

The Bassist's Guide to Chamber Music and Ensembles

2011 ISB Convention Panel Discussion

with Christine Hoock, Louis Levitt, and Kurt Muroki

The "Supplemental Info" Packet

As far as many bassists are concerned (and musicians and audiences in general), the bass has largely been left out of the sphere of chamber music. Yes, we have five to ten pieces that we may be asked to perform, but beyond that, many of us have been unsure of where to turn for more opportunities.

The "Top Ten" most frequently performed chamber works with bass go something like this:

1. Schubert "Trout" Quintet
2. Mozart "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik"
3. Beethoven Septet
4. Schubert Octet
5. Dvorak Quintet
6. Rossini Duo for Cello and Bass
7. Prokofiev Quintet
8. Schulhoff Concertino (trio for flute, viola, and bass)
9. Rossini Quartets
10. Boccherini Quintets (op. 39)

There are actually thousands of chamber works that include bass, and it seems that this "secret" is finally coming to light, thanks in part to all of the information now available through the internet. Not only are names of pieces available, but actual sheet music and recordings are much more easily obtainable--and sometimes (legally) for free.

The following are lists of resources that might be of great interest to any bassist searching for more chamber music repertoire. Disclaimer: these are only the tip of the iceberg, and we have probably left off quite a few helpful resources, ensemble websites, suggestions, and the like. Please let us know of any other resources you have found helpful.

General Resources for Chamber Works with Bass

3000+ Chamber Works for Bass is an extensive list, compiled over the last few years by Juilliard graduate Paul Nemeth: www.paulnemeth.com/basschamber.htm

Comprehensive Catalog of Music, Books, Recordings and Videos for the Double Bass by Murray Grodner

Available on CD-ROM from the ISB Store, Murray Grodner's huge database includes a section dedicated to chamber music

IMSLP/Petrucci Music Library: www.imslp.org

This is probably the best single source for copies of public domain sheet music. Many libraries and private collections around the world have digitized their music collections, and this website is the

simplest place to find what is currently available on the web. Not only do they provide sheet music, but they have just begun a new project to include sound files of the works.

Orchestral Music – A Handbook by David Daniels. www.orchestralmusic.com Used by conductors and orchestra librarians, this work indexes mainly large ensemble works. Many of a composer's smaller chamber compositions are also referenced and can be used to find pieces for full strings, solos with continuo, and other unique instrumentations.

Composers Online Forums. There are a number of active composers' forums on the internet, and these can be a good place to go if you wish to request scores, or to find out more about composers whom you may want to work with in the future.

Browsing your favorite music store. Some of the most unique discoveries can be from perusing some of the neglected areas of a music store/library/half-price bookstore.

Publishers

There are obviously quite a few “major” publishers who sell great works of chamber music that include bass. Here are some publishers, though, who focus on music with bass, as well as rare works:

Edition Silvertrust — Specializes in publishing “unjustly neglected music by once famous composers whose works were much appreciated.” Their catalogue includes a number of chamber works with bass, in addition to new arrangements of chamber works by Anthony Scelba.
www.editionsilvertrust.com/

Liben Music — A large catalog of creative chamber arrangements and original works by bassist/composer Frank Proto.
www.liben.com/

Ludwin Music — “Music with Bass in Mind.” Most of these works are arrangements for bass ensemble or bass and other instruments by bassist/arranger Norman Ludwin.
www.ludwinmusic.com/

Merton Music — A word-of-mouth “company”, founded by amateur chamber musician Theo Wyatt in Great Britain, Merton Music amassed a catalog of over 1,300 public domain (i.e. out of copyright) chamber works, and for many years provided them for sale for very cheap. The entire catalog has now been digitized and is available for free on IMSLP. There are *many* works that include bass.
http://imslp.org/wiki/IMSLP:Community_Projects/Merton_Project

Ourtext — A small-scale publisher in the U.K. that focuses on chamber music for strings. Ourtext has recently taken on the entire Merton Music catalogue, and will print and staple parts for these works for a very low price, if you prefer not to mess with the process yourself.
www.ourtext.co.uk/

Really Good Music — This small, independent publisher from Wisconsin came to attention of the bass community when they began publishing bassist/composer David Anderson's music several years ago. Their catalog also includes chamber music by bassist/composers Sidney King and Andrés Martin.
www.reallygoodmusic.com

