

# Bottesini Urtext Commentary

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# Bottesini Urtext Edition

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## Commentary by Stephen Street.

### Overview and Journal

My first introduction to Bottesini was just before I started Music College listening to his *Elegy* being performed by Joel Quarrington.<sup>1</sup> I listened to it on repeat being astounded by its virtuosity and sonorous tone. I did not believe pieces with such musicality or anything so beautiful had ever been written for the double bass. I imagine my reaction was similar to those from his period hearing him for the first time. Many tales of his skill can be found in newspaper articles ‘quoting him as one of the greatest soloists of his time’,<sup>2</sup> ‘the Paganini of the double bass’<sup>3</sup> or the famous tale of people storming the stage to look for a cellist in the wings. Ever since this moment I have had an ever-increasing passion for his music and desire to discover what he wrote.

Bottesini is standard core repertoire for the double bassist and especially any music college student. As part of my degree I have learnt several pieces of his repertoire, and referenced many different recordings but the more I learnt and listened, the more questions would arise as to the accuracy of the editions I was playing from. I started to notice substantial changes between different printed editions and recordings of the same piece, leaving me unsure of the composer’s original intentions.

The catalyst for the Bottesini Urtext started when I was learning a piece for my final recital – *Capriccio Di Bravura*. I listened to many different recordings<sup>4</sup> of this piece to enhance my knowledge of the music but I could not ignore the differences in a particular performance. This version contained complete changes of notes and phrases with sections placed in different octaves compared to other recordings. One phrase in particular was played in different octaves on each recording I listened to.

This left me with the questions, what did Bottesini play? What were his intentions? Why have these variations come up? What could have caused them? Has anyone else noticed these differences? How could I find out more information about what he wrote?

Now with this quest for information, I spoke to my professors and my colleagues to see what they thought. Their suggestions for these edits were to simplify the complexity of Bottesini’s pieces. Bottesini’s technique was far superior to others in that period, and it is most likely that others performing his works changed notes and phrases to make them easier, often with sections being placed down an octave. Bottesini’s *Grand Duo* is a prime example of this as it was re-arranged for violin and double bass. The piece was conceived for two double basses, but Bottesini could not

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<sup>1</sup> (Quarrington 11/1997)

<sup>2</sup> (Royal Cornwall Gazette 1884)

<sup>3</sup> (Slatford n.d.)

<sup>4</sup> (Quarrington, *Capriccio di Bravura* 1997) (Bosch 2013) (Martin 2008) (Badila 1994)

find a player capable of the second part and so a colleague and one of Paganini's pupils transcribed it for violin.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Chris West enlightened me as to Bottesini's extensive travelling and that variations could have occurred when he needed to rewrite pieces or re-arrange them from memory for the situation he was in.

The only way for me to find clarity would be to find and reference the original scores. To start with, the only resources I had were notes in edition covers or the Internet.

On the Internet I found some useful resources, one containing scanned fragments of a book written about Bottesini<sup>6</sup>. I also found that IMSLP<sup>7</sup> contained a copy of an original manuscript. By this point I had been a little surprised that no one had questioned the accuracy of the editions we commonly use. Within my own musical circles it was clear that there was a need and demand for an Urtext version.

I searched for differences in the editions that I had been playing from to find what areas need clarifying first. To date I have found variations in *Capriccio di Bravura*, *Grande Allegro di Concerto* and *Elegie No.1*, but I am certain that others have been edited also.

