

GUIDO CANTELLI

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Guido Cantelli was another fatal victim of an air crash joining the honourable names of Ginette Neveu and William Kapell.

I cannot help think of Cantelli whenever I hear Beethoven's Symphony no 7, his finest work. I treasured Cantelli's recording of this masterpiece for year. Cantelli was an internationally claimed conductor. His death at the age of 36 was another tragedy.

But before that he had a life of danger and drama.

He was born on 27 April 1920 in Novara in northern Italy. Antonio, his father was a bandmaster who conducted his own band and played the horn and the trumpet/ Guido had to go to band rehearsals and concerts. At a young age Guido imitated his father by 'waving his arms about' and sometime she conducted the band. He was taught the trumpet and joined the band as a child. His father was a strict disciplinarian when conducting and this greatly influenced his son.



Such was the boy's natural talent he went to study with Felice Fastora a well-known piano teacher who also taught composition. Later, Guido studied at the Milan Conservatoire from 1939 with Antonio Votto was an assistant conductor at La Scala under Toscanini. Cantelli started by conducting the student orchestra. He graduated in 1943 he was forced to join the Italian Army and like the German Zimmermann hated fighting for causes that were wrong. Cantelli refused to support fascism and was very outspoken about Hitler and the Nazis and was sent to a Nazi concentration camp and the appalling conditions and lack of food caused him to become very ill. He lost a considerable amount of weight and physically suffered for the rest of his short life.

He was taken to Bolzano and was under the care of many doctors. The chaplain helped him to escape to his home town and he took work as a bank clerk.

The evils fascists captured him and sentenced him to death by firing squad but, before that could happen, Italy was liberated and his life was spared.

In 1948 Toscanini visited Italy seeking a conductor to assist him with the NBC orchestra. He attended a concert at La Scala with Cantelli conducting and was deeply impressed and invited him to conduct four concerts with the NBC. That debut was on 15 January 1949 and the programme included Haydn's Symphony no 93 and Hindemith's Mathis der Mahler. This and his following concerts were sensationally successful. Toscanini wrote to Cantelli's wife, Iris, in praise of her husband.

When Cantelli conducted he knew the music so





well that he seldom used a score. Such was his fame that he conducted all the major orchestras in the USA and the Vienna Philharmonic. He toured South Africa and was invited to be the conductor of La Scala Milan on 16 November 1956 but eight days later he was dead.

He was an extraordinary conductor and conducted with physical vigour and energy including bending his knees, raising his hands while on tiptoe. To some it may have seemed

extreme but in view of his past it showed his joy to be alive. Today we have musicians who have strange and infuriating movements such as Clifford Curzon and Lang Lang but in Cantelli's case it was not showmanship but natural exuberance and love of the music. He did not play to the camera for very rarely was a camera on him people still recall his conducting Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, Verdi's *Requiem* Liszt's *Piano Concerto no. 2* with Claudio Arrau and Beethoven's *Piano Concertos* numbers 1 and 5 with Rudolph Sekin.

The air crash was in Paris on 24 November 1956, a few seconds after take off, and on 1 December Cantelli was laid to rest in his home town.

What a loss!

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