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A COMPARISON OF PROKOFIEV’S USE OF CELLO TECHNIQUES IN HIS CELLO CONCERTO, OP. 58 (1938) AND SINFONIA CONCERTANTE, OP. 125 (1952)

BY

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SCHOLARLY ESSAY

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This document examines the artistic collaboration between Mstislav Rostropovich (1927–2007) and Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953) and provides a comparative study of Prokofiev’s use of cello techniques in his Cello Concerto, Op. 58 (1938) and Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 125 (1952). It is interesting to see Prokofiev’s much better understanding of the possibilities of the cello in his Sinfonia Concertante, in comparison with his poor knowledge of the instrument in his Cello Concerto, where many passages are ineffective, difficult, or even unplayable. This document is intended to serve as a useful resource for cellists or anyone who are interested in the compositional background and process connected to Prokofiev’s Sinfonia Concertante.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION ..........................................................................................................................1
   - Rostropovich’s Biography ........................................................................................................1
   - The Artistic Partnership between Rostropovich and Prokofiev ...........................................3
   - Prokofiev’s Early Compositions Featuring the Cello .............................................................5
   - Prokofiev’s Cello Concerto Op. 58 .....................................................................................6

II. A COMPARISON BETWEEN SINFONIA CONCERTANTE, OP. 125 AND CELLO CONCERTO, OP. 58 .................................................................8
   - Passage Work: First Movement ...........................................................................................8
   - Passage Work: Second Movement ......................................................................................11
   - Passage Work: Third Movement .......................................................................................12
   - Double Stopping: First Movement ....................................................................................13
   - Double Stopping: Second Movement ................................................................................15
   - Double Stopping: Third Movement ...................................................................................17
   - Bow Strokes: Second Movement ......................................................................................20
   - Bow Strokes: Third Movement .........................................................................................23
   - Dynamic Range: Second Movement ..................................................................................25

III. CONCLUSION ..........................................................................................................................27

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..........................................................................................................................29
I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the artistic collaboration between Mstislav Rostropovich (1927–2007) and Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953) through an analysis of Rostropovich’s editions of Prokofiev’s Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 125, focusing on the cello techniques used in the work. In 1947, Prokofiev first heard Rostropovich perform his Cello Concerto, Op. 58; while the work was poorly received, Prokofiev was impressed by Rostropovich’s artistry and interpretive skill. With Rostropovich’s advice and collaboration, Prokofiev decided to revise the work, renaming it Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 125, dedicating it to his new collaborate.

Rostropovich’s Biography

Born in 1927 in Baku, which was then part of the Soviet Union, Rostropovich is widely regarded as one of the greatest cellists of the second half of the 20th century. At the age of four, he began his musical studies with his mother, pianist Sofiya Nikolaevna Fedotova. At ten, he started cello lessons with his father, Leopold Vitoldovich Rostropovich, a former student of the world-famous Pablo Casals and himself an eminent cello professor at the Gnessin Institute in Moscow. In 1943, at the age of sixteen, the younger Rostropovich entered the Moscow Conservatory, studying cello with Semyon Kozolupov as well as composition with Dmitri Shostakovich and Vissarion Shebalin.

1 In this document, unless otherwise indicated, information about Rostropovich’s life is based on the article “Rostropovich, Mstislav” in Grove Music Online by Noël Goodwin. Edited by Deane Root. Accessed May 1, 2014, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/.
In 1942, Mstislav Rostropovich made his concert debut. Between 1947 and 1950, he earned important competition prizes and awards in Moscow, Prague, and Budapest; standing out among them, the Stalin Prize, considered the highest honor in the former Soviet Union. As a teacher, he held positions at the Leningrad and Moscow Conservatories. Throughout his career, he received numerous additional recognition and honors, among them the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Gold Medal (1970), the Award of the International League of Human Rights (1974), an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University (1975), the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom (1987), and decorations from governments of over fifteen countries.