Bottesini was an organised person, keeping his manuscripts in catalogues with his compositions being bound into a series of books. As a celebrity of his day Bottesini travelled extensively and these were his travel catalogues that he would have carried with him and handed to the accompanist when he arrived. He kept together his concert pieces and fantasies for piano and double bass in a few bindings however his concertos for bass were kept separately. The pitches on the solo bass stave are the true sounding pitch in relation to all other instruments. This suggests Bottesini always played from memory, as there are no separate bass parts nor is the solo line written out in the 'correct' octave or key to read straight from the manuscript. Another reason to suggest this was a travel catalogue was the neatness and orderly manner in which the music is scored. These were final editions of pieces that were to be played from; there aren't constant errors or rewritten sections but a continual neat flow with any minor mistake either corrected with a piece of manuscript stuck over the top, or neat crossing out. If there were any other details that he wanted to add at a later date, he would mark them in with blue or red pencil. Bottesini often wrote both orchestral accompaniment and piano accompaniment parts for his pieces, but what is unusual is that sometimes, cues for certain instruments are written within the piano score, which suggests this is also to be used as a conductor's score, or as a tool to start orchestrating from.

### Case Study on *Capriccio di Bravura* and other observations

To show how beneficial these editions will be, I provide a case study of *Capriccio di Bravura*, comparing and contrasting editions and their flaws. The editions I am referencing are by Rudolf Malaric and Ludwig Streicher.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> (Unknown 2006)

<sup>6</sup> (Vetro unknown)

<sup>7</sup> (Bottesini, Concerto no 2 in B minor unknown)

<sup>8</sup> (Bottesini, *Capriccio di Bravura* 1994)(Bottesini, *Capriccio di Bravura* 1981)

The most noticeable phrase that has been altered starts at the end of bar 25. Presenting the different editions proves slightly difficult however. Malaric's edition is in transposing clef, and is how we usually expect to read bass parts, however Bottesini's manuscripts are written at sounding pitch. The solo Bass stave in Bottesini's original are written down a 7th to what we would normally read and has not been transposed – showing the notes true pitch in relation to all other instruments. The double bass when in solo tuning produces a sound a tone higher than is fingered. For example when the player fingers a D natural an E natural is produced. When we look at Bottesini's scores we know that he would have been fingering a note a tone lower than what is written on the page. This is exactly how Streicher's edition is written but is still an octave lower than is normally read. A simple guide to next few examples is this: extracts from Malaric's edition read as is; extracts from Streicher's edition transpose up an octave and finally extracts from Bottesini's scores transpose up a minor 7<sup>th</sup>. Apart from simplifying the pieces to make them easier to play, I consider transposing errors to be the next most important reason for discrepancies in his scores. When making editions, handwriting and copying parts from the page, it would be easy to forget which is the correct octave for it to be written in.

Here is the phrase from Malaric's edition, this is written in normal transposing clef:

Figure 1 Rudolf Malaric's Edition of Capriccio di Bravura

Here is the same phrase from Streicher's edition written down an octave than transposing clef:

Figure 2 Ludwig Streicher's Edition of Capriccio di Bravura

Finally Bottesini's manuscript at sounding pitch:



Figure 3 Bottesini's original manuscript of Capriccio di Bravura

At first glance it is easy to look at them all and think that they all are in the same octave and what's the problem? Streicher's edition is written down an octave, Bottesini's a minor 7th. Malaric's edition is written how a bass player expects to read it meaning the phrase in Malaric's version has been put down an octave. The second abnormality in the Malaric edition is beat 4 of each bar from bar 25 onward. The last beat has been put up an octave to keep it in the range of the instrument, I do not understand why he has chosen to break the phrase, he continues down an octave right until the end of bar 31. The use of the octave bracket is even more confusing.

The next noticeable phrase Malaric changed is the end of the cadenza before the allegro con fuoco. (Please apply the same transposition to all examples)

Malaric's edition:



Figure 4 Malaric's Edition of Capriccio di Bravura

Bottesini's manuscript:

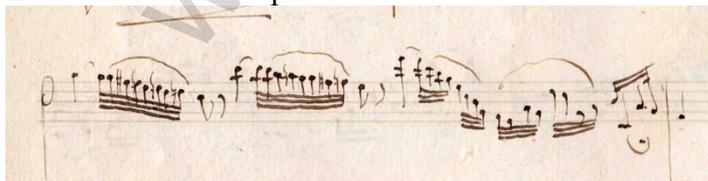


Figure 5 Bottesini's original manuscript

Streicher's edition:

Figure 6 Streicher's edition of Capriccio di Bravura

Apart from being in a different octave, we can see that Malaric has chosen to alter the last four notes of the small cadenza. I understand cadenzas are open to interpretation or could be improvised, however it seems just altering four notes is neither. I can only think that he also played a three string bass and the last few notes took it out of range of his instrument. Streicher's edition however has the correct notes but has doubled the note value.

