2015

The Missing Link: Filling the gap and achieving success in Australian contrabass auditions

Giovanni Vinci

Edith Cowan University

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The Missing Link: Filling the Gap and Achieving Success in Australian Contrabass Auditions

Giovanni Vinci

Supervisor: Tim White

Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts
Edith Cowan University

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Bachelor of Music Honours

2015
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis;
(iii) contain any defamatory material;
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Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
The Missing Link: Filling the Gap and Achieving Success in Australian Contrabass Auditions

Abstract

In Australia, a contrabass player who wishes to win a full-time orchestral position must pass a formal audition. Australian contrabass auditions normally consist of both solo works and a set of orchestral excerpts. In order to be successful in the audition, the aspiring musician must meet the standard expected by the adjudicating panel of musicians. This dissertation explores the keys to success in such auditions, shining light upon why some musicians are successful and others not. A series of interviews have been conducted with string musicians around Australia to assist in discovering optimal strategies and approaches to achieving success. Practising and studying the required orchestral excerpts is also key to performing a successful audition. This process can be achieved by systematically working through contrabass excerpt books, accumulating a knowledge of the repertoire and developing a high performance standard in preparation for auditions. However, there is a gap within the commercially available contrabass excerpt books. In these books, the information provided by the authors is limited to the orchestral part, marked only with bowings and fingerings. While information regarding bowing and fingerings is useful, incorporating information regarding tempo, vibrato, bow use, dynamics, orchestral context, phrasing and expression would also be beneficial. This dissertation explores the missing link neglected by these texts and offers a more comprehensive guide to the preparation of seven of the most frequently requested orchestral excerpts in Australia.
Acknowledgments

I extend my sincerest thanks to my supervisor, Tim White, for your knowledge, guidance and expertise throughout the process of assembling this dissertation. Your friendly attitude and willingness to help, even in the busiest of times, is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

To my family – thank you for your support throughout this research project, and my time at university. I would not be where I am without your support.

To all my mentors and colleagues who participated in this research. Your advice and expertise on audition preparation are fruitful and valuable. Thank you.
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Introduction

The primary goal of most aspiring contrabass players is to win a full-time orchestral job. For a bass player, there are few career opportunities as an international soloist and limited opportunities to play full-time in chamber music ensembles. Therefore, most players seek an orchestral position. The average number of contrabass players in an Australian professional state orchestra is six, and full-time positions in Australia become available only once or twice a year. Consequently, it is imperative that going into the audition, the aspiring professional is fully prepared and ready. In addition to this, competition for full-time positions is fierce, and the required standards are high. Often, no one will be appointed to the job, even after heavy deliberation. Nowadays, the criteria that a musician must meet can range from very specific technical abilities to general attitude and professional conduct. If a musician successfully passes the audition round(s) and is offered a trial, this process of winning a position becomes more complex. Upon the completion of the trial, the panel will discuss the applicant’s progress and decide whether or not the candidate will be granted a permanent position in the orchestra. The key to performing a successful orchestral audition is through the thorough preparation of excerpts and solos, via an effective and established practise routine.

Auditions are difficult to win and can be a stressful process, especially if travel is involved. Each year, three to four orchestral contrabass jobs become available in Australia, and therefore, traveling to an audition in another city is always going to be a factor to consider. The scarcity of contrabass positions attracts interest and competition from musicians all over the globe, so it is imperative that one is equipped with the best preparation routine ahead of investing time, energy and money into the application process. Players need guidance and resources to assist them in this process. Valuable guidance can come from teachers and tutors, who provide specific and general advice on how to competently play one’s instrument. The study of this dissertation will be informed by undertaking a series of interviews with a number of musicians and audition panellists around Australia, revealing the most effective strategies for achieving success in auditions.

The study of orchestral excerpts has long been a standard part of the life of young professionals seeking an orchestral job. These excerpts are taken out of the larger orchestral context, isolated and studied as separate passages. Every instrument of the symphony orchestra has a repertoire of excerpts that are rhythmically, technically, stylistically, or musically challenging. These passages are a challenge for musicians of all calibres, and as a result, literature and excerpt books, articles and masterclasses are readily available and provide a valuable resource for aspiring professionals. These resources offer educated guidance by professionals in this field.
Orchestra excerpts are especially difficult because they are very short, incomplete, they
don’t sound very good on their own, they are no fun to practise, and they present all
sorts of technical difficulties.\(^1\)

Perhaps the resource that is most readily available for aspiring orchestral bass players is
published orchestral excerpt literature. Generally, these are known as ‘excerpt books’, and consist of
compilations of challenging excerpts from the orchestral repertoire. These books are helpful;
however, they are generally limited in the scope of their advice by usually only providing guidance
regarding bowing and fingering. This is helpful to a certain extent, but also limited. For a young
professional student who desires to expand their understanding and immersion of the orchestral
context, a better model could be created.

Learn about the composer, the era, and the composition. Learn when the composer
lived, the musical style of the era, and apply this knowledge to the audition.\(^2\)

A review of the current commercially available literature for the contrabass reveals that none of
them provide comprehensive information and guidance dealing with a host of aspects that need to
be incorporated in one’s playing. Details pertaining to cultural context, orchestral context, vibrato,
phrasing, dynamics, and preparation need to be discussed in order to produce an effective, multi-
faceted didactic companion.

I. Rationale

A gap exists within the currently available pedagogical resources for contrabassists. Currently,
few - if any - comprehensive contrabass guidebooks exist. The texts that are useful have a deficiency
of instructional assistance, and have the potential to be made redundant by easy access to the
International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP)\(^3\), a resourceful database compiling thousands of
musical scores, partnered with a rising number of websites pertaining to orchestral excerpts. For
example, the website [www.doublebassexcerpts.com](http://www.doublebassexcerpts.com) offers a wide range of excerpts, displays the
sheet music (often the most commonly used published orchestral parts) and incorporates three


\(^3\) International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP), Petrucci Music Library. [http://imslp.org/](http://imslp.org/)
recordings of professional orchestras with pioneering conductors. The currently available guidebooks are both deficient in content, and are superseded by the quality of resources readily available online. This is the grounds for this research and one of many reasons why it would be beneficial to have a fresh, new text. This research will explore this gap in resources, and will propose a new model and format for orchestral excerpt guidebooks.

II. Research Questions

The research questions for this dissertation cover the audition process as a whole, and explore the different pathways that an aspiring orchestral musician might take in order to achieve success. These questions are designed to gather information and break down obstacles that musicians may face in the lead up to an audition:

- How are current Australian orchestral contrabass auditions structured? What repertoire is required as part of this process?
- Why do musicians win or lose auditions? Are there some effective strategies for success?
- How helpful is the current existing orchestral excerpt literature to contrabass players?
- Is it possible to create more comprehensive and useful literature?

III. Methodology

A number of different research techniques were used in order to gather information and produce findings, including document searches and analyses, interviews, one-on-one lessons with experts in the contrabass field and practise-led research. The process taken is outlined below:

1) **Document retrieval**: A series of emails were sent out to the librarians of each professional orchestra in Australia requesting an archival search of past auditions and audition lists. When they were received, the audition documents were examined in order to determine which were the most commonly requested orchestral excerpts and solo works. From this, a statistical table was assembled displaying the excerpts and how frequently they were required in Australian contrabass auditions. A selection of seven excerpts was taken from the top polling results; the list includes symphonic excerpts and opera orchestra solos.

2) **Literature review**: All of the contrabass excerpt books currently commercially available in Australia were sourced and examined. These books were reviewed and scrutinised to gauge
the range and type of information provided by each author and editor. Along with this, a review of other instrument excerpt books was conducted to see whether there are any better models available for this type of resource.

3) **Gathering information:** Interviews were conducted with some of Australia’s leading contrabass players and orchestral audition panellists to explore different strategies leading up to an audition. These interviews focused on audition preparation, passing an audition, practise strategies and excerpt analysis from a performance perspective. The interviews were conducted with contrabassists from three of Australia’s professional state orchestras and they explored different ways of deconstructing and preparing each orchestral excerpt. Amongst many musical facets, the discussion covered topics including: colour palette, types of vibrato, appropriate bow use, rhythmic applications, technical obstacles, orchestral context, creativity, and musicianship. These interviews were audio recorded and transcriptions are provided in the appendices of this dissertation. These interviews provided great insight and valuable information.

4) **Guidebook creation:** A multi-faceted and detailed guide to the preparation and performance of the seven most requested contrabass excerpts was created (Chapter 5 of this dissertation). The information includes background about the composer and context in which the larger work was written. Along with this, a breakdown of the various challenging aspects of the excerpts, based on the information gathered through the interview process, was written out. This research leads directly to an examination of the effective practise techniques, contextual aspects to consider and various approaches to performing the excerpt in an audition setting. The breakdown of each excerpt in Chapter 5 covers a broad range of issues that aspiring professionals will encounter while preparing audition excerpts.

IV. **Literature Review**

A number of published contrabass orchestral excerpt books are available in Australia. These books generally present a comprehensive range of key orchestral excerpts: excerpts which are frequently requested in professional auditions. There are also several books that focus on the
repertoire of one or a few composers. Oscar Zimmerman\(^4\), for example, has published ten excerpt books which are specific to Beethoven, Brahms, Bach, Tchaikovsky and others. It is beneficial to study these books, but they lack a detailed analysis that would help students overcome obstacles. In general, all of the commercially available contrabass orchestral excerpt books provide advice limited to the issues of bowings and fingerings. The usefulness of Zimmerman’s books, for example, would be greatly enhanced through the inclusion of sections or chapters devoted to advice and guidance, particularly in the book dedicated to the works of Richard Strauss. For example, the Also Sprach Zarathustra excerpt presents challenges which may seem overwhelming due to its musical complexity and length. A section dedicated to tackling this would greatly assist the preparation of this excerpt. The Orchester Probespiel texts published by Maßmann and Reinke\(^5\) are similarly limited. They provide a useful compilation of excerpts, but their advice is limited to bowings and fingerings.

An examination of orchestral excerpt books prepared for other instruments reveals some more effective models for such resource books. For example, more comprehensive and multi-faceted advice can be found in an excerpt book compiled by Randy Max entitled Orchestral Excerpts for Timpani\(^6\). Incorporated in Max’s text are well supported and reliable instructions on how to prepare for each excerpt. Max also provides suggestions on how to be actively aware in an orchestral setting, as well as analysis, tempo recommendations, practise techniques, orchestral context and deconstructive practise. Max also inserts scans of the original editions generally used in the orchestral setting. This text surpasses any other contrabass excerpt book that has been found, as it offers a more thoughtful approach and outlines structured preparatory processes. Similarly, John Tafoya’s The Working Timpanist’s Survival Guide; A Practical Approach to Audition Excerpts for the Orchestral Timpanist\(^7\) contains a deconstruction and analysis of twenty-two of the most frequently requested timpani audition excerpts. This book is clearly formatted, displays the excerpt taken from the published orchestral score, shows the bar numbers of the excerpt and the movement from which it comes, a recommended tempo, recommended mallets, some important considerations as well as a few practise tips. Overall, Tafoya offers useful performance practises for the student and professional timpanist, thus making it a valuable text for performance practise, preparation and preparation.

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routine. Both of these books include compact disks featuring orchestral performances of each excerpt.

Many theses and dissertations pertaining to the study of orchestral excerpts and the audition process are accessible online. Many have been submitted for the degree for Doctor of Musical Arts, published in America. They offer detailed studies and analyses of selected orchestral repertoire specific to instruments such as the violin and cello. Lawrence Anthony Brandolino’s dissertation in performance entitled “A Study of Orchestral Audition Repertoire for Violin”\(^8\) “attempts to satisfy the need for a curriculum of audition repertoire study in the applied lesson”\(^9\). Brandolino’s document focuses on performance problems found in 373 surveyed excerpts and offers solutions with regard to bowings, fingerings and metronome markings. This resource is helpful but does not offer broad content identifying problems and suggested solutions. Susan Elizabeth Moyer’s dissertation “A Detailed Study of Selected Orchestral Excerpts for Cello”\(^{10}\) functions in a similar vein to that of Brandolino. Moyer offers an all rounded, informational package to combat the difficulties of auditions and a well-informed deconstruction of how to prepare selected cello excerpts. She identifies and analyses the pressure points of each excerpt and suggests ways to contest these areas. Moyer references her advice with numerous scholarly articles and book reviews. The resource is clearly formatted and comprehensive.

However, there do not appear to be any similar dissertations or theses pertaining specifically to the contrabass, although a number of theses specific to the orchestral audition repertoire for the piccolo, flute, clarinet, French horn, trumpet, trombone and tuba have been sourced. Two dissertations focus on the contrabass: one focusing on the audition process itself, and another that deals with overcoming technical barriers based on étude studies. However, there are none that focus on deconstructing contrabass excerpts.

