

Art of the Bow with François Rabbath

François Rabbath, double bass
Hans Sturm, producer and director
Ball State University
www.artofthebow.com

This pedagogical *tour de force* is the latest and most in depth examination of François Rabbath—one of the most investigated string players in history. In this DVD bassists have the opportunity to delve deeply into the mysteries of the double bass with a master who has spent a lifetime devoted to its study. Furthermore, the DVD medium comes as close as is possible to a long series of private lessons with Rabbath as he transmits an extraordinary wealth of information.

The work encompasses an amazing breadth of material that is broken up into six different sections. The first two sections are a series of short lecture demonstrations that teach basic, yet vital, elements of double bass playing. The first of these, called ‘essentials,’ delivers information which is needed to begin the study of the bow arm movement that is the primary focus of this DVD (such as posture, bow hair and the weight of the bow). The

second section, ‘The Bow Arm,’ explains the movement of the body, arm and bow in great detail. Each concept is so thoroughly explained and well represented on the video that it is not unreasonable that a student struggling with body mechanics and tone production could find great progress could be made in improving their technique and sound that by studying these two sections alone.

The third section then allows Rabbath to demonstrate with a non-bassist (Sarah Kruger who is a graduate assistant in Ball State University’s biomechanics laboratory) how he would start a beginning double bassist. By assisting the student with the bow stroke from the beginning of her studies, Rabbath is able to teach the movement of the arm, wrist and hand in as relaxed and efficient a manner as possible.

In the fourth section, Rabbath is seated in a bistro and speaks for over forty minutes on a variety of topics including performance anxiety, teaching, practicing and interpretation. Time is also devoted to more personal issues such as the significance of the chains that Rabbath wears and how he was inspired by a chance meeting with Yehudi Menuhin early in his career.

The final two sections are an in-depth study of a series of bow strokes that Rabbath has categorized into seven ‘families’. These seven families not only sound different (for example a legato versus a staccato sound), but are also physically approached in different fashions. It is here that the versatility of the DVD format becomes so valuable. To begin with, Rabbath explains and demonstrates how to perform each of the different strokes. These demonstrations can be seen from the vantage point of any of four different camera angles, and you can switch between the four views while watching the DVD. To compliment this, the Biomechanics Laboratory at Ball State University helped Sturm create a virtual three-dimensional bow arm using Rabbath’s movements (by using three high speed cameras that filmed Rabbath performing the strokes with reflective markers on his bass and body) to further demonstrate how to per-

form the various bow strokes. One can hardly imagine a more efficient method of conveying the subtleties of these bow strokes than the combination of the multiple camera angles and virtual demonstrations.

This DVD is sprinkled throughout with live performances from a 2002 concert from France (a two DVD box set of this complete performance called *Carte Blanche à François Rabbath* is scheduled to be available soon) which often demonstrates in a real world setting the concepts that are discussed on the DVD. Although Rabbath demonstrates only with the French bow, many of the concepts discussed are applicable to any double bassist regardless of which bow they play. This DVD represents both a huge step forward for string pedagogy as well as an immensely valuable and inspirational tool for any double bass student or teacher.

— Review by Sandor Ostlund