

During the past years, I have come closer to discovering my own musical voice, as it speaks through the double bass. Though my musical training might have followed a line of rather conventional musical practice, it was continually ensued by an evolving thought regarding the contextualization of this instrument-specific language of music, which I have come to call *a folk music for the double bass* – an approach that strongly relates to the aspirations of the great Italian double bass player and composer Stefano Scodanibbio who says that he wants “to allow the contrabass to sing with its own voice”.¹ During the 1980s Scodanibbio discovered this voice, that comes from the instrument itself, as being based on the possibilities the instrument offers. The main discovery that furthered the establishment and refining of such a language was the expansion of flageolet techniques, the most evident of these being the interchanging of ordinary tones and flageolets. This conception of a music that is in a sense *rooted* in the instruments very own qualities and characteristics, a folk music for the double bass, so to speak, has been the main goal in creating my own music, and my aspiration in publishing the sounding results of my works for double bass on my CD *Light*.² To create a composed music, bound by intricate fixed rhythms, melodic shapes and forms, but yet to evince the sounding impressions of improvisation. My music thus follows a tradition that is based upon the exploration of those sounds that can be particularly well expressed through the double bass. The overtones enable a new world of sounds, while at the same time strengthening the link to the fundamentals of all sound.

Stefano Scodanibbio and the final step in the technical evolution of the double bass

The *overtones* and *flageolets* that I write of here are synonyms for *harmonics*, all of which are partial waves (‘partials’) within a sound that are integer multiples of the fundamental frequency. Of course, harmonics must have been used, at least to some extent, already from the earliest versions of this instrument, and have developed gradually ever since. In the classical period for example, composers used harmonics in two ways, either as brief arpeggiated figures in the violin or viola range, or in hornlike motifs in a playful canonic dialogue with the orchestra. A number of outstanding exponents of the Viennese virtuoso school (playing the Viennese violone, a type of double bass) gained recognition in 18th-century Austria and produced a remarkably vast body of literature including more than thirty double bass concertos.³ Following in the path of the early classical composers, via Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf, the Viennese virtuoso players, and the unique mastery of double bass virtuoso Domenico Dragonetti, we find a more extended range in the use of harmonics, which expanded all the way up to the 7th and 8th partials on the strings. Giovanni Bottesini (1821-1889) refined the solo technique and began writing more conjunct, lyrical passages in harmonics as well as the arpeggiated type of passage work, thus broadening the scope and concept of writing in harmonics. The last major development of new, idiomatic flageolet techniques took place with Stefano Scodanibbio during the 1980s. Scodanibbio was for a short time a student of Fernando Grillo, who had rapidly gained a reputation as the “Buddha of the double bass”. Grillo had already created a very detailed notational system, which he used to control every aspect of sound creation. As a young player, Scodanibbio was naturally fascinated by the complexity and control of the new sounds – particularly of the harmonics – that Grillo displayed, and he very quickly picked up a short, but intricate piece by Grillo named *Paperoles* (1976). Here, as in other pieces, Grillo explored sound and timbre *par excellence*. For Grillo, the object of sound became a subject of contemplation and exploration, in search of the peripherals of timbre that lay hidden in this instrument. Although a short piece, *Paperoles* is nonetheless monumental in its attention to detail. It was described by Scodanibbio as “a manifest where

more than 30 techniques of the modern contrabass are concentrated in just a little over 3 minutes, specifically notated almost to fetishism".⁴ Inspired by his teacher, Scodanibbio went on to compose *e/statico*, written in 1980 as one of his first pieces for the double bass. The similarity between the two pieces in their dissection and isolation of the sound object and in the elaborate notation of sounds and actions is striking. However, Scodanibbio would very soon abandon Grillo's style and notation, and instead adapt impressions from other contemporaries such as Salvatore Sciarrino, Luigi Nono and Franco Donatoni. With *Sei Studi* (the title alludes to Sciarrino's *Sei Capricci*), composed between 1981 and 1983, he defined his new style and techniques within a set of short études.

The novelty of Scodanibbio's music lies in his refined use of harmonics on every part of the string, also in the low and middle positions of the fingerboard. In his music, narrative and rhapsodic phrases are formed through an interchanging of ordinary tones and flageolets. This constantly changing motion between low and high sounds creates multi-dimensional rooms where sounds and fragments of melody can evolve. There are also a number of poetic implications in the 'weight relationship' between ordinary tones and flageolets, as Enzo Restagno so gracefully articulates in the liner notes to the recording of Scodanibbio's *Six Duos*: "The real sounds are more consistent and have a closer presence. The harmonics instead are gentle, distant and, with their thinness, vibrant, almost as if only in one's memory. To oppose, to superimpose or to juxtapose these two types of sounds means to give life to vicissitudes of presence and absence so to construct true and real novels".⁵