Reinhold Glière, Prokofiev’s teacher and a friend of Rostropovich’s father, was the first composer to recognize Rostropovich’s musical talent and potentials. Glière’s Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in D minor, Op. 87 (1946) was the first in a long line of compositions dedicated to

Rostropovich. Russian composer Nikolay Myaskovsky, a close friend of Prokofiev’s from their student years, continuing their relationship through letters during Prokofiev’s time in Paris, connected Rostropovich with Prokofiev. In Rostropovich’s own view, his career as a supporter of new music began through performing Myaskovsky's music. “The Myaskovsky concerto,” he wrote, “was the beginning of a definite path in life for me. Myaskovsky led me to Prokofiev, and Prokofiev indirectly to Shostakovich, and through Shostakovich to Britten.”

The Artistic Partnership between Rostropovich and Prokofiev

Among Rostropovich’s several composition teachers was Prokofiev himself. In her book *Rostropovich: The Musical Life of the Great Cellist, Teacher, and Legend*, Elizabeth Wilson describes Rostropovich’s recollection of how he sought attention from Prokofiev:

Of course he took next to no notice of me, since I was just a boy as far as he was concerned. But after December 1945, when I won the All-Union competition, he started to remember who I was. This was no doubt because I had played the concerto of his great friend Myaskovsky. I then decided to learn his first cello concerto and play it with piano at my solo recital in the Small Hall of the Conservatoire.

Rostropovich recalled that, when Prokofiev listened to Miaskovsky’s cello sonata performed by Rostropovich at his recital in 1949, Prokofiev said to him, “I shall now start writing a cello sonata for you.” Rostropovich was twenty-two years old; Prokofiev was in his late fifties.

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
The artistic partnership between Rostropovich and Prokofiev began in 1947 through Rostropovich’s performance of Prokofiev’s Cello Concerto No. 1, Op. 58 at the Moscow Conservatory. Completed in 1938, the concerto was poorly received due largely to the soloist’s Lev Berezovsky “poor interpretation.” Prokofiev was criticized for the work, which received little attention after its premiere. Unfortunately in the premiere neither the conductor nor the soloist was up to the task, both musically and technically, and the performance was a complete fiasco.

It was not until Prokofiev attended Rostropovich's convincing performance that the composer resurrected his interest in writing for the cello. Rostropovich later recalled his performance of Prokofiev’s concerto in late December of 1947:

I remember when I played his Opus 58 Concerto in recital with piano. Prokofiev was in the audience and he came up to me afterwards and said, “I think there is some good material in the piece, but I don’t like its shape. How would you like to work with me on revising it?” I was so elated by his offer that I practically floated out of the hall!

Rostropovich’s input and contributions strongly influenced Prokofiev’s subsequent compositions for the cello. Combining rare precision of intonation and fullness of tone in all registers, Rostropovich’s impressively powerful yet meditative performance in his recording of Sinfonia Concertante serves as an example of his role in advising the composer, on how the work might be improved technically, not to mention his skill as a performer, which won over the

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10 Janof, "ICS Exclusive Interview."

Prokofiev’s Early Compositions Featuring the Cello

Prokofiev started to write for the cello in 1912, his first beginning the Ballade in C Major for cello and piano, Op. 15. Other early compositions that feature cello include the Overture on Hebrew Themes, Op. 34 (1919).

Some of his early compositions show that the composer had only a smattering of knowledge about the cello and its possibilities. In the Ballade, the cello part is too low in register and too narrow in range; the result is particularly unsatisfactory in the pizzicato section. The ranges of the cello and piano parts are too similar; the lower register of the cello part and the marcato marking in the piano part make it very difficult to match dynamics in performance.13 On the whole, the piece sounds more like a piano piece with cello accompaniment than the reverse.

In Prokofiev’s Overture on Hebrew Themes, Op. 34 for clarinet, string quartet, and piano, the cello plays an insignificant role, merely providing accompaniment in the string ensemble. Although there is beautiful melodic material for the instrument, just as in the Ballade, the ranges

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12 Wilson, Rostropovich, 227.
and notes of the cello and the piano are almost identical, making the cello part nearly inaudible.\textsuperscript{14} Again, the \textit{pizzicato} on the open strings of the cello is not very effective, as the instrument sounds too similar to the left hand part of the piano.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Prokofiev's Cello Concerto Op. 58}
\end{center}

