

**CSABA PENGŐ**



**HUNNIA RECORDS**

**AUTUMN RAIN IN A SECRET GARDEN**



### **Csaba Pengő**

played on Tala-Pengő double bass No. 1 (2021)  
equipped with Anima Nova soundposts

### **József Csapó „Johnny”**

vocal on Track 6 (Ruins of Numantia)

[www.csabapengo.com](http://www.csabapengo.com)

[www.talapengobass.com](http://www.talapengobass.com)



## Starts

For many years I did what bass players all over the world usually do: I played in bands of different – really very different – styles and lineups. I also arranged and wrote music for these bands and for sung poetry productions. The inspiration for composing for the double bass came to me in Prague. In 2016, Basseurope, a festival that takes place in a different major European city every two years, was held in the Czech capital. It's a week-long event: from morning till late at night everything is about the double bass, bass making and, of course, bass players. Although the name suggests a European event, participants came from all over the world. I watched the world's leading instrumentalists with mouth agape, and saw truly amazing performances up close. In hindsight, I should probably be ashamed that it had taken me more than two decades to realise the potential of my instrument, but I can console myself by simply saying better late than never... I started writing pieces for the double bass when I got home. The first ones were duets, which we recorded in a studio – at that time I was playing both parts – and then came the solos. At the same time there were more and more videos available on the internet. This also gave me a better insight into where this otherwise rather closed and isolated part of music was going. In 2018, I was already a performer at the next Basseurope, which was held in Lucca, Italy. They could not have chosen a better place to organise this gathering than this wonderful Renaissance city in the north of Tuscany. I was just able to gather enough material to put on a solo bass programme. This was probably my third performance of this kind. I was very nervous inside, but it went quite well. Again, I gained a lot of positive experiences and inspiration that kept me going on this bumpy road for a good while. Besides the musical stuff, the Lucca trip also started me on a completely new path, but I will come back to that later. Soon afterwards, my friend Laci Gazdag and I started recording the songs that, as a result of a long work, were released in 2021 on my first solo album. It's hard to describe what keeps me interested in playing the bass and composing new music. Maybe it's a kind of compulsion or mania that keeps driving me to write new pieces. But whatever it is, it completely permeates my life and my thinking. In fact, I never get any peace from it, it's always on my mind...





## **Contemplations Suite**

In this collection, I put together pieces that I have created in response to nature or the influences that have affected me in my life.

### **01. Contemplations Suite, Part I. Long Marriage**

Due to the vicissitudes of life, a long marriage of several decades can bring a variety of adventures even in the most harmonious cohabitation. Somehow that is what this composition of mine reminded me of. The endless tranquillity of the main theme is slowly infiltrated and spilled over by a kind of tension introduced by the secondary theme but this tension completely dissolves in the return.

After a short introduction, the piece starts with a very calm melody, which is repeated. Then comes a gradually more agitated middle section of third-related – A flat major and C major – harmonies that returns to the main melody without a variation section, only introduced by the first half of the introductory section. Then, repeated an octave higher, the main melody slowly disappears fading into harmonics.

## **02. Contemplations Suite, Part II. Winter Field**

This piece consists of two main parts. The first one is a gloomy parlando melody following a dark arco introduction, the second one is a pizzicato, played with a harp-like technique, that consist of rather dissonant intervals in many places. For me, the first part depicts the piercing cold made even worse by the winds, and the second one represents the wonderful, but still rather cruel, beauty of winter.

The first part starts with a sound that's not very familiar: I play the tailpiece with a bow, and it produces this strange sound. The second, pizzicato part is almost always a source of amazement to listeners who are not particularly familiar with my instrument because it uses a two-handed flageolet technique that is not very often heard. A great master of this technique is the Italian double bass player, Stefano Scodanibbio, who uses it in many of his compositions.

## **03. Contemplations Suite, Part III. Peace**

This song-like little piece was born quite suddenly, out of a passing mood. My pieces are often said to be morose and full of tension. This one is the exact opposite. It consists of two musical sections, quite far apart in tone, which I think makes the transition between the sections exciting. When I play it, I always imagine a kind of timeless tranquillity to be the emotional guide of the rhythmically very slow flow of the melody.

