

# KUMMER –

## *(Progression of the Dresden School of Cello Playing)*

*Written by Annapaola  
(first published in [www.cellist.nl](http://www.cellist.nl))*

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# **KUMMER, Friedrich August**

**Born: 1797, 5<sup>th</sup> August (Meiningen, Germany)**

**Died: 1879, 22nd May (Dresden)**

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Friedrich August Kummer made his name in violoncello history as a talented performer, teacher and author of many teaching compositions for the cello. He was born on August 5, 1797 in Meiningen, the son of an oboist. When the boy was very young, his father was invited to the Dresden court chapel, and the family moved to Dresden. When Dotzauer began his career there in 1811, Kummer, who had previously studied oboe, became a pupil of his. According to Franqois-joseph Fetis, the young cellist took several lessons from Bernhard Romberg, who frequently appeared in concert in Dresden.

By the season of 1812/13, Kummer had already played in opera orchestra rehearsals as a trainee. A year later, he was admitted to the Dresden chapel, but because there was no violoncello vacancy, he entered as an oboist first. Carl Maria von Weber, who arrived in Dresden to supervise the glorious royal opera house, became very interested in the young musician, and Kummer was appointed a violoncellist in the theatre orchestra in 1814.

Determined and enthusiastic study of the cello combined with natural talent yielded brilliant results, and quickly led to Kummer's acclaim as a top-notch performer. In 1850, he succeeded Dotzauer as principal violoncellist in the court chapel, and remained there until his retirement in 1864 when his 50th anniversary was festively celebrated. Kummer died on August 22, 1879, in Dresden.

After visiting the Dresden Opera in 1858, Alexander Serov wrote delightfully about its orchestra, noting that "the famous Kummer was at the violoncello." Kummer often appeared in solo recitals as well-not only in Dresden, but in Leipzig, Berlin, Weimar and Rudolstadt. He also won acclaim in Vienna, Prague, Milan, Copenhagen and other cities. In Vienna during the 1820s and 30s, he even competed with Romberg and Borer.

After 1840, Kummer did not tour often, as his time was consumed by the orchestra. But aside from the court concerts in Dresden, he, common to the period, often performed as a soloist in the intermissions during opera performances. Pietro Raimondi's opera *La Donna Colonnello* is known to have been "saved" by Dresden musicians-among them the violoncellist August Kummer and the violinist Antonio Rolla -who played concert pieces during intermissions.

Kummer was also an excellent chamber musician. In Dresden, he played in a quartet with the concertmaster and violinist Franz Schubert, and with Karol Lipinsky. Kummer repeatedly appeared with Schubert in concert duets, enchanting audiences by their amazing sense of ensemble playing.

From the 1839/40 season on, the quartet "academies" organized by Karol Lipinsky in Dresden rose to fame. Kummer played in the Quartet along with F. Schubert and B. Miller. Their repertoire consisted mainly of the works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, including his last quartets. Wiktor Kazyfiski heard their brilliant performance of the Beethoven quartets Op. 95 and 131 at the home of Lipinsky.

A Dresden reviewer highly praised the Lipinsky ensemble's performance of quartets by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven in 1856. He mentioned the technical mastery, expressive interpretation and faithfulness to the style distinguishing the ensemble. At the time, the members were K. Lipinsky, F. Hiflweck, L. Hering and Kummer.

In 1838, Robert Schumann heard Kummer in a Quartet performance in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, where the first violin was Pierre Baillot, the second, Karol Lipinsky, and the viola, Felix Mendelssohn. In 1844, Kummer played in an ensemble with the Russian violinist Aleksey Lvov, to whom he dedicated the tables on instrumentation that he edited in Dresden.

When in 1856 a conservatoire opened in Dresden, Kummer was invited as professor of the cello class, and held the post almost until the end of his life. Among his many pupils were his sons Ernst and Max, Bernhard Cossmann, Justus Goltermann, Arved Poorten, Richard Bellmann and, according to some sources, Robert Haussmann.

Kummer possessed a powerful, beautiful tone and remarkable knowledge of the fingerboard. The outstanding features of his style, reflecting Romberg's and Dotzauer's influences, were its nobility, lack of excessive affectation and the aspiration to penetrate the spirit of the work being performed. His playing might have seemed somewhat stiff and overly academic, but it always remained simple and natural, and never overstepped the boundaries stipulated by the nature of the instrument.

K. Miltitz, a music critic who played the cello himself, provided Kummer as the example when speaking of the German way of playing, and specifically, about the trend that featured nobility, seriousness and solidity. Another reviewer wrote: "Kummer is distinguished for his peculiar composure while performing great feats of virtuosity. But the main thing about him is his elegiac playing; how wonderfully Kummer can reveal it, and how often he brings the listener to this mood ... E. van der Straeten considers Kummer one of the greatest German violoncellists of his time, who made an intrinsic contribution to the further development of the art of the cello. A classical style of performance, great and noble tone, and virtuosity were the highlights of his playing, but he was a stranger to the lighter and more brilliant bowing technique of the French and Belgian schools.

