The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia

Report by Benjamin Ward
2012 Churchill Fellow

Dr Iain Medgett Scholarship for the Study of Classical Strings: ‘A study and comparison of the diverse approaches to the double bass in the major orchestras of Europe and Britain.’

Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom

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Benjamin Ward

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Introduction

The complex history and development of the double bass has led to a variety of approaches to playing the instrument by the modern day player. Today, the double bass functions as the largest and lowest-pitched member of the violin family. It can be heard in an infinite number of contexts and situations, most commonly in the classical and jazz/improvised repertoire, but also as a solo instrument and in many other Western influenced musical genres. The modern double bass can be traced back to the sixteenth century, over this time the instrument has undergone many methods of tuning and construction; and with this, various approaches to left and right hand techniques. It would be foolish to assume that any instrument is more developed than another, as this argument is based on the musical tastes of the time. However, double bassists, more so than the other stringed instruments in the symphony orchestra, approach their craft in many different ways.

The aim of this project was to study and compare the diverse methods to the art of double bass playing in the major orchestras of Vienna, Berlin and London; to report and possibly transcribe how these different approaches affect the interpretations of the orchestral and solo double bass repertoire and; more personally, to become a more informed craftsman of the classical music tradition. During the course of the project I also reflected on the relevance of the orchestra and its tradition in society, how imaginative programming and education can play a role in the development of this important artistic body into the future. Through this I hope to implement my findings through my work in the Sydney Symphony and through education both in the orchestra and privately.

I wish to acknowledge and sincerely thank the late Dr Iain C. Medgett and the late Mrs Kate Medgett for their humbling generosity. A generosity which can enrich Australian culture, I truly feel the power of their gift and I hope I can do my best to pass on my experiences to the Australian community. I would also like to thank the Winston Churchill Trust whose belief in their fellows is absolutely inspiring. Without this opportunity many wonderful ideas and thoughts would be left as only that.

I would also like to thank the many orchestras in Vienna, Berlin and London who were so welcoming and helpful with their time. Importantly, I would like to thank the artisans of the double bass who gave up their time for my project both here in Australia; Alex Henery, Kees Boersma, Neil Brawley, Richard Lynn, David Campbell, Steve Larson, David Murray, Steve Newton, Josef Bisits, and Max McBride, and those wonderful and inspiring players I met abroad; most notably Christoph Wimmer, Principal Bass of the Wiener Philharmoniker, Klaus Stoll, ex-Principal Bass of the Berliner Philharmoniker, and Tim Gibbs, co-Principal Bass of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, who gave up so much of their time to speak with me about music and being a musician.

Finally, I would like to thank my family; especially Melissa, Peter and Lisa.
Executive Summary
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Project Description
A study of the different approaches to the double bass in the major symphony orchestras of Europe and Britain. Within the realm of the orchestral string bass art form, the double bass has many varied approaches. From the type of bow used to how one holds the bow, from how many strings are used to how they are tuned, the double bass is the eccentric character within the orchestral string section. However, its’ role as the rhythmic and harmonic foundation, its’ increasing role as soloist and its’ expansive range of extended techniques makes it one of the more interesting orchestral instruments of both past times and the modern day. The modern symphonic orchestra extends from the tradition begun in Europe and the United Kingdom. The aim of this project was to experience the major orchestras of Vienna, Berlin and London through concerts and rehearsals; and to discuss, listen and record the prominent double bassists within these orchestras. To study how the varied approaches of these players and the environment in which these orchestras function, affect the interpretations of both the orchestral and soloist repertoire.

Highlights
• Lessons, discussion and recordings with Christoph Wimmer (Principal Double Bass, Wiener Philharmoniker), Tim Dunin (Professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz and ex-Double bass, Wiener Philharmoniker), Ernst Weissenteiner (Principal Double Bass, Wiener Symphoniker), Johannes Auersperg (ex-Professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz) and Josef Niederhammer (ex-Principal Double Bass, Munich Philharmonic Orchestra and Professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna).
• Viewed rehearsals and concerts of the Wiener Philharmoniker, Wiener Staatsoper and Wiener Symphoniker.
• Lessons, discussion and recordings with Matthew McDonald (Principal Double Bass, Berliner Philharmoniker), Klaus Stoll (ex-Principal Double Bass, Berliner Philharmoniker), Edicson Ruiz (Double Bass, Berliner Philharmoniker) and Michael Wolf (Professor, University of the Arts, Berlin.)
• Viewed rehearsals and concerts of the Berliner Philharmoniker, Berliner Symphoniker, Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin, Konzerthaus Orchester, Rundfunk-Symphonie Orchester Berlin, Komische Oper, and the Orchester des Braunschweiger Staatstheaters.
• Lessons, discussion and recordings with Tim Gibbs (co-Principal Bass, London Philharmonic Orchestra), Duncan McTier (Double Bass soloist, Professor at the Royal Academy of Music), Tom Martin, Neil Tarlton (Principal Double Bass, London Philharmonia) and Graham Mitchell (Professor, London Royal Academy of Music).
• Viewed rehearsals and concerts of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonia and the London Symphony Orchestra.