The Cello Concerto, Op. 58 was composed at the suggestion of virtuoso cellist, Gregor Piatigorsky (1903–1976), who performed the U.S. premiere of the work in 1940. Piatigorsky and Prokofiev first met in Berlin in 1927 when Piatigorsky performed Prokofiev’s Ballade and suggested that the composer write a cello concerto. Piatigorsky recalls in his memoirs:

"I don't know your crazy instrument," he [Prokofiev] said. I played for him and, demonstrating all possibilities of the cello, saw him from time to time jump from his chair. "It is slashing! Play it again!" He made notes in the little notebook he always carried with him. He asked me to show him some of the typical music for cello, but when I did, he glanced through it and said, "You should not keep it in the house. It smells." Playing at cards in the game of bridge, he was even more blunt. Through some unfortunate circumstances a few times I happened to be his partner. Although a weak bridge player, I was not entirely insensitive to his remarks, uttered under his breath. "Why is the idiot bidding spades?" he would say, or, "Should I let the cripple play his three no trumps?" One day it led to a clash that ended, however, with an affectionate embrace.

Prokofiev started to sketch the concerto in the summer of 1933 and visited with Piatigorsky several times. About this collaboration, Piatigorsky writes:

Finally he completed the first movement. I received the music and soon we began to discuss the other movements to come. The beginning of the second, which followed shortly, appeared as excitingly promising as the first. "Even so, it will lead to nothing. I cannot compose away from Russia. I will go home."\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
In September 1938, Prokofiev completed the score and the first performance of the concerto took place in Moscow with Lev Berezovsky, a cellist of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, with Alexander Melik-Pashayev (1905–1964) conducting the State Symphony Orchestra. The work was poorly interpreted by the cellist and the difficult score was underestimated by the conductor, leading to disappointment from the audience and critics. Sviatoslav Knushevitsky (1908–1963), an important Soviet cellist of the time, publicly criticized the piece as one of Prokofiev’s “failures.” There was, therefore, little interest in further performances of the concerto.16

In the next section, I will discuss Rostropovich’s edition of Prokofiev’s Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 125, and will compare the work with its earlier version, Cello Concerto, Op. 58. The fact that Prokofiev resurrected the work with significant revisions was the direct result of the influence and technical prowess of Rostropovich performance.

16 Wilson, Rostropovich, 66.
II. A COMPARISON BETWEEN SINFONIA CONCERTANTE, OP. 125 AND

CELLO CONCERTO, OP. 58

My comparison of the three movements of Prokofiev’s Cello Concerto, and the Sinfonia Concertante will focus on six areas of cello technique: passage work, double stops, shifts in melody, articulation, dynamic range, and register.

Passage Work: First Movement

While the Cello Concerto, Op. 58 and Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 125 both have three movements, the lengths of these movements are quite different. In the Concerto, the first movement is the shortest movement while the concluding is the longest; conversely, in the Sinfonia Concertante the second movement is the longest of the three movements. According to Claude Samuel’s book on Prokofiev, “More particularly, the orchestration of the Sinfonia Concertante is less aggressive and the cello part purer. The strange passion and restless lyricism of the Concerto have become appreciably ‘healthier.’”

In the first movement of the Concerto, the cello part is only three pages long, in contrast to the seven pages from the Sinfonia Concertante. Due to the frequent use of the treble clef, the solo part seems more like a violin part, or the right-hand of a piano part. Because the cellist must play on the first (A) string in high positions, it is extremely difficult to achieve good intonation.

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Conversely, the first movement of the Sinfonia Concertante is more idiomatic for the cello, due, in no small measures, to Rostropovich’s participation in the composition process. Prokofiev extends the introduction and the orchestral part is strengthened in mm. 1-4. Prokofiev wanted eight measures of flamboyant virtuosic passage work for the cello and suggested that Rostropovich himself, write that section (Figure 1). Rostropovich recalls the situation:

I came in the next week with the eight bars and he immediately took it to the piano with a pencil and eraser in hand. As often happened when he concentrated, drool dribbled from his lower lip as he reviewed it. After changing maybe ten notes, he thanked me and said it was good. As I walked down the stairwell from his apartment, he shouted behind me, “Nice eight bars!” It was rare to receive compliments from Prokofiev so that was a great day for me. Unfortunately, he never heard the piece played with orchestra because the Soviet government didn’t allow his music to be performed in public. I premiered it in Copenhagen in 1953 after he died.18

