

DOUBLE BASSES ALL ROUND

David Kettle reviews a trio of recent bass discs

THREE RECENTLY RELEASED discs offer contrasting perspectives on the double bass. *Oltracuidansa* (Provençal for going beyond thinking) by **Stefano Scodanibbio** (Mode 225), an Italian avant-garde bassist who has worked with many contemporary composers, is the most challenging of the three. It presents an hour-long, single-track exploration of a plethora of extended techniques, selected and multi-tracked from six hours of material recorded by Scodanibbio. Yet despite its often bizarre sound world – at times it's even possible to forget you're listening to a double bass – Scodanibbio has constructed a readily accessible structure of slowly evolving textures where sounds gradually develop and morph into each other. Particularly

impressive is a section of jazz-like pizzicatos near the start which slowly meld into eerie semi-harmonics, or a later passage of seductive rhythms built from sounds produced

Leon Bosch makes the bass sing



on the bass's body. There's little sense of drama or opposition between different sorts of material, however – the sound tableaux Scodanibbio creates are beautifully etched but inherently static. Nevertheless, it's a hugely impressive achievement and displays Scodanibbio's breathtaking playing.

Temporary by improvising bassists **William Parker** and **Giorgio Dini** (Silta SR 0903) seems to fall between two stools. Its five improvisations for two basses lack the wilful strangeness of Scodanibbio's modernism, yet, despite their occasional forays into jazz territory, never fully embrace that idiom either. Nevertheless, there's impressive playing here as the two performers are responsive to each other's sound ideas, and the music they create is fresh and alive. The Largo movement is full of stuttering pizzicatos, with scraps of melody gradually coalescing then dispersing again, and the concluding *Danza e finale* ends with a compelling jazz-like riff. The music seems at times quite self-indulgent, and at others introspective, but it nevertheless delivers a rich and rewarding listening experience.

The Hungarian Double Bass by South African-born bassist **Leon Bosch** (Meridian CDE 84597) is by far the most traditional of the three discs, and it's a joy from start to finish. The varied repertoire – mostly short, light pieces ranging from gypsy-style evocations to more modern works – allows Bosch to show off his immaculate yet effortless technique. It's in the slower music that he really excels – in the Kodály Adagio, for example, he makes the bass sing in a deceptively simple performance, committed yet not over-stated. He has a superb control over the bass's sound – at times he is rich and full-bodied, yet at others he reduces the tone to something light and transparent, with wonderfully smooth phrasing. Bosch receives lithe, responsive support from pianist Sung-Suk Kang in a disc to really savour.

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