

# Viennese Bass Method

## Modern Development

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Through the course of previous lessons we have witnessed various stages of period Viennese technique development that in many respects rival and exceed the virtuosity of later repertoire written for the modern instrument. This period technique was obviously limited to the period compositions, but since it has now become openly accessible to us in our time a justifiable question may be presented if the whole Viennese system of playing can actually be used to perform the other literature and perhaps even be revived to the point where the contemporary pieces could be commissioned for it too?

It is well known that the Viennese technique has not survived as a living practice in a way that a practice of other string instruments has continued to live and develop until our time. The violin tuning has not changed since the 18th century, thus Mozart's violin concerti live today through the performances on modern violins with steel strings and modern setups that would be foreign in Mozart's day, and are nonetheless well appreciated today. This reasoning may lead to the conclusion that the period Viennese bass repertoire could also get a second life along the steel stringed instruments and not be limited to the period performance groups.

Moreover, for everyone who masters the higher levels of Viennese solo technique a sense of desire to explore the other feasible repertoire will occur spontaneously. By the very nature of human curiosity, a performer will try to explore the other period or contemporary pieces to see if they can also be performed and enhanced with projection benefits of the Viennese setup. In that respect the author of these lines does have some good news to share here, as the whole spectrum of standard bass literature and other period and contemporary pieces can actually be performed on the modern reiteration of Viennese bass equipped with steel strings too. The research has shown that the actual solo repertoire of the Viennese bass could almost be considered double in size from what the period masters have left us - thus offering a wide range of possibilities for its recognition on the modern concert podium as well.

The premise on how we can approach that other literature is quite simple and will already be familiar to the bassists who have performed transcriptions for the modern bass - whether it be a Paganini's *Moses Fantasy*, Eccles' *Sonata*, Schubert's *Arpeggione Sonata* or some of the original Viennese bass literature arrangements. That same premise can be applied on the Viennese technique but in the opposite direction and the principle of how this is done will be explained here briefly.

For those who attempt the Viennese Tuning study, it will immediately become apparent that both the Viennese tuning and the regular solo tuning share the same top A string. This string, for which the majority of solo passages in the later literature have been conceived, is also the one that many of the modern transcriptions favor. The unique coincidence where the top strings of the two tunings overlap has produced a particular convenience when we approach the modern repertoire, since the majority of these pieces utilize the top string in higher register thus limiting the inconvenience of Viennese triadic setup to the minimum. Moreover, as we will see, that same triadic convenience can sometime even offer the additional benefits in the literature which was obviously not conceived to benefit from it! Lastly, since the ambitus of the Viennese solo technique overlaps with the one used in majority of contemporary solo pieces, no handicap in reaching the high registers will ever be encountered either.

In the following lessons we will explore a variety of pieces from that repertoire and demonstrate how it can be performed on the Viennese tuning. There is also a chance that the very process of learning the Viennese tuning may become much easier to some when approached through the literature whose phrases and top string fingerings are already familiar.