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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Contrabass and violins

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Donald Joseph McNalley

Committee in charge:

Professor Mark Dresser, Chair

Professor Anthony Davis

Professor Jane Stevens

2013

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2013

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McNalley, Donald. *Contrabass Recital*. 1 Oct. 1998. WAV

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Contrabass and violins

by

Donald Joseph McNalley

Master of Arts in Music

University of California, San Diego 2013

Professor Mark Dresser, Chair

This Master's thesis is a document that accompanies my Master's Contrabass Recitals, which took place on October 1, 1998, and May 28, 1999 at the University of California, San Diego. These recitals consisted of "Homage a Walter" by J.S. Bach, "The Old King's Lament" by N. Maw, "Concerto in E-flat" by J.B. Vanhal, "Abolone" by J. McNalley, "Failing" by T. Johnson, "Grand Duo" by G. Bottesini, "Pavane pour une Infant Defunte" by M. Ravel, "Adagio for Strings" by S. Barber, and "Childrens' Song no. 7" by C. Corea. This thesis consists of short paragraphs introducing the works included in the October performance to the listener, a synopsis of the May recital, and a relevant research paper. Recordings of these performances were made by the University of California, San Diego for inclusion in the Mandeville Special Collections Library.

Introduction

It is the author's contention that the rapidly changing requirements of the music world now necessitate a wider variety of skills than in any generation since the Baroque era. In undertaking the course of study that has as its culmination this thesis, I endeavored to not just produce great artworks that are worthy of the title Master of Arts in Music, but to undertake a wide and diverse scholarship that could encompass everything from ancient world music traditions to the most contemporary processes. Therefore, this thesis is organized to touch on these issues in both a scholarly and creative way.

These issues are manifest in the recordings made in conjunction with this document.

Contrabass Recital

by

Joe McNalley

Thursday Oct 1, 1998 at 8PM

Mandeville Recital Hall

Homage a Walter

Bach-Ferragamo (1685-1750)
(1961-)

The Old King's Lament

Nicholas Maw (1935-2009)

Concerto in E-flat

Johann Babbiste Vanhal
(1739-1813)

Abalone (1998)

Joe McNalley (1964-)

Failing- a very difficult piece for solo string bass (1975)

Tom Johnson (1939-)

A UCSD Department of Music Presentation

Program Notes from Degree Recital, Oct 1 1998

Homage a Walter (pedal exercitum)

**Bach- Ferragamo
(1685-1750) (1961-)**

Dean Ferragamo is a marvelous contrabassist, composer, and friend who, after stints with the Hong Kong Philharmonic and the Bergen Opera is currently engaged in the Iceland Symphony. After reading about how the 19th century contrabass virtuoso Dragonetti performed Bach organ pedal pieces in his recitals, Mr. Ferragamo fashioned one of the pedal exerciti into this Dragonettistic piece. The title is a dedication to the great contrabassist and pedagogue David Walter, whom he had studied with at the Julliard school, and is at the same time a reference to Mr. Walter's own "Homage a Casals", which has become one of the most frequently performed solo contrabass pieces. Mr. Ferragamo himself describes the piece as a twentieth century look at a nineteenth century style transcription of an eighteenth century piece. In transcribing it, the key was changed from G minor to D minor, and enough significant changes were made to warrant calling it a different piece.

The Old King's Lament

Nicholas Maw (1935-2009)

The Old King's Lament was commissioned by the International Society of Bassists for the 1982 Isle of Man competition. It falls into the genre of descriptive pieces; its inspiration being the descent into madness of King Lear in the play of that name by William Shakespeare. The following excerpt is included on the front piece:

"...A poor, infirm, weak and despised
Old man...

...my cue is a villainous melancholy
 with a sign like Tom o'Bedlam...
 Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!
 rage! blow!"

Nicholas Maw was an English composer, born in 1935. Mr. Maw studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Paul Steinitz and Lennox Berkeley, and in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and Max Deutsch. As an educator, he held positions at Trinity College, Cambridge, Exeter University, Yale, Boston University, and Bard College. His last post was on the on the composition faculty of the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. His works have been performed by many of the leading orchestras and opera companies of our day, including Philadelphia, Chicago, London, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, the BBC and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden.

Concerto in E-flat

**Johann Babpiste Vanhal
 (1739-1813)**

Johann Baptist Vanhal, born in what Czech Republic, was in his day one of the most highly regarded of the Viennese composers. While his personal life is not particularly well documented, it is known that he played cello in a quartet that included violinists Franz Josef Haydn and Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf, and W.A. Mozart playing viola. In his very best work, he is considered on equal footing with Haydn and Mozart, and was particularly noted for his adventurous (for its time) chromaticism and sighing melodic lines. Toward the end of his career, he reverted to a less adventurous style. Vanhal's music has undergone something of a revival in the past few years, with his violin, viola, and clarinet concerti, as well as his symphonic chamber music receiving more attention.

The concerto in E-flat was written in the 1780s, most likely for Friedrich Pischelberger (1741-1813), for whom several of the Classical Viennese contrabass solos were written, including Hadyn's now lost concerto "per Violone principale" and Mozart's "per questa bella Mano (K.612). The manuscript was found in the collection of his student Johan Matthias Sperger (1750-1812), who himself wrote 18 concerti for bass in addition to 30 odd symphonies, sonatas and chamber music as Kapellmeister in Pressburg.

The use of the terms "Violone" and "Contrabasso" are often confusing. In 18th century Austria there were several instruments of varying sizes that were called variously "bassl", "halb-bass", "violone" and "contrabasso". Leopold Mozart in his "Violine schule" writes of different tunings; -C-G-D-a, an octave below the cello, and F-A-D-F#a, which today is generally called the "Weiner Stimmung" (Viennese tuning). Concurrently the so-called "German tuning" (E-A-D-G), the standard tuning of the present, was also employed.