Figure 1. Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 125, first movement, mm. 186-196

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18 Janof, "ICS Exclusive Interview."
Prokofiev is said to have asked Rostropovich to bring to him any pieces he had that illustrate virtuosic passagework for the cello and to make suggestions on the expressive possibilities of the instrument. Rostropovich brought to his attention the works by Popper and Davydov, but Prokofiev showed little interest in them. Nevertheless, we can see similarities between David Popper’s Cello Etude, Op. 76, No. 8 (Figure 2) and Rostropovich suggested passage work in the first movement (Figure 1). Both use the cello’s various positions in fast motion.

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19 Wilson, Rostropovich, 71.
Passage Work: Second Movement

Titled *Allegro giusto*, the second movement of the Concerto is in sonata form, consisting of an exposition with codetta, a development section, and a recapitulation. This movement has a very unusual ending, featuring an elaborate, expressive tune in C major, which will recur in the last movement.\(^2^0\) Also titled *Allegro giusto*, the second movement of the Sinfonia Concertante has a more complex sonata structure. Undoubtedly the centerpiece of the entire work, the middle movement is the most important and the longest featuring various cello techniques that are most likely based on Rostropovich’s recommendations.

Immediately after four measures of chordal introduction in the accompaniment, the solo cello enters in m. 5 and plays a cadenza-like passage through m. 18. The use of fast notes in the lower register at the beginning of this passage enhances an exciting and bright sound effect—normally it is very difficult for the sound of the cello to stand out when it plays fast, low notes with the accompaniment of the orchestra (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The beginning of the second movement, Sinfonia Concertante, mm.1–5

\(^{2^0}\) Ivashkin, “Cooling the Volcano,” 8–10.
Passage Work: Third Movement

Alexander Ivashkin realizes this comparison between the finale of the Cello Concerto with that of the Sinfonia Concertante: “although both of the works consist of variations, the compositions are very different. In the last movement of the Cello Concerto, Prokofiev introduces a ‘kaleidoscopic combination’ of different melodies and episodes from all movements with a Reminiscenza section. In the last movement of the Sinfonia Concertante, he presents a new theme. Moreover, there is no Reminiscenza section.”

The finale of the Cello Concerto is the most important and largest part of the composition. This movement consists of a Tema, two Interludios, four Variations (including a cadenza), Reminiscenza, and Coda. Unfortunately, the movement presents many passages that are uncomfortable for the cellist to perform, a fact reflected in the deletion of various sections in several important recordings of the Cello Concerto. In Janos Starker’s recording with the Philharmonia Orchestra in 1956, most of the Interludio II after the cello cadenza and most of the Coda in the finale movement are cut. In Christine Walevska's recording with the Orchestre National de l’Opéra de Monte-Carlo in 1972, most of the Coda is cut.

In my opinion, the reason for such deletions is due not only to the performance difficulty, but also to the over abundance of melodic ideas in the finale. The finale begins with the same melody that ends the second movement. Moreover, in the Reminiscenza section, Prokofiev

21 Ivashkin, “Cooling the Volcano,” 8.
22 Ivashkin, “Cooling the Volcano,” 10.
repeats the main melody of the first movement as well as some material from the second movement in what may seem to be a boring, and dull manner.

In contrast, the finale of Sinfonia Concertante is very comfortably written for cello. There are opportunities for various techniques of the instrument, such as a *staccato* passage with *pizzicato*, a triplet passage using *ricochet* bow strokes, a harmonic passage, and a beautiful two-voice melodic passage that requires double stopping.

**Double Stopping: First Movement**

In the first movement of the Concerto, Prokofiev frequently uses double stops in conjunction with wide leaps (see Figure 4). Not only must the performer play in the uncomfortable high positions, but also he is confronted with the need to make frequent finger stretches. This fast movement also requires frequent double-stop shifting to the thumb position, which is quite unfriendly to play in conjunction with a melodic line.

