



# MONASH University

**Experts and Excerpts: The Application of Giovanni Bottesini's  
*Complete Method for the Contre-Basse* to the preparation of orchestral  
excerpts taken from the works of Giuseppe Verdi**

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## Abstract

The hypothesis of this paper is that if excerpts are prepared using a contemporaneous method book, then new and interesting results may be realised. Limited to excerpts for the double bass taken from works by Giuseppe Verdi, this paper suggests using Giovanni Bottesini's treatise *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse* to address the technical and musical issues encountered in each excerpt. This idea is based in the knowledge that Bottesini was considered the foremost double bass player of his time, including by Verdi, and that the two composers were contemporaries, making Bottesini's treatise historically appropriate to the excerpts in question. The method laid out here is in two parts: identifying the separate technical and musical considerations in each excerpt, then finding sections of the treatise that may be used to work on each specific issue, or in which Bottesini explains his approach relating to that issue. This approach is not necessarily intended to lead to a performance that is any more or less likely to win an audition than any other. Rather, the point is to create a more informed interpretation, and to find whether anything new regarding interpretation of the excerpts may be learned.

## Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



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# Table of Contents

COPYRIGHT NOTICE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DECLARATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: BOTTESINI AND VERDI.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE APPLICATION OF BOTTESINI'S <i>COMPLETE METHOD FOR THE</i></b> <b><i>CONTRE-BASSE</i> TO TECHNICAL ISSUES IN VERDI EXCERPTS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE EXCERPT FROM <i>RIGOLETTO</i> .....	6
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE EXCERPT FROM <i>OTHELLO</i> .....	12
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: THE APPLICATION OF BOTTESINI'S <i>COMPLETE METHOD FOR THE</i></b> <b><i>CONTRE-BASSE</i> TO MUSICAL ISSUES IN VERDI EXCERPTS, AND THE RELEVANCE OF</b> <b>HISTORICALLY-INFORMED PERFORMANCE PRACTICE</b>	
<b>TODAY.....</b>	<b>19</b>
ISSUES SURROUNDING TEMPI.....	20
EXECUTION OF APPOGGIATURAS AND GRACE NOTES.....	21
PORTAMENTO.....	24
HISTORICALLY-INFORMED PERFORMANCE PRACTICE TODAY.....	26
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>32</b>
APPENDIX 1: EXCERPT FROM <i>RIGOLETTO</i> .....	32
APPENDIX 2: EXCERPT FROM <i>OTHELLO</i> .....	33
APPENDIX 3: EXPLANATION OF FINGERINGS FOUND IN GIOVANNI BOTTESINI'S <i>COMPLETE</i>	
<i>METHOD FOR THE CONTRE-BASSE</i> .....	34
APPENDIX 4: DETAILS OF MOCK AUDITION RECORDING.....	35
APPENDIX 5: PROGRAM NOTES ACCOMPANYING RECITAL.....	36

# List of Figures

Fig. 1 – F major scale from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> .....	7
Fig. 2 – Fingerings for the upper two octaves of F major from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> .....	8
Fig. 3 – Example of bar-long slurs, bars 1-4 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi’s <i>Rigoletto</i> Act 1, Scene 2, <i>Signor? Va, non ho niente</i> .....	9
Fig. 4 – Exercises in long tones for bow control from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> .....	10
Fig. 5 – Exercises in shifting from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre- Basse</i> .....	11
Fig. 6 – Exercise No. 5 in F Major, from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> .....	12
Fig. 7 – Exercise No. 9 from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre- Basse</i> .....	13
Fig. 8 – Bars 19 and 20 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi’s <i>Othello</i> , Act 4.....	14
Fig. 9 – Bars 23 and 24 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi’s <i>Othello</i> , Act 4.....	14
Fig. 10 – E flat minor scale from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre- Basse</i> .....	15
Fig. 11 – Fingerings for the upper octaves of E flat minor from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> .....	15
Fig. 12 – ‘Exercises for management of the bow upon the open strings’ from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> .....	17

Fig. 13 – Bars 1 to 5 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi’s <i>Othello</i> , Act 4. In bar 5 (highlighted), the performer must choose between string crossings and shifts.....	17
Fig. 14a – Exercise No. 4 from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> .....	18
Fig. 14b – An example from exercise No. 4 from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> transposed into A flat minor.....	18
Fig. 15a – Exercise No. 1 from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> .....	19
Fig. 15b – An example from exercise No. 1 from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> when transposed into A flat minor .....	19
Fig. 16 – Table of tempo markings from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> .....	21
Fig. 17 – Diagram from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> showing the double appoggiatura.....	22
Fig. 18 – Bars 9 and 10 (highlighted) of the double bass excerpt from Verdi’s <i>Othello</i> , Act 4. Demonstrating double appoggiaturas.....	23
Fig. 19 – Bars 18-23 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi’s <i>Rigoletto</i> , Act 1, Scene 2, <i>Signor? Va, non ho niente</i> .....	24
Fig. 20 – Exercises for portamento from Bottesini’s <i>Complete Method for the Contre-Basse</i> . It is understood that portamento should be employed under each slur where there is an interval requiring a shift.....	25
Fig. 21 – Bar 47 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi’s <i>Rigoletto</i> , Act 1, Scene 2, <i>Signor? Va, non ho niente</i> .....	26

## Introduction

Orchestral excerpts form an integral part of any aspiring orchestral musician's life. The premise of this paper is that one way of preparing excerpts is to use a method book, specifically one contemporaneous to the excerpts, to work on both the technical and musical issues presented. By doing this, the performer will gain a deeper understanding of the excerpt's historical context, as well as finding new insights that will help to create a more informed performance. This study will focus on double bass excerpts taken from the works of Giuseppe Verdi, using examples from *Rigoletto* and *Othello*, and the possible application to those excerpts of Giovanni Bottesini's 1870 treatise *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*. It should be noted that, as part of a portfolio, this is by no means a full thesis but rather an accompanying exegesis, and it is therefore subject to strict limitations in terms of word count. Details of the performance components of the portfolio are found in appendices 4 and 5.

## Chapter One: Review of Relevant Literature

The premise of this thesis is that a double bassist could use Giovanni Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse* as a resource when preparing orchestral excerpts from the works of Giuseppe Verdi. This hypothesis is grounded in the fact that Bottesini was the leading authority on the double bass of his day, and was respected by Verdi as such, in addition to his treatise being contemporaneous with Verdi's works. Studies that directly replicate this topic have not been found, although there is a considerable amount of information available pertaining to the component parts, such as the relationship between Bottesini and Verdi, and aspects of performance practice as

discussed in Chapter Four. It should be noted that my research has been restricted to reference materials available in English due to limitations on the scope of this paper.

