

A History of Descent

For Solo Double Bass

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Duration c. 6mins

Like many solo pieces I write, this started from a rather basic consideration of the physical nature of the instrument: the double bass has very long strings and its size and lowness seemed to imply a sense of gravity, and therefore falling, to me. I then thought about the different ways music makes descent: a smooth glissando without individual notes, scales, a sequence of suspensions, a more romantic melodic figure that owes a little bit to Mahler. It struck me that these come with historical baggage – there are styles attached. The piece begins as a bit of a catalogue of this, but gradually brings them into a more continuous and unified musical line, that incorporates historical elements but also synthesizes them.

For Ruohua Li, as part of the Royal Academy of Music's 200 PIECES series of commissions.

△ notehead = stopped note as high as possible on fingerboard/

○ notehead = harmonic pressure note as close as possible to bridge.

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♩ = 90

Double Bass

Gliss. on 4th string, starting as high as possible while still on the fingerboard.

non vib, like a viola da gamba

D.B.

As if playing Mahler

pizz.

arco

(natural harmonic gliss, starting as high as possible on the 4th string)

(stopped gliss)

flautando

D.B.

19

pizz. >

(continue gesture of gliss in l.h. after sound has ceased)

arco

(like a gamba again)

with audible sound of left hand pressure on string

D.B.

27

pizz. >

re-articulate pizz irregularly as resonance dies out

arco

Gliss absolutely continuous so mordents end on a lower note than they start. Keep finger space for mordent constant, so interval gets narrower during descent. Start with a relatively wide interval.

D.B. 32

f p f p f p f p f p

D.B. 37

p f p f p f p f (gamba sound again) *p*

D.B. 45

f 3 *pizz.*

D.B. 53

p 6 *arco* I II *IV (extreme vibrato)* *pizz.* *arco* (quite long) *ff p mp*

(natural harmonic gliss,
starting as high as possible
on the 4th string)

D.B. 62 *f* Mahlerian

Musical notation for D.B. 62-66. The piece is in 3/4 time. It begins with a dynamic marking of *f*. The notation includes a natural harmonic glissando on the 4th string, indicated by a circle with a dot above the note. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some slurs and accents. A fermata is placed over a note at measure 65. The piece concludes with a Mahlerian signature.

D.B. 67 *p*

Musical notation for D.B. 67-70. The piece is in 3/4 time. It starts with a dynamic marking of *p*. The notation includes triplets of eighth notes, marked *pizz.* (pizzicato). The piece then transitions to *arco* (arco) playing, with a dynamic marking of *p*. The melody features slurs and accents over eighth notes.

D.B. 71 *f p f*

Musical notation for D.B. 71-74. The piece is in 3/4 time. It begins with a dynamic marking of *f*. The notation includes a natural harmonic glissando on the 4th string, indicated by a circle with a dot above the note. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some slurs and accents. A fermata is placed over a note at measure 73. The piece concludes with a dynamic marking of *f*.

Extremely slow natural
harmonic gliss, dwelling on
the multiphonics between
the speaking harmonics.

D.B. 75 *pp*

Musical notation for D.B. 75-77. The piece is in 4/4 time. It starts with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The notation includes a natural harmonic glissando on the 4th string, indicated by a circle with a dot above the note. The melody consists of a single note held for a long duration, with a fermata over it. The piece concludes with a dynamic marking of *pp*.

D.B. 78 *p*

Musical notation for D.B. 78-81. The piece is in 3/4 time. It starts with a dynamic marking of *p*. The notation includes triplets of eighth notes, marked *pizz.* (pizzicato). The piece then transitions to *arco* (arco) playing, with a dynamic marking of *p*. The melody features slurs and accents over eighth notes.

D.B. 82

p *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

pizz. arco pizz. arco

3 3

p

D.B. 89

p *f* *p* *f*

pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco

6

p *f* *p* *f*

D.B. 93

pp *sfz* *f*

pizz. arco pizz. arco

7 5

3

D.B. 99

p