

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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FEATURE on ROHAN DE SARAM

Rohan de Saram was born to Ceylonese parents in Sheffield, Yorkshire, England. His father was Robert de Saram and his mother was Miriam Pieris Deraniyagala. His paternal grandfather was Colonel Fredrick de Saram, OBE and his maternal grandfather was Sir Paul Pieris. At age eleven he studied with Gaspar Cassadó in Siena and Florence. In 1955 at the age of 16 he was the first winner of the Guilhermina Suggia Award, enabling him to study in the UK with Sir John Barbirolli and in Puerto Rico with Pablo Casals. Casals said of him "There are few of his generation that have such gifts". In the following year he won a Harriet Cohen International Music Award.

At the invitation of Dimitri Mitropoulos, who described him in 1957 as "*a rare genius...a born musician... an amazing...cellist*", Rohan was invited to give his Carnegie Hall debut in 1960 with the New York Philharmonic, playing Khachaturian's Cello Concerto under the baton of Stanisław Skrowaczewski. Gregor Piatigorsky presented him with a special bow. He has lived in London since 1972, first and foremost as a performer, although he has also taught at Trinity College of Music, London. From 1979 to 2005 de Saram was a member of the Arditti Quartet but now works with other artists to pursue his own artistic vision. He has also toured and recorded with Markus Stockhausen's "Possible Worlds" group. He worked personally with Zoltán Kodály, Francis Poulenc, Sir William Walton and Dmitri Shostakovich. He has performed with the major orchestras of Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and the former Soviet Union with conductors such as Barbirolli, Sir Adrian Boult, Zubin Mehta, Seiji Ozawa and William Steinberg.

In ensemble or as a soloist, he has premiered works by Luciano Berio, Bose, Benjamin Britten, Sylvano Bussotti, John Cage, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Philip Glass, Sofia Gubaidulina, Paul Hindemith, Mauricio Kagel, György Ligeti, Conlon Nancarrow, Henri Pousseur, Wolfgang Rihm, Jeremy Dale Roberts (Deathwatch Cello Concerto, written for de Saram), Alfred Schnittke, Iannis Xenakis (Kottos) and Toshio Hosokawa (the concerto Chant for cello and orchestra). Berio was so impressed by his performance of *Il Ritorno degli Snovidenia* that he wrote *Sequenza XIV* (2002) specially for de Saram, incorporating drumming on the body of the cello drawn from de Saram's skills with the Kandyan drum. The work was given its world and numerous national premieres by de Saram who then also made the premiere recording. He plays the standard classical cello works, including the great concerti, sonata cycles and Bach's six Solo Cello Suites.

He founded the De Saram Clarinet Trio and a duo with his brother Druvi de Saram. He is one of relatively few new music interpreters to have explored the world of improvisation.

He has made numerous recordings, both with the Arditti Quartet and as soloist, including Vivaldi's Sonatas, Edmund Rubbra's Soliloquy for cello and orchestra, Britten's Cello Suites No 1-3, John Mayer's Ragamalas and Prabhandas, Xenakis' Kottos and Elliott Carter's Figment I and II, and works by Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Peter Ruzicka, Gelhaar, Pröve and Steinke. 2011 releases include Harmonic Labyrinth with Preethi de Silva, and the first of two volumes of de Saram in Concert featuring magnificent Wigmore Hall performances of the Kodaly Sonata for Solo Cello (his score carries Kodaly's hand-written praise for his performance before the composer in May 1960), together with the Rachmaninoff Cello Sonata, in which he is accompanied by his brother Druvi.

Alongside his performing life, Rohan has been in demand as teacher and adjudicator. Summer 2016 saw him teaching at an inaugural summer course in San Marino to which he returned in July 2017. He has recently taught at the Conservatorio Monteverdi in Bolzano, Italy, the Cervantino Festival, Mexico; Impuls Festival, Graz, Austria; Musik Akademie Basel, Switzerland; Universities of Minnesota, Buffalo NY and in Seattle USA; Dartington Summer School and the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, UK.

A highlight in 2013 was the publication of his book *Conversations* written together with Joachim Steinheuer, eminent musicologist at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. The book is written in English and published by Wolke-Verlag, Germany.

In November 2016, in recognition of his exceptional contribution to music, the Sri Lanka Foundation of Los Angeles honoured him with their Lifetime Achievement Award.



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