The greatest amount of existing literature relevant to this topic concerns Giuseppe Verdi. Crucially for this thesis, a number of volumes concerning Verdi, including Budden's *Verdi*<sup>1</sup>, Weaver and Chusid's *A Verdi Companion*<sup>2</sup>, and Brun's *A New History of the Double Bass*<sup>3</sup>, provide concrete links between him and Giovanni Bottesini, as set out in the following paragraphs.

Information concerning Bottesini is rather more difficult to find: the greatest part of what is available is written in languages other than English, principally Italian, and therefore beyond the compass of this study. For this reason, the biography of Bottesini supplied in Brun's volume *A New History of the Double Bass* has been an invaluable resource. Ramírez-Castilla's *Musical Borrowings in the Music for Double Bass by Giovanni Bottesini: A Reconsideration Beyond the Operatic Paraphrases*<sup>4</sup>, speaks about Bottesini, but is more concerned with his writing for the solo double bass. Russo's *Virtuosi of the European Art Tradition and Their Influence on the Development of the Double Bass*<sup>5</sup>, does touch on Bottesini's influence on orchestral writing for the double bass, but is mostly concerned with his influence on its development and advancement.

With regard to the technical aspects of the subject matter, there is comparatively little information available. There is considerably more information available concerning performance practice, and also on the musical issues raised by questions of

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<sup>1</sup> J. Budden, *Verdi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> W. Weaver and M. Chusid (ed.), *A Verdi Companion* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> P. Brun, *A New History of the Double Bass* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Paul Brun Productions, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> J. Ramírez-Castilla, 'Musical Borrowings in the Music for Double Bass by Giovanni Bottesini: A Reconsideration Beyond the Operatic Paraphrases', D. M. A. Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> L. Russo, 'Virtuosi of the European Art Tradition and Their Influence on the Development of the Double Bass', BMus Hons., Wesleyan University, 2011.

performance practice. Much of this information, however, generalises the Romantic period as a whole, as well as being specifically linked to more common instruments. Clive Brown's *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice: 1750 – 1900* provides some useful insights into performance practise in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Also relevant is Stephen Sas's *A history of double bass performance practise: 1500 – 1900*<sup>6</sup>, which does approach nineteenth century double bass playing through the method books produced in that period, but is less concerned with their broader application. As far as the potential applications of Bottesini's treatise are concerned, Lee's Doctorate of Music paper *Research, analysis and pedagogical application of Giovanni Bottesini's method for double bass*<sup>7</sup>, comes the closest. This, however, is concerned with applying the treatise to teaching, while my research is concerned with its potential application to the preparation of orchestral excerpts.

## **Chapter Two: Bottesini and Verdi**

Of the two composers in question, Verdi is the better known. Born on 9 October 1813, he was one of the Romantic period's foremost composers of opera. Bottesini, on the other hand, is comparatively unknown, despite his extensive output.

Born in Crema in 1821, Bottesini studied double bass at the Milan Conservatory.

Following his graduation in 1839, he embarked on a solo career, initially touring the major theatres of Italy, before giving his first international performance in Vienna. He spent several years moving around Italy, before being engaged as principal double bass

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<sup>6</sup> S. Sas, 'A history of double bass performance practise: 1500 – 1900', D. M. A. Thesis, The Juliard School, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> S. Lee, 'Research, analysis and pedagogical application of Giovanni Bottesini's method for double bass', Doctoral Thesis, Northwestern University, 2003.

of an opera company bound for Havana in 1845. It was this company's tours of major American cities that launched Bottesini as a soloist. Between 1848 and 1858, he toured the world with engagements in Mexico, Colombia, London, Paris, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium. It was following this period, in 1869, that he published his *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*<sup>8</sup>. From 1871 until 1877, Bottesini was director of the Cairo Opera House, and in 1879 accepted the post of conductor of the orchestra at Buenos Aires Teatro dell'Opera. He returned to Europe in 1886 as a soloist<sup>9</sup>, and in 1888, he accepted the directorship at the Royal Conservatory in Parma, a post he held until his death seven months later<sup>10</sup>.

It was in Venice in 1845 that Bottesini made the acquaintance of Giuseppe Verdi<sup>11</sup>. Although there is some debate as to the exact circumstances of this meeting<sup>12</sup>, it is clear that the two musicians maintained a lasting relationship. One of the best-known demonstrations of their relationships is the selection of Bottesini to conduct the premiere of *Aida*. While Montemorra Marvin casually asserts in *The Cambridge Verdi Encyclopedia* that the premiere was 'a task Verdi entrusted to [Bottesini]'<sup>13</sup>, both Brun and Budden are less certain; Budden says that 'Verdi reluctantly agreed to Giovanni Bottesini as conductor'<sup>14</sup>, while Brun asserts that 'In [Verdi's] mind...Bottesini ranked

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<sup>8</sup> This volume was originally published in French, with the title *Grande Méthode Complète de Contre-Basse*.

<sup>9</sup> P. Brun, *A New History of the Double Bass*, p. 236.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 226-236. This reference applies to the supplied short biography of Bottesini.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

<sup>12</sup> Montemorra Marvin claims that Bottesini was principal double bass of Verdi's orchestra (R. Montemorra Marvin, *The Cambridge Verdi Encyclopedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 70), while Brun states that they were merely in the same place at the same time (P. Brun, *A New History of the Double Bass*, p. 227).

<sup>13</sup> R. Montemorra Marvin, *The Cambridge Verdi Encyclopedia*, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> J. Budden, *Verdi*, p. 112.



poorly as a conductor'<sup>15</sup>, and that Verdi 'reluctantly accepted'<sup>16</sup> the appointment of Bottesini.

Verdi's opinion of Bottesini's skill on the double bass is an entirely different story. In a letter to his publisher, dated 1 January 1889, Verdi laments the 'indecent performance'<sup>17</sup> of the double bass section solo in *Othello* at a recent performance, stating that

now that the positions are notated by Bottesini, Faccio doesn't have anything to do except make [the bass players] play precisely, without paying attention...to the observations that will be made by those who don't know how to play well.<sup>18</sup>

Given that, at an earlier point in the letter, Verdi stated that 'the task of notating the positions should have been given to the most able bass player<sup>19</sup>', it is reasonable to assume that he considered this to be Bottesini. This letter demonstrates Verdi's infallible confidence in Bottesini's abilities as a double bass player, even a scarce six months before Bottesini's death. A further indication of Verdi's respect for Bottesini as a double bass player and musician comes in his eulogy for Bottesini on the day of the virtuoso's death: 'The loss of this distinguished artist is a tragedy to the world of the arts...'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> P. Brun, *A New History of the Double Bass*, p. 233.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>17</sup> W. Weaver and M. Chusid (ed.), *A Verdi Companion*, p. 136.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>20</sup> P. Brun, *A New History of the Double Bass*, p. 237.

