ELEMENTARY
DOUBLE-BASS
METHOD

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G. SCHIRMER, INC.
NEW YORK
PREFACE

I have been asked to write this book mainly for the high-school or junior-high-school student. I have met many young bass players who have taken up the study of the bass in order to help fill out the instrumentation of their school orchestra or band. Most of these students have had very poor grounding on the instrument—often because, living in small towns, they have had no professional bassist with whom to study and they have found the best bass methods now published too difficult to cover without an experienced instructor.

I hope that I have made this method for beginners so simple that the average public-school music supervisor can take the student who possesses a knowledge of the fundamentals of music through it to the point where he can benefit his school orchestra or band.

O. G. ZIMMERMAN
The Parts of the Instrument

The Double Bass

It is advisable that the length of the strings, from the bridge to the nut, be 41 inches. The gauge of the strings should be as follows: G-string 40°, D-string 60°, A-string 55°, and E-string 70°. It is best to have the G- and D-strings of gut, and the A- and E-strings of aluminum-wound gut. The bridge should not be too high, but just high enough so that the strings, when played, do not hit the fingerboard and cause a buzzing sound.
Position of the Player

Standing next to the instrument, the player must put the weight of his body on the right foot, advancing the left foot the distance of a short step in an outward direction. Inclining against the player, the instrument thus leans very slightly in a backward direction.

Types of Bowing

At the present time, two different systems of bowing are employed: the French, or Italian, style which was used by Bottesini, and the German style which was used by Dragonetti. They are sometimes known as the "Bottesini Bow" and the "Dragonetti Bow", but for convenience they will be called in this book "French Bow" and "German Bow". There are at present many fine bassists using both systems: each has its good and bad points.
The “French Bow”

The bow is held between the four fingers placed on the stick and the thumb placed at the point where the nut joins the stick. The fingers are kept well separated, the first finger acting as a guide. The wrist is bent inward, and the elbow is kept straight, but not stiff. The shoulder and elbow must always be relaxed, and the shoulder must move freely.

Holding the bow thus and swinging the arm, the bow can be passed across the strings between the bridge and fingerboard so as to cross the strings at right angles. The hair of the bow must be flat on the strings, with slightly more pressure on the upper side of the hair. Never let the point of the bow hang down; it must lie in an upward direction.
The "German Bow"

The bow is held between the thumb and the first and second fingers placed on the stick. The third finger rests relaxed in the center of the nut. The fourth finger is placed underneath the nut where the hair of the bow joins the nut. The wrist is bent slightly outward and relaxed. The elbow is also kept relaxed and away from the body.

Position of the Hand for the "German Bow"

The "German Bow" is passed over the strings in the same way as the "French Bow"; for explanation, see the preceding page.

Position of the Arm for the "German Bow"
The attachment on the scroll serves to lengthen the E-string, thereby lowering its sound to C (a third lower). The notes between E and C are obtained by the use of the pedals: C# by Pedal I, B by Pedal II, and D# by Pedal III.

Finger-Signs

0 - open string
1 - first or index finger
2 - second or middle finger
4 - fourth or little finger (assisted by the third finger)
Tuning

The bass is tuned in fourths:

- the highest and thinnest string is tuned to G -
- the next to D -
- the third to A -
- and the lowest to E -

Bow-Signs

- Down bow (starting at the nut)
- Up bow (starting at the point)

Exercises on open strings

D-string

G-string

G- and D-strings

D- and A-strings

A- and E-strings

G-, D-, and A-strings

G-, D-, and E-strings

D-, A-, and E-strings

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All four strings

The Positions

Tones other than those of the four open strings are produced by pressing the fingers on the strings to shorten them. This procedure has been systematized into what are called “positions”. The positions commonly used range from half position to seventh position.

General placement of the left hand for all positions

The ball of the thumb is placed on the back of the neck of the instrument, and the finger-tips (or, more exactly, the soft parts of the fingers a little way from the tips) are placed firmly on the string. The thumb will rest on the back of the neck at a point corresponding to that between the first and second fingers. Thus a bridge is formed between the thumb and the four fingers.

