

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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FEATURE ON

JASCHA SILBERSTEIN

cellist, opera orchestra principal cello {based USA}

Birth: 1934 - Stettin, Germany, now Szczecin, Poland

{birth name: Hannes Bruno Willer}

Death: 2008

A most important later twentieth-century German/North-American Cellist. Born in today's west Poland (almost on the German border); however, he was raised in Switzerland. His mother taught him the piano starting at age 4, and at 10 he made his first public appearance on that instrument playing Bach's D-minor Concerto. However, soon thereafter, hearing a record by the great Gregor Piatigorsky so impressed the youngster that he demanded lessons on the 'cello.

As we know in hindsight a virtuoso talent emerged, and the boy went on to study with 'cellist Hans Lofer (brother of composer Paul Hindemith) and, later, with the renowned Czech violinist Vasa Prihoda - both these were formidable interpreters of Romantic music.

After studies he easily made the transition into the professional scene, becoming the principal cellist of the Munich Radio Orchestra and of the Nuernberg Symphony. In 1963 he came to the United States to teach at the University of Texas El Paso and subsequently took on the first cellist position of the Pittsburg Symphony. He subsequently moved to Boston to play with the Boston Symphony and Arthur Fiedler's Boston Pops.

In 1966 he began his career as the renowned principal cellist of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in New York during the inaugural year of the new house. He concertized around the world and was the featured soloist on concerts, television, and recordings with Victor Borge, Live from Lincoln Center with Placido Domingo, European concerts with Joan Sutherland and Luciano Pavarotti, the River of Dreams album with Billie Joel, and the soundtrack of many movies including the Naked Gun movies, Lethal Weapon movies, and Kramer vs Kramer.

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, he appeared often at Butler University's Festival of neglected Romantic Music, playing works that had not been heard in many decades, several of which he recorded. Examples include:

Concerto no. 1 in A minor by D. F. E Auber (Orchestrated by Douglas Gamley)

Concerto in E minor, Op. 24 by David Popper.

Fantasy for cello and orchestra by Jules Massenet.

He was married to the Mezzo-Soprano Diane Kesling.

At one point he had almost become a 'cult' figure, such as you can see in these following commentaries:

'Striking performance by the principal 'cellist, Jascha Silberstein... a first-rate, affectionate interpreter.' - The New York Times

'Virtuoso playing of the kind not heard since the days of Emanuel Feuermann.' - Boston Herald

'Silberstein performed with great brilliance... The richness of his tone, the suavity of his articulation, and the artistry of his phrasing were equally remarkable.' - Minnesota Daily

He performed on a 1720 Goffriller 'cello, an instrument formerly owned by both Emanuel Feuermann and Joseph Schuster.

AUDIO examples:

Virtuoso Salon Music SILBERSTEIN and COOPER play SAINT-SAËNS, KORNGOLD, DAVIDOV

Live 1971, from Frank Cooper's ROMANTIC FESTIVAL 4: Virtuoso Salon Music

SAINT-SAËNS: Allegro Appassionata

KORNGOLD: Romantic Impromptu

DAVIDOV: At the Fountain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxeR0DJMYBk>

Jascha Silberstein and James Kreger: Kummer Cello Duet in G Minor: Ist movement

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9OdlwXOpaE>



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