

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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CELLISTS' CORNER

LAURENCE LESSER

Birth: 1938 - Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.

A native of Los Angeles, LAURENCE LESSER graduated in 1961 in Harvard College, where he studied mathematics! However, he went to Köln, Germany the following year to work with Gaspar Cassadó. Just before that, he played at the Zermatt master classes for Pablo Casals, who declared, *“Thank God, who has given you such a great talent!”* He won first prize at the Cassadó Competition in Siena, Italy in 1962.

When he returned to Los Angeles, he studied with Gregor Piatigorsky and soon became his teaching assistant and regular faculty member at the University of Southern California. During the remainder of the 60's he was a frequent contributor to the artistic life of Los Angeles. Notably, his 1965 performance of the Schoenberg Cello Concerto to inaugurate the Bing Auditorium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art was its first hearing with orchestra after Emanuel Feuermann introduced the work in the late 1930's. He recorded it the following year for Columbia Masterworks. He was a top prize-winner in the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow and a participant in the historic Heifetz-Piatigorsky concerts and recordings. He recorded it the following year for Columbia Masterworks. His New York debut recital in 1969 was greeted as "triumphant" and "magical."

He has appeared as a soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the New Japan Philharmonic, the Tokyo Philharmonic and many other major orchestras. He left Los Angeles in 1970 to become Professor of Cello at Baltimore's Peabody Institute. He was invited in 1974 to head NEC's cello department. In 1983 he was named the school's President, a position from which he retired in 1996 to return to performing and teaching. A high point of his tenure as President was the complete restoration of the 1000-seat Jordan Hall, one of the world's greatest acoustical spaces.

As a chamber musician he has participated in many festivals. LESSER's previous recordings include the complete Beethoven works with pianist Hae Sun Paik on Bridge Records. Other labels featuring him include RCA, Columbia, Melodiya and CRI.

He has been a member of juries for numerous international competitions, with special mention of chairing the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow in 1994, the 2002 and 2006 Grand Prix Emanuel Feuermann, the 2002 and 2018 International Paulo Cello Competition, and the Naumberg International Cello Competition. In September, 2005 LESSER was named "Chevalier du Violoncelle" by the Eva Janzer Memorial Cello Center at Indiana University.

Teaching has always been an important part of LESSER's artistic activity. His former students, numbering in the hundreds, are soloists, orchestra section leaders and members, chamber musicians and teachers, active throughout the USA and in many other countries around the world.

EDUCATIONAL VIDEO on J.S. Bach: CelloChat with Laurence Lesser, live from Cambridge, MA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsFJK06IdDs>

VIDEO AS SOLOIST: Bloch: Schelomo – Laurence Lesser and NEC Philharmonia with Hugh Wolff, a wonderful interpretation in my book!:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDaAJCqnbi0>



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