

## What is this?

Some colleagues have encouraged me to create a teacher's manual that would accompany the *Progressive Repertoire* series and I've had the good intention to write in detail about my teaching method and strategies. But to make a whole book with a *Finis* and all that implies is a daunting task. Anyway there is no *finis* if the material is worthy of interpretation and if the folks dishing out information work continually to develop themselves. With that in mind it might be better to employ a newsletter format in which ideas can be expressed any time I manage to write them down. So, here goes.



*La petite fille et l'octobasse de Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume. Musée de la musique, Paris.*

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## How big do you have to be to play the double bass?

If the little girl in the picture is five years old she's probably big enough. She could handle the 70cm mensur.

## The Rabbath Method


I've decided to stop referring to the teachings of François Rabbath as "The New Technique." It occurred to me that F. Simandl's hoary volumes, however long in the tooth, are still published as "New Method for the Double Bass" after 100+ years. In Simandl's case I think history made it's judgment ("good stuff") long ago and has moved on.

Suzuki originally called his material "Talent Education" because that's what it was. But he lived so long that by the time I met him, when he was in his late eighties, even he was calling it The Suzuki Method.

And, to tell the truth, even though there are bass players out there who haven't gotten the message yet, *Nouvelle Technique de la Contrebasse* has been available to mere mortals for two decades already. Sooner or later we're all going to call it the Rabbath Method. I started last week.

*Attention, Messrs. Leduc.*

George Vance  
May 2005



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but you can copy any bits that  
seem useful to you.

## Have you changed your strings lately?

The trouble with bass strings is that they don't break when they are worn out. They just fade away gradually like General MacArthur until one forgets how the bass sounded when the strings were fresh. I change my strings about twice a year, usually prompted by an upcoming chance to play in public. And I advise my students who log fewer hours than I to change them once a year. Someone told me that the strings will lose their responsiveness even if they aren't played just from being under tension. I don't know about that but it seems reasonable. Steel has properties like tensile strength and flexibility that are affected by stress. Do your ears a favor; put on a new set of strings.

When you install strings it's a good idea to fill the bridge notches with the lead (really graphite) of a very soft pencil. An art pencil such as a 6B is practically like grease. We want to be sure that the wrapping of the string doesn't separate at the point of contact with the bridge. When that happens the string gets caught there and tuning up pulls the bridge little by little until it isn't standing up straight anymore. Periodically one should look at the bridge from the side. If it's not straight up push it with your thumb. Don't be shy. If the bridge gets warped by the aforementioned phenomenon you will have to get a new one and that is expensive (especially if you go to a luthier who really knows his job).

I use a little hand tool called a string winder to speed up the process of installing strings. With that inexpensive little gadget I can change all the strings in a half hour and get on to the fun part of playing them in. At first they are so twangy the bass sounds like a giant banjo. Weird as it is I rather enjoy hearing the brilliance of the harmonics. After a day or two the strings settle down and sound as they are supposed to.

I've also tried using a power drill with a bit that fits over the tuning key. For me that is too speedy. I broke a new E strings accidentally by over tightening it with a power drill. That would be impossible to do by hand. Be careful with any tools more complicated than a knife and fork.

If you've never changed a set of strings before, change one at a time and bring it up to tension. If you took off all the old strings at once the bridge would fall down and maybe the soundpost also. Since those two items were probably installed in the right places by an expert you don't want to mess around with them. Setting the soundpost is a particularly tricky business even for someone with experience and the proper tools.