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Tony Brandolino’s article “Winning an Orchestral Audition: Advice from the Pros”\(^\text{11}\) offers a range of suggestions and reiterates the importance of preparation and practise. Brandolino emphasises that one can never be over-prepared, whether it is playing the concerto for the purposes of demonstrating showmanship, or preparing and presenting the orchestral excerpts. In his discussion with orchestral concertmasters, Brandolino presents a checklist of essential audition abilities: secure intonation, stable rhythm, the ability to blend with a section, musicality and a solid tone.

In May 2014, *The Strad*\(^\text{12}\) published an insightful article informed by London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) first violinist, Maxine Kwok-Adams, entitled “How to be Successful in an Orchestral Audition”\(^\text{13}\). Presented in a question and answer format, Kwok-Adams recommends a variety of preparatory techniques. She underlines the importance of being prepared, and advises on how technology can assist in this process. She comments that, from her observations of being on audition panels, many candidates are not familiar enough with the excerpts that they are required to play. This deficiency can be resolved through better preparation research, for example, listening to recordings and gathering contextual knowledge. Kwok-Adams asserts that orchestral excerpts are of greater importance than the chosen concerto in LSO auditions. If one dazzles in their concerto but comes up short in presenting rhythmically stable, in-tune and well-informed excerpts, it is unlikely they will succeed in the audition. With the ubiquity of online recordings, there is no excuse for candidates to fall short in their research of the repertoire.

In the same issue of *The Strad*, an article written by Chicago Symphony Orchestra cellist Brant Taylor entitled “10 Tips for a Successful Orchestral Audition”\(^\text{14}\) offers advice in the form of anecdotal gems to hopeful candidates. Taylor stresses that the best antidote for anxiety is preparation. The more one is prepared, the less stressed they will be. He emphasises the importance of producing a good sound, accepting that things might not go the way that one plans, and that the panel is always interested to see how one recovers from mistakes if they do occur.


A valuable resource for all musicians, albeit specific to trumpeters, is Heather Victoria Rodabaugh’s DMA dissertation entitled “Preparation for Orchestral Trumpet Auditions: The Perspectives of Three Prominent Orchestra Players”\(^\text{15}\). In this research, Rodabaugh interviews three orchestral trumpet players and both unpacks the audition process and provides advice on selected excerpts. Advice from trumpeters Robert Platt and Marie Speziale is summarised by two major points: “the most difficult aspect of an audition is mental attitude, and the concept of each excerpt must be so strong that it is as though you brought the rest of the orchestra in with you. Along with this, is the importance of professional decorum, preparation and having only one shot to make a good first impression.”\(^\text{16}\)

In recent years, there have been a number of published books on the issues of performance psychology that are encountered by classical musicians. These books are designed to assist performers to train their minds before and during an audition. Olympic sports psychologist Don Greene Ph.D. has written two books - *Performance Success*\(^\text{17}\) and *Audition Success*\(^\text{18}\) which explore the power of the mind in high pressure situations. Both books are valuable as they discuss real life situations and how to best deal with them. Incorporating many interviews with American professional musicians, these texts systematically examine the psychological obstacles that musicians face in preparation for an audition. These texts provide thoughtful anecdotes and useful processes to preparation for auditions.

In a similar vein, Martin Wulfhorst’s *The Orchestral Violinist’s Companion* is a comprehensive text which explains the violinist’s position in the orchestra. Its topics include issues that are faced by professional orchestral violinists such as learning repertoire, practising, sight reading, technique and how to conduct oneself in an audition. This is a valuable text that provides answers to a myriad of questions.


Chapter 1: What is an audition? How is it structured and operated?

When a full-time vacancy arises in an Australian symphony orchestra, a new player is appointed following an audition process. An audition allows a range of applicants to showcase their skills to a judging panel appointed by the orchestra. The goal of the panel is to identify the applicant or applicants who best demonstrate mastery of instrumental technique, comprehensive knowledge of the literature and persuasive musicianship.

In Australian symphony orchestras, vacant positions can either be tenured or contracted. Obtaining a full-time tenured orchestral job is preferred by many musicians as it allows them to build experience, financial stability, job security, musical credibility, satisfaction and community service. Contracted jobs – which can vary in length from months to years – are offered by some orchestras. Tenure offers stability and contracted positions allow a frequent turnover of musicians within the orchestra.

In Australia, professional orchestras advertise full-time vacancies on their websites, through their networks, and in online sites such as ‘Musical Chairs’ and ‘Music Australia’. Occasionally, orchestras will also advertise in print, that is, in newspapers or orchestral magazines. To apply for a vacant position, one first sends an application to the hiring orchestra. In this day and age, technology plays a major role in communication. The applicant must send in a résumé or curriculum vitae (CV) which outlines their experience, education, achievements and personal details. “Résumés are a huge giveaway, so making yours clear and concise so that it explains in seconds exactly what you’ve done is a huge benefit.”¹⁹ If the number of applicants is expansive, a CV review may be conducted, the list of applicants may be narrowed down, and a shortlist of candidates may be created. For those who successfully win the audition round, a trial or probation period is generally granted with the length decided by the orchestra. The purpose of the trial is not only about playing within the orchestra, but to examine issues such as “musically blending with the ensemble, and showing the highest standards of professional behaviours and musical preparedness.”²⁰

A list of the performance requirements for an audition is usually sent out to applicants either via email or by post. There is a lot of variation as to when this process occurs. Often, but not always, the excerpts are sent to candidates two weeks prior to the audition. On some occasions, they are


distributed months ahead, and at other times weeks ahead. Whichever the case, it is paramount that preparation of the excerpts begin immediately.

The structure of an audition is usually broken down into three parts: orchestral excerpts, solo concerto and sight reading. Each applicant prepares a list of excerpts chosen by the orchestra. The number of excerpts chosen varies, and is dependent on the vacant position or on the preference of the panel chairman. Auditions for principal and associate principal positions generally have a larger number and range of excerpts, whereas auditions for casual musicians are often short and limited. The primary purpose of these excerpts is to identify which candidates have a thorough understanding of the literature as well as technical proficiency and good sound production. The solo concerto is an opportunity for the candidate to showcase their musicality and style as a musician. Often, a movement from two contrasting concertos is requested, and usually the exposition of the first movement will be heard. The primary purpose of this is to gauge the candidate’s sense of musical style and technical ability. This opportunity also helps to settle nerves and allows the musician to get accustomed to the venue acoustics. Some orchestras, but not all, will have a sight reading component in the audition. This is to judge how a musician interprets music upon reading it, their response to what is marked on the page and their ability to maintain a logical flow despite making mistakes.

In the days leading up to an audition, applicants may be offered a time to rehearse their concerto with an accompanist provided by the orchestra. On the day of the audition, each applicant will be shown to a warm-up room. The warm-up room may be a private, quiet room that allows undistracted mental preparation, or it could be a communal, noisy environment which all applicants have to share. At the conclusion of the audition, the panel confers and decides on the success of the applicants. When all applicants have progressed through the round, the panel’s decision is relayed to the candidates by a member of the managerial staff. Applicants are entitled to request feedback from the panel after the audition, which is almost always granted. Post-audition feedback may be delivered in person, over the phone or via email.

The structure of the audition is generally broken down into a series of rounds. All auditioning candidates are heard in Round 1. The panel decides how many excerpts it will hear during the first round; generally they choose a small selection of excerpts from the larger list prepared by the applicants. At the conclusion of this round the panel will discuss the candidates and decide which applicants will proceed further in the process. Once the first round has concluded, the notification of success or otherwise will be made by a managerial staff member, and the successful candidates
compete in Round 2. The panel will usually request a different selection of excerpts in the second round. The selection procedure continues at the end of each round with the process of elimination continuing until the panel is satisfied that the remaining applicant/s has/have met the desired standard. It is possible that none of the applicants will be deemed to have met the requirements of the orchestra, and thus no appointment will be made.

The panel of adjudicating musicians has the responsibility of deciding which applicant/s has/have successfully met the desired standard. In Australia, the panel can be small or large; it may comprise of a number of principal players from the orchestra, a whole section of the orchestra, or even the whole orchestra itself. Sometimes the principal conductor of the orchestra will sit on the panel along with members of the managerial staff. In some cases, an outside professional may be asked to sit on the panel to offer an additional expert opinion.

Australian orchestras also make use of a variety of venues. Auditions may be held on the stage of a concert hall, in a moderately-sized rehearsal room or in a small practise room. Every venue will present different acoustical challenges. The auditions also may be screened, whereby a screen is placed between the musician and panel, ensuring anonymity on both sides of the audition. This is to eliminate bias and ensure fairness to each candidate.

Many Australian orchestras offer the option to do a recorded audition rather than a live audition. Sending a recording is generally preferred by international applicants and their auditions are submitted via audio or visual audio tape. In a recorded audition, the candidate records the required excerpts and repertoire in a continuous take (or as specified by the auditioning orchestra) and submits it as their application for the vacant position. At times the request for only live auditions or only recorded auditions will be made. The method is at the discretion of the auditioning orchestra.
Chapter 2: What are the most commonly requested contrabass excerpts and solos?

The role of the contrabass within an orchestra is arguably one of the least recognised, yet most important. The contrabass section functions as a harmonic foundation, provides a rhythmic basis, and can offer an attentive accompaniment. At times, the contrabass section and/or its leader will perform solo. As a result, audition panels tend to request a list of excerpts which require each applicant to showcase these attributes. The orchestral contrabass literature encapsulates a range of challenges faced in the orchestra, as well as the rare solo or section soli.

I have examined Australian orchestral audition papers dating from 1975 to July 2015, retrieved from the archives of numerous professional Australian state orchestras. The following list shows the frequency with which individual orchestral excerpts are requested from the twenty-eight Australian contrabass auditions I have sourced:

