

BERNHARD ROMBERG

- An evaluation of his career and influence

By Celloheaven

One can get a clear idea of the artistic personality of the German cellist Bernhard Romberg from an article by his famous contemporary, the romantic writer Ernst Theodor Amadeus (E.T.A.) Hoffmann:

"When I speak of the high perfection achieved by instrumental music at the present moment, what other name can come to my mind than that of the great master, whom to my sincere joy I found here after a long absence ...Bernhard Romberg is with us again. I made sure that he is really ours now having seen posters of his concert ... He played also in many other concerts but I managed to see and hear him only in this one, where he himself was the centerpiece."

"I do mean I could both hear and see him, because the general ardent desire not only to hear but also to see at a concert ... arises, no doubt, not out of idle curiosity: he hears better who sees. The mysterious affinity of light and sound becomes evident; light and sound merge into a single whole, and the soloist himself is transformed into a singing melody! This might sound strange, I agree, but, please, look and listen to our divine Bernhard, and you will appreciate what I say and will not reproach me for foolish eccentricity.

"Complete freedom of performances and absolute command of the instrument eliminate any struggle with this mechanical means of expression, and the instrument thus becomes a spontaneous, ingenuous organ of feeling, But is that not a supreme goal towards which any artist is striving? And who came closer to this than Romberg! He has complete power over the instrument or, rather, the instrument itself, with its force and grace, with its rare wealth of sound becomes part of the artist, and without any expense of mechanical force conveys all that the soul is feeling. Not the least important is that during concerts, Romberg never uses music and is performing from memory, sitting easily in front of his audience. You cannot imagine how greatly he impressed me."

(Hoffmann mentions Romberg's concert in Berlin on October 23, 1814. On the program were Romberg's symphony and his cello works-the Sixth Concerto/Concerto militaire, Rondolletto and Capriccio on Swedish folk songs-all performed by the composer.)

Many scholars compare Romberg with outstanding string instrumentalists such as Viotti, Spohr and Paganini because of his remarkable talent as a composer. His technical skill was appreciated by European audiences during his many tours.

It is no exaggeration to say that in the history of cello playing, Romberg's name signified a whole epoch, characteristic of the transition from the classical style to the romantic. At the same time a brilliant development of cello virtuosity occurred. Romberg's influence on the further evolution of this field of art is truly tremendous, and the educational value of his cello concertos is still significant today.

But Romberg's concert activity is undoubtedly of the greatest importance. For over half a century it was an example of the virtuoso performing skill in all European countries.

Bernhard Heinrich Romberg was born on November 11, 1767 in the Oldenburg town of Dinklage in the family of the musician Anton Romberg. Bernhard spent his childhood in Munster, where his father was a bassoonist and his uncle Herard Heinrich Romberg a clarinetist and choirmaster. His father, who also played cello, was the child's first music teacher. There is evidence that for a while, Bernhard also took lessons from the German cellist Johann Konrad Schlick. According to other sources, he studied with the Viennese violoncellist Franz Marteau, who later became famous. It is also quite possible that Romberg had his advanced cello lessons under the guidance of a violinist, as the violin character of his technique indicates. By 1773 Bernhard had already played for the Munster public with his cousin Andreas Romberg (1767-1821), who later became an illustrious violinist. The boys were then both seven years old. For several years afterwards, the young musicians toured together successfully in different European countries. In 1776 they visited Holland, in 1782 Frankfurt am Main, and in the 1784-1785 season, Paris. Their successful performance in one of the salons brought about an invitation to the "Concerts Spirituels."

Bernhard and Andreas made so great an impression on the famous French musician Francois Philidor that he introduced them to Jean Battist Viotti, thus enabling them to listen to this outstanding violinist. In Paris they heard Gluck's operas, Haydn's oratorios etc. One can imagine how greatly the 16-year old Romberg was impressed by the art of Duport and other French virtuosi, and it is very probable that the French influences which later manifested themselves in Romberg's creative work were, to a certain extent, connected with his youthful impressions.

Back in Munster, Romberg devoted himself assiduously to studying the cello. For several years, Bernhard and Andreas played in the Munster court orchestra. The Archbishop of Cologne, who in 1790 passed through Munster and happened to hear them play, invited the young performers to the Bonn Chapel. There they made friends with such musicians as Christian Neefe, Ludwig van Beethoven (who played organ and viola there), the Ries family, the leading Czech cellist Joseph Reicha (1752-1795), who might have also taught Romberg, and some others. Franz Ries, Andreas Romberg, Ludwig van Beethoven and Bernhard Romberg formed a quartet.

