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A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR YOUNG STRING PLAYERS
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The Case for Bass!

Well.....It's not a cello!

The development of solo repertoire for the double bass has experienced ups and downs throughout history, with both musicians and audiences. Most professional musicians and students have only an approximate idea about the potential of the double bass and even less of an idea of how to approach and play this instrument, and few of today's concertgoers are truly able to appreciate the double bass as a solo and chamber music instrument. This is one of the reasons that concert promoters often prefer not to programme double bass recitals, fearing that they will not appeal to as many people as more "popular" solo instruments such as piano, violin or voice. However, from my personal experience, I have noticed how interested and happy audiences and other musicians are to listen to or play in double bass recitals or chamber concerts where a double bass is involved. These were the main reasons why I started thinking about what I could do to spread and grow double bass repertoire and awareness for both musicians and audiences!

***"Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible"* F. Zappa**

What drew me to the double bass?

I only decided to turn from piano to double bass at the age of 20 – resulting in a lot of shock from my family and from some of my music teachers - but also in a lot of support and encouragement as well. I had heard these warm amazing sounds when in College and I discovered that they were coming from the double bass, an instrument that I only really heard as protagonist in jazz environments or orchestras. I felt totally in love and alive in a deeper way when I met the bass and realized that it was the instrument I felt truly attached too. It has been difficult, exhausting and strenuous (and still is!) but it was definitely one of the best choices I have made in my life. I feel it's important to share this in order to encourage people not to be afraid of change: Seeking what we like is always a benefit for our personal growth, and seeking what feeds our soul is sometimes not easy and really demands a lot of energy, determination and responsibility! But being out of your comfort zone and working for what you feel is most important will always be a work in progress.

Double bass – what will the 21st century legacy be?

There was a big boost in the development of double bass technique and research in the 20th century, with a huge amount of books and methods written, and some extraordinary performers that proved the fact that the double bass can have the same virtuosity and expressive possibilities as the other instruments in the string family. A lot of double bass festivals, workshops, competitions and awards were created to help increase awareness. So, why, in the 21st century, are we now still in a kind of semi-obscure? Why, even in very high profile and competent musical environments do double bass players struggle to find a proper space? Why, in many cases, are double bass students not really encouraged to explore and create an alternative career apart of the orchestra? Why do we not yet fully believe that as bass players we can try to create something different than the path that has been followed for the last 150 years? We have brilliant examples of bass players in both past and modern generations that have explored and expanded the repertoire, but we still need to connect this expansion through to concert managers, the record industry and performance organizers. I see this as the big talk for double bass performers in this century!

Musical instrument equality: something so obvious that it is ignored

Do you find it hard to be accepted as a high quality musician when playing bass?

In a world where we are gradually achieving social equality and rights in many areas, such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion; in the world of music world this is not fully happening yet. I've experienced (and am still experiencing) the fact that concertgoers, managers and artistic directors are often too quick to judge musicians by the instrument they play, in this case the double bass, assuming that is not as appealing or convincing as a violin, cello or piano. This process can result in a lack of attention being paid to the amount of care, quality and attention that the artist has put into their recordings and, meaning that many potentially excellent new projects are lost in

this proposal or funding stage. However I am fully convinced that the 21st century marks the renaissance of the double bass!

A little example...

The perception of someone as a double-bass player first, instead of as simply a musician, hints at how difficult it can be to move freely through the world of solo and chamber music. Most double bass players will have heard expressions such as "For a double bass player that's impressive!". It is really difficult to transfer the amount of pain I personally feel in this, but just imagine how you would feel if you were told; "For a child that's impressive!", or worse, "For a girl that's impressive!".

The strength to become a musician: student repertoire, academics and teachers

What can or should be done to raise awareness of the double bass?

The world of music, as with other art environments, mirrors society. It's vitally important to involve young people in educational initiatives to engage them and to boost change. As a Teacher Assistant at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London, I really feel that a huge difference can be made in terms of creating opportunities for the new generations of bass players, and making sure that other instrumentalists and composers know more about and have more contact with this fabulous instrument. Encouraging music students to listen to and explore the full range of chamber music for the whole stringed instrument family, gives huge advantages by creating a generation of musicians that are aware of all the possibilities for musical expression in this amazing family of instruments. Trying to share new music and new potential instrument combinations is also advantageous; the strong legacy we have of string quartets and piano trios is thanks to musicians and composers that in the past had the courage (and the financial support of patrons!) to explore and experiment with those, at the time, unusual combinations, and transform them in to established ones.

Your teachers are crucial. They have a huge responsibility on their shoulders, to transfer experience and technique but also to have the capability to allow the

personality of each student to shine through. I have worked with many teachers and all of them have given me something that allowed me to grow in a musical and personal way. A good teacher will always try to boost the student's potential whilst allowing them to keep their own freedom of choice and expression to some extent.

"Music from the Sphinx"

Because just "talking about music is like dancing about architecture" (probably a Frank Zappa's quote, and yes he is my favourite composer), I decided that the best way to start to spread my views on the double bass would be to make an album. It's called "Music from The Sphinx" and it is really a portrait of my musical and personal life at the moment. This recording is a humorous reaction to Arturo Toscanini's famous quote: "I will die before getting to understand women and the intonation of the double basses."

As a woman and a double bassist, that must make me doubly difficult to understand!

My musical journey for this album has been to arrange, adapt and bring to life a range of repertoire that responds to Toscanini (and the audience) by turning the unknowable into the approachable. The double bass deserves equal space and dignity without needing to imitate or compete with other virtuoso instruments (like a baritone pretending to sing Mozart's "Queen of the Night"...). There's a strong thematic link between all the composers on the album; in their music irony, humour and melancholy are constantly present:



they are rebellious dreamers, fighters and visionaries.

The pieces are theatrical in nature and have a strong message and a story to communicate with a wider audience.

This recording was a life changing experience. This album was entirely sponsored by the Richard Carne Trust. This Trust is led by Philip Carne, a special person who managed to turn a painful seed into a beautiful flower that keeps many young artists under its petals, supporting them economically and personally in their difficult artistic careers and believing in their projects. Believing in

something new, especially in a world governed by fear and uncertainty, is not simple; it is a gift that not everyone has but that we must surely encourage.

[STEVE: "YOU CAN READ ABOUT THE WORK OF THE CARNE TRUST HERE: WWW.CARNETRUST.ORG"]

If you'd like to listen to "Music from the Sphinx" it's available on all the main platforms. I really hope you enjoy it!

What I am doing? What are my plans for the future?

I am composing, transcribing and arranging more and more music for solo double bass and chamber ensembles. I am also composing for double bass and orchestra and creating collaborations with several established and young composers around the world. I also keep searching for philanthropic, energetic and adventurous people who can join and help me to go forward in my artistic development and my musical journey. It is a very tricky but exciting career; at the moment I am my own agent, manager and secretary, and it is very difficult sometimes to remember or find the time to do everything, but I am sure that this stage will prepare me for the future!

As a community we bass players have the power to change things, we have to spread the word, do fabulous things, and share it with the world.

Finally, as Frank Zappa (of course) said: "Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is not truth. Truth is not beauty. Beauty is not love. Love is not music. MUSIC IS THE BEST"

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