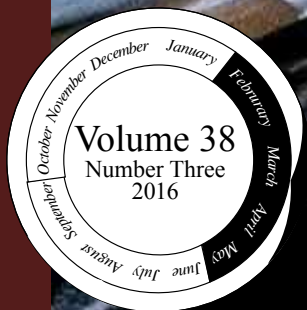
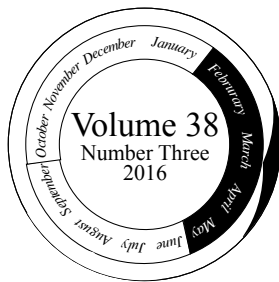




BASS WORLD

The Magazine of the International Society of Bassists





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about the artist...

Pictured on the cover of this issue is Sarah Richard's "The Practice Room," a portrait of bassist Evan Pardi playing an instrument made by luthier Seth Kimmel (see article on page 13). Sarah Richards was brought up in rural southern Oregon, where she usually had her



feet in the creek and a pen or pencil in her hand. She began her art studies at a local community college, and earned her bachelor's degree in applied art and art history from the University of Oregon. At age 25, she is one of the youngest artists in the International Acrylic Society, and is a two time national award winner. During her college years she developed a profound interest in adventure, culture and architecture, and has traveled throughout the U.S., Spain, France and the United Kingdom, pulling from those experiences for inspiration. Sarah's current work is centered around athletic subjects, where she focuses on catching the body in motion and the fine line between fluidity and strength. She currently lives and paints in Eugene, Oregon. www.sarahannrichards.com

Carlos Surinach's Double Concerto for Flute, Bass, and Chamber Orchestra

By Michael Montgomery



Carlos Surinach discusses the score of his Double Concerto with Lucas Drew moments prior to its first performance.

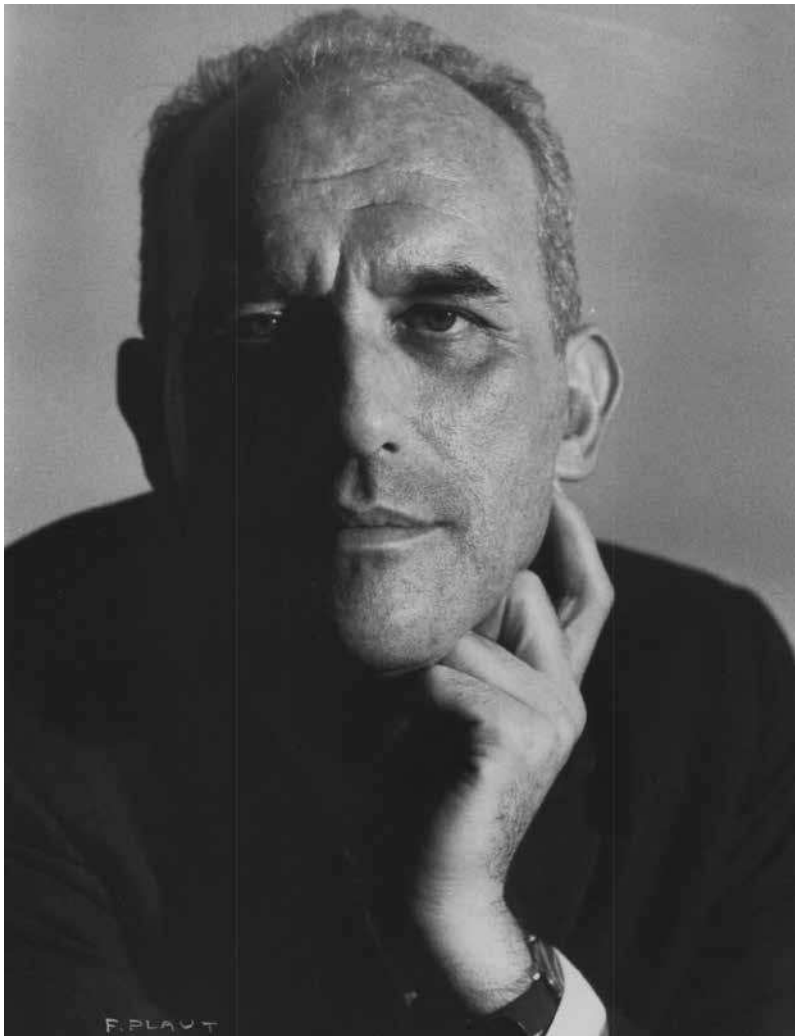
Photo courtesy of Lucas Drew.