There is also information about a trio formed by Beethoven, Ries and Romberg. If we add that by that time Romberg performed solo cello quite often and played his own compositions, it is clear that the atmosphere in Bonn was extremely partial to the young musician.

Very significant for Romberg's intellectual development was the fact that Bonn, situated not far from the Rhine and a university town, was especially influenced at that time by the progressive ideas of the French revolution.

In 1791, Romberg and other court musicians (Beethoven was with them also) visited Marhenthim, where he performed his concerto. Here is what Karl Ludwig Junker wrote about him at that time:

"Romberg, the younger, combines in his violoncello playing extraordinary rapidity with charming rendering. This rendering is the more marked and decided when he is heard in connection with the greater number of violoncellists. The tone which he produces from his instrument is, moreover-especially in the expressive parts-extremely clear, firm, and penetrating. Taking into consideration the difficulty of the instrument, a thoroughly marked purity of tone in the extraordinarily quick rendering of the Allegro, must be attributed to him in the highest degree. Yet this after all is mere mechanical readiness. The connoisseur has another standard by which he measures the greatness of artists and this is the manner of playing, the perfection of expression or the spiritual interpretation. Once on this point, the connoisseur will pronounce in favor of the expressive Adagio. It is impossible more deeply to penetrate into the more delicate hues of feeling-impossible to color them with more variety-to enhance them, moreover, by greater light and shade-impossible to hit more exactly the very tones through which this feeling has utterance, tones which appeal more directly to the heart than Romberg succeeds in doing in his Adagio."

Influenced by the advancing French revolutionary army, the situation in Cologne changed quickly, resulting in disbanding of the Chapel in 1793. Bernhard and Andreas Romberg left Bonn, to settle in Hamburg, where for several years they combined concert performances with playing in a theatre orchestra.

In 1796 the two musicians made a tour of Italy, and were invariably successful in Rome, Naples and other cities. In autumn of that year, on their way back to Hamburg, they stayed for a period in Vienna where they were introduced to Joseph Haydn. He treated them affably, and cordially helped out so that Viennese art patrons gave the musicians a hearty welcome. Here Romberg met Beethoven, who took part in his concert. Together they played two of Beethoven's Sonatas, Op. 5, which had been composed not long before.

After about two years in Hamburg, Romberg journeyed to England, Portugal and Spain in 1799, parting with Andreas for the first time. Romberg cherished especially rich memories of his visits to Madrid. Spanish influences are often felt in his works, for example, "Fandango" in the finale of the Second Concerto or "Capricho y Rondo en el gusto español con una misceliana de Bolero, Gitato, Cachirulo y Zorongo."

After returning to Hamburg for a while (he had married by then), Romberg again visited Paris in 1800 and played with dazzling success in the concerts "de la rue de Clery", "du theatre des Victoires", and others. Romberg's exceptional mastery immediately indicated that he was a cellist with the same standing as the French virtuosos Duport and Lamarre. *"His glorious talent was at the zenith of its power at that time,"* wrote Francois-Joseph Fetis. Romberg was in no way inferior to Duport and Lamarre in force and power of the performance, though Duport's tone was rounder and softer and Lamarre's style more delicate and elegant.

At the beginning of 1801, Romberg was offered a professorship at the Paris Conservatoire, and he taught there until the end of 1802. Romberg's first four Concertos Op. 2, 3, 6, and 7 were also published in Paris. On the title pages of the final three, he was cited as a "membre du Conservatoire de musique" but apparently this educational mission held little attraction for him, and he returned to Hamburg.

In 1805 Romberg was a court musician in the Berlin Chapel where he often performed with Duport. He also performed as a soloist at public concerts and in salons, enjoying remarkable success.

In his autobiography, Ludwig Spohr wrote about his encounter with the cellist at one of the musical sessions at the home of Prince Anton Radziwill:

"Romberg, who was in flower of his virtuosity at that time, played one of his quartets with cello obligato. I heard him for the first time, and was delighted by his recital."

Romberg did tours of other German towns, particularly Leipzig, where he used to appear in the Gewandhaus. At the same time (1807) the famous German music critic Johann Friedrich Rochlitz published a review of one of Romberg's recitals, in which he said:

". . . owing to his deep and courageously noble sentiment, to his taste-versatile, but devoted only to the deserving-to his well-trying, reliable and profound art ... Romberg is today proclaimed by the entire musical world . . . the most accomplished of all living violoncellists ... Since the time of Mozart, the most discerning audience has never been as greatly enraptured by any other artist, both as a performer and a composer ..."

