

In Search of Nino Rota and his *Divertimento* for Double Bass of 1973

By Alexandre Ritter

PART II

(Investigation of the Influences on the *Divertimento* - Conclusion)

Investigation of the Influences on the *Divertimento*

Franco Petracchi was using *Simplified Higher Technique* in his daily teaching, in the years when Rota was writing the *Divertimento*, upstairs in his office at the Bari conservatory, while Rota was its director. How did the exercises and etudes from *Higher Technique* influence Rota and how much of what he heard did he incorporate into the *Divertimento*? These questions will never have an absolute answer because the composer is no longer among us. Nevertheless, there are passages in the *Divertimento* that reflect the pedagogical goals facilitated when the specific innovations of the *Higher Technique* are employed.

The intent is not to find exact quotations from *Higher Technique* in the *Divertimento*, but rather to locate passages in the *Divertimento* whose style and idiom can be related to the specific innovations of *Higher Technique*. I urge the more curious reader to turn to my dissertation presented at the *OJBR* for a more in-depth look into the structure and style of *Higher Technique* and its possible influence on the *Divertimento*.

Abbreviations

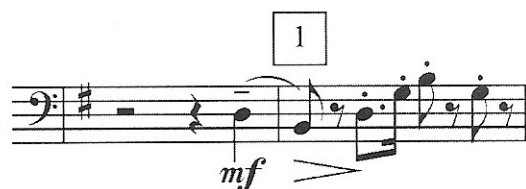
| | |
|-----|------------------|
| RN | Rehearsal Number |
| m. | Measure |
| mm. | Measures |

Marcia

The first compositional result of the collaboration between Rota and Petracchi was the *Marcia* movement. It is filled with many passages requiring the mastery of the basic techniques that are fundamental to Petracchi's training of performers. In every master class I have studied with him, Petracchi emphasized the necessity of working scales and arpeggios for every student, regardless of his or her level. Many passages in the *Marcia* give opportunities to demonstrate both scales and arpeggios.

The first theme presented by the bass is developed from a G major arpeggio as shown in Example 1. It is the first of many pas-

sages that call for the mastery of arpeggio patterns that is so fundamental to Petracchi's teaching:



Example 1. *Marcia*, 1 m. before RN1 to RN1 (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).

In Chapter 18 of *Higher Technique*, Petracchi presents a short exercise that develops the use of arpeggios that involve natural harmonics. They are also required in Example 2, which contains a G major arpeggio placed in the same register as the first bass entrance in the *Marcia*:



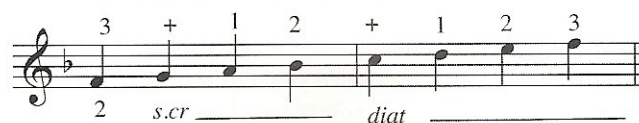
Example 2. *Higher Technique* (chapter 18, from measure 17 to 18, p. 26) © 1982 Yorke Edition.

The use of multi-octave scales in the *Marcia* is also prominent. At 3 mm. after RN 2, a two-octave descending F major scale is presented, as shown in the example below:



Example 3. *Marcia*, 3 and 4 mm. after RN 2 (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).

Petracchi's left-hand technique with a special use of the thumb is well-suited to the performance of rapid scales in several octaves. In Petracchi's system, the thumb can be used for any note above and below the midpoint of the strings, regardless of whether they involve natural harmonics. Therefore, the thumb can be used for notes that must be totally pressed down to the fingerboard. In his method the F major scale, for instance, uses the thumb for a c2, as shown in the example below:



Example 4. *Higher Technique* (chapter 5, F-major scale, p. 8) © 1982 Yorke Edition.

The major advantage to this technique is the increased ability to play fast passages: in effect, the bassist gains one more finger. The use of the thumb in unorthodox positions is also of great help in playing chromatic scales in a fast tempo. Many exercises are included in *Higher Technique* for the purpose of improving the student's ability to play chromatic scales. In Chapter 7, for instance, Petracchi uses the chromatic scale, one position after another, in order to develop the intonation and strength of the left-hand as it remains in a fixed position spanning a perfect fifth. In the excerpt below, the player starts at an E-flat and shifts up in the next measure to an E-natural:



Example 5. *Higher Technique* (chapter 7, first and second measures, p. 10)
© 1982 Yorke Edition.

