

PROKOFIEV BECKONS THE DOUBLE BASS INTO THE MODERN AGE:
A PEDAGOGICAL STUDY OF THE OP. 39 QUINTET

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Until Serge Prokofiev's 1924 ballet score *Trapèze*, the double bass occupied a background or at best a doubling role in almost all composers' use of the instrument. Technical challenge was limited in these pieces, because composers did not see the instrument's potential in a chamber music environment. As luthiers developed the instrument, the technical ability of players grew, and composers began writing more challenging music for the instrument. As one of the first major composers to see the double bass in a new light, Prokofiev wrote challenging music for the instrument. This paper illuminates the alluring pedagogical aspects of Prokofiev's Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39 and provides recommendations for accomplishing some difficult passages with ease.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Sergei Prokofiev's (1891–1953) Quintet in G minor, Op. 39 holds a key place within the canon of bass chamber literature. This paper discusses the pedagogical placement of Prokofiev's Quintet within the literature and provide basic guidelines for interpretation and performance of the double bass part with technical exercises. The focus is on the role of the double bass within the Quintet both as it relates to, and frequently departs from, the more traditional setting for the double bass in a chamber music ensemble by examining double bass chamber works written around Prokofiev's time.

When compared to the rest of the chamber music involving the double bass, this quintet is an anomaly in instrumentation: until Prokofiev's 1924 work, the piano quintet was the ensemble most composers chose when including the double bass. Prokofiev's novel introduction of a different ensemble produced an exceptional chamber music work. While demanding, Prokofiev's skillfully written idiomatic double bass part fully exploits the instrument's capabilities, a compelling demonstration of how thoroughly he understood the instrument. An advanced student will find the Quintet musically rewarding and worth the technical challenges that lie within Prokofiev's superb writing for the double bass.

Significance and State of Research

Biographies and Dissertations

Although much has been written on Prokofiev, including numerous biographies and his own diaries, very little has been published that specifically focuses on his Quintet in G Minor,

Op. 39. Even less about the double bass is found in these published works; no clues to his reasons for the use of the instrument is found in his diaries or biographies, and, therefore, no clues to his use of the instrument in the quintet. Even what we know of his relationship with the virtuoso bassist Sergei Koussevitzky (1874–1951) gives no insight into any discussion of the instrument between these two giants.

The biographies narrate the impetus behind the piece: it was originally written as the *Trapèze* ballet commissioned by Boris Romanov, a former Mariinsky dancer and ballet master.¹ The author Nestyev spoke to the composition’s virtuosity and challenging technical difficulties when he wrote that the music has an “intricate, chromatic style...contrived angularity of the themes...complicated technique of simultaneously developed melodic lines...even in Paris no one was willing to perform it.”² This is to say neither that it was not performed, nor that it was unplayable; it is possible that at the time such an ensemble was not available for the performance of such a work.

Of the Quintet’s harmonies, Prokofiev said the music was one of the most dissonant pieces he ever wrote.³ Analytical sources do not provide much context in the way of information on Prokofiev’s relationship with the double bass or its use in the Quintet. Neil Minturn’s book, *The Music of Sergei Prokofiev*, analyzes the work briefly, and the author claims that even though the work is polytonal, the individual parts “lean towards tonality,” an interesting observation in light of Prokofiev’s own thoughts about the work’s dissonance.⁴

Some dissertations include mention of the piece, but only in passing. Anthony Costa’s dissertation on chamber music for oboe and clarinet does describe the effect Prokofiev’s writing

¹ Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 184-185.

² Israel V. Nestyev, *Prokofiev* (Chicago: Stanford Univ. Press, 1960), 213.

³ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁴ Neil Minturn, *The Music of Sergei Prokofiev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 36-40.

had on other composers: he claims that the piece has served as an inspiration to such composers as “Ivo Petrić (1964), David Anderson (1994), and most recently Judith Lang Zaimont (1997).”⁵ Andrew Maddick’s dissertation on Prokofiev’s violin works focused more on other works instead of Op. 39, while the first chapter of Neil Minturn’s dissertation looked at only the fourth movement of the Quintet from a theoretical analysis perspective, discussing Prokofiev’s non-tonal voice. In short, while these dissertations mention Prokofiev and his works, they do not give us insight into Prokofiev’s Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, especially his double bass part.

Traditional Use of the Double Bass

Little in Prokofiev’s training, and even less in his contemporaries’ attitudes toward the double bass foreshadowed Prokofiev’s prominent treatment of the instrument in his quintet. Prokofiev was Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s (1844–1908) student as a youth. Rimsky-Korsakov seemed to have a low opinion of the double bass, perhaps valuing its rhythm and accompaniment qualities over its melodic potential. His position on the instrument was implicit in his statement that each of the stringed instruments “with the exception of the double basses...is qualified to assume full responsibility for the melodic line.”⁶ During his impressionable years Prokofiev attended many of Rimsky-Korsakov’s concerts,⁷ possibly including the opera *Mlada*. In this opera Rimsky-Korsakov wrote a solo line for the double bass in spite of his apparent views on the proper place for the instrument.⁸ This solo utilizes the harmonics above thumb position, in what double bass pedagogue George Vance (1949-2009) called sixth position.⁹ Rimsky-Korsakov calls for the double bassist to “muta sol in F#,” or tune the G string a half step down.

⁵ Anthony J Costa, “A Bibliography of Chamber Music and Double Concerti Literature for Oboe and Clarinet” (DMA diss., Ohio State University, 2005), 73.

⁶ Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *Principles of Orchestration* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964), 36.

⁷ Sergey Prokofiev, *Diaries 1907-1914: Prodigious Youth* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 57-58.

⁸ This solo occurs in *Mlada*, Act 2: Loumir’s Aria.

⁹ George Vance and Annette Costanzi, *Progressive Repertoire for the Double Bass: Vol. 1* (New York: Carl Fischer Music, 2000), 29.

This solo stands in stark contrast to Rimsky-Korsakov's own teachings in his orchestration text, both in allowing the bass to stand on its own and by expanding the conventional double bass range. He recommends not writing in thumb position (above g1)¹⁰ because in his view the standard orchestral bassist usually did not play in thumb position with ease. Rimsky-Korsakov advocated a limited range for double bass; he said that anything higher than e2 should be played as a harmonic.¹¹ This may have been mostly true for the instrument of his time, but as players' technical ability developed, the writing for the instrument evolved and higher demands came to be placed on the instrument and the player.

Koussevitzky's prowess on the double bass was well known, probably even to Prokofiev. In his article for the International Society of Bassists, Webster Williams asserts, "his Symphony No. 2 was dedicated to Koussevitzky...and [Koussevitzky] no doubt had influence on the intricate writing for the bass."¹² Before Koussevitzky, no major composers had written any solo literature for the double bass since Gioachino Rossini's (1792–1868) *Duetto for Cello and Double Bass*.

Relative to other stringed instruments the number of chamber music pieces involving the double bass is scant, especially from this time period, which underscores the need for an increased awareness of chamber music for the double bass. In order to understand the impact of Prokofiev's quintet within bass chamber literature, selected chamber literature involving the bass written in the Classical through early 20th century provide context: Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770–1827), Franz Schubert (1797–1828), Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904), Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971), Johann N. Hummel (1778–1837), Johann Ladislaus Dussek (1760–1812), Ralph

¹⁰ Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *Principles of Orchestration* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964), 8-9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹² Webster E Williams, "Prokofiev Quintet, Opus 39," *Journal of The International Society of Bassists* 3 and 4 (Spring and Summer 1981): 722.

Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), and Louise Farrenc (1804–1875) all made contributions to the instrument’s chamber music literature.¹³

Consistent with the principles espoused in Rimsky-Korsakov’s orchestration text, these composers did not trust the double bassist with much more than a very simple melody if by itself, as demonstrated to some extent in the first movement of Schubert’s “Trout” Piano Quintet in A major, Op. 114.¹⁴ Here, although Schubert allows the double bass a solo legato line with singing quality in the first movement, it is in the very low register usually written for the instrument. Later, there are some slightly more challenging passages for the double bass, such as the fourth variation of the Trout theme. Schubert did not entrust these passages to the bass alone; instead they are shared with the cello line.

Conventionally, the role of the double bass has been embedded in the augmentation of an otherwise traditional chamber group, such as Dvořák’s Quintet in G major, Op. 77 or the piano quintets of Vaughan Williams and Schubert. In Schubert’s “Trout” Quintet the bass player’s doubling role enhances the cello line or left hand of the piano, and provides depth and color. One such instance can be found in the third variation of the Trout theme,¹⁵ where the double bass and cello play the melody together. Dvořák’s quintet is another clear example of this traditional treatment of the double bass in a chamber music setting.¹⁶ While Dvořák treats the textural contribution of the double bass as another layer that depends on the other instruments, Prokofiev’s contemporary Stravinsky treats it almost as an auxiliary percussion instrument. Stravinsky exploited the bass in this way in his chamber piece *L’histoire du Soldat*. The double

¹³ Paul Nemeth, “4000 Chamber Works with the Double Bass,” last modified May 14, 2014, accessed May 15, 2014, <http://paulnemeth.com/basschamber.htm>.

¹⁴ Franz Schubert, *Trout Quintet, Op. 114* (Melville: Belwin Mills, n.d.), 1st mov., meas. 165-70.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3rd mov., meas. 61-80.

¹⁶ Antonin Dvořák, *Quintet in G Major, Op. 77* (New York: International Music Company, n.d.), 1st mov., meas. 72-80.

bass part is somewhat challenging in this piece, with an independent bass line that stretched the parameters of technique at its time, but it is still primarily limited to a percussion function.

Although these few available examples from the literature do demonstrate some development in instrumental technique and compositional role for the double bass, they do not provide the bassist with a steady, progressive march that leads with inexorable logic to the Quintet in G minor, Op. 39.

Pedagogical Literature

In addition to the pedagogical method set forth by George Vance in his progressive repertoire books, there are several technique books that provide practice methods and short exercises for difficult passages in other pieces of music, and which can also prove helpful for the study of Op. 39. One such text is Jeff Bradetich's *Double Bass: The Ultimate Challenge*, which provides a baseline of examples from other literature and gives exercises for practicing them.¹⁷ Michael Wolf's *Grundlagen der Kontrabass-Technik* provides diagrams and practice suggestions for bassists.¹⁸ Ivan Galamian's *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* with rhythms for practicing passagework is also a useful tool for all string players.¹⁹ Frederick Zimmerman's *Contemporary Concept of Bowing Technique* supplies a series of exercises that deal with tackling the challenges for the bow hand in certain pieces.²⁰ Although these references are strong examples of good practice techniques, none deals specifically with Prokofiev's Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39. The combination of these texts provides the groundwork for a strong

¹⁷ Jeff Bradetich, *Double Bass: The Ultimate Challenge* (Moscow, ID: Music for All To Hear Inc., 2009), 134-151.

¹⁸ Michael Barry Wolf, *Principles of Double Bass Technique*, Bilingual ed. (Mineola, NY: Schott, 2007), 220-227.

¹⁹ Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1964), 97-98.

²⁰ Frederick Zimmerman, *A Contemporary Concept of Bowing Technique for the Double Bass* (Mineola, NY: Hal Leonard, 1999), 119-133.

presentation of exercises to assist the developing bassist and provides groundwork for the exercises in this project.

Prokofiev's Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39 in a Historical Context

As previously stated, the work in question was originally part of Prokofiev's larger ballet entitled *Trapèze*. To get the most out of his commission from Romanov, Prokofiev recycled the original score twice, once as a concert piece in the Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39²¹ and again when he wrote the 1st & 3rd ("Moderato" and "Dance") movements for his Op. 43 Divertissement for Orchestra.²² In his book on Prokofiev's Ballets, Press writes that "Prokofiev regarded this commission as a pretext for writing an abstract instrumental piece," possibly inspired by Stravinsky's *L'Histoire*.²³

The year that Prokofiev wrote his ballet *Trapèze*, he was living in Paris and simultaneously working on several projects. The Parisian compositional style was apparently highly chromatic in 1924, and Prokofiev's French contemporaries possibly influenced his writing in this quintet.²⁴ At this time the musical atmosphere of Paris was dominated by *Les Six*, which included Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), Georges Auric (1899–1983), Louis Durey (1888–1979), Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), Francis Poulenc (1899–1963), and Germaine Tailleferre (1892–1983), all of whom were very interested in furthering avant-garde music by expanding harmonic language and defying the structural norms of traditional classical chamber music.²⁵

²¹ Israel V. Nestyev, *Prokofiev* (Chicago: Stanford Univ. Press, 1960), 213.

²² *Ibid.*, 232.

²³ Stephen D. Press, *Prokofiev's Ballets for Diaghilev* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2006), 66.

²⁴ Redpenning, Dorothea. "Prokofiev, Sergey." *Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online* Oxford University Press, accessed October 3, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/22402>.

²⁵ Paul Griffiths, "Six, Les," *Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online* Oxford University Press, accessed June 21, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25911>.

Claude Samuel commented that Prokofiev “flirted with polytonality and violently dissonant harmonies.”²⁶ This same year, Prokofiev labored over his Symphony No. 2 at Koussevitzky’s insistence, who “wanted Prokofiev to have a European hit.”²⁷ Moisson-Franckhauser’s biography on Prokofiev states that the composition of Prokofiev’s Symphony No. 2 was influenced by the urbanistic qualities of Honneger’s *Pacific 231*.²⁸ The symphony and quintet were joined by a third composition that year, all challenging the recent criticism that his compositions were “insufficiently modern to the Parisian ear.”²⁹ Prokofiev later adapted the ballet into a concert music version “to get maximum usage out of the composition.”³⁰ The piece was not premiered in its Op. 39 concert music format until a performance in Moscow twelve years after its conception.³¹ The Quintet received some international attention: first from Poulenc, who admired the piece in 1927, and later when the *Divertissement* received a good review in the winter of 1934 in *Soviet Art*.³²

²⁶ Claude Samuel, *Prokofiev* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971), 96.

²⁷ Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 184-185.

²⁸ Suzanne Moisson-Franckhauser, *Serge Prokofiev Et Les Courants Esthétiques de Son Temps: 1891-1953* (Paris (4, rue de Lille: Publications orientalistes de France, 1974), 157.

²⁹ Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 186.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

³² *Ibid.*, 213 and 287.