On the contrary, in the first movement of the Sinfonia Concertante, Prokofiev uses double stops very effectively, making these passages idiomatically more suited to the cello and more practical to execute. A good example can be found in mm. 128–130, where the cello carries out *glissandos* (Figure 5). In conjunction with this passage, two measures are provided as *facilitazione*. Presumably, Rostropovich includes this *ossia* to provide an easier alternative.
In the first movement of the Concerto, Prokofiev writes a passage in 32\textsuperscript{nd}-note triplets (Figure 6a). It is very difficult for a cellist to perform these discrete triplets as they require fast position changes from the fingers on the left hand. It also uses a register that is too close to the right hand of the piano, which makes the cello very difficult to be heard.

In the Sinfonia Concertante, Prokofiev revised this passage, which now includes a more lyrical melody with triplets in the same key. I suggest that vibrato be added to the 16th notes in between the triples, to carry out the melodic line more expressively (Figure 6b).
Double Stopping: Second Movement

In the second movement of the Cello Concerto, Prokofiev uses double stopping during a rhythmically intense passage, composed of repeated sixteenths in octave stops (Figure 7). Although intended to create a tremolo effect, these octave stops must be played with the thumb on the fingerboard of the cello, which weakens the resonance. In the second movement of the Sinfonia Concertante, Prokofiev uses a variety of octave stops very effectively (Figure 8). First,
he uses double-octave stopping with an open string “D.” Playing double stops of extended range with an open string helps create a clearer, more intense sound. Second, the dramatic tremolo is carried out more effectively by using a recurring rhythmic pattern.

Figure 7. Cello Concerto, second movement, mm. 55–57

Figure 8. Sinfonia Concertante, second movement, mm. 89–92

In the second movement of the Sinfonia Concertante, Prokofiev uses a different type of octave double stops to create a marcato sound and detached, successive down bow strokes (Figure 9).23 This brings two challenges to the cellist: first, one has to play more forcefully with short bow strokes when retaking a down-bow on the octave stops; and second, it is difficult to shape the melodic line on the upper notes while the thumb plays repeated notes in the bottom.

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23 Ivashkin, “Cooling the Volcano,” 8–10.
Double Stopping: Third Movement

In the finale of the Cello Concerto, Prokofiev uses double stops in octaves in a *cadenza* passage. Although this creates a lavish sound, it is very difficult for the cellist to use vibrato with the thumb and middle fingers of his left hand on these stops, which results in a less expressive sound (Figure 10a). In the finale of the Sinfonia Concertante, by contrast, Prokofiev uses a rhythmic passage with octave stops which can be performed with simple fingering even in a fast tempo. Furthermore the Concerto’s compound meter (9/8) (Figure 10a) becomes simple triple (3/4) meter in the Sinfonia Concertante (Figure 10b).
Prokofiev uses double stops in the finale of both the Cello Concerto and Sinfonia Concertante to create a melody and accompaniment. However, there are performance issues in the Cello Concerto as shown in Figure 11. In the first measure, the fourth quarter-note (F-flat) forms a perfect fifth with the melodic C-flat. This means that the two fingers used to produce these notes have to be placed side by side on the fingerboard. Frequent use of double stops in perfect fifths makes the thumb very uncomfortable and, more importantly, negatively impacts intonation.
In the finale of the Sinfonia Concertante, Prokofiev uses two-voice double stops extensively. In the passage as shown in Figure 12, he takes advantage of the open G string to create big intervals as a large as thirteenth. The open G string appears four times on down beats functioning like the basso continuo. When playing this double-stop passage, the performer needs to change positions in the left hand very quickly. Seven bars after rehearsal no. 17, the upper note E-flat of the first beat has to be played on the second (D) string but the same note E-flat on the second beat has to be played on the first (A) string, due to the use of a different note in the lower part. After the glissando from B-flat to E-flat in the upper voice, the middle finger of the left hand must relax and quickly move to a different string for the next, same note E-flat.

Figure 12. Sinfonia Concertante, Finale, rehearsal no. 17
Bow Strokes: Second Movement

The second movement of the Sinfonia Concertante requires more varied bowing techniques, which are needed for the more frequent changes of dynamics.