The full potential of harmonic sounds on the double bass, as it is realised by Scodanibbio and others, may very well be *the final step in the development of the historical double bass*. All major divisions of playing techniques have now been defined, and exploration of the natural inherent possibilities of the instrument itself has reached its final evolutionary stage. This recent development towards an 'ultimate' musical practice, including a vast number of extended performance techniques, e.g., playing *col legno*, producing percussive effects on the body and using harmonics, has taken place in close connection with the general developments in contemporary classical music, whose characteristic signifiers these performance techniques have become. Without intending to state fixed generalisations, or give an all too precise definition of the major divisions of playing technique (that themselves embody a much larger scope of variation), I wish to confine this evolutionary peak to techniques that seem to *belong* to the instrument, by idiomaticity, by a well-suited sound or by common use; to techniques that originate from the instrument itself! On the other hand, adverse techniques created by adaptations to the instruments themselves, such as the use of mutes, paperclips, electronics or other modifications, as well as the use of new materials and improvements in design, all belong to other categories of instrumental development, and form separate chapters in the continuous search for new sounds. Nevertheless, embraced by all variations of technical development, our present-day double bass Renaissance, "a period of explosive development similar in a general way to that of the other string instruments in the 19th century",⁶ is extremely multifaceted in its exploration of new repertoire, its mixture of musical styles, and in the way in which it fosters new schools of virtuosos who place the instrument centre-stage. As an effect, "people have now come to realize that, of all the bowed instruments, it may have the largest potential for variation of timbre and the greatest tone colour range".⁷ Indeed, it is within its expressive range of timbre that the modern double bass has truly found its voice.

Outside the Italian tradition, it is the American bassist and composer Bertram Turetzky that has made the most significant contribution to defining modern techniques and repertoire. In the same way as the 70s belonged to Grillo and the 80s to Scodanibbio, the 60s were the domain of Turetzky. Stefano Scodanibbio describes him as the initiator of the revival of the modern double bass and one of the most important bass players of our

time, regardless of the clear differences between the American and European styles of contemporary music. At work on both sides of the Atlantic, it is these musicians that have explored the remaining undiscovered territories of the double bass, and who have drawn the maps from which others can uncover new details. They have completed the evolution of our historical double bass, not by embroidering upon existing musical expressions, but by letting the body of novel performance techniques shape a new music.

The unfolding of our instruments geology of technical strata has been accompanied by processes of continuity, variation and selection: *continuity* that links the present to the past; *variation* that springs from the creative impulse of individuals or from collective musical developments; and *selection* by the community of composers and performers that determine the forms in which found techniques survive. Groups of the naturally inherent techniques might be referred to as *sounds made on the strings with the bow*, *pizzicato sounds*, *left-hand fingering systems* and *percussive sounds on the instrument*, although these are only tentative characterisations to let the reader see the idea of what I write about, for as previously mentioned, there is little purpose in making sweeping generalisations. The use of the bow to play the instrument, as we traditionally know it, is a technique that *belongs* to the double bass. Today, when we find ourselves in the 21st century, timbral colouration and novel bowing concepts begin to be approved as idiomatic techniques by young players and the wider community. As early as 1974, Turetzky had suggested categorisations for the new directions in bowing in his book on the contemporary contrabass (the revised edition was published in 1989)⁸, which has since proven to be very precise illustrations of most modern, idiomatic bowing techniques. The jazz pizzicato is a technique that *belongs* more to the instrument than does the classical pizzicato, although both types are clearly idiomatic. In fact, this is the starting point for most young players who begin fumbling around with a double bass. The basis for Turetzky's work on contemporary techniques was a re-evaluation of pizzicato technique, which he says was "until recently a wasteland in Western art music except for some isolated moments in orchestral, chamber and solo scores by Paganini, Elgar, Tchaikowsky, and Bartók".⁹ In jazz, he found a solo pizzicato tradition which re-energised all pizzicato technique. Still associating to the more modern musical scene, Turetzky was not directed "toward more speed but toward new vistas of *timbre*".¹⁰ And by saying so he confirms that timbre, as a musical parameter, had established itself as one of the primary elements within the new music. Because of the great resonance of the double bass, composers and performers quickly embraced the instruments ability to produce percussive sounds. Drum imitation was anticipated by Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber in his *Battalia* from 1673, where he lets the bass imitate a marching drum calling for battle, using *col legno battuto* and preparing the instrument by inserting a piece of paper through the strings. In the contemporary literature we find some very idiomatic examples of percussive techniques played with the fingers, mallets and the bow, namely in Jacob Druckman, Joji Yuasa, Philippe Boivin and Thomas Read¹¹, but also in Scodanibbio in *Geografía amorosa* (1994) and in his reinvention of Luciano Berio's cello *Sequenza* (XIV).