## **Chapter Three: The Application of Bottesini's Treatise to Technical Issues in Verdi Excerpts**

This chapter focuses on the technical side of preparing orchestral excerpts, using examples from Bottesini's treatise to show how it can be applied to the various technical issues that arise in each excerpt. It should be noted that the exercises used are often given applications other than those originally intended by Bottesini. The approach used below works by isolating the different technical elements of each excerpt, and issues of musicality and performance are addressed in the next chapter.

There are a number of orchestral excerpts for double bass that are considered standard, in that they are regularly included in auditions. Two of the most commonly occurring Verdi excerpts are the solo passage from *Rigoletto* (see appendix 1), and the section solo from *Othello* (see appendix 2), and it is these that are here used as case studies. The solo from *Rigoletto* occurs early in Act 1, accompanying Rigoletto and Sparafucile's duet, *Signor? Va, non ho niente*, in which Sparafucile offers Rigoletto his services as an assassin. The section solo in *Othello* occurs during the fourth act, immediately following Desdemona's *Ave Maria*, and prior to her murder by Othello.

### **Technical Considerations in the Excerpt from *Rigoletto***

There are a number of technical elements that must be taken into consideration in the preparation and performance of this excerpt. Starting from the most fundamental point, it will be noted that the excerpt is in the key of F Major. Practising this scale could be considered the primary starting point in practising the excerpt, as it allows the performer to incorporate excerpt preparation into their warm up. In the first half of his





increasing the speed of the metronome until an appropriate tempo is reached. This exercise is also useful for working on intonation in half position: the alternation between stopped notes and open strings provides constant fixed reference points against which to reference the stopped notes. If in doubt, the performer can play the stopped note and the preceding open string at the same time to check that the interval is accurate.

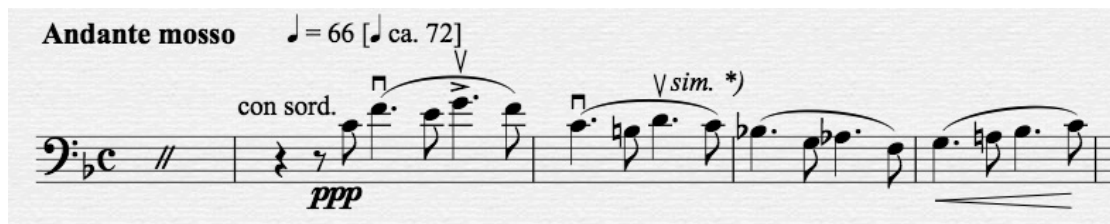


Fig. 3 – Example of bar-long slurs, bars 1-4 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi's *Rigoletto* Act 1, Scene 2, *Signor? Va, non ho niente*<sup>26</sup>.



Fig. 4 – Exercises in long tones for bow control from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*<sup>27</sup>.

Continuing to work on the most basic elements required in this excerpt, the performer should next work on shifting; since this excerpt must be as smooth as possible, the performer must be able to shift fluidly. Bottesini supplies the student with a number of

<sup>26</sup> F. Maßmann and G. Reinke, *Orchester-Probespiel: Kontrabass*, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 24.

exercises designed help with learning ‘all the different ways of changing position’<sup>28</sup>, as shown below in fig. 5. Although he states that these exercises ‘facilitate the knowledge of all the degrees of the scale’<sup>29</sup>, they do only extend to the neck joint. Since the *Rigoletto* excerpt moves above this point, the performer could consider formulating fingering patterns that emulate the patterns in fig. 4 to cover the higher registers; where open strings are used in fig. 4, the performer would use the octave harmonic.

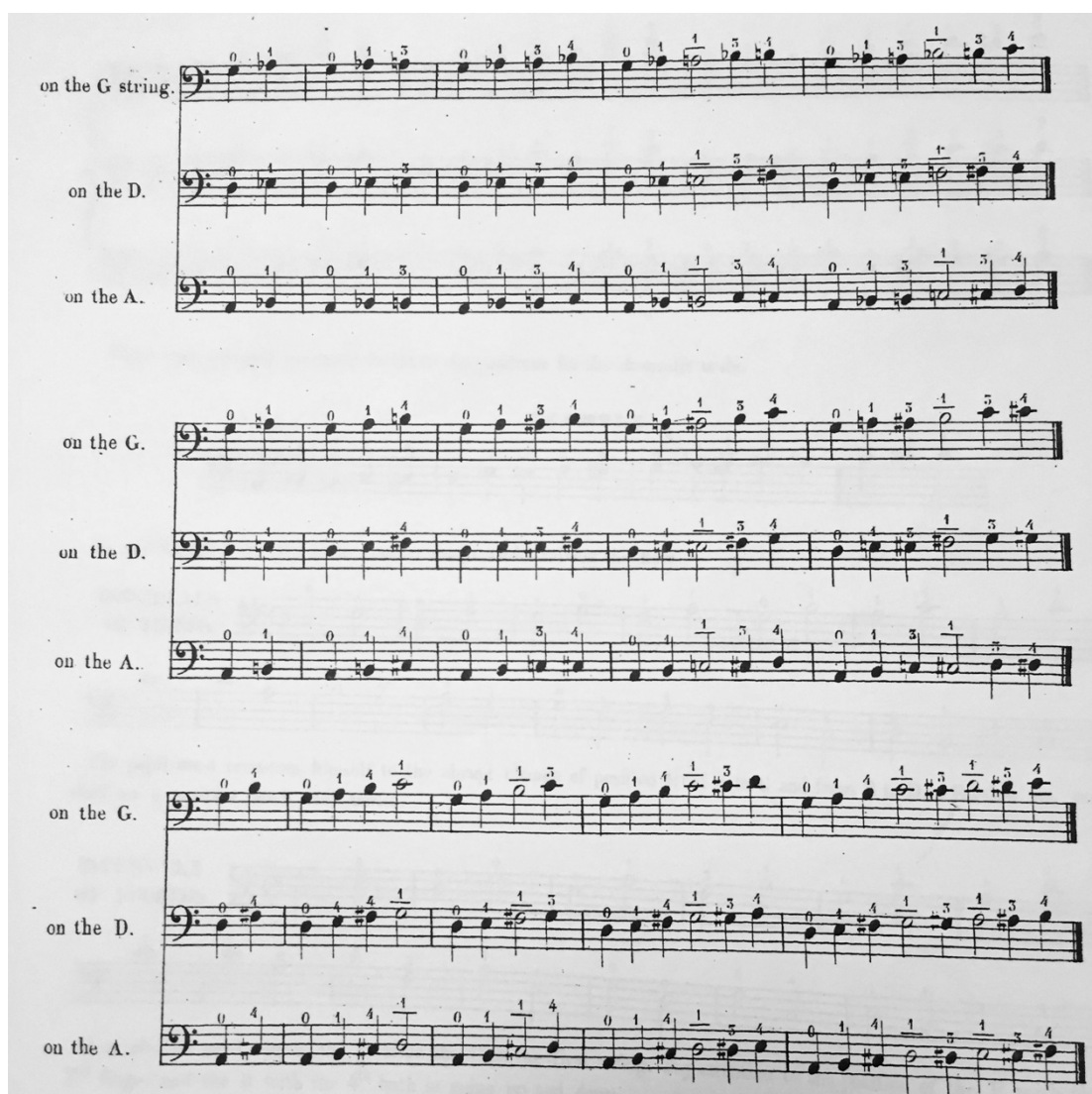


Fig. 5 – Exercises in shifting from Bottesini’s *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