Soon Romberg had to leave Berlin, as life in Prussia became unbearable for him - the Tilsit peace agreement greatly worsened the situation in the country. At the end of 1807 Romberg came to southern Russia following concert tours in Germany and Poland. From the beginning of 1809 until the spring of 1813, his concert appearances in St. Petersburg, Moscow and provincial towns were an uninterrupted succession of triumphs. Equally successful concert performances in many European cities followed. Many reviews of his Berlin concerts in 1813-1815 confirm that Romberg was at the peak of his artistic mastery at the time.

Until 1819, Romberg remained in Berlin, where since 1816 he had been court violoncellist and opera conductor, but later moved to Hamburg. With the exception of the 1826-1830 period which was spent in Berlin, Romberg lived his entire life after 1819 in Hamburg, touring constantly throughout the country and abroad.

The German artist performed several times in Vienna. Max Borer (1785-1867), who was acclaimed in Europe as a violoncellist, was very popular in Vienna in the 1820s. Music admirers used to say that Romberg played for immortality, while Borer -for the drawing-room.

At the end of February 1822, a Viennese reporter wrote:

"Bernhard Romberg, hero of all cellists, king of all virtuosi, celebrated a triumph three times this month. Each time the house was overcrowded, each time the audience was delirious, rewarding the master with applause. It is a divine treat to listen to such an unsurpassed performer, and one does not know what is more wonderful - the pure and inspired tone, or the inexpressible ease with which he overcomes all kinds of difficulties, or the elegance, originality and brilliant elaboration of his works."

At that time, Romberg toured with his son Karl, who also played the cello, and daughter Bernardina, a singer. In Vienna he met Beethoven, who was already very ill. A friend of Romberg's youth, Beethoven became one of the most eminent composers of the time.

Beethoven's letter, dated February 12, 1822 - the eve of Romberg's concert-is a vivid illustration of their friendship.

"My dear Romberg, this night I had terrible pains in my ears, as often happens at this time of the year. Even the sounds of your music would have caused me only suffering. That is why you will not see me today. In several days, it might be better and I will be able to bid you farewell. I have not visited you yet -excuse me. It is because my lodgings are too far away, and I have too much work. I have been ill for the entire year, you know, and a lot of new compositions were put aside. Well, why all these ceremonies between the two of us. I wish you financial recognition, to make the success of your brilliant art complete, which happens so rarely nowadays. If there is an opportunity, I hope to see you and your wife and the children, to whom I send my sincere regards. Good-bye, great artist. Truly yours, Beethoven ."

Romberg appeared in concert performances throughout Europe, travelling from St. Petersburg to Madrid, and from London to Kiev; his favorite journeys, besides those to Vienna and Prague, were across Russia. Romberg continued playing in public for many years, managing to preserve his breath-taking virtuosity. A reviewer of the Vienna concert in 1833 called Romberg, who was 66 at the time, *"the king of all cellists."* He wrote:

"The artist's consummate skill is truly enchanting. Though of advanced years, he is still the same great master; the only vocalist of his instrument, he seems to take delight in toying with extraordinary difficulties. He will, no doubt, long continue as an unsurpassed performer."

In musical essays, published in 1834-1836 in Nuremberg, Munich and Frankfurt am Main, Romberg's success was compared to that of Paganini. *"Even time yields to this artist. He is not getting old ..."* wrote a Munich critic, *"what he has lost in power, he has made up for in tenderness, sincerity and precision; the totality and perfection of his playing are as surprising as ever."*



Violoncelloschule

In the twilight of life, Romberg began compiling a cello method, which was completed in 1839 and the following year accepted as a manual for the Paris Conservatoire. It was first published in Paris, then in Germany, Austria and England. Bernhard Romberg died in Hamburg on August 13, 1841.

Consider the transportation facilities of Romberg's time, and one will be surprised that from childhood until well on in years, he constantly wandered with his cello all over Europe. What was amazing in such a way of life was his remarkably fruitful work as a composer, inseparable from his performing career.

Romberg composed not only for the cello; he wrote operas, a ballet, symphonies, overtures, quartets, concert pieces for piano, flute, violin, and incidental music. He also devoted much time to conducting and quartet playing. Romberg also composed cello music for teaching, although frequent tours prevented him from giving it too much time. He wrote a number of cello compositions of an educational character, thus revealing his remarkable inventiveness. It was his suggestion to introduce a hollow on the finger-board which saved the C-string from beating on the finger-board when the bow was pressed hard. Such innovations as the thinning of the cello neck, the lengthening of the neck and finger-board and the increasing of the distance between the finger-board and the sound-board are also attributed to Romberg.