The next area that is ambiguous across all the editions is the entry of the final melody in the recapitulation.

Malaric's Edition:

Figure 7 Malaric's edition of Capriccio di Bravura final recapitulation

## Streicher's Edition:

6 Contrabbasso

Figure 8 Streicher's edition of Capriccio di Bravura, final recapitulation.

## Bottesini's manuscript:

Figure 9 Bottesini's manuscript of the final recapitulation

As we can see we have this final melody written across 3 octaves, leaving the performer completely puzzled as to which Bottesini played it in. Malaric's edition is written in the correct octave but then changed by the octave marking above the staff putting it back down again. Streicher's edition however is written two octaves lower! As shown in the original manuscript Bottesini intended it to be played on harmonics in the top register of the instrument, as this would be the only way to reach the register written.

Within both editions, neither editor has given any reasoning why they have chosen to change Bottesini's scores, which is a shame as it would be interesting to hear their points of view. Another anomaly is that the solo Bass stave in the piano score of Malaric's edition is accurate in comparison with the original; so it begs the question, why give the soloist an edited part?

The only other reasoning I have for mistakes being perpetuated is that when the scores were first published by Ricordi, Richault and Escudier that errors were made in their first engraving. These have been copied into other editions ever since. Bottesini's link to Escudier in Paris was through Verdi. Verdi was a companion of Escudier and asked Escudier to publish Bottesini's music. Similarly in Italy, Bottesini

was a companion of Ricordi and once he had written or arranged a piece he would take it and perform it to Ricordi in order for it to be published.

As you can see by the points raised above, there is a clear need for this Urtext edition. It will give performers the clarity they need to interpret Bottesini's music, not only to eradicate unnecessary edits but also to see how Bottesini wrote phrases. I have noticed many interesting details in his scores that have been lost in today's editions. Many of these relate to note grouping and beaming. Bottesini is often very clear when he would like a note to belong to a certain phrase or not, this can be seen in the following examples:

Bottesini Manuscript bar 33:



Figure 10 Bottesini's manuscript

Edition Rudolf Malaric:



Figure 11 Rudolf Malaric edition of Capriccio di Bravura

Edition Ludwig Streicher:



Figure 12 Ludwig Streicher edition of Capriccio di Bravura

We can see in Bottesini's manuscript that he intends for the first semiquaver to be separate and not to belong to the group of four however both the Malaric and Streicher editions have these joined with Malaric even slurring it with the other notes. This happens again in bar 55:

Edition Rudolf Malaric:



Figure 13 Capriccio di Bravura Ed. R.Malaric

Edition Ludwig Streicher:



Figure 14 Capriccio di Bravura Ed. L.Streicher

Bottesini Manuscript:



Figure 15 Bottesini Capriccio di Bravura manuscript

Looking further ahead (shown in the example below) at the start of a new subject in bar 128 we can see that Streicher has added a performance direction, a sforzando and changed the articulation of the phrase, altering entirely how we interpret Bottesini's intentions.

Bottesini Manuscript bar 128:



Figure 16 Bottesini's manuscript bar 128

Edition Ludwig Streicher:



Figure 17 Capriccio di Bravura Ed L. Streicher bar 128

Another feature of Bottesini's manuscripts is the unusual beaming in the piano score. It is not usual to see in scores notes beamed between the two staves, but this is commonplace throughout Bottesini's scores. Bottesini's intention was to clearly mark out which hand should be playing which notes in the phrase.



