

Performer's Guide for Luigi Boccherini's Cello Concerto No. 9 in B-flat Major from a Pedagogical Point of View

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Abstract: Cello Concerto No. 9 in B-flat Major by Luigi Boccherini, edited by German cellist and composer Friedrich Grützmacher, is the bridge to lead amateur cellists to become professional, and it is essential for cellists in building a solid foundation before exploring other standard concertos. Similar to the major concertos, including the Elgar Concerto in E Minor, the Schumann Cello Concerto in A minor, or the Dvorak Cello Concerto in B minor, Boccherini's Cello Concerto No. 9 contains virtuosic techniques, such as various bow strokes, vibrato, thumb position, shifting, rapid string crossings and double stops. However, compared to the major concertos, Boccherini's concerto has an easier musical structure and a shorter music length, so it serves as a preparation before continuing on to the more standard concertos. This paper will provide a pedagogical approach to the Boccherini's ninth concerto, along with analyzing other composers' pedagogical approaches with supporting materials, such as etudes and cello exercises written by string pedagogue and violinist Shinichi Suzuki, and Bohemian cellist and composer David Popper.

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1. Introduction

As a cellist myself, I have been trying to improve my playing skills during everyday practice. For the past 17 years of learning the cello, I have covered many standard cello concertos, such as the Elgar Cello Concerto in E Minor, Dvorak Concerto in B Minor, and Haydn's two famous cello concertos. These concertos are known for their highly artistic and technical virtuosity, and every cellist knows those pieces well. However, speaking from a cellist's point of view, I wish that I could have learned a piece that built my musical foundation before I explored those standard concertos. If I could have done that, I would not have felt more prepared for these other concertos. Therefore, Cello Concerto No. 9 in B-flat Major by Luigi Boccherini is the bridge to lead amateur cellists to be professional, and it is an essential piece for cellists to build their musical and technical virtuosity. Studying this piece will prepare cellists for the next stage where they can comfortably play pieces.

Cello Concerto No. 9 in B-flat Major by Luigi Boccherini has three advantages. First, it is not as long as other concertos; it takes about twenty minutes to play. Therefore, cello students would not be overwhelmed during their learning procedure when they suddenly jumped from an eight-minute piece to a thirty-minute piece. Furthermore, the piece is strongly connected with etudes and practice exercises by string pedagogue and violinist Shinichi Suzuki, and Bohemian cellist and composer David Popper. While practicing Boccherini's concerto, students can easily find several useful etudes along with this piece to build their technical foundation. Finally, Boccherini's concerto is in Baroque style, so the music structure is clear and simple. Students will have more time to focus on their sound, vibrato, and techniques on both hands.

2. Background

Luigi Boccherini, born in 1743, was an Italian composer and cellist. He was the leading composer of Italian instrumental music during the Viennese Classical period. He was born in a musical family, where he developed his artistic talent at a young age. Boccherini's ninth concerto has been the most popular concerto out of the twelve concertos that were written by this classical composer.

The most common edition was edited by the German cellist, Friedrich Grützmacher. This is also the edition that I am going to perform in my lecture recital. He merged Boccherini's Ninth Cello Concerto with other Boccherini Cello Concertos in order to fit the style of a Romantic virtuoso concerto. In Grützmacher's edition, there are two extensive cuts in the outer movements. In the second movement, he decided to replace the original with the second movement of Boccherini's Cello Concerto No. 7 in G Major. The Fourth Cello Concerto in C Major, G.477 makes an appearance in bars 40 to 46 of the first movement, in bars 85 to 96, and 151 to 163 of the Rondo, borrowing from the respective movements. The arpeggios of the Fifth Cello Concerto in D Major, G.478's first movement are featured in their minor form in bars 47 to 53. The cadenzas are also written by Grützmacher. Despite all the changes, this Concerto holds up as one of Boccherini's best-known works.

3. Literature Review

As a virtuosic literature in cello, Luigi Boccherini's Cello Concerto No. 9 in B-flat Major has been considered as one of the most

documented works. Many scholars and pedagogues have discussed useful ways to learn it. In the dissertation "'Precisely Marked in the Tradition of the Composer': The Performing Editions of Friedrich Grützmacher." by Kate Bennett Wadsworth, Wadsworth precisely acknowledges the styles of Grützmacher's music editing, and includes many music examples to show Grützmacher's music interpretation as a cellist. Since Grützmacher edited the whole Boccherini's Cello Concerto No. 9, it is essential to learn Grützmacher's interpretation before playing this piece.

Suzuki also included this piece in one of his teaching books. For people who do not know the Suzuki Pedagogy Method, Kara Eubanks's dissertation "Essays in the Theory and Practice of the Suzuki Method" provides a thorough understanding of the Suzuki Philosophy and how it fits into the string-pedagogical practice. Also, in the book *Nurtured by Love*, written by Shinichi Suzuki, Suzuki's philosophy about teaching is summarized by the quote "Every child develops. Everything depends upon how they are fostered." Talent can be developed, and students should repeat practicing something until it is easy. There are also many books about teaching that are valuable to include, such as the book *Teaching from the Balance Point*.

4. Methodology

Dr. Suzuki not only includes the full Boccherini Concerto score in his *Suzuki Cello School*, Vol. 10, but he also provided many useful ways to help improve challenging techniques in Boccherini's Cello Concerto.

In the first exercise, he brought an old song from book one, transposed it into a new key, which is the key of the Boccherini Concerto, in order to work on tonalization in B flat major. While playing an old tune, students practiced the key of B flat and improved the quality of their sound naturally and comfortably.

Another example of Dr. Suzuki applying the old material to help students practice thumb position was using the tune of "French Folk Song" from book 1, in this way, students will get to know thumb position and the B flat major key before getting into the real piece, since there are lots of thumb positions in the Boccherini Cello Concerto No. 9.

Another supplementary material to help with playing this Concerto is David Popper's etude book, the "High School of Cello Playing," and especially the Etude No. 35.

In the Boccherini Concerto, there are many parts that have rapid string crossings containing some notes with open strings. Similar things occur in the etude number 35 of the "High School of Cello Playing." Therefore, practicing the etude number 35 by Popper will help tremendously before playing the Boccherini Cello Concerto.

Resources:

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