

CD REVIEW 37

DVORAK Cello Concerto in B minor.
BRUCH Koli Nidrei
TCHAIKOVSKY Variations on a Rococo theme.
Janos Starker
London Symphony Orchestra
Antal Dorati
Mercury Living Presence 432 001-2 (ADD)

There is no doubt that Janos Starker is a very gifted and unique cellist. He is a Hungarian-American and was born on 6 July 1924. Of his many achievements is that the fact that he was Principal cellist in the Chicago SO in their greatest days when Fritz Reiner was their conductor.

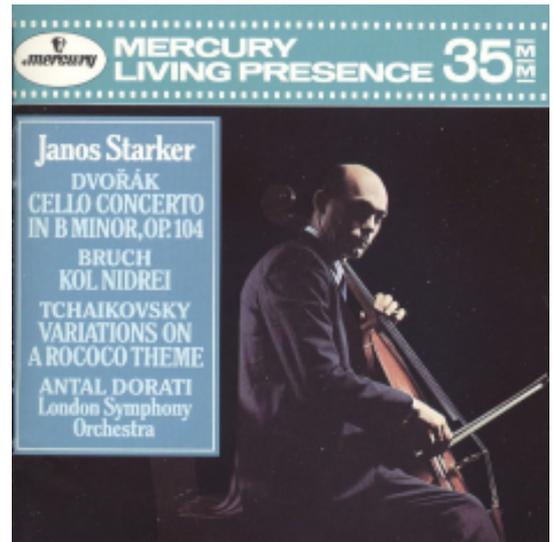
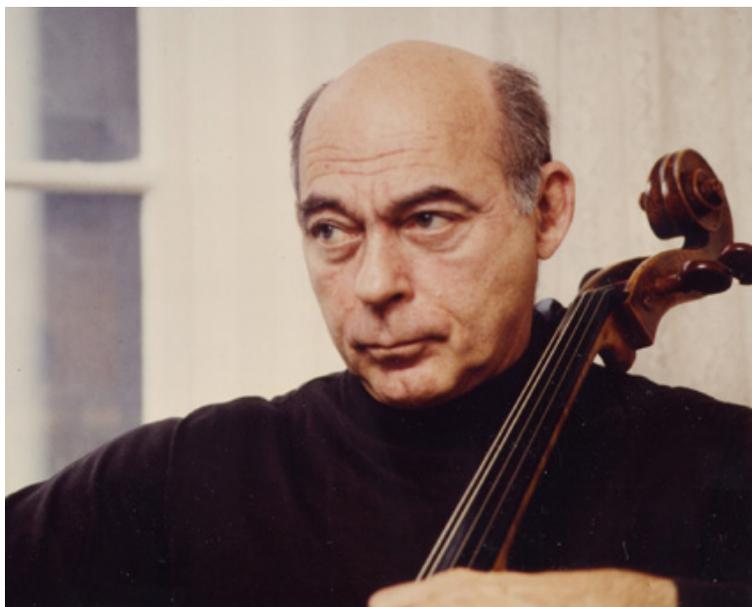
One can think of many virtuosos of the piano but Starker is the virtuoso of the cello. His performance of the Kodaly Cello Sonata will never be equalled let alone bettered.

Casals was a fine cellist, Piatigorsky was quite superb as was Feuermann. Fournier had the most ravishing tone, Tortelier was at his best in his favourite repertoire, Rostropovich had a lovely tone but his tempi tended to be slow and his vibrato excessive, Derek Simpson of the Aoelian Quartet was unfailingly reliable, Joan Dickson and Zara Nelsova introduced us to new works and fresh insights into others and Natalia Gutman showed her versatility with new works and Russian masterpieces.

Jacqueline DuPre performances were ruined by hormonal intensity. A British composer wrote a piece for her which she could not play unless she played non stop throughout the piece. One will never forget her playing Shostakovich's Cello Concerto no. 1 which was beyond her limited talent and was disastrous. Her performance of the Dvorak are full of misjudgements.

The Dvorak B minor concerto is the best cello concerto of them all and by miles. Britain has produced a couple of fine cello concertos with the Walton and the Finzi.

The first movement of the Dvorak is marked allegro but has episodes of grandioso and sostenuto. The grandioso passages are not nauseating as are the nobilementes of Elgar but retain a steady tempi and have a power that is not pompous. The cellist enters at 3.36 and what sumptuous themes there are.



Starker produces impeccable phrasing and does not linger over the evident beauty of the piece. He has an unequalled expressiveness and his double stopping including the double octaves is effortless and secure.

The second movement is in G with sections in G minor. Starker's cello sounds simply gorgeous and there may be some nostalgia and homesickness on the composer's part. One outburst is in G minor and is followed by one in G major. There is a short cadenza-like passage and part of it differs from my score. Starker reaches the top E, two

leger lines about the stave in the treble clef without difficulty and the movement ends in G major with an added sixth.

The finale reverts to B minor and the playing has a great sensitivity without damaging the tempi or style. Again, we have glorious melodies and in the andante section some subtle muted trumpets. Themes from the first movement reappear and a hint of one of his Cypresses which was a favourite of the woman he loved but never had. Her name was Josefina. He married her sister, Anna instead.

But now to the complaint. The music goes into B major and Josefina, the love of his life is recalled musically. The score calls for timpani 'heartbeats' on the note B but where are they? They are also missing in Rostropovich's recording and on other recordings.

In Max Bruch's Kol Nidrei, the cello is a little too forward. The work is scored for double woodwind, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, harp and string orchestra and is initially anchored in the key of D minor. It is marked *adagio ma non troppo*. It is often beautiful and nostalgic. When it goes into D major with the arpeggiated harp accompaniment the beauty is more obvious.

Dvorak could write well for the cello. Tchaikovsky could not. His variations on a Rococo theme, set in A major, is awful and, as one famous cellist said, misuses and abuses the cello. There is a theme with eight variations and a coda.

The theme is both feeble and irritating reminding us of the Elgar Enigma variations is the fact expressed by many. Not only feeble but sickly. The variations that are fast makes the cello sound like a disorientated bumble bee trapped in a match box. This is inappropriate for a cello.

Of course, Starker plays it well but uses an edition that I do not possess. There are quite a few editions but this is not a good piece. And there is a Tchaikovsky Cello Concerto., also in B minor, which was completed by Yuri Leonovich but it has never caught on. Sadly, the Rococo variations have!

© COPYRIGHT David C F Wright 2006. This article or any part of it, however small, must not be copied, quoted, reproduced, downloaded or altered in any way whatsoever nor stored in any retrieval system. Failure to comply is in breach of International Copyright Law and will render any offender liable to action at law.