Major Lessons
Through attendance at many rehearsals and concerts of major orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic and London Philharmonic, as well as many private lessons with some of the world’s leading classical double bass players, I learnt much about the various double bass approaches to the repertoire within the classical music tradition. From the double bass as the foundation of the symphonic orchestra and as a solo instrument, I not only experienced many insights into the double bass but also found that the fundamental idea of making music on the instrument would remain constant. The physical position of the double bass in the orchestra, the different instruments used such as the Viennese double bass or the Germanic five-stringed basses, the tuning of the instrument or the bow grip all influence the resulting musical output. Some of these ideas are based on a long standing tradition within an orchestra or place, or are simply a difference of opinion or school. The history of the double bass along with the other certain contextual issues are the main reasons behind different styles of playing and the formation of these certain traditions. Stepping from this, I reflected upon the role of an orchestra in society, both in its importance and also how it should remain relevant. Certain aspects such as programming and education were considered and may be a point of departure for another Churchill Fellow.

Dissemination of Information
I will disseminate the knowledge I have gained through my work in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra both within the bass section and in the orchestra as a whole. Also through private teaching, chamber music and other performance opportunities I hope to influence the double bass community through ideas I have learnt abroad in the classical music centres of Europe and Britain.
Programme

11th of April to the 12th of June, 2013

• Berlin: 11th - 17th April

Berliner Philharmoniker - Rehearsal Observation
Conductor: Paavo Järvi
Violin: Frank Peter Zimmermann
Sibelius - Symphony No. 5
Hindemith - Violinkonzert
Beethoven - Symphony No. 1

Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin - Rehearsal Observation
Conductor: Günther Herbig
Max Reger - Violinkonzert
Brahms - Symphony No. 1

• Vienna: 17th April - 5th May

Tim Dunin - Lesson
Ernst Weissensteiner - Lesson

Wiener Philharmoniker - Concert
Conductor: Christoph Eschenbach
Soprano: Marisol Montalio
Hindemith - Symphony in Es
Matthias Pinscher - Hérodiade-Fragmente
Beethoven - Symphony No. 8

Wiener Symphoniker - Rehearsal Observation
Honegger - Symphony No. 3
Bruckner - Messe f-moll

Johannes Auersperg - Lesson
Josef Niederhammer - Lessons

Wiener Symphoniker - Concert
Conductor: Mariss Jansons
Haydn - Symphonie G-Dur (Hob. I:94)
Liszt - ies Préludes
Haydn - Symphonie G-Dur (Hob I:88)
Bartók - Der Wunderbare Mandarin

Donau Festival with Klangforum Wien
Wiener Symphoniker - Concert
Conductor: Ingo Metzmacher
Bruckner - Messe f-moll

Christoph Wimmer - Lessons

Wiener Staatsoper - Concert
Hans Werner Henze - Pollicino

Wiener Staatsoper - Concert
Gaetano Donizetti - La Fille du Régiment

Wiener Symphoniker - Concert
Conductor: Tomáš Netopil
Klavier: Sasminka Stancil
Dvořák - Karneval Ouverture
Bartók - Konzert für Klavier und Orchester Nr. 3
Dvořák - Symphonie No. 7

Wiener Philharmoniker - Concert
Conductor: Esa-Pekka Salonen
Violine: Julia Fischer
Beethoven - Leonore Ouvertüre No. 2
Esa-Pekka Salonen - Violinkonzert (2009)
Beethoven - Violinkonzert

• Berlin: 5th - 26th May

Labor Sonor - Concert
Christian Kobi - Untitled #2
Johnny Chang and Lee Noyes - Having never been to Beirut
Diego Chamy and Mike Majkowski - The Transmission

Berliner Philharmoniker - Rehearsal Observation
Conductor: Jaap van Zwenden
Bartók - Concerto for Orchestra
Brahms - Symphony No. 1

Sowieso - Concert
The Musical Depreciation Society

Edicson Ruiz - Lesson

Klaus Stoll - Lessons
AckerStadtPalast - Concert
* Acker Deux Mi - Reihe für Tanz und Musik
* Chris Abrahams and Magda Mayas
* Takako Suzuki and Johnny Chang

Rundfunk-Sinfonie Orchester Berlin - Concert
* Rossini - Ouverture zu “Der Barbier von Sevilla”
* Mozart - Fagottkonzert, KV 191
* Haydn - Sinfonie No. 83 (Hob I:83)

Michael Wolf - Lesson

Orchester des Braunschweiger - Concert
* Conductor: Alexander Joel
* Schönberg - Gurrelieder

Sowieso - Concert
* Udo Schindler, Matthias Müller and Clayton Thomas

Konzerthaus Orchester - Rehearsal Observation
* Conductor: Thomas Dausgaard
* Mozart - Don Giovanni
* Nielsen - Flute Concerto
* Bruckner - Symphony No. 6

Berliner Philharmoniker - Rehearsal Observation
* Conductor: Claudio Abbado
* Mendelssohn - A midsummer night’s dream (excerpts)
* Berlioz - Symphonie Fantastique

Komische Oper - Concert
* Ligeti - Le Grand Macabre

Carnival of Cultures

Berliner Philharmoniker - Concert
* Conductor: Claudio Abbado
* Mendelssohn - A midsummer night’s dream (excerpts)
* Berlioz - Symphonie Fantastique

Matthew McDonald - Lessons

Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin - Concert
* R. Strauss - Don Quixote für Violincello, Viola und Orchester
* Brahms - Symphonie No. 1

Berliner Philharmoniker - Rehearsal Observation
* Conductor: Herbert Blomstedt
* Nielsen - Symphony No. 5
Beethoven - Symphony No. 4

Berliner Philharmoniker - Concert
Conductor: Herbert Blomstedt
Nielsen - Symphony No. 5
Beethoven - Symphony No. 4

• **London: 26th May - 12th June**

Tim Gibbs - Lessons

London Philharmonic Orchestra - Rehearsal Observation
Mozart - Marriage of Figaro

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Mozart - Violin Concerto No. 3 in G, KV 216
Mahler - Symphony No. 4
London Philharmonia - Concert
Debussy - Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune
Edgard Varèse - Amériques
Stravinsky - The Rite of Spring

Duncan McTier - Lesson

South Bank - Concert
Limbo

London Philharmonia - Concert
Beethoven - Symphony No. 9

Neil Tarlton - Lessons

Tom Martin - Lesson

London Symphony Orchestra - Concert
Conductor: Michael Tilson-Thomas
Violincello: Yo-Yo Ma
Copland - Quiet City
Shostakovich - Cello Concerto No. 2
Britten (arr. Cooke and Mitchell) - Prince of the Pagodas Suite
Double Bass, a History.