Figure 18 A section of the piano part in Bottesini's manuscript of Capriccio di Bravura

Within Bottesini's scores I kept noticing an unusual dynamic marking that I had not seen before. Throughout Bottesini's scores I kept finding the marking 'Fe'. This left

me puzzled for quite a while, thinking what this could mean. Reading through the scores I have found a recurring pattern – it was usually when the music was to be loud and heavily accented. My best assumption is to assume it means *feroce*, instead of using *sforzando* or *forte*.



Figure 19 Examples of the performance marking Fe

As shown in the examples above it exists three times within *Capriccio di Bravura* alone. Within his other manuscripts it occurs several times, again when he wants an accent or a loud passage.

A related but slightly unusual practice Bottesini does in his scores is the way he writes his dynamic hairpins. Usually whenever there is a crescendo or diminuendo it is written above the staff. This is not always consistent as sometimes it is within the piano staff or just for the solo bass staff, however on many occasions it is written between both the solo line and the piano part. My best judgement for this, is that he did this as short hand to save him having to write out repeated dynamics and that the hairpins apply to both the solo staff and the piano.

Here is an example where it is probably meant as short hand:



Figure 20 Bottesini's original manuscript of *Capriccio di Bravura* Bars 128 - 142

Here are two examples where it is difficult to interpret his dynamic markings:



Figure 21 Examples in Bottesini's Manuscripts of unclear dynamic markings

All of the information and examples above has come from *Capriccio di Bravura* alone, but there are still many things I have discovered in his other scores. Bottesini standardised the solo tuning we use today. He settled on a tone higher than normal orchestral tuning thus now tuning the bass F# B E A.

Bottesini tried tuning his bass in different ways; Viennese tuning A D F# A and three types of 4ths tuning, orchestral E A D G, a tone higher F# B E A and a minor third higher than orchestral tuning G C F Bb. Many of his compositions use the 4<sup>th</sup> tuning a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> higher, for example *Elegie and Tarantella* and his Concerto no.2, however most commonly he used the tuning a tone higher than standard orchestral tuning. We know this because several different copies of the same piece exist in different tunings. *Elegie No.1* exists in the three different tunings from C major up to Eb major. Bottesini had to retune the bass rather than just playing in higher positions as the pieces would be physically impossible as passages fall on the harmonics at the top of the instrument. It has to be noted however, Bottesini played on a 3 string bass (in 4ths) rather than using 4 strings and thus all of his compositions never go lower than A in the bass part. This is always a useful piece of information when looking at editions of Bottesini as any that go below this have been edited.

Within Bottesini's scores, I was surprised to see certain repeat marks that to my knowledge that I thought only started being used in the 20th century, markings that have been used since more improvisatory styles were invented, but I was wrong. Here are some taken from *Grande Allegro di Concerto*:

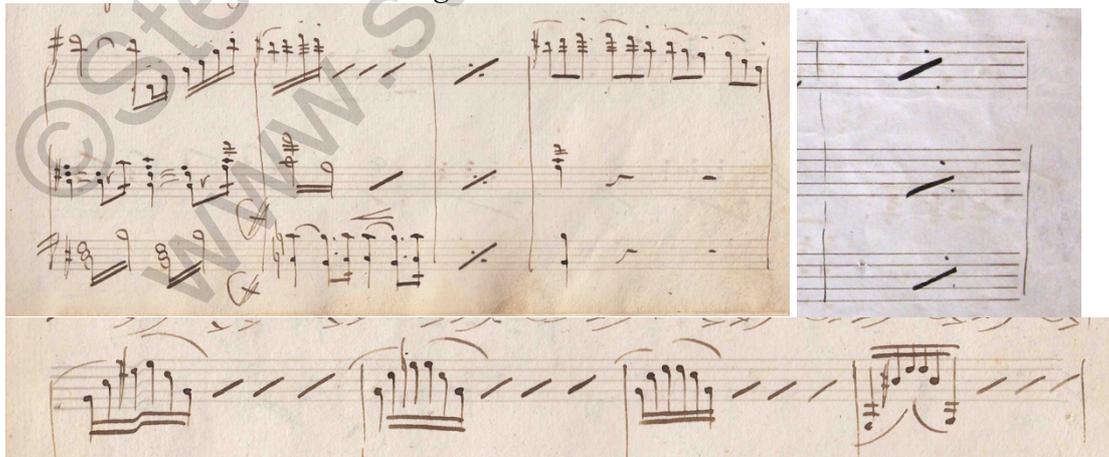


Figure 22 Examples of repeat markings in Bottesini's manuscripts

Today in more modern styles of music we would interpret these markings as ad lib and improvise through out the remainder of the bar something similar or from the bar

before. Here Bottesini used this as short hand to keep playing the same idea over each beat.

Other small observations that have cropped up are the stamps of paper manufacturers on the paper he used. On Bottesini's *Elegie no.1* a paper manufacturer of 'Lard-Esnault, Paris, 25 Rue Feydeau' exists on every page. Unless the paper was made and then shipped to Italy, I can't help but think that gives us an indication where the score was originally written. The only way to trace this is to search for records of his whereabouts in his private letters and or concert listings within newspapers. I have already found from the British Library newspaper records evidence showing performances of his compositions much earlier than is specified in the Oxford Grove Online dictionary and many records of pieces we did not know he had performed. There are also compositions I do not recognise or have not yet been accounted for. However I will need to find a way to be able to search both the French and Italian national archives in the same way to find more information

This leads me directly on to my next point: finding more information. The biggest challenge for anyone finding information is that nearly all information on Bottesini is only written in Italian. Only through republication and translation will these resources be available to the wider music community.

### Summary and Future Plans

What plans do I have for the project in the future? It is clear that this will be more than a lifetime's work for me working by myself, collating, discovering and re-publishing Bottesini's life and works. I have completed these five editions to the best of my ability, however to publish all of his manuscripts and document his whole life is too large a project for one person to take on. The next step for me is to seek help from the music community so I can spend time collating information and finding his manuscripts. It would be a fantastic goal to re-popularise all the other works that have been forgotten about, like his chamber music and his operas. It is sad today that none of his 13 operas are performed simply because they are out of print. I think there is a wealth of material that any Verdi opera lovers will snap up. My plan also is to continue producing reliable editions to help performers make decisions in their interpretations.

To help any one learning Bottesini's music, I have created a play along resource to accompany the pieces I am publishing. They contain just the piano accompaniments in an array of different rehearsal tempos, getting a little faster each time. I understand how difficult it is to have an accompanist regularly to rehearse with so I thought this would be a very useful tool for bassists to use.

Something that is very clear is the difficulty in reaching academic resources with documentation of Bottesini's life. Although some information is available it is out of print or has not been translated. He was a very significant person in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, being involved with most of the great musicians of his time, and so his experiences are a very important insight into music in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bottesini paraphrased nearly all the major composers of that era, many of whom he worked with. He was interviewed countless times and travelled extensively around the globe absorbing different cultures. Collating and translating his personal letters give us a fascinating insight to different cultures at the time and life in the Romantic period. It seems a shame to me that Bottesini is only remembered for one aspect of his life, little is

written about his significant conducting career, the performances of his operas nor of his experiences playing for others. Bottesini had a significant composition catalogue which was predominantly NOT solo works for the double bass including 13 operas, 4 string quintets, many string quartets, an oratorio, a requiem and many, many vocal pieces. In all he produced a total catalogue of around 300 pieces of music. This man lived such an interesting life and it seems such a shame that people do not get to experience the wealth of different things that Bottesini composed. Many of his compositions haven't been heard since they were performed in his lifetime, hopefully I can do my bit to change this.

One final small observation, being the true Italian that he was, Bottesini loved his coffee. It can be found spilt on many of his pages of his manuscripts, and he clearly enjoyed a good cuppa when he was either travelling or writing out his scores! So I hope with me you will raise an espresso to this forgotten genius!

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