# Peace

Cuba Pango

Handwritten musical score for guitar, titled "Peace" and "Cuba Pango". The score is written on six systems of staves, featuring various musical notations and performance instructions.

**System 1:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. Key signature: one flat (B-flat). The staff contains a melodic line with a "mutato" instruction above it. A "pizz." (pizzicato) instruction is written below the staff, followed by "8va" (octave). A "suld" (sul ponticello) instruction is also present.

**System 2:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. The staff contains a bass line. A "2." (second ending) is indicated at the beginning. The staff ends with a double bar line.

**System 3:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. The staff contains a bass line. A "suld" instruction is written below the staff.

**System 4:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. The staff contains a bass line. A "p" (piano) instruction is written below the staff.

**System 5:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. The staff contains a bass line. A "psul E" (pizzicato sul ponticello E) instruction is written above the staff.

**System 6:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. The staff contains a bass line. A "p" instruction is written below the staff.

**System 7:** Bass clef, 4/4 time. The staff contains a bass line. A "1." (first ending) and "2." (second ending) are indicated above the staff.

#### **04. Contemplations Suite, Part IV. Mayfly**

One of the most beautiful natural images for the visitor of Hungarian waters is the flight of the mayfly. This creature develops for years as a larva in the mud, then transforms into a magnificent flying insect and produces its offspring in a joyful mating dance, only to die soon after.

It is a very difficult task to give a title to an instrumental piece. Sometimes I must resort to little tricks. In this case for example, I played an early form of the piece to an audience and asked if anyone had any ideas for a title. A very dear friend of mine came up to me after the concert and said that this music reminded her of the short life of the mayfly. As somebody who has seen this phenomenon many times, I was immediately taken with the idea. As a result, I started to shape the music in a way that it increasingly depicted the short life of the mayfly with sounds. This is what happens when the choice of a title has a very strong impact on the music.

#### **05. Contemplations Suite, Part V. Autumn Rain In A Secret Garden**

In the last rays of the setting sun in the late autumn, I look through the curtains of the hopelessly falling autumn rain and a rusty wrought-iron fence at the beautiful garden of an abandoned villa that hides secrets. The garden's incomplete paving is almost completely covered by unpicked and freshly fallen leaves already wet. Water pours down the walls from the gutters that have holes everywhere, but the garden's statues stand proudly in place, defying time and transporting the viewer into a kind of timelessness.

It's one of the melancholic pieces closest to my heart.

## **06. Contemplations Suite, Part VI. Ruins Of Numantia**

This essentially classical piece is written for an unusual group of performers: a tenor voice and a double bass. I have always wanted to write a composition of this kind, but there is a major difficulty with vocal-bass duets: if the composer has a female or tenor voice in mind, it is not easy to write a piece without a huge distance between the vocal part and the bass. In this case, my solution to this problem was to write a very high double bass part to complement the high tenor voice.

I spent a lot of time choosing the title. Then, while singing this sad melody to myself, I suddenly remembered the sad story of the inhabitants of the Iberian Celtic city who refused to surrender to the Roman Empire even at the cost of their lives.

## **07. Contemplations Suite, Part VII. LuNá - A Broken Thread**

The tragic, incomprehensible end of a young life just taking off. The shock and the unanswered questions inspired this composition.

The composition is full of dissonant intervals and third-related harmonic steps, which take it to even deeper tonal levels. Technically, the legato tune is very difficult to play in pizzicato with the right articulation but without the melody falling to pieces.



## **08. Island Street**

This is my oldest composition for solo bass. It was one of the songs I played in my graduation concert back in 2004. The title suggests much more than the actual reality behind it: our family house is in Island Street.

Several singer friends tried to persuade me to have lyrics written for this song because they could imagine it in a band arrangement. Well, I've been considering that idea for a few songs lately.

## **09. Chain Gang (dedicated to Little G Weevil)**

A mix of different playing styles, this monotonous song is a bitter and acerbic work song. I drew inspiration from archive recordings made in prisons in the southern states of North America and the unmistakable style of my colleague, Little G Weevil. The raw, unrefined, violently repetitive groove-like melody is built around an infinitely simple but unrelenting rhythm.