There were several
specimens of the violone,
the giant fiddle,
the unwieldy double bass,
capable of majestic recitative,
whose pizzicato is more sonorous
than the stroke
of the kettle drum,
and whose harmonics
are availed magic
of almost unbelievable quality.

Dr Faustus
-Thomas Mann¹

The beginnings of what we now call the double bass have been a point of controversy amongst historians for some years. Though this has largely faded with recent publications and research, differences in terminology, its construction and its ancestry has clouded the story of its initial development and tradition. One would think that the double bass, mainly due to its role today, as connected with the history of the rest of the violin family, however, certain aspects such as; its tuning, constructional elements and the underhand bow grip, also tied the instruments' history to that of the viol family. To have an instrument that sounds and is audible in the contrabass octave makes for one of much physicality. This, and the evolution of the orchestra, are the reasons behind the various approaches and traditions of the instrument we see today.

“Why is the viol an important ancestor to the modern double bass? Viols were the first bowed string instruments in the history of western music to play in the contrabass octave, and they show many characteristics in tuning, construction, and method of performance seen in the double bass. During the evolution that led to the modern bass, the influence of two families of instruments seems to have been the most prevalent: the violin family and the viol family. Features retained by the modern bass derived from the viol family include its vertical playing position, a tuning system in fourths and thirds rather than fifths, use of an underhand bow (the modern German bow), lower sloping

shouldev, comers between upper and lower bouts that are squared off, some use of a flat rather than carved back, and a fingering system in which each finger represents one chromatic step, rather than one diatonic step. For this reason, the viol can be seen as a direct ancestor to the modern double bass.”

“Although a number of ancient converted instruments do trace their pedigree to the viol family, it is our view that the occasional variants of the double bass in outer contour attest to its adaptability. Made of the same wood and designed with proportionally similar structure, arching, air volume, thickness graduation and tension as the other instruments of the violin group, the double bass decidedly follows characteristic features of the type instrument of the family, from which it differs only superficially in construction. It is therefore fully entitled to being called a true member of the violin family”

During the Renaissance there were a wide array of bass stringed instruments and until the standardisation of the violin family in the late 17th Century, contrabass string instruments came in many various sizes and also many different names. This variety in terminology can still be seen today but has somewhat hampered research and historical documentation of the double bass.

To avoid arguments of semantics we can hopefully assume that the double bass is now a member of the violin family. Together with this we can then note that as the instrument developed it may well have been subject to influence from the viol family, especially since the difficulties of playing the instrument in the contrabass octave has been a well noted science amongst generations of artisans of the double bass.

“When the need for a percussive time-keeping instrument of the contrabass range became increasingly evident and the nascent orchestra ousted the sweet, delicate viols, double bass players who had to make a living accommodation the demand were understandably reluctant to dispose of pedigreed instruments simply because they no longer answered the new orchestral requirements. Bowing to reality, they brought basic modifications to their obsolete instruments that adapted them to the new standards from Italy.”

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5 Ibid, p 42.
This shift of popularity meant that many bass-violists were now double bassists of the more modern ilk. Which also resulted in many of the now double bassists using, or at the very least, being influenced by the techniques and ideas of the viol. The physicality of a contrabass stringed instrument resulted in differences of opinion in what is the best way to tune, bow and approach left hand technique. From the turn of the 17th century in Italy a new enriching music scene opened and the double bass grew in popularity and importance. Guiding the orchestra through harmonic and rhythmic force or accompanying choirs and singers, the double bass became the glue that held the performances together. Unlike the other stringed instruments of the orchestra the double bass players were sometimes spread around the orchestra to help with ensemble. Though the double bassists were used to unify the growing orchestra, the players were hardly unified on how to tune the instrument.

The standard orchestral tuning of the modern double bass is four strings tuned in fourths, starting from the lowest string, E - A - D - G. Though there are still many variations today with the amount of strings used to what pitch those strings they are tuned, most bass players would agree that, at the current time, the above tuning is the most common. These differences are a result of the physicality of the instrument and stylistic differences throughout history and cultures. At the turn of the 18th century Paul Brun states in “A New History of the Double Bass” (p. 126 and 127) that there were almost national tunings of the instrument, which could be said to reflect national temperaments. The use of three strings was at one point favoured as it gave the bass more of an open sound and did away with the heavy fourth string. Germanic countries favoured the use of the lower string however, feeling that the lower pitches were an important aspect of the instrument. This can be seen even further when, in the late 1800’s in Leipzig, a patent was taken out for a five-stringed double bass. In England, from the influence of the great bass player Domenico Dragonetti (1763 - 1846), three strings became popular in the early 1800’s, but as new works from the continent drifted in, the music required players to use the lower pitches of the fourth string:

“Dragonetti’s tuning, A - D - G, was ‘for many year the standard system.’ Richard Wagner's music, experienced through the famous Richter Concerts (1877), convinced English double bassists to outfit their instruments with more and deeper strings.”

