

SPECIAL FEATURE on EDMUND KURTZ

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Birth: 29th December 1908 Saint Petersburg, Russia

Death: 19th August 2004 (aged 95) London, England

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Edmund Kurtz was a Russian-born Australian cellist and latterly music editor. He was renowned for his "impeccable technique", "innate musicality", and his "rich tone", with a "warm, sensuous quality that seldom loses its luster". In a career spanning 60 years, he performed internationally as a soloist and chamber musician.

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Edmund Kurtz was born to a musical family. In 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, his family moved to Germany. That same year, Kurtz, aged 9, began to learn the cello. When he was 13, he began studies with Julius Klengel. Klengel later wrote about his pupil: *"In spite of his youth, Edmund Kurtz is already one of the most outstanding violoncellists of today ... rarely have I found a pupil who developed so rapidly"*.

He also studied with Leó Weiner in 1924-1925. In 1924, Kurtz had debuted in Rome, and the following year was to make his debut in Berlin. Both performances were successful and led to solo appearances in the main European cities. Pablo Casals recommended Kurtz to continue his studies with Diran Alexanian in Paris, but I think this was very short-term.

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From 1926 to 1927, Kurtz became the principal cellist of the Bremen Opera orchestra, and from 1932 to 1936 the principal cellist of the Prague German Opera orchestra under George Szell. He then moved to the United States, where he served as the principal cellist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He then also played in a piano trio formation, the Spivakovsky Trio, with violinist Tossy Spivakovsky and his brother Jascha as the pianist, touring internationally.

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In 1944, Kurtz left his post in Chicago to focus on a solo career. His first American appearance as soloist was in Dvořák's Cello Concerto with the NBC Symphony Orchestra under Arturo Toscanini in 1945. This performance was recorded live, and remains Toscanini's only recording of the concerto [see below!]. Other recordings include the Cello Sonata of Sergei Rachmaninoff with William Kapell, which received lavish praise by Tim Page of 'The Washington Post', and Prokofiev's Cello Sonata with Artur Balsam, which was the first recording ever of the work.

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Kurtz often played a Stradivari cello from 1724, named the "Hausmann", after Robert Hausmann, the cellist of Joseph Joachim's string quartet. He played several premieres of compositions dedicated to him:
Ernst Krenek - Suite for cello solo, Op. 84

Alberto Ginastera - Pampeana No. 2

Darius Milhaud - Elegie

Darius Milhaud - Cello Concerto No. 2 (which he performed with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Artur Rodzinski in November 1946).

He was also the soloist in the first American performance of Khatchaturian's Cello Concerto, with Serge Koussevitsky conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1948.

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In later years, Kurtz began prolifically producing new editions of cello repertoire. Widely considered the most important is that of Bach's six Suites for cello solo. Mary Campbell wrote in the cellist's obituary for *The Independent* that it was then "*recognized as the most important edition of the greatest music ever written for the instrument*". He drew upon facsimiles of the manuscripts, showing them opposite each page of cello music. The publisher described the edition:

"This new edition, in contrast to the array of Bach Cello Suite publications available today, has made use of all the five sources which have come down to us. The basis for this edition is the most reliable of the sources, the manuscript copy in the hand of Anna Magdalena Bach. All variant readings from the four other sources are clearly laid out for performance. Cellists now have the possibility of rendering performances based on just one of the five sources as well as the option of combining the sources in a mixed version".

It was very successful. There were at least 7 editions/reprints of this published in the 1980s in 3 different languages and held by nearly 100 WorldCat member libraries worldwide

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His recordings are alas few, but here is an important example:
DVORAK: Cello Concerto in B minor op. 104 / Kurtz · Toscanini · NBC Symphony Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fC-Jm0-Iph0>

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