CHAPTER 2

PROKOFIEV'S INSTRUMENTATION CHOICES

It is impossible to say exactly why Prokofiev chose the particular instruments he did when he wrote the Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39; however, there are several possible reasons. The instruments chosen provide the potential for caricatures in the story line of the ballet *Trapèze*. The narrative was a whimsical circus theme, which possibly inspired Prokofiev's peculiar ensemble, although author Harlow Robinson seems to suggest otherwise: "the choice of instrument and the harmonic-rhythmic style reveal a strong influence of Stravinsky—particularly...L'Histoire and the Octet."³³ It is possible that in addition to Prokofiev's sense of humor several other factors may explain his use of the double bass.

First, the sonic qualities of the instrument, which Prokofiev fully exploited, lend themselves well to the sounds of circus music. The double bass occupies every possible register, lending itself to a veritable compendium of personality archetypes. Prokofiev made full use of the contrasting sounds of arco and pizzicato as well as the instrument's unique properties for double and triple stops, especially the open string double stop. Prokofiev's use and understanding of all of these properties of the instrument including its distinctive timbre seem to point to this as one possible reason for his preference for the instrument, especially when the bass part is set against the other instrumental parts he chose.

Another possible explanation for Prokofiev's decision to use the double bass in the quintet is his association with Koussevitzky. The composer had a personal relationship with the Boston conductor and virtuoso double bassist as mentioned in Prokofiev's biographies and diaries. Prokofiev's Symphony No. 2 "was dedicated to [and possibly commissioned by]

³³ Ibid., 184.

Koussevitzky,³⁴ and this influence may have been a determining factor in the role of the double bass in this music. As mentioned above, the quintet and the symphony were written simultaneously.

To some extent, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mlada* solo may have been influential on the young composer. There is no evidence, however, that Prokofiev ever took Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration class in the Conservatory, and Prokofiev mentioned in his diaries that he wished he could have studied with that potential mentor. Interestingly, Prokofiev had a stronger bond with another great orchestrator in Reinhold Glière (1875–1956). As a child, Prokofiev took piano lessons with Glière, who would comment on the instrumentation potential in each piece he studied.³⁵ This is especially pertinent to Prokofiev's choice of the double bass because of Glière's compositional output. Glière expanded the double bass literature by writing the virtuosic *Intermezzo and Tarantella*, and he assisted Koussevitzky with his Concerto for Double Bass, written at the turn of the century and before his tutoring Prokofiev. Glière's role in the conception of this concerto is under much scrutiny, as debated in the notorious journal *High Fidelity*: here, an article written by Nicolas Slonimsky³⁶ and a later editorial by Mrs. Koussevitzky³⁷ debate the degree of Glière's involvement with the concerto. These two composers and their relationships to Prokofiev provide a potential insight into his understanding of the double bass.

The international emergence of prominent bassists who preceded Koussevitzky could have inspired Prokofiev to include the double bass in his music. The bass virtuoso Giovanni Bottesini (1821–1889), deceased only 35 years prior to Prokofiev's 1924 commission, was one

³⁴ Webster E Williams, "Prokofiev Quintet, Opus 39," *Journal of The International Society of Bassists* 3 and 4 (Spring and Summer 1981): 722.

³⁵ Sergei Prokofiev, *Prokofiev by Prokofiev: a Composer's Memoir* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1979), 34.

³⁶ Nicolas Slonimsky, "A Classical Scrapbook," *High Fidelity* 26, no. 4 (April 1976): 47.

³⁷ Mrs. Serge Koussevitzky, "Letter to the Editor," *High Fidelity* 26, no. 8 (August 1976): 9.

such innovator of the instrument. He championed the French or overhand bow³⁸ and composed numerous works for solo double bass, eventually gaining world renown. Although an opera conductor by profession, he was world renowned as a bassist, and audiences came to see him play bass solos during opera intermissions. Also around Prokofiev's time, bassists František Hertl (1906–1973) and Adolf Mišek (1875–1955) were prominent in the Czech double bass school. As evidenced by Hertl's large étude output, he had a strong pedagogical influence resulting in the continuation of the formidable Czech double bass school.³⁹ Mišek was also Prokofiev's contemporary and wrote three well-known sonatas for the instrument and a virtuosic Concert Polonaise.⁴⁰

Double bass innovations may have been a factor in Prokofiev's use of this instrument, especially in the Quintet. Until the early 20th century, the double bass had not been standardized: there were many different tunings, bows, and types of strings used. In the 1920s, a French inventor named Pierre Delescluse was researching and developing the first complete set of metal strings for double bass.⁴¹ Other string instruments had been using steel strings, but because of the amount of work and resources it took to make the large double bass strings, steel strings were not common until later than those for the other instruments. The changes in strings were accompanied by modern bows, including Bottesini's French bow and the German bow established in the Czech school.⁴² The modern instrument of that time was significantly smaller than its earlier counterparts, lending itself well to higher technical playing. Finally, the double bass was also becoming more consistent in its tuning system: before the instrument had no

³⁸ Paul Brun, *A New History of the Double Bass* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Yorke, 2000), 202.

³⁹ Jason Kyle Roederer, "A Performer's Guide to Hertl's Concerto for Double Bass" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 2009), 15.

⁴⁰ Cory Palmer, "Adolf Misek," TalkBass, October 7, 2006, accessed June 21, 2014, <http://www.talkbass.com/threads/adolf-misek.280185/>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 202.

unified tuning system; some double bassists used fifths and some fourths, certain countries favored three, four or five strings.⁴³

Whatever the reason for this new configuration, the double bass shared a rather equal role with the rest of the ensemble, independent of any other instrument in Prokofiev's Quintet. The indispensable double bass part therefore must be played artistically and with the technical prowess it is due. As the instrument experienced advances and players were able to accomplish more, Prokofiev mirrored these developments with an innovative chamber work that pushed the boundaries of double bass playing.

⁴³ Ibid., 127.

CHAPTER 3

OTHER CHAMBER WORKS INVOLVING BASS

Traditional use of the Double Bass

As mentioned earlier, the double bass has traditionally occupied a doubling role with little or no melodic responsibility. In the traditional chamber music context the double bassist often doubles either the left hand of the piano or the cello line, which is sometimes simplified. Although major composers have traditionally written for more standard ensembles such as the string quartet, there should be no assumption that the double bass chamber literature is sparse. If one needs proof of the existence of a vast array of pieces, Paul Nemeth has created a massive database of literature online.⁴⁴ A comprehensive look at chamber works involving double bass is outside the scope of this project, but a discussion of string literature, quintet literature, and chamber music involving bass provides some context for the Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39.

The Behavior of the Double Bass Within the Piano Quintet

Of the many standard subgenres of chamber music, the double bass occupies a conventional role in a variation of the traditional piano quintet. The usual instrumentation of this ensemble is piano, two violins, viola, and cello; however many composers chose to reduce the number of violins to one and add a double bass. Although Schubert's "Trout" Quintet is the best well known example, it was preceded by several other compositions, including the quintets by Hummel and Dussek. The first time the double bass appeared in a piano quintet was Hummel's Quintet in E-flat minor, Op. 87.⁴⁵ On the Wöllenweber edition of the score there is a publisher's note stating it is "the first composition of this instrumentation," preceding Schubert's "Trout"

⁴⁴ Paul Nemeth, "4000 Chamber Works with the Double Bass," last modified May 14, 2014, accessed May 15, 2014, <http://paulnemeth.com/basschamber.htm>.