Occasionally, two or more of these scordaturas appeared in the same section. Sperger is known to have used both the Viennese tuning and the German tuning. To increase the clarity of his instrument for solo work, Sperger removed his lowest (fifth) string and tuned his bass sharp one-half or one whole step, so that a concerto in D would become a concerto in E-flat or E. Most modern editions have been sonic failures in that they treat those pieces written for the alternate tunings as equivalent on the contrabass tuned in fourths (E-A-D-G). My solution is to play them in their original configurations, which immediately restores much of the luster of the original intention. Although there are written cadenzas by modern editors as well as

Sperger's originals, I have made the decision to approach the cadenzas as they were originally intended; as a vehicle for the performer to extemporize. In the classical period it was expected that a good musician should improvise; Mozart and Beethoven particularly were famous for this ability. While improvisation as a part of western classical music has suffered from some neglect over the last 150 years, it is encouraging that today in the late 20th century and into the early 21st century, and in no small part due to the influence of "crossover artists", we are experiencing a resurgence in improvisation in an art music context. It is my sincere hope that this trend will continue not only in the context of "New Music", but to breathe life into the traditions of yesterday.

Abalone (1998)

Joe McNalley (1964-)

Anyone who is lucky enough to know David Millard will tell you he is truly a unique individual. While he is justifiably famous as a luthier (he invented the bi-level guitar, and has restored countless instruments), he is also a fine visual artist, as well as a virtuoso on several instruments, including cello, guitar, flutes, and saxophones. Abalone is written to take advantage of some of Dave's unique abilities, and to give us both a vehicle for exploration.

Failing- a very difficult piece for solo string bass (1975)

Tom Johnson (1939-)

Failing was written for Jon Deak, co-principal bass of the New York Philharmonic, and received its premier in New York in 1975. As Johnson writes

"Deak continued to perform the piece regularly, but it was really Bertram Turetzky who did the most to make it widely known... one of the themes that runs through my work is testing performers. If there is a real challenge for the performer, and a distinct chance that the performer will not be able to meet the challenge in a particular performance, and it is going to be clear to the audience whether the performer succeeded or failed, then a performance takes on a special fascination, a little like athletic events."

My deepest thanks to: John Mark Harris and Dave Millard for their artistry, Bert Turetzky for his inspiration and guidance, and my family; Beth, Erin, Tim, and my parents for their loving support.

-Joe McNalley (notes revised 2013)

Contrabass and violins

May Master Degree Recital Synopsis

Following the recital of October, 1998, which established command of the solo Contrabass repertoire from baroque to contemporary, as well as compositional skill, this recital was created to underscore the many facets of musicianship that a contemporary contrabassist working at the highest professional level should, in the author's opinion, possess.

The skills to be demonstrated were

1. leadership
2. chamber music collaboration
3. arranging
4. conducting
5. creation of new sonic possibilities using the Carleen Hutchins violins in a variety of genres

As with the October recital that featured my performances on both a traditionally tuned contrabass and on a five string " Viennese tuning" contrabass, the May recital featured a contrast of timbres. Then San Diego Symphony Principal

Bassist Michael Wais performed a duet with the author on 18th century Italian contrabasses; specifically a Ceruti and Bolosio respectively.

In the second half, the author presented the Hutchins "New Violin Family" instruments. These instruments, which represent the pinnacle of acoustics twentieth century achievement in violin technology, complete the original intention of the Renaissance luthiers to create a complete set of "consorted" instruments based on the acoustics of the violin. All the performers chosen save one held principal or concertmaster positions in orchestras between the Los Angeles and Northern Baja California area. The performers were:

Igor Tchetchko, soprano violin

Kevin Connolly, mezzo violin

John Acosta, alto violin

Omar Firestone, tenor violin

Greg Adamson, baritone violin

Michael Wais, bass violin

Joe McNalley; arranger and conductor

The repertory chosen was intended to examine what genres and pieces can be performed successfully on the Hutchins Violins; whether there is a marked difference in the sonic possibilities of these instruments, and whether it would be a worthwhile endeavor to create a professional ensemble to further explore the possibilities inherent in this new medium. Ravel's *Pavane for a Dead Princess*, Barber's *Adagio for*

Strings, Palestrina's *Missa L'Homme Arme*, and Chick Corea's *Childrens' Song no.7* were chosen as they cover almost five hundred years, and widely disparate styles.

The Palestrina was an obvious choice, representing the period in which the idea of "consorted" music came to the fore, and at a time when the violin was just gaining popularity. The instrumentalists of the Renaissance were highly cognizant of trying to mimic the inflection of the choral style of the day. In Palestrina we discovered the unique sonority possible through the use of the Hutchins violins.

The Ravel was chosen for the lushness of French Impressionism. While this piece has been arranged for many ensembles, we found that in this ensemble we were able to stay true to what we perceived as Ravel's original intent; namely, harmonic material that is in the original piano edition but removed for clarity in Ravel's own orchestrations. The overlapping of matched timbres allowed those moments to retain the same clarity, as if the multiple violins were acting as one "super instrument".

The Barber was used as a preliminary exploration of long duration music. The results showed that it was possible to get the sound of a medium sized string orchestra with just a few of these instruments, when the appropriate registrations were activated on the correct instruments. The glassy non-vibrato sound exploited in the Palestrina also added a haunting quality to the opening and close of this work.

The Hutchins Instruments, when played by top tier professionals, were observed to have advantages over traditional strings. The matching harmonics, which are a result of Dr. Hutchins careful plate tuning and scaling theory, allow the instruments to perform with greater power and clarity than traditional strings. The democratic nature of these instruments also facilitated a collaborative approach to

music making. By embracing a communal leadership model, a willingness to explore further the new paradigm that these instruments embody was realized.

