

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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ENNIO BOLOGNINI

by Celloheaven

Ennio Bolognini was born in Buenos Aires in 1893, to a musical family. His father was an amateur cellist and a close friend of the conductor Toscannini, who became Ennio's godfather.

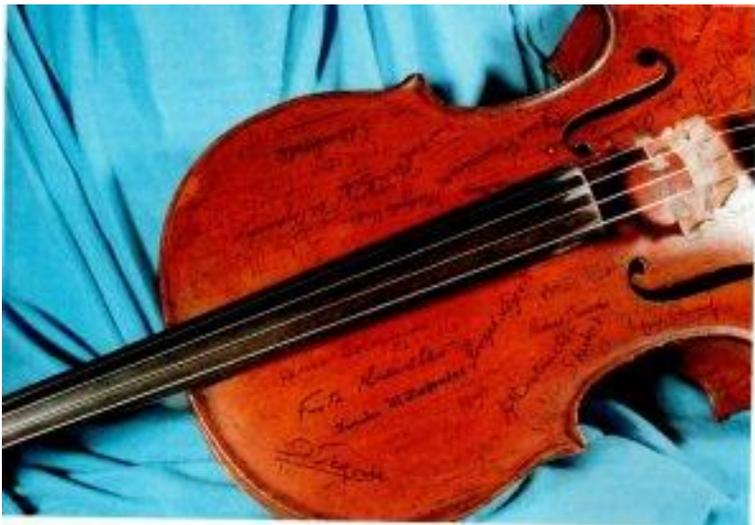
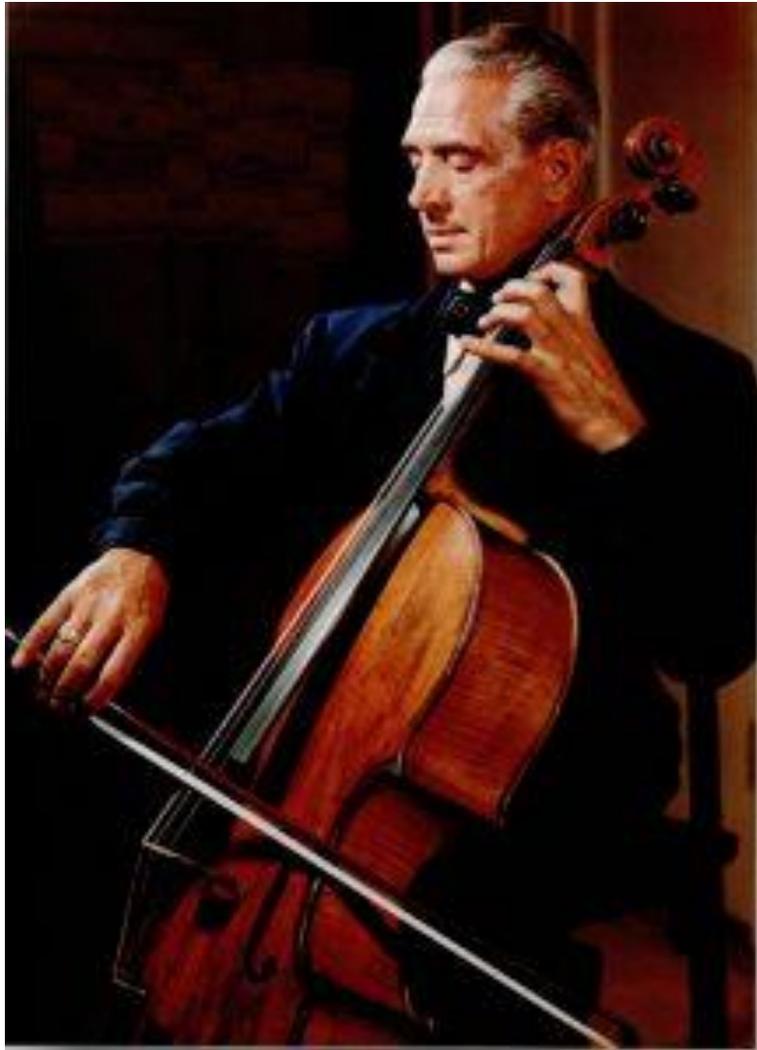
Bolognini studied first with his father, and later with Jose Garcia, Casal's teacher, who was now living in Buenos Aires. When Ennio was still only fifteen he won first prize in a Spanish/American cello contest, and was awarded a fine cello made by Luigi Rovatti. While still a teen-ager Ennio had the privilege of performing "The Swan" with Saint-Saens himself at the piano; and the Richard Strauss cello sonata, also with the composer.

In 1923 Bolognini emigrated to the United States. Interestingly the reason he moved to the United States was to be the sparring partner for Luis Firpo in preparation for his prize-fight with Jack Dempsey. Bolognini was not only an amazingly fine cellist, but also a champion boxer, and a licensed airplane pilot. He flew his own private plane, and was once a professional stunt flyer. He was co-founder of the American Civil Air Patrol, and trained cadets to fly B-29 bombers in World War II. He was a modern-day Renaissance man, an athlete, gourmet, gambler, speaking Hebrew, Greek, Japanese, Hungarian, Russian and 15 different Italian dialects.

Bolognini was well known for his fiery temper and impulsive behavior. When he was principal cellist of the Chicago Symphony (he always took his dog to rehearsals), he served as interpreter for Glazounov, who was appearing as a guest conductor. Glazounov, overcome by stage fright, came to Ennio instead of mounting the podium, and spoke with him anxiously for a few minutes, as the audience waited. Later, Bolognini was accused of trying to hog the stage, and he became angry and resigned from the Symphony.

He lived in Las Vegas from 1951 to his death in 1979, where he founded the Las Vegas Philharmonic Orchestra. He was a wonderful guitarist, and could also play flamenco music on the cello, as if it were a guitar. Casals praised Bolognini as the greatest cello talent he had ever heard in his life. Feuermann said that Bolognini was a better cellist than Casals, Piatigorsky or himself.

Bolognini's cello is now at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. It is unique, in that there are 51 signatures inscribed on it, including those of Kreisler, Heifetz, Stern, Szigeti, Liberace, Jack Dempsey, Bruno Walter, Janos Starker, Eugene Ormandy, Miklos Rozsa, etc. Everywhere he went, he asked his friends to sign his cello.



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