

Renaud GRUSS

Guide Musical et Technique de Contrebasse  
*Une Méthode pour Apprendre Vite*

Musical and Technical Guide for the Double Bass  
*A Method to Learn Quickly*

VOLUME I



938, Avenue du Dr Lefebvre - 06270 VILLENEUVE-LOUBET  
RCS 495 406 829 - ANTIBES - FRANCE

# Guide Musical et Technique de Contrebasse

## *Musical and Technical Guide to the Double Bass*

### Table des Matières - Table of Contents

Introduction	ii
Présentation des Positions <i>Presentation of the Positions</i>	1
Exercices sur Cordes à Vide <i>Exercices on Open Strings</i>	3
Etudes au Second Degré de la Première Position <i>Studies on Second Degree of First Position</i>	4
Etudes au Premier Degré de la Première Position <i>Studies on First Degree of First Position</i>	26
Etudes aux Premier et Second Degrés de la Première Position avec Démarchés <i>Studies on First and Second Degrees of First Position with Position Shift</i>	39
Etudes en Troisième Position <i>Studies on Third Position</i>	44
Exercices pour Passer de la Première à la Troisième Position <i>Exercices to Switch from First to Third Position</i>	49
Etudes pour Passer de la Première à la Troisième Position <i>Studies to Switch from First to Third Position</i>	54
Etudes à la Deuxième Position et pour Passer de la Première à la Deuxième Position <i>Studies on Second Position and to Switch from First to Second Position</i>	62
Etudes à la Cinquième Position et pour Passer de la Première à la Cinquième Position <i>Studies on Fifth Position and to Switch from First to Fifth Position</i>	67
Etudes à la Quatrième Position et pour Passer de la Première à la Quatrième Position <i>Studies on Fourth Position and to Switch from First to Fourth Position</i>	74
Etudes à la Sixième Position et pour Passer de la Première à la Sixième Position <i>Studies on Sixth Position and to Switch from First to Sixth Position</i>	79
Placer la Main Gauche dans l'Aigu <i>Position the Left Hand on High-Pitched Notes</i>	85
Premières "Doubles Cordes" <i>First "Double Strings"</i>	88
Les Gammes Usuelles <i>Usual Scales</i>	89
Etudes sur Gammes <i>Studies on Scales</i>	94
Quelques Etudes <i>Some Studies</i>	99

**Renaud GRUSS**

Professor of Double Bass, Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional de Toulouse

Solo double bassist with the Orchestre de Chambre de Toulouse

General administrator of the Orchestre de Chambre de Toulouse

Chevalier des Arts et Lettres

[rgruss@orchestredeschambredetoulouse.fr](mailto:rgruss@orchestredeschambredetoulouse.fr)

## Musical and Technical Guide for the Double Bass

### *A Method to Learn Quickly*

### Introduction

There have been enormous changes in the way that the double bass is taught over the last twenty or so years.

An increasing number of younger people have become interested in studying the instrument and traditional methods have been shown to be inadequate. The studies are too long for young pupils' muscles; the exercises are not melodic enough and are simply too austere for this new generation brought up on channel-hopping, so there was a need to come up with new ways of doing things.

Unlike these sometimes very young pupils, young adults who can already play, often having taught themselves as members of jazz groups, one day decide they would like to join the conservatoire so that they can learn both music theory – of which they often know nothing – and the technique used to play the instrument at the same time.

Then, between these two extremes, there is still the traditional learner, in other words the pupil who is just starting to play the double bass having almost reached adulthood, and who has been playing another instrument, sometimes for a number of years.

Although each of these specific groups does need to be taught in a particular way, there are still some characteristics shared by all of them.

Irrespective of age, size and strength, or the musical training they already have, on the double bass the first position is the hardest physically by far and people learn both more quickly and better if they are enjoying themselves with melodic studies.

This Guide has come about over the thirteen years I have been teaching at the Conservatoire de Toulouse, and has been tried and tested successfully with many pupils of all ages.

Furthermore, having spent twenty-eight years giving concerts all over the world with the Orchestre de Chambre de Toulouse, I myself have faced the need to keep constantly developing my own technique, and so I have come up with a lot of little exercises for my own personal use and my students have also been able to get a great deal out of them.

This Guide is the result of all the answers I have found in order to help me go honestly about my work as a musician and as a teacher. It offers you a special “path” which will help you to get on more quickly.