It was decided to continue with the formation of a not for profit 501(c)3 corporation to facilitate further musical research and artwork creation.

The “Yankee Church Bass”

In the 18th and 19th centuries an instrument that today exists only in museums and private collections formed the basis for instrumental accompaniment of devotional music in New England and the Hawaiian Islands. Known in its day as the “bass-viol,” it is usually referred to today as the “Yankee Church Bass,” the “American Church Bass,” or simply the “Church Bass.” While James Scoggan has claimed that the church bass (as it will be referred to here, to differentiate it from the bass viol da gamba) is a wholly American phenomenon,¹ in fact, it is really an American, and later Hawaiian expression of a class of instruments that played a role in European music of the 16th to 18th centuries. This paper will explore the rise in prominence and eventual decline and disappearance of this instrument as aid in the protestant service.

Physical Descriptions of precursors: violones and chamber basses

The so-called “Yankee church bass” is a stringed instrument which has principal dimensions greater than that of a standard violoncello (approx. 26” plate) and smaller than those of a conventional contrabass (41-48” plate). In the violin and viol families of instruments, the baritone and bass voices have been the least standardized since the 16th century. Gasparo da Salo (1542-1609) is known to have experimented greatly with different plate and string lengths: as a violinist at the chapel of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo he had a first hand need to experiment to find what effect on resonances and

¹ Scoggan, James: *American revolutionary* in Double Bassist no. 2 Autumn/Winter 1996.

Orpheus Publications, Middlesex, 1996

playability were incurred by alteration of these dimensions. By contrast, Andrea Amati (1511-1581), who was commissioned by the Valois kings of France to make an orchestra of instruments, standardized the size of his violoncello and contrabass instruments; clearly it is much less work to produce only two or three molds for the instruments in this range than to go to the herculean effort of da Salo, who made at least seven different sizes of bass instruments, all of which would have been called violone.² Because the music of the time was consorted, it made sense that the instruments themselves would be made as a matched set.

The acoustical research of Vincenzo Galilei in about 1590 demonstrated the problem of basing the dimensions of instruments on string length (as in the ancient Greek texts) as opposed to thickness or tension; the continuance of this research by his son Galileo in 1638 gave empirical credence to something the luthiers of Cremona and Brescia already understood: that the length of the string alone was not the determining factor in the sound of an instrument. The secret that these luthiers had discovered was that the effect of the combination of sounds from the front and back plates (the so-called “tap-tones” or *eigenmodes*) are one of the principal features that govern the timbre of an instrument.³ They applied this knowledge as best they could, but in constructing some of the members of the violin family there were other considerations, such as the ability to play the instrument truly “da braccio” (in the case of the viola, tenor, and violoncello),

² Rosengard, Duane: *Thomas Kennedy*, 1820 in International Society of Bassists Journal vol.

XVI no.1, Fall, 1989. International Society of Bassists. Evanston, IL, 1989.

³ Hutchins, Carleen, ed. *Research Papers in Violin Acoustics 1975-1993*. Acoustical Society of America. Woodbury, N.Y. 1997

that necessitated changing dimensions (smaller boxes) and resonance placements that have resulted in the muting of the alto (viola) and contrabass voices, as well as, to a lesser degree, the baritone (cello). It is worth noting that several of the early violin makers made violas in the body length that modern acoustics has shown to be optimal for the generation of violin placed resonances in their range: da Salò in particular is noted for his 20-inch violas.

Some musicologists have taken the lack of a “da braccio” designation for small and large basses to mean that instruments larger than the modern cello as violin family instruments were not in use, and the term “violone” for a bass instrument must only apply to the cello.⁴ There is a startling contradiction in this fairly commonly held assertion: the name violoncello literally means “small violone”. Why would the people of that era referred to the violoncello as a smaller version of itself? Clearly this is a fallacy that direct evidence, such as the instrument collection at Meran, refutes.⁵ However, the designation as “da braccio” instruments implied all would be played on the shoulder, and in fact this was the case with all the violin family instruments up to and including the ‘cello in size (Viola da spala).⁶ Not until the 18th century was this on the shoulder method of playing the violoncello abandoned in all parts of Europe.

⁴ Bonta, Stephen: *From Violone to Violoncello: A Question of Strings?* in Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society 3 (1997) 64-67

⁵ Roos, W.: *The Musical Instruments in the collection at Meran* in Galpin Society Journal XXXIII, p. 21-22. 1979

⁶ Planyavsky, Alfred: *The Baroque Double Bass Violone* translated by James Barket. The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Md.. 1998

In the conception of the violin family, three instruments which are no longer in widespread use today were developed and exploited: the high violin or violino piccolo, the tenor, and the small bass. It would be a physical impossibility to hold and play the larger sizes of bass instruments under the shoulder as was done with the other violin family instruments; iconography of the 17th century makes clear the difficulty in performing on the ‘cello in this manner. Therefore the largest instruments were not referred to as “da braccio” even though sonically they were produced to match the violins as best as the technology of the time allowed. This has led to a considerable amount of confusion concerning the use of these instruments, since they share similar names to the basses of the gamba family, and in fact it was a common practice to use the low bass of the gamba family (violone) in place of the contrabass violin or chamber bass. To add to this confusion, the mixing of forms between the viol and violin families in the bass range instruments makes clear identification tricky; for example, the use of frets on contrabasses was a common practice well into the 19th century. Additionally, the sloping shoulders of many bass instruments gives the sometimes false impression of a gamba bass: Sloping shoulders are a virtual necessity for playing in the higher positions.⁷ Today there are few contrabasses in violin form that retain the original rounded or squared off shoulders associated with the violin family because one of the most common alterations of the 19th century was to cut down the high shoulders of violin form basses. In the same period, ‘cellists were altering instruments originally intended to be violone instruments by having radical surgery conducted upon them to

⁷ Elgar, Raymond: *More about the Double Bass*. Basso Continuum. Princeton, N.J. 1963

attempt to turn them into modern cellos. In both cases the net result is the obfuscation of the intent of the maker, and a change in sound quality that was usually detrimental.

