

SCHUBERT: Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 114, “Trout”

Notes on the Program

By Noel Morris ©2020

“Whenever I tried to sing of love, it turned to pain. And again, when I tried to sing of pain, it turned to love.”

Schubert wrote those words in 1822. Now, almost two-hundred years later, musicians like to repeat them because that’s how Schubert gets his hooks in you. The poignancy of his music lies in his ability to instantly shift between emotional extremes, like fast-moving storm clouds that alternately cover or intensify the sunlight.

The composer was one of fourteen children born to Franz and Elisabeth Schubert. Only five survived infancy. The son of an amateur cellist and schoolmaster, he lived in a home where music was the focus of family life. By his teens, young Franz was the violist in his family string quartet, and it was for this group that he wrote some of his earliest known compositions—sixteen quartets by the age of nineteen (including unnumbered juvenile pieces).

As a youth, Schubert enjoyed a career as a chorister, receiving schooling, music lessons, meals and a roof over his head until his voice changed. After that, he worked for a time at his father’s school before becoming a full-time composer. Still in his teens, Schubert started moving in a society of Viennese poets, writers, musicians, and intellectuals.

In spite of the threat of government spies, the friends drank into the night, discussing the art and politics of Imperial Austria—as well as dancing, playing music, and reading aloud. These friends would be his support system, sustaining his short life by lending a piano, sharing in his compositions, or offering a place to sleep.

Those days were filled with ups and downs: A friend was jailed for sedition. Schubert battled depression. He was never financially secure, yet was not entirely unappreciated. In fact, while on vacation in 1825, he wrote to his parents: “I find my compositions everywhere all over Upper Austria.”

Between 1815 and 1817, he wrote some 300 songs. “Die Forelle,” The Trout, probably came from this time, although there is an amusing account from Schubert’s friend Anselm Hüttenbrenner. He reported that the two of them had drained a few bottles before the 21-year-old composer wrote the song in 1818. Other sources suggest the music had been in Schubert’s head since 1817. In any case, he produced that manuscript and added the time stamp: “at 12 o’clock at night.”

In 1819, Schubert and baritone Josef Vogl, vacationed together in the town of Steyr in Upper Austria where they took hikes into the mountains by day and played music by night. There, they got to know a local merchant and (not-so-good) amateur cellist named Sylvester Paumgartner, who had outfitted his home for music making. It was Paumgartner who suggested that Schubert write a quintet modeled after one they had played by Johann Nepomuk Hummel—that is, it was scored for violin, viola, cello, double bass and piano. By request, Schubert incorporated Paumgartner’s favorite song “The Trout” into the fourth movement.



SCHUBERT: Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 114, “Trout”

This is an ASO premiere.

Instrumentation: Quintet: piano, violin, viola, cello, contrabass

A photograph of a man with glasses, wearing a blue dress shirt and a striped tie, playing a double bass. He is looking down and to the left with a focused expression. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting with warm lighting.

XAVIER DUBOIS FOLEY: *For Justice and Peace*

From the Composer:

This double concerto, co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall, Sphinx Organization, and the New World Symphony, was created to mark the 400 years of slavery ever since the arrival of the slave ship “White Lion” in Jamestown, Virginia. The work features a chorus at the end, where they sing text inspired by frequent court cases where slaves have asked for their freedom, which was often denied because of the color of their skin.

*“Please your Honor, where’s my freedom?
We shall have equality, with liberty and justice for all!”*

