

contact

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Cowie, Leroy. 1975. 'Review of *The Contemporary Contrabass* by Bertram Turetzky'. *Contact*, 12. pp. 43. ISSN 0308-5066.

bass, and it contains a good deal of material either written for Turetzky or inspired by his playing and mastery of modern techniques. The academic and musical success which this book should earn will be deservedly won, as the scope is so wide as to include almost every aspect of playing. It is an encyclopaedia of modern sounds and effects available on the double bass, and is not only an important landmark in the history of string playing in general and the evolution of the double bass as a solo instrument in particular, but will be the definitive work on the subject for many years to come.

Chapter One begins with a telling complaint from Berlioz on the lack of pizzicato technique among string players. Some subtle distinctions are made about the respective positions and methods of plucking, whether slurred or expressive, or the very difficult tremolo and left hand alone species, or the oddities of less value like bi-tones, plucking behind the bridge or in the peg-box. Although less purely innovative, Chapter Two on bowing makes a sensible plea for a sharp contrast in the execution of *sul ponticello*, *sul tasto* and *col legno*. Reverse bowing (upside down under the strings) and bowing above the fingers of the left hand (coined 'AF') have less musical, but more visual appeal.

In Chapter Three, the bass is considered as a drum. There is as yet no standard notation for the many different effects the hands and fingers can produce over the entire surface of the instrument. The sounds which appeal most to me are the 'Rub' noises, which use sticky fingers, wood, cloth or coins on the body or strings. The chapter on vocal and speech sounds contains the most diverting ideas: singing, shouting, humming and talking with the instrument or in contrast to it. The use of phonetics in Kenneth Gaburo's *nsible* (1969) is very musical. The special problem this creates is that the voice, the most important measure or symbol of an individual personality, may upstage the double bass itself and detract from the musicality of the experience.

Harmonics are the subject of review in Chapter Five. The controversy about the best part of the string to play them on is stated rather than resolved. The artificial and double-stop harmonics are discussed sensibly and the attractive pulled-harmonic gets a worthy mention. A miscellaneous chapter discusses mutes, scordatura, glissandi and some of the permutations of sounds produced when various effects occur simultaneously.

The last chapter, on amplification, is written by the physicist and musician Arnold Lazarus. This contains a good deal of useful advice for string players faced with this problem. Technical terms are explained clearly and the various sections are sensibly set out to help musicians who may have to lay out considerable expenditure for such equipment. Occasionally, though, the effect is Pinteresque: "This mechanical energy sets the air in vibratory motion, thus creating the phenomenon we know as sound."

Unfortunately there is no mention of the comic possibilities of the instrument; nor is there anything more than a passing mention of the French repertoire. I doubt if many bass players will experiment solely with this book without a back-up of study-books and pieces. Many will need more convincing about the value of tapping, rapping and knocking on the instrument, as well as the violent snap-pizzicato and *col legno*. The steps into amplification and contemporary notation are large ones for any performer to make. It may be quite impractical, but I would suggest that the five photographs, which tell us practically nothing, should be scrapped, *Inside* by Kenneth Gaburo should be printed in full, and the excellent record of effects should be expanded to include a performance of it. This would really help the uninitiated who find the book mostly double-dutch, and that as the book progresses it seems too much like a jet plane disappearing over the horizon.

It is, however, a first rate book for aspiring composers. The drawings are clear, as are the explanations of ideas and sounds; the variety of material is tremendous and it is very easy to use, with the authoritative clarity which abounds in every chapter. It is both scholarly and inspiring, definitive and comprehensive; a milestone in the search for new timbres which is the cornerstone of Turetzky's philosophy, at the same time futuristic and deeply traditional. The search for timbre is also a search for beauty.

THE CONTEMPORARY CONTRABASS, by Bertram Turetzky
(Volume 1 of THE NEW INSTRUMENTATION series, edited by
Bertram Turetzky and Barney Childs)
University of California Press, 1974 (£4.90)

LEROY COWIE

Nan chu'an: "Your body is unusually big; isn't your straw
hat too small?"

Huang-po: "Though my hat may be small, the entire
universe is within it."

(Transmission of the Lamp)

This book, which runs to 114 pages and includes a small gramophone record, is the culmination of more than 20 years hard work playing and inspiring, teaching and lecturing on the double