*Figure 1. Table listing requested excerpt frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, Richard</td>
<td>Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40</td>
<td>Figure 9 – 4 Bars after Figure 11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Ludwig Van</td>
<td>Symphony No. 5, Op. 67</td>
<td>Movement III; Scherzo Bar 1 - 95</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Ludwig Van</td>
<td>Symphony No. 5, Op. 67</td>
<td>Movement III; Trio Bar 140 - 177</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Ludwig Van</td>
<td>Symphony No. 9, Op. 125</td>
<td>Movement IV; Bar 1 - 90</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi, Giuseppe</td>
<td>Otello</td>
<td>Act IV; Figure U to 7 Bars after Figure X</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus</td>
<td>Symphony No. 40, K550</td>
<td>Movement I; Bar 114-135</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prokofiev, Sergei</td>
<td>Lieutenant Kijé Suite Op. 60</td>
<td>Movement II; Bar 3 – 10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stravinsky, Igor</td>
<td>Pulcinella Suite</td>
<td>Movement VII; Vivo</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlioz, Hector</td>
<td>Symphonie Fantastique, H 48</td>
<td>Movement V; Bar 201 - 305</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composer, Full Name</td>
<td>Work, Full Title</td>
<td>Movement/Bar Information</td>
<td>Duration</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Berlioz, Hector</strong></td>
<td>Symphonie Fantastique, H 48</td>
<td>Movement IV; 10 Bars after Figure 56 – 2 Bars after Figure 59</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ginastera, Alberto</strong></td>
<td>Variationes Concertantes Op. 23</td>
<td>Movement XI</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beethoven, Ludwig Van</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 9, Op. 125</td>
<td>Movement IV; Bar 431 - 525</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brahms, Johannes</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 2, Op. 73</td>
<td>Movement II; Bar 47 - 55</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mahler, Gustav</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 1</td>
<td>Movement III; Bar 3 - 10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schubert, Franz</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 9, D944</td>
<td>Movement III; Figure B – 4 Bars after Figure C</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shostakovich, Dmitri</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 5, Op. 47</td>
<td>Movement I; 3 Bars after Figure 23 – 4 Bars after Figure 26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brahms, Johannes</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 2, Op. 73</td>
<td>Movement IV; Bar 244 - 279</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Britten, Benjamin</strong></td>
<td>Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra</td>
<td>Variation H</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ginastera, Alberto</strong></td>
<td>Concerto for Strings, Op. 33</td>
<td>Movement IV; Variation IV, 9 Bars before Figure 70 to the end</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mahler, Gustav</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 3</td>
<td>Movement I; Figure 43 – 1 Bar after Figure 47</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 39, K543</td>
<td>Movement I; Bar 14 – 20, 40 – 52, 86 – 96</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 39, K543</td>
<td>Movement IV; Bar 105 - 137</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus</strong></td>
<td>Symphony No. 41, K551</td>
<td>Movement IV; Bar 1 - 135</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Langlais, Jean</strong></td>
<td>Organ Concerto</td>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strauss, Richard</strong></td>
<td>Also sprach Zarathustra, Op. 30</td>
<td>4 Bars before Figure 3 – 16 Bars after Figure 3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composer</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Section/Phrase</td>
<td>Duration</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahms, Johannes</td>
<td>Symphony No. 1, Op. 68</td>
<td>Movement II; Bar 47 – 60</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydn, Joseph</td>
<td>Symphony No. 8, Hob. 1:8</td>
<td>Movement III; Trio Bar 37 - 82</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, Richard</td>
<td>Don Juan, Op. 20</td>
<td>Beginning until Figure D, Figure F – 3 Bars before Figure G</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britten, Benjamin</td>
<td>Variations on a theme of Frank Bridge</td>
<td>March; Beginning to End (Bar 1 – 45)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Ludwig Van</td>
<td>Symphony No. 4, Op. 60</td>
<td>Movement II; Bar 35 - 41</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milhaud, Darius</td>
<td>La Creation du Monde</td>
<td>1 Bar before Figure 11 – 3 Bars after Figure 15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus</td>
<td>Symphony No. 35, K385</td>
<td>Beginning – Bar 54, Bar 134 - 197</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus</td>
<td>Symphony No. 40, K550</td>
<td>Movement IV; Bar 49 – 70, Bar 228 – 247</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bach, Johann Sebastian</td>
<td>Orchestral Suite No. 2 BWV 1067</td>
<td>Badinerie; Beginning to End (Bar 1 – 39)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Ludwig Van</td>
<td>Symphony No. 5, Op. 67</td>
<td>Movement II; Bar 114 - 123</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prokofiev, Sergei</td>
<td>Romeo and Juliet Suite 2, Op. 64</td>
<td>Movement V; 5 Bars before Figure 50 – Figure 51</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Ilyich</td>
<td>Symphony No. 4, Op. 36</td>
<td>Movement I; 3 Bars after Figure B – 6 Bars before Figure D, Figure P – 1 Bar after Figure Q</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weber, Carl Maria von</td>
<td>Euryanthe, Op. 81</td>
<td>Overture; 5 Bars after Figure B – Figure C, 12 Bars before Figure G – End</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartók, Béla</td>
<td>Concerto for Orchestra, Sz. 116</td>
<td>Figure 35 – Figure 58</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartók, Béla</td>
<td>Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste</td>
<td>Movement I; 2 Bars after Figure 35 – 2 Bars after Figure 55</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Ludwig Van</td>
<td>Symphony No. 1, Op. 21</td>
<td>Movement I; Bar 12 – 52, 65 – 100</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composer</td>
<td>Work Title</td>
<td>Section Details</td>
<td>Measure/Bar</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Ludwig Van</td>
<td>Symphony No. 3, Op. 92</td>
<td>Movement III; Bar 31 – 127</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Ludwig Van</td>
<td>Symphony No. 7, Op. 92</td>
<td>Movement I; Bar 277 - 300</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britten, Benjamin</td>
<td>Peter Grimes</td>
<td>Scene 1; 2 Bars before Figure 11 – 1 Bar after Figure 12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Françaix, Jean</td>
<td>Six Preludes for String Orchestra</td>
<td>Movement IV; Beginning – 2 Bars after Figure 18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydn, Joseph</td>
<td>Symphony No. 31, Hob. 1:31</td>
<td>Movement IV; Variation 7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydn, Joseph</td>
<td>Symphony No. 45, Hob. 1:45</td>
<td>Movement II; Bar 55 – 67</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindson, Matthew</td>
<td>Auto Electric</td>
<td>3 Bars after Figure H – 2 Bars after Figure I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahler, Gustav</td>
<td>Symphony No. 9</td>
<td>Movement IV; Bar 3 – 24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendelssohn, Felix</td>
<td>Symphony No. 4, Op. 90</td>
<td>Movement I; Bar 269 – 334</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mendelssohn, Felix</td>
<td>Symphony No. 4, Op. 90</td>
<td>Movement IV; Bar 32 – 52</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint-Saëns, Camille</td>
<td>Carnival of the Animals</td>
<td>Movement V; L’Éléphant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoenberg, Arnold</td>
<td>Chamber Symphony No. 1, Op. 9</td>
<td>2 Bars before Figure 97 – 3 Bars after Figure 99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, Richard</td>
<td>Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op. 28</td>
<td>4 Bars before Figure 18 – 6 Bars before Figure 20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, Richard</td>
<td>Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op. 28</td>
<td>8 Bars before Figure 31 – Figure 32</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strauss, Richard</td>
<td>Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op. 28</td>
<td>3 Bars before Figure 37 – 10 Bars before Figure 38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Ilyich</td>
<td>1812 Festival Overture, Op. 49</td>
<td>5 Bars after Figure A – Figure C</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamson, Malcolm</td>
<td>Sinfonietta</td>
<td>Grave</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most Australian contrabass auditions also require the applicant to perform one or more movements from a solo concerto. An examination of Australian auditions shows that the most frequently requested solo concerti are works by Giovanni Bottesini, Serge Koussevitzky, Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf and Jean Baptiste Vanhal – i.e. two classical and two romantic concerti – each presenting technical and musical challenges. The solo works provide applicants with an opportunity to showcase their musical ability, technique and style in a solo context.

Figure 2. Table listing the four main contrabass concerti

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottesini, Giovanni</td>
<td>Concerto No. 2 in B Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dittersdorf, Carl Ditters von</td>
<td>Concerto No. 2 in D Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koussevitzky, Serge</td>
<td>Contrabass Concerto Op. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanhal, Jean Baptiste</td>
<td>Double Bass Concerto in C Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dittersdorf’s *Concerto for Contrabass No. 2 in D Major* and Vanhal’s *Double Bass Concerto in C Major* are both technically intricate and need to be performed with stylistic accuracy.

The romantic challenges of Serge Koussevitzky’s *Contrabass Concerto Op. 3* and Giovanni Bottesini’s *Double Bass Concerto No. 2 in B Minor* exhibit marked musical differences. Commonly, a candidate would play a movement from each concerto of both eras, with a cadenza.

In addition to the four works above, there are popular concerti by composers including Franz Anton Hoffmeister, Antonio Capuzzi, Domenico Dragonetti and Eduard Tubin. Occasionally, Australian orchestras offer applicants the opportunity to present a solo work of their choice.
Chapter 3: What are the secrets of success? Strategies and approaches that win or lose auditions.

Winning a full-time orchestral position is a key moment in the life and career of many aspiring contrabass players. However, competition is fierce, and few contrabass positions become available in Australia each year.

For a musician, the opportunity to perform a professional audition may arise at any point of their career. Auditions and their preparation can be physically and mentally demanding, whilst also being a great learning experience. Performing in an audition is considered by many musicians to be one of the most stressful situations they may face. The stress that applicants experience can arise from a number of factors including the venue and location of the audition, the size or attitude of the panel, the difficulty of the excerpts or solo work, or the perceived importance of the audition to the applicant’s life and career. In an audition, the important result may be decided on in minutes after many years of the applicant’s disciplined practise, and the audition is usually held in the presence of a panel of musicians with an esteemed degree of experience and expertise. The commonly shared feelings of stress experienced by musicians prior to an audition can be managed through mental and practical preparation, cognitive behaviour therapy, exercise and other strategies that support the individual.

In Australia, it is rare for a contrabass player to win an audition at their first attempt. “In order to land an orchestral job, you must not only be prepared, but also be extremely persistent.” Each experience can inform and enrich each subsequent audition opportunity, yet the requirement is always to be fully prepared musically, physically and mentally. “You need to know the literature really well. If you start to learn it on the day you get the audition list, it’s too late.” It is recommended that musicians accumulate a library of orchestral excerpts and resources for personal reference and practise. This library is invaluable for aspiring professionals as it assists them to

21 K, R. Violist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
22 S, A. Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
maintain their knowledge of excerpts at a high standard, so that when a position becomes vacant, most of the notes are familiar and can be re-learnt to a high standard in a short space of time.

The preparation involved for an audition includes developing a thorough understanding of each excerpt; and an important aspect of this is knowing why each excerpt has been chosen. One must identify the variety of challenges that each excerpt presents. This includes becoming familiar with the whole work in which the excerpts appear and comprehending how one’s part fits within this larger work. “The best players give you a sense that you can hear the rest of the orchestra around them.”

The resources and recordings that are readily available online today can be extremely valuable in the preparation of orchestral excerpts. There are a myriad of video and audio recordings featuring an extensive range of orchestras available on websites such as YouTube, and in accessible databases such as the Naxos Music Library. These options offer a number of high quality orchestral performances; on YouTube, one can watch a performance of a world class orchestra with a renowned conductor at no cost. Aspiring professionals can use these resources to study the tempo of each excerpt, to observe the orchestral context of the excerpt, take note of which bowings and fingerings are used, to understand the harmonic context of the music and the importance of playing the correct rhythm.

Listen to recordings of any of the excerpts listed that you may not have heard in full orchestral context. It will not do your chances any good if you are playing the excerpt with great confidence in your audition, blissfully unaware that the piece usually goes twice as fast!

The modern digital world offers a prolific range of easily accessible resources and online databases. However, until recently, the procedure for locating resources was far different. Recordings were found on compact records and cassette tapes, and were only available for purchase or loan from a shop or library. Sourcing recordings often took a great deal of time. The amount of recorded material now available online allows applicants to familiarise themselves with music performed by different orchestras and conductors, or in a different style. Extensive listening

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26 YouTube – online video sharing website, https://www.youtube.com/
preparation helps musicians to establish a reliable and consistent memory of the music, style and tempo.

“After you have all the right notes, rhythm, dynamics and intonation, the work really begins.” 29 Being deeply familiar with the music allows the performer to build creativity, interpretation and control. This musical confidence can be reflected in contrasts in dynamic, nuanced phrasing, rhythmic stability and personal style. “Many who play all the right notes, but lack personality in their sound, rarely win auditions.” 30

In an audition, it is important to demonstrate secure and consistent intonation, solid rhythmic stability, good sound production, technical mastery, persuasive melodic phrasing and confident knowledge of the literature. “The number one skill you need to get into an orchestra is good rhythm.” 31 Candidates should seek to demonstrate that they are conscientious, have done their research and are serious about filling the vacant position. It is unusual for a candidate who is underprepared to succeed in an audition. “If players are struggling with intonation, quality of sound, or any of the fundamentals of playing, they should reconsider taking an audition” 32. Progress to subsequent rounds in an audition depends on secure intonation, rhythmic stability, suitable and stable tempi, style and contextual understanding. If the candidate has not demonstrated a fundamental level of competency, they will be passed over by the panel. “There will always be another audition at a later time, but a bad first impression can never be reversed. Be committed to making a good first impression.” 33

Australian contrabass auditions usually require applicants to perform both a requested concerto and list of excerpts. Candidates often underestimate the importance of the orchestral excerpts. 34 Sometimes applicants put a lot of effort into showcasing a dazzling concerto, but give the

34 K, R. Violist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
excerpts little attention and thus fall short in the audition. “Candidates must remember that the job they are going for will require them to play orchestral repertoire for many years to come, rather than pursuing a solo focused career.” The concerto is an important part of the audition structure as it gives the candidate the opportunity to showcase their musicianship, soloistic flair, and creative style. Concerti give the panel an insight to the candidate’s artistry as well as their stylistic and musical decisions. They also help to ease the candidate into the new environment and get accustomed to the room they are playing in. The concerto should be fundamentally strong and well prepared, but it is important to note that a perfect concerto performance will not get you an orchestral job. A less-than-perfect concerto performance partnered with persuasive and intelligently played excerpts can still appeal strongly to an audition panel. However, an impressive concerto combined with uninformed and complacent attitude towards the excerpts will not get anyone past the first round. “The balance of the audition is heavily tipped in favour of how the excerpts are played.”

Along with excerpt research, it is important to have an understanding of the performance style and personality of the auditioning orchestra. It is very useful to build a knowledge of how the contrabass section plays, what type of bow strokes they use, how the different sections communicate and interact, and the types of personalities that musicians they have – whether there is an extroverted approach or a more introverted style. Some orchestras encourage their members to move around during performances; in extreme cases, some members play as if they are an international soloist. Other orchestras prefer a more disciplined physical approach, whereby movement is minimal so it does not distract other musicians. This approach varies from orchestra to orchestra and country to country, and it is important to understand this. If one can’t attend the orchestra’s concert, then finding recordings online is the next best thing. It is a good idea to approach a member of the section from the auditioning orchestra and to request some lessons.


37 K, R. Violist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.


39 D C, A. Violinist, International Soloist and Associate Professor of Strings at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. Interview by the author, October 2015.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.
The section player’s suggestions and advice will be well informed and invaluable in preparing for an audition.\textsuperscript{42} If applicants can organise lessons with a section member, it should be done well in advance of the audition so that the player’s suggestions can be taken on board, assimilated, retained, and practised.