⁴⁵ Although not necessarily inside the scope of the paper, it is important to note that the same publisher places the Dussek Quintet circa 1800 in the foreword to the Dussek piano score, while Hummel's quintet was written in 1802.

quintet by almost two decades.⁴⁶ Hummel's quintet, although a valued addition to the chamber literature for the double bass, does not demand much of the double bass player: there is scant melodic material; when it appears it is usually fragmented and always doubling another player, either the cello or the bass notes of the piano part.⁴⁷ When playing melodic figures with the piano in the last movement the bass part is simplified.⁴⁸ The double bass in this setting is used to add color and warmth to the bass lines and create a fuller texture.

Another Classical period composer who wrote for the piano quintet was Dussek. His Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 41 was published around 1800, according to the publisher of the Wöllenweber edition of this piece.⁴⁹ The double bass part mostly assists the cello and the low end of the piano as well. In the finale, the double bassist plays through the break of the instrument shifting from thumb position to the neck block area for a fleeting instant, providing a small technical challenge for the bassist.⁵⁰ Following the example of Hummel's quintet, the cello and the bass notes of the piano throughout the piece double what limited melodic participation exists.⁵¹

In Schubert's 1822 Quintet in A major, D. 667, more commonly referred to as the "Trout" quintet, the double bassist doubles both the cello line and the left hand of the piano for the duration of the piece. Of the two instances in which the double bassist inhabits a melodic role, both are very low in register and only one is independent of another line or instrument.

⁴⁶ Johann N Hummel, "Piano Score Foreword," *Quintet in E-Flat Major for Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello and Double Bass, Op. 87*. (Gräfelfing: W. Wöllenweber, 1998), p. 4.

⁴⁷ Johann N Hummel, *Quintet in E-Flat Major for Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello and Double Bass, Op. 87*. (Gräfelfing: W. Wöllenweber, 1998), 1st mov., meas. 1 & 124.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4th mov., meas. 41-59.

⁴⁹ Johann L. Dussek, "Piano Score Foreword," *Quintett Op. 41* (Munich: Verlag Walter Wöllenweber, 1992), p. 4.

⁵⁰ Johann L. Dussek, *Quintett Op. 41* (Munich: Verlag Walter Wöllenweber, 1992), 4th mov., meas. 53.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1st mov., meas. 176-180.

The double bass participates in another piano quintet written by Ferdinand Ries, a student of Ludwig Van Beethoven.⁵² The Quintet in B major, Op. 74 by Ries is more reflective of his relationship with Beethoven than it is a continuation of the piano quintet. This piece seems to be more of a piano concerto than it is a chamber music piece and the string parts reflect that impression. The pianist is prone to sweeping melodies and virtuosic passagework followed by stormy punctuations. The string parts tend to add texture, especially the double bass part, which as usual doubles the harmonic foundation notes and supports the musical structure.

French romantic composer Louise Farrenc wrote two piano quintets, one of which was her first chamber ensemble composition.⁵³ Her Quintet No. 1 in A minor, Op. 30 contains mostly doubled lines⁵⁴ but includes a few peculiarities: sometimes the double bass doubles the cello at pitch instead of at the octave,⁵⁵ and a few times the double bass is allowed to completely take over as a harmonic foundation with an independent line.⁵⁶ Despite these isolated instances, Farrenc's Op. 30 still has a very conservative double bass part. Editor and music professor Susan Eileen Pickett remarked in her forward to the Farrenc Quintets that the use of the double bass was most likely due to "the presence of great bassist Achille-Victor Gouffé [(1804–1874)] of the Paris Opera."⁵⁷

Vaughan Williams's Piano Quintet in C minor contains a few arpeggiated passages that cover a large range and would require the double bassist to be able to move fluidly among the low to mid-high positions on the instrument. These passages are usually within a thick texture

⁵² Cecil Hill, "Ries." *Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online* Oxford University Press, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23444pg4>.

⁵³ Louise Farrenc, "Piano Score Foreword," *Quintet No. 1, Op. 30*, ed. Susan Eileen Pickett (Bryn Mawr, Pa: Hildegard Publishing Company, 1995), p. 1.

⁵⁴ Louise Farrenc, *Quintet No. 1, Op. 30*, ed. Susan Eileen Pickett (Bryn Mawr, Pa: Hildegard Publishing Company, 1995), 1st mov., meas. 88-107.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1st mov., meas. 36-43.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1st mov., meas. 52-57 and meas. 184-193.

⁵⁷ Louise Farrenc, "Piano Score Foreword," *Quintet No. 1, Op. 30*, ed. Susan Eileen Pickett (Bryn Mawr, Pa: Hildegard Publishing Company, 1995), p. 1.

and are not in the foreground of the music. When the double bass does have a melodic line, it is not independent.

The Behavior of the Double Bass Within the String Quintet

Outside of the piano quintet, Boccherini wrote a few string quintets that included double bass. These were his Op. 39, nos. 1, 2, and 3. Within these works the double bass has a somewhat independent role at times, but occupies its lowest register, and often has a simplified line. Nevertheless, Boccherini did allow the double bassist to play some independent lines and take over the harmonic foundation much like Farrenc's piano quintets.

Dvořák also made significant contributions to the double bass chamber literature with two pieces, a wind serenade and a string quintet. His Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, Cello and Double Bass, Op. 77 contains much of the same doubling elements found in other double bass-inclusive chamber music. The double bass plays sparse melodic material, always shared with the cello part.⁵⁸ Also, Dvořák does not write anything past the neck block of the instrument and employs some simplification techniques.⁵⁹ Despite the dependency of the double bass part on the other instruments, the instrument plays a vital role in creating a thicker texture and grounding the ensemble.

Double Bass in Mixed Strings and Winds Setting

In addition to his numerous string quartets and other chamber pieces, Beethoven wrote a septet involving winds and strings. The instrumentation of his Septet in E-flat major, Op. 20 consists of clarinet, bassoon, French horn, violin, viola, cello and double bass. As dictated by the nature of orchestration at the time, Beethoven wrote the double bass part as a doubling role that supported either the bassoon or cello at all times. When the double bass is given the melodic

⁵⁸ Antonin Dvořák, *Quintet in G Major, Op. 77* (New York: International Music Company, n.d.), 1st mov., meas. 97-100 and meas. 149-154.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1st mov., meas. 78-79 and 4th mov., meas. 280-282.

line, it is only in lockstep with the cello line, at more contrapuntal moments such as the first movement and the third variation in the fourth movement.⁶⁰

Farrenc similarly orchestrated her double bass part as a structural role, laying down the harmonic foundation and providing a doubling texture for the bassoon and cello lines in her Nonet in E-flat, Op. 38. This work is scored for flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn, bassoon, violin, viola, cello and double bass.

Dvořák uses the instrument in a manner comparable to other composers in his Serenade in D minor, Op. 44 for winds, cello and double bass. The double bass part doubles the bassoon and cello parts extensively, providing a harmonic foundation and rhythmic support to the ensemble.

