

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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EMANUEL FEUERMANN

By Karel

Emanuel Feuermann was one of the great cellists of the twentieth century, especially admired and appreciated by other cellists. Pablo Casals, speaking with Jose Maria Corredor in 1954, being asked about the best cellists of his day, immediately named Emanuel Feuermann. Casals remarked, *"What a great artist Feuermann was! His early death was a great loss to music."* Feuermann, likewise, had been a great admirer of Casals.

When Feuermann made his American debut in 1935, the hall was packed with fellow cellists, who had come to hear something truly extraordinary. Following the performance, a critic wrote:

"Difficulties do not exist for Mr. Feuermann, even difficulties that would give celebrated virtuosi pause."

In 1938 an English reviewer wrote in *The Strad*, following a concert:

"I do not think there can any longer be doubt that Feuermann is the greatest living cellist, Casals alone excepted...In Feuermann we have a spectacular virtuosic artist of the front rank, the Wieniawski, shall I say, of the cello."

Feuermann was famous for his unbelievable facility in the upper registers of the instrument, and was said to be able to easily perform Mendelssohn's violin concerto on his cello exactly as written for the violin.

Feuermann was born into a musical family, in Kolomea, in Galicia, Poland, in the year 1902. His father played cello and violin, and was Emanuel's first teacher. His elder brother Zigmund was a child prodigy on the violin, and toured Europe. When Emanuel took violin lessons from his father, he insisted in holding the violin vertically, so his father fixed a pin on the end of the violin, and turned it into a very small "cello." By the time he was nine, Emanuel was taking lessons from Friedrich Buxbaum, principal cellist in the Vienna Philharmonic.

But the most significant event in his life as a young cellist was hearing Casals at his debut in Vienna in 1912. Feuermann was galvanized, demanded that his mother purchase the music Casals had performed, and began practicing incessantly. In February of 1914, at the age of twelve, Emanuel Feuermann made his own debut, playing the Haydn D Major Concerto with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Weingartner, with great success.

Rather than being exploited as a child prodigy, as his brother had been, Feuermann spent the next several years in Leipzig, studying with Julius Klengel, who was a very gifted teacher. Klengel was good at bring out the best in his pupils, while allowing them to preserve their individual personalities. Klengel wrote of Feuermann, *"Of all those who have been entrusted to my guardianship, there has never been such a talent...our divinely favoured artist and lovable young man."*

When Grutzmacher died in 1918, Klengel recommended that Feuermann, though only sixteen years old, be offered Grutzmacher's post as professor at the Gurzenich Conservatoire at Cologne. Feuermann proved his capabilities at an audition, and was hired.

Much could be written concerning Feuermann's career and performances. There was an especially fruitful friendship with Heifetz, the great violinist, with whom he recorded the Brahms's Double Concerto. Feuermann, Heifetz and Primrose, the violist, performed and recorded much chamber music. When Feuermann died, Piatagorsky took his place in the trio. Heifetz appreciated Piatagorsky's talents, but let it be known that he considered Feuermann to have been the true "Fireman."

Emanuel Feuermann died unexpectedly on May 25, 1942, following a minor operation, when he came down with an infection. Unfortunately, the medical use of antibiotics was not yet much advanced at that time.



Here follows some additional information contributed by Bob Battey who spoke with Feuermann's niece:

* A distant relative of his, Ms. Annette Morreau, a former Starker pupil living in London, is currently working on a biography.

* The "routine medical procedure" that caused death was a hemorrhoid operation that was, inexplicably, performed by his wife's gynecologist at a small Jewish hospital for refugees.

* At his funeral, pall-bearer Toscanini broke down crying, and shouted "this is murder!"

* Other pall-bearers were Ormandy, Serkin, Elman, Huberman, Schnabel, and Szell. A quartet including Erica Morini and Frank Miller played the slow movement of Beethoven Op. 74.

* He was color-blind.

* His first several instruments were loaners from a patron; the first instrument he bought was the Tecchler (now owned by Martha Babcock in the BSO), on which the Dvorak was recorded. Then a Montagnana, which he finally traded in for the Strad (now owned, I believe, by Parisot) in 1937. The price was the Montagnana + 1,000 pounds.

* His close friendship with Hindemith ended when Hindemith allowed Koussevitsky & Piatigorsky to give the first performance of the 1940 Cello Concerto, even though it was being written for Feuermann. Feuermann could not offer a venue as prestigious as Boston for the premiere.

* His average fee for concerts in 1938 was \$500 (and the average agent's commission took \$112 of that).

* The plan had been to record virtually all the trio literature with Heifetz & Rubenstein. They were extremely well-matched musically and personally (the only known photo of Heifetz laughing is with him & Feuermann). Additional trio sessions were his first scheduled work after his surgery.

* The last concert he gave was the Dvorak with the Philadelphia Orchestra in Ann Arbor, a few weeks before the operation.



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