As members of a consort each instrument would be tuned G-D-E-A (violin, tenor, and chamber bass) or C-G-D-A (piccolo violin, viola, violoncello, and contrabass). Anathase Kircher's "Musurgia Universalis" of 1650 confirms the use of the G-D-A-E tuning for a bass instrument that it refers to as the violone.⁸ Up until the mid 19th century, the C-G-D-A tuning was still in use, as was its three string version G-D-A for the contrabass. The difficulty of making the very large stretches in the left hand led to the adoption in much of Europe of what is commonly called "German" tuning for Contrabasses: E-A-D-G in fourths.⁹ Besides these two basic tunings for the contrabass in fourths and the chamber bass in fifths there are many variations in both the 16 foot and 8 foot registers. Many of these tunings are derived from viola da gamba tunings - including the "Viennese" or third-fourth tuning F-A-D-F#-A. The existence of instruments of these sizes in configurations of anywhere from three to six strings in museums adds credence to the belief in a more widespread use than has previously been acknowledged.

In particular, what is known of the practices of the court at Salzburg in the mid 18th century is that along with the violoncello, the so called bassl or halb-bass was

⁸ Brun, Paul: *A History of the Double Bass*. Published by the author. Chemin de Flanerie, France, 1989.

⁹ *ibid*

employed side by side with the five-string Viennese violone.¹⁰ Unfortunately, where the smaller basses are concerned, there is little information on what tunings were in use. What is clear is that several sizes of baritone and bass instruments coincided under a plethora of names: some of these were clearly five or six string double bass gambas playing at the 16-foot range, others were playing at the 8-foot range and were somewhat larger than a standard 26 to 27 inch violoncello of the Stradavari pattern.¹¹

Praetorius alone lists Gross Contra-bas-Geig, Gar grosse Violn de Gamba, Sub Basse, Gar Gross Bass-Viol, Gross Contra-Bassgeig, Violone, Gross Viola-da-Gamba Bass, Die Gross Viola da Gamba, Violono oder Contrabasso da gamba, and Gross Bassgeig for string basses in *Syntagma Musicuum*.

While it is impossible to be definitive as to where the dividing line between a large cello and a small bass is with any certainty, in the absence of any supporting evidence of intention by the luthier or use by the players, it seems likely that many instruments housed in museum collections now termed “oversized cello” are in fact chamber basses. The small size can mean either a higher pitch, or a softer tone in a lower range.

Raymond Elgar points out that these smaller basses are far easier to transport by coach, and therefore would have been preferred by those bassists who had to travel

¹⁰ Planyavsky, Alfred: *Geschichte des Kontrabasses*. Hans Schneider Tutzing, 1984.

¹¹ Broadley, Arthur: *The Violoncello; its history, selection and adjustment*. H. Marshall and Son. London, 1921.

frequently.¹² Additionally, they were used in outdoor processions, sometimes in a marching band configuration by affixing a strap through the ribs on the bass bar side. In Germany, five different sizes of basses are recognized; including one termed the “Bier Bass” because of its use in beer halls. Iconography shows that instruments of this size were used at the Leipzig Thomasschule in 1729, at Dresden in 1685, and in Prague at the end of the 18th century.

In addition, we have the account of Domenico Dragonetti, who as a boy achieved his initial fame by accompanying the singer Brigida Bandi-Giorgi (1759-1806) in the streets of Venice on a Basso di Camera.¹³ When the first of these smaller basses made its way across the Atlantic is not certain as few instruments of any type survive from the colonial period.

Conditions in Colonial New England Leading to the Adoption of the Yankee Church Bass

In early colonial New England, musical instruments were not considered suitable for worship services. The number of instruments listed in household inventories and mentioned in correspondence is therefore indicative of the use of music in social gatherings. As early as 1681, mention is made of viols played after supper at the house

¹² Elgar, Raymond: *More about the Double Bass*. Basso Continuum. Princeton, N.J.

1963

¹³ Brun, Paul: *A History of the Double Bass*. Published by the author. Chemin de

Flanerie, France, 1982

of Peter Thacher in Milton, Massachusetts. The use of viols in a “broken consort” in a parade celebrating the King’s birthday in Boston in 1686 is also noted. In 1716 one Edward Enstone was dealing instruments in Boston including “...Bass-Viols, Violins, Bows, Strings...”¹⁴ Owners of “Bass-Viols” included Rev. Edmund Browne (1606-1678), John Foster (1648-1681) who was Boston’s first printer, Rev. Charles Morton (ca. 1627-1698) of Charlestown, who owned “2 Base Vialls, one at 20s the other at 10pe...”, Gov. William Burnet (1688-1729) who owned “A large bass violine”, Samuel Grainger (1684-1734) schoolteacher of Boston, who owned “4 base viols”. Contemporary accounts report that “Consort Musick” and “broken consorts” played for the public, as well as for social occasions such as weddings and balls.