Go to lessons three, four weeks before if you’ve got the excerpts that far in advance and work through and go several times to the same person while you get help from them. Because so many people don’t play for anyone and then they get there and there are glaring errors that could’ve been fixed by one person listening.\textsuperscript{43}

Even if you are not able to organise a lesson with someone from the auditioning orchestra, it is important to simulate a mock audition routine; performing the audition excerpt by excerpt in an appropriate venue and not stopping if a mistake is made. By doing this, one gets accustomed to the pace of the audition setting, and nothing will come as a surprise in the real event.

Play your solo and your excerpts in front of as many people as you can, as many times as you can. Anyone you play in front of will add an element of tension for a performance, and can be used to ascertain where problems are when the adrenaline flows.\textsuperscript{44}

It will be unpredictable prior to the audition to know which room the proceedings will take place in. To be prepared for this, one is advised to practise in a variety of rooms that are different sizes and built with different materials. It is advised that one understands how their instrument reacts in a dense, carpeted room compared to a wooden floorboard room; being familiar with one’s instrument will allow oneself to readily adapt to unfamiliar environments. If the audition is held on the stage at a concert hall, the recommendation is that an applicant should focus on a full tone production rather than trying to fill the whole hall with sound.\textsuperscript{45}

If a candidate decides to submit an audition via tape, it is recommended that it should be done in a professional studio. This may be expensive, but extremely worth the money. There is no substitute to submitting a good recording whereby the playing is...

\textsuperscript{42} K, R. Violist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.

\textsuperscript{43} K, R. Violist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.

\textsuperscript{44} W, J. Associate Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.

clean and crisp, and without any extraneous or distracting noise that impedes one’s performance.46

46 K, R. Violist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
Chapter 4: Current commercially available excerpt books and their limitations

Orchestral excerpt books can be an extraordinarily valuable resource in the study and preparation of orchestral auditions. Most orchestral excerpt books are compilations of important excerpts that are frequently requested on audition lists around the globe. The currently available contrabass literature offers a comprehensive collection of edited and lightly marked scores; however, these books are somewhat limited in the scope of their advice. These following texts are valuable, but are limited or deficient in many respects:

**Orchester Probespiel - Maßmann and Reinke**⁴⁷: Prefaced with a brief foreword outlining the importance on mastering not only solo repertoire, but also, orchestral excerpts, this text provides musicians with a substantial collection of general orchestral excerpts. The musical scores presented are clean, consistent and easy to read. Initial tempi, metronome markings and some articulations are given. Published in 1992, this text does not present many of the orchestral excerpts that are requested in contemporary auditions. Almost 90% of the excerpts in this book are published without any indication of bowing or fingering; these excerpts are left blank presumably for the musician to insert their own. The scope of the advice given is very limited, but at least a legible score is provided – although it has been re-typeset, and is not a copy of the version used in orchestras. To my knowledge, this is the only contrabass excerpt book that includes a CD recording of each featured excerpt.

**Schwabe, Oswald - Orchesterstudien Für Alle Instrumente Kontrabass**⁴⁸: Published in a comprehensive collection of ten volumes, this series of excerpt books offers a wide array of prominent orchestral excerpts. These books are categorised by composer with two volumes dedicated to Beethoven. The excerpts are clearly formatted and come with some recommended bowings and fingerings, along with the score tempo. This resource is useful as a comprehensive compilation of orchestral excerpts; however, these texts are deficient in offering advice and background information on context, sound, phrasing, tempo and preparation techniques.

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Madenski, Eduard. - STRAUSS Orchesterstudien aus den Symphonischen Werken für Kontrabass⁴⁹: This is an extremely valuable excerpt book for any aspiring contrabassist, and the text is solely devoted to the tone poems of Richard Strauss. The tone poems of Strauss feature some of the most technically and rhythmically demanding passages for contrabassists. The harmonic shifts also make these excerpts difficult. Numerous excerpts within ten of Strauss’s major works selected by Eduard Madenski of the Imperial Opera (Vienna Philharmonic Society) are presented with legible excerpts copied directly from the printed versions of the music performed by modern orchestras. These excerpts are marked with suggested fingerings, and have appropriate dynamic, tempo and musical terminology in both Italian and German, reinforcing the legitimacy of having an orchestral part. “It is always in your best interest to practise from original parts to avoid errors that seem to appear in reprints of excerpts in method books.”⁵⁰ This text would benefit from having additional advice or suggestions, as it is difficult to know how to deconstruct such a challenging excerpt at first reading. Strauss is notorious for demanding both an athletic and physical approach in the playing of all instruments, particularly the string section. An aspiring professional using this book will need additional advice from a contrabass teacher or orchestral player.

Zimmerman, Oscar G. – The Complete Bass Parts⁵¹: This resource is published in ten volumes, each dedicated to a different composer (for example Beethoven, Brahms or Tchaikovsky). This publication is very comprehensive; it examines a variety of challenging passages from a range of orchestral works, including many that are not popularly regarded as being prominent excerpts. The dedication of each volume to a sole composer affords a thorough examination of the entirety of each of their contrabass parts. “The Zimmerman books are carefully notated orchestra parts published by the former principal bassist of the New York Philharmonic, and are a valuable resource that should be purchased by any bass player with an interest in orchestral performance.”⁵²

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Chapter 5: Seven excerpts examined in depth with advice, context and useful information

This chapter aims to partially 'fill the gap' within the current commercially available contrabass repertoire. Informed by the findings of my survey of Australian contrabass audition lists, seven excerpts have been chosen, deconstructed, analysed and dissected in a number of ways.

The information presented has been gathered by undertaking a series of interviews with some of Australia’s leading contrabassists: full-time musicians from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. These interviews have been extraordinarily valuable in my preparation of these excerpts. They have assisted me to create a comprehensive resource for aspiring orchestral contrabassists. The seven experts discussed themes centred around preparation, practise and attitude, along with effective practise strategies. Contributing to this, is my own accumulated knowledge and study of these excerpts.

I have also undertaken a recording analysis of each excerpt. I have provided tables which outline the work, the orchestra, conductor, the year of the recording and the tempo of each excerpt. The aim of this table is to explore the variety of tempi in the recordings of each work. It is important for musicians to be aware of the different speeds with which these works have been played.

I would also like to point out that the recommendations provided in this text should not be considered as a sole strategy for audition preparation. Rather, I have suggested an approach to preparing these excerpts; one of a myriad of strategies that an aspiring orchestral contrabassist might employ. The following paragraphs summarise the expert panel’s views of the key aspects of each excerpt:

**Excerpt 1)** Strauss’s *Ein Heldenleben* presented the common challenges of precise shifting as well as rhythmic precision, intonation and bow distribution. Each professional contrabassist recognised the difficulty of this excerpt and suggested a combination of slow and technical practise, especially in arpeggios and broken thirds.

**Excerpt 2)** Mozart’s *Symphony No. 40 in G Minor* is seen as a particularly difficult excerpt for bow use. Each musician mentioned that there needs to be a consistency of articulation, clean string crossings as well as a relationship between the melodic and rhythmic material, along with exciting phrasing.
**Excerpt 3**) Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9 Recitative* was seen as an opportunity to showcase one’s beautiful, rich and full sound production. Each musician recommended being aware of the traditions of this recitative and emphasised the importance of knowing where *rubato* is allowed or expected.

**Excerpt 4 and 5**) The *Scherzo* and *Trio* from Beethoven’s 5th Symphony were regarded as two very important excerpts. Approaches to conquer these excerpts included slow scale and arpeggionic practise in double stops and broken thirds, fluid bow motion across all open strings at a soft dynamic and controlling a consistent *spiccato* bow stroke.

**Excerpt 6**) Verdi’s contrabass soli from his opera *Otello*, focuses on a vocal quality of sound and being able to showcase contrasts in colour and dynamics that reflect the narrative. This excerpt also creates colourful changes in character and allows the performer to evoke emotion, passion and suspense.

**Excerpt 7**) The *Ronde du Sabbat* from Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique* is an excerpt that is heavily marked with instructions from the composer. Rapid changes in dynamics, articulation, character and colour occur within this excerpt, and it is important to be acutely receptive of them. The experts recommended a very disciplined and methodical approach to preparing this excerpt, with further recommendation to compartmentalise the work in blocks with slow practise guided by a metronome. Below is a more thorough examination of these excerpts.
Excerpt One

Richard Strauss, *Ein Heldenleben Op. 40*; Figure 9 to Figure 11

*Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life)* Op. 40 was completed in 1898, and is the eighth tone poem in a series of ten; and demands great orchestral bravado. Strauss made a most significant contribution to program music; deemed a high point for this genre in the late 19th century. In these works, he extended the musical boundaries, widened the expressive quality of music and pushed each instrument to their limit. The result was astounding, with the narrative quality being very impressive.

Strauss grew up in a musical household, composing his first work at the age of six continuing until his death in 1949. Strauss was encouraged and supported by his father who was a horn player; he showed early promise as a musician, and when observing rehearsals of the Munich Court Orchestra during his formative years, he caught the eye of many conductors. *Ein Heldenleben* was written whilst Strauss was staying at a Bavarian mountain resort in July 1898, simultaneously as his previous tone poem *Don Quixote*, both of which contain parallel notions. *Ein Heldenleben* was said to be written in the mould of Beethoven’s *Eroica*; both works depicting ‘the ideal of great and manly heroism’.53

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Movement 1, Figure 9 to 4 Bars after Figure 11
Score Tempo: Lebhaft bewegt (Lively with movement)
Suggested tempo: $\downarrow = 100$

Figure 4. Recording analysis of Ein Heldenleben

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orchestra</th>
<th>Conductor</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London Symphony Orchestra</td>
<td>Sir John Barbirolli</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>$\downarrow = 90$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bavarian Radio Orchestra</td>
<td>Mariss Jansons</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$\downarrow = 109$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Symphony Orchestra</td>
<td>Bernard Haitink</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$\downarrow = 108$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra</td>
<td>Herbert von Karajan</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>$\downarrow = 110$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra</td>
<td>Cornelius Meister</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>$\downarrow = 120$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra</td>
<td>Willem Mengelberg</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>$\downarrow = 130$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal Challenge: Precise shifting
Subsequent Challenges:

1) Intonation
2) Rhythm
3) Bow distribution

Known as ‘Figure 9’ to the universal contrabass community, this excerpt presents a host of challenges that often overwhelm aspiring musicians. Due to the prior expectation of this challenge, contrabassists often dive into working on this excerpt, rather than analysing the approaches to take in making this excerpt enjoyable to play.

Therefore, a good strategy to preparing this excerpt is to disregard any preconceptions about its difficulty. It is more helpful to attack the practise routine with a strong technical foundation and to be systematic in its analysis.\(^5^4\) Essentially, this excerpt is composed of arpeggios starting on

\(^5^4\) H, B. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
inversions. One should identify the keys and tonalities of this passage and start to build a technical foundation.

Rather [than] go straight to Figure 9 and have the first experience of doing an A flat arpeggio starting on the third degree in context, take it out of context and practise all your arpeggios in broken thirds.55

Therefore, doing slow arpeggionic exercises in the keys of C minor, D minor and A flat Major, will help to establish a solid foundation for working on the excerpt itself.

Precise shifting: This excerpt is particularly difficult because it requires precise and seamless shifting that encompasses a three octave range across all four strings all the while governed by a tempo that must maintain momentum. Shifts on the contrabass are unlike any other string instrument; having intervals so widely spread out on the fingerboard presents a challenge to the majority of musicians. In this case, *Ein Heldenleben* contains a healthy number of shifts, perhaps more aptly regarded as leaps that travel up and between strings. To help with these shifts, it is a good idea to choose a fingering that is most comfortable and has more than one note in each hand position thus minimising the amount of shifts. It is also worth mentioning that the first fingering one tries isn’t necessarily the one that works the best. One should try a number of fingerings and then make an educated decision about what feels the best. Even if the one fingering that you try is comfortable, it doesn’t necessarily mean that is the most effective one.56 Keeping in mind that this excerpt is a melodic line, the fingering chosen must not disrupt overall motion and direction.

Intonation: Intonation is an obvious criteria in this excerpt, as in all excerpts, and it is important that secure intonation is delivered. Intonation on the contrabass is widely known to be a challenging aspect, yet is the one aspect that is pivotal in ensemble playing. Because of the expansive register changes the integrity of each note needs to be the same in whichever octave it appears. The physical shifts that occur in the excerpt are also obstacles that need to be controlled in achieving consistent intonation. For this, slow and precise practise of arpeggios needs to be done as preparation prior to tackling this excerpt. Moreover, one must make sure that the melody serves the harmony. The harmonic change in this passage is quite quick, changing every three or so bars. One must ensure that the change from directly on Figure 9, the G to the A natural three bars later and

55 H. B. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
56 Ibid.
then to the C three bars further on, is concise and demonstrates a growing phrase until it erupts to the final B flat in the third bar of Figure 10. One must be accurate in discerning the tones and semitones in the arpeggionic figures so that the harmonic progression is understandable, logical, conveys momentum and has a sense of tension and resolution.

