

Bass Concerto in D major
Edgar Meyer
Born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, November 24, 1960

Edgar Meyer premiered his Bass Concerto in D major in 1993 with Edo de Waart and the Minnesota Orchestra and later recorded it with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Hugh Wolff. Meyer wrote the following description of his work:

“Solo double bass and orchestra is not a natural pairing. The orchestra, with its combined instrumentation, is capable of a huge variety of dynamics and colors, whereas the bass is not a very loud instrument and has a predominantly dark sound. The ambition of this piece, however, is to bring out the qualities of the bass that make it a surprisingly good solo instrument. At best, the bass is very vocal and able to convey a wide range of emotion. The five-and-a-half octave range used in this piece provides, if nothing else, a bit of drama. And the indigenous involvement of the bass in many styles of music outside of classical provides a natural springboard from which to explore the intersection of some of these styles with classical music.

“The first movement is exploratory in nature. It opens in D. The longest harmonically stable sections of this movement are in F-sharp, although there is a long circle of fifths (F-sharp, B, E, A) which ends during the second orchestral tutti section, suggesting a recapitulation and a return to D. However, after the second tutti, the movement ends quickly and quietly in F-sharp.

“The second movement is a melancholy interlude, staying primarily in B. Its somber mood is interrupted only once by a brief tutti section.” Elsewhere Meyer added that he “lifted” the idea of a singing solo bass part accompanied by plucked upper strings from Haydn’s C major Violin Concerto.

“The final movement returns to D. It is an energetic rondo which shows off some technical possibilities of the bass.” Here again Meyer found outside influences, in this case more

modern—“a fiddle tune with blues overtones. I got the idea for this type of tune and the way of playing it from hearing Sam Bush play the violin and mandolin.”