With the last works of Scodanibbio, in particular *Oltracuidansa* (1997/2002), *Ottetto* (2010/2011) and the *Sequenza XIVb* (2004), he captures all the factors in the technical evolution, and in doing so draws a final line to a historical development. The general technical possibilities inherent in the double bass, its colloquial characteristics, have been expressed and sketched on paper. Thus, an epoch in the instruments development is over, an epoch which covers the years from mid-17th century, when the double bass as we know it emerged in its own right and the basses of the violin family were standardized and odd-size patterns abolished,¹² up until the present day, when the era of 20th-century contemporary music comes to an end and the concepts of pluralism and technology take over. Playing techniques have developed either in parallel with the modifications, improvements and standardisations of the instrument, for example in the way music played

on the Viennese violone was later adapted for instruments of different sizes, tunings and number of strings, or as curiosities in connection with modifications to the instrument or bow. The instrument of today fuses design, string technology and performance techniques. So, to speak of our historical double bass as *the* double bass, is something that also reflects the account of how the instrument itself has developed through time. Certainly, the exploding interest for the double bass we have witnessed in the past fifty years, its *second revolution*¹³, would not have been possible without the vast improvements in playing conditions that have taken place over the past century, such as the introduction of steel strings and the creation of adjustable bridges.¹⁴ Simultaneous developments of bow technique and fingering systems, by performers such as Gary Karr, Stuart Sankey, David Walter, Knut Guettler, Jean-Marc Rollez, François Rabbath, Francesco Petracchi, Ludwig Streicher, Klaus Stoll and many, many others, have perfected the traditional classical technique. However, with some exceptions, the performers so crucial to this development are profiled rather as teachers than as composers.

So where do we go from here? The developments we have seen over the past 20 years, such as multiphonics on the double bass, do not form new and independent groups of playing techniques, and the techniques are not as idiomatic as the flageolet techniques used by Scodanibbio. It is therefore unlikely that these subgroups will come into general use. What probably will happen is that a selection of the most idiomatically extended techniques will mature in the hands of the orchestral player and become part of the symphonic repertoire. Also, and to a greater extent, novel sounds will make colourful alterations to the general solo repertoire, where young performers will continuously refine the concept of virtuosity. In the future, the double bass will be incorporated into musical styles in which it has not been much used before – be they Indian classical music, Arabic music or all kinds of folk and traditional music – and thereby absorb new variations of sound and technique. Perhaps by the end of this reflection on technique, we should dwell on some words from Scodanibbio: “[...]only the new can make sense of a work and of working. And looking for the new **is**, to me, the condition for doing anything. With all the risks, dangers and chance that going off the beaten track involves [...]. Invention is more important than technique, which of course has to be there – it just shouldn’t be visible.”¹⁵

Virtuosity

The organization and presentation of musical sound is one of the ways through which shared meanings are articulated. Values are not only represented and expressed through the social practice of musical performance but also through musical sounds themselves. This applies to and unites ideas and practices of all fields of musical expression, from traditional and folk music to art music. It is within the communication of values and meaning, in the presentation of musical sound, that the modern musician articulates his ‘virtuosity of knowledge’. The composer Luciano Berio used this extended concept of virtuosity to summarise his view on musician and instrument. Central to this concept, is the expansion of the scope, not only of technical possibilities, but also of the register of musical expression, through a kind of intellectual virtuosity that constantly reflects and challenges the idiom of the individual instruments, their technical capacity, and the historical roots of that idiom. Berio claimed that he never ‘abused’ the instrument in the manner of the more experimental styles of his contemporaries, and similar statements are given by Scodanibbio when he says that his music is “an expression of the desire to help the instrument finally find its own voice, after having known only the stammering of voices inappropriate to it or the sadistic violations of the so-called avant-garde”.¹⁶ They “never tried to alter the nature of the instrument, nor to use it “against’ its own nature”.¹⁷ With a similar respect for tradition, Salvatore Sciarrino, too, employs conventional instruments and puts them to unconventional use, and proceeds in having instruments pushed to their expressive limits.

Our modern-day understanding of the virtuoso performer is of a musician with analytical and technical insight; one who articulates the structure of the piece and sets the work in a historical perspective. Furthermore, he proposes emendations to a score by personal interpretations and co-composing practices – I strongly believe that the freedom of interpretation and of ‘reinvention’ must be emphasised in future collaborations between composer and performer – through critical reflection and active participating in the interpretative process and, not least, through the communication of the music. This understanding harks back to the very old usages of the meaning of ‘virtuoso’ from the 16th and 17th centuries, when its meaning signified not only a highly accomplished musician but was also an honorific term reserved for a person distinguished in any intellectual or artistic field.¹⁸ Today, the musician should neither be a mere intermediary of the artistic idea, nor should he be just a flamboyant entertainer with a perfect technique. Performers like Grillo and Scodanibbio, Bertram Turetzky and others, myself included, belong to a centuries-old tradition of composer-instrumentalists whose works have revitalised the literature for their instrument. And perhaps our task for the future is now founded on the reflection and communication of instrumental development through extended techniques, and to establish concomitant relations with new ways of investigating musical sound.