**Rhythm:** It is essential in this excerpt that the rhythm is played precisely. Players should come off the minim ties (G, A natural, C, C respectively) in time, not late or early so the arpeggios can flow on from the long note in tempo.\(^{57}\) The best way to counteract this is to think in duplets whilst sustaining the minim and continue this pulse through the triplet arpeggio. Having a cross rhythm like this is far more effective than thinking in triplets, as there will be the tendency to either slow down or speed up due to the difficulty of maintaining the exact rhythm. In this case, one must be aware of the orchestral context. The viola section, two oboes and two clarinets are playing duplets marked *fortissimo*. Being aware of this two against three exchange will vastly improve the accuracy of coming off the ties.

**Bow distribution:** The bow distribution in this excerpt needs to be considered and well calculated. Due to the nature of the instrument, the notes in the lower register at the beginning of each arpeggio should receive minimal bow. Little bow usage combined with healthy bow pressure will make these low notes project well, leaving the majority of the lower half of the bow for the rest of the arpeggio. With more bow left for the last three notes of the arpeggio, a sense of heroic freedom is achievable, offsetting the tendency to run out of bow. It is also vital the bow changes are placed in the correct spot so they do not disrupt the melodic line. “Your individual choice of bow changes needs to be negotiated with no audible bumps.”\(^{58}\)

**Professional Tip:** To make sure you don’t run out of bow on these arpeggios and that each note receives a good amount of attention, for practise, change where the notes fall in regards to beats in the bar. For example, hold the first minim for two crotchet beats, then start the arpeggiated sequence directly on the third crotchet beat.\(^{59}\) Following this, elongate the last triplet quaver (G, A, C and C respectively) before landing on the subsequent minim in the following bar. Doing this will also make the transition between the last triplet quaver to the following minim clear and concise, which

\(^{57}\) N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.

\(^{58}\) W, J. Associate Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.

\(^{59}\) S, A. Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
will assist rhythmic stability. Once this exercise has been applied, return to the original rhythm and the passage should feel more stable and the notes receiving equal attention.

In the audition: Performing this excerpt in an audition is by no means an easy feat. Firstly, it is important to play this passage at a steady tempo; it is better to play under tempo than to scramble the triplets and semiquavers. Most recordings found online have tempi ranging from $\textbf{j} = 110-120$ and others range from $\textbf{j} = 100-104$; the latter are the tempi to aim for. It is recommended that one plays at $\textbf{j} = 96$ and allow the adrenaline of the audition to pick up the tempo. Understanding the orchestral context is also important; keeping in mind the duplet pulse and the forces that play in unison with the contrabass section i.e. four French horns, three bassoons, a contrabassoon and bass clarinet. One should play this excerpt with a full sound, not forced. Marked fortissimo and then fortississimo, it is useful to have a flat bow contact with the string to maximise contact and sound. Using the relaxed weight of the right arm to draw the sound out of the instrument is more preferable than tensing and forcing the sound. “It’s really important to make the string crossings smooth, and to make sure that your weight goes across with your string crossings.” With this open sound, enjoy the legato feel of these expansive melodies and keep the bow pressure even all throughout the arpeggio figures. Differentiate between the three semibreves; the first is a continuation of the triplet figure, the second has an accent on it and the third has a crescendo through it. Ensure these are different and serve a different role in the passage. Pay acute attention to each marked articulation; the staccati semiquavers toward the end need to be crisp and clear with a simple ‘push pull’ bow movement. The following accents on the minimi should be sharply

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60 H, B. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
61 Ibid.
63 ‘Push Pull’: a type of bowing loosely defined by simple back and forth movements with a straight bow.
attacked and demonstrative leading into the quick oscillating trill. It is important to keep the long notes alive by adding vibrato, this will also keep a sense of movement. “Avoid vibrato until the intonation is correct and the left hand is stable and secure.”

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64 N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
Excerpt Two

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Symphony No. 40 in G Minor*, K550, Movement I, Bar 114-135

Finished in July of 1788, Mozart’s ‘Great G Minor Symphony’ marks a period of his life when he was suffering both financially and physically, slowly starving to death, living in penury with his talents and abilities largely unappreciated by society. Apart from earning a small salary for his service to Emperor Joseph II, it was later understood through a series of tragic letters that Mozart had to beg for funds from his good friend Michael Puchberg. Mozart’s last symphonies, 39, 40 and 41, along with some smaller scale works, were composed in a span of ten weeks. In this brief ten week period, Mozart delivered magnificent works acknowledged as masterpieces by contemporary society. These works were not trivial and circumstantial but brilliantly inventive. They have been recognised as structural models studied by many succeeding composers. Expressing his own misery at the time, the opening movements of Mozart’s *Symphony No. 40* are turbulent. The work’s finale culminates in a joyful celebration, embodying a large portion of his music which has brought so much joy and pleasure to those who suffered less than he did.65

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Movement 1, Bar 114 to 135
Score Tempo: Allegro molto - Alla Breve
Suggested tempo: Minim = 96

Figure 7. Recording analysis of Symphony No. 40 in G Minor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orchestra</th>
<th>Conductor</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Philharmonia Orchestra</td>
<td>Otto Klemperer</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Minim = 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra</td>
<td>Carlo Maria Giulini</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Minim = 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bavarian Radio Orchestra</td>
<td>Rafael Kubelik</td>
<td>N.d.</td>
<td>Minim = 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra</td>
<td>Leonard Bernstein</td>
<td>N.d.</td>
<td>Minim = 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Symphony Orchestra</td>
<td>Fritz Reiner</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Minim = 115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra</td>
<td>Nikolaus Harnocourt</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Minim = 125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N.d. – No date

Principal Challenge: **Bow stroke**
Subsequent Challenges:

1) String crossings
2) Phrasing
3) Precise shifting

Regarded as one of the more intricate and technically difficult passages of the classical contrabass repertoire, it is important that the aspiring professional contrabassist is aware of their physical movements, particularly in their bow arm. Being aware of the bow arm – partnered with a disciplined left hand - allows a clear execution of this excerpt.

Prior to practising this excerpt, it is important to listen to the whole symphony to get accustomed to the notions and themes presented and to understand how phrases are nuanced, notes are ended and dynamics treated. With this knowledge, one can then approach the excerpt understanding the music that precedes and succeeds it. Establishing the tonality aurally is also a good idea, confirming the dark key of G minor will help attain a sense of emotion. A harmonic
analysis of each bar or set of four quavers will benefit the musician as one will gain a sense of where tension and resolution should be stressed or released.

**Bow stroke:** There is much debate as to what level of spiccato is acceptable in playing this passage. This excerpt needs to be played off the string, the length of the notes should not be too short and spiky, but there should be some space between the notes. Therefore, one could play this excerpt with a leggiero stroke that brushes the string in a vertical motion. This vertical motion should definitely be utilised on the D, A and E strings. On the G string, especially in the higher register, the stroke needs to become much more horizontal. It will usually work best towards the lower half of the bow. To become proficient in this stroke, one should analyse the movements that need to occur, being acutely aware of where the bow hits the string and where it ends up. It is also a wise idea to understand the mechanics of one’s arms in this process; where the exerting forces lie or where they need to be tamed. One should practise this stroke on an open string, first slowly and then speed up. Once the desired stroke is achieved, alternate bowing between two adjacent strings, then three, then four. Once this bow stroke is consistent and uniform across each string, half of what is required to play this excerpt is secure.

**String crossings:** Leading on from, and in direct correlation to, the bow stroke, is mastering the string crossings. Once the bow stroke is grounded, adding string crossings can be tricky as they happen quite rapidly and often sporadically in the excerpt. One needs to be aware of the bow arm angle and body position in order to get around to the higher strings efficiently. The bow needs to be parallel to the bridge across all strings as this will make them oscillate in a 90 degree angle both vertically and horizontally, producing the most centred and focused sound. Being aware of these specific technical movements will make the rest of the work that is to be done by the left hand simpler. These movements must be mastered at a slow tempo, without using the left hand before moving on. One should first be able to complete clear crossings between two adjacent strings, then three and four. A useful exercise is to play the excerpt without the left hand and on the correct strings in which the notes fall to understand which arm and body movements need to be done and in relation to where they need to be done, and whether the motion is going to or coming from.

66 N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.

67 S, A. Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.

**Phrasing:** A very important aspect of this excerpt is shaping each phrase. A standard approach would be to practise this passage in full awareness of the classical style. The overall motion needs to contain momentum and must always lead to a certain note. Identifying where the climaxes of each phrase occur will demonstrate an understanding of how it would have been played in a period orchestra. This will demonstrate historically informed knowledge and research. It is important that the quaver runs don’t lose their shape and musicality by being overly preoccupied with clinical correctness. Rather, one should advocate an organic sense of line. This excerpt needs to be played with a lot of excitement and interest. This can be achieved in the running quaver passages if the role of each quaver is well thought out. There should be a feel of two in a bar, the first quaver in the first group of four quavers needs to mark the downbeat of each bar, and the last quaver of the second group of four quavers in the bar needs to lead to the first quaver in the next group of quavers. Each phrase must portray a sense of drop and ascension; outlining the gradations and nuances beginning from the first two quavers in Bars 128-132 inclusive. At all times there should be “rhythmic accuracy between the legato theme and the continuous, steady staccato quavers.”

**Precise shifting:** This excerpt contains a lot of small shifts that need to be precise so that the notes can be understood. One needs to be aware of the tones and semitones that occur and the function of each accidental. This excerpt must also be harmonically accurate. Understanding the key changes in each bar or in every set of four quavers combined with the qualities of the accidentals will help convey a sense of stability and motion. Consequently, the shifts and string crossings need to be agile and accurate to facilitate the speed of the excerpt. To enable these shifts, a good fingering is essential; one needs to choose a logical fingering that best works for them. One should stick with comfort; there will be an option whether to have either a fingering that contains more shifts or more string crossings. In either case, no extraneous noise should be heard between shifts and large intervals; movements should be calculated but also free and not tense.

**In the audition:** *Mozart Symphony No. 40* is a daunting excerpt to play in an audition; however, a positive mindset will support the musician. Focusing on musicality rather than on technicality will assist in achieving a suitable sound. Marked forte, the opening needs to be convincing within the realms of being realistic. This is the initial time the contrabass plays the tune, and in context they

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69 C, D. Contrabassist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.

70 W, J. Associate Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.

71 H, B. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
play in unison with violas, cellos and bassoons. The violins have the same tune pitched a tone lower and they start three bars prior, so at the commencement of the contrabass/cello/viola/bassoon entry there are overlayed running quavers. One can imagine the excitement and commotion this causes, as well as portraying a sense of argumentative melodic turbulence. Even though it is marked forte, it needs to be a forte in the lighter sense of the style with a full sound.\(^\text{72}\)

Beginning the excerpt can be difficult, but if one thinks in a terraced gradation, momentum and phrasing will occur naturally. One needs to start this excerpt off smoothly and softly in relation to subsequent passages. The first C quaver needs to be assertive and full so that the excerpt begins with vitality. There should be a sense of growth amongst the three B natural crotchets in the opening of this excerpt. The phrase leads to the last of the three B natural crotchets and then releases to the top G. In the next descending phrase, the same growth pattern should be employed to each crotchet with then a firm, direct landing on the first quaver of the next bar which needs to be secure in order to push off into the quaver runs. The quaver runs need to have a sense of motion and the phrasing must always move forward. The quavers should not be rushed, it is important to relax into them without getting tense or panicky. A sense of arrival should be felt at the B flat crotchet in beat one of Bar 122 followed by a release to the bottom G. Bars 123-127 should be treated in a parallel way as the opening of the excerpt. The first quavers in each bar from Bar 128-132 are the arrival points that need to be emphasised; these are strong, and then the ascending quavers lead to the start of each following bar, growing in excitement and interest until the descending quavers release the momentum of the excerpt leaving the constant As to taper out the end of the excerpt. The quavers in Bars 131-132 should be broadened out with a more horizontal stroke and as the climax of the excerpt, needs to convey a sense of arrival and conquering.