George Vance  
April 2005

## South Side Fantasy

### an Electro-acoustic work for Double Bass and CD

One of my fantasies is to commission new works for recital use from composers who write beautiful music. I had my chance a couple years ago when I wrote what amounted to a fan letter to a composer named Nikola Resanovic. Because my other life in music has to do with Eastern Orthodox liturgical music I had acquired three volumes of Dr. Resanovic's chant settings which turned out to be incredibly beautiful. After my parish choir began to use some of them in the services I discovered his e-mail address on the University of Akron web site and wrote to let him know that the choir liked singing his music and the congregation made nice comments at coffee hour. What composer wouldn't like to know that his music is being performed, even by amateurs, and appreciated? And, more or less parenthetically, I asked him if he had ever written anything for the double bass and if not, would he consider doing so. In fact it hadn't occurred to him before but he was willing. By way of examples of what is going on with the bass these days I sent him some recordings of François Rabbath and the score of Frank Proto's *A Carmen Fantasy*. At the time Dr. Resanovic gave me a bit of a warning that his secular music is more complex than what he writes for four-voice a cappella choir. That turned out to be an understatement. His style is very chromatic and rhythmically complex (in this case meant to approximate the freedom of gypsy playing.). Lots of notes. He discovered the full range of the bass from listening to Rabbath and employed the entire fingerboard.

I love *South Side Fantasy*. It has a form that can be understood at the first hearing, a big tune, hot licks that are playable (at least after I figured out that there is a scale called "octotonic" that has a very natural fingering), a solo part laid into the accompaniment in a way that it can always sound, and a theatricality in the way the solo part and accompaniment interact. I was astonished that a composer who doesn't play the bass himself would write so well for it. And, most importantly, audiences have responded very well to performances. The last time I played it in public I used a microphone on the bass to give its sound a little electronic "edge." That fit in well with the accompaniment.

You can obtain the score and compact disc directly from Dr. Nikola Resanovic by sending him an e-mail at nr2@uakron.edu. And tell your clarinet playing friends that this composer has written a very successful electro-acoustic piece called *alt.music.ballistix* in which the clarinet is accompanied by sounds from modern gadgetry.

George Vance  
May 2005

### Equipping the Beginner

If the teacher cannot make an acceptable sound on a student's instrument, what reasonable person would expect the beginner to have any success with it? That is why when a new student comes to me the first order of business is to see if his instrument and bow are playable. Perhaps the bass came from school or was rented from one of the local shops. If the bass is the correct size for the student, I check that the bridge has been adjusted to the lowest possible action throughout the full range of the instrument. If not I have the parent take the bass to a shop to have the bridge adjusted. In order to do that the fingerboard may need to be planed. Invariably the strings on school basses need to be replaced. The endpin must be in working order. If the bow hair is old or dirty it must be replaced. The shops in my area are all acquainted with the specifications I require and it is usually not too expensive to have the school instrument put in serviceable adjustment.

It is essential that the beginner have a bow that is not too long. There are no industry standards about the designations "quarter-size," "half-size," etc., but my observation is that the young bass player has usually been supplied with a bow that is longer than his arm. He will find it impossible to draw the bow perpendicular to the string. The typical fiberglass bow, in addition to being too long, is so tip heavy that the student cannot manage it in a normal way. Later, when he acquires a bow that is properly balanced, he will have to retrain.

The parents of the beginning bass player will understand, sooner or later, that the instrument and bow must

have some fine qualities in order for the student to make progress. Carved basses made in Germany are available. My students typically trade up through the small sizes until they grow big enough to handle the “Q Model” double bass designed by Christian Laborie after his famous Quenoil pattern. A trade-in program also makes good economic sense for the parents. The student has good instruments to play as he grows and when the time comes to purchase an adult-size bass most of the investment has already been made.

All of my basses have Corelli tungsten strings. If a new student’s bass has another type I require that they be changed because Corelli strings will help the student learn to bow correctly.

The bows made by Jean Grunberger for bass virtuoso François Rabbath are ideal for our purposes. They are, however, rare and expensive. Rabbath has also worked more recently with Gilles Duhaut. The bows of the Canadian maker, Zdzislaw Prochownik, are recommended and reasonably priced. Many of my students are using the carbon fiber Carbow by LNM which was designed by Grunberger. The Carbow has the feel and characteristics of Grunberger’s fine wooden bows, but in a price range for students.

My preferred bows for the young players are the brazil wood models produced by Ary France. They have the wide ribbon of hair and deep camber necessary to produce a beautiful tone.

I always install a piece of pure latex surgical tubing on French bows over the place where the frog meets the stick to create a cushion for the thumb. This is something the teacher can do at almost no expense to make a huge difference in comfort for the student.