As far as Berio was concerned “the composer can only contribute to the transformation of musical instruments by using them, and trying to understand *post factum* the complex nature of the transformations”.¹⁹ How can we hence define the *musicians* view on the transformation of musical instruments through composing? Does the process differ from that of the composers? The answer, I believe, is yes. Where the composer usually observes the transformations as a result of the compositional process – where he has worked with form and structure, but also with instrument and playing techniques – the performer follows the opposite path. For him the transformations begin with physical explorations of the instrument – progressively, by acquiring knowledge of its fundamental techniques and by gradually transcending them with new ways of using the instrument –, which initiates the creation of new musical expression. And, as seen throughout the history of virtuosity, improvements in the *construction* of an instrument inspire performers to push their technique to the limits. For the musician who works on developing novel playing techniques, the process of transformation is not complete until he is satisfied with his ability to use those techniques in his own or others’ music. Études, transcriptions, improvisations, new arrangements and original compositions constitute the performer’s documentation of his instrumental endeavours. His collaborations with composers can develop aesthetical references and define entire movements, and sometimes the performer and the composer, and the technique and the music, all fuse together in works of art that transcend history.

It is rare to find a rewriting and reinterpretation of a piece that so much epitomises the ‘virtuosity of knowledge’ that Berio was talking about, as Scodanibbio’s double bass version of Berio’s *Sequenza XIV* for cello. In his program notes to the new version, Scodanibbio writes: “Since 2000/2001 Berio was talking about a Double Sequenza for cello and contrabass. His first idea was to have them performed one after the other. But eventually he wrote the cello Sequenza (XIV), which, in its final version, was performed by Rohan de Saram in 2003. He sent me the score in April of the same year asking me to ‘reinvent’ (that is the word he used) it for double bass. He didn’t want a transcription - this was very clear. He expressly asked me to make a version for double bass using the new techniques he heard in my pieces.” The cello Sequenza combines western and non-western elements, in homage to Rohan de Saram’s Sri Lankan descent and diverse musical background. De Saram grew up playing the Kandyan drum, one of the most significant instruments in Sri Lanka, and he provided Berio with tapes and transcriptions of Kandyan drumming. The percussive sections, with which Berio enriched his work by featuring a twelve-beat Kandyan drum rhythm often expanded or reduced by one beat, are

in Scodanibbio's version often reinvented using his special technique of playing flageolets with both hands, thus enabling quicker passages, a higher degree of virtuosity and adding more tonal material to the percussive sounds. Scodanibbio has himself often pointed out the sounding similarities between his flageolet techniques and the tabla drumming in Indian music. This is particularly clear when listening to his duo with Terry Riley, where they imitate the shape of sound of Indian ragas. As in all of Scodanibbio's compositions, the interchanging of harmonics and ordinary tones shapes the identity of the 'new' *Sequenza*. The extremely diversified melodic passages, regarding pitch, rhythm, dynamics and timbre, reach into an even further dimension when they travel in and out of harmonics and ordinary tones. Overtones are used mostly as 'resonators', in creating chords from the sounding overtones. Contrary to the many arrangements of Berio's *Sequenzas*, for example the arrangements of *Sequenza IX* for clarinet into versions for saxophone and bass clarinet, the double bass *Sequenza* contains a higher degree of original material in the new version. Scodanibbio supplemented his version with several brief, personal commentaries or reflections on Berio's music, as optional inserts similar to those used by Berio in, for example, *Sequenza VII* for viola.

Between 1991 and 1994, Scodanibbio composed a cycle of six duos for all combinations of what he refers to as the 'real string quartet' – violin, viola, cello and double bass. Enzo Restagno writes: "*Six Duos* resembles from time to time pages of a diary, conjuring up suggestions of remote music and distant countries, real or imagined".²⁰ The contemplations in this musical diary lets us follow crucial moments of development and expression of musical, instrumental and philosophical character, and lets us see how these elements also colour each other. As in an experiment similar to that of investigating Scodanibbio's line of compositions, the listener can appreciate the unfolding of technique and aesthetics by following the chronological timeline in which my own works are presented on the CD *Light*. From time to time the music resembles pages from my own diary, exposing memories of movies I have seen, stories I have heard, music I have played...

There are many common inspirations that ground my own and Scodanibbio's music. We find impulses through our travels, in the local music and culture that we meet. In *Sequenza XIVb*, Scodanibbio wrote a cadenza drawing on guitar techniques from flamenco music. In *Shared moments* (2009), I use a simple rhythmical frame that imitates a folk rhythm from a Norwegian fiddle tune. Improvisation as process and performance grew out of our experimentation with sound and timbre, and the new techniques in turn inspired spontaneous endeavours within new musical expression, as in Scodanibbio's duo with Terry Riley, and my own duo with Norwegian folk singer Unni Løvlid. Our common concept of virtuosity and instrumental idiom springs out of our upbringing in and positioning within the western classical tradition, though also out of our active participation in the popular music of our time. The latter is demonstrated in the variation piece *& Roll* (2007), in which Scodanibbio makes a virtuosic play on Jimi Hendrix's *Foxy Lady*, yet in its original version as a theatre act the piece is also closely linked to Berio's interpretation of theatre and humour in compositions such as *Sequenza V* (1966) and *Melodrama* (1970) and to Mauricio Kagel's instrumental theatre pieces. My own references to popular music are best seen through my work with POING, a trio with saxophone, accordion and double bass, where we constantly improvise on popular material and feel equally at home there as in more 'serious' music.