Without the actual instruments themselves, it is impossible to make an assessment as to whether these “base-viols” were actual viola da gambas, or chamber basses, or even possibly violoncellos. We do know that when the sources refer to consorts they refer to a homogeneous group of instruments, whereas a “broken consort” refers to an ensemble that draws from more than one family of instruments. Sadly, the documents do not specify what instruments any of the consorts or broken consorts consist of. Whether the differing nomenclature of the “base-viols” is because these were recognized as different instruments, or because of inexactitude on the part of the chroniclers is not precisely determinable. It does seem likely that, as was the case on the continent, that a few chamber basses may have made their way into ensembles in the

¹⁴ Lambert, Barbara, ed.: *Music in Colonial Massachusetts* vol. II. The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, 1985.

new world, especially in light of the aforementioned use of the “viols and drums” in the parade in celebration of the king’s birthday. Contemporary iconography from mainland Europe shows that instruments of this size were used in outdoor settings, and some of the extant instruments found in European museums have handles or holes through which straps can be placed to increase the mobility of the performer.¹⁵

Whereas it seems evident that secular music making was prevalent in the colonies, and was not as so often has been supposedly frowned upon as an ungodly activity (witness the number of ministers who were instrument owners) in most circles, the clergy’s position on the use of instrumental music in the Puritan churches of the 17th and early 18th centuries was one of antipathy.

According to Michael Broyles, “Puritan theology proscribed all but the simplest psalm singing in the service, thus assigning music a minor role [in the worship service].”¹⁶ The Puritan service was a multi-hour affair tightly controlled by the clergy; the emotional expression of the individual in a church service was seen as a challenge to the authority of the clergy, which as the political leaders in a theocratic state had a double stake in keeping control. Broyles writes:

“The Parish clerk or deacon was entrusted with the text and the precentor with leading the singing. Commonly they were the same person. Because the precentor usually had little or no musical training and in consequence lacked prestige and

¹⁵ Roos, W.: *The Musical Instruments in the collection at Meran in Galpin Society Journal* XXXIII, p. 21-22. 1979

¹⁶ Broyles, Michael: *Music of the Highest Class*. Yale University Press. New Haven, Connecticut, 1992.

status as a musician, the congregation tended to go its own way when the psalm was sung.”¹⁷

About 1700, the clergy started to speak out against the “old way of singing”.

Cotton Mather in particular lamented in 1718 that “the psalmody is but poorly carried on in my Flock, and in a Variety and Regularity inferior to some others; I would see about it”¹⁸. In 1721, Mather published *The Accomplished Singer. Instructions first, How the Piety of Singing with a True Devotion, may be Obtained and Expressed; the Glorious God after an uncommon Manner Glorified in it, and His people Edified. And then, How the Melody of Regular Singing, and the Skill of Doing it, according to the Rules of it, May be Easily Arrived unto*, which marks the first published effort to reform psalmody. Mather’s emphasis on written notation and rejection of the more improvisatory “old singing style” was called “regular singing”. This was followed by several other tracts denouncing the old way.

While regular singing was adopted in Boston, the more conservative congregations in rural areas were resistant, in some cases even seceding from the Puritan Church to join the Church of England rather than submit to the reform. As the new way of singing was associated with written notation, the need to teach the faithful that notation became an important issue. In the 1720s the first singing schools were formed with the goal of musical literacy.

Singing schools were usually independent organizations that met one night a week, often in the local tavern. The singing schools became popular with young people

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ *ibid*

who used them as a chance to socialize with the opposite sex. Soon after the introduction of the singing schools, the singing school masters began introducing what were called “fuging tunes”: a genre that was then popular in England. These fuging tunes were dependent on notation and were also much livelier than the traditional church psalmody.¹⁹ William Billings was the outstanding American composer of the fuging tune era. In 1770, Billings published *The New-England Psalm-Singer*. *The New-England Psalm-Singer* stands as the most important collection of fuging tunes of the period. Billings, despite his great success as a composer, considered himself first and foremost a teacher of music: he listed his primary occupation as “singer master” in the Boston city directory of 1798. As such, he provided the first documentary evidence of the use of the church bass when he appealed for the use of a bass instrument to stabilize the harmony of a choir.²⁰ Benjamin Crehore, Billings’ cousin, is known to have been making church basses in the 1780s for use in the singing schools.²¹ He labeled these instruments “bass-violos”, not for their violin form symmetry, but either because of their tuning or sound ideal. Bertram Turetzky, music professor and owner of a Crehore

¹⁹ Broyles, Michael: *Music of the Highest Class*. Yale University Press. New Haven, Connecticut, 1992.

²⁰ Lambert, Barbara, ed.: *Music in Colonial Massachusetts* vol. II. The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, 1985.

²¹ Libin, Laurence: *American Musical Instruments in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. W.W. Norton & Co. New York, 1985

church bass, reports that its sound, as would be expected, did not have the power of the larger contrabass.²²

Ironically, it was the success of the futing tune and the singing school that led to a backlash against the style in the late 18th century. As has been noted, the singing schools were popular as a place for young people to fraternize with the opposite sex. The position of the singing master as outside the realm of direct control of the clergy and the seemingly secular considerations given in the choice of melody helped to erode the control that had been exercised by the ministers. Because rehearsals were frequently conducted in the local taverns, and sometimes were followed by dancing accompanied by the singing master's fiddle, these rehearsals further aroused the ire of the church fathers, who believed the singing school could do as much harm to morals as it could help by promoting ensembled performance. The dichotomy of the songs of praise as exemplified by the futing tune versus the Calvinist rhetoric, with its emphasis on guilt and the salvation of an elect, only served to drive the schism developing within the Puritan churches deeper. That New England had moved away politically from its theocratic roots further eroded the clergy's ability to control the musical part of the service. What finally occurred was a reform of the Calvinist teachings itself away from its bleakest, most guilt ridden theology toward a philosophy emphasizing the possible salvation of a prepared convert.²³

²² Turetzky, Bertram: Interviewed by D.J. McNalley. March, 1999

²³ McQuoid, Rev. William A.: Interviewed by D.J. McNalley. February 1999

While the clergy could not abolish the musical part of the service, they were able to influence the choice of material that was sung away from the fugging tune, which was derided as obfuscating the text. Andrew Law and John Hubbard were two of the most outspoken advocates of this anti-fugging tune reform. What they emphasized, starting in the late 1770s was a style based on simple melodies with a more vertical harmonic rhythm. They advocated a style based on “correct” harmonies exemplified by the model of the European Hymn. This was embraced by the clergy as the answer to the fugging-tune dilemma, and gradually supplanted fugging-tunes altogether.

