

**WILL YAGER, DOUBLE BASS**  
**FACULTY RECITAL**

# PROGRAM

*Due pezzi brillanti* (1985) .....Stefano Scodanibbio  
I. (1956-2012)  
II.

Twelve Waltzes (1840) ..... Domenico Dragonetti  
X. Allegretto (1763-1846)

*Soror mystica* (1978/79) .....Fernando Grillo  
(1945-2013)

*Esplorazione del bianco I* (1986).....Salvatore Sciarrino  
(b. 1947)

Twelve Waltzes ..... Domenico Dragonetti  
XI. Vivace

*Let it come* (2014) .....Giulia Lorusso  
(b. 1990)

Twelve Waltzes ..... Domenico Dragonetti  
XII. Presto

*Alisei* (1986) .....Stefano Scodanibbio

# ABOUT THE ARTIST

**Dr. Will Yager** is a versatile double bassist committed to experimental music, improvisation, jazz, and collaborating with living composers in the creation of new solo and chamber repertoire for the double bass. He is a founding member of the soprano/double bass duo LIGAMENT and improvising trio Wombat. Performance highlights include appearances at Bang on Can's Long Play Festival, Big Ears Festival, University of Iowa Center for New Music, International Society of Bassists Convention, SPLICE Festival, High Zero Festival, Experimental Sound Studio's Quarantine Concerts, Omaha Under the Radar, SEAMUS National Conference, and the Feed Me Weird Things concert series. Yager is also a founding member and currently serves on the board of the nonprofit organization Bass Players for Black Composers.

As members of LIGAMENT, Anika Kildegaard and Will Yager have premiered many new works and have an upcoming album of pieces written expressly for the duo. Notable performances include appearances at the Kansas City Contemporary Music Festival, Cleveland Uncommon Sound Project's Re:Sound, New Music on the Point, and the Cortona Sessions for New Music. Recent concert seasons have included residencies at the University of Idaho and University of Iowa, a collaboration with the composition department at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, and tours of the midwest and east coast. Their upcoming 2024-25 season will include a return to the Peabody Institute, a residency with the University of Iowa Center for New Music, a winter tour with clarinetist Jean-François Charles, and a spring tour with voice/flute ensemble SydeBoob Duo.

Wombat, along with saxophonist Justin Comer and guitarist Carlos Cotallo Solares, is an improvising trio dedicated to experimental and intermedia performance. Wombat has performed at the Oh My Ears Festival, MOXsonic Experimental Electronic Music festival, the University of Iowa Center for New Music, as well as tours across the US. Wombat has several recordings available on Bandcamp, including their most recent recording *Burnt Ends*. Will is also an active jazz musician and has performed with Gregory Tardy, Damani Phillips, Mark Boling, Steve Grismore, and others in the Iowa and Tennessee areas. He has an upcoming piano trio album with Dr. Geoffrey Dean and Hunter Deacon slated for release in 2025.

In addition to his varied performance activity, Will is a devoted educator. He currently teaches double bass at the University of Northern Iowa, and spends his summers on faculty at the North Carolina Governor's School West. Prior to his position at UNI, Will taught at the University of North Alabama and Maryville College.

Dr. Yager holds degrees from the University of Iowa, University of Tennessee, and Maryville College.