From four strings to three strings and back; from the added fifth string to an extended E-string; to new ideas about solo strings and tuning; as we moved from the classical to romantic eras and then toward the modern era and beyond, composers asked more of double bassists in the form of range which resulted in a variety of approaches. The same is also true of the bow.

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The history of the bow of the double bass is inextricably linked to that of the rest of the violin family. The two bow holds of the modern day bass player are the underhand and overhand holds, or, German and French bow grips. Initially, string players who played the smaller string instruments and held the instrument under the chin or upon the shoulder (e.g. Violin, Viola) played overhand and those who played larger stringed instruments (e.g. Cello, Double Bass) played underhand. However:

“Following the rejection of the unwieldy bass violin from the 1660’s, Italian bass players discarded the old underhand bow hold and began bowing overhand, a custom that gradually spread to all European countries.”

The underhand bow however was not all lost, with some players, the great aforementioned Domenico Dragonetti of which was one, believing that it gave more articulation and sound to that of the overhand bow.

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The figure above is from Paul Brun's ‘A New History of the Double Bass’ (p 199). Here we can see the top bow as Dragonetti’s bow followed by two modifications of that bow. The final bow, is what was called the Parisian bow, or as it is known today, the French bow. The argument has been never ending and today both bow holds still exist on the double bass, however German and Austrian symphonic orchestras require the use of the German bow.

Studying the many and varied approaches over time to the Double Bass, which are still evident in some form today, provided the inspiration for my fellowship. The aim of this project was to be able hear the inspiring orchestras and bassists of Vienna, Berlin and London and learn how the traditions and cultures of both the orchestras and city still affect their approach to the symphonic and solo literature. Below, I have outlined my journey and some of my findings. With regards to my many individual lessons, I played a concerto from either the classical or romantic eras, together with some excerpts from the symphonic literature followed possibly by a piece from the 20th century. I have recorded all of my lessons which I have edited and included for reference, so as to be of use to other musicians.

Vienna

The opening part of my trip was focussed on the Viennese orchestras and bass players. The opportunity to see and importantly hear the Vienna Philharmonic, in Vienna, both in the concert hall and in the opera theatre was a special experience. Another highlight was hearing the the Vienna Symphony play Bruckner’s Mass in F minor at the famous St. Stephan's Cathedral. Along with this, I met many bass players working in the city in various orchestras and at various universities. Over the course of two weeks I had many discussions about playing the double bass both as an orchestral musician, as a chamber musician and as a soloist. The main points I came across whilst in Vienna were; the position of the basses in the orchestra, the repertoire’s affect on the style of playing, the construction or setup of the instrument, the tuning of the instrument and politics as an influence on the style or musical output of an orchestra.

The Orchestral Setting

The position of the Double Bass section in the orchestra has evolved in conjunction with the evolution of the orchestra and its’ musical works. The location of the section varies from orchestra to orchestra and can be traced to repertoire, acoustic of the hall and tradition. As stated above, the main role of the double bass, which seems to have remained constant throughout its’ history, is to lay the harmonic and rhythmic foundation of the orchestra. With this point we can see that the position of the double basses is critical to how sections of the orchestra interact with each other,
the conductor and soloist/s in performance situations. The Vienna Philharmonic famously places the basses in one single row along the back of the orchestra, which has had both a traditional and artistic purpose. Christoph Wimmer, principal bass of the Vienna Philharmonic, spoke about the importance of the double bass in interpreting the soloist and the conductor in guiding the orchestra.

"the orchestra can be controlled from the Timpani, Concertmaster and the Double Bass"

The orchestra, he suggested, can be lead from this triangle. With the basses situated at the back of the stage or pit, in one line, their presence can be felt from all parts of the group. Being in one line also results in each individual bassist having to guide the orchestra without the visual advantage of seeing their principal player. This is similar to the idea of early orchestras in which the bass players were spread about the orchestra to help with ensemble or even placed close to the conductor to help conduct the orchestra themselves.\(^8\) In contrast to this, the Vienna Symphony has a more variable bass section placement behind the cellos in two rows or what a visiting conductor might prefer.\(^9\) Timothy Dunin, Professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts and ex-player with the Vienna Philharmonic (also an Australian, if I may add!), spoke of the importance of an orchestra that respects the bass section no matter where they are placed. The idea of ‘waiting for the basses’ and an orchestra playing ‘behind’ the conductors beat possibly stems from this. He even mentioned this in a purely musical or artistic form with not so much as a disregard for ensemble, or in his words;

"…playing together, what good does that do anybody if it’s cold and sterile… there are certain risks worth taking."

I found this thought fascinating and inspiring, that the fundamental feeling of the music surpasses all other ensemble aspects. It is something I truly felt when listening to the orchestras in Vienna. An orchestra’s repertoire can also impact how the orchestra and in our case the bass section deal with these ideas of ensemble, positioning and even an individuals’ instrument.