Recital Music — Owned by bassist David Heyes and his wife, soprano Sarah Poole, Recital Music carries quite a bit of chamber music, and also is the primary publisher for bassist/composers Teppo Hauta-aho and Miloslav Gajdos.
www.recitalmusic.net

Sikorski Music Publishers — Based in Hamburg, Germany, Sikorski is “equally committed to works from the entertainment-music branch and to those from the serious music sector as well.” Their site allows for a search by instrument, and quite a few chamber works with double bass are available, including several works by Sofia Gubaidulina.
www.sikorski.de

Slava Publishing — Founded by the late George Vance, Slava Publishing continues to carry chamber music with bass and quite a few bass ensembles in their catalog.
www.slavapub.net/

Yorke Edition — Bassist Rodney Slatford's publishing company, which has quite a few chamber works with bass and bass ensemble pieces.
www.yorkedition.co.uk/

Retailers

There are many places to buy chamber music, but some are a bit more bass-friendly -- or search-friendly -- than others. Again, apologies for all the great resources that are being left out, but here are some useful ones:

Eble Music — a great “brick and mortar” music store from Iowa City, staffed by extremely knowledgeable salespeople.
www.eble.com/

Elkin Music International — if you are ever looking for a rare edition, especially from non-U.S. publishers, this is a great company to call. They specialize in tracking down hard-to-find music.
www.elkinmusic.com/

Lemur Music — probably the largest bass-only retailer in the U.S., Lemur carries a very large catalog of bass music:
www.lemurmusic.com/

Sheet Music Plus — one of many online print-music retailers, but they stand out because of their ability to search their huge chamber music catalog by instruments involved.
www.sheetmusicplus.com/

Recordings

Another method of searching for music is to look for recordings. Yes, there are quite a few recordings of "Trout", but if one begins to dig deeper, there are quite a few groups who are currently recording lesser-known chamber works with bass.

Ensemble Acht, a group from Germany, has recorded eight CD's of chamber music. These have included octets with bass by composers such as Adolphe Blanc, Howard Ferguson, Jean Francaix, Ferdinand Thieriot, and Felix von Weingartner.
www.ensemble-acht.de/

Ensemble Concertant Frankfurt. The ensemble was founded by members of the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, and has a string quintet at its core. They have recorded string quintets by L. Boccherini, Joseph Eybler, Franz Xaver Gebel, and George Onslow, in addition to several pieces with piano and additional strings.
www.ensembleconcertantfrankfurt.de

Another ensemble from Germany that has had a very significant output is the **Linos Ensemble**. They are a larger group, with a core of five string players, five wind players, and a pianist. They have quite a long list of CDs, and have recorded chamber works with bass by Dvorak, Farrenc, Fesca, Francaix, Prokofiev, Ries, Schubert, and Spohr.
www.linos-ensemble.de/

The Gaudier Ensemble, based in the UK, has been together over 20 years, and has a significant catalog of critically-acclaimed recordings that include bass. Some of the lesser-known works they have recorded include the Berwald Grand Septet and the Francaix Octet.
www.gaudier.co.uk/

The Nash Ensemble has perhaps made one of the biggest contributions to the cause of chamber works with bass. The group has been in existence for 40 years, and has performed over 250 premieres (140 of which were commissions). They have over 60 recordings in their catalogue, many of which include bass. Rodney Slatford (who runs Yorke edition) was a founding member, and Duncan McTier took over once Slatford retired.
<http://home2.btconnect.com/nashensemble/index.htm>

Nepomuk Fortepiano Quintet is a group in the "Trout" formation: violin, viola, cello, bass, and (forte)piano. They have, indeed, made a recording of the Schubert "Trout", but also of piano quintets by John Baptist Cramer, Johann Nepomuk Hummel (from whom they take their name--and who may have been the first to write for this combination,) Johann Ladislaus Dussek, George Onslow, Ferdinand Ries, and Franz Limmer.

The Schubert Ensemble of London performs works for piano and strings, and has recorded over 30 CD's, many which feature works for bass, including the Farrenc, Hummel, and Vaughan-Williams piano quintets.
www.schubertensemble.com/

Beyond “The Tradition”

Many bassists are highly creative in their search for chamber music that speaks to them. Sometimes this means arranging works for the musicians whom they want to perform with, especially when very little has been written for a given ensemble combination. Sometimes it means commissioning new works from composers. Sometimes it means writing works oneself. One of the many inspiring things about attending an ISB convention is to see all the different ways that others have approached these challenges. While there is no way to list every single project or ensemble of interest, here are some more links that may be of interest for those looking for inspiration. Apologies to all of those that we have not been able to include!