A similar appraisal of him was made by Wilhelm Wasielewski: "Kummer's playing bore the stamp of great precision and correctness, united to powerful and solid intonation. His technique was in every point thoroughly cultivated, but to acquire the 'finesse' of a virtuoso he was of too simple a nature, which was better calculated to occupy itself with the sphere of music in its intellectual aspects than in brilliant display... His manner of rendering was always strictly objective and according to rule."

Judging by the *Method of the Violoncello* published in 1839, the main aim of one learning the cello, according to Kummer, was to achieve a full and powerful, but not stiff tone. He emphasized the character of the instrument's expressive means: "Because of the beautiful sound of the cello, its most characteristic feature is the influence upon the mind and the heart, only when used with mind and heart. As for the intensification and modification of sounds, which is the basis of playing melodious parts, we must follow the example of a good singer. The performance should be simple and natural, one should avoid overloading it with embellishments. Several notes played on the violoncello often have a greater effect than numerous and difficult passages."

Kummer's point of view, both as a cellist and an interpreter, on the aims of a virtuoso is very characteristic: "The highest mission of a virtuoso is that he must breathe life and soul into a body which a composer has created out of sound. The force serving this aim is within the artist himself; it is the product of his feelings and is manifest in its highest purity and nobility only when it radiates unadorned, natural simplicity." Kummer warned his pupils of excessive use of expressive means such as vibrato, portamento and rubato, although he did acknowledge they were important tools of expression.

Kummer's *Method* was of more practical significance than the *Method of Dotzauer*. Its chapter on methods, though, is interesting for its systematic exposition and progressive nature of certain statements.

The picture of the position at the instrument furnished in the *Method* is in many ways similar to that of *Dotzauer's*; but it is more natural, although the low elbow position is still characteristic (not as low as with *Romberg*, but lower than with *Dotzauer*). That this type of position was typical of the German violoncello school, at least by the middle of the last century, can be seen from the same picture being repeated in the *Method of Sebastian Lee*, published in 1845.

Kummer was eager to develop a natural position and natural movements. He approached the contemporary idea of the function of certain fingers on the frog of the bow, and considered the freedom of its movement more important than the force of the pressure. When evaluating the role of the arm, Kummer sometimes overestimated wrist movements.

Emphasizing the intrinsic influence of strokes on the character of the piece performed, he suggested at the same time that the pupil, where possible, keep to the rule that the downbow be used on the first beat of the bar, though he specified exceptions from this outdated mechanical regulation. Kummer gives fewer stroke variants than does Dotzauer, but they are more carefully selected and methodically arranged. He gives the distribution of the bow needed due attention.

Kummer forms the left hand positions on the basis of the C major scale (while Davydov bases his on the diatonic major scale from each string, which is organically connected with the *modus* thinking). In the chromatic scale, Kummer's fingering, like that of Dotzauer, is more advanced than the Romberg fingering. Kummer gives the fingering of all scales, going through five octaves; the double stopping division is quite subdued. A table of all natural harmonics is presented in the Method and the artificial harmonics are also described.

The music material of Kummer's Method is more interesting musically than that contained in Dotzauer's Method and is presented with the accompaniment of a second cello. A great number of melodies-etudes (No. 67-69) appear in the section "Exercises in interpretation." Romantic in spirit (close to Mendelssohn and Spohr), they are good exercises in cantilena.

As additional material, Kummer suggested etudes and caprices by Dotzauer, etudes by Merk, caprices by Franchomme as well as Grützmacher's exercises.

Among Kummer's many other teaching compositions are the Daily Exercises (Op. 71 and 125), the Violoncello duets to be played at sight and a great number of etudes ("Ten melodic etudes" with accompaniment by a second violoncello Op. 57 still retain their pedagogical value). Kummer employed an interesting new form for his teaching material - Repertorium and Orchesterstudien - a collection of fragments from complicated orchestral parts.

Now outdated, concert works for the cello reflect the romantic tendencies of his period. Among them were: a Concerto, Concertino, in the form of a vocal scene (analogous to Spohr's violin Concerto in the form of a vocal scene); the concertino Souvenir de Swiss; Konzertstfick for two violoncellos; the Fantasia on themes from Meyerbeer's opera Robert the Devil; variations on themes from the Gounod opera Romeo et Juliette. Kummer wrote a number of pieces on Russian, Czech, Hungarian and Scotch folk song themes, thus undoubtedly following Romberg's example. There was great interest by his contemporaries, especially amateur cellists, in his arrangements of Schubert's lieder-among the earliest cello transcriptions.

The Dresden violoncello school in the second half of the 19th century was continued by Grutzmacher - an illustrious German violoncellist, performer and teacher who wrote numerous compositions for the cello and edited the classic works.



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