The thirst for versatile creative activity, paralleled with a certain petty-bourgeois narrow-mindedness, coexisted quite well in Romberg's character. The haughtiness and arrogance of the universally recognized "Europe's favorite" led to unconcealed egocentrism.

In his extensive correspondence, Romberg never revealed any interest in the hectic developments of his epoch. But he did not betray his esthetic convictions and artistic quests either. His independent conduct and undisguised antipathy to the Prussian monarchy, often expressed in his letters (for example, that to Kunst of August 8, 1826), prove that Romberg was far from being of the obsequious and deferential attitude to the court so usual then.

It has already been said that Romberg's concert career, which lasted for over fifty years, was the major part of his artistic life. The development of his performing style was greatly and fruitfully influenced by different cultures which he encountered during his tours in Europe. Romberg was strongly attracted not only to the German musicians, but also to outstanding cellists of other lands during the second half of the 18th century, such as the Italian Boccherini and the Duport brothers of France. It is hard not to recognize in his cello works the influence of French string playing, which in its turn was markedly influenced by Boccherini's creative achievements. This influence might have taken root with Romberg during his stay in Paris, and developed as a result of his contacts with the Duports in Berlin and with other French string players at the Paris Conservatory. Though he regarded Boccherini and Duport with profound reverence, Romberg never simply imitated them. He evolved a truly individual style, distinguished for the unusually powerful tone, "broad bow," perfect intonation, exceptional technical ease, combined with remarkably expressive performance.

Romberg's powerful and deeply emotional playing was not at all strained.

"The beauty of cello playing," he wrote in his method, "lies mainly in the fact that everything is performed with ease and grace. If it is done violently and strenuously, the playing ceases to be beautiful."

The cellist gave much attention to the dynamic nuances - light and shade. He connected dynamics and agogics with the art of cello singing and emphasized their similarity to vocal singing and to expressive human speech. But his assertion that there is a direct correlation between crescendo-diminuendo and the ascending-descending motion of the melody seems rather formal. Romberg's exceptionally brilliant performance of the Adagio was, however, conspicuous for his sparing use of expressive means such as vibrato and showy strokes, and had a certain "academic touch" which reflected his general esthetic conceptions.

This very lack of passion and drama in Romberg's playing prompted Stendhal to say:

"What a superb treat Romberg's playing might be if only he had Werter's passionate soul instead of the pure and honest soul of a virtuous German bourgeois!"

But the cellist's manner was absolutely opposite to that of the then popular drawing-room virtuosity, which exulted in superficial technique, thoughtless sentimentality, excessive vibrato, portamento, etc.

In his method, Romberg always warned his students to eschew anything which could spoil the "high style." Hence, he demanded that vibrato be used very moderately (Bebung, Tremolo): *"When used rarely and with the bow's great force, it gives brio, and vigor to the sound. Vibrato should be used only at the beginning of the note, but not during its entire length. In times of old," he continues, "nobody could maintain the tone, even in a very short time, without constant finger vibrato, thus producing truly 'whining music.'*"

He recommended only moderate use of spiccato, harmonics, etc. - and then only as a certain coloring. Though highly appreciative of Paganini as an unsurpassed "virtuoso of romanticism," Romberg criticized him mercilessly for abundance of harmonics in his playing after hearing him in Italy in 1820.

Romberg also warned against the so-called "vulgar expressiveness" in music as typified by a certain Jacob Scheller, who enjoyed imitating voices of different animals on his violin. "*Music,*" he says, "*should not be played simply to pass the time away; on the contrary, its aim is to make the human heart sensitive and receptive to all that is good and beautiful.*" Romberg's brilliant mastery and consummate professionalism were the means of attaining that aim.

It was his art as a performer that led to his work both as a composer and a teacher. Romberg's artistic career, at the crossroads of two epochs (on the one hand, that of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven; on the other, the period of the blossoming of musical romanticism) initiated a new direction in the history of cello playing. Unlike the art of the 18th century musicians, whose outstanding feature was primarily improvisation as a means of revealing esthetic ideas, the art of Romberg as a composer was subjugated to his aspirations as a virtuoso performer.

Among his cello works are ten concertos, six concertinos, sonatas, duets, fantasias, divertissements, capriccios, polonaises, variations and other pieces. Though only of academic value today, they were highly appreciated by Romberg's contemporaries (remember the impassioned letter by E.T.A. Hoffmann and opinions of other contemporaries). During the first decades of the 19th century, there was a huge gap between the art of playing and the profound creative output of outstanding composers such as Beethoven and the romantics.