Finally, by approaching Scodanibbio's line of composition, or by comparing my own and Scodanibbio's works as two composers using the same playing techniques, it is possible to draw conclusions on usability, idiomaticity and timbre. Virtuosity is a concept that embraces all these techniques. But technical brilliance is first and foremost portrayed in the linear, arabesque-like gestures that constantly shift between fundamental and overtone spectra, creating dazzling narratives as seen in *On turning* from *Sei Studi* or in

Due pezzi brillanti (1985), or in the rhythmic cascades of flageolet pizzicato heard in *Voyage that never ends* and in *Farewell*, the last movement of *Sei Studi*. Programmatic ideas, as well as expressiveness and rhetoric of sonorities, are widely investigated in compositions such as *Alisei* (1986), *Ecco - 21 cartoline per Edoardo Sanguineti* (1997) and throughout *Six Duos*. The sound world of timbral exploration and transformation that meets us in *Oltracuidansa*, a piece for double bass and 8-channel tape based entirely on sound material generated by the double bass, has grown out of philosophical reflections sparked by the discovery of a text by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben – *La fine del pensiero* (The End of Thought) – “a text that leads to the recognition that thought cannot find an adequate language, at least not a verbal one”.²¹ Scodanibbio contemplates much on questions related to the language of the double bass and how he can give a voice to the thought. He never answers his philosophical reflections in clear words, but a number of compositions arose from the creative exploration of ‘language’ and ‘voice’, as in *Marche bancale* and *La fine del pensiero*, both composed in 1998 in collaboration with French dancer and choreographer Hervé Diasnas using music for double bass and tape. Together with rhythmic and percussive possibilities explored in *Geografia amorosa*, these pieces found the sounding entities leading up to the sonorities heard in *Oltracuidansa*. As the overtones strengthen the link to the fundamentals of all sound, *Oltracuidansa* also reveals the atavistic and, in the double sense, dark tones of the instrument. The work articulates the culmination of Scodanibbio’s technical, aesthetical and philosophical thought. As expressed in the post-structuralist vocabulary of Gilles Deleuze: “*Oltracuidansa* is strongly archaic, stretching over vast distances under the spell of its sensory-acoustic texture, not so much aimed at the experience of interesting effects, but more rampant on the rhizomatic proliferation of sounds”,²² as opposed to the aborescent conceptions that prevail in most of Scodanibbio’s other compositions. Interestingly, it can also be perceived retrospectively in its sounding similarities to Fernando Grillo’s experimental compositions from the 1970s.

Timbre and texture can, just as rhythm and melody, find their inspiration in all of our cultures and histories, in the traditions of the past, in the instant creation of the present, and in future research. After all, it is the instrument in our hands that gives us the sounds with which we create our music. Through the virtuosic combination of normal sounds of certain tones and the (virtual) sounds of the corresponding overtone spectrum, which are created using special bowing and pizzicato techniques – we achieve our “completely new, not unnatural but nevertheless exciting vision of the instrument”²³ –, and, a new music emerges, which I call *a folk music for the double bass*.

“...to allow the contrabass to sing with its own voice”

The parallelism between folk music and art music has for some time been acknowledged in contemporary musicology. Already in 1941, Zoltán Kodály gave an excellent summary of these relationships in his study entitled ‘Folk Music and Art Music’. I will quote Kodály here, taken from a later inquiry into the similarities of folk music and art music by Bence Szabolsci.²⁴ “In folk music”, Kodály says “strictly speaking a new transcription, a variation is produced by the lips of the singer on every occasion. This operative power of unconditional ownership has been emphasised many times as an essential trait of the folk song. It used to exist also in higher art. Apparently, the mode of production is entirely different: here it is a process of individual creation, there the slow variation of the existing gradually leads to a new work through the links of tiny changes. But let us look more closely at the history of music: does composition of so much individual character, showing no likeness to anything in existence, spring from the heads of composers as did Minerva from the head of Jupiter? The early works of even the greatest masters are also mere imitations, often scarcely differing from the compositions of their predecessors. Their originality, their individual tones develop only step by step. The influence of others can be

dissolved even in their most original works. No one could have guessed the composer of Tristan from Wagner's first operas. He was doubtful of himself at the age of thirty, because he found so much imitation, so many foreign influences in his own works. This was natural. The artist does not live in a vacuum, but in the company of other people; he feels and thinks like millions of other people; only he can express himself in a better way... In the history of art, schools, groups, and hosts of followers mean the same as does the variation in folk music... A new type of song is developed from existing forms by slow variation, always growing more different, but hardly at a slower pace than that discernible in art music. There, too, the appearance of a new style has been found to act like a revelation. However, the history of music can in most instances demonstrate its gradual preparation by a long line of forgotten works”.

