

Giovanni Bottesini

Allegro di concerto

Urtext edition

Facsimile reproduction of composer's autograph piano score in E minor

Piano scores: *(not included in this free PDF file)*

- Original version in E minor
- Transposed version in D minor

Performance practice notes

© 2025 Božo Paradžik. All rights reserved. Permission is granted for educational and non-commercial use only. Commercial use of this article, as a whole or in part, is prohibited without the author's written consent.

From the early 20th century onward, training musicians in historically informed interpretation was largely neglected. The consequences of this neglect are still strongly felt today, as much of the notational practice used in earlier centuries has been forgotten. Thanks to the tireless work of leading musicologists of our time, who have carefully examined and compiled historical sources, many details of 18th- and 19th-century performance practice have been rediscovered and brought together into an increasingly complete picture.

Urtext editions such as this one, which faithfully reproduce 19th-century autograph scores, should not be approached solely through a modern interpretive lens. Performers are encouraged to consider the performance practices of Bottesini's time, which were deeply shaped by the Italian *bel canto* tradition. This aesthetic favored a beautiful, singing tone, seamless legato, and vocal-like articulation on all instruments.

Dynamics in this repertoire should be understood as expressive shaping rather than fixed volume levels. Markings such as *p*, *f*, and crescendo often imply a flexible range of nuance, frequently connected to harmonic tension, melodic direction, or rhetorical emphasis. Sudden contrasts may be intended more as changes of color and intensity than as purely loud or soft effects.

Articulation likewise reflects vocal models. Slurs generally indicate phrasing and breath-like continuity rather than mere technical grouping, while detached markings often suggest lightness and clarity rather than sharp separation. Bow strokes and finger articulation should aim to preserve a sense of line and cantabile flow, even in passages that appear technically demanding.

Tempo should also be treated with expressive flexibility. Indications such as Andante, Allegro, or Adagio describe character as much as speed, and performers are encouraged to allow subtle rubato, particularly at cadential points, in melodic climaxes, or in transitions between contrasting ideas. Such flexibility should remain organic and stylistically grounded, never disrupting the underlying pulse.

This interpretive approach shaped instrumentalists as much as singers, who consciously sought to emulate the expressive qualities of the human voice. Historical sources suggest that the prevailing sound ideal of Bottesini's contemporaries favored a lyrical, soft, and sweet tone. Composers' notational conventions reflect this aesthetic; many markings and indications found in the score assume this sound world and may therefore be misunderstood or applied too literally when interpreted from a purely modern perspective.



In the early 20th century, performance practice changed rapidly. The flexible, vocal-inspired phrasing of the 19th century gave way to greater precision, clarity, and structural awareness. Romantic expressiveness and free *rubato* were replaced by stricter tempos, clearer articulation, and closer attention to the composer's intentions. Innovations in instrument design and recording technology further influenced playing styles, ushering in a new era of technical brilliance and stylistic diversity.

This contemporary approach differs markedly from what a musician of Bottesini's time would have considered logical. To avoid misunderstandings when performing mid-19th-century notation, this short guide provides general hints for reading and interpreting the music of that period, based on insights from leading modern musicologists, and aims to support historically informed performance. In Bottesini's notation style, the most potentially misleading elements from a modern perspective are the articulation symbols. Therefore, the following table presents intensity grades from strongest to weakest, and indicates how they are presumed to be performed:

<i>sfz</i>	This articulation symbol / dynamic grade appears very rarely in Bottesini's works. He seems to have used it for the highest level of intensity.
------------	---

<i>fz</i>	Applied to notes of elevated intensity and serves, within Bottesini's notational practice, a role comparable to the modern <i>sforzando</i> . However, its execution was presumably smoother in character and imbued with a considerable degree of <i>espressivo</i> .
<i>sf</i>	This symbol is applied to exposed notes, yet its initial articulation should be executed considerably more softly than is customary in contemporary performance practice. Bottesini employed it frequently and across all dynamic levels. Notes marked in this way may appropriately be performed at approximately one dynamic degree above the written indication for the respective passage.
>	This articulation symbol is applied to notes of particular importance - whether harmonically, melodically, or for other musical reasons. Such notes should be rendered with a degree of prominence, yet in a smoother manner than contemporary accent symbols, resembling more an <i>espressivo</i> emphasis than a pronounced attack. This emphasis should presumably remain within the same dynamic range as the surrounding passage.