The works of the 18th century classical composers were unpopular and neglected by virtuoso performers. Against the background of the cello repertoire of the time, principally of showy but superficial fantasias on opera themes, variations, potpourri, etc., Romberg's concertos stood out favorably. They were distinguished for the clear classical form, combination of noble and expressive melodies and brilliant virtuosity, so akin to the nature of the violoncello. The success of Romberg's works during his time was undoubtedly due to his exceptional mastery as a performer.

But as of the second quarter of the 19th century, when the music of Beethoven and that of the romantic composers became more popular and when musical taste in general became more refined, many reviewers (although paying tribute to his brilliant virtuosity) frequently criticized Romberg for the one-sidedness of his programs and the limited artistic value of his compositions.

Not surprisingly Romberg, as a composer of the transitional period, wrote in a variety of styles. His composing skill evolved under a whole range of interlocking influences. His instrumental output is, perhaps, closest to the French violin school (Viotti, Baillot, Rode, Kreutzer). But one cannot deny the influence of the 18th century classical composers (beginning with Mozart) and the early romantics (Spohr, Weber) as well.

Romberg's romanticism, like that of Spohr, has a very balanced, contemplative and somewhat academic nature. As mentioned earlier, it is alien to the elevation and dramatic flights typical of Paganini's romanticism. Romantic influences are noticeable in Romberg's Fourth, Fifth, and Ninth Concertos. The programmatic pieces, such as *Le Reve* (subtitled "Pierce de Fantaisie") or *Le Bal masque*, inspired by the Vienna waltzes, also reflect very definite romantic influences.

Romberg considered the concerto "the most perfect work of music" and this genre is the most important in his cello legacy. Today Romberg's cello concertos are only of academic value. They have a fitting place in music school curricula because of the instrumental technique needed. Their form is like that of the French violin school concertos (concertos of Viotti, Rode, Kreutzer). In all of them, the technical side of the performance is emphasized. The idea of the tutti and solo competition, characteristic of the classical concerto, disappears almost altogether in Romberg's compositions. The orchestra plays the role of accompaniment only and consists usually of a string quartet, flutes, oboes, bassoons and French horns. The concertos have a three-movement composition: fast-slow-fast. The first movement is a typical French violin concerto Allegro (4 tutti and 3 soli); the second movement has the features of a lyrical romance; the third - technically the most complicated - is written in the Rondo form.

Romberg completely wrote out the cadenzas in the fast and slow movements himself. He obviously wanted to limit the freedom of the performer, whose artistic skill might not have been adequate for the required level. That is why he was very precise, marking certain nuances, fingering, strokes and metronome beat. Here is Cadenza of the Andante grazioso in his First Concerto:

The image shows a musical score for a cadenza, labeled "1" and "Cadenza". It consists of four staves of music. The first staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The second staff is also in treble clef and contains a similar melodic line. The third staff is in treble clef and contains a more complex melodic line with slurs and a fermata. The fourth staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with slurs and a fermata. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, and *crdo.* (crescendo).

Romberg's Sixth Concerto is called "Concerto militaire." March-like episodes are prevalent in the two fast movements; the slow movement has the funeral march character. The Seventh "Swiss" Concerto, dedicated to Matwey Wialgohorsky, also bears a programmatic title, and has pastoral coloring:



The Ninth Concerto (written in 1824), the most interesting from both the artistic and the technical point of view, remained in the performing repertoire for the longest period of time. Like Romberg's other concertos, it consists of three movements: Allegro, Andante and Rondo (Allegretto). Compared to previous concertos, it is remarkable for the more extensive development of themes distinguished for their melodic expressiveness, and for its bright use of the cello's virtuoso resources:



In tribute to the traditions of his time, Romberg composed many variations, capriccios and divertissements on folk songs of different nations. During his tours in Europe he tried to collect folk songs, which he later used in his compositions. He said that Spanish, Russian and Italian melodies provide the richest material for a composer. His Russian contacts will be described further in this chapter; as for the Spanish influences, they undoubtedly inspired the composer's "Fandango" (from the Second Concerto), and Spanish Capriccio. There are also the Capriccio on Polish songs and dances, Capriccio on Swedish songs, Fantasia on Norwegian songs, Divertissement on Austrian folk songs, etc.