How can I claim the existence of a specific ‘folk music for the double bass’, one that has matured within the sounding domain of contemporary music? Does this concept shed new light on the music I discuss in this article and more closely link it to a linear tradition of musical and technical development? The answer here is, of course, a resounding yes. I have already explained briefly how processes of continuity, variation and selection have accompanied the technical development of the double bass similar to the ways in which they have helped define traditional folk music. Another characteristic of folk music – the transmission by word of mouth – has a fascinating equivalent in the communication of modern technique, and of contemporary music, which also lies very much in oral transmission. As an autodidact of contemporary music, I learned by listening to recordings and watching double bass players play. Continuous research is conducted on the instrument until I understand the technique and sound I want to use. Techniques are passed on from player to player and from player to composer, which in turn nurtures a variation and selection of sounds. In addition, the *conversation* between players is invaluable when it comes to sharing experiences and learning new, especially when novel techniques are assimilated into personal styles and compositions and when developing the introspective thoughts and reflections that make up every creative and artistic work. I have found great pleasure in discussing recent musical developments with players such as Scodanibbio, Teppo Hauta-aho, Mark Dresser and Jiri Slavik, and this has sometimes revealed technical details in situations where one would not expect. An example of this is when I learned a variant of the *rimbalzo verticale* technique, the *rimbalzo verticale infinito* – a unique technique for the double bass where the bow bounces from the middle of the string down to the bridge – during a pleasant dinner conversation with Scodanibbio. The sonority is reminiscent of an electronic sound, bouncing and flapping very softly, and it is through electroacoustic and pre-recorded music that the technique comes into its own. The *rimbalzo verticale* is heard extensively in Scodanibbio's piece *Oltracuidansa*, and has formed central ideas in many of my own works, such as *Shared moments* for double bass and tape. From a meeting with Teppo Hauta-aho in Helsinki I learned another technique, the pizzicato multiphonics, which I also use frequently in my own pieces. I recall that Hauta-aho was quite specific in his description of this technique and in the use of the term ‘multiphonics’, which, when he was confronted with other uses of the term, evoked question marks and comments about its uselessness. Unfortunately, the wider double bass community still remains narrow-minded, and marked by prejudice and protectionism, which is probably largely due to the fact that the instrument allows for such very strong *personal* styles to develop. The paradox is, of course, that this should be perceived as something very positive.

In a dialogue with Nils Økland, one of Norway's finest players of the Hardanger fiddle and a bridge-builder between contemporary music and folk music, the similarities between folk music and classical/contemporary music were brought forward. Økland sees analogous features in the way in which classical music in its golden ages drew on the concepts of variation and the flowering of melodic *types*,²⁵ and the way in which folk music

has always included the contemporary music into its own expressions. He points out characteristics such as ornaments and fiddle tunings as examples of elements which were once used in contemporary music but which went out of fashion and continued to evolve into various local folk traditions. "I let myself be influenced by the music I hear around me", says Økland, "My music has been compared to contemporary music, improvisation and sometimes baroque music. The fact that I mainly work orally is of course common in many styles, but I think that if folk performers throughout history have heard contemporary [classical] music that has made an impression on them, they may have transformed these impulses and incorporated them into their own music. For example, it is said that several fiddlers began to create *lyarslåtter* in the same mould as fantasies produced by the classical violin virtuoso Ole Bull and others [in the late 19th-century]. Before the romantic era – even though there were mutual influences of art and folk music – I think it was normal not to have titles attached to the folk tunes, and the music was mainly related to dance and social or practical events[...]. I think I see two main lines in the understanding of folk tradition when I meet [folk] musicians: some are very concerned with imitating their mentors as closely as possible, while others have a freer relationship to tradition and put more of themselves into the music." Økland himself relates to the latter approach: "When I compose, the interpretation comes more naturally. I do not have to transform, convert or recreate music from a score. When I make music, I often experiment with shapes and forms and am not bound by tradition. Similarly, I think great performers from different styles have some of the same freedom in the performance of their own music[...]. I once read an interview with some French painters who exhibited at the Henie-Onstad Art Centre. They said something like that they felt it was wrong for them to try to paint like their heroes in the tradition of French painting. They were convinced it was more respectful to create their own expressions, and that being inspired by history helped them maintain a close bond with the tradition." When asked about innovation and transcendence of style, Økland answers: "I believe there is a line of composers and improvisers who have integrated folk music into their own music, from Haydn and Mozart through Brahms, Bull, Grieg and right up to the present day: Eivind Groven, Béla Bartók, Johan Kvandal, Geirr Tveitt, Lasse Thoresen, Don Cherry, Arild Andersen, Jan Johansson, Frode Haltli, Jan Garbarek, Anne Hytta, etc." An interesting mix of composers, indeed: folk, jazz, classical *and* contemporary musicians!