The exercises shown above provide another opportunity to work on intonation, in that they require the performer to play the same note with different fingers in consecutive bars. This forces the performer to pay attention to the intervallic relationships between the notes since the differences in fingering mean that merely learning the shifts is even less advisable than usual. It is also important to be aware of the differences in accurate tuning when playing an exercise, and in the context of a solo work or excerpt. 'Piano tuning', being equivalent to equal temperament and describing a situation where one third, for example, is the same as every other third, is acceptable when practising an exercise for intonation. When playing a solo work or excerpt, however, the performer should be aware of subtle differences in tuning: where an interval may be in tune in an exercise, it may need to be slightly sharper or flatter in a solo work or orchestral excerpt depending on context; for a major triad the third should be slightly narrower than usual.

Once the elements discussed above are mastered, they should be combined. The exercise shown in fig. 6 does this, requiring six notes slurred under one bow, with the added complication of either crossing strings or shifting. This exercise requires good bow control, so that the tone quality remains constant, and there are no accents at the bow changes. The long slurs mean that the performer must pay particular attention to their shifts, so that there is no audible slide between the notes. Another option is exercise number nine from the end of the first part of the treatise (see fig. 7). Although this exercise is not rhythmically like the *Rigoletto* excerpt, it does provide a useful amalgamation of the skills required for clean slurring and shifts.



Fig. 6 – Exercise No. 5 in F Major, from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*<sup>31</sup>.

Fig. 7 – Exercise No. 9 from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*<sup>32</sup>.

## Technical Considerations in the Excerpt from *Othello*

In many ways, the *Othello* excerpt is more soloistic than the *Rigoletto* solo, requiring large leaps (see fig. 8) and fast runs (see fig. 9) While many of the points discussed above are also relevant to the *Othello* excerpt, the more soloistic style does add a

<sup>31</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 84.



number of technical elements. The writing is also interesting because the low E at the beginning of the excerpt, and the low G in the final semiquaver passage, clearly show that this was written for a bass with four strings<sup>33</sup>, even though the three-stringed variant of the instrument was still prevalent in Italy.



Fig. 8 – Bars 19 and 20 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi's *Othello*, Act 4<sup>34</sup>.



Fig. 9 - Bars 23 and 24 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi's *Othello*, Act 4<sup>35</sup>.

Since this excerpt covers a large part of the instrument's compass, it is worth taking notice of Bottesini's observation at the beginning of the second half of his treatise, that 'The greatest difficulty...is that of equalising the sounds spread over the full extent of the Contre Basse'<sup>36</sup>. This statement highlights how important it is that an even tone be maintained across the compass of the instrument. In terms of this specific excerpt, evenness of tone is of particular concern since, although not as continuously legato as the *Rigoletto* solo, the majority of the excerpt should be relatively smooth. This is

<sup>33</sup> It is suggested by Forsyth in *Orchestration* that the orchestras with which Verdi would have been working would have had both three and four stringed basses, perhaps with a single desk of four stringed basses. Forsyth also suggests that those players with four strings would have started the passage, and the rest of the section would have joined in, perhaps in bar seven, once the music is safely onto the third string. (C. Forsyth, *Orchestration* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1914), p. 453.

<sup>34</sup> F. Maßmann and G. Reinke, *Orchester-Probespiel: Kontrabass*, p. 44. The clef and key signature have been included in this figure for reasons of clarity.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 44. The clef and key signature have been included in this figure for reasons of clarity.

<sup>36</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 86.



being a delay between when the bow starts to move on the string and when the note sounds.

Lack of immediacy in sound production is a problem that can arise in someone's playing for a number of reasons: insufficient weight<sup>39</sup> in the bow, a hesitant beginning to the stroke, too much or too little rosin, poor string contact, and inappropriate bow position being a few. In order that it is not a problem at the beginning of this excerpt, the performer may like to consider the exercises shown in fig. 12. Although Bottesini intended this exercise to work on bow position, and it does not include the E string, it is easily adaptable for sound production since correct bow placement is necessary for good tone, and can be extended to include the E. When working on this exercise with sound production as a focus, the performer should start each note from the string and on a down bow, since this is how one would begin the excerpt. In order that each note has a clear, immediate beginning when working on open strings, the bow should be placed approximately an inch below the end of the fingerboard, and horizontal across the string; placing the bow over the fingerboard will muffle the sound, and shifting it closer to the bridge will cause the sound to become forced, while putting the bow on an angle will create inconsistency in the tone. Each bow stroke should begin one to two inches along the bow; any closer to the frog, and the beginning of the note will be indistinct. If the note does not speak immediately, it is important that the performer stop and consider why, rather than merely continuing with the exercise: is the bow straight and at the correct place both on the string and the along the bow, is there enough weight being transferred through the bow at the beginning of the stroke, is the bow too heavily into the string before the stroke begins, how much rosin on the bow.

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<sup>39</sup> It is important to distinguish between weight and pressure: pressing the bow into the string crushes the sound, whereas dropping the weight of your arm into the string through the bow allows it to grip the string without inhibiting sound production.

Once a possible problem has been identified, the performer should try again with the appropriate correction in mind.



Fig. 12 – ‘Exercises for management of the bow upon the open strings’ from Bottesini’s *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*<sup>40</sup>.

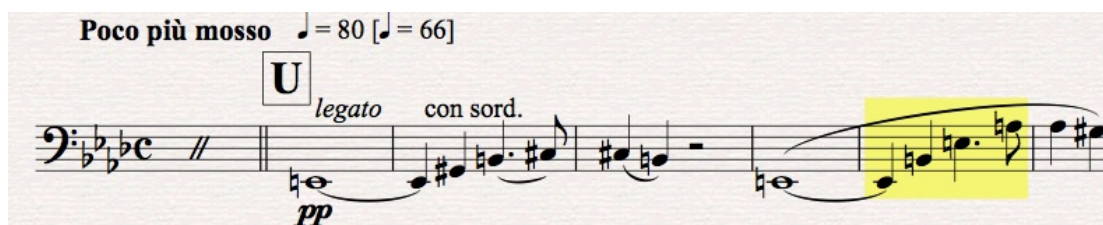
Much of the material applied to the *Rigoletto* excerpt is also applicable to the *Othello* section solo. As previously mentioned, much of this excerpt should be as smooth as possible. While it is therefore important that bow speed and changes are even, it is equally important that the left hand remains smooth. In aid of this, the performer may return to the exercises shown in fig. 5, to work on fluency and accuracy of shifting.

