

## Composer Dinos Constantinides through his Concerto for Two Cellos



Dinos Constantinides was born in Ioannina, Greece, in 1929, and died in the United States in 2021. At the age of 12, he began taking violin lessons in Ioannina; at 15, he moved to Athens where he completed his violin and advanced music theory studies at the Hellenic Conservatory of Athens, under the tutelage of Yiannis Papaioannou in theory, Lydia Kouroukli in chamber music, and Giorgos Lykoudis in violin. He dropped out of Law School in Athens and moved to the United States to study violin on a Greek State scholarship. He attended Juilliard School of Music and Indiana University and studied with Ivan Galamian, Dorothy Delay and Josef Gingold. He also earned a PhD in Composition from Michigan State University. In the United States, Constantinides came in contact with great musicians, composers and authors of the era, including I. Stern, S. Barber, D. Mitropoulos, D. Shostakovich, P. Back, and

others. In 1960, he started playing in the Symphony Orchestra of Baton Rouge, in Louisiana, and taught violin and composition at Louisiana State University (LSU) at Baton Rouge.

He has been honored with many awards and distinctions. In 2010, he received an Honorary Doctorate from the Department of Music Science and Art of the University of Macedonia (Thessaloniki, Greece). His music has been performed all over the world by numerous orchestras. He has given many concerts and released many recorded works (more than 65 CDs). He has composed over three hundred works, including two operas, six symphonies (his second symphony earned an award), and many works for a wide variety of instruments and voice.

Through his friendship with musicians in Romania, D. Constantinides developed extensive artistic activities in the country. In one of his concerts in 1998, he was approached by the *Rossini Cello Duo*, who asked him to compose a piece for them.

Concerto no. 2 was initially written for cello and oboe, for two of his colleagues who never performed it. And so, when the *Rossini Cello Duo* requested a composition, Constantinides recomposed this piece for two cellos in 1999 and dedicated it to them. The *Rossini Cello Duo* is made up of *Marianna Oteleanu-Amarinei* and *Constantin VestemEANU*, and they are based in Bucharest.

The titles of the four movements are: *Prologue, Dialogue, Monologue I & II for Mozart, Epilogue*. These titles, chosen from the corresponding Greek words, imply the “conversation” between the two cellos, in the Prologue, or the Dialogue, or the Monologue, and ultimately in the Epilogue.

In the introduction to the musical text of the concerto, the composer himself states that throughout the piece there are intervals that shape and control the themes. Furthermore, the sounds are based on intervals of seconds and thirds that belong to a cluster chord; they determine the harmonic development and influence the piece’s musical course.

The concerto is thirteen minutes long, for two solo cellos accompanied by a string orchestra with an oboe and two horns. As the composer notes, the concerto reveals the thoughts of two people who express themselves in many different ways through conversation.

In the first movement, the tempo oscillates between two indications, one *Fast*, one *Slow*. The 4/4-, 3/4-, and 5/4-time signatures alternate with great frequency. The dynamics follow an ascending and descending succession with variations, from *pp* to *f* for the orchestra, and from *p* to *f* for the solo cellos. As for the music articulation, he chooses trills, staccato, legato, two pizzicati in the second cello solo; and many types of pauses. The composer articulates this movement with elements of dissonant sonority, polyphonic images and in some bars, heterophonic.

The tempo of the entire second movement is *Fast*. It is a rhythmically consistent part, with a 4/4-time signature. The composer implements the classical music articulation and, by his own statement in a personal interview, he mimics the rhythmic pattern of the 1<sup>st</sup> part of L.V. Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*. The dynamics of the movement range from *fff* in the cello solos to *pp* with descending and ascending variations. He uses intense accents on the notes and the techniques of tremolo and trill. With dissonant sounds, he adds an acute character to this movement, which devoids of lyrical style. By assigning the role of basso continuo to each solo cello alternately, he creates an equitable dialogue between them.

Being deeply knowledgeable on the technical abilities of the instrument, the composer employs the composition technique that he calls “motivic variations” to create suitable rhythmomelodic circumstances for the solo cellos. He writes masterful passages, providing the soloists with opportunities to demonstrate their virtuosity to the audience.

By the composer’s own admission, in the characterization of the third movement he expresses his gratitude to W.A. Mozart for his musical legacy. This part contains compositional elements from that era, with a key signature with three sharps (F# - C# - G#), which implies a tonic in A major in a *Slow* tempo, and with four sharps (F# - C# - G# - D#) with a *Fast* indication. He again alternates the three and four sharps and the respective tempos. He utilizes 3/4-, 4/4-, 2/4-, 5/8-key signatures with alternations even bar by bar. The dynamics follow ascending and descending variations from *p* to *f* in the first cello, and from *p* to *ff* in the second cello. The playing techniques noted in this movement are: *pizzicati, con legno, legato, staccato*, use of harmonic note, and absent the trill technique.

The third movement does not present any difficulties in regard to skillfulness. Although the composer dedicates this movement to Mozart, the piece’s style includes the “musical element of today”.

The fourth movement, the *Epilogue*, consists of 125 bars; it is the longest of all parts, and written in a *Fast* tempo. The composer alternates 4/4-, 2/4-, 3/8-, 3/4-, 5/8-, and a very rare 7/16-time signature. The polyrhythmic element in the fourth movement is a parameter that indicates the composer's strength and creates action and reaction between the performers and the audience. The mixing of all these rhythms, by challenging the "strong – weak" dipole, causes an instability in the listener's ear, and an emotional reaction. The dynamics range from *p* to *ff* and one *fff* in the final note of the movement.

Although the compositions of D. Constantinides are characterized by atonality, during our personal interview in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the composer stated that he uses a key signature with four sharps where he notes E Major as the tonality in this movement for 40 continuous bars. In this movement as well, he is influenced by and imitates the thematic motif of the first movement of L.v. Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*.

The two solo cellos engage in noble competition through the continuous complementary movement of sixteenth notes, and through the forceful and dense rhythmic treatment, a competition, between the wind instruments (oboe, horn) and the cellos, also emerges.

In conclusion, it is a challenging piece, both for the solo instruments, and at the level of "communication" between the soloists and the orchestra.

The pronounced lyrical style throughout D. Constantinides' work justifies his characterization as a "neoromantic composer". In addition to his composing work, he was also a teacher who was distinguished for his pedagogic methods.

Dinos Constantinides. An internationally acclaimed Greek composer, who continued to compose until his death at the age of ninety-two.

Score in C

# Concerto for Two Cellos

(for Mariana Oteleanu-Amerinei)

Dinos Constantinides

## I. Prologue

Fast ♩=116

Oboe  
F Horn  
Solo Cello 1  
Solo Cello 2  
Violins 1  
Violins 2  
Viola  
Violoncello  
String Bass

Oboe  
F Horn  
Solo Cello 1  
Solo Cello 2  
Violins 1  
Violins 2  
Viola  
Violoncello  
String Bass

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