The Repertoire

An orchestra’s repertoire, the music that it plays, can affect greatly how they approach playing together both as a whole and within each section. The Vienna Philharmonic play both in the opera

\(^8\) Wimmer, Christoph. Private Conversation. Vienna, 23rd of April 2013.


theatre as the Staatsoper and in the concert hall as the Wiener Philharmoniker. Opera, from an ensemble point of view, almost requires an extra level of awareness as the bass section must both communicate with the other sections of the orchestra, the conductor and be mindful of the solo singing line above. This aspect was another reason Christoph Wimmer gave to the infamous ‘late’ playing of the Vienna Philharmonic. The Vienna Symphony, however, performs much more exclusively in the concert hall playing symphonic repertoire and this could be one of the contributing factors as to why both orchestra’s, though performing in the same venues, have a different sound. Further, the Vienna Philharmonic’s more famous pieces in their repertoire could also be affecting how the bass players approach the symphonic canon.

The waltzes of Johann Strauss II are the party pieces of the Vienna Philharmonic of which they play every year, most famously, at their Neujahrskonzert. A waltz which has the well-known dance quality of important first beat followed by the minor second and third beats places the bass part into particular significance. This springboard, which the basses supply, allows the music to flow and bounce in the triple time signature and of which the bassists of the Vienna Philharmonic are particular experts. The intricacies of the rubato and many different styles of waltz make these seemingly easy bass parts into a whole new world which could only be learned through the
tradition of the orchestra itself. This tradition has certainly had an affect on how the bass section deal with guiding the orchestra and how they play or setup their instrument individually. To add to this, is the idea that Brahms, Strauss, Mahler and Bruckner wrote with this specific orchestra in mind; even more, with the specific sound of the Viennese double bass. This highlights the importance of the traditions and unique sound of the Wiener Philharmoniker being upheld.

The Setup

"Viennese [Bass] players produce sound by playing into the string and releasing. The Berlin players use more bow speed. The Viennese setup is different, with a more scooped out fingerboard it allows players to dig into the string and to variate the front of each note. This could be an influence from the Strauss Waltzes."\(^{12}\)

Though not a point to be taken universally, it is an interesting thought that between Berlin and Vienna differences in setup and repertoire have affected their fundamental approaches. Viennese constructed basses have a unique metallic and transparent sound compared to Italian or German instruments. Only some of the bass players in the Vienna Philharmonic play on these instruments these days and they mix 4-stringed basses with that of the 5-stringed form. The Vienna Symphony also has this set-up with the Principal players playing on 4-stringed instruments and Tutti players on the 5-stringed version.

The five stringed bass has an extra lower string tuned either to a C or a B depending on the repertoire being played or the players preference. The low B is rarely needed, however, Germanic and Austrian countries have traditionally preferred having access to the lower pitches where as in England, France and Italy players have been satisfied with the four-stringed version of the double bass. As mentioned above, the tunings of the double bass has never really settled like that of its’ siblings the Violin, Viola and Cello.

Tuning

In Vienna today, other than the use of five-stringed instruments, there are no real differences in how one tunes their Double Bass generally, but I thought it interesting that all students are encouraged to play in solo tuning. This is even when practicing and performing orchestral excerpts. Solo tuning is the standard orchestral tuning of today tuned one whole tone higher, so, E - A - D - G becomes F# - B - E - A. This tuning allows the instrument to be easily heard over a piano accompaniment in a solo situation and brightens the bass somewhat overall. This is in contrast with Australian students who tend to play most of the time in orchestral tuning and only to use solo tuning when preparing a solo recital.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
What Paul Brun (see references) calls “The Golden Age of Virtuosity”, was the era in the 18th Century Austria, mainly in and around Vienna, in which a number of wonderful musicians and exponents of the stringed violone practiced and played. The violone, or at least the term Violone has been clouded in speculation and confusion between musicians and historians alike due to the different uses of the term over time. It would not be suitable for us to debate and discuss within this platform, but any person interested in further reading on this subject should consult; Alfred Planyavsky’s ‘The Baroque Double Bass Violone.’ (Scarecrow Press Inc., 1998.) and Paul Brun’s ‘A New History of the Double Bass.’ (Villeneuve d’Ascq, France : Paul Brun Productions, 2000.)

For the sake of this report, the term Violone is referring to a type of double bass with a slender gamba form and the so-called Viennese (third-fourth) tuning, influenced by the lute making of Vienna.\textsuperscript{13}

An unprecedented number of major concertos and pieces blossomed from this era for this instrument and are still played be bassists today all over the world. Mainly of five strings tuned F - A - D - F# - A, the amount of music that came from this time is truly astonishing with compositions by Joseph Haydn (cir. 1763, now lost), by K. Kohaut (1765), D. J. Kneissel, B. R. Roslaub (Burgsteinfurt, Concerto No. 3), Dittersdorf (2), W. Pichi (2), A. Zimmermann, J. K. Vanhal, F. A. Hoffmeister (3), L. A. Kozeluch, and J. M. Sperger (18). The most important representatives of the Viennese school were: Josef Kämpfer (1734-after 1796); Friedrich Pischelberger (1741-1813); and Johannes Mathias Sperger (1750-1812)\textsuperscript{14}. It is also becoming increasingly popular to follow authentic performance practice and perform in the tuning of that time. This makes most of the arpeggiated passages, which are very difficult in today’s tuning, much more achievable. Which can then allow the player to focus more on the music rather than some technical difficulty.

As orchestral music developed, the lack of power and sound of the violone receded to the more deep and commanding double bass. It was changes in thought, fashion and politics that also affected the instrument and its’ orchestra.

**Politics**

The history of Double Bass playing in the Vienna Philharmonic definitely has its’ origins Bohemia, or modern day Prague and environs in the Czech Republic. Founded by Wenzeslas Hause (1763 - 1847) and following with Anton Slama, Joseph Hrabé and Frantisek Simandl, this bass lineage of the 19th century, known as ‘the Prague school’, had a substantial influence on the first players in


the Vienna Philharmonic\textsuperscript{15}, the ‘gamba grip’\textsuperscript{16} and through them, the entire double bass world.