In this particular excerpt, there are a number of instances where the performer must choose whether to shift, or cross strings. While this is a matter of personal choice, it may be easier to preserve the still quality of the excerpt by shifting; in bar 5 of the excerpt (see fig. 13) for example, if the performer chooses to use string crossings, they will be forced to change strings for every note. If, alternatively, they use a shift, the number of string crossings is cut from three to two. When shifts are chosen over string crossings, the exercises shown in fig. 5 are again useful. In addition to improving intonation, slow

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<sup>40</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 22.

practise of these exercises lets the performer work on making their shifts imperceptible, a necessity for this excerpt. Slurs could also be added to the exercises, as imperceptible shifting under slurs is particularly necessary in this excerpt.



Although also in a key inappropriate for the excerpt, this exercise can also be transposed into A flat minor, as shown in fig. 15b.



Fig. 14a – Exercise No. 4 from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*<sup>42</sup>.



Fig. 14b – An example from exercise no. 4 from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse* transposed into A flat minor.



Fig. 15a – Exercise No. 1 from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 64.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 72.



Fig. 15b – An example from exercise no. 1 from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse* when transposed into A flat minor.

Breaking an excerpt into its component parts is a common preparation method. By applying Bottesini's treatise to this breakdown, however, it may be possible to gain a deeper insight into the workings of the excerpts. Although at times unfortunately vague, Bottesini speaks on almost every aspect of playing the double bass. While some of his suggestions are outmoded, it is apparent that much of what was put forward in his treatise of over a hundred years ago is still both relevant.

## **Chapter Four: The Application of Bottesini's Treatise to Musical Issues in Verdi Excerpts, and the Relevance of Historically-Informed Performance Practice Today**

As well as mastering the technical aspects of their excerpts, the performer must also consider questions of performance practise. Musical decisions are largely up to the performer's personal preference; for example, whether to use a small portamento here or take a little time there, on which notes to vibrate and how much, whether to begin that crescendo slightly early or to make it slightly longer are all up to the performer's discretion. Beyond this, however, the performer must take more specific aspects of each individual piece into consideration.

Each of the excerpts here examined contains a number of musical elements that are regarded differently now to the way they were when Bottesini put pen to paper. Due to limitations on the length of this paper, this discussion is limited to the few musical

issues discussed in Bottesini's treatise, in addition to some discussion of the application of historically-informed performance practise today.

## Issues Surrounding Tempi

In his treatise, Bottesini states:

We understand by "movement" that gradual variety of slowness or rapidity...which is appropriate to the due execution of a piece, so as to give it the true character or sentiment intended by the composer.<sup>44</sup>

This indicates that movement is synonymous with tempo. Unfortunately, the table supplied by Bottesini explaining common tempo markings, shown in fig. 16, is somewhat vague. It will be noted that both excerpts here used have metronome markings (see appendices 1 and 2). Since, however, all of the excerpts in Maßmann's volume are supplied with metronome markings, these are likely editorial suggestions, rather than specific to Verdi's wishes, and should therefore be noted but not necessarily strictly adhered to.

<b>Largo.</b>	—	very slow.	<b>Moderato.</b>	—	moderately quick.
<b>Larghetto.</b>	—	not quite so slow.	<b>Allegretto.</b>	—	a little faster.
<b>Adagio.</b>	—	slow and expressive.	<b>Allegro.</b>	—	gay and rather fast.
<b>Andantino.</b>	—	not too slow.	<b>Vivace.</b>	—	lively.
<b>Andante.</b>	—	not quite so slow as Andantino.	<b>Presto.</b>	—	quick.
			<b>Prestissimo.</b>	—	very quick.

Fig. 16 – Table of tempo markings from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*<sup>45</sup>.

The *Rigoletto* excerpt is marked andante mosso. Looking at Bottesini's guide in fig. 16, we are informed that andante indicates 'not quite so slow as Andantino'<sup>46</sup>, which is not

<sup>44</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 8.



particularly informative. The addition of the prefix *mosso* does not serve clarify anything, apparently indicating that the excerpt should be performed faster than not too slow. According to Johann Maelzel's original metronome, *andante* should fall between sixty and sixty-six beats per minute<sup>47</sup>. This, however, comes from a time well before Verdi and Bottesini's, and is a German interpretation of tempo; in the latter parts of the century, Italian tempi were significantly faster than in Germany<sup>48</sup>. At another point in *Rigoletto*, however, Verdi has indicated an *andante mosso* written in 3/8 as ♩ = 120<sup>49</sup>, which gives us an approximation of his ideas concerning tempo. It would seem, then, that the best we can do is to take all of this into consideration, and base our decisions regarding tempo on the context in which we find the excerpt. Indeed, in the case of the *Othello* section solo, for which we are supplied simply with the direction *poco più mosso*, context is the only real guide we have.

## Execution of Appoggiaturas and Grace Notes

Bottesini describes an appoggiatura as follows:

*instead of immediately sounding the principal note we take the one above or below it, passing to the principal.*<sup>50</sup>

He also distinguishes this from what he terms a double appoggiatura, being when 'two successive notes are taken'<sup>51</sup> (see fig. 17), rather than the single passing note he describes for a regular appoggiatura.

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<sup>47</sup> C. Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice: 1750 – 1900*, p. 307.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 311.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 354.

<sup>50</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 79.

<sup>51</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 79.



Fig. 17 – Diagram from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse* showing the double appoggiatura<sup>52</sup>.

Examples of double appoggiaturas are found in the *Othello* excerpt (see fig. 18). There is some argument as to whether appoggiaturas should be stronger or weaker than the main note, and whether the two notes should phrase in one direction or the other<sup>53</sup>. In this instance, the question of where the emphasis should be placed is easily solved by context; were either the main note or the appoggiatura to be accented, it would disrupt the line of the phrase. However, emphasis on appoggiaturas in the nineteenth century is often indicated with dynamic marks<sup>54</sup>, and this can be seen in fig. 18. Verdi's dynamic markings here show that rather than the main note or the appoggiatura being emphasised, they should follow the line of the phrase. This is also logical in terms of context: the majority of the excerpt should be as smooth as possible, to create the right atmosphere, meaning that any undue emphasis would be inappropriate. For similar reasons, the duration of the appoggiaturas in this situation should be equivalent to their notated value, rather than shortened, which agrees with Bottesini's assertion that an appoggiatura should split 'the value of the note into two equal parts'<sup>55</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> *IbidBasse*, p. 79.

<sup>53</sup> C. Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice: 1750 – 1900*, p. 473.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 474.

<sup>55</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 79.



Fig. 18 – Bars 9 and 10 (highlighted) of the double bass excerpt from Verdi's *Othello*, Act 4. Demonstrating double appoggiaturas <sup>56</sup>.