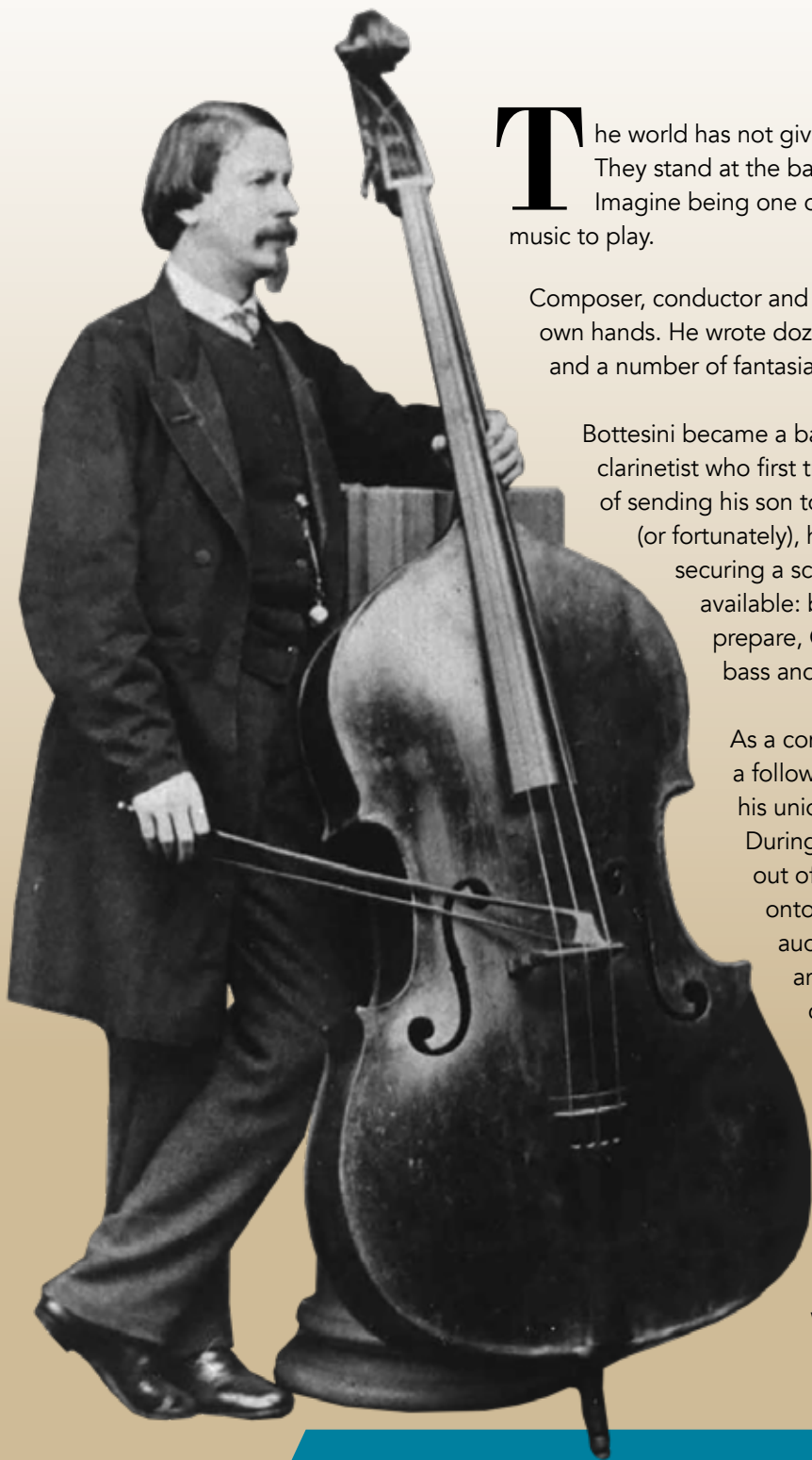
This work also features a gavel, which represents the justice system that slowly took away colored people’s rights as the years passed. The soloists, which features the double bass and violin, represent two principle voices that paint the full picture of what life was like during slavery in what was soon to be considered the United States of America.

XAVIER DUBOIS FOLEY: *For Justice and Peace*

This is an ASO premiere.

Instrumentation: Solo double bass, strings, soprano, alto, tenor, bass

BOTTESINI: Double Bass Concerto No. 2 in B Minor

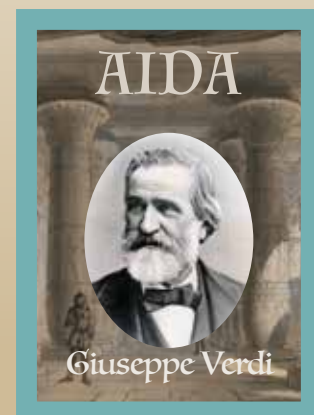


The world has not given classical bass players many opportunities to shine. They stand at the back of the orchestra and only rarely get to play solos. Imagine being one of the greatest players ever, but having too little solo music to play.

Composer, conductor and bass player Giovanni Bottesini took matters into his own hands. He wrote dozens of works for solo double bass, including concertos and a number of fantasias on famous opera arias.

Bottesini became a bass player almost by accident. His father was a clarinetist who first trained the boy on violin. The elder Bottesini dreamed of sending his son to the prestigious Milan Conservatory. Unfortunately (or fortunately), he couldn't afford the tuition, so he inquired about securing a scholarship. As it happened, there were only two available: bassoon and double bass. With just a few weeks to prepare, Giovanni switched instruments, auditioned on double bass and won.

As a conductor, Bottesini developed a following in the opera house for his unique sense of showmanship. During intermission, he would climb out of the orchestra pit, lug his bass onto the stage and dazzle the audience with improvisations on arias from whatever show he was conducting. A longtime friend of Giuseppe Verdi, Bottesini led the world premiere of *Aida* in Cairo in 1871.



For bass players, he wrote music that not only coaxes the full expressive range out of the instrument, but actually expanded bass-playing technique. The Concerto No. 2 for Double Bass, written in 1845, features a staggering six-octave range.

BOTTESINI: Double Bass Concerto No. 2 in B Minor

First & Most Recent ASO Performance: **JUN 14, 2014** | **Gemma New, conductor** | **Xavier Foley, double bass**
Instrumentation: **Solo double bass, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 timpani, strings**