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\(^{\text{72}}\) B, K. Principal Contrabassist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
Excerpt Three


Heralded as one of the greatest pieces of music in the canon of Western Art music, Beethoven’s final symphony is scored for an orchestra plus choir, the first symphony to do so on a large scale. Completed in 1824, this work is regarded as one of Beethoven’s finest works; a musical collaboration of musicians, vocalists and poetry dedicated to the concept of the universal brotherhood of man. This composition embodies the revolutionary creation of a man with an optimistic vision of human potential. Perhaps one of the most frequently performed symphonies in the world, *Beethoven Symphony No. 9* calls for a thoughtful approach and thorough harmonic understanding.

*Figure 8. Excerpt 3 – Symphony No. 9, Op. 125; Recitative, L.V. Beethoven*

Movement 4, Bar 1 to 90

Score Tempo: Presto – Allegro ma non troppo – Tempo Primo – Vivace – Tempo Primo – Tempo Primo Allegro – Tempo Primo Allegro

**N.B. - Tempo:** Due to the heavy tempo fluctuations in this excerpt, a recording analysis would not be effective. One should source recordings of this work and follow along with their part, identifying the tempo relationships and become aware of where *rubato* is used.

Prior to practising this excerpt, it is essential that one becomes familiar with a number of recordings of Beethoven 9. Historically, the recitative has transformed over time, being interpreted in a variety of ways by different conductors. Becoming familiar with such traditions will help one form their own informed interpretation. “It’s really important that you listen to lots of different interpretations, because there will definitely be some interpretive freedom allowed in an audition.”

Principal Challenge: **Musicality and sound production**

Subsequent Challenges:

1) **Articulation**

The recitative that opens the fourth movement of *Beethoven Symphony No. 9* is a dramatic and characterful piece of writing. It opens with a stormy sense of suspense in the woodwind and brass section until it erupts with an entrance played by the cello and contrabass sections. In many editions of this piece, the phrase ‘in stile recitativo, ma in tempo’ is written, which instructs the musicians that this is played ‘in the recitative style, but in tempo’. “For this reason it is of highest importance that the tempo remain flexible in this excerpt.” Therefore, it is important that one understands the vocal qualities of this excerpt and to use *rubato* tastefully.

**Musicality and sound production:** Orchestras frequently request this excerpt in order to hear how musical the applicants can be within the realms of logical phrasing and beauty of sound. Sound production in this excerpt is principally critiqued; the panel will be looking for a musician who can create sound that is full, relaxed, resonant and sensitive. The most important aspect of one’s sound is its richness and vocal quality. Since this excerpt foreshadows the recitative sung by the bass baritone later in the work, there must be a clear, consistent and focused sound. The attention to where notes speak on one’s bass should be acutely adhered to so the most beautiful sound is

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74 W, J. Associate Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.


76 N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
created every time. One thing that will ensure a solid sound, is a solid left hand. One must make sure that each note is carefully treated by the left hand, with substantial contact and anchorage from the thumb. Each long note needs to have a sense of growth within it and each short note needs to receive special care as sometimes they end up in odd parts of the bow. Vibrato is essential in keeping long durational notes alive; a varied vibrato from warm to intense should be utilised on the majority of notes so that the excerpt is pleasing to listen to. Vibrato will add colour, resonance and strength to one’s sound production. It is important that each section of the excerpt is considerably thought out; the first entry needs to be declamatory and confident whereas Bar 65 is subdued and intimate. One should show an understanding of each section within the excerpt by demonstrating a contrast in sound, being receptive of dynamics, articulation and phrasing.

**Articulation:** The ground work for this excerpt is to establish a pure and focused sound followed by consistent intonation and accurate rhythms. To successfully perform this excerpt, one must adhere to all the articulation markings. There are many contrasting sections within this excerpt, and the marked articulations help to highlight this. Staccato notes must be short and detached, with spaces in between them; the silences between the *staccati* are also important. One must play separate notes with a sense of release as well, holding the left hand firm to allow a strong sound production. A good idea is to think about the starts of every note. As this excerpt is vocal in quality, the melodic notes should not be played with ‘K’ attacks, unless they are marked with *staccati*. The opening two notes should feel as if they begin with a sympathetic ‘W’ sound. An awareness of the articulation and how it affects the sound is an important factor in performing this excerpt proficiently.

**In the audition:** It is important to stay calm at the outset of this excerpt; this is the opportunity to showcase what a beautiful sound one is capable of making. The first A crotchet needs to sound like an up-beat. It should have the sense of leading to the E. To achieve this, one needs to breathe

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77 S, A. Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.

78 ‘K’ attacks are achieved by playing a note with a sharp front, created with bow pressure and immediate release. ‘K’ attacks are similarly treated like accents.

79 N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.

80 Notes that imitate a ‘W’ phonetic sound are created with a gentle surge of bow speed and pressure, sinking into the string sympathetically. There is usually no audible front to the note.

81 N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
out as they play the first A. Concentrate on a full and open sound that heralds the theme of brotherhood and declares confidence. The following E that lasts four crotchet beats cannot be choked at all; it needs to be sustained with life and vibrato. It needs to grow into the following quaver passage, somewhat bleeding into the D. The next quavers (G, A, B flat) marked with *staccati* must each be louder than they succeed, with a sense of forward motion leading to the four slurred quavers passage. These four quavers usually start on a down bow traveling to close to the tip. One needs to be attentive to the bow position playing the next two quavers short at the tip. One needs to transfer their weight into the tip of the bow, keeping it on the string to achieve two clear and separate quavers. The following slurred quavers (E to G) need a full smooth connection. It is recommended that one plays the E on the A string and then shift back to the G. This eliminates a string crossing and helps sustain a nice legato tone. The two following B flats, an octave apart, need to have the same integrity despite their range. Placing them both in half position with a reliable handshape will allow these notes to ring together. The second B flat should be sustained with *vibrato* and then *decrecendo* before the phrase ultimately finishes with a release in sound, phrasing away logically.

It is important that the next entry at Bar 24 (F sharp to A) acts as an interruption to the descending quavers in the wind section. These two notes should mimic that of a timpani in sound and attack. The following quavers should be somewhat legato and follow the contour of the line. It is a good idea to slur the last two quavers of that phrase, yet finishing in a stately manner. The next phrase needs to have momentum through it; it is important not to slow down too early, and only do so precisely where it is marked. In the first entry, there must be a contrast in dynamic from *forte* to *fortissimo*. The E flat must be sustained for its correct length which then propels into the running quavers maintaining forward momentum to the dotted crotchet D, which then continues the phrase into the *poco Adagio* section. The *ritardando* prior to the *poco Adagio* shouldn’t be too excessive, it should just naturally lose speed and flow into a smooth and quiet cadence. The *forte* chords at Bar 56 should be declamatory, continuing in the *vivace* style of the second movement, which is alluded to in the eight bars prior. It is important that the passage of quavers from Bars 57 – 62 have a sense of forward direction up until the end of the phrase. Despite having the tendency to slow down, there is no *ritardando* marked and one must follow the contour of the pitches to phrase well. The *Tempo*

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82 N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.
Primo Allegro at Bar 65 must portray an intimate and sensitive colour. It is a good idea to use half bow hair, rotate the bow towards yourself and play slightly over the fingerboard. To achieve a nice even and singing sound, the bow flow must stay even, and even within the realms of piano, a focused sound must be attained. The crescendo into the following quaver passage should act as a catalyst for more energy, excitement and movement. The arrival at the fortissimo F sharp should feel triumphant.

It is important to note that the first note of the last entry is in a different tempo to its succeeding passage. The A crotchet should be played with a similar feeling to the very opening of this excerpt. This crotchet is played on the second minim beat of Bar 80. Prior to entering, one should sing the four bars before to this, the ‘Ode to Joy’ theme, in their head. At the correct moment, the entry should be played with conviction and confidence. The next E must proceed in the new, faster tempo. It is important to note that the trumpets play triplets over the dotted rhythm in Bar 84, which means a bit of time can be taken to make sure this sounds triumphant. The descending running quavers should all maintain forward momentum leading towards the sforzando G that is held for three and a half crotchet beats. This G needs to receive a lot of warm vibrato to keep the note alive. The sforzando should not be a sharp accent at the start of the note, but more of a gentle surge in bow pressure into the string. The last two crotchets should not be regarded as being insignificant. On the contrary, they should receive special attention so that the excerpt finishes with jubilance. A slower bow is good to use here as this will produce a controlled and clear ending, as opposed to a fast bow which will create too much extraneous noise.

Professional Tip: Do exactly what is written on the page. Adhere to all the markings: articulations, dynamics and tempi. The tempo relationships must be consistent to make sense. Be responsive to every note length and acutely aware of where the phrase is coming or going. Pay extra attention to your sound and create the most luscious, vocal quality one can. Singing this excerpt in one’s head prior to performing it will give one a good sense of melodic line and a clear indication of phrasing. All this information just needs to be transferred to the contrabass in performing the excerpt for the panel.

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85 N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.

86 B, K. Principal Contrabassist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
Excerpt Four

Ludwig Van Beethoven, *Symphony No. 5 in C Minor Op. 67*; Movement III: *Scherzo* Bar 1-95

Universally recognised as a result of the dramatic minor third motif at the beginning, Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony has become one of the world’s best known compositions and most frequently played symphonies. The first four notes of the symphony are perhaps the most heard and interpreted notes of any work. Maybe they represent the hammer blows of fate? Maybe they are a symbol of victory in the time of war? Either way, this multi-layered motif is merely the tip of a harmonically and emotionally dense masterpiece. The third movement is one of Beethoven’s direct quotations from Mozart’s *Symphony No. 40*. Beethoven subtly transforms the opening of the finale to generate his own theme.87


Figure 9. Excerpt 4 – *Symphony No. 5*, Op. 67; Scherzo, L.V. Beethoven

Movement III, Bar 1 to 95

Score Tempo: Allegro

Suggested tempo: Dotted minim = 86
Prior to practising this excerpt, it is important that one becomes familiar with the minor scales and arpeggios. Practising C minor, B flat minor and F minor scales in thirds and double stops will help establish a lot of the groundwork that forms the technical crux of this passage.\(^8\) Doing this slowly and understanding note relationships within the hand shape is essential for securing accurate intonation, which becomes easier when the excerpt is played at tempo.

Principal Challenge: **Seamless Shifting**

Subsequent Challenges:

1) Maintaining a soft dynamic
2) Intonation

Seamless Shifting: Shifting in this excerpt requires a quick and accurate left hand. The opening speed of this movement requires the left hand to maintain a good structure and it is preferable to maximise the number of notes in one position.\(^9\) The left hand must always maintain good contact with the strings to achieve an even sound with the bow. Due to the speed of this movement, feeling the pulse in 1, shifting must happen quickly. The left hand moves immediately after each note is

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\(^8\) H, B. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.

played. It is important to remember where the phrase is going. Securing the left hand will establish a secure foundation for this excerpt.

**Maintaining a soft dynamic:** The *pianissimo* marking of this excerpt (Bars 1 – 18 and 52 – 66) can be achieved by securing the combination of having a solid left hand and smooth bow control. The bow should be turned towards oneself therefore only using half the hair. It is also a good idea to play slightly over the fingerboard whilst maintaining good contact with the string. This will produce a desired airy sound that still has centre and focus. The arpeggiated opening, frequent string crossings and expansive slurs require a fast speed with little pressure to achieve this correct sense of phrasing, dynamic and sound. It is important to play each note its exact value without rushing or clipping notes short. One must evenly distribute the bow and subdivide constantly.90

**Intonation:** The opening arpeggiated figure and perfect fifth intervals require precise intonation so that an harmonic sequence is understood.91 Each accidental should serve a melodic purpose, for example in Bar 3 the F sharp must lead to the G, likewise with the C sharp to the D in Bar 12. The C and B naturals that occur in Bars 14 – 16 must bring the tonality back to G major. Knowing the precise function of each accidental will help make this excerpt logical and easy to understand. A good way to practise intonation in these passages is to play the notes as double stops where possible, understanding how these notes fit into each other and one’s hand shape. It is also important to practise C minor, B flat minor and F major arpeggios to establish a sense of tonality. This will secure the intonation.

**In the audition:** Before performing this excerpt, one must determine the starting tempo. It is a good idea to sing the horn part at Bar 19 after the *fermata*92 which may be recognised from the many recordings that have been listened to in preparation for the audition. This is a reliable and stable tempo and is recommended by many professionals. Once this tempo is established, one should stay relaxed and breathe. The opening phrases must flow smoothly, with even string crossings following the melodic line up to the E flat and back down to the G. There needs to be a logical ritardando at the last cadence point before the pause which gives the effect of losing momentum. This pause needs to be measured out logically. Often musicians don’t keep track of the

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90 S, A. Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.


