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The double bass: by virtue of its size...

By virtue of its size, the double bass can be an awkward instrument to learn. It can take years to have everything working symbiotically.

In preparing for an exam, the candidate must ensure that he/she is technically secure in all areas. As an examiner though, one is also always listening for the “Holy Grail” of excellent tone production and beautiful sound quality. There are several factors which will help a student achieve these things.

Firstly, the size of the instrument can make a big difference to the sheer volume that can be produced. Naturally, a student has to be playing the correct instrument for their body size, but sometimes students stay on a smaller instrument long after they should have moved to a larger one. I would always encourage students to practise in front of a full-length mirror to monitor how their playing looks with regard to the following things:

Bow angle

The bow should always be perpendicular to the string being played. The most common problem is the tendency to have the tip of the bow pointing down towards the ground, when playing on the G string. The result is an airy sound which has no rich, full centre.

Bow position

Within any piece, scale or exercise, there will be the necessity to move your bow closer to the bridge. The higher the notes, the closer to the bridge you will need to be. The resulting sound will be clear and strong.

Posture

Excellent posture is another aspect which one should never overlook. With good posture, it is easy to tackle these issues, but if you slouch, the aforementioned issues can become almost impossible to fix.

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