About Simandl:

“Though forever abroad he remained a loyal Czech and for many years was in charge of the Vienna Philharmonic, being largely responsible for the promotion of Czech music with the orchestra, including symphonic works by Smetana, Dvorák and Fibich.”\textsuperscript{17}

During this period bass players studied and played where they lived and the orchestras, unlike today, were made up of players from the local areas only. With the advancement of Europe in the early 20th century, the orchestras became more international, or at least at that stage, more European.\textsuperscript{18} This story is similar for orchestras around the world and has resulted in a more internationalised style of playing that transcends the inherent tradition and lineage that was so evident. However, the Vienna Philharmonic is known for preserving its traditions in an attempt to protect their unique sound. The Viennese oboe and the Viennese horn are a good example of this. Throughout the orchestra's 150 year history, another aspect that has shaped their artistic output is its’ democratic self-administration.

Importantly, these aspects discussed are not just peculiar to the double bass section but apply across the orchestra as a whole. The musicians self-administration is tantamount to the level of the orchestra's artistic output and the responsibility that follows this idea.

“…remains faithful to traditional principles by retaining its’ autonomy and the subscription concert series as the artistic, organisational and financial basis of its' work.”\textsuperscript{19}

Not all orchestras are in the fortunate position of funding itself with a popular opera season and it remains a poignant point that the musicians of the orchestra should have artistic control with regards to its’ own programming and artistic vision. This would help in not only encouraging and maintaining high standards through responsibility but also may help to avoid a situation in which the musicians are guided by persons outside of the artistic body.

\textsuperscript{15} Wimmer, Christoph. \textit{Private Conversation}. Vienna, 23rd of April 2013.


\textsuperscript{17} A Pioneering Spirit, Double Bass Recital website: \url{http://www.recitalmusic.net/spweb/content.php?contentid=349} (last viewed, 19 November 2013)

\textsuperscript{18} Wimmer, Christoph. \textit{“Die Kontrabassgruppe der Wiener Philharmoniker im Wandel der Zeit” (The Double Bassists of the Vienna Philharmonic over the course of time)}. Master-Arbeit. Anton Bruckner Privatuniversität Linz, 2012

\textsuperscript{19} Wiener Philharmoniker website: \url{http://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/orchestra/history/the-modern-era} (viewed, 18th November 2013)
Berlin

The second leg of my fellowship was to Berlin. My stay here was to hear and study many wonderful concerts, rehearsals and musicians. Some highlights were; viewing the Berlin Philharmonic and Claudio Abbado both rehearse and perform Symphonie Fantastique by Berlioz and lessons with the legendary Klaus Stoll, Matt McDonald and Edicson Ruiz. The Berlin Philharmonic are one of the premier orchestras of the modern day, the opportunity to hear them at the Philharmonie on a number of occasions was absolutely wonderful. To add to this I was also lucky enough to hear many of the other great orchestras of the city such as; the Rundfunk Sinfonie Orchester Berlin, the Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin and the Deutsches Symphonie Orchester.

The Setup
In the orchestral setting, German orchestras prefer the use of 5-stringed double basses, that is with an extra lower string tuned to a B or C depending of the musicians preference and the requirements of the works they are currently playing. This is in contrast to the approach in Sydney in that when required to play notes in the E1 to C1 range, we use an extended E-string or Contra C-string extension. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages, with a 5-stringed bass there is more pressure on the bridge thus impeding the bridge’s vibrations and with a 4-stringed bass the extensions are often heavy and can hinder the motion of the neck. Another idea which is not uncommon, but much more encouraged in Berlin, is the idea of standing and playing the bass in solo situations.

Not at all a Germanic idea or principle, but much more prevalent and encouraged especially in the student body, is standing at the bass contrasted to sitting on a stool. The advantages of this are that the back of the bass is not dampened by legs of the person playing which allows for a more open sound and, arguably, one has more room for the bowing hand. Though this is not a new method by any means, I thought it an interesting point that standing rather than sitting when playing solo repertoire seemed a lot more common with student bassists in Berlin than in Sydney.

Tiered Seating
The tiered seating plan of the Philharmonie is not unique, however after viewing many rehearsals and concerts in the hall I felt that other than it’s wonderful acoustic, the tiered seating allowed the musicians to connect with each other and feel involved from every part of the orchestra. As well as this, the seating also gives an extra sense of communication with the audience. From the perspective of the double bass, this is an important issue and one that could be addressed in Sydney in the Opera House Concert Hall along with its well documented acoustical problems. These dilemmas can be overlooked and troublesome to rectify, especially given the world heritage
status of the Opera House; from a bass playing perspective or even from a general musicians perspective, the importance of these issues cannot be mentioned strongly enough. An acoustic can be thought of as an instrument in itself; to be able to play at the highest level requires an acoustic in which musicians can hear themselves and has a balanced output of each register. The tiered seating helps in both a visual and aural way; visually one can connect with other members or sections of the orchestra and the conductor. From the aural perspective, the tiered seating allows musicians even at the back of the orchestra to be able to hear clearly the other parts of the music, a point which is particularly pertinent to the bass player who normally sits at the back of the orchestra. Klaus Stoll, an orchestral double bassist for 54 years(!), spoke about this aspect and much more in my lessons with him.

