

Schäfer, Stefan

Ladies´ Choice

Canzone Dolorosa

Friedrich Hofmeister Musikverlag
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Stefan Schäfer has been principal bassist of the Hamburg State Orchestra since 2003. As a composer he has worked in a variety of genres but, naturally, his oeuvre is comprised mostly of music for the double bass. In these two handsome new publications from Friedrich Hofmeister of Leipzig we are given two distinct examples of Schäfer´s body of work.

Ladies Choice was, as is stated in the publisher´s notes, composed in 2003 for a young musicians competition. A quick scan of the score will show a variety of features one might expect from a typical young person´s piece: the accompaniment is relatively uncomplicated and avoids any thickly-voiced sonorities so as not to obscure the solo line, the bass´s range extends only into the highest registers via natural harmonics and the harmonic language is accessibly triadic. Additionally, Schäfer attempts to appeal to younger players perhaps not completely sold on the idea of studying „classical“ music by affecting a sort of pseudo-pop sound and feel.

Though not terribly advanced from a technical standpoint, *Ladies Choice* introduces a small handful of concepts that may prove challenging to the beginner, such as double-stop playing and polyrhythms. The accompaniment is generously presented in both D major and E major, so as to allow the soloist to use either solo or orchestra tuning as they please.

Canzone Dolorosa was conceived as a companion piece to Giovanni Bottesini´s *Passione Amorosa* and contains, as one might expect. Schäfer´s attempt to imitate the Italian humor, bravura and effortless flair in accessible modern style. Cast in three traditionally fashioned movements (Allegro deciso, Andante and Allegretto), the composer himself describes the work as „a delightful competition between two bassists vying for the favour of the pianist.“

From a musical standpoint, *Canzone Dolorosa* is straightforward, exciting and fun. Its brevity, liveliness and attractive harmonic language ask very little of the listener, allowing both audience and performer to engage in a bit of humor and melodramatic theater. Regarding the technical, the work could be most accurately described as intermediate-to-advanced: while each soloist has to contend with a handful of Bottesini-esque semiquaver runs and quick arpeggios, the technical difficulties presented here do not equal those in the older composer´s more challenging works. Having been written by a bassist, everything fits well under the hand. Both parts are to be played in solo tuning.

All in all, both works are welcome additions to the double bass repertory: *Ladies Choice* a modern choice alongside young players´ traditional options of Marcello, Vivaldi, etc. and *Canzone Dolorosa* an attractive programming option for two bassists looking for an alternative to Bottesini´s more well-known duets. As is typical from Hofmeister, both scores are printed on fine, heavy paper, nicely spaced and lacking in silly page turns. Each contains a biography of the composer as well as a brief program note describing the work and its origins.

- Review by Evan Runyon