

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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By Karel

MAURICE GENDRON

Born near Nice on 26th December 1920, Gendron was brought up in a poor household by his mother and grandmother, his father having deserted them. He could read music at the age of three and began violin lessons at four with his mother, a professional player in the silent cinema, but he did not get on with the instrument and at five changed to a quarter-sized cello specially made for him. When he was ten his teacher Stephane Odero (in the city of Cannes) took him to hear the virtuoso cellist Emanuel Feuermann, whose playing was a revelation to the boy. He met Feuermann and played for him a number of times but could not afford to travel for lessons to Vienna, Zurich or Feuermann's final base, New York, and his hero died there during the war, aged 39.

Meanwhile Gendron entered the Nice Conservatoire at 12, but had played at only 11 years old the Dvorak cello concerto, under Jean Mangot, taking a first prize in 1934, and was soon giving local concerts. But his mother had lost her job with the advent of the "talkies" and he was forced to leave the Conservatoire to scrub floors, clean windows and iron shirts in order to help the family finances!

In 1938, with the help of his teacher Jean Mangot, who gave him a rail ticket and 1,000 francs, he entered the Paris Conservatoire, in Gerard Hekking's class. (All his life Gendron remembered this help from Jean Mangot and later helped pupils when they came long distances to him for study). Living in Paris at age 14 he had to live in unheated lodgings and sell newspapers to subsidise his studies. Again, he carried off a first prize. At the outbreak of the war he was so poor and undernourished that he was found unfit for army service and in due course he joined the Resistance. Unlike Fournier he (absolutely) refused to play in Germany.

His Paris "debut" came in 1943 after the Dutch art connoisseur Jan Heyligers heard him practising and invited him to play for a few friends. With Jean Neveu at the piano, he found himself among such luminaries as Francis Poulenc, Georges Auric, Jean Cocteau and Jean Françaix, Messiahn.

As his reputation spread in bohemian society, he got to know Picasso (who made a picture for Gendron), Braque, Chagall, Sartre, Mauriac and Camus. In 1945 he played the Dvorak cello concerto under Mengelberg with the Paris Orchestra and made a live recording of it. Gendron's London debut was a more public affair but just as dazzling. On 2 December 1945 he shared the platform of the Wigmore Hall with Pierre Bernac, Poulenc and Benjamin Britten, with whom he played Debussy and Faure. Eight days later he appeared at one of Myra Hess's National Gallery Concerts with Britten and Peter Pears, performing Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata and Faure's Second Sonata.

His reputation with the wider London public was sealed when he gave the first Western performance of Prokofiev's Cello Concerto, Op.58, with the LPO under Walter Susskind. *"That's how I began my career,"* he recalled. *"No one wanted to hear Maurice Gendron, but they all wanted to hear Prokofiev!"* He was given exclusive rights to the concerto for three years and it made his name.

For his New York debut in January 1958 he chose a memorial concert for Feuermann, playing the Haydn D major and Dvorak Concertos also with Mr. Barzin and the National Orchestral Association. He returned to the US a number of times, scoring a smashing success in an appearance with Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic with Schumann's cello concerto in February 1959 and 27th February 1959 together with pianist Philip Entremont.

His friendship with Britten and Pears continued and he appeared at the first Aldeburgh Festival in 1948; but Britten's offer to write a work for him was withdrawn, to Gendron's chagrin, when the composer formed a close artistic relationship with Rostropovich. Even so Gendron played at the festival in 1963 with Britten and Menuhin. Gendron gave another recital with Britten that included the Arpeggione sonata, Faure's Elegie and the sonata Britten had written for Rostropovich, when the Russian cellist was unable to appear. After this concert Britten thanked Gendron in a letter of 5 July 1963: "*We were all immensely grateful to you for coming to the festival, at such short notice, and for playing so magnificently. Your playing created quite a sensation, as you noticed, and it was for me personally a great pleasure to do the Sonata with you. I thought you played it wonderfully*".

Maurice Gendron played solo concerts in Asia as Japan, Corea, South Africa, and America. Gendron made close musical friendships with Hephzibah and Yehudi Menuhin, and a great musical partnership with Yehudi Menuhin. In 1956 Gendron formed a famous trio which lasted for 25 years, made records and premiered works such as the trio by Alexander Goehr. One of the humanitarian concerts in Paris for Unesco in 1976 with Menuhin and other big figures of classical music of the time; in this concert Gendron played in a piece of Mozart for cello and piano - with Hephzibah Menuhin: "Andantino" a rare composition of Mozart. All think that Mozart never wrote for cello and piano... this execution is available in premier a recording (live of this concert).

