

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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RAFAEL FIGUEROA

cellist, orchestra principal cello & cello professor

The principal cellist with the Metropolitan Opera since 1995, Rafael Figueroa has also appeared as a soloist in his own right and as a chamber musician throughout the U.S., Europe, South and Central Americas, Korea and Japan.

He was born in San Juan of Puerto Rico in 1970, and now is established as one of the most sought-after cellists of his generation. He completed his studies at Indiana University under Janos Starker and Gary Hoffman.

He is the winner of many distinguished competitions and awards including the First Prize at the Gregor Piatigorsky Competition in Boston, The Bronze Medal at the International Pablo Casals Competition in Budapest and winner of the concerto competition at the Third American Cello Congress.

Rafael made his Carnegie Hall solo debut together with concertmaster David Chan and The Met Orchestra in the Brahms Double concerto led by James Levine to critical acclaim.

Rafael has been a frequent soloist with the Casals Festival in Puerto Rico as well as the Casals Festival in Tokyo, The Pacific Music Festival in Japan, Aspen Music Festival, Marlboro Music Festival, the Musique et Vin Festival in Burgundy and the Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival. For five years he was the cellist of The Amadeus Trio and a member of the Chelsea Chamber Ensemble, with whom he premiered and championed a large number of works by contemporary American composers.

The music critic Jay Nordlinger said after a performance at the Carnegie Hall:
“We often hear these musicians, but we seldom see them, sitting in the pit as they do. When they appear on a stage, we may think, - Ah, so that’s what Rafael Figueroa looks like when he makes those marvellous sounds on his cello! - ”

And Zachary Woolfe of the New York Times described the following:

“Deep in Verdi’s opera ‘Don Carlo’, an impassioned solo cello line embroiders a bass aria with a vein of feeling. On a recent evening, the conductor Carlo Rizzi was leading the work at the Metropolitan Opera. Rizzi isn’t demonstrative on the podium; his gestures tend to be controlled, focused, professional. But from a seat at the back of the pit, it was possible to see him, at the end of the aria, smile slightly and blow a subtle kiss down in the direction of the orchestra’s principal cello, Rafael Figueroa”

A greatly respected cellist in the twenty-first century!



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