Atypical Chamber Music Written for Viennese Bass

In addition to the piano quintet that was prevalent during the Classical period, other chamber music pieces appeared, some posing virtuosic challenges: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's K. 612, "Per Questa Bella Mano," and the Hoffmeister Solo Quartets Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 are examples of such peculiarities emerging from this period. These compositions were likely the result of the prominent Viennese double bass, which was tuned in D major, lending itself well to fast passagework, double stops, and arpeggiated figures; this resulted in the more technically challenging double bass chamber music.⁶¹

In the Hoffmeister Quartets, the double bassist is in the limelight, playing the virtuosic part with other string players as mere accompaniment. The cello plays the role of the harmonic foundation while the double bass plays extensive passagework, arpeggiated figurations, and

⁶⁰ Ludwig Van Beethoven, *Septett, Op. 20* (Austria: Philharmonia, 1953), 1st mov., meas. 171-82, and 4th mov., meas. 73-78.

⁶¹ Paul Brun, *A New History of the Double Bass* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Yorke, 2000), 100.

double stops that were idiomatically written for the Viennese bass. In modern tuning this is much more challenging, but still readily accomplished by a high level player.

Mozart's "Per Questa" is a solo for bass voice with obbligato double bass. The bass part was written for Friedrich Pischlberger (1741-1813), a virtuoso Viennese double bassist.⁶² The bass part opens with leaping double stops that are manageable on the Viennese bass but prove quite a challenge to the modern double bass player due to the difference in tuning and resulting different fingerings. Like Hoffmeister, Mozart wrote passagework and arpeggiated figurations into this part which came naturally on the instrument.

Chamber Music by Prokofiev's Contemporaries

In later chamber works composers often wrote for the bassist in the middle or the high register, but usually only as a percussive part or in simple melodies for a short duration. Stravinsky gave the double bass independence from the other instruments, but its role is still largely a percussive and harmonic foundation in his *L'Histoire du Soldat*. The instrument occupies a percussive role with an ostinato-like cross-rhythm, a march held against metric modulations.⁶³ Additionally, the double bassist plays harmonics⁶⁴ and double stops⁶⁵ throughout the piece. Although the instrument has a mostly independent line, it still occupies a background rhythmic role.

Some of Prokofiev's Parisian colleagues in *Les Six* also contributed to the double bass chamber music literature. Milhaud included the double bass in numerous chamber music pieces: String Quintet No.2, Op. 316 (1952); *Les Rêves de Jacob*, Op. 294 (1949); *String Septet*, Op. 408 (1964); *Machines Agricoles*, Op. 56 (1919); *Aspen Serenade* (1957); and *Les Charmes de la Vie*,

⁶² Ibid., 267.

⁶³ Igor Stravinsky, *The Soldier's Tale* (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, n.d.), Part 1, "Soldier's March", meas. 50-56.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Part 1, "Music to Scene 2", meas. 15-21.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Part 1, "Royal March", meas. 1-10.

Op. 360 (1957).⁶⁶ Poulenc included the double bass in two chamber works: *Mouvements Perpétuels* (1946) and *L'Invitation au Château*, Op.138 (1947). Finally, Tailleferre included the double bass in her work for flute, two pianos and double bass entitled *Impressionnisme* (1970). Although most of these works were much later than Prokofiev's ballet score written in response to the French criticism of his compositional style, it is possible that the existence of his quintet may have in part influenced these members of *Les Six* to write for the instrument.

Quintets After Op. 39

This piece served as a starting point for other composers to write for the same instrumentation. In 1964 Ivo Petrić wrote an *Hommage a Sergej Prokofjev*. This one-movement work is written on a theme from the Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39. Although inspired by Prokofiev, Petrić does not demand the same level of technicality from the double bass player. That said, there are some instances of shifting and thumb position playing that does not occur in earlier works. Petrić also allows the double bass part to be independent of the other instruments and there is one countermelody that is challenging and somewhat exposed.⁶⁷

David Anderson has been quoted saying “I have always loved the Prokofiev Quintet and had always hoped to write a piece that could be included on the same program with the same instrumentation. I was commissioned by the Kentucky Center Chamber Players for a new piece and we agreed that this would be an excellent project. There are many influences in this piece (in addition to Prokofiev), including Shostakovich, Barber, and of course my teacher and mentor, Frank Proto.”⁶⁸ In addition to expanding the quintet literature and providing a companion piece to the Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, Anderson has also expanded the technical demand in quintet

⁶⁶ Paul Nemeth, “4000 Chamber Works with the Double Bass,” last modified May 14, 2014, accessed May 15, 2014, <http://paulnemeth.com/basschamber.htm>.

⁶⁷ Ivo Petrić, *Hommage a Sergej Prokofiev* (Adliswil, Switzerland: Pizzicato Verlag Helvetia, 1996), meas. 117-26.

⁶⁸ “Really Good Music,” Really Good Music, accessed April 22, 2014, <http://www.reallygoodmusic.com/index.jsp?page=itemDetail&iid=128035>.

literature. The double bass is featured as a solo instrument with independent lines, and uses many extended techniques including glissandi, double stops and harmonics. Additionally, the Anderson Quintet uses virtually the entire range of the double bass.

Judith Lang Zaimont's 1997 composition entitled *...3: 4, 5...* is the most recent quintet with the same instrumentation as Prokofiev's Op. 39.⁶⁹ According to the score's foreword written by the composer, it was commissioned "as a companion piece" to Prokofiev's work.⁷⁰ The piece is a continuation in the compositional trend Prokofiev set. The demanding double bass part contains melismatic material covering extreme registers,⁷¹ and there are numerous passages in thumb position. Additionally, Zaimont is not shy about the use of harmonics and double stops; they are scattered throughout the piece.

Trends in Chamber Music Involving Double Bass

When examining these chamber music pieces, one sees that composers consistently viewed the double bass as inferior. The instrument's ability to provide a strong harmonic and rhythmic structure typically resulted in a doubling for texture, so that what scant melodic material was offered usually depended on another instrument.

⁶⁹ Judith Lang Zaimont, "Judith Lang Zaimont: Discography," Judith Lang Zaimont: Composer, 2012, accessed May 20, 2014, <http://www.jzaimont.com/discography/discography-id21.html>.

⁷⁰ Judith Lang Judith Lang, "Foreword." *...3: 4, 5...* (Ham Lake, MN: Jeanne, Inc., 1997).

⁷¹ Judith Lang Judith Lang, *...3: 4, 5...* (Ham Lake, MN: Jeanne, Inc., 1997), 1st mov., meas. 5, 10.

CHAPTER 4

PLAYING OP. 39: GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Melodies in Thumb Position: Recommended Fingerings

The Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39 offers technical challenges throughout the piece that are incongruent with the espoused principles of orchestration espoused by Rimsky-Korsakov as well with the double bass parts in Prokofiev's contemporaries' compositions. For example, Prokofiev directly violates his orchestration teacher's recommendation by writing a high, sustained melody for the double bass in the first movement.⁷² This melody is played in thumb position and would require a fingered bar on the perfect fourths from A to E.⁷³ The second measure of the passage is probably best fingered using a three-note progressive⁷⁴ pattern as outlined in the Bradetich technique packet (Ex. 1).



Ex. 1: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 1st mvt., mm. 44-47.

In this particular instance, the fingered bar poses an additional challenge of making smooth string crossings if chosen instead of shifting up and down the G string.

Use of Harmonics

Harmonics are overtones of the open string. They produce sounds that resemble a flute or whistle “when the string is lightly touched at specific fractional divisions or nodal points.”⁷⁵

⁷² Serge Prokofiev, *Quintet, Op. 39* (New York: International Music Company, 1948), 1st mov., meas. 44-47.

