Leonard Rose: America's Golden Age and Its First Cellist

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Steven Honigberg, a student of Leonard Rose, has written the first biography of one of the world's greatest cellists: *Leonard Rose: America's Golden Age and Its First Cellist*. Anyone who purchases the book may request a free bonus CD of Rose performing two cello concerti never released commercially: Alan Shulman's *Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra (1948)* and Peter Mennin's *Cello Concerto (1956)*. Quite an amazing offer.

Divided into 25 chapters, this 501-page volume contains eight appendices, which include details about performances in Rose's symphonic and chamber music career as well as solo appearances* with major orchestras, his discography, and several musical review fragments. Appendix H lists all of the music Rose edited for International Music Company, including the three volumes of orchestral excerpts with his fingerings, still a valuable resource for any cello section player. Unfortunately, there is no appendix listing the dates and locations of all his many Community Concert recitals.

Rose felt strongly about them and is quoted in the book: "I think Community Concerts did a great deal for music in this country because it brought music to a widespread audience before the days when phonograph records were readily available."

I heard two of these memorable performances in my hometown—the first in 1952 (his second season with Columbia Artists Management) and the other in 1959, after which he accepted me as one of his summer students at Meadowmount School of Music in upstate New York. A unique privilege.

I definitely recommend reading the book; throughout are musical gems. Within the text are mini-biographies of legendary musicians, such as Heifetz, Toscanini, and Mitropoulos. Many of the facts therein aren't integral to Rose's life, yet these tangential histories and anecdotes are fascinating. However, their placement within chapters (rather than in footnotes or endnotes) breaks the book's storyline, and although the author makes some Rose connections in these sections, the narrative remains somewhat choppy at times. And to eliminate the few repetitious facts, this self-published book, which wove so many sources in its composition, needs additional proofreading before the next printing.

As one of his sources, Honigberg used Rose's memoir, which Rose dictated at the end of his life-even though painful memories made it difficult. In one way, I am inclined to think some recollections should have been left unpublished. For a while after the death of his first wife, his children and he were estranged. In the long run, I am not certain how beneficial it is learning the sad details of Rose's psychological problems and family challenges.

It might have been better for the book to focus only on his inspiring contributions to cello playing and pedagogy. On the other hand, the author piques the reader's interest with the

opening chapter's lead describing the strained relationship in one of these disturbing situations, which acquaint us with Rose on an intimate level. Indeed it is possible his dysfunctional relationship with his father spurred Rose to achieve greater heights in his career.

I can clearly visualize my first lesson with him over a half century ago; he began with the bow arm. According to the biographer, "His unique mechanics—the natural motion of the hand, arm, and fingers coordinated in unison to make effortless circular bow changes—was Rose's most advanced breakthrough for the cello."

Years later, I immediately recognized his "bow" signature at a young cellist's recital, so I wrote to Mr. Rose: "As soon as the bow hairs touched the strings, I knew the cellist had to be one of your students. He had what we (your students) fondly call the *Rose bow arm*. What a mark of achievement for a teacher to stamp on his students!"

Over three summers, Leonard Rose spent 24 hours of his life with me as a pupil. At my final lesson with Rose, I was his first student that day. He asked, "Do you mind if I 'warm up' my fingers?" Then he played the entire Schumann Concerto. This unforgettable private concert still inspires me. Years later, he autographed the record jacket of the recording of this piece: "For Jayne—My old friend & student—Leonard Rose."

For the cover of his book, Honigberg chose the photo on the same LP because Rose's intense stare intrigued him. I never understood why the photographer cropped that image and didn't include the entire head of Rose, a figure larger than life!

The book mentions ". . . he played his heart out at every new venue, whether at a college campus, in a high-school auditorium, gymnasium, library, or community house, constantly honing his skills as soloist." Frequently, after these concerts, there were receptions. I was honored to host two small ones.

Through the years, some students with poor training came to study with Rose. In a letter to a respected cello teacher, he lamented, "I have spent a good part of my life undoing someone else's messes." He himself knew how to practice—and he practiced a lot. When asked why, he told Pinchas Zukerman, "It's the only way I know how to play properly."

He recognized extraordinary talent and in his memoir said, "I am convinced that Yo-Yo Ma will go down in history as one of the greatest cellists of all time."

In bestowing his entire library of musical scores to Rose, his renowned cello teacher Felix Salmond also recognized the genius of Leonard Rose.

*In December 1959, I listened to the radio broadcast of Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic in the Brahms Double Concerto with Isaac Stern and Leonard Rose. Only later did I learn Rose's A-string broke onstage, and in a tutti passage, he replaced it quickly with a string from Laszlo Varga, principal cellist. As usual, Rose didn't miss a note.

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