This example demonstrates the innovative manner in which Petracchi helps the performer to develop strength and precision for each note in a chromatic passage. By working chromatically on two different strings, one position at a time, the tendons and muscles can acquire considerable strength. I would like to recall witnessing just how uncomfortable those exercises were for all the students who were being taught by Petracchi. Even though the specific patterns found in this exercise are not directly quoted in the *Divertimento*, it is certain that his insistent drilling of various chromatic patterns in lessons and in the *Higher Technique* may well have inspired Rota to devise chromatic patterns of his own.

The chromatic passage given below is one such example. It begins 6 mm. after RN 3 and spans a tenth:



Example 6. *Marcia*, 6 to 8 mm. after RN 3 (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).

Aria

In 1993 Lucia Borsatti entitled her published interview with Petracchi "The Master of Bel Canto."¹ Indeed, the vibrato and the strong lyrical sensibility that Petracchi gives to his interpretations are of such incomparable intensity as to invite comparison with the golden age of Italian opera. In one especially fine example, we can hear Petracchi's interpretation of *Una Lacrima* by Gioacchino Rossini on the compact disc *Franco Petracchi in Tokyo I* with the Tokyo City Philharmonic Orchestra.² This performance demonstrates Petracchi's intense vibrato and lyrical phrasing, two characteristics of his playing that might have influenced Rota's decision to relocate the composition of the *Aria* to the double bass, and consequently to the *Divertimento*.

As Petracchi states, the *Aria* was composed in 1968.³ Throughout this movement, Rota provides the performer opportunities to explore all the lyrical phrasing of which the bass is capable. The soloist's first entrance, illustrated in Example 7, gives the first of them:

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Example 7. Aria, from beginning to RN 1 (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).

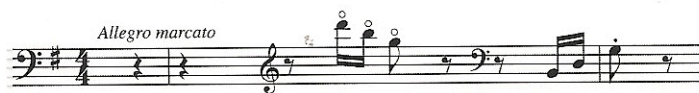
The intense lyrical character of this first theme requires the soloist to demonstrate a proficiency in vibrato and control of bow technique in order to bring out different timbres and dynamic levels throughout the passage. Furthermore, the first theme demands precise intonation from the player, especially if one opts to play this theme on just one string (the G string). Necessary practice for this technique is found in Chapter 11 of *Higher Technique*,⁴ wherein Petracchi presents an exercise in order to prepare the left hand for a shift on the same string, from the higher positions to the lower positions and vice-versa. This exercise (shown below in Ex. 8) is important for developing precise intonation in changing positions on the same string, as the first theme of the *Aria* demands.



Example 8. Higher Technique (chapter 11, first and second measures, p. 16) © 1982 Yorke Edition.

Finale

In the *Finale*, Rota explores many aspects of virtuosity on the double bass. The *Finale* is an *Allegro marcato*, a relatively fast tempo, creating technical challenges including arpeggios, double stops, and many string crossings. In doing so, Rota exploited Petracchi's unique virtuosity and the characteristic technical abilities that Petracchi was displaying at the time the piece was composed. In many instances of the *Finale*, Rota writes arpeggios in different rhythmic figurations and keys, e.g., in the first measure, where Rota starts the movement exploring the G major arpeggio (with harmonics), and at 8 mm. before RN 1, where he writes a B-flat major arpeggio. Both examples are given below:



Example 9A. Finale, first measure (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).



Example 9B. Finale, 8 and 7 mm. before RN 1 (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).

Even though *Higher Technique* only has one chapter in which arpeggios are worked (Chapter 18), in Petracchi's lessons, he gives great importance to arpeggios making each student work

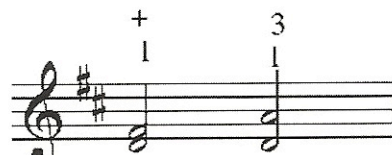
exhaustively, resembling the end of the *Divertimento* in which Rota challenges the player with 11 measures of the G major arpeggio.

