

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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FEATURE ON
RON CARTER

Jazz and classical bassist, cellist, teacher & bandleader

Birth: 4th May, 1937 Ferndale, MI, USA

Ronald Levin Carter is an American jazz double bassist. His appearances on an amazing 2,221 recording sessions make him the most-recorded jazz bassist in history!

Carter has three Grammy awards. However, Carter is also a cellist who has recorded numerous times on the violoncello.

In fact, he started out on cello aged 10 in school then decided to primarily switch to double bass. Not just those two though - in high school he ALSO learned to play violin, clarinet, trombone, and the tuba!

Why did he make the bass his first instrument? Well, supposedly, the reason he switched was because he then thought he'd have a harder time getting into the Detroit Orchestra on Cello! That's a sort of confidence for you! But he was a hard worker and a good studier. He received a bachelor's degree from the Eastman School of Music in 1959 and a master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music in 1962.

In addition to being part of the legendary Miles Davis Quintet in the 1960s, his performing career has included collaborations with Lena Horne, Bill Evans, B.B. King, the Kronos Quartet, Dexter Gordon, Wes Montgomery, and Bobby Timmons. Apart from the Grammy awards, among his most recent accolades was being honoured with the premier French cultural award, ‘Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres’.

Always a sociable guy, he has given the following replies to interesting questions:

Q: When did you first know you wanted to be a musician and how did you come to know it?

A: When I was 11, the band director for my school district went to all the schools and asked the students, “which instrument do you want to play?” and I decided on the cello. Within a year, I went to a Detroit Symphony concert and heard Georges Miquelle play a Saint-Saëns cello concerto – I can still hear it in my ear right now.

Q: How has your teaching changed over the years?

A: I have become much more patient. As you get older, you start to allow one more mistake that you wouldn’t have allowed this time last year. I’ve learned to let the second mistake go by, but not the third or the fourth.

Q: If your students could only remember one thing from your teaching, what would you want it to be?

A: I’d want them to remember how important it is to practice with an honest ear. I think in general, students need to listen more productively, whether they’re playing a scale or a phrase for an étude. Not listening with a self-critical ear makes their progress slower—they don’t make strides honestly enough.



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