What is the significance of Romberg's cello works, especially his concertos, in the history of the art of the cello? The best of them squeezed out of the cello repertoire superficial fantasias on operatic and other themes, along with salon pieces of facile virtuosity. But undoubtedly far more important was that Romberg greatly expanded the cello's expressive and technical resources. Another of Romberg's basic merits was his development of the cello finger-board technique.

Having developed the achievements of Boccherini and Duport in creating specific cello fingering, Romberg used it masterfully in many cello compositions. Hugo Becker, one of the greater cello teachers of the first half of our century, wrote that Romberg's concertos were "the best teaching exercise, especially for the left hand." Systematically using varied combinations with the thumb, Romberg furnished cello students with abundant exercise material for mastering the thumb technique.

The use of the thumb, known already in the 18th century, greatly broadened the cello's expressive and technical resources. The range of the entire instrument and of each individual position was extended immensely. Initially, the thumb technique was used sparingly, but it was only in the time of Boccherini, Duport and Romberg that it grew to perfection. The use of the thumb as a support in the high registers on neighboring strings gradually led to the so-called "positional parallelism" principle.

Romberg's merit was to develop this method to the maximum, enabling musicians to change positions far less frequently. Besides, Romberg's favorite device - sequence-like progressions - provided extensive training material for shifts in thumb positions and mastery of the finger-board. Equally significant was his extensive use of the fourth finger in thumb positions, which broadened the volume of the position. Romberg also greatly developed the octave technique.

One frequently encounters the "restez" device in his works. Its modification, later called "Davydov's hinge (sharnir)," consists in moving all fingers on different intervals off from the thumb, which remains in place- thus broadening the volume of the position:



But it has to be pointed out that Romberg's devices such as long delays in thumb registers, "positional parallelism" on the lower strings and the use of the thumb in cantilena on prolonged notes lead to deterioration of the artistic value of the performance. Because of the abundance of varied stroke combinations, arpeggios, leaps over the strings etc., Romberg's concertos are of certain interest in bowing technique.

A great number of devices, used by Romberg in his works - primarily in the concertos - were later widely diffused and developed. Besides the devices previously mentioned, one often comes across in Romberg's works legato passages on one string (a good example being Popper's Spinning Song) or a number of natural harmonics on one string, alternating with the open string sound (this device was also used by Davydov in At the Fountain).

Romberg's cello concertos, however, are not of only pedagogical value. It should not be forgotten that, combined with Romberg's artistic talent, they were an impulse to the further development of the art of cello performing and cello literature. Being what can be called an encyclopedia of the cellos virtuoso and technical peculiarities, Romberg's works showed contemporary composers the instrument's wealth of expressive resources, thus stimulating many new compositions.

Romberg's cello compositions proved to be of great teaching value in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. Karl Schroeder and Friedrich Grutzmacher were greatly interested in his cello concertos; Hugo Becker and Julius Klengel concurred in that opinion. It is also well known that Karl Davydov frequently used them in his teaching and sometimes performed them in concerts. Today they have been re-edited in many countries, including Russia.



Kummer

Romberg's pedagogical career, though very irregular and less characteristic of him, is also worth mentioning. Suffice it to name some of his pupils: the French violoncellist Louis Pierre Norblin, Romberg's nephew Cyprian Romberg, Matwey Wialgohorsky, Julius Schopler, August Prell, Adolf Press, Julius Ritz, etc. But Romberg's influence went far beyond his own pupils; his impact on Justus Johann Friedrich Dotzauer, head of the Dresden school, and Friedrich Kummer, another noted representative of the same school, is not - to be underestimated.

As justly stated by Herbert Schafer and Josef Eckhardt, Romberg's Method, published in 1840, following those of Dotzauer (1832) and Kummer (1839), who were, in fact, greatly indebted to Romberg, appeared too late and was definitely outdated in what it had to say on hand position and bow holding (deep grip of the instrument's neck, slanting "oblique" position of the fingers on the finger-board, stiff holding of the bow), as well as the music context. The bowing technique described in the Method, with Romberg's typical avoidance of jumping strokes, staccato, etc., had also become outdated. Little attention was paid to double stops, shifts and strokes. But at the same time, Romberg's Method, compared to those of Dotzauer and Kummer, had certain advantages as far as esthetics and the style of playing were concerned - greatly to Romberg's credit.

The chapters "On light and shade," "On playing," "On musical works and their performance" and "On chamber music" are also broadly significant.



Speaking of the most illustrious cellists who were prominent figures in the development of the art of the cello, Hugo Becker felt that "it was not so much their artistic proficiency, as their advanced innovations in works of music, that were highly conducive to the progress of cello art." He named Romberg, Servais and Davydov as "the most brilliant creative personalities in the realm of art, whose compositions had a huge impact on the development of cello playing."

