

Historical Importance of Two Cello Concertos by Joseph Haydn on the Development of Concerto Composing Tradition for Solo Cello

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Abstract: : Composed during the Classical Period of the Western History of Music, Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) Cello Concertos No. 1 in C Major and No. 2 in D Major are among the most important representatives of the concerto composing tradition for solo cello. Comparison of Haydn Cello Concertos with the cello concertos of the Baroque tradition, reveals a significant improvement on employing the wide range of cello playing techniques, cello sonorities and the presentation of both virtuoso and lyric thematic materials between the far pitch areas of the cello’s fingerboard, featured in Haydn concertos. As a result, two cello concertos of Joseph Haydn are among the most important and also influential examples of the history of the cello repertoire, considered within the developmental stages of the concerto composing tradition for solo cello. In contrast to the simple harmonic and melodic structures of the orchestra parts in Haydn concertos, solo cello parts feature the presentation of thematic materials, built with complex rhythmic structures and lyric melodic lines, occupying both high and low pitch areas of cello’s fingerboard, which puts an emphasis on cello as a solo instrument in front of an orchestra. In this paper, historical stages of cello becoming one of the most essential instruments on concerto composing tradition are explained from Baroque traditions to Classical traditions as discussing the role and the importance of Haydn Cello Concertos No. 1 in C Major and No. 2 in D Major on the birth and the development of a concerto composing tradition for solo cello.

Keywords: Haydn Cello Concerto, Solo Cello, Concerto Composing Tradition

1. Introduction

Soloist presentation of a small instrumental group in front of a bigger instrumental group is among the most important developments that also prepared the birth of a concerto composing tradition during the Baroque Era. Beginning of the standardization period of the orchestra during the Classical Period, is another important fact, holding a fundamental importance on the development of the concerto composing tradition for a solo instrument and a solo cello with an orchestral accompaniment. Composed during the Classical Period of the History of Music, Joseph Haydn Cello Concertos No. 1 in C Major and No. 2 in D Major are among the earliest and the most influential examples of the concerto composing tradition for solo cello, featuring the virtuoso qualities of the cello with an orchestra accompaniment, which also marks the importance of the concertos for the cello repertoire. Among the other historical facts, prepared the birth of a concerto tradition for solo cello, are the growing popularity of secular music, performed with stringed instruments; more frequent employment of the bass instruments on the presentation of the main thematic materials on a composition, starting from the beginning of the 18th century; and, gradual abandonment of the popular basso continuo tradition of the Baroque Period.

During the Baroque Era, successive presentation of contrasting thematic materials between two instrumental groups, of which smaller of them functions as a soloist, was one of the main principles of a concerto composing tradition, called concerto grosso. Concertos, written for one solo instrument, accompanied with an instrumental

group, on the other hand, also featured a successive presentation of contrasting themes, which was another widely employed genre of the Baroque tradition. “One of the most striking and distinctive, but by no means exclusive, features of Baroque music is the principle of strong contrast and opposition of sonorities, often achieved through division of the performance medium into two or more groups. This principle, known as the *stile concertato*, originated in the late sixteenth century and took on greater significance throughout the seventeenth century, culminating in the development of a new instrumental form—the concerto—that capitalized specifically on this important Baroque principle of composition.”¹

Concerto composing tradition of the Baroque times continued into the Classical Period, after the second half of the 18th century, as developing into more virtuoso presentations of a solo instrument in front of an orchestra. Cello concertos of Joseph Haydn No.1 in C Major and No.2 in D Major are among the outstanding representatives of the concerto composing tradition for a solo stringed instrument, during the Classical Period. The concertos were among the first compositions, which employed the wide range of cello sonorities and technical facilities. Thus, they have held an essential role in the performance practice tradition of the cello in front of an orchestra. Among the most important characteristics of Haydn Cello Concertos, emphasizing the significant importance of the compositions for the time period in which they were composed, are the use of far pitch areas of the cello’s fingerboard on the presentation of the main thematic materials; presentation of both lyric and technically demanding melodic lines; successive use of bow structures, built with different characteristics; and, employment of complex rhythmic structures on the solo cello part with a simple orchestra accompaniment. As a result, presenting cello’s high artistic qualities in front of an orchestra, Haydn Cello Concertos are among the compositions that mark the birth of the tradition that emphasized the cello as a virtuoso and a solo instrument. This paper will discuss the importance of Joseph Haydn Cello Concertos No.1 in C Major and No.2 in D Major on the birth of the concerto composing tradition for solo cello.