Allegro

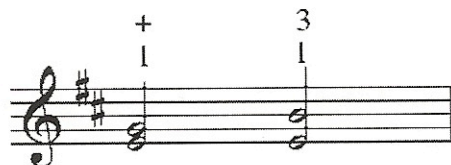
The first movement of the *Divertimento* draws on techniques that are found in several different chapters of Petracchi's method. In Chapter 9 of his text,⁵ Petracchi, using Selmi's etude, develops a unique fingering in which the thumb is used to play double stops in thirds and fifths precisely in tune. Three examples are given below:



Example 10A. Higher Technique (chapter 9, measure 10, p. 15) © 1982 Yorke Edition.



Example 10B. Higher Technique (chapter 9, measure 12, p. 15) © 1982 Yorke Edition.



Example 10C. Higher Technique (chapter 9, measure 14, p. 15) © 1982 Yorke Edition.

In Chapter 19, Petracchi uses another Selmi etude to demonstrate how the thumb can be used to play fourths in "thumb position," as shown in the example below:



Example 11. Higher Technique (chapter 19, explanation, p. 27) © 1982 Yorke Edition.

Rota begins the introduction of the *Allegro* with a G major arpeggio, followed by double stops of sixths, fifths, fourths, sixths and thirds as shown in the example below, mm. 2 to 5 after RN 5:



Example 12. Allegro, 2 to 5 mm. after RN 5 (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).

Here the resemblance between this passage and Petracchi's double stop exercises involving the thumb is striking. It is very demanding technically to play double stops in tune, especially when the thumb is being used to play part of the chord. Today

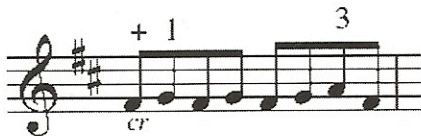
more and more bass players are acquiring the skill of using the thumb to play chords in many different positions on the finger-board, but at the time Rota composed the *Divertimento* such a technical device was not in vogue and not as common a technical solution as it is nowadays.

After the introduction section of the *Allegro* is over and the movement is well underway (i.e., at RN 7), Rota inserts passages that require the chromatic thumb position toward which Petracchi devoted much attention in his method, e.g., at mm. 2 to 5 after RN 7, as given here.

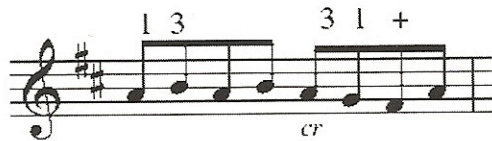


Example 13. *Allegro*, 2 to 5 mm. after RN7 (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).

For the purpose of comparison, here are two examples from Chapter 3 of *Higher Technique* in which Petracchi explored the use of the chromatic position:



Example 14A. *Higher Technique* (chapter 3, measure 3, p. 3) © 1982 Yorke Edition.



Example 14B. *Higher Technique* (chapter 3, measure 12, p. 3) © 1982 Yorke Edition.

A comparison of the passage at 2 mm. after RN7, beat 2, involving the four sixteenth-notes on pitches E, F, and G (example 13) with the second half of the measure in example 14A, involving pitches F-sharp, G and A shows that both passages are based on the same interval pattern and in the same order, with the latter passage transposed up a major second. In comparing 3 mm. after RN7 beat 2, involving a sixteenth-note pattern using pitches C, B-flat and A (example 13) with the second half of the measure in example 14B (pitches A, G, and F-sharp), one sees that they also share the exactly interval pattern content in the same order but with the latter passage now transposed down a minor third. A performer could use the same fingering introduced in Petracchi's method to realize both the passages in the *Divertimento*.

Another similar use of the chromatic position in the *Divertimento* is found between rehearsal numbers 9 and 10; here Rota wrote a passage that technically and musically bears a great resemblance to *Higher Technique*'s Chapter 3 as demonstrated in example 14A, taken from the second half of the measure. The passage of Rota's music, at RN 9 to 1 m. after RN 9 in example 15 can be compared to example 14A from *Higher Technique*'s Chapter 3:

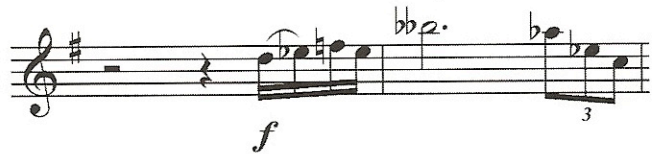


Example 15. *Allegro*, at RN9 and 1 m. after RN9 (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).