We double bassists, when looking for new solo literature, often lament the lack of attention we receive from renowned composers, who for their part can perhaps be excused for not thinking of the bass as a solo instrument. This being the case, I would like to offer a few comments to draw attention to a work that has possibly been overlooked.

Carlos Surinach

The composer Carlos Surinach, born in Barcelona, Spain March 4, 1915, lived the better part of his life in the United States. Though in his musical training he was truly multi-national, and the many varied influences are evident in his style of composing, he

remained essentially a Spanish composer all his life. His mother, a pianist, was his first music teacher. Surinach began his formal music studies at age 14 at the Caminals Academy of Music in Barcelona, where he studied both piano and music theory. In 1940 Surinach traveled to Dusseldorf, Germany, to study composition at the Robert Schumann Conservatory with Hugo Balzer, and then in 1941 conducting with Max Trapp at the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin, where he composed his first published works. Returning to Spain in 1944, Surinach took the position of conductor of the Barcelona Philharmonic Orchestra. He remained at this post until 1947 when he left to live and conduct orchestras in Paris from 1947 to 1950.



Surinach portrait
by Frederick
Plaut, photo
courtesy of
the author.

Moving to the U.S. in 1950, Surinach soon began to receive many commissions, and was especially successful with his collaborations for ballets. A major breakthrough for Surinach after his move to America came in 1952 with a commission by the Jose Limon Company for his ballet *Ritmo Jondo*, which paved the way for three more ballet commissions that followed from Martha Graham. Due in no small part to these early successes, Surinach resided in the United States from this time until his death in 1997.

An Encounter with a Double Bassist

Dr. Lucas Drew, formerly Principal Bassist of the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra and Professor of Double Bass at the University of Miami, some years ago had a fruitful encounter with this prominent composer. He writes:

“In 1983 we honored Carlos Surinach as a guest Spanish-American composer at the Latin American Chamber Music Festival I helped organize at the University of Miami School of Music. In the following years I approached Surinach, who was living in Miami at the time (he had moved to Miami in 1983), about composing a Double Concerto for Flute, Double Bass and Orchestra. In 1988 I met with Donald Kahn, a generous supporter of the arts in Greater Miami and he agreed to commission the composition through the Janet A. Hooker Charitable Trust. Immediately, I went to Surinach’s apartment to convey the good news. When I arrived there was a circular hole in the door where the lock once was. However, when I arrived

home that afternoon, there was a postcard from Surinach – greetings from New Haven, CT – his new address!

“The composition was completed in 1988 and the first performance was given during the Festival Miami with the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra October 4, 1990, James Judd, conductor, with Christine Nield-Capote, Flute and Lucas Drew, Double Bass. Christine and I rehearsed with one another, though there was at that time no piano reduction for an accompanist to work from. We had three thirty minute rehearsals with the Philharmonic. Then in his 80s John Bitter, former Dean of the School of Music and Conductor of the UM Symphony Orchestra when I was an undergraduate student (1953-57),* [please see endnote below] was in the audience at the premiere. He praised the performance of the soloists and orchestra – ‘that they achieved the essence of Surinach’s intentions and style.’”

Later this premiere performance was broadcast nationwide on the Alamo Classical Music Hour. In 1992 a CD with the same soloists was recorded with the University of Miami Symphony Orchestra, Thomas Sleeper, conductor. The composer Carlos Surinach attended all rehearsals and the premiere concert in 1990 and was present at the CD recording session two years later.

Surinach’s Style of Composition

A major feature of Surinach’s style is the influence of “Flamenco” music of his native country and the impact it has on his work. It is believed by some that people from Flanders and the Low Countries, the “Flemish Gypsies” of the fifteenth century, first brought what was to become Flamenco music to Spain. In Spain they would have encountered and absorbed the Arabic-Moslem and the Sephardic Jewish music traditions, which were especially prevalent in the southern regions of the country. The music that evolved as these cultures met and mixed is today referred to as the “Cante Jondo” style of Flamenco music, and it is characterized by sorrowful, melancholic, plaintive sounds reflecting a somber disposition of

the displaced immigrant peoples to whom it belonged. Though most outsiders today will be more familiar with a newer, more rhythmic and upbeat “Canto Flamenco” style (which developed later in the nineteenth century), it is the older Cante Jondo style that permeates Surinach’s music.