The Half Position

With the left hand in this general position, place the first finger about an inch from the end of the string (the exact distance must be determined by the size of the instrument). The first finger must raise the open string a half tone. Then the second finger is pressed upon the string the same distance from the first as we have allowed between the nut and the first; thus the second raises the string another half tone. The third finger is used for the present only to assist the fourth finger. Next we press the fourth finger (along with the third) on the string, the distance between second and fourth again being the same as that between open and first, or the same as that between first and second. Be very careful that, when the second finger is pressed down, the first also remains on the string; and when the fourth finger is pressed down, see that the first, second, and third fingers are all on the string.
The Half Position: the four tones on each string

G-string
\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{or} \quad \text{or} \\
&\text{or} \quad \text{or}
\end{align*} \]

A-string
\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{or} \\
&\text{or}
\end{align*} \]

E-string
\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{or} \\
&\text{or}
\end{align*} \]

Exercises on separate strings

D-string
\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{or} \\
&\text{or}
\end{align*} \]

A-string
\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{or} \\
&\text{or}
\end{align*} \]

E-string
\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{or} \\
&\text{or}
\end{align*} \]

Exercises on all strings

1
\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{or} \\
&\text{or}
\end{align*} \]

2
\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{or} \\
&\text{or}
\end{align*} \]

F major scale (to be memorized)
\[ \begin{align*}
&\text{or} \\
&\text{or}
\end{align*} \]

3
The First Position

The entire hand is moved one half tone higher, the thumb being in the same relationship to the fingers as it was in the half position. Now the first finger will be a whole tone above the open string, where the second was in the half position; the second finger will be where the fourth was in the half position; and the fourth now will be on a new tone.
Signs for the positions

hp - half position
I - first position
II - second position
II½ - second-and-a-half position
III - third position
III½ - third-and-a-half position
IV - fourth position
etc.

The shift between hp and I

The following exercises require the use of both the half and the first positions. When shifting positions, the player must move the entire hand, including the thumb, which always stays at a point corresponding to that between the first and second fingers.
II Position

The II position is one half tone higher than the I position, and one whole tone higher than the half position.

Exercises on separate strings

Exercises in the II Position

Children's prayer from "Hansel and Gretel"  
Exercises in the I and II Positions  
Engelbert Humperdinck

C major scale
Staccato

*Staccato* (indicated by a dot over or under the note) means that the tone of the note is to be interrupted before it has been held its full value. The remaining time indicated for the note is taken up by rest. The extent to which the note is to be shortened is determined by the player's taste or by specific indications in the music.
II\textsuperscript{3} Position

This position is the "intermediate" position between the II and III positions. To simplify the name we will call it the II\textsubscript{3} position. It lies one half tone above the II position.

Exercises in the II\textsubscript{3} Position

Exercises in the II\textsubscript{3} Position in conjunction with other Positions

Db major scale
III Position

The III position is one whole tone higher than the II position, and one half tone higher than the II\(\frac{1}{2}\) position.

G-string

D-string

A-string

E-string

Exercises in the III Position
Exercises in the III Position in conjunction with other Positions

D major scale

Folk-Tune

Folk-Tune

A major scale

Hymn
III½ Position

The III½ position is one whole tone higher than the II position, and one half tone higher than the III position.

G-string

D-string

A-string

E-string

Exercises in the III½ Position

Exercises in the III½ Position together with the preceding Positions

Eb major scale

Nursery Tune

Folk-Tune

38860
IV Position

The IV position is one whole tone higher than the III position, and one half tone higher than the \( \text{III}_\frac{1}{2} \) position.