At the beginning of the second movement of the Sinfonia Concertante, Prokofiev calls for a new bowing technique not used in the second movement of the Cello Concerto. Since Rostropovich could handle the technique he encouraged Prokofiev to include it in the work. A repetitive, big bowing gesture is needed in the symmetrical lines, and the chordal notes marked *staccato* in a faster tempo, *Allegro giusto*, indicate the tempo should be quarter note = 132, in order to produce a bold effect.

One bow stroke, *ricochet*, should be discussed here. *Ricochet* is a “thrown” bow on the string with bounces and enable to rebound one, or multiple times.\(^{24}\) When performing an arpeggiated passage, the cellist needs to use a *ricochet* bow stroke, which requires an appropriate control of the reflexive bouncing motion up from four strings crossing. This stroke has a distinctive sound, and the resulting articulation is crisp and alive. The speed and four notes of articulation could also be controlled. In Rostropovich’s edition, he suggests using an up bow for descending notes and down bow for ascending notes. It is more comfortable to play the *ricochet* bow stroke starting from the lowest string (C string) to the highest string (A string) with a down bow. For better intonation in executing arpeggio passages as shown in Figure 13, the fingers in the left hand should remain flat and stretched on each of four strings as if when playing chords.

Different approaches on bow strokes can be found between the two works. In the Concerto, two measures before rehearsal no. 42, Prokofiev uses *marcato* on eight consecutive notes, which are to be played on separate bow strokes (Figure 14a). But in the similar passage in the Sinfonia Concertante, he calls for *tremolo* on the first four notes and up-bow *marcato* on the last three eight notes. Such changes make the cello sound more rhythmic and exciting (Figure 14b).
In the 2nd movement of the Sinfonia Concertante, we find other marcato passages that call for repeated down-bow strokes (Figure 9). The marcato is an effective, dramatic rhythmic pattern when performed in a loud dynamic. When executing such passages, the cellist needs to maintain a smooth, circular motion of the arm, and should move quickly and lightly. It is also important to use the natural weight of the arm in order to produce a resonant sound.

In the Cello Concerto, Prokofiev uses marcato on sixteenth notes in conjunction with slurs in a fast tempo. On the piano, it is not difficult to play such a passage as indicated; while on the cello, it is impossible to play sixteenth notes with marcato in fast tempo using slurred, bowed strokes at the same time.

Comparing m. 207 of the second movement of the Cello Concerto (Figures 15a) and m. 264 of the second movement of the Sinfonia Concertante (Figure 15b), one can find that Prokofiev makes several changes to the latter work. He removes the marcato marking and adds an accent to the first note, E, of the measure of sixteenth notes. Without the marcato marking one will find it much easier to play with slurs. It is important that when playing this passage, the cellist should maintain a good balance between the pressure and the speed of the bow.

Figure 15a. Cello Concerto, m. 207
Figure 15b. Sinfonia Concertante, m. 264
Prokofiev does not use the *tremolo* bow stroke in the Cello Concerto, but he uses it at the end of the second movement of the Sinfonia Concertante. The term *tremolo* on stringed instruments refers to the rapid moving of the bow back and forth quickly for the duration of the note’s value. In the passage shown in Figure 16, the ascending scale on the first (A) string of the cello and the recurring four-note theme marked with *tremolo* create a dramatic tension and lead to the outburst of the ending. The *tremolo* eighth notes have a single slanted line through the stems, indicating repeated sixteenth notes. This passage should be played with very short, rapid, and unaccented bow strokes.

Figure 16. Sinfonia Concertante, second movement, mm. 397–402

Bow Strokes: Third Movement

There are revisions of bowing and fingering when one compares the finale of the Sinfonia Concertante with the Cello Concerto. As shown in Figures 17a and 17b, Prokofiev improves the

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passage through eliminating the slurs and using separate bow strokes. Ivashukin has no doubt that this idea must have come from Rostropovich. In the Concerto, the first sixteenth note is to be played by the thumb of the left hand on the first (A) string, the second sixteenth note by the index finger on the second (D) string, the third sixteenth note by the middle finger on the third (G) string, and the fourth sixteenth note by the index finger on the G string again. As discussed earlier, such fingering requirements can cause pain among the fingers and the left hand, and the slurred passage is very difficult to execute in a fast tempo.