Every bass player must have a cake of rosin. Carlsson is my preference. There are many others on the market, some stickier, some more powdery. Carlsson seems to do the job year round without calling attention to itself. For some reason schools are often supplied with rosin that does not work at all.

Although a stool is not a necessary piece of equipment for a developed player, I expect a beginner to play in a seated position so that he will not be distracted by trying to balance the instrument while so many other matters occupy his attention. Any inexpensive wooden stool is serviceable but the height must be correctly established by the teacher and the legs sawed off accordingly.

From Rabbath we have learned that using an endpin installed at a 44° angle solves many problems. (See “A few words about the bent endpin.” elsewhere in this issue.) On school basses and rental basses I install a bent steel rod in the existing endpin socket. After trying the Bent Endpin many players who own their own basses make the decision to have the Laborie graphite endpin installed. This is a real solution to the endpin question.

The strings should be wiped off with a soft cloth at the end of the day. Oil from the skin and rosin dust build up over time. An old cloth diaper is perfect for that.

And finally, among all the items a beginner must have is some device for tuning the bass to A-440. See “Tuning Procedure” in *Progressive Repertoire, Vol. 1*. The simplest thing for someone who does not have experience is a battery operated chromatic tuner such as the Korg CA-30. It enables the student to tune the open strings accurately. As the student becomes more sophisticated he can use an inexpensive tuning fork or tune to the pitch produced by most electric metronomes. I prefer the chromatic tuner for beginners especially if there is no one at home who knows how to assist with the tuning procedure.

George Vance  
August 2003

### It’s not nice to spit in the house.

Spit is one of God’s gifts. Our Lord even used it to cure a blind man. It’s good for many things but the one that comes to mind apropos of the bass is its property as a natural adhesive. If you are using one of those rubber things with a metal cup in it to keep the endpin from slipping on the floor you’ve probably noticed that it doesn’t always work on all surfaces. Try spitting on it.

And when you get tired of that, throw the silly thing away and get an endpin with a non-slip, non-marking rubber end on it. The Laborie endpin is ideal.

George Vance  
April 2005

## About Practicing

I ask my students to play the bass every day of the week but one. One day should be a day off to allow the muscles to recuperate from the effort required to play the bass correctly. These practice sessions should be at least the length of the lesson time and modeled after the lesson.

**Tone Research** This is the search for the most beautiful tone that can be made on that day by that bass, that bow and that bass player. (Actually the tuning procedure is also tone research because it is impossible to tune the bass correctly without using one's best bow technique.) Tone research in its simplest manifestation is playing one note, say four strokes on open D or a harmonic, listening to what comes out and searching for a way to make the tone more beautiful. When I cannot think of a way to beautify the note further, I play some other note and try to make it as beautiful as the first one. For instance, I will make a stopped note have the same quality as the open note.

The tone research phase of the practice session lasts for as long as the student remains interested in the subject, probably a few minutes. After tone research I suggest playing scales.

**Scales** I have the impression that nobody is born liking to play scales. It's an acquired taste, so it might be sensible to do it early in the practice session. It is certainly nice to carry over sensations from tone research into the scales.

I introduce the idea of working on technique in the abstract, the habit of playing scales, to my students when they arrive at the second piece in Book 2 of the repertoire, "Music Box." More or less about the time the student begins Book 3 he acquires my volume of scales and exercises, *Vade Mecum for the Double Bass*.

The scale player's routine is this: Each scale is repeated five times without pause. On each repetition the student focuses his attention on something specific, alternating between the left hand and the right hand. Half the time allotted for scale playing is spent on fingerings, and half on bowing variations. The scales are played without stopping in order to develop mental and physical stamina but it is important to know when to quit. Fatigue and boredom are both excellent reasons to stop. A student can use this procedure for three consecutive days, then take a day off (from scale playing).

**Playing Review Pieces with the Reference Recording** After the scales it is time to review pieces already learned and play along with the reference recording. Dr. Suzuki said that our ability grows by playing the review pieces. We only study the new piece so that it will become a review piece.