Another quarter-century partnership was formed with the witty, elegant composer Françaix. A marvellous pianist with whom he made up a distinguished duo, Françaix wrote for Gendron some pieces for cello and Orchestra and for cello & piano.

An earlier duo with Dinu Lipatti was of short duration because of the Romanian pianist's illness. Other pianists to play with Maurice Gendron included C.Ivaldi, P.Gallion, and Rudolf Serkin. On his own, Gendron was a fine player of solo Bach, "the best interpretation of the cello suites" available now a memorable recording (1968-69), and he made his own contribution to the concerto literature by rescuing the two works by Boccherini which Friedrich Grutzmacher had vandalized into a ghastly pastiche. Until Gendron came on the scene, all cellists had played this mangled version. He not only rediscovered the original Bb Major Concerto which formed most of the basis of the pastiche, but persuaded Pablo Casals after a travel in Prades to conduct his recording of it with the Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux.

Gendron published a number of transcriptions and was a superb deviser of cadenzas for classical concertos such as those by Haydn. He also made the first critical edition of the D major Concerto, and now this edition is required in (virtually) all cello competitions.

He taught in Saarbrücken (from 1954), at the Menuhin School and at the Paris Conservatoire (1970-87) and summer Master Classes at Mozarteum of Salzburg (last one in 1989, and one of the last concerts and recording in Japan in 1985 with two concerts a day at 65 years old). In the early 1970s he suffered a fearful car accident in which a shoulder was severely damaged. He fought his way back and in 1985 reappeared in London for a 40th anniversary recital, but was not the same force as before.

He died on 20th August 1990 at the riverside home in Grez-sur-Loing where he and his wife, a former violinist and gentle person, had lived for years surrounded by the paintings and drawings given to Gendron by his artist friends.



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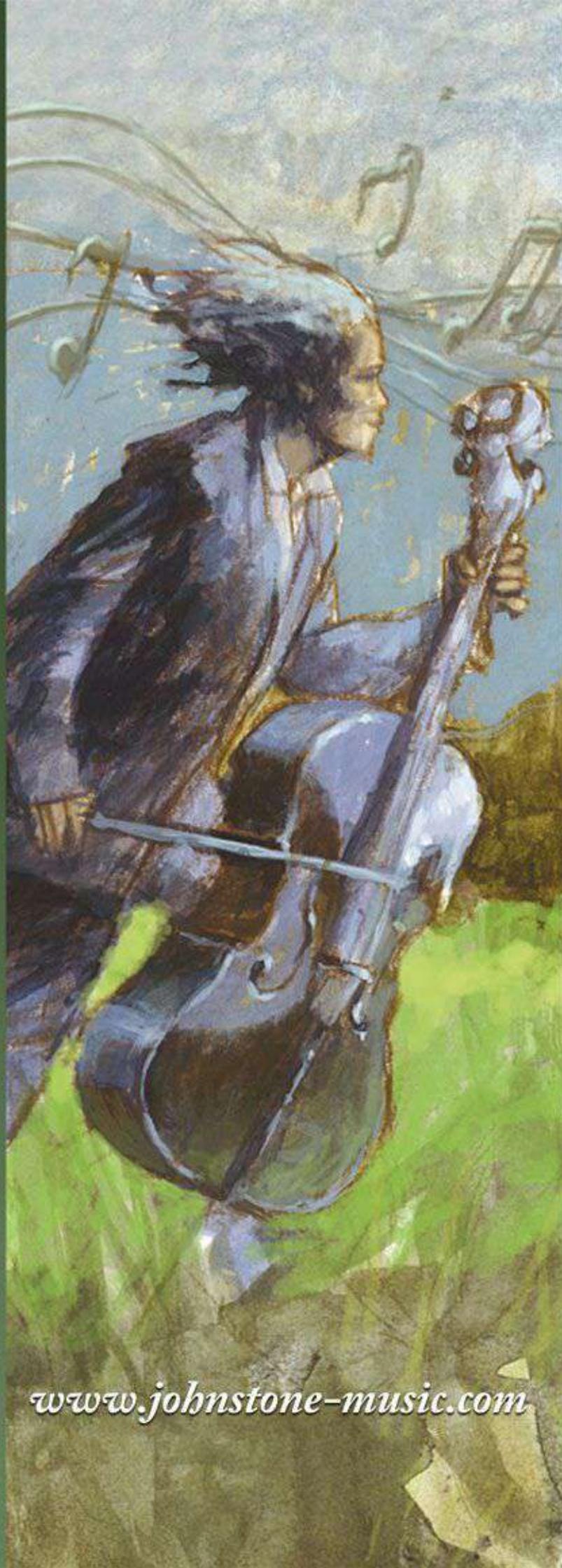
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