# PROGRAM NOTES AND COMPOSER BIOGRAPHIES

**Stefano Scodanibbio** was one of the most important double bassists of the 20th century; his contributions both as performer and composer are incredibly significant in the development of both the way the double bass is played and its repertoire. As a performer, Scodanibbio worked closely with many of the major composers of the 20th century: Salvatore Sciarrino, Brian Ferneyhough, Terry Riley, Luigi Nono, and Luciano Berio to name just a few. Scodanibbio's work was primarily concerned with his mission to "allow the contrabass to sing with its own voice" and his expansion of what is possible with the use of harmonics on the double bass. While harmonics have been a staple technique of solo double bass literature since the Classical era, Scodanibbio's compositions during the 1980s take the idea to a new level. *Due pezzi brillanti* (1985) is a prime example of Scodanibbio's work in this realm. While both movements utilize the compositional possibilities of double bass harmonics as a primary principle of organization, the two ultimately different realizations demonstrate the possibilities of the instrument while also creating a varied and interesting experience for the listener. The first movement takes great advantage of the physical properties of the string that allow for a single harmonic to be activated at a variety of points along the string. This allows for the quick alternation between stopped pitches and high harmonics without the need to shift to shift rapidly up and down the fingerboard. The sonic result, however, is one of sparkling hocket. The second movement, while still taking advantage of the convenience of low and high pitches being available without shifting, swaps linear expansion for a compression of melodic material into repeated notes. These repetitions form cells that contract and expand by utilizing shifting accent patterns, and the materials develop and mutate before the piece ends in a lighthearted fashion. The music of Stefano Scodanibbio has had a profound impact on my personal performance practice, both as interpreter and improviser, and my study of his music has been incredibly meaningful.

- Will Yager

**Stefano Scodanibbio** was a contrabass soloist and composer born in Macerata, Italy. In the 1980s and 1990s his name was prominently linked to the renaissance of the double bass, playing in the major festivals throughout the world dozens of works written especially for him by such composers as Bussotti, Donatoni, Estrada, Ferneyhough, Frith, Globokar, Sciarrino, and Xenakis. He created new techniques extending the colours and range of the double bass heretofore thought impossible on this instrument. In Rome in 1987, he performed a four-hour non-stop marathon playing 28 pieces by 25 composers. He collaborated for a long time with Luigi Nono ("arco mobile à la Stefano Scodanibbio" is written on *Prometeo's* score) and with Giacinto Scelsi. He regularly played in duos with Rohan de Saram and Markus Stockhausen.

In the 1990s, Stefano Scodanibbio taught Master Classes and Seminars at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, University of California Berkeley, Stanford University, Oberlin Conservatory, Musikhochschule Stuttgart, Conservatoire de Paris, Conservatorio di Milano, and more. In 1996 he taught double bass at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse.

As a composer his catalogue consists of more than 50 works principally written for strings (*Sei Studi* for solo contrabass, three String Quartets, *Concertale* for contrabass, strings and percussions, six duos for all possible combinations of the four strings, etc.) He was chosen four times for the ISCM, International Society of Contemporary Music (Oslo 1990, Mexico City 1993, Hong Kong 2002, Stuttgart 2006). In June 2004 he premiered the *Sequenza XIVb* by Luciano Berio in his own version for contrabass, from the original for cello. His Music Theatre work *Il cielo sulla terra* was premiered in Stuttgart (June 2006), Tolentino, Italy, (July 2006) and Mexico City (2008).

He has recorded for the Montaigne Auvidis, col legno, Mode, New Albion, Dischi di Angelica, Ricordi, Stradivarius, and Wergo labels. Active in theatre and dance, he worked with authors, choreographers and dancers including Rodrigo García, Virgilio Sieni, Hervé Diasnas and Patricia Kuypers. Of particular

importance is his collaboration with Terry Riley and with Edoardo Sanguineti. In 1983 he founded the "Rassegna di Nuova Musica", New Music Festival held every year in Macerata, Italy.

**Domenico Dragonetti's Twelve Waltzes** for unaccompanied double bass are probably his most famous works and exist in many editions. Although Vincent Novello describes them as "some of the last 'playful exercises' which Dragonetti wrote to evince his wonderful command over that gigantic instrument," there is no indication of when they were composed. Dragonetti could have stopped composing just before his death which would date them to the 1840s, or he could have stopped in the 1820s, in which case they would date from that time. We have no indication from the manuscripts — Dragonetti rarely, if ever dated his works — so any suggested year of composition is mere supposition or speculation. According to Novello, Dragonetti never performed the waltzes in public but did perform them for his friends in his own lodgings. He performed as a soloist during his first years in London, from 1794 to around 1800, and would then only appear as a soloist for an extra fee, which was boosted even further if the organizers wanted him to perform one of his own works. Dragonetti was a shrewd and successful businessman who certainly knew his worth!