**Studying a New Piece** I recommend studying new material at the end of the session. That way, if there is an interruption or energy flags, the core work has been done.

George Vance  
August 2003

### SEVEN ESSENTIAL POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ABILITY

1. The student should listen to the reference recording every day to develop musical sensitivity.
2. Parents and teachers must constantly remind the student to produce a ringing tone.
3. Correct posture, relaxed bow hold, and accurate intonation are minimum requirements at all stages of development.
4. Parents and teachers should develop the student's motivation to practice correctly by encouraging the love of music.
5. The student should master the technical point of each piece before proceeding to the next piece.
6. Old pieces should be reviewed constantly.
7. The student should perform frequently in group lessons and recitals.

## A Few Words About The Bent Endpin

by François Rabbath

The bent endpin was developed for me by the luthier Horst Grünert. Its purpose is to change the center of gravity of the double bass so that a standing player will feel less weight on the thumb supporting the neck.

In my approach to the instrument the left hand has access to both ends of the fingerboard and the bow arm can apply weight equally on the four strings without the necessity of turning the instrument. The bent endpin encourages an “opening” of the face of the bass and obliges the player to stand erect. Since the bass is at a steeper angle to the player it is automatically natural to apply the weight of both arms, especially the bow arm, with relaxed weight rather than muscular pressure. Notice also that the sound of the instrument is projected more efficiently at this angle.

François wrote the above several years ago when we were all using bent steel endpins. Since that time he and Christian Laborie took the idea to an elegant solution with a graphite rod installed directly into the end block at the proper angle. I decided to call the new and improved version The Laborie Endpin since he worked out the technical details and is responsible for their manufacture. (It’s only a matter of time before there are knock-offs, but I suppose Christian will have to regard that as the sincerest form of flattery.) It’s only natural that bass players would pause to think before having a hole drilled into the end block for a Laborie endpin. First one must be convinced that this operation really is going to change everything for the easier. One way to do that is to try the old steel version that fits into the existing endpin socket. It’s also useful for instruments that have been rented or gotten from a school, cases in which drilling a new hole is not an option.

One can order a bent steel endpin from my catalogue (\$20). I make them in my basement because by doing it myself I can easily give each student an endpin that is the right length. But I also get calls from bass players who want to try the bent endpin. It’s impossible to be sure about the fit when the player and his bass aren’t present, but it’s no doubt better to make something that comes close than to not have it at all. The twenty bucks is just to cover the trouble it takes. I always mention that anyone who has a few basic tools can do it himself and thereby be free to experiment with the length. So if you are living in an apartment in New York and don’t even own a screwdriver, call me. But if you want to do it yourself, here’s how:

### How To Make A Bent Endpin

Any steel rod may be bent. Grünert used the Götz endpin assembly which has a sufficiently thick rod (10mm). If a thinner rod such as is found on cheaper endpin assemblies is bent it will tend to wobble. It is possible to bend hollow endpins such as the Ulsa aluminum model but the procedure is more complicated. The rod is bent at a 44° angle. For maximum effectiveness, establish the length of a straight endpin with the bass in playing position and bend the rod at the point where the rod leaves the socket.

The bass cannot be carried around with the non-retractable bent endpin sticking out, so a short rod with a rubber tip (or a wheel) is a necessary piece of equipment.

*Material:* **Steel rod** comes in 36” lengths which is enough to make three endpins for normal height people. If you have a 10mm endpin shaft (all the good endpins from Germany) the first thing you discover is that the hardware store down on the corner doesn’t sell metric rod. The closest thing they have is 3/8” which, unfortunately is a little too small. What you really want is 25/64” which isn’t 10mm either but is perfectly close enough. For that you have to drive to some industrial park at the edge of town to a place that sells to tradesmen. While you’re out there stop in at a rubber place also to get a length of **1” O-ring cord** for making the endpin tip. Ask for non-slip, non-marking rubber. They know what to give you. If you don’t feel compelled to patronize your local merchant, MSC in Jonestown, PA (800-645-7270) will send you 25/64 oil hard drill rod by UPS.

