

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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MSTISLAV ROSTROPOVICH

By Karel

Born on 27th March 1927 in Baku, a city on the west shore of the Caspian Sea, Mstislav Rostropovich began musical studies in early childhood with his parents. His mother was an accomplished pianist, and his father a distinguished cellist who had studied with Pablo Casals. At the age of sixteen he entered the Moscow Conservatory where he studied composition with Prokofiev and Shostakovich.

In 1945 he came to prominence overnight as a cellist when he won the gold medal in the first ever Soviet Union competition for young musicians. Thereafter, despite his continued battle with the communist authorities, he became one of the central figures of the music life there, for twenty five years inspiring Soviet cellists, composers and audiences alike.

Due to international recording contracts and foreign tours, Mstislav Rostropovich also came to the attention of the West. He recorded nearly the entire cello literature during this time and attracted an unprecedented large quantity of new repertoire for the instrument through his personal contact to composers such as Benjamin Britten, who wrote his Cello Symphony, his Sonata for Cello and Piano and the three Suites for Solo Cello especially with Rostropovich in mind. Other composers who have written for Rostropovich include Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Boulez, Berio, Messiaen, Schnittke, Bernstein, Dutilleux and Lutoslawski.

Mstislav Rostropovich and his family departed from the Soviet Union in 1974 in the midst of a controversy that attracted international attention. From 1969 until then Mr. Rostropovich and his wife the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya had supported the banned novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn not only by allowing him to live in their dacha outside Moscow but by writing an open letter to Brezhnev protesting against Soviet restrictions on cultural freedom in 1970. These actions resulted in the cancellation of concerts and foreign tours for Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya, a Soviet media black-out and the cessation of all recording projects. In 1974 they were finally granted exit visas, effectively allowing them to go into exile. Four years later they were stripped of their Soviet citizenship, a decree which held until 1990.

Since 1974 Rostropovich has become one of the leading conductors in the West. He is Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra, Washington and is a regular guest conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic. His recent recordings for Sony Classical include Schnittke's Cello Concerto no. 2 and In Memoriam, and "Return to Russia", a unique audio and video documentation of Rostropovich's tour of Russia in 1990 with the National Symphony Orchestra, Washington, his first visit there since his exile Other composers who have written for Rostropovich include Bernstein, Messiaen, Lutoslawski, Dutilleux, Ginastera and Benjamin Britten.

Mstislav Rostropovich died in a Moscow hospital Friday 27th of April 2007.

ROSTROPOVICH, 1950



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