The need to ground the harmony of the singers became an acute problem, especially in view that the Presbyterian-Congregationalist practice still theoretically forbade the use of instruments in church. The church bass filled this need and became the first instrument allowed into Puritan worship service because it was relatively inexpensive, was an aid to the foundation of the harmony, and did not overpower the choir. Known colloquially as “God’s fiddle” to differentiate it from the violins which were called “the devil’s fiddle” due to their association with secular entertainment,²⁴ the church bass quickly became integral to the performance of much church music in New England.

²⁴ Lambert, Barbara, ed.: *Music in Colonial Massachusetts* vol. II. The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, 1985.

The Use of the Yankee Church Bass in the 19th Century in New England

Once the church bass became established, its use spread rapidly throughout New England. Baptists and Anglicans, who had never had any injunctions against the use of instruments in service, also adopted the church bass, particularly in rural areas or anywhere where the cost of an organ was prohibitive. Crehore, William Green, and Benjamin Willard all were making church basses in quantity.²⁵ The demand grew so rapidly that in the case of William Green, he left the firm of Bent and Green in 1800 to concentrate on church bass manufacture.²⁶

In some areas, Maine for example, the “old style” of singing died hard; this was particularly true in the more insulated rural areas. George Jewett made the first instrument known to be carved in Maine in 1794/1795. Currently housed at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., this instrument, with a 29 ½” body length, and graced with a carved head, may have in fact been intended as a large cello, rather than as an actual church bass.²⁷ In 1802, the first record of use of a church bass is noted in the ledgers for an Augusta parish, which purchased a church bass for \$35.00, to be played by one Stephen Jewett.²⁸

²⁵ Ayars, Christine: *Contributions to the Art of Music in America by the Music Industries of Boston, 1640-1936*. Wilson co., New York, 1937.

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ Lambent, Barbara, ed.: *Music in Colonial Massachusetts* vol. II. The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, 1985.

²⁸ Edwards, George Thornton: *Music and Musicians of Maine*. AMS Press. New York, 1970.

Lowell Mason continued and extended the hymnodic reforms started by Law and Hubbard. In 1822, the *Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music* was compiled by Mason and published by the society. *The Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music* was based on nineteenth century European models, with several adaptations of the hymns of Gardiner. In particular, Mason wanted to weed out the last vestiges of the “fuging tune” for what he considered a morally and aesthetically superior European style. Mason gave his first address on the state of church music in 1826 in Boston. In that address, he was a strong proponent of a trained choir that would lead the congregational singing, and believed that the devoutness of the chorister had a direct influence on the quality of that leadership. More importantly for this study, he was a proponent of the use of the organ, or in its absence, the violoncello. According to Broyles, “he wanted to favor the violin, but could not because of its many ‘irrelevant associations’”.²⁹

Mason’s mention of the cello as an instrument to add to the ensemble of the choir with church bass is especially significant because Mason, a cellist himself, also had played the church bass in his local parish as a youth; here he is advocating extending the number of string instruments involved in the service. Since the cello essentially replaced the tenor violin as that voice in the violin consort when that instrument (the tenor) went out of fashion, it makes logical sense that the tenor would be the next voice reinforced. Mason described the performance practice on the church bass as “catching” the

²⁹ Broyles, Michael: *Music of the Highest Class*. Yale University Press. New Haven, Connecticut, 1992.

accompaniment. These bass lines were often improvised, in a manner oppositional to the common practice in classical music of simplifying a bass part. Mason's position as president of the highly influential Handel and Haydn Society from 1828 to 1832 and as musical leader of several Boston churches gave him a strong bully pulpit from which to expound his views.³⁰ The churches that, following Mason's advice, used string instruments were called the "catgut churches," those who still eschewed the use of string instruments "anti-catgut".³¹ It is clear that the church bass was in widespread use by the early 19th century. After the efforts of the first generation of luthiers: Crehore, Green, and Willard, who were primarily working in Boston, a second wave of makers arose, centered principally around New Hampshire. The most prolific and best known of these New Hampshire makers, which included William Darracott (1799-1868), John Pierson, Nathan Farley, Milton Morse, and the Dearborn Brothers, was Abraham Prescott. According to violin expert James Scoggan, Prescott made between 500 and 600 church basses and 207 double basses, making him "an isolated singularity in US lutherie whose production remains unequaled to this day".³² Although Prescott claimed to be self taught in lutherie, Thomas James Wenberg states in *The Violin Makers of America* that he apprenticed to Benjamin Willard sometime between 1805 and 1810. In 1809 Prescott made the first church bass to bear his label, allegedly using a violin in his possession as a

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ Libin, Laurence: *American Musical Instruments in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. W.W. Norton & Co. New York, 1985.