Becker

During the first decades of the 19th century, Romberg visited Russia no less than six times, and lived there for a long period. Inspired by folk songs, he composed a number of works and had them published in Russia. Romberg's first visit to Russia was in 1807. After a successful appearance in Riga at the end of 1808, he moved on to St. Petersburg, and on January 19, 1809 gave a recital at the court. After a public concert on February 17, Romberg left for Moscow, where he performed in two concerts. In a letter of this period he expressed his great satisfaction with his stay in Russia.

Russian, music lovers highly appreciated the cellist's consummate artistry immediately from his first appearances. "Lately, the excellent Romberg played the violoncello here; I was delighted," Alexander Bulgakov wrote to his father from St. Petersburg on February 19, 1809. On March 16 these words were recorded about the cellist's second concert: "Romberg is a master, I recently listened to him with great pleasure."

During that stay which lasted four years, Romberg played in St. Petersburg and in Moscow, in the Baltic towns and in the South of Russia, in Moldavia and Valakchia. It was an uninterrupted succession of triumphs. We have memoirs of his contemporaries about his St. Petersburg concerts during those years.

Romberg's appearances were the first to receive a review in St. Peterburgskiye vedomosti in 1811. That same year he performed in Kiev.

Until the spring of 1812, Romberg seems to have lived in Moscow (his son Karl was born there in January 1811). He stayed at the house of Count Saltykov, where musical events were often held. The spring of 1812 found Romberg and his friend Ferdinand Ries, the noted Bonn pianist and pupil of Beethoven, on a tour through Russian provincial towns. Their visits to Moldavia and Valakchia in February and March of that same year inspired Romberg to compose his Capriccio on Moldavian and Valakchian folk songs.

In a letter from Moscow of March 9, 1812, Alexander Bulgakov wrote to his brother Konstantin Bulgakov, then chief of the diplomatic office at Kutuzov's headquarters in the Dunai principalities, *"I congratulate you on Romberg ... Romberg reaches your heart ... what impeccable composition, what perfect taste, grace and ease of performance."*

After his St. Petersburg and Kiev appearances, the German artist gave recitals in April 1812 in Moscow and Riga; his program featured the "Swiss" Concerto, Capriccio on Moldavian and Valakchian songs, and Variations on Russian folk songs.

Romberg remained in Russia until the spring of the following year but had to leave for Sweden because of the war with Napoleon in 1812-1813. Apart from his subsequent brief visits, we will look at his periods in Russia in 1824-1825 and from 1828 to 1830.

During his first visit, Romberg lived at the home of Matvey Wialgohorsky, who was eager to receive cello instructions from the great master. Later eloquent praise was lavished on Romberg by the famous Russian critic Vladimir Odojevsky after the Moscow recital on January 18, 1825 at the house of Blagorodnoye Sobraniey (Noble Assembly). The program was comprised of the Overture to Weber's Der Freischutz and Romberg's own compositions: the Ninth Concerto, Capriccio on Polish songs and dances and Overture to the opera Alma.

Odojevsky wrote:

"Many music-lovers have not forgotten his (Romberg's -L.G.) first visit to Moscow; those who did not hear him, knew him by his world renown - and the ovation was unanimous when he appeared on the stage. And it grew once he began playing. Those who had heard him before were convinced that he had done the impossible - managed to perfect his already perfect art; the new generation in the audience was spellbound, enraptured and surprised ... There is nothing new in Romberg's music, but it is so original that none of the cello composers can be compared to him. Or his music may seem familiar to us because it has been so skillfully and artistically stolen from the depth of the human heart! In the first Allegro (of the Concerto-L.G.) Romberg wholly captivated the audience by the difficulties he surmounted; moreover, they flew past so effortlessly (as happens with the great composers) and were very natural and ingenuous indeed. The Andante and Rondo-Romberg's triumph - enchanted everyone in the house. In the former, connoisseurs were able to discern an exceptionally original accompaniment of the kettledrum, which alone, without other instruments, merged with the violoncello and produced some miraculous music."

In Russia Romberg played not only solo, but in quartets as well. He was the first to play the cello part in one of Beethoven's last Quartets, commissioned by Prince Nikolay Golitzin. In his letter from St. Petersburg of April 29, 1825, Golitzin thanked Beethoven for the Quartet (Op. 127, E flat Major) and informed the composer:

". . . In a couple of days we shall play your new Quartet with Bernhard Romberg, who has been here since last month ..."