My point, however, is not to link the 'folk' concept to any consistent definition of traditional folk music, which is elusive anyway. The characterisation of a folk music for the double bass springs out of Scodanibbio's formulation of his desire *to help the instrument find its own voice*. It describes a music that is composed *together* with the double bass, and at its root lies questions about the identity and identification of the instrument, the delimitation of musical repertoires, how these repertoires are transmitted, and the assessment of sounds. I am associating the music of Scodanibbio and Berio, Scelsi and Sciarrino with the base repertoire that has been moulded into an idiomatic syntax of instrumental music. For me, their music carries within its core the concepts, expression, and divulgement of folk music. The intermingling and interrelated compound of (novel) sounds, based on harmonics, founds the sonorousness which the instrument speaks, and constitutes the folk music of the double bass. The harmonics, as they are used in this music, may be regarded as equivalents to the fiddler's open strings, or to the understrings on the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle. They create a certain drone-like feeling in the music, they make intonation easier, and they create new dimensions of expressiveness, virtuosity and timbral colouration. And as in the traditional music for fiddle, harmonic variation can be acquired by retuning the strings. In Norwegian traditional music alone, there are more than 25 different tunings for the fiddle. Simple scordatura tunings of one or two strings are used by Scodanibbio in *Voyage that never ends* and *Sequenza XIVb*, and I use it myself in the piece *Shared moments*. Perhaps the most radical cross-tuning in a piece of high difficulty

so far can be encountered in a remarkable work by Heinz Holliger called *Prelude e Fuga for Solo Double bass in the Viennese Tuning* (2010). Here, the strings are tuned F-A-D-F#-A as in the old Viennese tuning, used in Austria around 1760 and onwards during the first revolution of the double bass. A completely new harmonic landscape manifests itself in Holliger's piece, neither harmonious nor consonant, as we might suspect from the tuning, but rich in dissonant sounds and unexpected melodic turns deduced through the flageolet techniques on every part of the fingerboard. Similar variation in harmonic material created by a combination of flageolet techniques and cross-tunings can be heard in the music of Giacinto Scelsi, for example in *Dharana* (1975), a duo for cello and double bass, and *Kshara* (1975) for two double basses. Providing a fascinating source of variation of harmony, one must nevertheless tread carefully in this landscape, to maintain very strong aesthetic reasons for the use of scordaturas. As an oboist and composer, Heinz Holliger provides a monumental example of the composer-instrumentalist as a contemporary folk musician. He successfully places the experiments with timbre and playing technique within the compass of structure and organisation in much the same way as Scodanibbio ventured in his later compositions, and perhaps one of the ways forward for future composer-instrumentalists.

The folk music of and for the double bass is nourished by a venture of sound (timbre) through variation, improvisation and composition. Reflections upon tradition, sound and texture are still treated with reason, sometimes freely and sometimes by structure, inside the compositions, as variations, try-outs, études within the étude and as reflections of word and thought. But to use the term 'folk music' when describing the sound of some contemporary compositions does not imply that the music is simpler, more 'popular' or accessible, or more connected to 'real life' than the more intellectual contemporary music. Unfortunately, contemporary music as an encompassing category is often automatically and inexorably compared to the most avant-garde and modernist directions within the genre, forgetting that numerous styles exist that use many of the same musical elements – simple rhythms, repetitions, flowing lines, drones and overtones – as traditional music. The folk music for the double bass is still firmly planted within the sounding and intellectual domain of a broadly defined contemporary music.

What we might see as the clearest characteristic in this music is the reinstatement of *improvisation* in every part of the creative act. In the many portrayals of improvisation, it is the *spontaneous character of expression* that we meet in all kinds of folk and traditional music that attracts me the most. The concept of a folk music for the double bass, as a true goal for expression and recreation, constitutes the same prepared spontaneity and rehearsed freedom as a folk fiddler's performance, with the accumulation of thoughts and experiences through *an unrestrained sound*. We can even take a step further, and say that other factors that usually constitute a folk performance – the storytelling, the intimacy, the nearness to the performer and the piece – should also belong to the communication of contemporary music. In a concert we can tell stories or anecdotes about the creation of the piece, the life of the composer, personal interpretations and so on, and by linking these stories to the musical narratives we can establish stronger ties between music and audience. It is also my experience that much contemporary music fits in with intimate, informal concert settings. The music deserves to be played close up to the audience in order to give the audience a sense of the physicality, in both movement and sound, that is part of the performance. In Norway, we have in recent years seen these attitudes manifested through performers such as Nils Økland, accordionist Frode Haltli and saxophone player Rolf-Erik Nystrøm, who create a synthesis of folk and contemporary music and bind improvisation, storytelling and nearness to the music in new and unique ways.

Finally, the folk music for the double bass embraces an *idiomatic intelligibility*, meaning that it assimilates types of thinking and expression, turns and formulas in the