Several elements of Flamenco music may be found in Surinach’s compositions. For instance, he makes use of florid passages that replicate the melismatic vocalizations of the gypsies of old. We see much of this in the cadenza-like passages written for the soloists in the Double Concerto. His occasional use of the insistent reiteration of a single pitch (which we see in the first trumpet motive that closes the final movement of the work – see example 3) is borrowed from Flamenco, as is his almost exclusive use of the diminished scale (a mode in which each whole tone is preceded and followed by a half tone – see example 2). Flamenco music often shifts between a 3/4 and 3/8 meter, a shift also often seen in the works of Surinach.

Ex. 1: Movement I, opening

The musical score for Example 1 consists of two systems. The first system shows the opening of Movement I, with a Flute part in 3/8 time and a Double Bass part in D (solo tuning) in 3/8 time. The Flute part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic, followed by a sforzando (*sf*) dynamic, then a piano (*p*) dynamic, and finally another forte (*f*) dynamic. The Double Bass part starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and ends with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The second system continues the music, with the Flute part starting at measure 9. The Flute part begins with a sforzando (*sf*) dynamic, followed by a piano (*p*) dynamic, and then a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The Double Bass part starts with a sforzando (*sf*) dynamic, followed by a forte (*f*) dynamic, and then a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic.

The solo bass and flute frequently converse with one another in cadenza-like passages, often unaccompanied.

Ex. 2: Movement II

Double Bass in D (solo tuning)

The musical score for Example 2 shows two systems of music for the Double Bass in D (solo tuning) in 3/4 time. The first system starts at measure 16 and features a melodic line with a diminished scale. The second system continues the music with a similar melodic line.

Surinach makes much use of the diminished scale; whole tones are most often followed by half tones.

The composer finds great drama in Flamenco music, and seeks to capture that sense of “theater” with his own compositions. Surinach is intuitively aware of the rhythmic aspects of Flamenco, the clapping of hands, stamping of the hard heels of the dancers’ shoes, percussive effects of the Flamenco guitar style – these he mimics with the ample use of orchestral percussion instruments and by scoring sharply punctuated chords for the full orchestra - in so doing he is able to recreate the drama of this Spanish style.

General Characteristics of the Concerto

Surinach's sense of drama is immediately evident as the concerto opens with a single short chord played *sforzando* by the entire orchestra. The echoes of this sudden clash are allowed to settle during two measures of silence, after which the soloists enter unaccompanied in 16th note exchanges with one another (see example 1). Throughout this work the soloists are heard in these passages, together or individually, thinly accompanied (or, as often as not, completely unaccompanied) by the orchestra. Directives such as *poco rubato*, *ad libitum*, or *a piacere*, found in many of the passages, help to give them a cadenza-like feel, reminiscent of the often poignant melismatic Flamenco vocalizations. Orchestral tutti initially seem to only interrupt or punctuate the dialogue taking place between the two soloists, and the large ensemble does not seem to find its voice until almost two minutes into the piece, where a substantial orchestral tutti occurs. Gradually a conversation evolves between orchestra and soloists. The final orchestral tutti dies down to let the flute and bass quietly make one final statement (the bass doubling the flute melody two octaves lower) accompanied only by the concertmaster, whose solo begins in the movement's final seven measures.

Ex. 3: Movement III, last six measures

Trumpet I in C

Surinach's use of an insistent reiteration of a single pitch is also characteristic of the Flamenco style.

It should be noted that the double bass (even when using the brighter “solo tuning” as it does in this work) does not project as loudly or cut through the textures of dense orchestral scores to the degree that some of the more powerful orchestral instruments might. The fact that the composer makes much use of the instrument's lower register (I count only five instances of the bassist being asked to venture into thumb position in the entire piece) to play off the contrasting high register of the flute makes it even more difficult to hear. It is therefore helpful that full orchestral forces are not employed during solo bass passages – the composer does an excellent job of orchestrating sparsely the sections that accompany the solo passages so that both soloists are always audible. In doing this Surinach has come up with some very interesting instrumental combinations to accompany the solo bass. For instance, at one moment in the first movement we find the bass being accompanied by a single bassoon, and again in the final movement by an ensemble consisting of a military drum, bass drum, timpani, and piccolo.