**Klaus and Bottesini**

My lessons with Klaus Stoll were of particular inspiration, together we worked on the opening movement of Bottesini’s Concerto No. 2 in B minor and also discussed the life of an orchestra.
“the difference between a good orchestra and an excellent orchestra is how the orchestra executes the dynamics, the colours. An excellent orchestra is never guided too much by the conductor, but they bring their own energy and heart to the music. They take risks.”

This ‘soloistic’ self-image is a key part to the Berliner Philharmoniker’s sound and energy even from the times of Arthur Nikisch (principal conductor, 1895 - 1922). Klaus played with this orchestra for about 46 years under Herbert von Karajan, Claudio Abbado and Sir Simon Rattle. During this time he experienced the many different eras and styles the orchestra has offered.

“As an Orchestra evolves it doesn't necessarily get better or worse but maybe focusses on different things”

Under the baton of these three different directors, the Berliner Philharmoniker evolved in many different ways. The orchestra has become more international, since the Karajan days, with the bass section having only two German players currently in tenure. This has also been an influence of the orchestras’ famous Digital Concert Hall where now people all over the world can hear and watch their concerts live. As in Vienna, Klaus mentioned that a major problem for orchestras and their musicians can be the lack of influence with regards to programming and their artistic output. The separation between the artistic output of an orchestra and an orchestras’ musicians can lead to a lack of connection and responsibility to the art form. This is an issue that all orchestras should be aware of managing; nothing could be more detrimental to the life and vibrancy of an orchestra than dictatorial control from a certain director or administrative group over programming.

Giovanni Bottesini’s music is among the most popular pieces programmed by classical double bass players both old and young. Through his music, Klaus explained the importance of connecting to the composer and what the music means to oneself;

“… you will teach yourself, you will inspire yourself the moment you understand the spirit of the music, what the music has to express. That is the most important aspect of the music to correspond with, the composer, what it means to you. You must build your relationship with the music yourself, then one would not need to take too many lessons. This may be the problem of


today’s conservatories, so many teachers teaching for technical progress, that is the problem with the printed methods, always ‘progress’… The real message is with the music, the composer.”

An understanding of the harmony, phrasing and your own musical ideas are what will further your relationship with the audience and with the music. For myself, I saw this as one needing a certain honesty with the music one is playing, approaching the repertoire or music one is playing through a desire to play that certain music or composer rather than being guided by the programming or syllabus of a certain institution. The music of Bottesini, though not for everyone, is some of the most prolific in the classical double bass repertoire.

Giovanni Bottesini, known as the Paganini of the double bass, composed many works not only for the double bass but also operas and other symphonic works. This operatic influence is clear in all of Bottesini’s music for the double bass and an understanding of Italian opera of the mid 19th Century would help any interpretation. The bel canto style Bottesini employs can be difficult for the young bassist in approaching his works; Klaus believes that an understanding of the harmony of the work and how it functions in this context can deepen ones connection to the music; thus helping the interpretation. We can see this if we look at a few examples in Bottesini’s Concerto No. 2 for Double Bass in B minor:

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Above, is the second phrase of the opening movement; in the highlighted box the harmony moves to the dominant, in which, coming from the minor key creates a ‘major’ high point. With this knowledge one can bring out this harmonic change which transforms the whole opening section. Another section that can be difficult to execute from a harmonic point of view is the small quasi cadenza at the end of the second subject:

Here we have the dominant again moving towards the new key of G major, Klaus believes the dominant should never be broken. This idea combined with the knowledge that this is the first use of sixteenth notes or semi-quavers in the piece, means that the solo line should move with fluidity towards the resolution. This is in contrast to many interoperation's we hear today.

Though these are basic examples and may represent a wanting in my own playing, some advice to any music student would be the importance of aural training and an understanding of harmony as the foundation to any good musical education.

(To hear the rest of the lesson please listen to my edited version, to hear him sing the bass line and speak about his ideas is much clearer and inspiring than what I can express in writing.)
The final part of my Churchill Fellowship took place in London. Highlights here were wonderful lessons with Tim Gibbs, Duncan McTier and Neil Tarlton and the opportunity to hear the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonia and the London Symphony Orchestra. Unfortunately one of my main contacts and inspirations for going to London was to meet and play for Rinat Ibragimov, Principal Double Bass of the London Symphony Orchestra and Professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, who, due to health reasons had to withdraw from all commitments, I hope his recovery has been quick and that he is, or will be, back playing the bass very soon. The scene in London is quite different from that in Sydney, or even Berlin and Vienna. The competition between orchestras for funding and ticket sales seems to result in a heavy work schedule for each orchestra which, in turn, affects how they audition new players, travel both nationally/internationally, and even how each orchestra sounds.

The Scene
The orchestral scene in London has five symphony orchestras; the London Philharmonic and Philharmonia at the Festival Hall; the London Symphony Orchestra, at the Barbican; the Royal Philharmonic, resident at Cadogan Hall; and the BBC Symphony Orchestra (one of the BBC's five symphony orchestras in the U.K.), also based at the Barbican. To add to this, there is also the English National Opera, the Orchestra of the English National Ballet, the Royal Opera Orchestra, the BBC Concert Orchestra and the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. Comparing this situation to other cities is somewhat futile in that each city and country have their own needs and cultural tradition. However, the saturation of orchestras in London means that the London orchestras approach programming, rehearsing and touring differently than that of a city with one major symphony orchestra, opera orchestra and chamber orchestra as in Sydney.