*Equipment:* **Mapp Gas torch.** Propane will work but more slowly. **Vise. Bucket of water.** Grinding wheel or **hand file. Drill and 25/64 drill bit.** A smaller drill bit is useful for making a pilot hole.

*How to do it:* The endpin will be bent at the point where it leaves the socket when it has been adjusted for playing. There’s no reason for the part that will be inside the socket to be longer than four inches. Clamp the rod vertically in the vise and heat the bending point to incandescence. Wearing a protective glove, pull the rod back to the desired angle, 44°. (I drew the angle on a piece of cardboard to serve as a template.) Remove the rod

from the vise and plunge it into a bucket of water to temper the steel. Grind a flat spot on the pin just above the bend on the place where the screw will hit when it is installed. Without this flat spot the endpin will twist in the socket. Saw off a couple inches or less of the rubber, put it in the vise, and drill a hole most of the way into it to make a tip.

*It is not meet to muzzle the ox that treads out the corn.*

At the end of the block on my street is a stop sign. It's red and octagonal and says "STOP" in big letters. But I hardly ever do stop there. There's no traffic so I just look both ways and coast on through. Of course, if another car was coming along I would stop but why bother in the absence of any threat to person and property? Situational obedience; no harm, no foul. I think there is a lot of that in everyday life, enough to become a habit.

This little symbol, ©, is also a sort of stop sign. You see it all the time while you are photocopying at Kinko's or the library. It means something in terms of the laws of the land. (Back when Russia was the Soviet Union one corollary to state lawlessness was a refusal to honor international copyright conventions. It was ok to steal from the West.) But to you and me, the bass players on the street, it means "let the people who created and made available this music have their just recompense."

If you play any music published by Frank Proto you have seen the notice he puts in his editions:

NOTICE: The photocopying of copyrighted material is illegal. It is also self-defeating; if you photocopy this music, you are making it impossible for us to produce more editions like it.

Exactly right.

Once I was about to make a presentation at a very large teachers' conference when one of the organizers said, "There's a student here and he plays your books. Would you like to use him as a demonstrator?" I said yes, of course. It's always nicer to see a young person show how it works rather than just talk about it. So they brought the boy up. He was a bold fellow to do it on a moment's notice in front of all those people. And guess what? The first thing he does is put on the music stand a Xerox copy of my entire Book 1 with a staple in the upper left hand corner. Ok, we forgive him because he's a little kid and it wasn't his idea, although maybe he would have enjoyed having the real thing with a cover and all. And maybe his mom or dad didn't think about the meaning of it even though they should have. But at least his teacher should have been discrete enough to say, "Well, we like this material enough to use it and we are interested enough to come to this event to hear what the author has to say about it. But since we are stealing from him, let's not make a public display of it." I didn't say anything to anyone at the time, of course. But I've been wanting to get that story off my chest for ten years, so there you have it.

George Vance  
May 2005

*All knowledge is from the stars. Men do not invent or produce ideas; the ideas exist, and men may be able to grasp them. If all professors of music in the world would die in one day, heaven, being the original teacher of music, would not die, and would teach other persons this art.*

*Phillipus Aureolus Theophrastus, called "Paracelsus" (1493-1541)*

## More About Practice

Practice at the correct tempo. In any passage we need to establish the correct relations among movement, space and time in the left hand and weight, speed and placement for the bow. But the coordination of these six factors is dependent on the tempo. So when we practice slowly, we are doing something, but not studying the passage in question. If the tempo seems too fast, employ the procedure “Stop-Think-Play” as outlined in the Book 2 preparatory exercise for “The Happy Farmer” and in *Vade Mecum*, the preparatory exercise for the universal fingering of the one-octave scale.

In a similar vein it is very discouraging to hear a student stop to replay notes each time an accident occurs. It is much more efficient to notice the accident and correct it on the next pass. If there is a problem that cannot be corrected just by being noticed (e.g., “I went too far; I will go less far next time.”) one can rejoice because an interesting opportunity has presented itself for examination. The problematical passage is isolated and the student searches for its resolution.