In his very extensive biography of Romberg, Herbert Schafer hardly mentions the musician's final long sojourn in Russia when he was already over 60, saying that:

". . . there is no evidence of Romberg's likely tours in winter 1828-1829 and 1829-1830 . . ."

From reviews of the period it can be deduced that Romberg had managed to preserve his brilliant mastery and that his tours in Russia were an uninterrupted string of triumphs.

"Mr. Romberg is singing, not playing the violoncello. Every stroke of the bow produces tones which touch your soul and fascinate your heart. In the realm of music, Mr. Romberg is an unsurpassed phenomenon in the art of performance, musical feeling and composition. He has long been called in Europe the German Orpheus, and has evoked surprise and admiration in all the world's capitals. There has never been a single unfavorable opinion hostile to Mr. Romberg. He has been unanimously acclaimed by all musicians and connoisseurs as the Number One violoncellist, like Mozart-the Number One composer. His very name inspired the hearts of all artists with awe and deep emotion."

Dmitriy Kushenov-Dmitrievsky thought very highly of Romberg (see Liritchesky museum, St. Petersburg, 1831), called him the "perfect cello virtuoso" and emphasized his numerous appearances in St. Petersburg and in Moscow. The Russian obituary notices stated that the artist was the greatest of violoncellists

"... who has elevated violoncello to a very high rung, which it deservedly occupies now not only in the orchestra but also as a concert instrument." His playing was characterized as "free, pure and exalted," distinguished for "virile, simple and natural beauty."

Romberg's concert career was in no small measure instrumental in stimulating the art of the cello in Russia. His recitals on the concert stage, as well as in private houses (at the homes of Lvov, Wialgohorsky, Saltykov and others) were highly conducive to the popularization of violoncello among Russian musicians.

In 1809-1810, the Elbert Publishing House in Moscow brought out Romberg's Variations on Russian folk songs:

"Tchem tebya ya ogortchila"

(What made you so distressed?)

"Ya po tzvetikam hodila"

(I went out to pick flowers) Op. 14,

"Vspomny, vspomny, moya ljubushka"

(Please, my sweetheart, remember),

"Kak za retchenkoy slobodushka stoyit"

(There is a village on a river bank),

"Za gorami, za dolami"

(Behind the mountains, behind the valleys) Op. 19,

"Kak u nashih, u vorot"

(Once, at our gate),

"Ah, shto zh ti, golubtchik, ne vesel sidish"

(Oh, why are you not gay, my darling) Op. 19.

Vladimir Odojevsky praised them effusively, and appreciated Romberg's aspiration to delve deeply into the national peculiarities of the Russian folk song. The Variations on Russian songs played by Romberg himself became acknowledged hits in Russia at that time. It is interesting to quote here a quatrain published in the literary magazine *Aglaya* after the performance of "Ah, shto zh ti, golubtchik, ne vesel sidish" (Oh, why are you not gay, my darling): You might have hardly recognized yourself, My darling, When filled with joy, enchanted and spell-bound On strings of Romberg-Orpheus in languish lying, You triumphed. Romberg's interest in Russian folk melodies can also be seen in his *Capriccio on Russian Songs, Variations on Russian songs Op. 52 and Souvenir de St. Petersburg*.

It should be pointed out that Romberg's brilliant performance of Russian songs in his Variations appealed to audiences not only in Russia, but in Vienna, Prague, Berlin and other cities of Europe as well. His cello concertos were popular in Russia throughout the 19th century. In the 1830s and 1840s they were often performed by his son Karl and nephew Cyprian—both of whom lived in Russia for quite a while. The outstanding cellist and teacher of Davydov, Karl Schubert, who lived most of his life in Russia, was also an impeccable exponent of these pieces. Davydov himself is known to have played Romberg's Ninth Concerto with orchestra on several occasions.

(A special note is that in 1911, the program of the cello competition dedicated to the 50th Anniversary of the Russian Music Society featured Romberg's concertos).

Despite basic differences in Davydov's and Romberg's educational concepts, the Russian cellist often used Romberg's concertos in his teaching. Romberg's long and enduring activity in Russia, his relations with illustrious Russian musical figures, as well as his compositions on Russian folk themes are a valuable contribution to the history of the Russian-German musical contacts. The peculiarity of Romberg's place in history is that he both brought the curtain down on a certain stage in the development of cello art, whose greatest figures were Boccherini and Duport, and opened new vistas, or to use Becker's words, the "new triple constellation" formed by the names of Romberg, Servais, and Davydov.

By CELLOHEAVEN