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# ELEGY: TOBY HUGHES



Toby Hughes *double bass*  
Benjamin Powell *piano*

Desenclos ~ Glière ~ Dubugnon ~ Mišek ~ Bottesini

## FOREWORD

This collection of works represents some of the most important moments from my musical journey so far. Comprised mainly of original compositions for the double bass (with the exception of the Ekskize which was originally for voice) these pieces offer a brief insight into what the instrument has to offer both musically, and as a versatile solo instrument.

The album is dedicated to the memory of Corin Long. He was one of my first and most important teachers. Without a doubt, I would not be writing this without the limitless inspiration, encouragement and enthusiasm I received whilst learning with him.

I'm extremely grateful to Mary Bowerman for giving me this opportunity. With special thanks to Ben Powell, Champs Hill Records and City Music Foundation.



## TRACK LISTING

ALFRED DESENCLOS (1912–71)

### ARIA ET RONDO

- |   |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1 | Aria  | 05'03 |
| 2 | Rondo | 07'25 |

REINHOLD GLIÈRE (1875–1956)

### FOUR PIECES

- |   |                      |       |
|---|----------------------|-------|
| 3 | Prélude Op.32 No.1   | 03'43 |
| 4 | Scherzo Op.32 No.2   | 05'05 |
| 5 | Intermezzo Op.9 No.1 | 04'04 |
| 6 | Tarantella Op.9 No.2 | 04'48 |

RICHARD DUBUGNON (b.1968)

### EKSKIZE No.1

- |   |   |       |
|---|---|-------|
| 7 | from <i>Deux Ekskize</i> , Op.17, transcribed for double bass and piano | 03'40 |
|---|---|-------|

ADOLF MIŠEK (1875–1955)

### SONATA No.2 IN E MINOR Op.6

- |    |                              |       |
|----|------------------------------|-------|
| 8  | Con fuoco                    | 06'38 |
| 9  | Andante cantabile            | 08'11 |
| 10 | Furiant. Allegro energico    | 04'26 |
| 11 | Finale. Allegro appassionato | 07'49 |

GIOVANNI BOTTESINI (1821–89)

### ELEGIA No.1

- |    |  |       |
|----|--|-------|
| 12 |  | 04'22 |
|----|--|-------|

Total playing time: **65'14**

Produced and Edited by Patrick Allen  
Engineered and Mastered by Patrick Allen  
Recorded on 15th, 16th and 17th October 2019 in the Music Room, Champs Hill, West Sussex, UK  
Cover photograph by Adam Lambert, 2020  
Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen  
Label Manager for Champs Hill Records: Rebecca Dixon

While the double bass has enriched the sound of symphony orchestras and large ensembles for centuries, the instrument is also blessed with a considerable repertoire of solo concertos and recital showpieces. From the late 1700s, players such as Johannes Sperger, the long-lived Domenico Dragonetti and Giovanni Bottesini set new standards of virtuosity, refined and extended playing techniques and composed works to display the many facets of its character. The range of music for double bass broadened in the last century, a process accelerated by new generations of performer-composers and touched by the influence of jazz. This recording reflects the importance of teaching lineages to the instrument's development; above all, it draws attention to the quality of some of the finest music for double bass

Austria, Bohemia and Moravia, the heartlands of the Habsburg empire, cultivated a rich tradition of double-bass playing and teaching. In 1677 Johann Jacob Prinner, Kapellmeister at the court of Prince Eggenberg at Graz, noted the earliest known instructions for playing the instrument in his compendious *Musicalischer Schlissl*. Throughout the next century the double bass increasingly took centre stage as a solo instrument, thanks to players of the calibre of Sperger and Friedrich Pischelberger. Sperger, born in the Moravian town of Feldsberg, now Valtice in the Czech Republic, made his name as a virtuoso player in Vienna before serving as musician to a succession of aristocratic employers in Austria and Germany.