Note that Petracchi's *cr* left-hand position developed in Chapter 3 could be used to realize this passage. Note also that this passage has the same interval content (but in different interval order) as example 14A (second half of the measure), but transposed a major third above (A-sharp, B and C-sharp).

According to Petracchi, Rota purposely wrote a passage capturing the common errors that he heard students make during their lessons with Petracchi. Very frequently, in playing arpeggios, the students would never play the tonic final note of their arpeggios in the higher positions in tune. In response, Rota purposely ended

the final passage of the *Allegro* (beginning 2 mm. after RN 23 and shown below) on a dotted half B-double flat, thus mimicking the mistake: i.e., B double-flat instead of a proper A-flat.



Example 16. *Allegro*, 2 to 3 mm. after RN 23 (reprinted with permission from Carisch Sheet Music Publishers).

As already noted, the precise manner in which Petracchi's teaching at the Bari Conservatory influenced Rota's writing of the solo bass part can never be known. Nevertheless, the technical passagework discussed above provides opportunities that are well-suited to demonstrate the practicality and versatility of Petracchi's innovations in the playing of difficult music.

At the outset, it is useful to know that Petracchi's thoughts about the piece resulted from the numerous opportunities he had to discuss it with the composer and to perform it with Rota at the piano. The following recollection concerning the *Marcia* exemplifies the fruitful working relationship between the two. Here the performer is describing how the tempo was set, Petracchi recalls specific details about how the revisions were done:

In the course of reading over the piece, he made a point of telling me that the tempo must be *allegramente*, like when children leave school, not when they enter. We estimated that a quarter-note at 132/138 could be optimal. We worked a great deal together; he would come to my house very often and we would play together, as a man of the cinema, he was accustomed to changes and attempted to satisfy me by choosing the right keys and the best sounding positions.⁶

Petracchi gave details to explain why a particular change in the *Marcia* was made, saying "in the *Marcia*, at rehearsal number 6, one plays in the octave because, otherwise, the sound of the instrument is 'swallowed' by the orchestra."⁷

When I asked Petracchi if these modifications were indeed done after the publication, the performer agreed: "Exactly, he [Rota] agreed with my technical suggestions."⁸

Petracchi recalled that Rota would come to his house for rehearsing. On a typical occasion, Petracchi would make suggestions and Rota would look for ways to revise the score based on them. In a more extended comment, Petracchi addressed changes made to the *Allegro*:

We worked a great deal together; he would come to my house very often and we would play together... On my own

score, which I also distribute to my students, there are numerous expressive, dynamic, and metronome markings that are fruit of my time with Rota at the piano.⁹

Petracchi's remarks above pertain to the first page of the *Allegro*, on which there are a substantial number of revisions to the tempo markings. The collaborative process that led to the revision was interrupted by the death of the composer in 1979. In the interview transcript that follows, Petracchi (i.e., FP) responds to my (AR) question as to when the revisions were actually made in relation to Rota's death:

AR So, Maestro, in the *Divertimento*, all the modifications that we note on your score were made before Rota's death or after?

FP After his death I changed nothing. Everything was accepted or suggested by the Maestro. Also in the concerto by H. W. Henze, I made numerous modifications, but only with his consent. He wrote on my score, "the corrections made by Franco Petracchi are not only accepted by me, but also desired, because they are done with reason." The same with the music of Rota.¹⁰

Conclusion

The first research goal was to discover when and in what circumstances Nino Rota composed his *Divertimento for Double Bass*. The *Divertimento* was composed intermittently through a long period of time from 1967 to 1971. Concerning the compositional process, it is essential to know that at the time Rota was director of the Bari Conservatory and Petracchi was the teacher of double bass. As a result it was possible for Rota to hear the music in the classroom from his office downstairs and to visit the classroom itself. The close proximity enabled the two musicians to discuss the progress of the work on multiple occasions, to perform the version with piano, and to use the experience to change many details of the scoring, in each of the four movements.

The second goal was to explore the possibility that aspects of Petracchi's interpretive style and performing technique could have influenced the composition of Rota's *Divertimento*. Technical features of a sort that Petracchi found important were found to be present throughout the *Marcia*. In the *Aria* movement, Rota gave Petracchi the kind of intense lyrical phrases that would allow him to demonstrate his ability to "sing" on the double bass. In the first and fourth movements Petracchi was given numerous chances to demonstrate his rare, exceptional virtuosity. Thanks to this collaboration, one of Italy's most famous 20th-century composers created a work of lyrical beauty and virtuosic challenge, guided at each stage by many practical suggestions from the artist who inspired the work and performed its premiere.