G-string

\[ \text{or } \begin{align*} \begin{array}{c} \text{G-string} \end{array} \end{align*} \]

D-string

\[ \begin{align*} \begin{array}{c} \text{D-string} \end{array} \end{align*} \]

A-string

\[ \begin{align*} \begin{array}{c} \text{A-string} \end{array} \end{align*} \]

E-string

\[ \begin{align*} \begin{array}{c} \text{E-string} \end{array} \end{align*} \]

Exercises in the IV Position

\[ \begin{align*} \begin{array}{c} \text{Exercises in the IV Position} \end{array} \end{align*} \]

Exercises in the IV Position together with the preceding Positions

E major scale

\[ \begin{align*} \begin{array}{c} \text{Exercises in the IV Position together with the preceding Positions} \end{array} \end{align*} \]
Nursery Tune

B major scale

Folk-Tune

V Position

The V position is one half tone higher than the IV position.
Exercises in the V Position together with the preceding Positions

F major scale

V\textsubscript{\frac{3}{2}} Position

The V\textsubscript{\frac{3}{2}} position is one half tone higher than the V position.
VI Position

The VI position is one whole tone higher than the V position, and one half tone above the V\(^{\frac{3}{5}}\) position.

The fourth finger is not used in this position because it is too short. We substitute the third for the fourth; thus the fingering for this position will be first, second, and third.

You will notice that the note on which the third finger is placed will be one octave higher than the open string. This is called the harmonic of the open string and may be played by just touching the string instead of pressing it. In playing this harmonic, one must raise the first and second fingers from the string.

To indicate a harmonic, the sign \(\circ\) is placed under or over the note.
Up to this point we have used all the major scales except the following. It is advisable that the student memorize all of the major scales and first study them in the form of whole notes, using the whole bow for each note. He should then play them in the form of quarter notes, giving only one beat to each note, but still using the entire bow for every note.

C# major scale

G# major scale

C# major scale

The double-sharps (𝄪) & double-flats (𝄫) commonly met with, and their equivalents

C𝄪 is the equivalent of B D𝄪 is the equivalent of E F𝄪 is the equivalent of G G𝄪 is the equivalent of A

D𝄫 is the equivalent of C E𝄫 is the equivalent of D G𝄫 is the equivalent of F A𝄫 is the equivalent of G B𝄫 is the equivalent of A

Legato

Legato means that each note is sustained its full value and is joined to the next note as closely as possible. Two notes tied together (indicated by the sign – ) are played on the same bow. The student should study all the scales using the legato style as in the following example of the C major scale.
Bowing

This exercise is to be studied with the following examples of bowing:
Bowing (cont'd)

This exercise is to be studied with the following examples of bowing:
Intervals

The following intervals must first be studied using the whole bow for each note. Then play them as staccato notes, making four eighths of each half-note. Next study them in the legato style, joining every two half notes.

Thirads

Fifths

Sixths

Sevenths

Octaves

These intervals should be studied in all keys.
Broken chords in all keys

The letters G, D, A, and E over notes indicate the strings to be used.
Pizzicato

_Pizzicato_ (pizz) means that the passage must be played by plucking the strings with the fingers of the right hand instead of using the bow. If the "French Bow" is used, the second finger plucks the string and the bow is held in an upward direction between the first, third, and fourth fingers. The thumb is placed at the edge of the fingerboard. If the "German Bow" is used, the first finger plucks the string and the bow hangs in a downward direction, held by the third and the little finger (inside the nut). When the pizzicato passage has ended, the sign "arco" will appear, which means that the bow is again brought into use.

Example from "Les Préludes"

Franz Liszt

Example from "Symphony No. 4"

Peter I. Tchaikovsky
On the following pages are a few of the difficult passages from compositions which are often played in high-school orchestras. Many of these passages cannot be played well until the student has spent several years studying the bass; but careful study of them with the fingerings and bowings marked should result in his being able to play them acceptably.

From Symphony No. 6 (the "Surprise" Symphony)

Adagio cantabile

Vivace assai

Josef Haydn
From the Symphony in E minor (the “New World” Symphony)

Largo

Antonin Dvořák
From “Marche Slave”  
Peter I. Tchaikovsky

From “Lohengrin” (Prelude to Act III)  
Sehr lebhaft  
Richard Wagner
From the "L'Arlésienne" Suite

I. Overture
Allegro deciso

Georges Bizet

Andante molto

II. Minuet

From "The Barber of Seville" (Overture)

Andante

Gioacchino Rossini
From the "Unfinished" Symphony (first movement)

Allegro moderato

Franz Schubert
From the Symphony in D minor (first movement)

César Franck

Lento

Allegro non troppo

Lento

Allegro non troppo

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