Novello wrote at the top of the first page of the composition, "Twelve Waltzes for the double bass, composed by Dragonetti, and this copy is in his own hand-writing," when he presented the manuscripts to the British Library in 1849. The manuscript has six pages of music, two waltzes per page, and they are clearly written on the whole, although there are many corrections, changes, and additions. Novello's comments, at the top and bottom of the first page, fortunately, add extra information about the pieces which would have been lost.

Each of the twelve waltzes follows the same pattern and suggests that Dragonetti may have been testing himself to write something new for each one but in a similar style. They are all in ternary form (ABA) — A is always a major key, and B is the relative or tonic minor, apart from Waltz No. 11, which modulates to the subdominant key — D and G majors, respectively. They are mainly in bass clef, using the orchestral range of the instrument, although there are the occasional forays into the higher register. Dragonetti uses a range of keys, without any relationship from one to the next occasionally, and employs many scalic figures, arpeggios, and double stops to significant effect, alongside the contrast of high and low registers. The waltzes have much to offer the bassist in terms of musical, technical, and performance challenges. Two or three performed together could be effective as a contrast of Bottesini, Eccles, and Koussevitsky. Still, it is unlikely that Dragonetti intended them to be performed as a set.

Much of Dragonetti's music is of its time, but his incredible showmanship and performance skills must have been exceptional to elicit such outstanding concert reviews. He was much loved and respected by his friends and colleagues, idolized by the audiences, and certainly put the double bass "on the map" like no one before him. Dragonetti left an enduring legacy as a performer, and his many works deserve the occasional performance to celebrate the genius of "Il Drago."

- David Heyes

**Domenico Dragonetti** was Europe's first - and possibly the world's finest - virtuoso double bassist. Born in Venice, the son of a poor barber, he received violin instruction from a local shoemaker, who later persuaded him to take up the double bass. The young Dragonetti demonstrated prodigious talent on his new instrument and at the age of just 13 was appointed to the orchestra of the Opera Buffa in Venice before joining the orchestra of St Mark's five years later. During these years, he discovered the famous Gasparo da Salò bass, an instrument that he would play for the rest of his life. In 1794, Dragonetti moved to London where he was to play operas and concerts at the King's Theatre. Here he met the Italian violinist Giovanni Battista Viotti with whom he would form a close musical relationship as a duo partner. Over the course of his career the Venetian would go on to play before the Emperor Napoleon at the palace of Prince Staremberg, perform with Paganini and meet Haydn, Beethoven and many other great composers. He continued to give major concerts throughout the final years of his life,

including as the principal bassist at the Beethoven Festival in Bonn in 1845, only a year before he passed away. His obituary of April 1846 read: 'Dragonetti was the greatest performer of his age on the double bass - possessing the finest instinct of true excellence in all that concerns his art.'

Music for the awakening of the full moon of the interior sky.  
The moon, the mystical sister of the sun.  
From the serious tone "melody" in ethereal atmospheres,  
through the grades joint, follows the axiom:  
*Natura non facit saltus* - Nature does not make jumps -.  
The *cantus firmus* announces the full moon of the inner sky.

- Fernando Grillo's foreword for *Soror mystica*

Born in 1946, **Fernando Grillo** studied the double bass with Corrado Penta in Perugia, where he also took cello lessons and began learning composition with Valentino Bucchi. He rapidly became interested in the sonic possibilities of the bass, conducting what he called 'ricerca fondamentale' (fundamental research) into the instrument's capabilities. As well as exploring the mechanics of vibrating strings, he experimented with bowed and fingered harmonics, and examined how different types of bowing and arm gestures could alter the sound quality.

After graduating in 1970, Grillo spent two years collaborating with composer Giacinto Scelsi. After winning first prize at the Gaudeamus contemporary music competition in the Netherlands, he embarked on a series of double bass premieres, including works by Xenakis, Christian Wolff and Klaus Huber as well as several of his own compositions.

In 2000 he was appointed chair of double bass at the 'Santa Cecilia' Conservatoire of Music in Rome, and also gave masterclasses and lectures on the instrument at conservatoires around the world. From 1984 to 1994 he taught at the Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music.