I was driving home from a gig in the countryside – oddly enough, we were playing very sensitive, soft music there – and that's when the idea of the song crossed my mind. Luckily, I didn't forget it by the next day – unfortunately, that happens quite often – and I was able to start working on it.

This piece requires a very specific plucking technique. It is similar to the Bartók pizzicato used in classical music, which involves striking the plucked string against the fingerboard with great force, creating an aggressive percussive effect. Even bassists with decades of experience find it difficult to adapt to such extreme stress when learning a new technique. There are four types of sounds in this composition: the drumming, the ostinato of the E string against the fingerboard, the harmonics that help to create a sense of harmony, and finally the melody itself.



## 10. Eastern Europe Express

Those who know me well will know that the blues is a very dominant musical style in my life and career. EEE is a typical train song. These were played mostly on harmonica and piano in the heyday of the blues. The reason why this song is called Eastern is because of its unique undertone. It's based on a baritone acoustic scale, which gives the whole thing a special Eastern European flavour as it rattles through these few minutes.

## 11. Circles

Based on harp harmonics, the structure of this technically quite difficult piece, which can still only be performed with a sense of lightness, is completely different from all my other pieces. In a way, it follows the classical compositional tradition. After the theme is played, it goes through two more keys, more or less following the original theme, then returns in the original key, with a slight variation, and ends with a classical conclusion, hence the title: Circles. This title was given by my excellent filmmaker and photographer friend, Zoltán Marton, who also made a video for it.

The inspiration came from the first four chords of Serge Gainsbourg's *Ces petits riens*. If you listen to it, you might be surprised, since the piece bears no resemblance to this song in genre, melody or mood, but still it was this ten-second section that captured my imagination. From this grew this rather complex piece.



## Composition

If you listen to my pieces, you will probably get the impression that they are very diverse in style and sound. I often hear this as a positive comment after my concerts. On the one hand, this diversity stems from the fact that the double bass has an extremely wide range of different ways to play it, which I try to exploit and, on the other hand, the musical influences that I've had in my life also evidently appear in my music. In addition, I believe that a solo bass concert, like any solo instrument recitals, needs to be very diverse so that the uniformity of sound does not bore the audience after a while.

The idea for a new composition almost always comes from a short musical motif that comes to me while practising. For me, the most important part of this is a sound or a mood that I try to bring to a form that constitutes an aesthetic entirety. I see it as a kind of improvisational painting: I build up the other layers around the initial idea, trying to make sure that the whole composition is a coherent whole. There are a lot of little irregularities, mainly rhythmic ones, in my pieces that I often only realise when I write them down. When I compose a solo piece, my working method is completely different from when I write for a band. I compose solo pieces purely in my mind, I never write them down until the very end, or even then. There was a, relatively long, piece that I've recorded also, and I only wrote it down for a composer's competition because I had to. In bands, I use sheet music a lot, but in solo concerts I would feel very strange looking at the music. I think I could only do it to the detriment of the relationship with the audience.

I don't like it when new music has to conform to a genre or any stylistic constraints or patterns. Since they are based on a certain set of solutions, a certain set of tried and tested patterns, these patterns only allow you to choose from this set of solutions and they also determine the way you choose. From then on, it's like re-cooking a tried and tested recipe..

## The recording

It is a very difficult task to prepare for a recording that requires so much energy and attention. As this is not the usual recording with a thousand cuts and replays but follows the classical recording method (rehearsing at home, recording in the studio), it requires a very high level of preparation from the performer. Since it is a solo performance, the situation is made even more difficult by the fact that there is no other instrument to rely on, even if only for a short time. You can hear every little noise from the bass, so the whole piece must be played with the utmost attention, and if that attention is distracted for as little as a moment, you need to start the recording again. In this case, two and a half studio days were allotted for the twelve pieces, which proved sufficient time for the recording. Some compositions were recorded on the second time, some on the fifth, and some on the first. It was a great help that my friend, László Gazdag, who also made my first album, gave me maximum support during the studio work, for which I am really grateful to him.

