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# New Dragonetti Edition Puts the Bass in the Lead Role



String Quintet No. 18 is a pure gem for chamber players in search of a richly textured work

By Chi-chi Nwanoku

**WHAT A PRIVILEGE** it was to receive the first copy of Grancino Editions' new edition of the String Quintet No. 18 by Domenico Dragonetti (1763–1846). It's no wonder he was a popular figure on the music scene in Europe, especially London, wowing audiences and esteemed colleagues with his virtuosic prowess on the double bass. He made his mark in such a way that his social and musical engagements diary was chockablock! It's even more impressive when you consider the huge contribution he made to double-bass literature as well as for other instruments.

Following his death, his towering legacy as a great performer has outweighed his status as a composer, so this new arrival of more gems from his chamber-music library is extremely welcome, beginning with the

introduction to his String Quintet No. 18 in C major.

This edition comes under the heading Early Double Bass Series, No. 1, published by Grancino Editions, and has been enthusiastically prepared and edited by double bassist John Feeney, principal bass of the Orchestra of St. Luke's. His preface provides good insight to the work, although I would have liked to see some acknowledgment of the contribution from the British Library, where Dragonetti's manuscripts reside.

John's work on this edition has brought us a wonderfully crafted two-movement string quintet in which the double bass, rather than the traditional first violin, takes the leading role.

Then there's a violin part that weaves lyrically around the solo bass part, offering entertaining flourishes with interjections here and there, and giving occasional moments of relief to the bass. The work is further enriched by his choice of two violas and a basso, instead of a cello. This instrumentation has a luscious result, allowing a warm and even balance throughout.

The first movement is a short lyrical andante that has previously appeared in a version for double bass and piano. The quintet arrangement undeniably enhances

**Composition:** Domenico Dragonetti: String Quintet No. 18 in C major for solo double bass, violin, two violas, and basso

**Edition:** Grancino Editions, 2010 ([grancinoeditions.com](http://grancinoeditions.com))

**Considered by:** Chi-chi Nwanoku, principal double bass of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and a professor of double bass at Trinity College of Music in London





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its presentation, and the parts are sensitively balanced. The second movement, *allegro non troppo*, is in rondo form in which the main theme is a playful figure that goes round and round on itself. In terms of length, it seems to outbalance the first movement. The second movement, stylistically, is less convincing as a quintet; the parts are less equal, in that it's almost concert-like for the double bass with string quartet accompaniment. A bit of a giveaway, I suppose, given the composer was a virtuoso bassist, but it's all good entertainment. The second movement requires a considerable amount of preparation for the bassist, particularly for the running passages.

**'This instrumentation has a luscious result, allowing a warm and even balance throughout.'**

—Chi-chi Nwanoku

Jeannot Maha'a, at Grancino Editions, has given great care to the appearance of this edition. His commitment has produced a beautiful result—both the cover and set of parts have a convincing and tasteful 18th-century look, all the way down to the hue of the paper on which they're printed.

The importance of legibility of music parts cannot be underestimated and it made light work for us when I read this edition through with colleagues from the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. The only issue was that the solo bass had to turn back and forth between *Da Capos* and *Dal Segnos*. But it's a small compromise given the positive elements and clarity befitting everything else.

This edition is soon to be followed by *String Quintet No. 13*, in which the double bass again takes the leading role.

Considering the popularity of the instrument and the high standard of double bass playing globally these days, this edition is extremely timely. I recommend it highly to music academies, music schools, and *hochschulen* everywhere.

And I look forward to the opportunity to reintroduce these works to chamber concerts here in the UK, where no doubt they started life.