Sperger's contrabass concertos influenced those of Dragonetti, whose career led him from a post among the instrumentalists of Saint Mark's in Venice to fame in London as soloist and fortune as the city's highest-paid orchestral player. His technical advances inspired Vaclav Hause, who founded the remarkably influential

Prague School of double-bass playing in 1811. Hause's pupils at the Prague Conservatory included Josef Hrabě, who in turn taught Josef Ramboušek (best known today as Serge Koussevitzky's teacher), Emanuel Storch and Franz Simandl, principal bassist of the orchestra of the Vienna Court Opera during Gustav Mahler's time as its director. In 1890 the fifteen-year-old Adolf Mišek left home in the Czech village of Modletín to study with Simandl at the Vienna Conservatory. Mišek joined the Vienna Court Opera orchestra in the late 1890s and succeeded Simandl as professor at the Conservatory in 1910. At the end of the First World War, following the creation of independent Czechoslovakia, he moved to Prague as principal bassist of the National Theatre orchestra and continued to teach and compose until his death at the age of eighty.

Alfred Desenclos had the misfortune to be born too late to enjoy the best years of creative ferment in France between the wars and too soon to be part of the generation who shaped French musical life after 1945. As the seventh of ten children, family circumstances meant that he had to leave school and earn a living. During his late teens he timetabled piano practice and studies at the conservatoire in Roubaix around work as an industrial designer in the textile industry. In 1932 he quit his job and enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire, where he progressed to win prizes in harmony, fugue and composition.

Desenclos, who survived on the stipend he received as choirmaster at the Parisian church of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, won the prestigious *Prix de Rome* in 1942 with his cantata *Pygmalion délivré* and made several trips to Rome between 1943 and 1946 to create new works. His commitment to traditional techniques of composition and to the spirit of romanticism stood at odds with the post-war rise of serialism as the dominant ideology in European new music. Desenclos' mature

output includes a symphony, settings of the *Salve regina* and *Requiem*, secular works touched by the influence of jazz and music for films. He was appointed professor of harmony at the Paris Conservatoire in 1950 and composed many test pieces for the institution's competitive examinations. His *Aria et Rondo*, published in 1952, was created with advanced players in mind. Desenclos dedicated its contrasting movements to Alphonse-Joseph Delmas-Boussagol, a veteran performer who succeeded his renowned teacher, Édouard Nanny, as professor of double bass at the Paris Conservatoire in 1939. Given the work's considerable demands on the bassist, not least the *Aria's* explorations of the solo instrument's upper reaches and the false harmonics that colour the closing pages of the jazz-infused *Rondo*, it seems likely that Desenclos received Delmas-Boussagol's sage advice on matters of technique.

Reinhold Glière received his early musical training as a violinist with Otakar Ševčík in his native Kiev and later as a student of violin and composition at the Moscow Conservatory. In 1901, the year after his graduation, he joined the teaching staff at Moscow's Gnessin Institute, which schooled many of the finest young musicians in imperial Russia. From 1905 to 1907 Glière studied conducting in Berlin, where his fellow pupils included the double-bass virtuoso and recent member of the Bolshoi Theatre orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky. Glière's *Four Pieces* for double bass were originally written as paired slow and dance movements, the *Intermezzo* and *Tarantella* perhaps as early as 1902, the *Prélude* and *Scherzo* by 1908. The composer dedicated the set to his friend Koussevitzky, who included the *Intermezzo* and *Tarantella* in recitals he gave on a tour of European capitals during the 1906–07 season. Each piece unfolds over a simple sonata form, with an exposition comprising two clear themes, a development section, a

recapitulation and a coda. Glière's melodies are children of the Russian Romantic tradition, charged with heightened expression and nostalgia and, in the case of the *Tarantella* and *Scherzo*, redolent of lively country dances.

Richard Dubugnon, born in Lausanne, chose to focus on music while studying history at the University of Montpellier. He took elective courses in harmony and counterpoint and was hooked: "I couldn't escape anymore, I had to write music," he has recalled. "It was my thing, because I always needed to create, to invent, and I thought just studying history was maybe very inspiring, but frustrating in the sense that I couldn't do anything about it." In the late 1980s Dubugnon moved to Paris where he received private lessons in harmony and double bass; he enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire in 1992 and graduated with first prizes for counterpoint and double bass. After further studies in composition with Paul Patterson at the Royal Academy of Music in London, he returned to France in 2002 and has pursued a successful career since as composer and bassist.

