

**Virtuosos für Kontrabass -(Virtuosity on the Double Bass)**

**Josef Niederhammer, Double Bass, Dieter Lallinger, Piano, A Digital Recording by "Musikproduktion Ambitus", Hohe Wide 45, 2000 Hamburg 20, Grottenberg 7, 8901 Horgau, West Germany**

*Reviewed by Klaus Schrruff, Aachen, West Germany*

This is the first record by Josef Niederhammer, Principal Bassist in the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, West Germany, which is very interesting because it presents some world premieres on record!

Side one starts with the Suite Andaluza by Pedro Vals followed by his Introducción y Tarantela and by Giovanni Bottesini's Bolero! Side two offers another virtuoso piece by G. Bottesini to us, the Fantasia Sonnambula and ends with the first complete recording of the Suite im alten Stil für Solo Bass by Hans Fryba (Suite in Olden Style). On the contrary to Bottesini, Pedro Valls, who lived in Barcelona (Spain) from 1869 until 1935 is not well known among bassists (if he is known at all!) And even less is known about his life. Of

course, he was a double-bass player himself and wrote many pieces of music for his instrument, many of which show a distinct influence of Bottesini. Thus he composed a Homenaje a Bottesini and also wrote a method for the bass. The beautiful and charming Suite Andaluza is a series of typical Spanish Songs and Dances such as the Serenata, the Polo

Gitano, the Saeta and the Zapateado and provides a valuable enrichment to the bassist searching for new, original literature! The Introducción y Tarantela shows another aspect of Pedro Valls' ability to write for his instrument without neglecting a certain virtuosity which

the audience often asked for in former times as well as today! Listening to his music proves it should no longer be left dust covered in archives and drawers. Play it!!! Until now, only parts of the Suite im alten Stil by Hans Fryba have been recorded although this wonderful, baroque-style composition is often demanded in international and national competitions, being a challenge to and fun for all bassists. No doubt the technical difficulties and the questions of interpretation are the reasons for the lack of other previous recordings. Hans Fryba,

born 1889, died in 1986 after having been a member of the "Orchestre de la Suisse Romande" in Genève, Switzerland for a long period of time. He must have been a very talented and imaginative bassist and composer, a fact that is also evidenced by his other works for bass

(such as the Three Arabesques for Solo Bass). Niederhammer interprets the music in a way I do not always agree with. He sometimes shows a lot of temperament, especially in the fast movements of the Suite Andaluza and in the Tarantela, but it also sounds intellectualized

as if he had been trying to find the "one and only" way of interpretation, thus forgetting to simply play and let the music talk to him and to the audience. He has no technical problems, but there is a lack of heart and sensitivity in the Fryba Suite sometimes producing tension and expectation without resolving them. It is played too straight, even and study-like, lacking in moods and expressivity. This major work for our instrument has the style and movements of a baroque suite, but on the contrary has deeply romantic and exciting moods.

The manufacturing quality of the record is of a high average, though it seems most recording engineers have problems catching the sound of the bass (with piano) and only a few records exist with a satisfying sound. A disadvantage is the fact that the music was recorded on different locations, which sometimes makes the bass sound synthetic. But please, I do not want to be misunderstood and try to prevent people from purchasing this record. No, please, do buy it, because it is one of the best available and can be a challenge to other bassists.

Congratulations, Josef Niederhammer, for encouraging us in leaving the beaten path of recording the same works time and again!

*Reviewed by Klaus Schrruff*

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