

Viennese Bass Method

Lesson 13. Standard Solo Bass Repertoire

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In this lesson we will introduce the most common pieces from the standard repertoire that are playable on the Viennese tuning. These pieces however are intended for the steel string setup without period frets, as they are conceived for the modern instrument and assume different shifting patterns.

The initial examples by Koussevitzky will demonstrate a unique benefit of shared top A sting that enables the modern literature to be performed with hardly any alteration. Thus, all the performer needs to do is play these pieces as on the modern instrument, but with the awareness of those few notes that "stray" out of the top string. By this approach one can actually play the period tuning in a matter of seconds and also quickly acquire a sense for the period notation. The second movement of Koussevitzky concerto can also be performed on the single string, yet here the phrasing makes itself perfectly suited for the advanced harmonic-based fingerings, so these are indicated.

The Bottesini pieces are also playable on the Viennese tuning and require only minor alterations. In the famous *Elegy* the top string approach preserves all the original harmonics too. The B minor concerto follows this pattern, yet with more of an F# string use, and a practical demonstration of this piece in Viennese tuning can be heard at the "Music Samples" page of the site. Those who are well acquainted with the concerto may recognize a small but necessary alteration in the cadenza. The ambitus in these pieces is not an issue, because Bottesini's lowest string is the same as the Viennese fourth A string.

Lastly, in the Hindemith Sonata sample, we will see that even the 20th century polytonal literature can be performed on the Viennese tuning. As the piece was conceived for the tuning in fourths, it uses open strings periodically, thus requiring the Viennese arrangement to be centered around the bottom two strings. This unfortunately makes the original harmonics inaccessible except as arranged. Yet surprisingly, the entire remaining corpus of regular pitches can be played without any alteration! Moreover, sometimes a true single-position Viennese fingering can be used too, as seen in the *Lied. Finale Allegretto* section.

Exercise 102. Koussevitzky, op. 1 no. 2, Valse Miniature

Tempo di Valse

I ————— II I —————

(8^{va}) —————

II — I — II ————— I ————— II I —————

8^{va} —————

I —————

Exercise 103. Koussevitzky, op. 3 Concerto, 1st Movement

The initial opening phrases of the concerto require shifts and fingerings to the lower positions that will differ from the one common in modern tuning. However, starting with the *Alla Breve* section, everything is playable as on the modern instrument's the top string. The indications for the use of second string may be ignored and the harmonic references are here just for your convenience to explore and use them if preferred.

The same top-string approach can be applied to the next exercise featuring the Second Movement. Here however, the period fingerings may be more suitable as they enable the use of harmonics in period style and thus emphasize more the unique Viennese tuning timbre. Fascinating but true: Sperger could have performed Koussevitzky using his advanced technique - and with plenty of vibrato too!

Allegro
Alla Breve

Exercise 104. Koussevitzky, op. 3 Concerto, 2nd Movement

Andante

8^{va}-----

I _____ II _____ I II _____ III II I II I _____

(8^{va})-----

(8^{va})-----

(8^{va})-----

I _____ II I _____ II III I _____ II _____

Exercise 105. Bottesini, Elegia in Re

Andante Sostenuto

3^o 3^o 1 4 1 2 2 4 2 1 2 8^{va}-----

I _____

(8^{va})-----

8^{va}-----

I _____ I _____

Exercise 106. Bottesini, Concerto in B minor, 1st Movement

In this example most of the original Bottesini's articulation markings are omitted for the sake of clarity. However, this omission should not imply that Bottesini's music ought to be performed with any less expression than usually. Quite to the contrary, Viennese tuning - in its unfretted setup - can reach and even exceed the expressive possibilities of the modern bass. A performance of this concerto in Viennese tuning is featured on the "Music Samples" page of the site.

Allegro moderato

Exercise 107. Bottesini, Concerto in B minor, 2nd Movement

Andante

Exercise 108. Hindemith, Sonata, 1st Movement

Allegretto

II III IV II I III I III I

I IV III II I II III (I II III)

I II II I

I III IV III

Exercise 107. Hindemith, Sonata, 3rd Movement, Finale section

Lied. Allegretto grazioso

I II I II III II III I

I II I II I

I II I