2. Birth of the Concerto Composing Tradition for Solo Cello and its Transition from Baroque to Classical Traditions

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), an Italian composer from the Baroque Period, is among the most influential figures on the development of the concerto composing tradition. Corelli’s significant contributions to the instrumental music towards the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, also had a great impact on the development of the concerto composing tradition of his time. Corelli’s twelve *concerti grossi* are among the first examples of concertos, presenting contrasting thematic materials successively between two instrumental groups. The works of Corelli both for orchestra and solo instruments are among the representatives of the compositions that employed the interpretative power of a stringed instrument, appeared in the use of ornamentations, trills and the themes, structured between the far areas of the solo instruments’ fingerboard. “Corelli had a reputation for perfectionism: his playing was both elegant and learned, his publications contained only the polished gems of a much larger output...His sonatas and concertos were the standard-bearers for subsequent Baroque and Pre-Classic composers; four movements were established as the norm, and the harmony was firmly tonal...his demands on the players were always idiomatic and slow movements perforce skeletal, to allow soloists the opportunity truly to demonstrate their musicianship.”²

Concerto grosso tradition of the Baroque Period, featuring the solo presentation of a small instrumental group against a bigger instrumental group, is among the most important historical facts that initiated the start of a tradition, which featured the virtuoso presentation of a solo instrument in front of an orchestra. One of the main functions of a bass instrument in the concerto grosso tradition was the presentation of the basso continuo line. Basso continuo practice of the Baroque Music is the main fact on defining the role of the bass instruments on the concerto grosso tradition. Thus, the role of the bass instruments on the concerto grosso tradition of the Baroque times remained limited in terms of exhibiting the performance practice capabilities of the bass

¹ *A History of the Concerto*, Michael Thomas Roeder. (pp. 17)

² *Companion to Baroque Music*, edited by Julie Anne Sadie (pp. 61)

instruments. Bass instruments, at this point of the Music History, were still functioning mostly as an accompaniment and the cello was among the most essential instruments of the basso continuo practice. Cello's gradual separation from the basso continuo assignment of a composition was an initial phase on the consideration of the cello as a solo instrument. As a result, the cello started to become more of a popular instrument besides its role as holding an essential role on the basso continuo tradition of the Baroque times.

Cello Concertos of Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) are among the earliest compositions, demonstrating the performance practice competences of the cello of the time in a concerto form. "...his originality is revealed in the Concerto in E minor, which opens with the solo cello accompanied by a bassoon—a unique choice. In addition, this concerto has a novel characteristic in its tempo markings. In the first movement, solos are marked *adagio* and *tutti allegro*, while in the second movement it is just the reverse...Even if his type of writing did not reach the highest attained by some other late eighteenth-century composers, he was already exploiting the cello's potential for virtuosity in a significant way...Vivaldi gave his soloists a pure line—tender or dramatic—that could be sung by emotion. He was thus the first to introduce the expressive style of playing.”³

Belongs to the early developmental stages of the concerto composing tradition for solo cello, concertos of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788) are also among the significant contributions to the cello repertoire. The concertos display the influence of both Baroque and Classical concerto composing traditions for solo cello. Although the successive employment of contrasting thematic materials between the orchestra and the solo part in the frame of a *ritornello* form displays the Baroque influence on the concertos' formal structure, employment of the cello as a solo instrument in front of an orchestra with the presentation of the cello's virtuoso qualities evokes the Classical style of concerto writing on the cello concertos of Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach. “Unlike the private instrumental genres (such as the solo sonata and the quartet) and the public symphony, whose participating forces are roughly equal, the classical concerto pits a single instrumentalist against a full orchestra.”⁴

Cello concertos of Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach, composed towards the beginning of the Classical Period, are among the most remarkable examples, employing the cello as a virtuoso instrument in front of an orchestra. Some of the challenging cello playing techniques and musical characteristics, emphasizing the cello as a solo instrument, presented in the concertos are: Employment of wide range of dynamics and variety of cello playing techniques both on lyric and virtuoso themes; use of arpeggios, double-stops and complex rhythmic structures in the melodic lines; and, thematic materials that require shifting between the far pitch areas of the cello's fingerboard. Thus, The Cello Concertos of Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach, are among the historically important concertos on the transition period of the concerto composing tradition from Baroque to Classical styles.

3. Concerto Composing Tradition of the Classical Period & Haydn Cello Concertos No.1 in C Major and No.2 in D Major

Cello Concertos of Joseph Haydn, No.1 in C Major and No.2 in D Major, are among the most remarkable compositions of the History of Western Music, on defining the final steps of the cello's transition from being a bass instrument of the basso continuo tradition of the Baroque times into being a solo instrument, performing in front of an orchestra. Haydn Cello concertos, featuring the employment of the cello's virtuoso qualities and sonorities, are among the first examples of the concerto composing tradition for solo cello. Solo cello parts in both concertos display independent presentations of the virtuoso thematic materials with a simple orchestral accompaniment, which can be even considered as revolutionary in comparison to the cello concertos of the Baroque times. Cello Concertos of Joseph Haydn, No. 1 in C Major and No. 2 in D Major, are also among the most remarkable representatives of the Classical tradition of the concerto composing style. Some of the main

³ *Cello Story*, Markevitch, Dimitry, Seder, Florence W. (pp.129)

⁴ Caplin, William E (1998), *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn Mozart and Beethoven*, Oxford University Press: New York. (pp. 243)

musical characteristics of the Classical concerto tradition, employed in Haydn Cello Concertos are the use of sonata form with double exposition; employment of thematic materials, built with more simple melodic structures than Baroque times with the use of less ornamentation; employment of complex rhythmic structures in the solo part, characterized with triplets and sixteenth-note figures with simple orchestra accompaniment, rhythmically built with eight-notes.

