

Double Bass Equipment and Setup

Equipment

The double bass is a very physically taxing instrument, and for this reason it is important for the student to have a bass and bow that are well maintained and suitable for his/her size. The following are some suggestions for the teacher and student to make the learning process fun and enjoyable with as little pain as possible.

Double Bass Size: This is one of the most important factors to consider when starting on the double bass. If the bass is too big, it will be very difficult to play even a simple tune. Bases come in a wide variety of sizes from 1/8 (or smaller) to 7/8. Because of this a student can start on the bass at a very early age. Today students are starting as early as the age of four. When deciding on a bass size, the most important thing to consider is the size of the student's hand. If the student has to stretch too much or even shift to play a whole step in half position, the bass is too big. The other thing to consider is the height of the student. If the end pin has to be fully extended to suit the student, the bass is too small.

Bridge: I feel it is very important to have a bass with adjusters on the bridge. String instruments are very susceptible to climate changes. For this reason, too much humidity can cause the strings on the bass to go so high that the student will have a lot of difficulty just pressing the strings down. With adjusters, you can keep the string height fairly consistent throughout the year. For a student, I suggest keeping the strings approximately 4mm to 5mm above the end of the fingerboard. Also it is important that the bridge be cut properly and aligned properly. If it is not set up well, it will also cause great difficulties for the student, such as string crossing challenges and tone production problems.

Fingerboard: It is also imperative that the fingerboard be properly planed and dressed. If it is not, it will be very difficult for the student to shift properly because of the disparity in string height along the fingerboard. Also, a poorly planed fingerboard can cause the strings to snap and buzz while playing.

Bow: The size of the bow should correlate to the size of the bass. I also strongly recommend using real hair instead of synthetic hair. The difference in tone production is quite drastic on the bass. I also feel it is important to have the freshest hair possible on the bow. For me this means changing the hair every three or four months. As the hair gets older, it becomes more and more difficult to draw out a good tone, and it usually causes the student or performer to press more than necessary.

Strings: It is important that strings also be fresh. This means changing the strings every six months. I would not keep strings on longer than a year, because of the affect it will have on tone production

Rosin: I recommend: Kolstein Soft, Pop's, Neimann or Carlsson.

Cleaning the Instrument: I use a rag to clean the rosin off of the body of the instrument, but I do not use a rag to clean the strings. For the strings I recommend a Scotch pad or something equivalent. When you use a rag to clean the strings, fibers from the rag stick to the rosin on the strings, and in turn, end up on the hair of your bow.

Guidelines for Holding the Double Bass While Standing

1. Adjust the end pin so that your right hand touches the bridge somewhere between the tips of your fingers and your knuckle while the bass is facing you. **For the teacher:** This will vary depending on the physique of the student and dimensions of the instrument.
2. Hold the bass at arm's length with your left hand. The side of the bass should be directly in front of your left leg with the bridge of the bass pointing directly to your right.
3. Bring the bass in toward your body and lean it on your left upper thigh. Then, turn it at a 45° angle to the left so that the top back edge of the bass is resting on your pelvis just above your left inner thigh and somewhere on or below your waist. **For the teacher:** These contact points will vary depending on the physique of the student and dimensions of the instrument.
4. While transferring your weight on to your right foot, turn your right heel slightly in to the left, turning your foot to the right, and take one step forward with your left foot. **For the teacher:** This is just a good starting position for the student. Flexibility and freedom of movement should be encouraged. While playing, it is entirely acceptable to shift weight from leg to leg.
5. To check the height of the bass, hold the neck with a fist in your left hand just below the peg box and nut. Point toward your head with your index finger. If your finger is pointing into your left ear, the height is approximately correct. **For the teacher:** The height of the bass also will vary depending on the student and the bass. There are two general guidelines for the height. First, the student's left elbow should not be higher than the shoulder while playing in the lower positions, and, secondly, the student's right hand should be able to hold the bow comfortably between the fingerboard and bridge.

Standing Illustrations

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



Guidelines for Holding the Double Bass While Sitting

(This is not advisable for early beginners.)

1. Adjust the end pin so that your right hand touches the bridge somewhere between the tips of your fingers and your knuckle while the bass is facing you. **For the teacher:** This will vary depending on the physique of the student and dimensions of the instrument.
2. If your stool has four legs, situate it so that one of the four legs is facing forward. Sit near the edge of the stool with your right foot placed firmly on the ground with a slight bend in the knee, and the left foot placed on a rung. **For the teacher:** If there are two rungs, generally the top rung is the best place to for the left foot. Ideally the foot should be placed high enough for the left leg to support pressure placed on the strings and fingerboard but low enough to grant full access over the shoulder of the bass for thumb position. In most cases neither rung is ideal. For optimal performance it is advisable to attach a small piece of wood to two of the legs of the stool as a rung, so the student can have both full access and support. This will take some experimentation by both the teacher and the student.
3. With both of your hands on the back shoulders of the instrument, hold the bass approximately at arm's length and bring it in to your body and between your legs. Turn the bass so that the back of the bass is resting on your left leg and the right side of the bass is resting on your right inner thigh and pelvis. **For the teacher:** Once again, these contact points are only guidelines and will vary from student to student.
4. To check the height and angle of the bass, hold the neck with a fist in your left hand just below the peg box and nut. Point toward your head with your index finger. If your finger is pointing into your left ear, the height and angle are approximately correct. **For the teacher:** The height and angle of the bass also will vary depending on the student and the bass. It is good to experiment with the height and placement of the end pin, because these will both affect the height and angle of the bass. There are four general guidelines for the height and angle. First, the student's left elbow should not be higher than the shoulder while playing in the lower positions. Secondly, the left shoulder of the bass should be low enough to allow easy access to the end of the fingerboard. There should be enough clearance so the student can draw a full down bow on the E string without hitting his/her leg, and the student's right hand should be able to hold the bow comfortably between the fingerboard and bridge.

A Word about the Stool

Generally speaking, a wooden stool with four legs and two or more rungs for each pair of legs is very good for a student. Some players find that a cushion makes playing much more comfortable. If the student is fairly short, it is probably best to wait until he/she is taller before using a stool. The stool should not be so high that the student can not place both feet comfortably on the ground while sitting on the edge of the seat, and it should not be so short that both knees are too bent. Once again, these things should be determined by a qualified teacher who will take the students physique into consideration.

Sitting Illustrations

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.