I have not felt the need to write what has already been written by other teachers. The methods by Billé, Bottesini, Labro, Montag, Nanny, Simmandl, Streicher, Rabbath, Rollez, etc., all propose their own particular approaches of the instrument, and they are all worth looking at if you wish to acquire an overview. So I have made no attempt to be exhaustive – there is plenty of educational literature available which already does that!

On the other hand, the order in which the technical aspects are tackled and the attention paid to certain “details” are decisive to both speed of progress and accuracy of musical expression.

This is why you will find the following in this Guide:

## Volume I:

- 1/ Leitmotivs: the advice I am constantly giving my students.
- 2/ Cycle I: Learning, the path I suggest to beginners of all ages.

*Note: Studies are also planned to be worked in Cycle II and Cycle III with a modification of work instructions. Refer to the pictograms and instructions above each study.*

Volume II:

- 1/ Cycles II and III: Studies and scales for students from Cycle II onwards.
- 2/ Cycle III: Studies on the “details” which are far more than that.

## 1/ Leitmotivs

Technique has no meaning in itself, it is merely there to serve the music. From the very first note, from the very first scale, you need to look at the meaning of what you are doing. Any technical movement which may be strictly off-limits in one style of music may be highly recommended in another.

Technical convenience must always take a back seat to musical necessity and this is a habit you need to get into as soon as you start learning. Every movement you make goes with a musical idea and vice versa.

If there were no silences in music we would all soon go deaf, so you need to bring the silences to life, because they are part of the music.

On stage silence can be frightening so think about it as soon as you start working on a piece.

You need to work little, but often.

When you are working, “Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment, full effort is full victory” (Gandhi, letters to the Ashram). Do not tense up trying to succeed at all costs through a difficult bar. Success will arise out of the quality of your work, once you stop worrying about “getting it right” but are simply working on yourself.

Accuracy is not the end in itself - it is merely the means we use to play the music properly. Playing accurately is not enough - what matters the most is the accuracy of your diction, in other words the quality of the phrasing and the accuracy of the note is just one part of the accuracy of the phrasing.

In your technical work (scales and studies), do not try to keep track of how many notes you have played. Each scale, arpeggio and exercise needs to be played “as though” it were a fragment of such-and-such a symphony. When you do not know what to do, imagine that you are playing at Haydn or Mozart’s home and you will definitely not be wasting your time.

Each time you start work you need to prepare for the session before you pick up the instrument. Work on your scores at a table with a pencil and a rubber. Try to work more with your head and less with your fingers.

Although you can train and strengthen a muscle, the same is not true of our tendons and joints. If you feel any joint or tendon pain this is because you are not working properly and you are probably all tensed up rather than using your own natural weight. Your arms should be an extension of what you are doing with your pelvis and your abdominal muscles. Remember to push down on the instrument with both your right hand and your left.

Work on plenty of studies all at the same time - your brain can cope with far more than you think, so you need to learn to trust it rather than sending it to sleep by mind-numbingly rehearsing the same study for hours on end.

## 2/ Cycle I: Learning

The path that I am suggesting takes on board how physically hard the instrument is to play.

The first studies are all in the second degree of the first position, in other words with an "A" on the G string played with the first finger and a "B" with the fourth finger.

When you are only just starting to learn, the "A" string is only used occasionally, and the "E" string is deliberately ignored.

At this stage we will not be worrying about how fast you play, accuracy will arise out of speed once we get into Cycle II and beyond.

I would advise getting to grips with studying the third position and the shift from the first to the third position very quickly, before you finish studying the first degree. Experience shows that even the youngest pupils have no great difficulties in doing this on the two higher strings. Although it is smaller, the shift from the first to the second position is considerably more difficult, so the second position is studied after the third.

It is the same thing for the following two positions - the fourth is more difficult than the fifth and so I suggest that we should study them in reverse order.

In the first studies including shifts, these are conventionally shown with a line over the note which involves the change of position. This indication disappears as the book progresses.

It is only once the left hand has been toned up that the studies will come back down towards the bass notes and will tackle the study of the third and fourth strings.

There are two or even three versions of certain studies, changing the key or the articulations. Although once we get to the second cycle we can ask the student to read a score in which not all of the bow strokes are shown, the same does not go for beginners who need everything to be written down, and the same goes for transposition.

34 **Allegro**

38

42

46

50

55

60

64

*ff* *f* *mf* *f* *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

*f* sempre

*mf*