⁷³ Jeff Bradetich, *Double Bass: the Ultimate Challenge* (Moscow, ID: Music for All To Hear Inc., 2009), 59.

⁷⁴ Jeff Bradetich, *Technical Exercises for Double Bass* (Moscow, ID: Music for All to Hear, 2009), 3.

⁷⁵ Guy Oldham, Murray Campbell, and Clive Greated, “Harmonics,” *Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online* accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/50023>.

Upper harmonics are often used for special effects on string instruments, especially the double bass, which has especially resonant harmonics due to the increased string length. There are several instances in the Quintet where Prokofiev wrote in the high register for the double bass using harmonics, including the 3rd movement (Ex. 2).



Therefore, it is advisable to only slow down a little at the “Poco meno mosso” and if one takes time to do so at the end of the second phrase.

In both passages, it is advisable to stay in a “home base” type of fingering, with thumb on the second octave harmonic. This is reinforced in the George Vance method as well as Jeff Bradetich’s book.⁷⁶ Therefore, an appropriate fingering for passages such as those above is thumb on G, first finger on B and second finger on the D (Ex. 4).



Ex. 4: George Vance 6th position harmonics preparation exercise, pg. 29.

This type of fingering is useful for the harmonics found throughout the third and fifth movements.

An obvious contradiction to this rule is inevitably found in the first example of harmonics in the piece. Here Prokofiev writes a glissando from one harmonic to another, most easily achieved on a single finger, and thus breaking the rule about keeping to the “home base” fingering (Ex. 5).



Ex. 5: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 1st mvt., mm. 14–17.

⁷⁶ George Vance and Annette Costanzi, *Progressive Repertoire for the Double Bass: Vol. 1* (New York: Carl Fischer Music, 2000), 29.

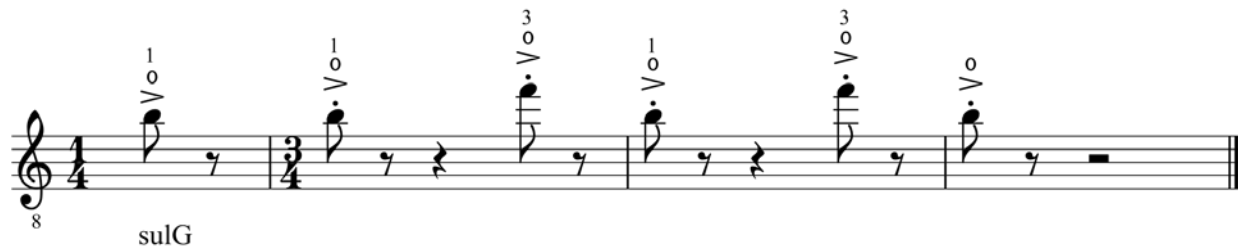
A glissando is best achieved with the same finger, and as the second finger is the strongest finger of the hand,⁷⁷ it is probably the best option for the moving notes in this passage.

The harmonics found later in this movement are slightly problematic; they are not possible from home base (Ex. 6a).



Ex. 6a: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 1st mvt., mm. 97–100.

There are several alternate fingerings, gleaned from previous performances. Some bassists may choose to read the three measures up an octave, placing the second B natural in the same octave as the previous one; these could be played as artificial harmonics.⁷⁸ Alternatively, they could be played in the same octave as natural harmonics (Ex. 6b).⁷⁹



Ex. 6b: Alteration of written notes to playable harmonics.

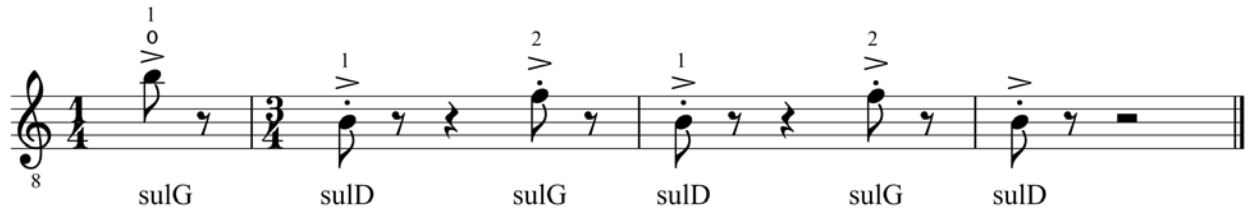
Another possible interpretation is to play the high B as a harmonic and the lower B and F as closed notes (Ex. 6c).⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Jeff Bradetich, *Double Bass: The Ultimate Challenge* (Moscow, ID: Music for All To Hear Inc., 2009), 55.

⁷⁸ Prokofiev Sergey “Sergei Prokofiev - Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39 (1924)” (video), February 27, 2012, 4:00, accessed April 14, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioSnEB20Eis>.

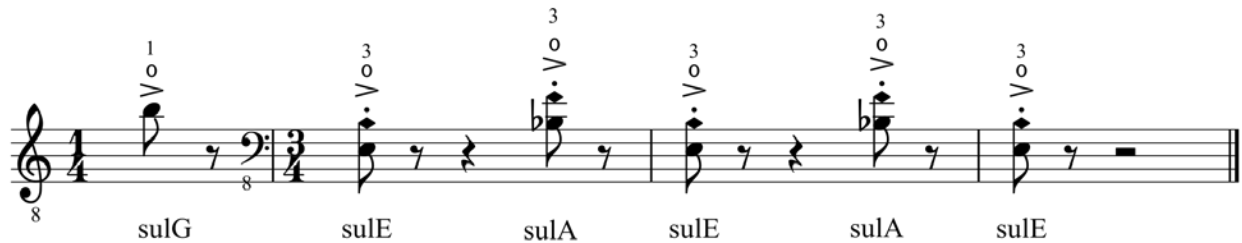
⁷⁹ Sergey Prokofiev “Quintet, Op. 39 by Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) Part I” (video), 2002, 4:39, accessed April 13, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOKsR2T65ig>.

⁸⁰ Sergey Prokofiev “Ensemble ACJW: Prokofiev's Quintet in g Minor” (video), February 5, 2010, 4:08, accessed April 13, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uk9df3R6dxY>.



Ex. 6c: Alteration of written notes from harmonics to closed notes.

One final option is to play the lower B harmonic on the E string and the F natural on the A string, a half step up as an artificial harmonic. This is slightly more challenging but produces the desired notes as harmonics (Ex. 6d).



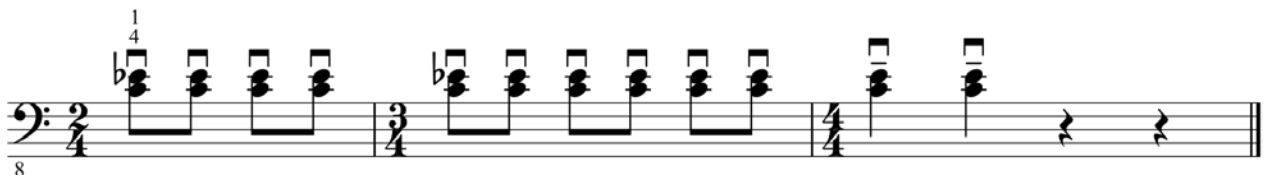
Ex. 6d: Alteration of written notes from harmonics to artificial harmonics.