It is at moments like these that the student can make real discoveries. One of my favorite examples is “the third solution.” There is this way and that way, and then there is also a third way that didn’t occur to me at first. We see that in life as well as music all the time. The proper solution turns out to be the one that didn’t fit our preconceptions.

Life is short and we have physical limitations about how long we can play in one day. But when we practice we must behave as if there is all the time in the world to take an interest in the smallest detail. If you are really in a hurry to make progress, discover what lies beyond logging hours by the clock.

Some days we “don’t feel like” practicing. If one refuses at first to give in to these feelings and goes ahead with the work even on the bad days, they gradually stop happening. The student has to experience this waning of off days for himself to believe the foregoing statement is true.

George Vance, August 2003



### A Good Idea

Here is a practical way to carry a bow without adding extra weight to your bag. It’s called a bow sock and I got this one as a gift from my friend Peter McLachlan in Australia. Pete’s wife Viv made this one and I don’t know if you can see in this picture but it is covered with a print of Australian aboriginal theme, very beautiful. The basic item itself is velvet on the outside so it won’t scratch the bass and lined with satin so the rosin on the bow hair doesn’t pick up any fuzzy stuff. It is fastened around the neck heel with Velcro.

I think this is ideal especially when traveling with a flight case. The bow is protected from everything short of a catastrophe that wrecks the bass.

If you want to get a bow sock from the source and also see some of the other neat things Peter makes, check out [www.bassworks.com.au](http://www.bassworks.com.au). Now if Viv will just make me one to carry two bows I’ll be doubly happy.

### Pre-Socratic Philosophy of Intonation

Most of us know the name of Pythagoras from high school geometry class having come across the famous theorem about the sides of a right triangle:  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ . What they forgot to tell me in high school was that Pythagoras was a philosopher who thought one could show that the universe is in harmony — all's right with the world — because everything in it could demonstrably be expressed in terms of the ratios of integers. Pythagoras taught there are four subjects one needed to study to get the point about the harmony of the universe: arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy, what was called in the Middle Ages the *quadrivium* (the big four). If I say any more about that or about math I'll be out of my depth so I'll cut to the part about what that has to do with putting your fingers on a string. Pythagoras discovered that a vibrating string divides into nodal points. The node at the mid-point of the string produces a vibration one octave higher, a ratio of 1 part to 2 parts. At one-third of the string length, 1:3, the node produces a vibration an octave and a fifth higher. And the string is divisible like that at any fraction of its length. All the intervals in the octave have these relationships as ratios. A fifth is 2:3, a fourth is 3:4, etc. The interesting thing, really quite astounding if you never noticed it before, is that there are two kinds of major seconds. One has a ratio of 8:9 and the other is 9:10.

The Holy Grail of music theory was the attempt to derive our diatonic scale from the overtone series produced by the natural divisions of a fundamental tone. But one little detail seems to have been overlooked by some pretty good minds in music theory; Hindemith, for instance. They always tried to get the intervals of Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do from the fundamental tone Do. And it doesn't work. That led to the invention of the "comma" which is something like a theoretical crowbar used to force an incorrect assumption to yield the right result. But, in fact, the scale as we hear it is derived from the overtone series. And if you want to have a theory about it you just have to build the scale from the sub-dominant tone Fa. Pythagoras was right.

All this was figured out and explained by John Redfield in *Music, A Science and an Art*. (1926. Knopf, New York) Chapter 4 is the bit you want to read if you want to check my source.

By the way, that cycles per second can all be expressed as multiples of 11 was pointed out to me by my friend W. A. Wagner.

Overtone Series on F

1      2      3      4      5      6      (7)      8

Tonic  
Sub-dominant

9      10      (11)      12      (13)      (14)      15      16

Dominant

C Major Scale derived from Overtone Series on F  
 Partials 1, 3, 5, 9, 15, 27 & 45 have been transposed to the octave above middle C.