92 C, D. Contrabassist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
period for which it has been held and it will be overdone. It helps to maintain a pulse throughout the pause in the cadence. I suggest counting 3-4 bars then entering with the next phrase in tempo; this keeps the tempo flowing organically and the mind engaged.\textsuperscript{93} The upcoming \textit{sforzando piano} must be abrupt and sudden, a surge of bow speed is ideal. It is important that the \textit{sforzando piano} doesn’t get in the way of the rhythm and flow. The following \textit{ritardando} should be executed with finesse and care. The next section marked \textit{forte} should have forward momentum and strength. These crotchets and minims should imitate bell tones with a fullness of sound. It is important to be acutely aware of all the different markings on the page and to exaggerate them, particularly the dynamic and tempo fluctuations. There must be a logical sense of phrase and line within these realms to produce a convincing rendition.

\textsuperscript{93} N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
Excerpt Five

Ludwig Van Beethoven, *Symphony No. 5 in C Minor Op. 67*; Movement III: **Trio** Bar 140-177

*Figure 11. Excerpt 5 – Symphony No. 5, Op. 67; Trio, L.V. Beethoven*

Movement III, Bar 140 to 177

Score Tempo: Allegro

Suggested tempo: Dotted minim = 76

*Figure 12. Recording analysis of Symphony No. 5, Op. 67; Trio*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orchestra</th>
<th>Conductor</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra</td>
<td>Christian Thielemann</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Dotted Minim = 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Philharmonic Orchestra</td>
<td>Leornard Bernstein</td>
<td>N.d.</td>
<td>Dotted Minim = 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Symphony Orchestra</td>
<td>Fritz Reiner</td>
<td>N.d.</td>
<td>Dotted Minim = 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bavarian Radio Orchestra</td>
<td>Mariss Jansons</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Dotted Minim = 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra</td>
<td>Willem Mengelberg</td>
<td>N.d.</td>
<td>Dotted Minim = 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra</td>
<td>Herbert von Karajan</td>
<td>N.d.</td>
<td>Dotted Minim = 87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consideration, while practising, must be given to how the angle of the bow will impact clarity. There are many string crossings and shifts carried out at rapid speeds in this excerpt. Slow methodical practise should be undertaken to better understand how precise body movements can assist in achieving maximum accuracy and strength in sound.

Principal Challenge: Spiccato Bowing

Subsequent Challenges:

1) String crossings

**Spiccato Bowing:** This excerpt is chosen for the difficulty in producing a consistent *spiccato* bow stroke. The constant quavers present a challenge as they ought to be played swiftly which requires good left hand dexterity to achieve clarity. Therefore, a controlled and consistent *spiccato* bow stroke is paramount. One should determine which bodily movements are needed to achieve an even stroke and this can be achieved by slowing the movement right down and being aware of what mechanics need to happen. A good idea is to first master this stroke on one note at a slow tempo and then gradually increase the speed, maintaining a full and focused sound. When this is done at various speeds with a metronome, one can compartmentalise each bar using the same discipline. The *spiccato* stroke will work best towards the heel of the bow; this is where most control and clarity will be achieved.

**String crossings:** Leading on from and in direct correspondence with the bow stroke is mastering the string crossings. This excerpt has a lot of movement both for the left and right hand; they need to be well coordinated to maximise clarity. The string crossings often happen rapidly, so quick movements are essential. One must be aware of their bow arm angle and body position so that the bow is always moving in a vertical motion. Particularly in the quaver passages, one must ensure that each quaver receives flat bow hair for maximum contact and sound. The bow must remain parallel to the bridge and perpendicular to the strings at all times. Mastered at a slow tempo, accurate string crossings will add precision to sound production.

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94 B, K. Principal Contrabassist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.

95 H, B. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
In the audition: The first crotchet must be full and receive a good amount of bow length; it propels into the running quavers. The quaver runs should have a sense of motion and direction and crescendo to the minim G. It is important that these quavers have a consistency in articulation and that the G is warmed up with vibrato and crescendos throughout. Succeeding this, the passage of crotchets need to logically grow and decay according to the range of the pitches. These notes should have a bit of length to them and felt in a pulse of one in a bar, rather than three as this can get too heavy. Emphasising the first beat of each bar will maintain a sense of direction and forward motion, which is needed in this excerpt. One must be aware of the rests after Bar 160 counting the full duration of these rests and not entering too early. “The third beat entrances (such as Bars 161, 163 and 165) must be made with confidence, as they represent the rhythmic surprise of the scherzo.”96 The following quavers must also have a sense of growth up to the minim G and then similarly to the minim C. These quaver passages must always phrase towards the minim at the end of the run, conveying a logical sequence of dynamic and shape.97


Giuseppe Verdi was one of the most prolific opera composers of the romantic era. Verdi had great success with a number of his operas, namely *Aida*, *Rigoletto* and *Il Trovatore*, which all contain glorious melodies which have become famous. This work was completed in late 1885 and premiered in Milan in early 1887, and proved to be a resounding success. The relationship between the music and narrative on stage is a vital component on the preparation of this excerpt. A lot of Verdi’s writing contains emotional, expressive and vocal qualities which need to be strongly conveyed.
N.B – Tempo: Due to the nature of this solo being heavily influenced by the discretion of the conductor and musicians, revolving around emotive and passionate qualities, a recording analysis was deemed trivial. To get accustomed to this soli, one should listen to a variety of recordings to discern the fluctuating tempi, complete with accelerandi, rubato and associated stylistic preferences.

The contrabass soli located in Act IV is an opportunity for one to showcase their expressive and melodic playing. In performing this excerpt one needs to be aware of the narrative context, communicating the relationship between what is happening on stage and the music. This excerpt must show a logical progression of suspense, tension and eruption which is expressed in dramatic form on the stage.

Principal Challenge: Intonation

Subsequent Challenges:

1) Melodic structure
2) Articulation
3) Rhythm

Intonation: Intonation in this excerpt must be precise, with intervals between the notes correctly spaced out. Especially in the opening few phrases, the major triad intervals need to be large enough so the harmonic frequencies are in tune. The spaces between the tones and semitones should be distinctly different, and each accidental needs to be treated correctly in relation to how it is sequenced between notes. Usually, the flat accidentals need to be flatter and the sharps need to be sharper. The leading tone qualities must rise to make the melody in tune. A good way to improve intonation whilst practising this excerpt is to play the opening phrases in double stops becoming aware of how each note fits in with one another and what hand shape needs to be secure.98 One must also be aware of the larger shifts that occur and discovering how these shifts are best executed. One should practise these shifts disregarding the rhythm first to make sure their hand lands well and precisely where it needs to.99 That is, the primary practise will be on intonation and subsequent process will be on rhythmic quality.

Melodic structure: This excerpt is a great opportunity to showcase one’s beautiful melodic playing ability by demonstrating a vocal sound, meaningful vibrato, beautiful phrasing and pure

98 S, A. Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.

99 Ibid.
tone. Each phrase needs to have a growth period, destination point and resolution. Analysing the text and identifying the notes which should be stressed demonstrate an understanding of phrasing. For example, in the first passage, the phrase begins quietly on a low E, grows through the major third and builds tension to the C sharp and then releases to the B natural. This phrase needs to foreshadow that something sinister is going to happen; it must portray suspense. Being acutely aware that each phrase has a specific purpose in the narrative storyline, and exaggerating this, will communicate an informed contextual rendition of this excerpt. To achieve this vocal quality, the dynamics must also be adhered to. The dynamics range from pianississimo to fortissimo, allowing the opportunity to demonstrate and explore a varying colour palette. The soft dynamics should be intimate and sonorous, whereas the louder ones should be dramatic and bold; an array of characters must have strong conviction and portrayal through these dynamics.

**Articulation:** The articulation markings in this excerpt assist in creating the narrative element. The opening accent on the open E string is crucial in representing what happens on stage at this time. It is the moment where Othello steps into his chamber where his wife, Desdemona, is sleeping. This accent conveys the fact that something tragic is going to occur. The fact that this is placed on the open E string, the lowest note on a contrabass at the time of composition, speaks volumes of how important the context is and why each articulation marking is utilised. Prior to the premiere performance of Otello, contrabasses only had three gut strings. The Otello performances were some of the first where contrabasses had four strings, hence why this such an important point marked in history in this opera. In Bars 8, 13 and 16 are a recurring sequence of three E flat crotchets marked staccato. One must understand each of these notes; although they are marked identically, there must be a distinction between them. Each must be louder than the one before thus conveying a sense of growth and suspense. It is important to understand that staccato does not necessarily mean short and detached. In this case, it may mean that there is a desired silence between notes that needs to be audible.

The staccato semiquaver passage at Bar 23 should be carried out close to the heel of the bow and off-the-string. These semiquavers need to be crisp and clear especially since they are in the lower register of the contrabass. A small amount of bow is to be utilised to maximise clarity. The accents that follow need to sound very different, and therefore require more bow and weight into the string. It is important to note, that the cellos, violas, bassoons and clarinet join in on the ascending scale with the whole orchestra playing the final dramatic two chords, signalling something

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100 B, K. Principal Contrabassist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
terrible has happened. These accents must portray a sense of rage, stemmed by jealousy which is one of the major themes in *Othello*. Every articulation is deliberate and purposeful and discerning each one is important. Each detail omitted is a detail that can be added by another candidate in the audition. In the situation of an audition every detail one omits is one more that another auditioning candidate can apply.

**Rhythm:** Due to the slow speed of this excerpt and the length of some of the notes, it is important that one keeps subdividing throughout. In the opening tied semibreves, it is a good idea to count in quavers so that the note ends precisely and the next note begins on time. Maintaining a consistent pulse throughout the excerpt will demonstrate one’s ability to keep stable and reliable; rhythmic stability is an essential criteria for any contrabass player. Semiquavers must be played evenly and calculatedly. They should be subdivided so they do not become clipped or rushed, particularly in Bars 9, 10 and 22. Bar 14 must also be subdivided into semiquavers; often the dotted rhythms sound too much like a set of triplets. Rhythmic precision is essential, eliminating ambiguous rhythm in the excerpt. The silences in this excerpt must also be accurately measured as well. Throughout the rests, it is crucial that one maintains the pulse in quavers or crotchets. With the music in front of them, the panel quickly recognises whether or not the candidate is counting. This will be indicated by their successful entries on the appropriate beats. It is important to know the orchestral context here, for example, following the minims in Bars 12 and 15 (and likewise in Bar 18), the viola section plays eight semiquavers beginning on the third crotchet beat of the bar followed by a crotchet on beat 1 of the following bar. On beat 2 of this bar, the bass drum strikes a deathly blow. Then the contrabass enters on the second quaver of the third crotchet beat. Conceptualising this in one’s head will help maintain a consistent pulse and can ensure precise entries.

**In the audition:** Playing this excerpt in an audition is an ideal opportunity to showcase a *cantabile* luscious and rich sound. Therefore, it is important to breathe and be relaxed so one can sink into the deepness of the bass register. Marked at the beginning is *con sordino*, which should be adhered to. Playing with the mute can make some of these shifts easier, but the sound must still

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101 H, B. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
102 C, D. Contrabassist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
103 S, A. Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
104 C, D. Contrabassist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.
105 W, J. Associate Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
be focused and direct. The accent at the start must be audible, but not in a soloistic sense. A subtle, yet firm accent to signify Othello’s step into his chamber should be heard. This first phrase needs to be subdued and suspenseful. The whole phrase needs to maintain the same dynamic from beginning to end, with the C sharp resolving to the B natural. The second phrase should be played in a similar vein to the first, making sure that all the notes are rhythmically even and calculated. Similarly, this next phrase starts like the previous two but crescendos into the three repeated E flat quavers. These quavers grow into the new melodic material climaxing at the G flat and then releasing in sound, literally dying away to a pianississimo E flat minim at the morendo marking. Even though the dynamic drastically drops, the pulse must be consistent throughout. Next are the first of the three importantly terraced phrases; the first phrase must stay somewhat quiet but still contain a sense of growth and decay. The rhythm needs to be precise and calculated. The next phrase at Bar 16 should have slightly more dynamic growth and decay than the previous one, with the tension resolving from the D flat to the C flat. The next phrase at Bar 20 contains the ultimate shift from E flat to C flat. One must not be influenced by anecdote and rumour that identify this as a difficult interval to pitch. The C flat needs to sustain its intensity, with a continuous vibrato all throughout keeping it alive. The melodic line continues and decrescendos until the suspenseful semiquaver section, starting rather subdued, begins to gain momentum and volume culminating with three dramatic and powerful chords signifying tragedy. These last accented chords should be played with heavy weight into the string, a moderate bow speed and maximum bow hair contact. The ending of this excerpt should be exciting and interesting, erupting with a clear, focused and penetrating sound.