London orchestras, due to this competition play more concerts and rehearse less. Their programming has much music from the standard repertoire (Beethoven, Brahms) but increasingly, directors such as Esa-Pekka Salonen of the Philharmonia conducting early 20th century Viennese repertoire, the orchestras look to differentiate themselves. Orchestras need to ask themselves what will their relevance to society be moving into the future and how to further the tradition of classical music. With the competition between the orchestral companies in London, I believe this reflection and contemplation is beginning to happen. However, the competition in London is a healthy one, but this comparison cannot be necessarily made elsewhere.
Audition System

Orchestral auditions in London have no screen and have an often lengthy trial system. An advantage of this is that the section and orchestra get to know each applicant better in the orchestral setting, thus potentially finding a candidate more suited to the orchestra. A disadvantage is that the process can often take a long time with many applicants having to be free to work and work in appropriate performance weeks, thus making the process Kafka-esque with the appointment seemingly never arriving. Tim Gibb’s, co-Principal Double Bass of the London Philharmonic Orchestra suggested we could combine the best ideas of both the American audition system, where they are heavily screened and trials tend to be only given to one winning candidate and the system in the U.K. I believe that a comprehensive trial system, as we see in the U.K., is very important to an orchestra in hiring new players that will suit both the section and the company as a whole, quite often a wonderful solo audition does not transfer into a wonderful orchestral player.

Hierarchy

How do the orchestras of London, such as the London Philharmonic and the Philharmonia sound so different though they rehearse and perform in the same halls and hardly differ in their programming output? A possible answer could be the hierarchy of an orchestra. The hierarchy of an orchestra is the system by which an orchestra employs principal or solo players and tutti players.

- The Philharmonia have a wonderful round sound, especially within their wind sections. The orchestra employs joint principals, so that is two Principal players who never play the same concert together, this means that in the wind sections, 2nd players always play the second line and are never asked to play Principal.

- The London Philharmonic who have harder or more of a front to their sound, employ co-principals, that is one Principal player with a Co-Principal who sits at the second chair whilst the Principal is present and then sits Principal in the event the Principal player is absent. With regards to the wind sections this mean that 2nd players sometimes must play the solo wind lines in the event that the Principal player is absent.

The difference in sound between orchestras is something that I believe is very important; and the difference between these two orchestras makes for an interesting and diverse musical culture. Though it is an interesting point that human resource methods together with the musicians of the orchestra could affect an orchestras sound. Orchestra’s have many different variations within this
theme of structure, and it could possibly help orchestras improve their environment if they contemplate the framework of their organisation both on the stage and behind the scenes.

Brahms and Breathing

Tim Gibbs, in my lesson with him, amongst many other interesting points had intriguing ideas about an excerpt from the first movement of Brahms Symphony No.1:

Each highlighted section contains a different type of articulation that the composer is requesting; staccato, accent, sforzando, staccatissimo (‘dagger’) or simply a ‘normal’ articulation. Tim suggests that the player can come to a resolution with how one would approach every different articulation, this can then be applied to the rest of the Brahms canon. Opinions with how one would approach each articulation is different between players and orchestras, it is advised to be as flexible as possible and be aware of the preferences to whom you may be auditioning for. Approaching the audition situation can be difficult as a student, especially with nerves and stress. Another point Tim mentioned, is to be aware of how you are breathing before and even whilst you play.

Tim suggests being conscious of taking a breath in, followed by breathing out, before beginning any piece or excerpt. This can be especially helpful when in a stressful audition situation as it allows the body to relax and helps focus the mind. Possibly more time could be spent on the mental approach to auditions and performance in the university situation.
Conclusions

The opportunity to travel to Europe and the United Kingdom as a Churchill Fellow was certainly a humbling one. This is most poignant when one reads some of the amazing projects both current and past that have been undertaken by some inspiring Australians. This led to quite a time of self reflection and it must be said, self doubt when questioning the validity of my project. Indeed, I questioned if others may have uncovered, espoused and expanded more fully; and consequently, more fruitfully. However, as I give further thoughts to my own work; and further consideration over my experiences during my fellowship, I hope I can honour such a valuable opportunity.

During the course of the journey my perspectives were challenged as were my ideas about art and music. Also, I found my focus specifically on the double bass in the orchestra gradually changed to that of the orchestra as a whole; the differences between symphony orchestras, their programming, other specific aspects of the orchestra and also the challenges of orchestras into the future. That is, with regards to its’ artistic and educational output. This may be a point of departure for another Churchill Fellow. Below are some ideas or recommendations that I experienced during the course of my fellowship:

for the student musician:
- importance of aural training, this includes sight singing.
- importance of a comprehensive understanding of harmony and within this, basic piano skills.

with regards to the double bass specifically:
- experimenting with standing at the instrument, not necessarily as a permanent step but as a method in understanding how ones own body can approach the instrument.
- possibly having the facility of both German and French bow techniques.
- stretching before playing as an injury deterrent.
- focussing on the breath; both before and during a performance.

and for Orchestras as a whole:
- importance of a world class acoustic.
- the idea of a tiered seating plan.
- musician input into programming, at least in a more immediate fashion, with a thought towards modern Australian music not just of the symphonic vain but in broader genres.
- following from the above point; a style of programming, in partnership with more traditional programming, that will challenge audiences and the mainstream idea of an orchestras musical output.

Disseminate

I hope to implement ideas learnt through my Churchill Fellowship mainly through my work with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, with more involvement in its artistic and management committees in the future. As well as this, as an independently active musician in Australia and through education; both in the Sydney Symphony’s programs and my own private teaching.
References


