

LINDLEY, Robert

Born: 1775, 4th March (Rotherham, England)

Died: 1855, 13th June (London)

I believe it is well worth the effort to produce this very small article on Robert Lindley, for he may be considered the first truly great English cellist. Within his lifetime he was not equalled as a cello performer within England.

He was born on March 4th, 1775 at Rotherham, and began music when he was about five years of age. His father, an amateur performer, began by teaching him the violin, and then, at nine years of age, he started the cello. By the age of sixteen he had made considerable progress, and the younger brother Cervetto (James, 1682-1783), on hearing him play, took such an interest in him that he taught him gratuitously, bringing him to the South of England.

As a teenager he had already started composing. His good fortune shone when a cello performer who was to have performed a violoncello solo at one of the Brighton concerts was suddenly taken suddenly ill. Lindley's substitute performance was rapturously applauded, and he played several further performances at several subsequent concerts with the same result. His career was therefore born! He was then engaged for the Brighton Theatre, frequently playing before the Prince Regent.

In 1794 he succeeded Sperati as principal violoncellist at the Opera and was principal cellist at virtually all the important concerts in London. In the following year, 1795, he became a close colleague of Dragonetti, the renowned double-bass player. This friendship lasted over fifty years. They played together at the same orchestral dates continually. Forster quotes Chorley's remark that "*Nothing could be compared with the intimacy of their mutual musical sympathy*".

The Royal Academy of Music was established in 1822 and he immediately became a professor.

He retired in 1851, and died in 1855.

Regarding Lindley's own playing, he was surely the greatest Englishman seen up to that point in history - his technique was strong and his tone was rich and strong, and he was distinguished for the extreme purity of his tone. It is hard to be objective, but although his technical skill was remarkable, it is improbable that he could have equalled Romberg, neither in pure technical prowess nor in its rendition. However, there is a well-known story that relates how, when Romberg fixed during his residency in England during a period, he heard Lindley play - and when asked by Salomon what he thought of his performance, simply replied: "*He is the devil.*"

Apart from solo opportunities Lindley's orchestral playing was also excellent. In particular it was noted that his performance of the accompaniment to Recitative from figured bass was most "elaborate and ingenious."



Robert Lindley

Unfortunately, Lindley is less remarkable as a composer. He wrote some four Concertos, Duets for Violin and Violoncello (Op. 5), Duos for two Violoncellos (Op. 6, 8, 10, and 27), Solos for Violoncello (Op. 9), and several Variations on Airs, as well as the Potpourris that were commonplace then. None has survived the passage of time.

Amongst Lindley's pupils, CHARLES LUCAS (born 1808 in Salisbury), was the most remarkable. He attended the Royal Academy of Music in London. In 1830 he was named Composer and Violoncellist to Queen Adelaide, and performed on the organ at St. George's Chapel. He was orchestral conductor at the Royal Academy of Music, and succeeded Cipriani Potter as Principal there in 1859. He had already taken the place of his master, Lindley, as first violoncellist of the Italian Opera. He died on in 1869, in London. His own successor in the opera was a cellist named Collins.

His son, William (born 1802), was also a cellist, and gave promise of future excellence, but was forced to withdraw himself from public appearances due to delicate health.

To sum up, Robert Lindley achieved unquestionable glory during his career, and especially from his work in London. However, he was an isolated talent, without obvious successors. In his final years, and after his death in 1855, the void in the English cello scene was admirably filled by Alfredo Piatti, an Italian *maestro* but whom the English considered as almost nationalized as one of their own! William Edward Whitehouse, born in 1859 and a student of Piatti, was to become the next great English hope. Furthermore, one could definitely speak of him as being mastered in the 'Piatti' school. It was Whitehouse who this time did indeed help to open up a loosely-defined but rich late-romantic cello school, which is to be covered in a separate article "The Late-Romantic English Cello School" – in which the leading lights were:

Herbert Walenn (b.1870)
Percy Such (b.1878)
May Mukle (b.1880)
Arnold Trowell (b.1887 New Zealand)
Felix Salmond (b.1888)
Cedric Sharpe (b.1891)
W.H. Squire (b.1891)
Beatrice Harrison (b.1892)
Laurie Kennedy (b.1896 Australia)
Anthony Pini (b.1902)
Reginald Kilby (b.1903)
Douglas Cameron (b.1903)
Raymond Clark (birth year uncertain)
Colin Hampton (b.1911)
Florence Hooton (b.1912)
Vivian Joseph (b.1916)
William Pleeth (b.1916)

Although we may consider the names of Norman Jones (b.1921) and Derek Simpson (b.1928) as belonging to a later style of playing, they are none-the-less included here as they were personally known to the author. Indeed more biographical information on Simpson may also be found in a quasi-humorous separate article titled the 'Six Rules of Cello Playing'.

DAVID JOHNSTONE