taste of our period and in the style of our time. This has been most evident in the artistic life of Stefano Scodanibbio. As a performing musician, and as a traveller, he came into contact with music and cultures from all over the world, but still reserved a special place for Spanish and Latin-American influences. He enjoyed a particularly strong relationship with Mexico, where he spent much of his time. The impacts it had on him is evident in the arrangements of folk songs from Mexico in *Canzoniere messicano*, and of classical flamenco music in the pieces *Quattro Pezzi Spagnoli*, both cycles scored for string quartet and written in the second half of 2000s. Many of the titles of Scodanibbio's compositions find their sources in literature. *Jardins d'Hamilcar* comes from *Salammbô* by the French writer Gustave Flaubert, *Dos abismos* from *Rapsodia para el mulo* by Lezama Lima, *My new address* by Vittorio Reta and *Visas*, his first string quartet, from the same author; "Visas, naturally the most authentic expression of poetry belonging to my own generation".²⁶ Scodanibbio's music emerged in the dawn of postmodernism and pluralism, when contemporary music gradually opened up to other influences to affect its idiom. It is difficult to imagine a similar *folk music for the double bass* arising anywhere else than in the 'golden years' of contemporary music, the 1980s, in the deep traditions of Italian music-culture. It carries within it a reflection upon previous developments while embracing the new idiomatic intelligibility. And it thrives on using confrontational and intensifying antagonisms, such as low and high sounds, normal tones and flageolets, improvisation and structure. It incorporates different styles of music, absorbing national and foreign musical influences, balancing high art and folk culture. It frees the double bass from its image as a ponderous, awkward instrument or a bastard cello, sometimes transcending into a percussion instrument, sometimes becoming an Indian violin. Scodanibbio's music as well as my own does not incorporate dogmatic attitudes, much more does it include a reflective pragmatism towards history, virtuosity, expression and language.

"What is the language of the contrabass? How can an idea be given voice? How can one determine from among the great variety of the contrabass's voices, from among its thousand voices, *the voice*? Does language [the use of language] perhaps conceal the voice? And if in the end 'the flight of the voice into the use of language is to have an end', if 'the completed thought have no more thoughts', then are we not perhaps looking down into the abyss of silence? Of my works for contrabass this one [*Marche bancale*] pursues most deeply the possibilities for the instrument to become a 'living creature'.²⁷

An expression from within the instrument and our self, in a folk music for the double bass.

¹ Wolfgang Korb: CD sleeve notes for Stefano Scodanibbio *Geografia amorosa*, Col-legno, 2000, translation by Steven Lindberg. Quote by Stefano Scodanibbio.

² *Light* features solo and chamber works by Håkon Thelin. The CD is released under the label Atterklang, www.atterklang.no.

³ Paul Brun: *A New History of the Double Bass*, Paul Brun Productions, 2000, p. 99-104. Brun writes about the Viennese virtuoso school as the "golden age of virtuosity", a period that lasted from approximately 1750 to 1820.

⁴ Stefano Scodanibbio: *Echi di un'avventura*. Here, Scodanibbio describes his own development of the double bass and the pieces that have been written for him.

⁵ Enzo Restagno: CD sleeve notes for Stefano Scodanibbio *Six Duos*, New Albion Records, 2001.

⁶ Paul Brun: *A New History of the Double Bass*, Paul Brun Productions, 2000, p. 92.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁸ Bertram Turetzky: *The Contemporary Contrabass*, New and Revised Edition, University of California Press, 1989.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

¹¹ The works I especially refer to are *Valentine* (1969) by Jacob Druckman, *Triplicity for Contrabass* (1970) by Joji Yuasa, *ZAB ou la passion selon st. Nectaire* (1981) by Philippe Boivin and *Music For Solo Contrabass* (1983) by Thomas Read.

¹² Paul Brun: *A New History of the Double Bass*, Paul Brun Productions, 2000, p. 39.

¹³ The first revolution being the Viennese virtuoso school in 18th-century Austria.

¹⁴ Paul Brun: *A New History of the Double Bass*, Paul Brun Productions, 2000, p. 92.

¹⁵ Stefano Scodanibbio: CD sleeve notes for *My new address*, Stradivarius, 2003.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Korb: CD sleeve notes for Stefano Scodanibbio *Geografía amorosa*, Col-legno, 2000, translation by Steven Lindberg. Quote by Stefano Scodanibbio.

¹⁷ Luciano Berio: *Two Interviews with Rosanna Dalmonte and Bálint András Varga*, trans. and ed. by David Osmond-Smith (New York/London, 1985), p.92.

¹⁸ Wikipedia article on the term 'virtuoso'. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtuoso> (Accessed 19. Aug. 2011).

¹⁹ Luciano Berio: *Two Interviews with Rosanna Dalmonte and Bálint András Varga*, trans. and ed. by David Osmond-Smith (New York/London, 1985), p. 91.

²⁰ Enzo Restagno: CD sleeve notes for Stefano Scodanibbio *Six Duos*, New Albion Records, 2001.

²¹ Wolfgang Korb: CD sleeve notes for Stefano Scodanibbio *Geografía amorosa*, Col-legno, 2000, translation by Steven Lindberg.

²² Burkhard Schäfer: CD-review of *Oltracuidansa*, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, März/April 2011.

²³ Wolfgang Korb: CD sleeve notes for Stefano Scodanibbio *Geografía amorosa*, Col-legno, 2000, translation by Steven Lindberg. Quote by Stefano Scodanibbio.

²⁴ Bence Szabolcsi: *Folk Music, Art Music, History of Music*.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 508-509.

²⁶ Stefano Scodanibbio: CD sleeve notes for *My new address*, Stradivarius, 2003.

²⁷ Wolfgang Korb: CD sleeve notes for Stefano Scodanibbio *Geografía amorosa*, Col-legno, 2000, translation by Steven Lindberg. Quote by Stefano Scodanibbio.