In the Sinfonia Concertante, Prokofiev improves more or less the same passage with new separate bow strokes and fingering, which help to create more excitement and tension to the ending. The new fingering is as follows: middle finger-thumb-index finger-thumb, middle finger and thumb are to play on the first (A) string and the index finger on the second (D) string. One should note that cellists use only the A and D strings, with such fingering in the fast tempo for a comfortable performance.

Figure 17a. Finale of the Cello Concerto, rehearsal no. 92
Dynamic Range: Second Movement

Rostropovich was famous for expanding the dynamic range of the cello, expanding the artistic possibilities for the instrument. In preparation for a successful performance, the soloist should always have an estimate of the dynamic range in order to have a good balance with the piano or the orchestra. Generally, when a soloist performs with piano, one can have easier control on the balance of dynamics. However, when working with an orchestra, the soloist needs more stamina, and communication with the conductor on balance and dynamics is crucial.

Prokofiev uses very different dynamic markings in identical passages in the Cello Concerto and the Sinfonia Concertante, as shown in Figures 18a and 18b. In the second movement of the Cello Concerto, although the cello part is marked $ff$ molto espress., the conductor should be very careful to balance the orchestra, also marked $ff$. This can be applied to the same passage in the Sinfonia Concertante, where the dynamic mark is changed to $p$ molto cantabile, and the dynamic range used in the cello solo and orchestral parts is from $p$ to $pp$. The orchestra should always play softer than the soloist.
In his edition of the Sinfonia Concertante, Rostropovich makes occasional timbral suggestions for the soloist. An example is shown in Figure 19, where Rostropovich uses awkward fingerings on the third (G) string. It appears he envisions a darker sound from the cello to match with the sound of the horns of the orchestra.  

III. CONCLUSION

I first heard Rostropovich’s recording of the Sinfonia Concertante when I was in college. I remember I was deeply fascinated by the brilliant and flamboyant cello technique of Rostropovich as well as the gorgeous sound of the orchestra. Since then I have always had an interest in Rostropovich’s performance style as well as his artistic partnership with various twentieth-century composers.

Composers from the former Soviet Union typically valued each other’s works, although their preferences and styles could be very different. Some of them were inspired by the compositions of their compatriots. For example, Shostakovich’s first cello concerto was influenced by Prokofiev’s combination of cello and celesta or seven timpani in the Sinfonia Concertante. Miaskovsky’s Sonata was also influenced by the second movement of Prokofiev’s Sinfonia Concertante, particularly the beginning passage. Rostropovich recalls:

I remember after I performed the Miaskovsky Sonata with Sviatislov Richter, Prokofiev complained that he couldn’t hear any of the difficult fast notes in the cello’s lower register because the piano was drowning them out. Interestingly, fast low notes in the cello part appeared in the beginning of the second movement of Prokofiev’s Sinfonia Concertante (Figure 6b), but he made sure that the orchestra isn’t playing so that the notes are audible. All of them borrowed from each other.

In the twentieth century the cello achieved an important, equal position along with other instruments. Many composers, such as Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Britten, Penderecki, Berio, and Messian, wrote music for the cello because of Rostropovich, who strongly encouraged them to write music for him. He usually said to his composer colleagues, “Must write a piece for me!”

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28 Janof, "ICS Exclusive Interview."
29 Ibid.
and enjoyed producing the unusual timbres that modernist composers often demanded. Numerous works, including concertos, sonatas, and solo suites are dedicated to and commissioned by Rostropovich. Without Rostropovich’s artistic friendship with composers, and his desire to invent and play new sounds or timbre, the cello repertoire would not have such variety.

Prokofiev decided to revise his first cello concerto after he got inspiration from the performance of the young Rostropovich. His Sinfonia Concertante was created about 15 years after the Cello Concerto was written. The two works appear to be similar, but they are indeed quite different in terms of the structure and cello techniques required.

In this document, I have made a comparative study of the two works. It is interesting to see Prokofiev’s much better understanding of the possibilities of the cello in his Sinfonia Concertante, in comparison with his poor knowledge of the instrument in his Cello Concerto, where many passages are ineffective, difficult, or even unplayable. I hope this document will serve as a useful resource for cellists or anyone who are interested in the compositional background and process connected to Prokofiev’s Sinfonia Concertante.