The second movement opens with several sharply punctuated primal sounding chords (reminiscent perhaps of a Flamenco dancer's shoes striking the floor?) played fortissimo by the large ensemble. After a 16-bar interruption from the soloists, a passage lightly accompanied by two French horns and two trombones, the chords are boldly sounded once again. In a twenty-measure cadenza presented by the soloists we find a sextuplet pattern that is reminiscent of a sixteenth note figure we heard at the opening of the first movement. The movement ends quietly with the solo flute accompanied by the first and second violins, quietly playing their final few measures *ponticello*.

In the third movement the orchestra and soloists are integrated to a greater extent than previous movements. The opening, a frantic quick moving 16th-note passage initially presented by the violins, quickly spreads to the rest of the string section, and is followed by four intensely loud, punctuated chords from the winds and percussion section. The 16th-note passage of the strings is then taken up by the clarinets and bassoons. A brass fanfare fades giving way to a low rumbling in the orchestra's bass section, which introduces the first cadenza-like passage for the soloists in this movement. At rehearsal number 53 (see example 4) the string section echoes a short motive stated by the solo flute and bass. Three measures later at a *Tempo Primo* we find our soloists playing one of their more extensive cadenzas, and finally the bass soloist slowly sounds some of the instrument's lowest notes, introducing a statement consisting of broad orchestral chords. These chords are repeated three times, each time returning in a slightly lengthened form and exhibiting slightly more rhythmic activity. Between each repetition of this series of chords the first trumpet plays a declamatory motive, a reiteration of a single “B” note (again, a practice borrowed from the Flamenco idiom – see example 3), which brings the piece to a close, punctuated by one final abrupt *secco* chord played by only basses and timpani.

Ex. 4: Movement III
Rehearsal 53

Finally in the last movement the orchestral string section echoes what the soloists play.

Conclusion

In this piece the double bass world has been gifted a work most will find rewarding, technically challenging yet accessible, one that presents our instrument in a somewhat unique setting scored with many interesting instrumental combinations. The bass is showcased as a solo instrument on par with the flute. The work is not too long, and there is nothing here to tax the ear of the audience – on the contrary, I would expect most would find the sounds and textures quite interesting and enjoyable to hear in concert. If a piano reduction could be had, I suspect the work would also appeal to many bassists searching for repertory to present on chamber music programs. Let's not let this one be forgotten!

**This note was added by Dr. Drew to pay tribute to this exceptional educational experience of which very few are aware: "At that time the University of Miami Symphony Orchestra was somewhat similar to the Eastman-Rochester Orchestra (faculty, advanced students, and professionals). During this period the UM Symphony had guest conductors such as Stokowski, Monteux, Beecham, Villa-Lobos, Chavez, Hansen, etc. and soloists of equal international caliber. When I was invited to be a faculty member in 1959 Fabien Sevitzyk, nephew of Serge Koussevitzky, was conductor of the UM Symphony through its transition to the all professional Greater Miami Philharmonic in 1966."*

Carlos Surinach's "Double Concerto for Flute, Bass and Chamber Orchestra" is available through G. Schirmer, Inc. (Associated Music Publishers, Inc.) for rental only. The work is designed to be performed by a principal flute and principal double bass of a symphony orchestra. The chamber orchestra accompaniment consists of thirteen winds, three percussionists, and strings. The CD of the piece recorded in 1992 by the University of Miami Symphony Orchestra is available from Centaur Records, Inc. (CRC 2256).

The author wishes to acknowledge the great help afforded by Esperanza Alvarez-Erviti's "An Analytical Discussion of Three Piano Works by Carlos Surinach" (a Doctoral Essay presented at the University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL, August, 1985) in the preparation of this manuscript.

Michael Montgomery, a section bassist with the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra for many years, holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in double bass performance from the University of Miami. His principal teachers are Lucas Drew and the late Robert Rohe, who was principal bassist of the New Orleans Symphony and a student of Fred Zimmermann. Dr. Montgomery's articles about bass have been published in the *American Suzuki Journal*, *Pastoral Music*, and *Bass World*, and his compositions and arrangements for bass are published by Latham Music, Recital Music, and St. Francis Music Publications.