³² Scoggan, James: *Prescott revisited* in *Double Bassist* no. 5, Spring 1998. Orpheus Publications, Middlesex, 1998.

model. Curiously for someone using a violin as his model, Prescott made no string instruments other than church basses and contrabasses.³³ In 1820 Prescott was successful enough as a church bass maker to hire workmen for his shop in Deerfield, New Hampshire. Prescott loaded the instruments on a coach and went from town to town peddling them to the local congregations. Scroggans states “as a deacon in the Deerfield Baptist Church he could exploit his contacts and sell instruments to neighboring houses of prayer”. Apparently business was good, for he moved the operation to Concord in 1831 and hired additional help. As a savvy businessman, Prescott made whatever he thought people would buy: organs, melodeons, and reed instruments. He usually labeled his instruments thusly:

Abraham Prescott
 Manufacturer of Premium bass & double bass viols
 Seraphines & melodians
 Dealer in Umbrellas and Parasols

Prescott sold the bass making wing of his business to his former employees, David and Andrew Dearborn in 1845. Prescott himself retired a wealthy man in 1850, and died in 1858.³⁴ Ten years Prescott’s junior, William Darracott did not achieve the fame of Prescott but is today remembered for the high quality of his craftsmanship. Darracott seems to have lived his entire life in Milford, New Hampshire. In his youth he made violins and church basses. As an adult, he not only made string instruments, but

³³ Henley, William: *Universal Dictionary of Violin and Bow Makers*, vol. IV. Southern Publishing Co. Brighton, 1960

³⁴ Ogden, Samuel R. *Abraham Prescott, or Bass Viols and Parasols*. unpublished typescript. 1966.

also auctioned pianos at his shop, where he was assisted by his son George L. Darracott. In 1843 William became the town's first dentist; apparently he applied the same dedication to his bedside manner, for his obituary states "his well-stored mind, unusual readiness in conversation, and sympathetic nature, mitigated the discomforts of the dentist's chair."³⁵ For many years it was believed that Darracott only made church basses, and no instruments of standard double bass dimensions. Up until 1985 the only published material on Darracott was in Raymond Elgar's *Looking at the Double Bass*, which states "[he] made a few small basses that are keenly sought after."³⁶ In 1993 San Diego luthier David Millard discovered a full size (48" body length) four string double bass made by William Darracott in 1829. This instrument, which also has a repair label from George Darracott from 1885, is currently under restoration.³⁷

That these luthiers were also creating instruments of such large dimensions underscores the success of Lowell Mason's effort to increase the depth of the ensembles in church services.

While a church bass could provide an adequate if subtle foundation, the production of full size contrabasses indicates that there was a need to augment the fundamental with a very powerful sound in the lowest registers. Since the American Symphony orchestra did not yet exist (the New York Philharmonic was founded in 1842,

³⁵ Libin, Laurence: *American Musical Instruments in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*.

W.W.Norton & Co. New York, 1985.

³⁶ Elgar, Raymond: *Looking at the Double Bass*. Basso Continuum. Princeton, N.J. 1967.

³⁷ Millard, David: personal communication. January and February, 1999.

the Boston Symphony in 1882) and instruments of such dimensions are generally considered unfit for chamber music performance, the logical conclusion is these were used a special reinforcement for the more numerous church basses, perhaps in something like the manner that the Bassl or Halb-bass was used in conjunction with the 16 foot violone or contrabass in Saalzburg in the 18th century.³⁸

That Prescott made such a significant number of the largest basses indicates that there must have been a prodigious demand. These full size basses have become popular with symphonic players in the USA because of their deep rich tone and powerful voice.³⁹ While Mason's reform movement had the effect of opening the previously reluctant churches to the use of instrumental music, and thereby increased the use of the church bass, by the time of the Civil War the use of the church bass in New England was beginning to abate.

While there had been strong opposition to any sort of instrument being used in a church service in the 18th century by the Puritans, by the time of the mid 19th century this opposition had been almost entirely swept away. Mason's championing of the church organ played a large part in this decline. While a few organs had been introduced to the more progressive Congregationalist churches in the late 18th century (a Worthington, Connecticut church received the first organ at a Congregationalist church

³⁸ Panyavsky, Alfred: *Geschichte des Kontrabasses*. Hans Schneider, Tutzing, 1984.

³⁹ Elgar, Raymond: *Looking at the Double Bass*. Basso Continuum. Princeton, N.J. 1967.

in that state in 1792),⁴⁰ the prohibitive cost made organs unobtainable for all but a few of the wealthiest parishes. As New England's economy continued to boom throughout the early 19th century and the church coffers filled, more and more organs were introduced. The soft sound of the church bass that helped it to be adopted in the 18th century was no match for the enormous volume of the organ. By the time the Civil War ended, organs dominated the landscape of protestant New England's churches of all denominations. The church bass began its swift fall into obscurity, to the point at which the descendants of those people who had used it in worship service from the 18th to the mid 19th century could not recognize it as a different instrument than the violoncello, or remember its function.

Transplantation of the Church Bass to Hawaii

On April 6, 1820 the brig *Thaddeus* arrived at Kailua-Kona carrying a group from the American Missionary Company from New England. These missionaries were joined by George P. Kaumuali'i, a Hawaiian dignitary and convert to Christianity who, having spent some time studying in New England, was now returning to Hawaii.⁴¹ The *Thaddeus* arrival marked a turning point in Hawaiian musical history: the royal family, including Liholiho (Kamehameha II) came aboard. Hiram Bingham, the leader of the group of missionaries, wrote in the ship's journal:

⁴⁰ Lambert, Barbara, ed.: *Music in Colonial Massachusetts* vol. II. The colonial Society of Massachusetts, Boston, 1985.

⁴¹ Sebree, Shirley: *Pele's Tears: Reclaiming the lost gems of Hawaiian Music in Western Music styles*. Vantage. New York, 1994.

“...all assembled on the quarter deck of the *Thaddeus*, and the mission family with the aid of the bass-viol, played by George P. Kaumuali’i, and the voices of the Captain and officers, sang hymns of praise(kanahe)...After dinner we sang, at his [Liholiho’s] particular request, several psalms and hymns, with which both the King and the multitude around appeared pleased.”⁴²

The George P. Kaumuali’i referred to as a performing with the *Thaddeus* crew and missionaries was Prince George Kaumuali’i, son of the King of Kaua’i. This performance marks the first recorded concert of Western music in Hawaii, and the first introduction of a Western instrument by a Hawaiian. The ship then sailed on to Oahu, where on April 23, 1820, Prince George became the first to introduce the church bass in a concert on land, at Honolulu. The entry in the *Thaddeus* journal for April 23, 1820 reads:

“Today for the first time, we have public worship on land. A considerable audience of European and American residents, Masters and officers of vessels, chiefs, sailors, and common people assembled in and around the house occupied by Brother B[ingam], to hear the sound of the gospel for the first time on these shores. Brother B[ingam] preached from Luke 2:10...The people are much pleased be our singing, aided by the Bass viol played by [Prince George] Tamoree.”