Although all are possible, the desired result will be clear based on the group's tempo and balance issues. It is likely that the solution in Example 6c will be easiest and most appropriate based on the thick texture in the ensemble at that point in the music.

Multiple Stops

On stringed instruments, it is possible to play more than one note at a time; this is commonly referred to as "multiple stopping." The most common instance of this for bowed stringed instruments is a double stop, whereby a string player plays two adjacent strings at the same time. The appearance of double and triple stops is not ordinarily seen in double bass music, especially in a chamber setting. There are several instances of double stops throughout the piece, from isolated vertical points to extended passages of double stops. Bradetich suggests

that double stops have certain preferable fingerings: the interval of a major third should be played with first and third or fourth fingers, while the interval of a minor third should be played with first and second fingers, as implied in his “Thirds Drill.”⁸¹ The second movement illuminates a good example requiring this fingering plan (Ex. 7).



Ex. 7: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 2nd mvt., mm. 34–36.

Apart from thirds, other types of double stops require a special fingering. A perfect fourth should not be barred with one finger; instead the double bass player should use a fingered bar fingering.⁸² In this technique the adjacent string is pressed with the adjacent finger, lending better tone production and facility in shifting and vibrato.

The double stops offered at the beginning of the third movement challenge the double bass player to understand all of these rules, necessitating the following fingering (Ex. 8a).



Ex. 8a: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 3rd mvt., mm. 1–8.

The bass part offers the benefit of encouraging good left hand technique because it is necessary to play the double stops with curved fingers to allow the higher string to speak. The fingers on

⁸¹ Jeff Bradetich, *Technical Exercises for Double Bass* (Moscow, ID: Music for All to Hear, 2009), 7.

⁸² Jeff Bradetich, *Double Bass: The Ultimate Challenge* (Moscow, ID: Music for All To Hear Inc., 2009), 74.

the lower string must create a tunnel for the string to resonate through. Additionally, Prokofiev calls for the player to bow “sul tallone,” or at the frog, creating an extra challenge with the repetitive retakes.

Although the tritone double stop in the second movement is not either of the intervals discussed previously, the fourths tuning of the instrument dictates an inverted major third fingering and is easily fingered with first and second fingers. Yet this is not the challenging part of the passage. The tritone double stop alternates with a high a-sharp, necessitating a large leaping shift (Ex. 8b).



Ex. 8b: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 2nd mvt., mm. 24–28.

This passage is best practiced with a shifting drill, so as to eliminate the ever popular, desperate and mostly unsuccessful “Hail Mary” approach to a large shift, whereby the player leaps to the note and loses contact with the string. It should also be mentioned that this is a great place to apply interval shifting, calculating distance traveled from first finger to first finger, thereby avoiding the leaping shift where the hand leaves contact with the string. It is very common for most string players to discuss this type of shifting but surprisingly most bass players do not think about shifting in this way. Since the first finger is playing the C natural on the E string, the G string equivalent would be D-sharp; this means that the first finger is making a shifting distance of a perfect fourth from D-sharp to G-sharp and then the third finger plays the A-sharp (Ex. 8c).



Ex. 8c: Interval shifting between positions.

One type of double stop inherent in much of Prokofiev and Stravinsky’s music is the open string unison double stop seen in the first movement of the Quintet (Ex. 9).



Ex. 9: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 1st mvt., mm. 12–13.

Also related are open string double stops; Prokofiev used the octave against an open string frequently in his orchestral and within the Quintet (Ex. 10).



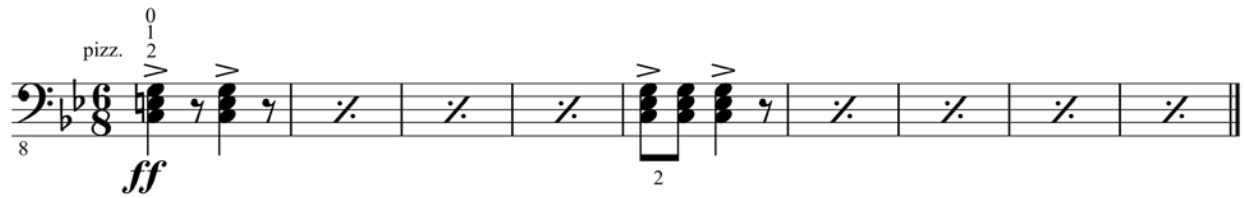
Ex. 10: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 2nd mvt., m. 8.

In his films produced at the University of Illinois, Paul Rolland discusses the benefits of playing octave double stops. According to Rolland, passages like this portion of Prokofiev’s Quintet “encourage good left hand position and intonation.”⁸³

The double stops in the fourth movement are not necessarily fast-paced, but they do fall under the category of the major/minor third fingering. This movement also contains some possible open string double stops. The real challenge with these double stops actually has more to do with the right hand, as the slow tempo requires more bow control.

⁸³ Paul Rolland, *The Teaching of Action in String Playing* (Fairfax: ASTA with NSOA, 2000), film #7.

Nearing the end of the piece, Prokofiev wrote a pizzicato triple stop C major chord at rehearsal 85. This repeating chord is played fortissimo, with accents (Ex. 11).



Ex. 11: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 6th mvt., mm. 108–115.

The pizzicato can be performed one of two ways, with one finger per string so each note sounds at the same time as the others, or by strumming across the string. The most effective way to execute this passage is by strumming with the right hand thumb, as it is considered the strongest digit and will therefore create the desired effect, indicated with accents on the fortissimo chords.

Independent Lines

Some passages of the Quintet feature the double bass heavily, and these should be illuminated for another reason. It is an unusual event when the double bassist plays solo, and completely without accompaniment. This skeletal texture is an anomaly and was used infrequently in double bass chamber music literature; however, this occurs throughout Prokofiev's Quintet, such as in the first movement. Here the double bass tumbles down from the break in its register to its lowest note, ushering in a new section of music (Ex. 12).



Ex. 12: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 1st mvt., mm. 110–113.

Although this section is not particularly challenging from a technical standpoint, it is rather unusual to utilize the double bass in such an exposed manner.

Possibly influenced by the rising popularity of jazz, Prokofiev's fifth movement is very fast and features the double bass. He opens with a blistering double bass pizzicato solo punctuated by screeching interjections from the ensemble (Ex. 13).



Ex. 13: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 5th mvt., mm. 1–7.

The acrobatic pizzicato line is independent of the other instruments and provides a challenge to the bassist. Instead of a linear melody, the disjunct passage has large leaps that span a large geographical portion of the fingerboard, both vertically and across all strings. The other instruments punctuate the ever-present bass part with exclamatory gestures.

Later in the same movement, Prokofiev further delves into these jazz-like properties while the double bass sings through a large range and into the higher register with syncopated rhythms (Ex. 14a).



Ex. 14a: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 5th mvt., mm. 49–52.

This passage is difficult for multiple reasons. First, Prokofiev combines triplets and sixteenth notes; this requires the bassist to have a very strong rhythm. Additionally, the syncopations over

these rhythmic modulations make it all the more challenging. Finally, the large range of this section of music creates a challenge for the bassist to shift fluidly. In dealing with the first measure, it may be necessary to practice the first measure alone, with one bow stroke per triplet beat first, to obtain a more precise rhythm for the melodic contour (Ex. 14b).



