Double Bass Concerto no. 2 in E major by Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf

I. Allegro moderato  
II. Adagio  
III. Allegro

Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf was born in Vienna, he started musical career as violinist in the Vienna Opera Orchestra under opera composer Christoph Willibald Gluck, then went on to become Hofkomponist (Court Composer) in Johannesberg (today Javornik in the Czech Republic). He spent most of his productive life in various posts in the Czech hinterland, playing the violin, staging plays and operas and composing prodigiously.

Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf’s Double Bass Concerto no. 2 in E major is idiomatically written for the Viennese violone, a five strings instrument with the “Viennese tuning” (F-A-D-F#-A). For this reason the publishers had to modify the scores taking under consideration the possibilities of the modern way of tuning the double bass. In the first movement, the piano makes the first statement of the theme and then the bass enters and has its say. Another tune is heard high in the bass' register. Both themes are developed in a short section before the recapitulation begins. There is an extended cadenza for the solo bass and the movement comes to an end in the syncopated rhythm in the strings that was heard at the beginning. In the second movement, the bass sings a gentle song with and without accompaniment from the piano. And in the last movement, a rondo for orchestra and soloist that gathers momentum and ends in a flurry.

Allegro di Concerto "Alla Mendelssohn” by Giovanni Bottesini

Giovanni Bottesini is commonly considered one of the most outstanding and influential nineteenth-century composers for the double bass. Since Bottesini was born in Italy and trained at the Conservatory in Milan, it is logical to assume that he had first-hand contact with the best of the Italian operatic tradition of the nineteenth century. The fact that a considerable fraction of Bottesini’s virtuoso music for the double bass includes thematic references to renowned opera pieces or songs does not imply a direct influence of Italian opera on Bottesini’s instrumental music, but rather points out the thematic material that would secure the attention from the audience. Besides, his compositional output expanded the technical and expressive possibilities of instrument beyond the boundaries. Bottesini’s virtuoso compositions contain a meticulous exploration of the different technical possibilities of the double bass.

Bottesini paraphrased the same tonal and formal processes from Mendelssohn’s first movement of violin concerto and incorporated them to this new composition. There are many characteristics that make this connection evident even for the unaware listener. Both pieces are in E minor; in both works the soloist starts after a very short introduction by the accompaniment, three beats in Bottesini’s and a bar and a half in Mendelssohn’s; both pieces are in sonata form, and in the middle of the Development is a false return of the opening theme that prepares the listener for the written-out cadenza.

"Divertimento concertante" for double bass and orchestra by Nino Rota
Nino Rota came to widespread recognition in America as the composer responsible for the haunting scores to Francis Ford Coppola’s first two installments of The Godfather in 1972 and 1974. Although this was the first time many Americans had heard of Rota, the composer was nearing the twilight of an incredibly prolific career in his native Italy as both a film and concert composer. The bulk of his most popular work was done in collaboration with the famous director Federico Fellini. In total, Rota wrote more than 150 film scores.

The Divertimento contains many of the same neo-Classic elements of clear lines and charming lyricism that are particularly pervasive in Rota’s scores for Fellini’s films. Scored for a standard Classical orchestra, the opening Allegro is cheerful and festively jaunty in an Italianate style. The soloist enjoys the interplay with the orchestra and is given gestures that sail through the entire range of the instrument, from the characteristic husky bass of the lower strings to the warm and resonant upper register. Throughout the concerto, the soloist explores a four plus octave territory not often heard in the bass’ usual role within the orchestra. The bright Marcia has the swagger and humor reminiscent of the music of Sergei Prokofiev and pits the solo bass against crisp and defined lines in the winds and brass. The full expressive capabilities of the double bass are explored in the more serious- minded Aria. The soloist and orchestra each take their turns with a beautiful collection of melodies that are brought to a climax before the soloist offers a lingering, nostalgic epilogue. The Finale bursts forth with an athletic pace and a series of tussles between the soloist and the woodwinds. The energy slackens twice for a brief lyrical interlude and a cadenza before launching into a frenetic reprise of the opening volley that brings the concerto to a close with one final exclamation point.