By June, Bingam had established the first singing school in Hawaii. Prince George was back in Kaua’i the same month, where he performed for his father, who remarked that the Prince must be very intelligent [akamai] to play so skillfully upon the

⁴² Graham, Robert, ed.: *Na Himeni Haipule Hawaii*. Hawaii Conference United Church of Christ. Honolulu, 1972.

instrument. The instrument stayed on Kaua'i until 1824, when it was returned to Honolulu.⁴³

The need for church basses was acute, since the native population had no experience with learning Western intervals; Bingam initially taught by rote. He first simplified some of the early hymns and psalms to just the tenor and bass; later he increased the complexity of hymns he was translating into Hawaiian. In 1823, the first Hawaiian Hymn book *Na Himeni Hawaii: He Me Ori I la lehova, Ke Akua Mau*, was published, sans notation. The entire printing of 2000 was eagerly procured by the Hawaiians. Within ten years, 52,000 hymnbooks had been printed and distributed throughout the islands. By 1826, 80 singing schools had been established on the Big Island of Hawaii alone.⁴⁴ In 1831 Lorenzo Lyons (Laiana) arrived on Hawaii from Boston. Like Bingam, Lyons was a trained musician. Lyons translated more hymns and wrote new ones, including “Ka’ohumanu”, the first hymn without a non-Hawaiian source. Lyons also introduced the gospel style song, which according to Sebree, “became secularized folk songs to the *maka ainana* (common people).”⁴⁵ In 1843 *Ke Kumu Leomele*, a book delineating Hawaiian singing practices and published by the Mission Society, recommended the use of the “violonella”, which is probably the early Hawaiian translation for the “bass viol”. The Hawaiian word for contrabass is

⁴³ Kanahale, George: *Hawaiian Music and Musicians*. University of Hawaii Press. Honolulu, 1979.

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ Sebree, Shirley: *Pele's Tears: Reclaiming the lost gems of Hawaiian Music in Western Music styles*. Vantage, New York, 1994.

“violina nui”, and there is no evidence to suggest that violoncellos had been introduced yet.⁴⁶

The reports of church basses are scattered, although it is clear church basses were arriving from New England in some numbers. In 1844, the Maui Mission reported receiving a bass viol, and in 1849 the Ha’ili Mission reported the use of these instruments.

With the example of both Hawaiian nobility and the recommendation of the church, demand for church basses increased. The whaling fleets that helped drive the booming economy of the Northeast frequented Hawaii for its ideal location as a supply station, and for its proximity to excellent Humpback whale hunting grounds. These fleets were a logical vehicle for supplying the needed instruments.

While there were many foreign powers seeking their fortunes at these crossroads of the Pacific, none made such an imprint as the New Englanders. The presence of the Congregationalist churches, which are among the oldest buildings in Hawaii, gives testament to the great influence of New England culture. Because there were such frequent sojourns back and forth between New England and Hawaii, the missionaries were able to dominate much of the religious and social life. While the success of the missionary movement is surely due in part to the rapid disintegration of the “kapu”

⁴⁶ Pukui, Mary, ed.: Hawaiian/English Dictionary. University of Hawaii Press. 1979.

system, the missionaries' teachings seem to have been accepted with a great deal of zeal, particularly in the adoption of the hymnology.⁴⁷

Unlike in New England, where the church bass never became a professional instrument, in Hawaii by the mid to late 19th century it had been conscripted into the growing field of Hawaiian secular music. Kanahale reports that both the YWCA Hawaiian ensemble and Mekia Kealakai featured it. The Royal Hawaiian Band, founded in 1863 (and the oldest municipal band in the USA), lists both bass and contrabass on its ledgers for 1887.

Oddly enough, it was the Royal Hawaiian Band that in part helped bring about the extinction of the church bass in Hawaii. In 1872, Henry Berger emigrated from Potsdam, Prussia, to Oahu and became the new band leader. A contrabassist himself, Berger allegedly introduced the larger instrument into the islands and to the band. The contrabass replaced the church bass in short order. Ironically, one of Berger's brightest pupils and later a leader of the Royal Hawaiian Band himself was Mekia Kealakai, the last documented bandleader who used a church band in Hawaiian secular music. Kealakai (1867-1944), described by John Philip Sousa as "the greatest flute player I ever heard" was an international celebrity, having performed Hawaiian music in the USA and in Europe for many years. In 1920 he took over the Royal Hawaiian Band. Although it has not yet been discovered when he stopped using the church bass in his ensemble, Kanahale believes by the early 1900s it was all but extinct in the native repertoire:

⁴⁷ Kanahale, George: *Hawaiian Music and Musicians*. University of Hawaii Press.

Honolulu, 1979.

replaced by the contrabass.⁴⁸ In the churches, although this disappearance happened later, it was in nearly identical fashion as that of New England. In 1867, Kawaihau church obtained the first organ in the Hawaiian islands. While not all churches could afford organs, the prevalence of other string instruments, such as the guitar, mandolin, and 'ukulele, along with the contrabass, helped seal the fate of the church bass.⁴⁹ The tropical climate's unforgiving toll has meant that no known specimens of this once plentiful instrument are documented in Hawaii at present.

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ *ibid*

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