The clearest examples of grace notes are found in bars 18 to 23 of the *Rigoletto* excerpt (see fig. 19). Bottesini tells us that grace notes should 'take no value from the notes they press on'<sup>57</sup>. Brown corroborates this, by classifying them as

a very short ornament that barely removes anything from the value of the notes between which it stands.<sup>58</sup>

Like the appoggiaturas discussed above, these grace notes are written out, rather than being in small print, coinciding with the fashion for more precise notation. Although in the nineteenth century grace notes were generally placed on the beat<sup>59</sup>, these are obviously intended to be placed before the downbeat of the next bar. Placing them strictly in the fourth beat of the bar will create an unnecessarily metrical feeling; the excerpt over all should be flowing and casual to match the aria it accompanies, and being overly concerned with placing the grace-notes exactly on the final hemi-demi-semiquaver of the bar will disrupt this. If, rather, the performer uses them as passing note, only touching them briefly, then a more lilting impression is created, which I consider to be more appropriate bearing in mind the context of the excerpt

<sup>56</sup> F. Maßmann and G. Reinke, *Orchester-Probespiel: Kontrabass*, p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> C. Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice: 1750 – 1900*, p. 459.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 479.



Fig. 19 – Bars 18 to 23 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Act 1, Scene 2, *Signor? Va, non ho niente*<sup>60</sup>.

## Portamento

The description of portamento provided by Bottesini is as follows:

By this term is understood the passage...of one note tied to another...by  
“carrying” the sound without removing the hand from the string.<sup>61</sup>

Bottesini uses the term tie synonymously with slur, and in this instance, he is referring to what we would consider to be slurs rather than ties (see fig. 20). The term portamento has also been used to refer simply to legato playing, but by Bottesini and Verdi's time, it referred almost exclusively to an audible slide between notes<sup>62</sup>. Contrary to Brown's assertion that 'On bowed string instruments portamento is a natural outcome of position changing'<sup>63</sup>, portamento should only be employed as an intentional ornament. In essence, a portamento should cover only a small amount of the interval between the two connected notes, as distinct from a glissando, which should cover the entire interval.

<sup>60</sup> F. Maßmann and G. Reinke, *Orchester-Probespiel: Kontrabass*, p. 61. The clef and key signature have been included in this figure for reasons of clarity.

<sup>61</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 81.

<sup>62</sup> C. Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice: 1750 – 1900*, p. 559.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 560.

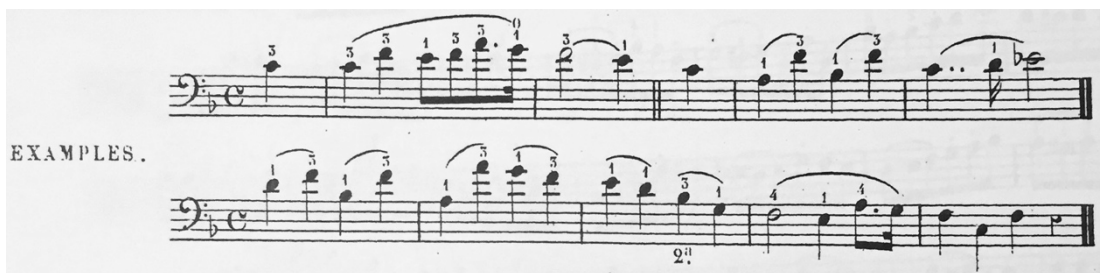


Fig. 20 – Exercises for portamento from Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*. It is understood that portamento should be employed under each slur where there is an interval requiring a shift<sup>64</sup>.

The *Rigoletto* excerpt does not provide a great deal of opportunity for portamento. The phrase in bar 47 (see fig. 21) does however allow for a small amount of portamento between the first and second notes. In this instance, the effect created should be elegant, and maintain the nonchalant attitude of the aria. It is also important that the portamento does not become overbearing, because of the accompanying role of the excerpt. In this situation, it is possible to use the fingering to limit the slide, as does the one suggested in fig. 21.



Fig. 21 – Bar 47 of the double bass excerpt from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Act 1, Scene 2, *Signor? Va, non ho niente*<sup>65</sup>.

The *Othello* excerpt provides an opportunity for a much more dramatic portamento between bars 19 and 20 (see fig. 8). In this instance, the portamento should occur at the head of the sudden crescendo through the repeated E flats, and be used to emphasise the C flat, the highest note in the excerpt; this is best achieved if rubato is also employed, creating the necessary time to apply the portamento. It is at this point that

<sup>64</sup> G. Bottesini, *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse*, p. 81.

<sup>65</sup> F. Maßmann and G. Reinke, *Orchester-Probespiel: Kontrabass*, p. 61. This fingering is my own suggestion.

the atmosphere changes from brooding to tortured, and it is this high, loud C flat that achieves this. By using a large portamento between the E flat and the C flat, the performer is able to create a kind of agonised wail that reflects the mentality of Othello himself at this point in the opera<sup>66</sup>. Of course, the performer must be careful that any portamento used here remains tasteful, and does not become a glissando.

## Historically-Informed Performance Practise Today

When it comes to historic performance practice, 'authentic' is a term that appears regularly. Some claim that only 'A solo performance by a composer who is also a virtuoso'<sup>67</sup>, or 'A cantata directed by Bach or an opera directed by Mozart could be described as authentic'<sup>68</sup>. This viewpoint, though, enters into the intentional fallacy argument, as discussed by Kivy<sup>69</sup>, which states that we cannot know the original intentions of the composer, and should therefore disregard them entirely. Along similar lines to Kivy, Neumann states in *New Essays on Performance Practice* that 'The goal of the search is ultimately unreachable and the best we can hope for is to approach it...'<sup>70</sup>. While it may be true that we cannot precisely realise the composer's intentions, the technical issues of the appropriate period are another story: Bottesini was not alone in producing a treatise on the manner of playing his instrument, and many of these texts include useful hints as to what would have been expected of a performer of the day. The term 'historically informed' is preferred for this paper, on the understanding that this

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<sup>66</sup> Refer to page 6

<sup>67</sup> F. Neumann, *New Essays on Performance Practise* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> P. Kivy. *Sounding Off: eleven essays in the philosophy of music* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012)

<sup>70</sup> F. Neumann, *New essays on performance practise*, p. 18.

refers not to any attempt to recreate the composer's wishes, but rather to be aware of the practices of the time.

Having applied Bottesini's method to the two excerpts in question, and found how they could have been interpreted at the time of composition, we must now consider whether it is fitting to do so in a modern context. Although an entirely historically-informed performance may not always be appropriate, it is still beneficial to have the requisite knowledge. Having an understanding of the context of the excerpt within the piece from which it is taken is generally seen as being imperative, so why should an understanding of the historical context not be seen in the same way? If the performer were to gather the knowledge presented in the preceding chapters of this paper and apply it judiciously to their performance, a point of difference from other candidates would be created. If this is the case, then it would seem logical that taking on board information available through contemporaneous resources would be beneficial in any performance situation, and would lead to a more informed performance.