The following observations are intended not as commentary only on Bottesini's individual compositional style, but as guidance regarding the broader performance practices of the 19th century. Given the substantial evolution of musical interpretation since that time, these conventions may easily be misread from a contemporary perspective and thus warrant careful consideration:

-  and  Throughout the 19th century, hairpins were primarily used to indicate subtle changes in tempo rather than dynamics, as is commonly assumed today. Nevertheless, they could also imply a corresponding increase or decrease in loudness.
- Tempo markings at the beginning of a movement, according to the musical conventions of the 18th and 19th centuries, generally applied only to the first theme. Subsequent sections or themes could adopt their own tempo, which did not necessarily correspond to strict metronomic accuracy.
- Dots placed above or below notes generally indicate shorter, detached articulation; however, their precise meaning—ranging from slightly detached to very short—varied considerably between composers and was often combined with other markings such as accents or *marcato*. This resulted in complex and inconsistent usage prior to standardization. Because the interpretation of such symbols remained composer-specific, they present a particular challenge for modern performers. In Bottesini's works, a light detachment of the notes is generally recommended, in accordance with the broader principles of *bel canto*, rather than performing them as very short staccato. There is no historical evidence indicating how Bottesini himself approached such situations, nor does his method provide instructions regarding the execution of dotted notes.

As a soloist, Bottesini often employed a scordatura on the double bass that was tuned higher than the tuning commonly used in orchestras. Because concert pitch had not yet been standardized in the 19th century, a variety of pitch levels coexisted. In addition to the frequently used pitch of A \approx 435–440 Hz, the older Baroque pitch of A \approx 415 Hz remained also widespread. This resulted in a difference of almost exactly a semitone. British practice, particularly in large concert settings, remained at notably higher pitch longer into the century, contributing to a brighter and more brilliant sound. For this reason, the accompaniments to many of Bottesini's compositions exist in two versions: one at the notated pitch, and another transposed a semitone higher, the latter intended for use with lower-pitched keyboard instruments or orchestras. For the same reason many old editions include organ parts in two different pitches because organs were tuned to a different, fixed pitch than orchestral instruments, requiring transposed notation so they could play together. There is also a theory suggesting that Bottesini tuned his instrument to different pitch levels; however, there is no historical evidence for that. Bottesini often wrote stronger dynamics and clearer articulations for lower-pitched instruments - whose sound is naturally softer - to balance the difference.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This Urtext edition is based on a single primary source: the autograph of the piano score in E minor.

Cautionary accidentals have been added editorially where required for clarity. All markings referring to specific notes indicate the sounding (real) pitch.

Abbreviations

d.b. – double bass staff

r.h. – piano, right hand

l.h. – piano, left hand

a-f-min – autograph of the piano score in F minor

Source Commentary

1

In *a-f-min*, the tempo indication is *Moderato*.

26 – d.b.

In the autograph, a natural accidental precedes F on the 3rd beat, but no accidental is given for the final note of the bar. Given the simultaneous F-sharp in the piano *l.h.* afterbeat, F-sharp must be assumed here as well. The same omission occurs in bar 135. Another autograph of the work in F minor confirms this reading: in bars 26 and 135 the accidental is written before both notes.

32 – d.b.

On the 3rd beat of this bar, no sharp accidental appears before A in the double bass part, nor is A-sharp implied by the harmony. In the otherwise parallel preceding bar (31), A-sharp is explicitly notated in both piano and double bass parts. The notation in bar 32 therefore appears intentional and leads into a harmonically distinct continuation.