*Ekskize*, one of two duos 'in the French style', began life as a short piece for voice. It was adapted by the composer for flute and harp and first performed as such in 1997 at the Royal Academy of Music, before being transcribed for double bass and harp or piano. *Ekskize* opens with an evocation of Debussy's soundworld without ever straying into the territory of pastiche. Dubugnon's substantial miniature contrasts long, lyrical melodies with passages in which the texture breaks down to leave only fragments of sound and silence.

Mišek's output as a composer reached beyond the double bass to embrace everything from songs and marches to string quartets and a fine piano trio. His three sonatas for double bass and piano flow from his deep knowledge of the

instrument and gift for melodic invention. The Sonata No.2 in E minor Op.6, completed in 1911, looks back to the aesthetic world of Brahms, especially so in its outer movements. Mišek launches the work with a first subject conditioned by the trope of the tragic hero, its impassioned nature eased by the charm of the movement's lyrical second subject before being disturbed with the arrival of an extended codetta, almost a third theme, marked by relentless quavers and scale motifs. The contrasts between heroic striving and graceful reflection are explored throughout a series of developmental episodes and intensified in the movement's recapitulation.

Mišek's *Andante cantabile*, reminiscent of a tender Czech folk melody, offers a consoling song without words. The slow movement's central section, marked *animato* and cast in 12/8 time, strikes out with renewed vigour while retaining the expressive eloquence of what has gone before. The music modulates through several keys, expending much of its energy en route to the return of the movement's opening theme, now glossed by a flowing piano accompaniment. Shades of Dvořák surface in the *Furiant*. Its opening section, which unfolds like a coiled spring, is marked by sonorous piano chords and the distinctive rhythmic pattern of the Czech *furiant* dance. Its swagger gives way to a tranquil trio, another example of Mišek's mastery of dramatic contrast. In the final movement, the composer manages to incorporate the display elements of conservatoire-style test pieces into a rondo-like structure, the opening of which is repeated in full. The central section's lyrical melody is subverted by traces of the finale's main theme before its triumphant return.

No history of the double bass would be complete without at least a chapter on the work of Giovanni Bottesini. In 1835 the prodigiously talented teenager, already an experienced violinist and orchestral timpanist, gained a scholarship to study double bass at the Milan Conservatory even though he had no more than a rudimentary knowledge of the instrument. Bottesini made such swift progress under the instruction of Luigi Rossi that he graduated with a generous cash prize which enabled him to buy a magnificent instrument that, according to legend, he found abandoned backstage at a puppet theatre. Playing with a French bow on three strings, Bottesini secure an international reputation with his peerless technical command and remarkable sound. The English clergyman H.R. Haweis, writing in 1884, recalled how the so-called Paganini of the double bass 'swarmed up and down the finger-board, holding it round the neck at times with the grip of a giant...'. Disappointed to see 'a player on the *contre-basso*' on the bill of his favourite London concert series, Haweis was held spellbound by the Italian musician's virtuosity. 'How he bewildered us by playing all sorts of melodies in flute-like harmonics, as though he had a hundred nightingales caged in his double-bass!' Bottesini's *Elegia*, the first of three surviving elegies by the composer, grows from the germ of a simple four-note melody to cover the full range of the double bass, soaring high into the instrument's upper register and advertising the lyrical virtues of its low notes.

Andrew Stewart



Photograph: Benjamin Ealovega, 2018

## I TOBY HUGHES *double bass*

From an early age Toby Hughes was determined to pursue a career as a soloist playing an instrument more familiar to most people in its role at the back of an orchestra or a jazz band. His education has placed him at the vanguard of the solo double bass movement.