Ratios: 8:9      9:10      15:16      8:9      9:10      8:9      15:16

cps: 264      297      330      352      396      440      495      528

11x24      11x27      11x30      11x32      11x36      11x40      11x45      11x48

### From where did that come?

It took me a while to identify the man who I would ever after refer to as my teacher. Turned out it was Tony Bianco. At my first lesson I began with an etude by Billè and the first thing he said to me was, "You don't hear

the scale correctly.” That might have been a discouraging thing to learn about oneself, but I wasn’t there to be sensitive. Tony scribbled the syllables Do Re Mi, etc. in the margin of my Billè book and proceeded to explain about the big whole steps, the little whole steps and the half steps. Later he told me about the Redfield book and I managed to find it in the library. It’s Tony’s theory and I’m sticking to it.

And what does it all mean, Mr. Natural?

It means that if you play all the major seconds alike the 4th and 6th degrees of the scale will be sharp. Everyone thinks that the 7th degree, the leading tone, must be played very high. “Expressive intonation.” But what’s really going on is that the sixth degree which is supposed to be a small major second away from the fifth was played sharp. As a result the seventh doesn’t function correctly. Both half-steps in the scale have the ratio 15:16 and the leading tone doesn’t need to be juiced up if the other intervals are in the right places.

George Vance

May 2005

### *Le Son Premier*

At the first lesson with François Rabbath, whether you are the principal bassist of a major orchestra or an absolute beginner, you find out that there is an ideal place to put the bow on the string for each note in order to make a freely ringing sound. This is one of his fundamental ideas and he calls it *le son premier*, the basic sound or the first sound one should learn to produce.

Here is what I think is happening. Any fundamental tone produces a series of overtones. The quality of the tone has everything to do with the richness of overtones present in it. That’s why you spent so much money to have a nice instrument. There are harmonics present all along the length of the string, of course, and you have probably noticed that it is impossible to make a given harmonic speak if the contact point of the bow happens to be on another node of the same harmonic. If you don’t know what I mean by that, try playing the F-sharp harmonic on the D string in 1st position while the bow is tracking across the F-sharp near the end of the fingerboard. Also, we know that some of the members of the overtone series are considered out of tune, namely the partials 7, 11, 13 and 14. If the bow tracks on one of those out of tune partials it is eliminated from the tone and, probably more importantly, all the other partials are permitted to be present in the tone. This is, methinks, the acoustical explanation of *le son premier*.

As Joni Mitchell said, sometimes it’s just physical.

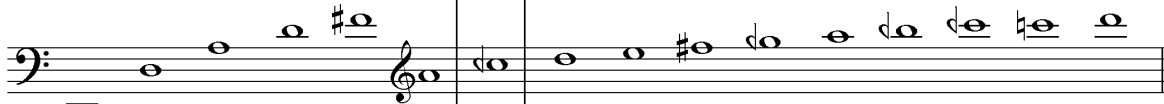
George Vance

May 2005

#### Bow Placement on the Double Bass open D String (actual pitch, 72 cps)

Fraction of string length:

1    1/2    1/3    1/4    1/5    1/6    1/7    1/8    1/9    1/10    1/11    1/12    1/13    1/14    1/15    1/16



Distance from bridge in cm:

104.5    52.2    34.8    26.1    20.9    17.4    14.9    13.0    11.6    10.5    9.5    8.7    8.0    7.5    7.0    6.5

## *François Rabbath in Concert*

**August 11, 2005, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, College Park, Maryland**

This concert is sponsored by The Potter Violin Company of Bethesda, Maryland. The owner, Dalton Potter, does many good works to support string playing and especially the educations of young people. I thought you should know that.