Ex. 14b: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 5th mvt., m. 49 adapted

Once comfortable with this rhythm, one should delete the second note of each tie (Ex. 14c).



Ex. 14c: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 5th mvt., m. 49 adapted

After practicing this way, the final step is to put the ties back in, which poses a bowing challenge to the bassist, if the player chooses to bow the passage as it comes. The longer notes will be down bows, potentially forcing the player towards the tip of the bow. However, this is not problematic because the following measure has two long up bows, allowing the player to recover to the frog.

In dealing with the third measure of the passage, there are two likely fingerings for the third and fourth notes. Either the player can finger the tritone with second and fourth fingers or first and second fingers. In choosing the most appropriate fingering, it is advisable to look to the notes that follow. Immediately after the tritone the bassist must shift to the neck block position, where four notes can be played in one position (Ex. 14d).



This can be done for four strokes per note, and then reduced to three and two at the same stroke speed, allowing the player to maintain the right hand speed and give the left hand the opportunity to get used to the notes. Likewise, the rhythmic permutations offered by Galamian and many others are helpful to facilitate “thinking breaks” while practicing two or more notes at the desired performance tempo (Ex. 15c).



Ex. 15c: Fast passagework modified as a rhythmic permutation.

The rhythm in the example above allows the student to perform two notes at tempi with a small break afterwards. After practicing the entire passage with the rhythm in the first measure successfully, the performer should practice the entire passage with the rhythm in the third measure as well. When string players utilize the methods of multiple strokes and rhythmic permutations, fast passages are more readily managed.

Ensemble Related Challenges

In addition to the chromaticism that was inherent to Prokofiev’s compositional style during his stay in Paris, the Quintet offers a few other challenges. Balance is one such factor to consider throughout the piece as Prokofiev writes dynamics specific to each part. The fourth movement in particular contains individualized dynamic markings that indicate Prokofiev’s desire of which parts of each textural element he would like to illuminate. The specific dynamic marks in the fourth movement should be considered part of an arch, gradually making a crescendo to the middle point around rehearsal 47 and then a decrescendo to the end as written. The ensemble should use caution; the written dynamics at the climax of this movement may prove too forceful for a live performance as they will drown out the melody in the violin.

Another alluring facet to the piece is ensemble coordination. Several times throughout the Quintet, Prokofiev writes offset melodic interjections that form a pattering sensation in the melodic contour; this use of phrase elision and overlapping melodies is very effective from the listener's standpoint but can be very difficult in performance. A few instances in particular should be mentioned, beginning with the first movement. In measure 23, the clarinet melody reiterates the violin against the strong beat instead of on it. Another instance of this layering effect occurs in the second movement between rehearsal numbers 26 and 27. Here multiple melodies come together and overlap, creating the additional burden of balance. In the third movement, the quintet is struggling with the challenge of the constant meter shifts as well as this additional melodic overlap. At rehearsal 35, the double bass imitates the viola line an eighth note apart, and then imitates the clarinet melody at the same rhythmic displacement. This occurs similarly in the fifth movement at rehearsal 52. The proper performance of these sections can be challenging and the ensemble should plan to dedicate some rehearsal time to these sections.

Throughout the piece, Prokofiev presents melodic ideas that could individually represent different characters in a circus. This leitmotif style of writing is not surprising considering the original work was a ballet, but it provides a challenging task for the ensemble to present a cohesive performance as a chamber work in concert format. The last movement is particularly challenging, as it seems that all these leitmotifs are struggling against one another. During this movement, the double bass plays a sinister, yet lilting duet with the violin (Ex. 16a).

Ex. 16a: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 6th mvt., mm. 37–48.

This duet has a bouncing, jovial attitude facilitated by clipped small phrases and a disjunct line. These characteristics combined with the chromaticism make it demanding for the double bassist. This instance of high register playing is salient because the double bass is used to create mood as an equal to the violin. It is recommended the passage be fingered as shown in example 16b.

Fig 16b: Prokofiev, Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, 6th mvt., mm. 37–48 with fingerings.

In this passage, the double bass player should consider first the character and the bowings before designing a fingering. For the most part, this fingering blocks notes together and avoids shifting large distances within a slur. Also, the movable closed thumb is extremely helpful in the

passage and allows the player to avoid awkward shifts and smooth over string crossings, particularly in measure 46, where thumb position and fingered bar are used for facility.

CHAPTER 5

PEDAGOGICAL PLACEMENT OF OP. 39

Recommended Level for the Quintet

Based on the Quintet's technical demands, it is recommended that the player be both musically and technically advanced. It is not a far reach to say that this level of playing should be expected of a college student, who would benefit from several of the technical challenges offered. The musical maturity required as well as the difficulty of playing should fit well within the ability of a well-rounded upperclassman.

An assimilation of modern string technique is a pre-requisite to the study of this piece, and it is therefore assumed the student will have a strong technical foundation before approaching this chamber work. The endeavoring bassist should have a fluent understanding of harmonics at the end of the fingerboard, be capable of playing through the break of the instrument (at the neck block) and in upper positions, and should be well-versed in the modern technical demands on double bass. The ideal bassist for this piece should be comfortable playing across the strings in higher positions and shifting among positions with ease. Thumb position should be a frequently and easily utilized technique, and the model performer will not be mired in, or distracted by, technical issues when presented with the musical opportunities Prokofiev provides for the double bass in this work.

Benefits of playing the piece

As mentioned in previous chapters, there is a lack of technical demand in the bass chamber music literature leading up to the Prokofiev Quintet. The use of the instrument as an independent entity adds to the formidable nature of the piece and makes it that much more

pedagogically alluring. The rhythmic and chromatic challenges add to the student's development and create further complexity. Finally, the work required to achieve ensemble cohesion is an added challenge from which all involved instruments benefit.

As previously discussed, double stops challenge the player to make sure the string is clear to vibrate which calls for a curved left hand shape.

Placing the Quintet in a Pedagogical Context

Within the canon of double bass chamber music literature lie many pieces that do not require much advanced playing from the double bassist. The types of writing that make a piece of music more difficult include the following: technical difficulty for the left and right hands, harmonic language including chromaticism, and ensemble cohesion. In general, the double bass chamber music literature before Prokofiev's Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39 was much less challenging for the double bass player, but it is still important to the development of the bassist's musicianship, particularly in sensitivity to other players in the ensemble for balance purposes.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Summary

When considering Prokofiev's Quintet in G Minor, Op. 39, the technical and musical elements are accessible and beneficial for the student performer. Many of the techniques pushed the boundaries at the time of composition and Prokofiev expected more of the double bass than his predecessors in defining the double bass within chamber music literature. The Quintet is aesthetically pleasing, musically inspiring and technically demanding, and Prokofiev has given future composers a new perspective from which to see the double bass.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could delve into to the list of chamber music involving the double bass. One might consider the technical and musical difficulty of chamber music involving double bass and place them in a sequential order to benefit the student performer. This project could also suggest the merits of studying each piece and would be helpful for developing a progressive repertoire within the chamber music system and for providing grounds for a well-rounded chamber music program in all levels of study.

Also helpful would be the addition of études and repertoire that include some of the beneficial aspects of this piece, including harmonic glissandi, triple stops and most notably the open string double stop.

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