

## **Germany, Pro Kontrabass 2001- present**

*Pro Kontrabass* ('Pro Contrabass') is a German initiative to promote the musical instrument the double bass. The object is to increase the number of students opting to play the double bass in music schools. The decision to adopt this initiative was made in May 2000 by the extended federal board of the German Music Schools' Association (*Verband Deutscher Musikschulen - VdM*).

### **Background**

Very few children who play a stringed instrument choose the double bass. In Germany, a mere 0.2 % of all students enrolled in music schools play the double bass. This represents a dire shortage, especially considering the growing dearth of young double bassists who wish to play in a school orchestra. Professional ensembles are also experiencing difficulties finding double bassists, and are able to fill vacancies only with the help of foreign musicians. This is in fact quite puzzling, seeing as how young players face a bright future with attractive career opportunities in both classical music and jazz. In response to the double bass crisis, the Federal Government ordered the VdM to come up with promotions designed to make studying the double bass more attractive, with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of double bass students in music schools.

### **Concept**

A number of different activities have been undertaken to stimulate double bass education. Important components include having teachers share experiences and follow additional courses, the 'double bass camp', the mini-bass project, producing publications and giving presentations and concerts. The project's social relevance is illustrated by the subsidy granted as part of the youth aid programmes. Learning to play the double bass offers children and young adults a wealth of appealing opportunities. In a relatively short period after starting lessons, students are able to play with other young musicians. By being able to play simple harmony and bass lines, double bassists quickly find themselves in demand. Playing together not only teaches youngsters about music, it also helps them develop positive character traits such as willingness to cooperate and instils a sense of responsibility.

### **Objectives**

The objective is to increase the number of students taking double bass lessons in music schools.

### **Description**

So far, the numerous activities that have contributed to helping achieve the stated objective include:

- At the 2001 music school conference in Leipzig, Pro Kontrabass unveiled several small publications and gave a presentation on instrumental education for young children using the mini-double bass.
- Providing support to educators by setting up regional educational cooperatives involving educators from music and colleges of higher education. They are dedicated to distributing literature, giving demonstrations and concerts and providing examples of further schooling.
- Pro Kontrabass urged young double bassists to participate in the 'Youth making music' competition. Twenty-three double bassists entered the Hamburg state competition in the 'Solo' category, compared to a mere 12 in 1998. Another Pro Kontrabass initiative goal is to see that double bassists are allowed to perform in the 'Piano and String Instrument' duet category in 2003.
- Reading lists and recommendations have been published such as 'Orchestra reading for beginners' and 'Youth Making Music', 'Duet' and 'Mixed and/or Similar Strength'.
- An essential aspect of the project is to advance double bass teacher professionalism in the area of early instrumental education relating to the mini-double bass and/or junior double bass. In the spring of 2003, Pro Kontrabass launched a professionalisation module related to early instrumental education at the State academies in Trossingen and Rheinsberg. The module helped 20 double bassists become familiar with new didactics and methods for double bass education.

- The first VdM bass camp, which took place in Plön in October 2002, was a major success. Thirty-six young double bassists converged to play under the direction of six instructors (jazz double bass, double bass ensemble and mini-bass). Interest in the camp was huge, judging by the fact that there were more than 60 applications. For an impression of the event visit [www.pro-kontrabass.de/ploen](http://www.pro-kontrabass.de/ploen). Prompted by positive feedback, a second double bass camp will be held in October 2003 in Weikersheim.
- Pro Kontrabass supports regional events, such as the 'Bassgeigen gala', by offering logistic and non-commercial help.
- In 2003, a publication on double bass class structure in the music school was issued as part of the *Arbeitshilfen* ('employment tools').
- The quarterly informative bulletin 'Newsletter' was published for the first time in the spring of 2002. This publication serves to update all interested parties on Pro Contrabas activities.
- Up until now, the initiative's biggest accomplishment is the 2-year promotion (which started in 2002) by the *Stiftung Deutsche Jugendmarke* ('German Youth Foundation').

### **Organisation**

Many individuals and institutes recognise the initiative and offer their ideas and visions as support. An initiative group was formed that suggested possible steps and measures for promoting the double bass. A project coordinator was appointed for the group. The initiative has also received a great deal of professional support.

### **Publicity**

Publications, solicitations, presentations, a newsletter and concerts all help draw attention to the initiative.

### **Finance**

The initiative is receiving financial support from the Federal Government and the Stiftung Deutsche Jugendmarke, among others.

### **Evaluation & Products**

The diversity of the assignment and the scope of the various objectives clearly indicated that this project must meet a number of basic criteria:

- Acceptance by the double bass world in order to pinpoint and solve practical problems.
- Partner institutes must be stimulated to cooperate actively.
- The project requires financial support that can guarantee its longevity.

Within one year, a host of significant activities were taking place. These activities generated positive feedback which served to emphasise the project's usefulness as well as stimulate additional actions. In addition to a double bass week, more entrants to competitions, an increase in the number of double bass students in music schools and a professionalisation module, a number of publications have also been issued.

### **Information**

For more information, please contact Manfred Uhlmann (project leader) or Dr Markus Quabeck (project coordinator) on 00 49 228/ 95 706 29, Tuesday-Friday 9:00-14:00. You can also find further details on the VdM website. Surf to <http://www.musikschulen.de> and click on the *Projekte und Initiativen* button, then click on the *Pro Kontrabass* button.