

3 May | Monday

Lee Si Yuan

Double Bass Recital

Kerim Vergazov, *piano*

PROGRAMME

CARL VON DITTERSDORF
Concerto for Double Bass No. 2
I. Allegro Moderato
II. Adagio
III. Allegro

YURI LEVITIN
Sonata for Double Bass Solo
I. Moderato
II. Allegretto
III. Allegro

– Intermission (10 mins) –

SERGE KOUSSEVITSKY
Concerto Op. 3
I. Allegro
II. Andante
III. Allegro

SERGE KOUSSEVITSKY
Valse miniature

Carl Ditters Von Dittersdorf (1871-1951)

Concerto for Double Bass No. 2

I. Allegro Moderato

II. Adagio

III. Allegro

Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf was an important Austrian composer and Violinist in the classical era, a prolific composer, during his 60 years of life, he composed over 120 symphonies, 45 operas, a myriad of sacred and chamber works as well as works for the Double Bass. In the 18th century, there was a small (and brief) school of double bass virtuoso playing centred in Vienna and Dittersdorf wrote the Concerto for Double Bass No. 2 in D Major with the style of this "Viennese school" playing in mind.

The pianist plays a short introduction before the soloist enters playing the main theme. A new theme not heard initially enters in the piano part and is repeated using harmonics, high in the register of the bass, forming a dialogue like "tutti section". Both themes develop in a short section of development before a recapitulation happens. The recap leads up to a cadenza filled with virtuosic double stops and flowing melodies before the movement then comes to an end in the syncopation rhythms which opened the first movement.

The nature of the bass's tone is prominently displayed in this slow movement, with the long and gentle melodies giving a certain kind of charm and "singing" quality to the movement. The soloist plays quite high in the register, but harmonics are not used in the movement and only sparingly in the cadenza, which closes the movement in a decidedly "pastoral" feel.

A rondo theme is first heard in the orchestra, the soloist then plays a short bridge before the theme repeats. The level of agility possible on the bass is on display here in the form of rapid arpeggios. Short parts of the theme are heard as well as short episodes in harmonics and arpeggios, with combinations of both at times. The ending "moves forward" the tempo and a strong final statement of the theme ends the concerto.

Yuri Levitin

Sonata for Double Bass Solo

I. Moderato

II. Allegretto

III. Allegro

Levitin was a Soviet-era Russian composer, he finished his musical studies in Leningrad under Dmitri Shostakovich. A Leningrad Conservatory graduate, he composed this piece for double Bass and it is a technically and musically challenging piece for bassists to perform.

The Sonata opens with a Moderato , a theme bearing much similarity to contemporary soviet music of the era soon develops into a initially slow march, the march eventually reaches a climax, but interestingly a short pizzicato “filler” seems to have been intentionally added to create additional contrasts and a “calm before the storm” atmosphere. The recap are in different keys, perhaps to create more “tension” in the closing of the first movement, both the main and secondary theme are reiterated , with the pizzicatos closing the movement in a unwritten morendo-like atmosphere.

The second movement is a Allegretto, the 3/4 time and tempo seemingly gives the movement the contrasting feel of a "dance" compared to the previous movement, however the tempo is not exactly very fast (Allegretto), this has the effect of giving the movement a more "ponderous" feel overall , not unlike "The elephant' from Saint-Saëns Carnival of the Animals.

The 3rd movement is in rondo form, two aspects set it even further apart from the previous movements, the tempo is now an Allegro in the true sense, and additionally the time signature is now in "cut time".

Levitin was born in 1912. From a musical and compositional standpoint, the movement sounds extremely alike to the works of his contemporaries Shostakovich or Prokofiev, especially in terms of musical themes and articulations.

In performing this movement, the greatest challenge lies in contrasting the repeats of the main themes, the secondary themes and the development section, lastly intonation difficulties due to rapid modulations, tricky rhythms and fast tempo means the movement requires a high level of stability and concentration in playing in order to deliver an effective and complete performance.

S. Koussevitzky (1871-1951)

Concerto Op. 3

I. Allegro

II. Andante

III. Allegro

Serge Koussevitzky was a Russian composer, conductor, and double bassist, he was the music director of the Boston symphony orchestra from 1924 to 1949. A great champion of contemporary music, he commissioned many works during his lifetime, one of the most important being Maurice Ravel's arrangement of Modest Mussorgskys 1874 suite for piano, Pictures at an Exhibition, in 1922.

Koussevitzky was also a virtuosic bassist; he joined the Bolshoi theatre orchestra in Moscow at the age of twenty as principal bassist and won critical acclaim with his first solo recital in Berlin in 1903. The Double bass Concerto in F major was written in the

same year with the help of composer Reinhold Gliere, Koussevitzky afterwards regularly included the work in his own concert programmes where he will perform it himself. The concerto, with its brilliance and grandeur, fully displays the character and technical possibilities of the Double bass and is considered a classic masterpiece in the solo repertoire of the instrument.

The concerto consist of three movements, starting with a Allegro which opens with a Tchaikovsky-like theme declared by the orchestra, followed by the bass playing a short recitative. The soloist then continues the main theme, presenting it in a lyrical and passionate way, a songful second subject is presented and without providing a full development, a bridge is fashioned to the aria-like Andante.

Koussevitzky mostly uses the middle and upper ranges of the instrument here for better projection, but at the same time his careful orchestration prevents the orchestra from overpowering the Bass, as the Bass is not an instrument which is very loud , nor is it one which resonates very well as compared to the Cello or Violin.

A full pause precedes the third movement, another Allegro, which begins with the same Tchaikovsky-like theme as the first movement. The bass picks up this melody with more tension and sprit than before, and proceeds through a loose, rhapsody-like restatement of the opening movement. The piece concludes in a glorious coda with a reiteration of the aria-like theme from the 2nd movement before finishing off with a fanfare-like tutti from the orchestra.

S. Koussevitsky (1871-1951)

Valse miniature

The famous Russian Bassist and connductor Serge Koussevitzky wrote four original short solo pieces for double bass in the 1890s. These works were frequently featured in his own recitals and represents almost half of his composition output. The valse miniature here seems to be more Viennese than Russian in a musical sense ,invoking an atmosphere not unlike a dreamy evening spent in a German pub during at turn of the century . The music features rubatos on the opening beats of each recurring “waltz” phrases , these phrases are punctuated by two distinctive sections that seems to represent the climax of an ongoing ball dance , with the tempo intentionally moving forward before the final recap and the music settles down to a mini coda which closes the piece climatically.

Programme notes by Lee Si Yuan.