I knew that the "stimulus rich" home environment would make it very difficult to prepare for the studio session. I would have been able to practice only as a sideline to the daily chores at home, and directing my thoughts in one direction would not have been effective. So, I rented a small cottage in the countryside, in a lovely little village called Tiszasas. Here, in the undisturbed, quiet countryside, I could really concentrate on the music. I systematically went through the songs. I picked one, recorded it, listened back, corrected it, and then checked it again after replaying it. This is a very tedious, labour-intensive and attention-demanding process of practice but in this environment, it became a focused and passionate creative process.



## Building instruments

As I said about Basseurope 2018, this event started me on a completely new path. I travelled to Italy with my friend Gábor Szkórits-Tala – who, by the way, is a qualified luthier. At the Lucca Festival, as befits the event, a good number of the world's great instrument makers were represented. Of course, we spent days looking at and trying out their basses. At one of the stands, I came across an instrument with a very special shape and a wonderful sound. I had never held anything similar in my hands before.

Sergio Scaramelli made this double bass, a copy of an 18th century instrument built by an Italian master, Ferdinando Landolfi. Scaramelli restored the original and took the measurements and made his copy. We spent a long time trying it out, looking at it, and Gábor asked me at one point, "Shouldn't we make a similar bass?" I immediately replied "Of course, we should!" Well, that's pretty much how the three-year process – with many breaks – started and, at the end of it, in November 2021, the bass I recorded this material with was finished. Apart from its shape, its material is also uncommon: the sides and back are made of cherry instead of the usual maple. The soundpost is special, too. It's not made of wood; it's made of carbon fibre and it's adjustable. This is the invention of a Hungarian innovator, the late Pál Molnár (Anima Nova).

I am a DIY type of guy, and working with wood has always been close to me. Instrument making is a craft that requires a great deal of perseverance and skill, which, like musicianship, is not without aesthetic sensibility and offers plenty of tricks to learn. I have had very interesting and valuable experiences in the process of building my bass, and it has completely changed my relationship with this instrument.

We are already working on our second instrument. This is very exciting, because no one – yes, no one, not even the greatest luthiers – really knows what the instrument will be like at the end. We hope to have finished the new bass around August 2023, but until then we need to make many a shaving with our tiny little planes and scrapers and apply nearly 30 coats of varnish to the wood.







## Recording setup

Microphones for double bass: 2x **Neumann U67**

Cables: **Soundtransformer**

Preamp: **BAE 1073**

Mic for vocal: **Neumann M149**

Preamp: **Merging Technologies Hapi**

Converter: **Merging Technologies Hapi**

Recording engineers: **László Gazdag, Tibor Lahó**

Balance engineer: **Tibor Lahó**

Mastering engineer: **Tom Caulfield**

Recorded audio format: **Native DSD256 (Pyramix, Merging Hapi)**

Mixed and mastered on **Neumann KH 420 Monitors**



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## **CSABA PENGŐ – AUTUMN RAIN IN A SECRET GARDEN**

01. Contemplations Suite, Part I. Long Marriage	3:51
02. Contemplations Suite, Part II. Winter Field	5:02
03. Contemplations Suite, Part III. Peace	2:30
04. Contemplations Suite, Part IV. Mayfly	2:52
05. Contemplations Suite, Part V. Autumn Rain In A Secret Garden	3:18
06. Contemplations Suite, Part VI. Ruins Of Numantia*	3:08
07. Contemplations Suite, Part VII. LuNá - A Broken Thread	4:28
08. Island Street	4:25
09. Chain Gang	2:43
10. Eastern Europe Express	4:16
11. Circles	3:30

All songs are composed by **Csaba Pengő**

**József Csapó "Johnny"**: vocal\*

Special thanks to **László Gazdag, Tibor Lahó, Szabolcs Fekete, Roland Heidrich, Gábor Szkórits-Tala, Andrea Mihók, Misi Palotai**



## **The Rabbit**

There's always a rabbit in the head of my bass. My wife crocheted it and many years ago I put it there as a joke and it stayed. And then another one appeared in the head my second bass. That's how these rabbits are...



Recorded at **Hunnia Records Studio A, 27-29 May, 2023**  
Recording and balance engineers: **László Gazdag, Tibor Lahó**  
Mastering engineer: **Tom Caulfield**  
Recorded audio format: **DSD256**  
Photos: **Roland Heidrich, Misi Palotai**  
Producer: **Róbert Zoltán Hunka**  
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