Grillo played an 18th-century double bass attributed to Pietro Giacomo Rogeri and a c.1980 French bow by Horst Heinz Pfretzschner. In later years he largely withdrew from double bass performance, believing that modern composers undervalued the instrument's possibilities: 'I often had the impression that composers used my techniques merely as effects, not in a real musical sense, and so in the end I became more reserved as far as collaborations are concerned, and withdrew from the new music scene.'

Like much of the music on this program, **Salvatore Sciarrino's *Esplorazione del bianco I*** (1986) places a magnifying glass over the compositional possibility of a few, fragile sounds. This interest in the smallest nuances of sound and expression is a hallmark of Sciarrino, particularly his works for strings and winds (especially the flute). The title (roughly translated as "exploration of the white") places this solo bass work in something of a family with two other pieces; *Esplorazione del bianco II* (for small mixed chamber group) and *III* (for drum set). The works are related not in their explicit musical materials, but in idea. Sciarrino explores what lives in the liminal; most of the double bass solo inhabits the space between *niente* and the lowest possible dynamics. This fragility demands immense control over the most subtle physical actions required to make the double bass speak. It's hard not to imagine some level of cheekiness on the part of Sciarrino; most of the piece is in the extreme upper register and forces the player to hunch over the instrument in the effort to reach the notes. This combination of perceived effort and the redefinition of the dynamic palette that one is usually accustomed to create an environment in which even the silences become savage. My rough translation of the closing line from Sciarrino's own note for the piece feels right to me: "the exploration of white thus represents immersion in blindness, a subtle dazzling variety."

- Will Yager

**Salvatore Sciarrino**, born in Palermo in 1947 boasts of being born free and not in a music school. He started composing when he was twelve as a self-taught person and held his first public concert in 1962.

But Sciarrino considers all the works before 1966 as an developing apprenticeship because that is when his personal style began to reveal itself. There is something really particular that characterizes this music: it leads to a different way of listening, a global emotional realization, of reality as well as of one's self. And after forty years, the extensive catalogue of Sciarrino's compositions is still in a phase of surprising creative development. After his classical studies and a few years of university in his home city, the Sicilian composer moved to Rome in 1969 and in 1977 to Milan. Since 1983, he has lived in Città di Castello, in Umbria.

He has composed for: Teatro alla Scala, RAI, Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Biennale di Venezia, Teatro La Fenice di Venezia, Teatro Carlo Felice di Genova, Fondazione Arena di Verona, Stuttgart Opera Theatre, Brussels La Monnaie, Frankfurt Opera Theatre, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, London Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo Suntory Hall. He has also composed for the following festivals: Schwetzingen Festspiele, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Witten, Salzburg, New York, Wien Modern, Wiener Festwochen, Berliner Festspiele Musik, Holland Festival, Alborough, Festival d'Automne (Paris), Ultima (Oslo).

He was published by Ricordi from 1969 to 2004. Since 2005, Rai Trade has had exclusive rights for Sciarrino's works. Sciarrino's discography is pretty extensive and counts over 100 CDs, published by the best international record labels and very often awarded and noted.

Apart from being author of most of his theatre opera's librettos, Sciarrino wrote a rich production of articles, essays and texts of various genres some of which have been chosen and collected in *Carte da suono*, CIDIM – Novecento, 2001. Particularly important is his interdisciplinary book about musical form: *Le figure della musica, da Beethoven a oggi*, Ricordi 1998.

Sciarrino taught at the Music Academies of Milan (1974–83), Perugia (1983–87) and Florence (1987–96). He also worked as a teacher in various specialization courses and masterclasses among which are those held in Città di Castello from 1979 to 2000 and the Lectures at Boston University. He currently teaches in the summer masterclasses at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena.

From 1978 to 1980, he was Artistic Director of Teatro Comunale di Bologna.

Academic of Santa Cecilia (Roma), Academic of Fine Arts of Bavaria and Academic of the Arts (Berlin), Sciarrino has won many awards, among the most recent are: the Prince Pierre de Monaco (2003), the prestigious Feltrinelli International Award (Premio Internazionale Feltrinelli) (2003), the Salzburg Music Prize (2006), an International Composition Prize established by the Salzburg Land, the Frontiers of Knowledge Prize from the Spanish BBVA Foundation (2011), the A Life in Music Prize from the Teatro La Fenice – Associazione Rubinstein in Venice (2014), the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement from the Venice Biennale (2016).

