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Restoration of a Brescian style double bass

The instrument is property of Maestro Ezio Pederzani.

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Premise

Ezio gave me the instrument in the summer of 2009 for a full restoration.

The work will have to be done with respect for the original parts and for its history, maintaining its current musical function

All broken or deformed parts will be repaired in order to give solidity and equilibrium to the instrument, while the badly executed additions and repairs will be removed, but there will be no alterations that would make it more modern or playable at the expense of modifying its form.

In the same way, alterations that have been made in the past will not be undone, as there will be no attempt to restore the instrument to some presumed "original" state.

Ezio does not possess any certificate, experts' evaluation or document on this double bass, since it was left to him by his father, Gino Pederzani, who was also a bass player with the R.A.I. Orchestra in Torino.

The only information given is that the father bought the instrument on an unknown date from his teacher, Antonio Betella, who taught at the Parma Conservatory.

The previous owner is unknown.

On the inside of the back, in addition to the label, it is possible to see a pencil notation, indicating a restoration by Giulio Degani, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1927.

Giulio Degani was born in Montagnana, near Venezia, in 1875. He was his father Eugenio's apprentice, until he took over the business in Venezia in 1915; in 1922 he moved to America, establishing himself in Cincinnati, where he worked for Wurlitzer.

I do not know how the instrument got to America, or how it came back to Italy.

I never worked on a confirmed Brescian bass, so my knowledge of this workmanship is based on studies rather than personal experience.

I am consequentially not in the position to provide any attribution for this instrument.

I hope that this document will be helpful to any expert who will examine the bass in the future.

Observations

The instrument is of a form typical of the Brescian design.

The current measurements in millimetres are:

Body length	1073 (with ebony columns at the heel 1088)
Lower bouts width	665
C bouts width	347
Upper bouts width	520
Distance between upper ff holes eyes	168
Body stop	557 (with ebony columns at the heel 572)

Ribs heights

At lower block	227	
At lower corners	230 E side	233 G side
At upper corners	221 E side	234 G side
At the back's bend	223 E side	228 G side
At the heel	145 E side	147 G side
Back length from lower edge to the bend	896	

String length (Eb neck)	1053
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The top is made of three pieces of spruce, with regular fiber and quarter sawn.

The back and ribs are in cherry wood.

The back is in two pieces, quarter sawn, but with the grain deviating to slab cut at the edges.

The upper ribs are quarter sawn, while the C and the lower ribs are slab cut.

The neck graft is in maple, and the scroll is in walnut.

The varnish that covers most of the instrument is not original and red-brown

Large areas are touched with a darker material.

There are many cracks on every surface, most of them already repaired, often with filler













The lower curves of the back have been modified, next to and on the sides of the lower block, for a length of about 45 centimetres, with a replacement of the edge and purfle, of a maximum width of 20 millimetres



The glueing surface of the ribs to the back in this area has been lowered by 5 millimetres
The endpin hole is not in the middle point of the ribs' height but more towards the top.



It is possible that the ribs and lower block have been planed down, and the lower part of the back rebuild, to repair the damages caused by resting the back edge of the instrument on the floor while playing, or because of the removal of a "clog" used for the same reason, and that in the beginning there was an end button instead of an endpin.

The width of the back has been decreased, as proved by the old purfling beside more recent ones, from the back button to the maximum width of the upper bouts.

The width of this reduction is of about 5 millimetres per side. The back button has been cut transversely and rebuild.



In the same area the top has been widened with two additions of the edge and purfling.

On the G side, the addition has a maximum width of 17 millimetres and a length of about 180 millimetres.

On the E side the addition is much longer, of about 300 millimetres, and the maximum width is of about 22 millimetres.

The two additions, and some fillings as well, cover the highest point of the top.

On the neck's sides, to complete the body's outline, there are two ebony columns.





It seems that the upper part of the body has been modified to bend the shoulders ribs, by widening the top plate and tightening the back.

The neck graft was fitted the last time in order to have an Eb neck.

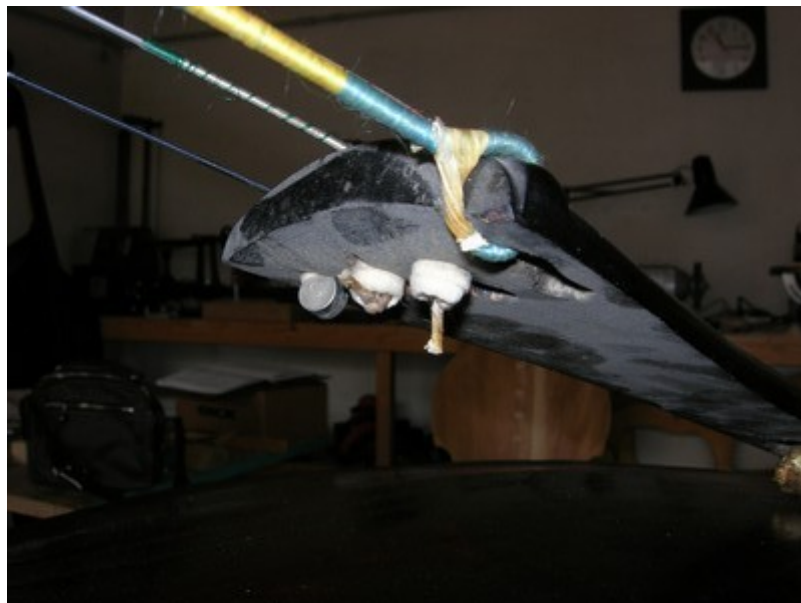
The back of the scroll and pegbox has a single scoop.

From the inside of the pegbox it is impossible to see how many pegs were mounted in the past, because of the graft.

On the outside there are German single-plate tuning machines.

Of the strings mounted, the E string is gut core with a copper round winding, the middle two are gut core flat wound, the G string is metal.

This stringing suggests that the instrument was last played in the 60's.



Initial works

The instrument shows a limited number of woodworm holes, closed with either filler or wax.

I do not see recent or open holes, so I deduce that the problem has been solved in the past.

To make sure I inject a woodworm treatment product (Xilamon), which is diclofluanide and permethrin based. I will use the same product in the inside as well.

I take down the strings, the bridge and tuning machines.

The bridge is deformed and has been repaired on the E side with an ebony plate, where it was fractured and eaten by woodworms.



The tuning machines are German made.



Under the plates there are two ebony and filler replacements, where a previous set of tuning machines for four strings were inlaid in the pegbox.







On the back of the pegbox it is possible to see three filled holes, that might be left from a previous set of three machines with retaining pins.





I will be able to get better informations on the previous stringing when I will repair the pegbox by removing the ebony and filler from the walls in order to make new additions.

I remove the neck to avoid deformations or cracks that may be caused by its weight on the ribs during the restoration

Under the non original back button there is a metal screw inserted diagonally between neck and upper block



On the G side a wedge has been inserted to block the dovetailed neck fitting.



Various replacements are glued to the upper block both on the sides and back of the dovetail, with different woods (walnut, maple, spruce). There are three screws as well.



I unglue the top from the body.



By having access to the inside of the instrument, I can see a label:

"o. Paolo Maggini in Brescia"



There is a pencil notation as well:

“ Riparato da Giulio Degani in Cincinnati Ohio 19 Ottobre 1927 “.



I decide to start working on the ribs.

To do so, before unglueing the back from the ribs to have better access, I build a wooden cross to hold the form by glueing it to the upper and lower blocks, and blocking it to the C bouts.



I then separate the back from the ribs.



I build a wooden cross to hold the ribs on the back side as well.