American String Project — Founded by bassist Barry Lieberman, this small, conductorless string orchestra performs standard string orchestral works as well as arrangements (often carefully chosen string quartets) with a bass part added to fill out the sound. There are several interviews available where Lieberman describes the history of the group, and his criteria for works that he feels work well with bass added.

www.theamericanstringproject.org/

Cello e Basso (formerly Axiom duo) — Cellist Emmanuel Feldman and bassist Pascale Delache-Feldman have arranged, composed, and commissioned a number of interesting works to perform as a duo. They have a CD which showcases a number of these pieces, and have performed at previous ISB conventions.

Duo Millenia — Comprised of harpist Elisabeth Chardonnet and bassist/composer John Dahlstrand, this duo has composed, arranged, and performed many new works for harp and bass.

www.millenia-music.com/duo.html

Poing — One of the leading contemporary music ensembles in Scandinavia, this trio is made up of saxophonist Rolf-Erik Nystrøm, accordion player Frode Haltli, and bassist Håkon Thelin.

www.poing.no

Project Trio — Cellist Eric Stephenson, bassist Peter Seymour, and (beatboxing) flutist Greg Pattillo have been performing and recording together for several years. They have arranged and written much of their own repertoire, as there was little music for this ensemble before, and have recorded 3 CD's as well as a live concert DVD, which was released in May 2011. In addition to a steady schedule of concerts, Project Trio is very active in music outreach in schools and communities where they perform.

www.projecttrio.com

Sybarite5 — This NY-based string quintet, which was founded by today's panelist Louis Levitt, has been active in a variety of projects, from standard classical chamber music repertoire to arrangements of Radiohead. They tour and hold residencies in New York City and Aspen. On May 21st their CD, *Disturb the Silence*, debuted at number 11 on the Billboard Charts.

www.sybarite5.org

Time for Three — Violinists Zachary De Pue and Nicolas Kendall and bassist Ranaan Meyer met while students at the Curtis Institute, and built a repertoire as a trio mixing classical with bluegrass and jazz influences. They have recorded several CD's, and premiered a trio concerto written for them by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jennifer Higdon with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

<http://tf3.com/>

The Vecchione/Erdahl Duo: bassist Rolf Erdahl and oboist Carrie Vecchione have been commissioning and performing works for oboe (and/or English Horn) and bass since 1999. They have performed at previous ISB conventions, and released their first CD, "It Takes Two . . ." in 2008.
<http://oboebass.com/>

Miscellaneous Tips

By following the recordings and concert announcements of various performing ensembles, one can find some adventurous programming of smaller chamber music works. Here is a list of several successful modern ensembles: A Far Cry, Arcos Chamber Orchestra, East Coast Chamber Orchestra (ECCO), Ensemble Intercontemporain, Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Resonanz, International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), Klangforum Wien, The Knights, London Sinfonietta, Mercury Baroque, Signal Ensemble, Silk Road Ensemble, Speculum Musicae, Les Violins du Roy.

Collections: If you are interested in trying out some lesser-known chamber works with bass, but would prefer not to slog through endless internet databases yourself, you could try to find one of the several compilations of works online. One group from Los Angeles, dubbed the Clarinet Institute, has been putting together discs filled with PDF's (digital, printable files) of public domain manuscripts for clarinet, and now has branched out to other instruments. Their String Quintet DVD-ROM includes about 20 quintets with bass, in addition to quite a few for the "other" strings.
<http://clarinetinstitute.com/44329%20String%20Quintet%20Archives.htm>

Hear it first: IMSLP has begun a new project where musicians can upload a recording of their own performance of a piece in the database. This tool could be incredibly useful for all bassists if people began to post (high quality) recordings of the hundreds of lesser-known chamber works in IMSLP. This would allow browsers to get a general feel for the piece, to see if they would be interested in performing it themselves. Of course, listening to someone else perform it is never as good as doing a reading yourself, but when we're dealing with this many new pieces, any sort of reference can be much appreciated.
http://imslp.org/wiki/IMSLP:Performers_Portal