

## New works for bass

Lawrence Milner and Chloe Cutts report on two performances  
of new works for the double bass

Premiere of *Burlesque for Double Bass* by Allan Stephenson. Performed by Leon Bosch with the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra, 24/25 March 2004

Credited with some 90 compositions in all genres from chamber to full-scale orchestral works, plus concerti for almost every orchestral instrument, the *Burlesque for Double Bass* is Allan Stephenson's first concerto for this instrument.

Born in Wallasey, Cheshire, UK, Stephenson studied piano from the age of seven and cello from thirteen onwards, entering the Royal Manchester College of Music in 1968 and leaving with an Associate degree in 1972. He arrived in South Africa in 1973 as sub-principal with the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra and since then has conducted all the major symphony orchestras in South Africa in concert and ballet performances.

The *Burlesque* was first conceived in 1974 but Stephenson said 'Certain passages were not as practical as they should

have been...the cadenza was one horrifying portion, and so I decided to revise the whole piece to make it more playable.'

This was done in consultation with Leon Bosch, the soloist for the premiere of the piece. 'Leon has been most persistent in getting me to revise the work, it is only fitting that he give the premiere performance of it,' said Stephenson.

Stephenson described the composition as follows: 'it is in my usual quasi sonata form, but with two sets of first subjects. The first sounds are the open strings of the double bass – this is the first subject and is developed a little here before the tempo speeds up to an *allegro molto*. The music then moves towards a more lyrical strain in the orchestra and quiets down to reveal the second subject in solo harmonics. These two ideas are developed until an orchestral *ritornello* heralds in the cadenza...



a standard recapitulation follows and then a virtuosic coda and *finis*.'

I attended the second night performance with Leon Bosch as soloist with the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra which was scaled down for the *Burlesque*. One of the well-known difficulties of writing orchestral accompaniment for the double bass is to keep the orchestral volume from dominating the soloist. This has been achieved admirably with this ensemble. My impression of the music is that it is a wonderful addition to the double bass repertoire and that it deserves to be widely heard. LM



World and UK premieres, performed by Corrado Canonici and violinist Caroline Balding. Italian Cultural Institute, London, 8 April 2004

This decidedly Anglo-Italian evening featured works for solo bass, and bass and violin, by eight 20th-century British and Italian composers. Among them were the UK premiere of Ennio Morricone's *Studio for solo bass* and the world premiere of a new work for bass and violin by British composer Ian Moore, entitled *Rondeau*. Morricone's *Studio* was commissioned by Franco Petracchi and received its world premiere by Canonici in 1992 in Darmstadt, Germany. The piece has three movements in A-B-A form. The 'A' sections, 'have to be played as fast as possible' according to the programme notes, an instruction not taken lightly by Canonici, with the lyrical 'B' section providing contrast. 'The first and last movements are like a mirror, in that the first movement begins with a very quiet dynamic, and the last movement finishes with the same dynamic,' says Morricone. 'The double bass is an incredible

instrument, with many possibilities, far more than I finally used, because I decided to concentrate on the very technical elements of the instrument.'

Written for the event, Moore's *Rondeau* is a two-minute string duet named after a type of medieval French poetry, and follows a similar fixed structure, but using the concepts of microtonal harmony and complex rhythmic structures. Other featured works included Luciano Berio's only bass piece, *Psy*, a new composition by Christopher Fox, plus works by Bruno Maderna, Virgilio Mortari, Giacinto Scelsi, and Martin Butler. Prior to the event, Canonici launched his CD, *A Roaring Flame*, with a performance at King's College, London on 6 April. This is the first solo bass CD recorded in the UK entirely dedicated to British composers, and almost all are recorded here for the first time. Look out for a review of the CD in the next issue of *Double Bassist*. CC