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Excerpt Seven

Hector Berlioz, Symphonie Fantastique H 48; Movement V, Bar 201 – 305

Perhaps Berlioz’s finest work, this programmatic symphony explores a distorted dream of love and infatuation. Composed in five movements and vividly orchestrated, this work was completed in 1830 and premiered in December that year. Stemming from diabolical passions – Berlioz had fallen in love (and later married) an English Shakespearean actress named Harriet Smithson – this work was heralded as ‘revolutionary’ yet ‘radical’ by those who heard it at the time. The fifth movement in which this excerpt appears is particularly evocative; it includes the Dies Irae followed by the Witches’ Round Dance which eventually collide in vibrant aural chaos. This piece was received differently by Berlioz’s contemporaries; Felix Mendelssohn condemned the work for distorting the sacred cantus firmus of the Dies Irae, whereas Franz Liszt and Camille Saint-Saëns applauded the work for its innovation and creativity.¹⁰⁷

Movement V, Bar 201 – 305
Score Tempo: Poco Meno Mosso
Suggested tempo: ↓. = 118

The *Ronde du Sabbat* from Movement V of this monumental work is saturated with detail and instruction. Every bar has been meticulously marked with articulations and dynamics, intending to create an evocative narrative. In order to successfully perform this excerpt, it is paramount that one strictly observes all markings, creating an exaggerated sense of contrast and character.

**Principal Challenge:** Articulation

**Subsequent Challenges:**

1) Bow stroke
2) Dynamics

**Articulation:** Berlioz, along with Gustav Mahler, is different to any other composer in term of his repertoire of articulations and how literally you have to take them. The important thing about this excerpt is to be receptive and aware of all the types of articulation markings. Orchestras will choose this excerpt to see if one can demonstrate distinctly different articulations in a close sequence. There needs to be a contrast between *staccati*, accents, *sforzandi*, and *sforzandi* with accents. They all need to embody a different character and be so dissimilar that the panel can discern one from another. The accents need to have an audible front to the note and a noticeable surge of bow

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speed or weight into the string will assist in this. Likewise, the sforzandi must be played in this regard, and with greater exaggeration. They should sound like an eruption and ought to be more aggressive than the accented notes. The sforzandi with an accent should be a fusion between the two separate markings, requiring a lot of weight into the string, a bit of bow speed and aggression (within the realms of reason) is preferred. That is, there needs to be a distinction between all three of these markings. So essentially, an accent is pretty much all your weight at the front of the bow and popping that very first articulation whereas a sforzando is less of a ‘T’ sound and more of a ‘W’ sound; as a result of that, sforzandi tend to be a bit heavier. The staccati must be off-the-string, crisp and vertical. They ought to be vastly different to any other articulation which can be supported by a controlled spiccato bow stroke. The absence of articulation is also important. Unarticulated notes must have character and should receive some length and vibrato where necessary.

**Bow stroke:** In direct correlation with achieving all these contrasting articulations, is the mastery of the bow stroke and being in command of the bow. The rate of articulation change is rapid; one only needs to play the first two bars to understand this. Most articulations are used during these two bars. Therefore, one must stay in control of keeping pace with these changes and respond quickly with the bow. The accents and sforzandi need a clear front to the note which can be achieved by getting weight into the string. It is encouraged that one should get the staccato notes off-the-string, but still having clean contact. The motion should imitate a ‘V’ shape rather than a saucer; vertical as opposed to horizontal. These articulations can be played optimally towards the heel of the bow. This is where one will have most control over the sound; it will be clean, crisp and measured. If one plays away from the heel, some control and precision will be lost and the quick changes of bow stroke will be difficult to make.

**Dynamics:** The sudden change in dynamics throughout this excerpt contribute to its effective expression. The dynamic change ranges from piano to fortissimo with a host of colours in between. It is vital that each dynamic marking is a stark contrast from what is softer and louder. Each dynamic ought to be unique, two dynamics should not be of a similar volume. It is important to exaggerate each dynamic, so that the panel can discern a forte from a fortissimo. It is also important to make a distinction between the notes of different dynamics with different articulations. The articulations shouldn’t influence how loud or soft a note is. This can be challenging, but this attention to detail

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111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.
will be evident to the panel. The *crescendi* and *decrescendi* usually occur over a short length of time, sometimes half a bar. Therefore, it is important to make a contrast between the initiating and exiting dynamics. There are instances where a *crescendo* is indicated over three quaver beats, which is not a lot of time. In these cases, and any case for that matter, it is useful to think that: i) the start of the *crescendo* will always be the quietest place, ii) making one’s *piano* dynamic softer will make the *forte* dynamic louder, and iii) an effective *crescendo* will be created if it starts towards the end of the marked phrase. By exaggerating a combination of these three things, one’s *crescendi* will be successful.

**Professional Tip:** In order to conquer all the detail in this excerpt, slow practise is crucial. It is necessary to know how one’s body reacts to the rapid changes of bow stroke to achieve articulation and dynamics. Practising passages at a slow tempo will assist in raising this awareness. It is also wise to compartmentalise each bar and practise them over and over again. Separating this excerpt into cell blocks and then working on the transitions between these bars is necessary. One must be disciplined in this approach and the result will be rewarding. All practise should also be done with a metronome; too often candidates do not subdivide and will regularly rush the quaver passages. Attention to the entire excerpt by being aware of all the correct articulation, dynamic and bow strokes at a slow speed with a metronome will establish a solid foundation in understanding and playing this excerpt.

**In the audition:** The first two dotted crotchets marked with accents need to start on the string to make good contact and with flat bow hair to achieve a nice full sound. The second dotted crotchet, played on an up bow, should match the first one played on a down bow. Naturally, the down bow will be loud so it is important that the up bow receive more attention and weight into the string to balance the sound. The next three quavers need to be crisp and off-the-string leading to an eruptive *sforzando* by using a substantial amount of bow speed. The next descending phrase should remain steady and the octave Gs should propel the *crescendo* to the crotchet C. The following syncopated rhythm at Bar 247 must literally come out of nowhere and surprise the listener. The preceding quaver F must be very soft in order to exaggerate this dynamic change. One should note that in the orchestral context, the brass section joins in with the syncopated rhythm.

Bar 250 needs to start softly with four clean and crisp semiquavers. These semiquavers should be glued on-the-string for maximum clarity; a simple ‘push pull’ bow stroke should be utilised which

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S, A. Principal Contrabassist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
will also assist in the crescendo. The following trill should have fast oscillations, maximised by rotating the whole hand back and forth at a rapid pace and the following quavers should have space in between them. The following acciaccaturas need to be crushed into the notes they are attached to. The fortissimo descending quavers need to jump out in volume, played with good string connection. Bar 256 is the first real dynamic contrast, played at piano. A good idea is to play these two bars entirely on the A string to achieve a consistent and even change in tone colour which will aid the dynamic change. The next entry must also stay at this piano level and must not be rushed. This is the first instance where there are constant quavers; one must maintain a steady and subdivided approach. These staccati might be played off-the-string and at Bar 264 a change to good contact on-the-string leading up to the accented C crotchet is preferred. On-the-string contact will help make the quick octave leap in Bar 264 clean and clear. Likewise in Bar 266, there needs to be contact with the string, especially to make the slurred semiquavers really clear. The following octave Gs need to be firmly grounded within a secure left hand shape. It will help to have the first finger as a strong anchor with the thumb resting behind it on the neck. This will help sink the weight into the string.\footnote{N, S. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, September 2015.} There needs to be a feel of two in a bar and no hemiola; a good way to ensure this is to give more bow length to the low G that falls on the second dotted crotcheted beat of the bar keeping a straight bow.\footnote{Ibid.} The following ascending and descending quaver passages must be phrased logically, demonstrating a dynamic growth and decay. The syncopated rhythms must be angular and a stark interruption to the prior melodic material. From the second quaver beat at Bar 277, one should note that this ascending scale is the point at which the entire orchestra plays in unison.

A sudden drop to piano here is recommended and a dramatic crescendo must be heard with short and succinct staccati. From Bars 279 to 286, there needs to be a tremendous contrast in dynamics in each bar. One must exaggerate these changes to different ends of the spectrum, obeying each marking. The three dotted crotchets at Bar 286 and 287 need to imitate bell tolls, having a clear front to the note followed by some release by the bow but still having strong contact in the left hand. In the following syncopated bar, the decrescendi need to be emphasised, assisted by bow speed and contact. At Bar 290 we are reintroduced to the opening theme of this excerpt again, but a perfect fifth above. Similar ideas as this should be transferred at the first time reading this material, being responsive to the range difference and how one needs to combat these differences with technique. The crotchets at Bar 298 should be even and square preceding the quavers which
fall to the crotchet Cs which then grow to the B flat and release to a healthy, string E flat to conclude this excerpt.

This excerpt is saturated with many different markings and instructions. It is essential that one is acutely aware of exaggerating these markings in their slow practise, as they will, in turn, be noticed in an audition. Structured and disciplined practise is essential to master this excerpt, with a strong emphasis on paying attention to the articulation differences within the passages. It is crucial that an aspiring professional contrabassist has a thorough knowledge of how their part contributes to the orchestral context and how they are able to achieve the different colours, dynamics, bow strokes and articulations that are incorporated in this work.

In context, there are layers upon layers of polyphonic material. It is chaotic with thematic material traded between sections of the orchestra. This is a ‘wicked’ excerpt, full of character and evocative narrative; the more detailed practise one does to showcase these sudden changes, the better. Really get a feel for the manic nature of this excerpt; one can convince the panel they understand the difference in styles.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ H, B. Contrabassist of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Interview by the author, October 2015.
Conclusion

The aim of most aspiring contrabassists is to win a full-time position in a professional orchestra – and in Australia, the only way to do this is by succeeding in a professional audition. Australian auditions generally require applicants to perform a range of orchestral excerpts along with a solo work. The applicant’s performance of the orchestral excerpts is the most important part of their audition.

Orchestral excerpts are pieces of music that ought to be prepared and performed with passion, style and individuality. They should not be considered a stressful part of one’s practise routine, but treated as challenges and opportunities to broaden the knowledge of orchestral playing. The delivery ought to be greater than playing the correct notes: there must be a demonstration of mastery of instrumental technique, comprehensive knowledge of the literature, and persuasive musicianship. An audition gives an opportunity to showcase this.

A gap exists within the currently available orchestral excerpt resources for contrabassists. The author hopes that this publication will contribute, in some way, to enhancing the current orchestral excerpt literature for aspiring orchestral contrabassists. This study examined the content of twenty eight Australian contrabass auditions and dissected seven prominently requested excerpts, concentrating on the elements that require attention in their practise and preparation.

A series of interviews undertaken with professional contrabassists centred on pre-audition preparation – of self, repertoire, context, knowledge and musicality. This resource summarises their advice, and hopes to inform musicians in a variety of ways to understand what is required of them, what they should expect in an audition, and to provide advice regarding the preparation and performance of orchestral audition excerpts.

It is important to note that this resource is only partial and only examines seven excerpts in detail. It would be interesting to address and similarly examine more of the most frequently requested excerpts.

I have sought to help fill the gap within the currently commercially available orchestral resources for contrabass players. The aim of this dissertation is to create a didactic resource, informed by this country’s leading contrabassists and orchestral musicians, and made available to future orchestral musicians.
Bibliography and References

Orchestral Excerpt Books for the Contrabass:


Theses and Dissertations specific to the Contrabass:


List of Sourced Australian Contrabass Auditions:

Australian Chamber Orchestra: Causal Double Bass – 2009
Australian Chamber Orchestra: Causal Double Bass – 2012
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Associate Principal Bass – 1975
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Double Bass Assessment – 1981
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Double Bass Assessment – 1983
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Double Bass Assessment – 1985
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Double Bass Assessment – 1990
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Associate Principal Double Bass – 1992
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Casual Double Bass – 1992
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Associate Principal Double Bass – 1993
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Casual Double Bass – 1994
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Sub-Principal Double Bass – 1997
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Sub-Principal Double Bass – 1998
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Assistant Principal Double Bass – 1998
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Assistant Principal Double Bass – 1999
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Section Double Bass – 2006
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Section Double Bass – 2011
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Casual Double Bass – 2009
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Casual Double Bass – 2010
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Casual Double Bass – 2011
Orchestra Victoria: Principal Double Bass – 2015
Queensland Symphony Orchestra: Section Double Bass – 2012
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra: Casual Double Bass – 2015
West Australian Symphony Orchestra: Principal Double Bass – 2006
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Orchestral Excerpt Books for other Instruments:


Journals and Articles:


**Naxos Music Library Recordings:**


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Other Theses and Dissertations:


Hays, Lacey. "PREPARATION FOR AUDITION VERSUS PERFORMANCE: AN EXAMINATION OF FOUR PROMINENT ORCHESTRAL EXCERPTS FOR TRUMPET." (2014).


Books:


Websites:

   http://www.cmuse.org/most-interesting-facts-about-giuseppe-verdi/3/

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Appendix A is unavailable in this version of the thesis
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