## **Conclusion**

The object of this study was to find whether taking what Bottesini can tell us about playing the double bass and applying it to the issues surrounding excerpts from Verdi's works could provide a new angle on excerpt preparation. The relationship between Verdi and Bottesini, and Verdi's apparent respect for Bottesini, is interesting in that it both confirms Bottesini as an appropriate authority on Verdi's double bass parts, and reaffirms Bottesini's standing as the preeminent double bassist of his day. The application of Bottesini's knowledge as laid out in his treatise has provided a number of interesting insights: from a fingering system designed with comfort and stability in

mind, to specific directions for period appropriate ornamentation. Perhaps the greatest benefit of applying *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse* to excerpt preparation, however, is that it encourages methodical preparation, and contains material pertinent to the tiniest of details in each excerpt. Admittedly, playing as close to exactly in Bottesini's style as possible may not be acceptable in many modern day situations; views on performance have, after all, changed dramatically in the last hundred and fifty years. Although some of Bottesini's claims, such as the inferiority of the four-stringed double bass, are outmoded, his insight on playing the double bass is as valuable today as it was during his own lifetime and his *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse* provides invaluable information for anyone preparing material from that time.



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## Appendix 1

61

Rigoletto

1. Akt, Nr. 3, Duetto  
Andante mosso ♩ = 66 [♩ ca. 72]

Giuseppe Verdi

con sord.  
ppp

V

V *sim.<sup>2)</sup>*

1

2

1

2

2

1

2

1

2

1

2

allargando  
morendo

<sup>2)</sup>Vorschlag der Herausgeber

Maßmann, F. and G., Reinke. *Orchester-Probespiel: Kontrabass*, Mainz, Schott, 1992, p. 61.

## Appendix 2

4. Akt Othello Giuseppe Verdi

Poco più mosso  $\text{♩} = 80$  [ $\text{♩} = 66$ ]  
 (U) legato con sord.

*pp* *tutti un poco marcato*

*piu marc.* *f* *ppp* (V)

*dim.* *p* *stacc.* (X)

*f cresc.* *f un poco piu marc. e cresc.* *ff*

Maßmann, F. and G., Reinke. *Orchester-Probespiel: Kontrabass*, Mainz, Schott, 1992, p. 44.

## Appendix 3

### **Explanation of Fingerings Found in Giovanni Bottesini's *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse***

It will be noted that the examples used in this paper do not use the standard 1-2-4 fingering system, but rather a combination of 1-4-4 and 1-4-1. This is not a misprint, but rather Bottesini's own fingering system, and is consistent across the original French version of *Complete Method for the Contre-Basse* and the subsequent English and Italian translations. When the 1-2-4 system is applied, each finger covers a consecutive semitone. This does, however, require a significant stretch between the first and second fingers, which can lead to inconsistent intonation. By replacing the 2 with a 4, Bottesini negates this problem; the space between the 1 and the 2 in first position is roughly the same as the gap between the first and fourth fingers when the hand is closed such that the fingers are immediately next to each other. Bottesini's approach increases stability in both hand shape and intonation. The principal advantage of the 1-2-4 system is that it reduces the number of necessary shifts when playing in neck position, which can also be seen as increasing stability as fewer shifts means a smaller margin of error.

When playing scales of three octaves, the fingering in neck position should be adjusted so that the middle octave finishes 2-3. This allows for the third octave to be played 1-3-1-3-1-2-3, a pattern that can be applied to all keys. Using the 1-3 pattern in thumb position means that there is always a third comfortably under the hand, and once again avoids the uncomfortable and unreliable positions of other systems, such as thumb-1-2-3. This particular system requires the player to reach with their third finger, meaning that that note is often flat. It is also difficult to do this without moving the first and second fingers, meaning that it is an impractical system in general. While there are systems other than Bottesini's that champion fingerings other than thumb-1-2-3 in thumb position, such as that of Ludwig Streicher, Bottesini's is as good a choice as another.

With regard to the application of Bottesini's fingering system to one's own playing, it is advisable to study it as much from a knowledge point of view as anything else; the more you know about your instrument, the better informed your choices will be. If a performer wishes to make a complete study of the way that Bottesini would have played the excerpts discussed above, then they should of course apply the fingerings given in the figures. Otherwise, it is suggested that the performer study Bottesini's suggestions, but that they choose the system that works for them personally.

## Appendix 4

Details of orchestral excerpts performed for the mock audition component of this portfolio (see attached DVD). Excerpts are listed in performance order.

1. Beethoven: *Symphony No. 5 in C minor* – III. Allegro (start to bar 100)
2. Beethoven: *Symphony No. 5 in C minor* – III. Allegro (scherzo)
3. Beethoven: *Symphony No. 9 in D minor* – IV. Presto (recit)
4. Berlioz: *Symphonie Fantastique* – V. Witches' Round Dance
5. Brahms: *Symphony No. 1 in C minor* – I. Un poco sostenuto – Allegro (figure E to bar 190)
6. Brahms: *Symphony No. 1 in C minor* – II. Andante sostenuto (bars 46 – 60)
7. Brahms: *Symphony No. 1 in C minor* – III. Un poco allegretto e grazioso (bar 87 – second ending)
8. Britten: *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* – Variation H
9. Dvorak: *Symphony No. 8 in G Major* – IV. Allegro ma non troppo (figure O to one before P)
10. Haydn: *Symphony No. 31 "Horn Signal"* – IV. Moderato molto – presto (variation 7)
11. Mahler: *Symphony No. 1 in D major* – III. Langsam (bars 3 – 10)
12. Mahler: *Symphony No. 2 in C minor* – I. Allegro maestoso (start to 17 after figure 1)
13. Mozart: *The Magic Flute* – Overture (bars 33 – 53)
14. Mozart: *Symphony No. 40 in G minor* – I. Molto allegro (bars 114 – 135)
15. Schubert: *Symphony No. 9* – III. Scherzo allegro vivace (B to bar 146)
16. R. Strauss: *Ein Heldenleben* (figure 40 to 8 bars after)
17. R. Strauss: *Ein Heldenleben* (figure 77 to figure 78)
18. Verdi: *Othello* – Act 4
19. Verdi: *Rigoletto* – Act 1, Scene 2, *Signor? Va, non ho niente*
20. Wagner: *Die Meistersinger* – Overture
21. Wagner: *Die Walküre* – Act 1, Scene 1, Langsam



## Appendix 5

### Masters Graduation Recital 24 April, 2015

**Alexandra Giller: Double Bass**  
**Elyane de Lausade: Piano**  
**Pat Brearley: Viola**

#### **Concerto for Double Bass in B minor**

**Giovanni Bottesini**

*I. Allegro moderato*

*II. Andante*

*III. Allegro*

Bottesini is perhaps the best-known composer of solo repertoire for the double bass, if indeed there is a thing as a well-known composer of solo double bass repertoire. Born in Crema in 1821, he studied double bass at the Milan Conservatory. He had a successful career as a soloist, which saw him travel throughout Europe and North America, and as far afield as Brazil, Cuba and Colombia. He was also a member of various opera orchestras, and director of several opera houses, including the Cairo Opera House, and the Teatro dell'Opera in Buenos Aires. Bottesini was known for composing double bass fantasias based on popular arias from whichever opera he was conducting or playing for at that point, which he would get up and perform during the interval of the opera. In New York, the news that Bottesini would be performing during the interval often caused a crush at the doors to the theatre!