Formal structures of the cello concertos of Joseph Haydn feature the use of a three-movement setting, built with fast-slow-fast movement order. The first movements in both concertos are in sonata form with a double exposition, performed successively on the orchestra and the solo cello parts. Orchestra parts of the double expositions, in the first movement of each concerto, present the introduction of the main thematic materials of the movements. The second movements of the concertos feature the use of ternary form on presenting the cello sonorities on lyric melodic lines. Main thematic materials of the second movement in the C Major concerto are introduced with an orchestra part, before the solo entrance. In the second movement of the D Major Concerto, on the other hand, the main thematic materials of the movement is introduced in the solo part. The last movement of the C Major Concerto starts with a long orchestral introduction, summarizing the main thematic materials of the movement. The main thematic materials of the third movement, on the solo cello part of the C Major Concerto, feature the presentation of scale-like motives. The third movement of the D Major Concerto on the other hand is in rondo form and the first rondo theme of the movement is introduced on the solo cello part and repeated with the orchestra accompaniment. Main rondo theme and its variations are presented between the solo and the orchestra parts throughout the third movement of the D Major Concerto.

Thematic materials of Haydn Cello Concertos No.1 in C Major and No.2 in D Major are structured in Classical traditions. Melodic lines, in both concertos, are built with clear metric organizations. “The beat is important in the Classical style, but it is arrived at by subdivision of the measure. That is why the beat may vary so much from one part of a movement to another: the measure is being subjected to different forms of subdivision. As a result, a Classical theme is tied more firmly to its metrical position. For this reason, intelligent performance demands decision in every doubtful case as to what the real (as opposed to the noted) measure is.”⁵

4. Conclusion

Classical Period of the History of Western Music witnessed fundamental developments on the genres that have been influential and widely employed since the second half of the 18th century. Concerto is among the genres, which had some of its most essential developmental stages during the Classical Period. Thus, concerto composing tradition for solo cello also had its important developmental stages during the Classical Period. The time period between the cello holding an essential role on the basso continuo tradition of the Baroque times and being a solo instrument in front of an orchestra in the Classical Period witnessed the production of the compositions that presented some of the most widely performed works of the cello repertoire.

Among the first examples of the cello concertos, presenting cello sonorities on lyric thematic materials, are the cello concertos of Antonio Vivaldi. Although Vivaldi concertos employ the cello as a solo instrument, the use of cello’s fingerboard on the compositions can be considered limited, because of the employment of the thematic materials mostly between the first and the fourth positions of the cello’s fingerboard. The cello concertos of Carl Phillip Emmanuel Bach, composed towards the beginning of the Classical Period, feature a great deal of improvement on employing the cello’s technical facilities on the virtuoso themes. At the same time, the formal structure of the concertos of Carl Phillip Emmanuel Bach, resemble the Baroque concerto setting. Belong to the Classical Period concerto composing tradition, Haydn Cello Concertos No.1 in C Major and No.2 in D Major are among the most important examples, featuring the cello’s both virtuoso qualities and the sonorities in musical forms that have been employed widely on concerto writing after the second half of the 18th century.

⁵ *Musical Form and Musical Performance*, Edward T. Cone, (pp.72)

Comparing Haydn Cello Concertos with the concertos of the Baroque times, in terms of the cello playing techniques and sound limits, reveals a significant improvement on employing the cello as a virtuoso instrument. Some of the most important differences that prove the employment of the virtuoso qualities of the cello in Haydn Cello Concertos are the use of thematic materials, structured between the far areas of the cello's fingerboard; melodic lines, built with complex rhythmic structures; successive employment of the bow structures that have different characteristics; and, the use of a simple orchestral accompaniment on the presentation of the main thematic materials on the solo cello part. Although use of ritornello form, in which the cello and the orchestra performs the main thematic materials successively, is very common in Baroque Period, in Haydn Cello Concertos, the solo and the accompaniment parts are clearly separated from each other. Cello Concertos of Joseph Haydn feature a simple accompaniment part while emphasizing the solo cello part with complex musical structures.

Cello Concertos of Joseph Haydn No.1 in C Major and No.2 in D Major are among the most widely performed compositions of the cello repertoire from the Classical Period. Among the cello concertos, employing the cello as a virtuoso instrument, from the following time periods are Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 129 by Robert Schumann; Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104 by Antonín Dvořák; Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85 by Edward Elgar; Cello Concerto in D minor by Édouard Lalo; and Cello Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major, Op. 107 by Dmitri Shostakovich. Comparing Haydn Concertos with the cello concertos from both Baroque Period and the following time periods of the History of Western Music reveals the historical importance of the concertos on the process of cello becoming a virtuoso instrument, performing in front of an orchestra from Baroque times into the 20th century music.

References:

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- [2] Companion to Baroque Music, edited by Julie Anne Sadie (pp. 61)
- [3] Cello Story, Markevitch, Dimitry, Seder, Florence W. (pp.129)
- [4] Caplin, William E (1998), Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn Mozart and Beethoven, Oxford University Press: New York. (pp. 243)
- [5] Musical Form and Musical Performance, Edward T. Cone, (pp.72)