67 – d.b.

The melodic line ascends to a higher octave in the autograph. This reading may appear unusual only because some earlier editions altered the original text. The passage is notated identically in *a-f-min*.

185 – d.b.

The autograph corresponds exactly to the present notation: the final note of the bar carries no accidental. Although an F-sharp (enharmonically E in solo tuning) would not conflict with the harmony—appearing simultaneously in the piano *l.h.* after the trill—the source reading has been retained.

189 – r.h.

In the autograph, the sharp accidental is missing in both bars 189 and 191. As the piano *l.h.* plays D-sharp simultaneously, D-sharp must be assumed.

190 – d.b.

In this bar, and likewise in bar 192, no sharp accidentals are given for C and D in the upper octave (middle of the 4th beat). While analogous passages in the piano part (bars 189 and 191) require accidentals, the harmonic context in bars 190 and 192 differs. The double bass part may therefore be performed as written without harmonic inconsistency.

Contrabbasso
(solista)

Allegro di Concerto

Urtext edition

Giovanni Bottesini

Allegro Maestoso*

The musical score is written for Contrabass in a single system. It begins with a bass clef and a common time signature. The tempo is marked 'Allegro Maestoso*'. The score consists of nine staves of music, with measure numbers 1, 6, 11, 17, 23, 28, 31, 34, and 37 indicated at the start of their respective staves. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Dynamic markings include *(p)* (piano), *sf* (sforzando), and *p* (piano). Performance instructions such as accents (>) and slurs are used throughout. A double bar line is present between measures 17 and 23. The score concludes with a final measure (37) marked with a fermata and a *p* dynamic.

60 *p*

65 *sf* *8va* *sf*

70 *sf* *p*

74

77

81 *sf* *pp*

85

89

92 *poco rallentando*

96 *p*

103 *solo*
p

109

113

117

120

125 *8va*
sf

130 *f*

134

136 **2**
V. S.

139

142

145

148

151

154

159

166

171

8va-----
3
8va-----
199
pp
202
205
6
p
214
219
223
f
(cresc.)
227
9
(p)

240

Musical notation for measures 240-243. The system consists of two staves: a bass staff on the left and a treble staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some notes beamed together. There are dynamic markings such as *sf* and *mf*, and phrasing slurs.

244

Musical notation for measures 244-247. The system consists of two staves: a bass staff on the left and a treble staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps. The music continues with similar rhythmic patterns and includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*.

248

Musical notation for measures 248-251. The system consists of two staves: a bass staff on the left and a treble staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps. The music features a more complex rhythmic texture with many sixteenth notes and some triplets. Dynamic markings include *mf* and *f*.

252

Musical notation for measures 252-255. The system consists of two staves: a bass staff on the left and a treble staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps. The music continues with intricate rhythmic patterns and includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*.

256

Musical notation for measures 256-260. The system consists of two staves: a bass staff on the left and a treble staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f*.

261

Musical notation for measures 261-264. The system consists of two staves: a treble staff on the left and a bass staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes. A dynamic marking of *sf* is present at the beginning of the system.

265

Musical notation for measures 265-267. The system consists of two staves: a bass staff on the left and a treble staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps. The music continues with similar rhythmic patterns and includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*.

268

Musical notation for measures 268-271. The system consists of two staves: a bass staff on the left and a treble staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f*.

272

Musical notation for measures 272-274. The system consists of two staves: a bass staff on the left and a treble staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps. The music continues with similar rhythmic patterns and includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*.

275

Musical notation for measures 275-278. The system consists of two staves: a treble staff on the left and a bass staff on the right. The key signature has two sharps. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f*.

278

281

287 *calando* *ff* *ff* *ff* *Poco più*

295

300

304

307

309

311

314