Of Bottesini's works for bass, the *Concerto in B minor* is probably one of the best known, being as it is one of our very few major concertos. Being both a conductor and composer of opera, Bottesini incorporated many elements of operatic music in his writing for the bass. Personally, I like to think of this concerto as an opera in miniature. The cantabile first movement, with its many opportunities for expressive ornamentation, could be thought of as the slightly sleazy hero of the story wooing his current fancy. The contrasts between duple and triple rhythms create interest, and the dramatic *cadenza* could easily be sung by an over excited tenor in the throes of passion. Personally, I hold the second movement to be one of the loveliest works for solo double bass. With regard to the story of the miniature opera, this could be representing the female love interest, locked in her boudoir, contemplating the perfidy of her lover. Its melancholic reflection, with calm legato lines and contrasting sections of increased passion. The third movement is the jauntiest of the three, and forms the conclusion of our operetta. With its flamenco influenced opening, this movement sees our hero and his lover finally work out their differences and declare their love for each other. It is impassioned and tempestuous. Interestingly, there are two potential endings for this concerto. Today, we will be hearing the minor version. You can decide for yourself what that says about our imagined operetta!

## Sonata No. 2 in E minor, Op. 6

Adolf Míšek

*I. Con fuoco*

*II. Andante cantabile*

*III. Furiant*

*IV. Finale*

Adolf Míšek was a Czech double bassist and composer. He was born in 1875 in the town of Modletín in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and moved to Vienna at the age of fifteen to study double bass with Franz Simandl at the Vienna Conservatory. At twenty-three, Míšek joined the Viennese orchestra of the state opera. In 1912, he became professor of double bass at the Vienna Conservatory, following the retirement of Simandl. In 1918, Míšek relocated to Prague to take up the position of principal double bass with the National Theatre. He remained in that post until his death in 1955. Comparatively little is known about him beyond these key details, and the majority of the writings that mention him are in Czech.

Míšek's *Sonata No. 2 in E minor* is the best known of his three solo sonatas for double bass and is an interesting mixture of over the top action and calm, reflective melodies. The opening of the *Con fuoco* first movement, which follows standard sonata form, features challenging octave leaps and abrupt changes in dynamics, which combine to create a tempestuous mood. This is followed by a reflective tempo tranquillo section, which serves as an island of calm for both the audience and the performer before the third section of the movement, marked tempo giusto, which takes us determinedly into the development section. This in turn gives the player the opportunity to demonstrate their string crossing prowess before the movement eventually recapitulates with the opening theme. Following the quicksilver nature of the first movement, the *Andante cantabile* second movement is a welcome respite. The flowing melodies have a reflective quality, emphasised by the gentle dynamics. The chirpier animato section serves to reinforce the introspective feeling of the rest of the movement, as well as providing forward motion to the otherwise comparatively static cantabile lines of the first and third sections of the movement.

The *Furiant* is often seen as being either one of the more exciting or the more excruciating pieces in the double bass repertoire. The strong dynamics and short note lengths are reminiscent of the first movement, while the hammering chords in the piano line help to give the movement its 'furious' nature. Large leaps around the instrument are also prominent features and give the performer an added element of risk in their life. The trio section never feels entirely settled in its calmer atmosphere, as it is dotted with pockets of abrupt drama that hark back to the more enthusiastic nature of the first part of the movement.

Bringing this marathon of a sonata to a close is the allegro appassionato *Finale*. This movement takes elements of the previous movements and binds them together to create an elegant summing up of the whole. The opening is reminiscent in character of the beginning of the sonata, and shares some rhythmic patterns. The movement as a whole is unrelenting; even in the lyrical sections, the motion merely becomes less urgent. The abrupt changes in register and brisk alterations between legato sections and rapid-fire passage work are what truly create the fireworks in this spectacular movement.



## Sonata for Viola and Double Bass

Johannes Sperger

*I. Allegro moderato*

*II. Romanze: adagio*

*III. Presto – allegro moderato*

Austrian composer and double bassist Johannes Matthias Sperger was born in Feldsberg, modern day Valtice, in 1750. He began his musical training with the local organist, before moving to Vienna to study double bass with Friedrich Pichlberger, and composition with Albrechtsberger. During his time in Vienna, he was a member of the Wiener Tonkünstlersozietät, with which organisation he first performed his own compositions at the age of eighteen. It has been hypothesised that he was either friends, or at the very least in contact, with Josef Haydn at this point, too, Haydn then being at Esterházy. This concept is supported by a number of Haydn's original manuscripts having been found among Sperger's belongings following his death. Throughout his life, Sperger held a range of positions across eastern Europe. He was, variously, a court musician for the Cardinal Primate of Hungary in Pressburg (Bratislava), Count Ladislav Erödy at Fidis, and Grand Duke Friedrich Franz I of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. Despite being a prolific composer, with an output comprising over forty symphonies, various sonatas, cantatas, and choral works and no fewer than eighteen double bass concertos, Sperger was always renowned as a double bass player before anything else. He died at Mecklenburg-Schwerin in 1812, and was honoured the following week with a performance of Mozart's *Requiem*.

One of two sonatas for double bass and viola by Sperger, this work represents the light-hearted style so common to the Classical period. In the pantheon of classical music, it sits alongside similar lightly entertaining chamber pieces common to its time and beloved of the aristocracy. Although works such as this may have been performed in a formal concert setting, it is also likely that it would have served as background music. The interplay between the viola and the bass invites the performers to have fun with their interpretation, and to make as much of each detail of the music as possible. The shared rolls of soloist and accompanist make this very much a duo sonata, with no one instrument having a clear lead over the other. The lightly elegant first movement demonstrates a kind of conversation interplay between the two instruments, and encourages the performers to bounce off each other's musical ideas. The contemplative *Romanze* that forms the second movement is an island of calm in an otherwise energetic sonata. It is delicately nuanced, and demonstrates the transparent simplicity typical of music from the Classical period. The third movement explodes into life with double stops in both parts, and quickly establishes its rollicking and robustly joyful nature. The movement is peppered with moments of humour, including the abrupt switch from the original allegro moderato to the meno mosso section. The central minor section of the movement is a welcome contrast to the otherwise unrelenting positivity and chirpiness that forms the final flourish of this recital.