

A NOTE FROM *Johnstone-Music*

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SPECIAL FEATURE on CONDUCTOR-CELLIST LAWRENCE LEONARD

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Birth: 22nd August 1923

Death: 4th January 2001, aged 77

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Leonard received his musical education at the Royal Academy of Music and the École Normale de Musique de Paris. His professional musical career began remarkably early at only aged 16, and furthermore, as an orchestral cellist in the London Symphony Orchestra. That early experience, playing under such great conductors as Sir Henry Wood, Richard Strauss, and Leopold Stokowski must have inspired him to consider becoming a conductor himself. In the profession he was colloquially known as 'Frankie' - this originally to avoid a mix-up with an uncle of the same name, who also happened to be a professional cellist!

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The first news of his regular conducting came in the late 1950s and 1960s, when Leonard, a close friend of cartoonist Gerard Hoffnung's, participated both as conductor and composer, in the celebrated 'Hoffnung concerts'. A big step for him came in 1959, when Leonard Bernstein personally chose him to conduct the London premiere of 'West Side Story'. He was then assistant to Barbirolli and the Hallé orchestra between 1963 and 1968, and also Associate Conductor of the BBC Northern Orchestra around this time. Also it is worth mentioning that in 1964, Leonard conducted the world premiere of Gian Carlo Menotti's chamber opera 'Martin's Lie', at the Bath International Music Festival.

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In 1968 he was appointed Music Director of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, and held the position until 1973. Apart from the obvious conducting duties, two of his orchestral compositions were premiered (an adaptation of Machaut's Grande Messe de Notre Dame in 1972 and Group Questions for Orchestra in 1973). Lawrence Leonard was very versatile. For example, in 1971, he went ahead and conducted the Edmonton Symphony in a concert featuring the British rock band Procol Harum, which was recorded and released commercially as Procol Harum Live - however, later he refused to have his name listed in the credits. This was actually a great shame, because the recording went on to become of the most successful live

pairing of symphony orchestra and rock musicians ever! It was a worldwide best-seller, and as an off-shoot came a successful single from it too. But most importantly, the legacy under Leonard's leadership meant that the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra had developed by 1971 into a full-time ensemble and one of Canada's major orchestras.

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After the Edmonton period Lawrence was increasingly well known; he gave guest performances with all the major UK orchestras and he toured extensively, especially in former East Germany. In 1977, in another interesting project he arranged Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition for piano and orchestra. Some of Leonard's original orchestral compositions include: Four Pieces, Four Contrasts, Break, Processional, A Short Overture, A Swinging Tune, and the symphonic poem Mezon (written for the Sultan of Oman).

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With a wealth of experience it was no surprise that his advice to the newer generations was much sought after. In later years, he was Professor of Conducting at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and Morley College, and regularly conducted the Royal Academy of Music Chamber Orchestra. I can count on first hand that I played a couple of concertos as soloist with him conducting at the R.A.M. (Dvorak & Don Quixote) and found him a wonderful man - amiable and understanding, with great support to my playing (which you should remember that such an occasion itself is a 'nervy' playing in front of your 'colleagues' in the student orchestras!). In the 1980s and 90s, he ran the chamber orchestra, wind group and conducting classes at Morley College (London), giving selflessly of his time to run a unique weekly practice orchestra for his students.

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Ever a man widening horizons, Leonard wrote a book, 'The Horn of Mortal Danger' (1980), a children's adventure tale set in a secret civilization underneath London. It was a 'completely new departure' from anything he had done before!

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He passed away in January 2001. A memorial concert was given by the Morley Chamber Orchestra in Southwark Cathedral, London, on 15th March 2001. A lovely man who shouldn't be forgotten...

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‘documenting the cello’

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Also both general musical and cello based articles, directories of famous historical cellists, and many other items of interest

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To take advantage of this, try to write to us three weeks or more in advance with any information. Last-minute entries are certainly better than not writing at all - however, understandably, once we have past the calendar month of the event it is not usually possible to add old items to the calendar. It is very interesting for the promoters of *Johnstone-Music* to have knowledge of your activity - and so in return for your information you will be entitled to a free gift of a work/s for every diary addition you tell us about. To find out more about this, please visit the “*Cello Club*” section in the web!