At the core of **Let it come** lies the idea of sound emergence: sound that is born, manifests, and takes shape through instrumental gesture. The double bass becomes a resonant body, a field of exploration where the performer does not merely produce sound but allows it to emerge, embracing both its fragility and its power.

Listening shifts from the result to the process, from action to its resonance: each sound seems to arise from nothingness, suspended between silence and matter, revealing the tension between control and surrender. The performer acts as a mediator of a sonic flow that challenges the boundaries between intention and spontaneity, between gesture and resonance.

Through a deep investigation of the instrument's timbral possibilities, *Let it come* invites the listener into an experience where time expands, and sound unveils itself in its purest essence.

- Giulia Lorusso

**Giulia Lorusso** is an Italian composer based in Paris. She began her studies in piano and composition at the Conservatory "Giuseppe Verdi" in Milan, under the guidance of Alessandro Solbiati. Continuing her education in Paris, she attended the IRCAM Coursus and completed a Master's degree at the Conservatoire de Paris (CNSMDP), where she studied with Frédéric Durieux. Additionally, she participated in the generative improvisation class led by Vincent Lê Quang.

Her catalogue includes both instrumental and electroacoustic compositions, interdisciplinary projects, installations, interactive and experimental music theatre, as well as collective creations. Through her compositions, Lorusso explores the dynamic interplay between listener, sound, and space, while also engaging in a critical dialogue with the tradition.

One of her projects, *Fabrica*, is an exploration within a three-dimensional virtual environment that examines the concepts of freedom of choice and responsibility in listening. In this work, listeners assume the role of active participants, shaping their own musical journey within an immersive music virtual landscape.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of her creative approach. She works with researchers, philosophers (as in *If it was a Forest*), visual artists (*Biome*, *Fabrica*), puppeteers (*Corpo Unico*), and fellow composers. In 2021, she co-created *Invitation to how it's done* with Mathieu Corajod and Giovanni Montiani. This piece featured eight spatialized musicians positioned across different rooms, an itinerant audience, and electronics diffused through bone-conduction headphones.

Lorusso's dialogue with tradition is exemplified in *Sedimenti* (2021), where she deconstructs a fragment from Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings Op. 48*, stretching it to the extreme and transforming it beyond recognition. This transfigured material is performed by four spatialized string quartets, multiplying and reinterpreting the traditional chamber ensemble to explore the perception of sound in space.

Her compositions have been commissioned by prestigious institutions, including IRCAM-Centre Pompidou, GMEM de Marseille, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Radio France, and ProQuartet. Renowned ensembles such as the Brussels Philharmonic, Quatuor Tana, Quatuor Diotima, Ensemble 2e2m, United Instruments of Lucilin, and Yarn/ Wire have performed her works.

Lorusso has held artist residencies at leading institutions, such as ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medien) in Karlsruhe, IRCAM in Paris, the European University of Cyprus (EUC), Royaumont Fondation (Incubator project), and Fondazione Spinola-Banna per l'arte in Turin.

She has been a composer associated with Ensemble 2e2m for the 2023–2024 season. Her accolades include the Prix SACEM Hervé Dugardin (2023) and the Premio Una vita nella musica giovani, awarded by Teatro La Fenice of Venice (2024). Her interactive installation *Fabrica* was featured in the Réseaux Monde exhibition at Centre Pompidou in 2022.

Lorusso is also an active educator. She served as a guest professor for the inaugural edition of the Académie MIXTE, organized by Proxima Centauri Ensemble in Bordeaux, France, and has taught composition at both undergraduate and graduate levels at the Conservatories of Pesaro and Vibo Valentia in Italy. She is an admirer of Pauline Oliveros's work and currently organizes workshops inspired by the Deep Listening practice as part of her music theory courses at the Conservatory of Pantin (Île-de-France).