The third research goal was to investigate the specific influence of Petracchi's innovative pedagogy for the bass and of his method book *Simplified Higher Technique* on the composition of the *Divertimento*. Several chapters of *Higher Technique* introduced playing principles and presented exercises that bore a significant similarity to passages in the *Divertimento*. The following chapters are particularly relevant: Chapter 18, which dealt with arpeggios; Chapter 5, which concerned scales; Chapters 7 and 8, which devel-

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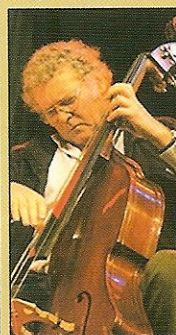
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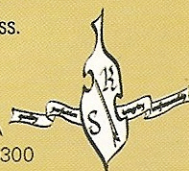
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oped chromatic scale technique; Chapter 11, which introduced Petracchi's shifts on a single string, developed for lyrical passages; Chapter 9, which applied various double stop patterns to chord playing; Chapter 19, which introduced the playing of fourths with the "thumb position;" and, most significantly, Chapter 3, which led to a possible direct musical quotation in the *Divertimento*.

The final research goal was to determine the general circumstances and specific changes made as a result of the collaborative decision to revise the work after its publication in 1973. By comparing the published score and Petracchi's personal copy of his revised part with additional handwritten changes, it was possible to establish main categories of revision and to survey them in detail, throughout all four movements. The most significant changes fit into the following categories: note alterations, additions, and deletions, rhythmic alterations, and register alterations as well as revisions of terms, titles, and special markings.

With respect to the circumstances that led to the revisions, I refer the reader to the full transcript of my 2008 interview with Petracchi and to the excerpts from it given

in my dissertation.

In my opinion, the latest revised version that Petracchi owns is the most faithful document of what Rota really intended with the *Divertimento*. Aside from all the many detailed changes discussed previously and in depth in my dissertation, there are major tempo revisions throughout the *Divertimento* that were not incorporated into the 1973 edition. These revisions are of great importance since they represent more accurately all the meaning, the representation of ideas, the scenarios, and feelings that are an intrinsic part of Rota's compositional style. The musical world would greatly benefit if all the details that Rota provided to Petracchi as they worked together and which are now represented in this latest revised version that Petracchi owns would be made available in a new published critical edition of the *Divertimento*.

To conclude, I encourage the more enthusiastic readers to go to chapter "The Revisions after the Publication" of my dissertation presented at the *OJBR*. That chapter is directly concerned with the revisions that were made to the *Divertimento* after its publication in 1973. My main intention was to provide performers with a

detailed list of all the passages that have undergone significant alterations from their original form. Another set of less significant revisions are also listed in Appendix B of the dissertation. Finally, I sincerely hope that this research project will inspire more and more bass players, to learn and perform this ingenious and fun rarity of the double bass solo repertoire.

Brazilian born bassist Alexandre Ritter has been on the faculty of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul-UFRGS, Porto Alegre/Brazil since 2000. Alexandre received both a Doctor of Musical Arts and Bachelor Degrees from the University of Georgia, studying with Milton Walter Masciadri, and pursued Master's studies at the University of British Columbia with Kenneth Friedman.

Endnotes

¹ Lucia Borsatti, "The Master of Bel Canto," *The Strad* 104 (February 1993).

² Franco Petracchi, *Franco Petracchi in Tokyo I*, Tokyo City Philharmonic Orchestra, Franco Petracchi and Norichika Iimori, live Recording, 1993, compact disc.

³ "The *Marcia* was composed in 1967 and the *Aria* in 1968." Franco Petracchi, interview by author, 06 October 2006, Vancouver, e-mail, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

⁴ Franco Petracchi, *Simplified Higher Technique*, foreword by Wolfgang Sawallisch, introduction by Rodney Slatford (London: Yorke Edition, 1982): 16.

⁵ Franco Petracchi, *Simplified Higher Technique*, 15.

⁶ Franco Petracchi, interview by author, 11 February 2008, Athens, audio recording, transcribed and translated by Michael Faucette, University of Georgia, Athens.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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