

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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DIRAN ALEXANIAN

by Celloheaven

Diran Alexanian (1881-1954) was one of the most controversial cello teachers of his time. He was born in Constantinople, but his parents came from Armenia. In Leipzig he studied with Grutzmacher, and played chamber music with Brahms and the violinist Joseph Joachim. He was an accomplished cellist at a young age. For example, when he was only seventeen, he played the solo part of Strauss's Don Quixote with the composer conducting.

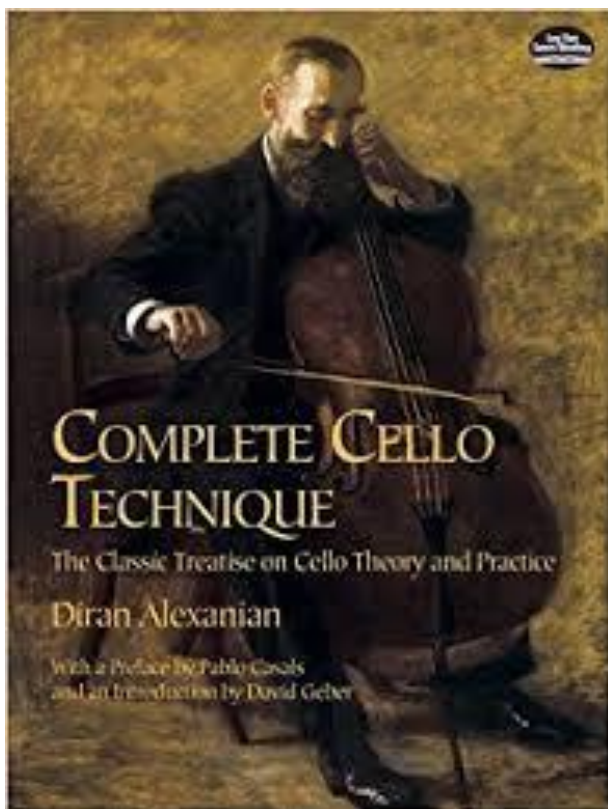
When he was twenty years old he settled in Paris, where he met Pablo Casals. Casals had seen Alexanian perform, and noticed that Alexanian was using revolutionary fingerings that were in line with Casals's new way of playing the cello. They got to know one another, and discovered that they had similar ideas with regard to general technique and the interpretation of music.

The Ecole Normale de Musique was founded in 1919 in Paris by Alfred Cortot, August Mangeot, Thibaud and Casals. For many years Pablo Casals gave consultations at the cello class of this school. Diran Alexanian became his assistant. Alexanian taught the "Casals Class" from 1921 to 1937. There he put his (and Casals) then controversial ideas into practice.

In 1929 he published his famous edition of the Bach Suites. He attracted students from all over the world, including Maurice Eisenberg, Antonio Janigro, Piatigorsky, Fournier, and Feuermann. In 1936 Alexanian performed the Second Cello Sonata of Enesco, and in Paris Enesco and Alexanian performed the Brahms Double Concerto together. Alexanian was a gifted composer himself, and wrote pieces for cello and other instruments in which he used Armenian folk songs.

In 1937 Alexanian moved to the United States, and taught at the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, and the Manhattan School of Music in New York City. Here his students included Bernard Greenhouse, David Soyer, George Ricci, Raya Garbousova, Alexander and Mischa Schneider.

His hobby was cooking, and he particularly enjoyed oriental food. One of his favorite restaurants was The Golden Horn, a Turkish restaurant in New York. He would eat slowly, and often take two hours to finish a meal. Alexanian was a difficult teacher to like, but he was recognized as one of the giants of cello pedagogy. Raya Garbousova said, *"I know many famous musicians of today who were in desperation when he died. His knowledge was tremendous."*



Alexanian with Casals

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