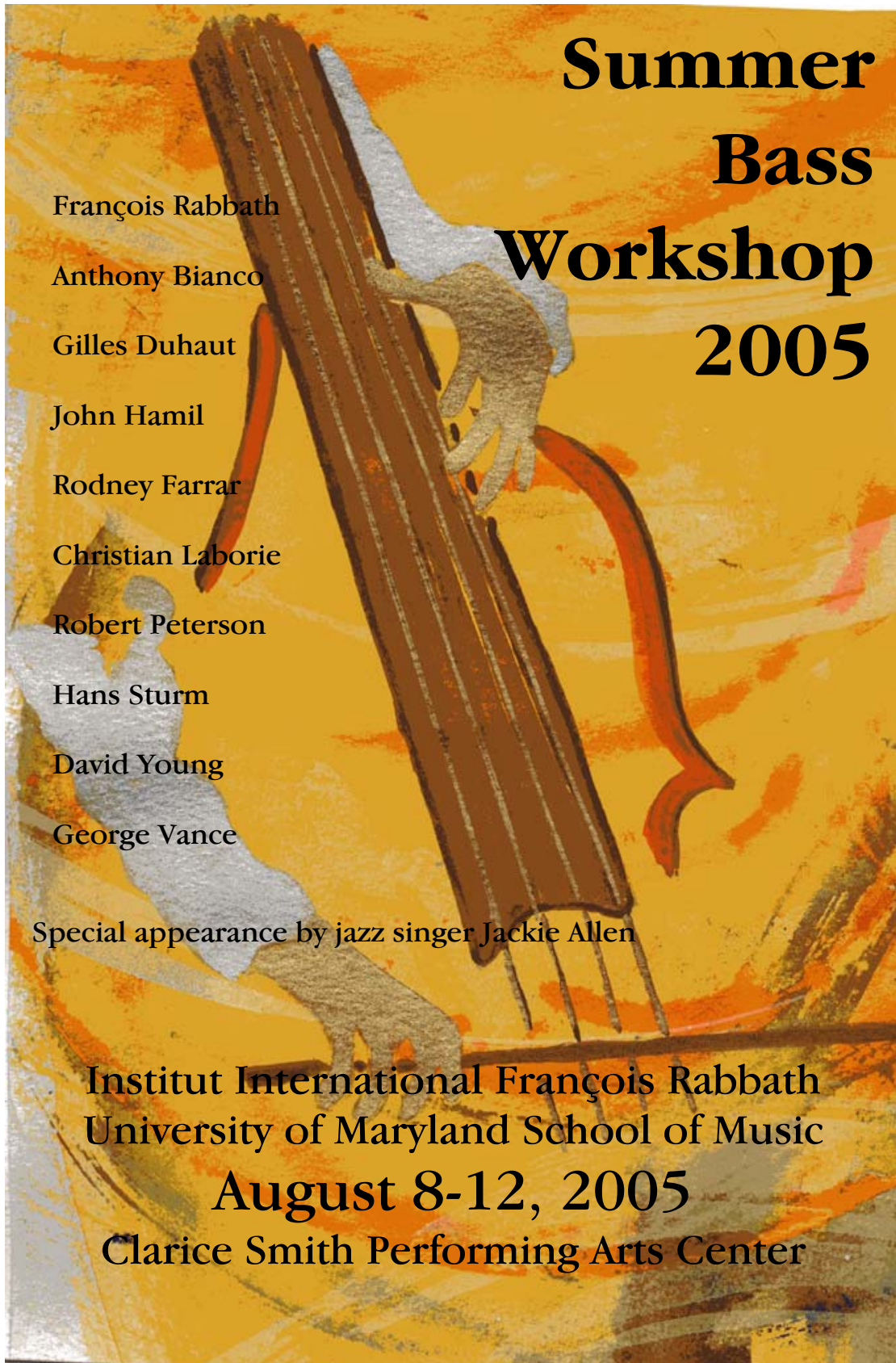
## Exegesis

It would be a public service for the future if everyone who has studied the Rabbath Method under the man himself would share information about his explanations of the printed material, correcting misprints and making plain any confusing bits. Below is Rabbath's clarification of one such item: the meaning of the articulation marks in the bowing variations in *New Technique*, Vol. 3. Thanks to Lloyd Goldstein for asking the question.

The image displays musical notation for bowing variations in bass clef. The first section shows variations 2-9, with a large slur over the notes. Below it are variations 2, 3, 4, and 5, each with a slur and an *etc.* marking. The second section shows variations 10-17, with a large slur over the notes. Below it are variations 10, 11, 12, and 13, each with a slur and an *etc.* marking.

## Advertisement

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Original art by Martine Rabbath. You really need to see it in color to understand how beautiful it is. Design by Sam Vance.