He first had lessons with Corin Long, former principal of the RPO, who taught him that he could play anything and should try everything. He moved, after Corin's death, to be taught by Graham Mitchell, and then at 16 he was invited to study at the combined Universities of Lausanne, Fribourg and Sion under the tutelage of Božo Paradžik. A year later, he was awarded the 'Future Talent' Coombs Scholarship by the Duchess of Kent and in 2011 won the Royal Philharmonic Society's 'Julius Isserlis Scholarship' to further his studies in Berlin with Matthew McDonald, principal bass of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. He returned to the UK to learn with Jiří Hudec at the Royal Northern College of Music from where he graduated in 2015.

Toby has been recognized widely for his exceptional accomplishment winning numerous awards including the Chandos Symphony Orchestra's 'Young Musician of the Year', the 2014 Royal Over-Seas League Competition string section (the first double bassist ever to win it), the 2016 Bromsgrove International Competition and the 2018 Tunbridge Wells International Young Concert Artists Competition.

Toby has already performed in Wigmore Hall, St-Martin-in-the-Fields, Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Edinburgh Festival. He has recently had a bespoke instrument made for him by Derek High which is built for solo playing, and which has opened up more repertoire opportunities for him.

Toby has been supported by the Tillett Trust, the Musicians' Company and Making Music, and has been a City Music Foundation Artist since 2018. He is delighted to record and release this debut album with Champs Hill Records featuring solo works for double bass.

**“Pianist Benjamin Powell demonstrated an immense range of tone and sound in his programme: granitic and stern for Stockhausen, brilliantly light-fingered in Elliott Carter, fiery and moody for Anthony Gilbert, volcanically sensuous in Skryabin.”**

Ivan Hewett – *Daily Telegraph*

Since winning the British Contemporary Piano Competition in 2010 Benjamin Powell has gained a reputation for intelligent and expressive performances with a strong commitment to contemporary music. He has performed across the UK and Europe as a soloist, chamber musician, and song accompanist in venues including Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, Snape Maltings, Bridgewater Hall, IRCAM (Paris), and Harpa (Reykjavik). In 2014 he was appointed pianist for Manchester’s leading contemporary music group, Psappha.

He has taken part in a performance of the complete solo piano music of Helmut Lachenmann at the Aldeburgh Festival and a performance of Marco Stroppa’s *Traiettoria* in IRCAM, Paris. Benjamin’s recording of selections from Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* was used in the National Theatre production of Sir Tom Stoppard’s ‘the Hard Problem’.

Benjamin is much in demand as a chamber musician and has collaborated with many distinguished musicians including Stefano Canuti, Leland Chen, Levon Chilingirian, Craig Ogden, Miklós Perényi, Thomas Riebl, Sophie Rosa and Eva Thorarinsdottir.

He studied at the Royal Northern College of Music with Carole Presland and later (thanks to scholarships from the MBF, DAAD, and Lynn Foundation) with Pierre-

Laurent Aimard and Alexander Melnikov at the Hochschule für Musik Cologne and RNCM respectively. Benjamin also attended the International Musicians Seminar in Prussia Cove studying in the class of Thomas Adès.

Since 2007 Benjamin has been a staff pianist at the RNCM where he now also teaches piano. His students have gone on to win prizes in major competitions, including BBC Young Musician of the Year, James Mottram International Competitor, Manchester International Piano Concerto Competition and the British Contemporary Piano Competition.

Benjamin was born and raised in West Sussex and currently lives in Glossop with his wife and three children.





Photograph: Adam Lambert, 2020



## Toby Hughes City Music Foundation Artist

**City Music Foundation** (CMF) is a UK charity based in the City of London. CMF's mission is to turn exceptional musical talent into professional success by equipping outstanding musicians with the tools, skills, experience, and networks they need to build and sustain rewarding careers. We believe that by investing in these talented musicians early in their professional careers we can not only secure their employment, but help to ensure the future of quality music in the UK and beyond. To find out more or to apply, please go to our website.

“ CMF has offered an invaluable platform for me to bring the solo bass to a wider audience and further develop my musical career. Opportunities for the double bass to be heard as a solo voice are rare. I am extremely grateful to CMF for helping to support me in promoting and developing my instrument. ”

Toby Hughes (2018 CMF Artist)