

## NICOLA BENEDETTI

Nicola Benedetti is a Scottish violinist born to an Italian father and Scottish mother in a well-to-do family.

She was born on 1 July 1987 in West Kilbride, North Ayrshire and began to learn the violin at the age of four or five. By the age of nine, she had passed all eight grades of music examinations. That speaks for itself. She must have been very good and immensely talented.

At her home, you would regularly hear the Bee Gees and not Beethoven.



Just after her tenth birthday, she entered the Yehudi Menuhin School and had some studies with the Jewish-American Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999). He was a brilliant business man but not a great violinist. I heard him live in the Beethoven, Brahms and the Bruch over ten years and his intonation was always suspect and often downright out of tune. It is said that he worked with the jazz violinist Grappelli (1908-1997) because intonation was not important in jazz.

Benedetti also had lessons with Natasha Boyarskaya, also in Surrey.

In 2004, at the age of 16, she won the Young Musician of the Year at the Usher Hall, Edinburgh. It was said that this was fixed as she was from Scotland and the final was in Scotland!

She played the Violin Concerto no 1 by Szymanowski, a work I had known for forty years. The performance was awful in many ways but, being charitable, I put it down to inexperience, youth and perhaps nerves. One cannot expect maturity and accomplished performances in one so young, although there are exceptions.

However, she became an international star and was awarded a six album recording contract worth £2 million and has about a hundred concerts a year.

She made her first tour to the USA in 2005 and over the years has improved considerably and received good and excellent reviews. Her Italia album is quite amazing (I have just heard the pre-release CD) and I anticipate it will sell very well. The Vivaldi Summer has stunning fire and passion!

Her previous recordings include a work by a composer also from North Ayrshire, James MacMillan in a piece called Ayrshire for violin and orchestra.

She has recorded the Szymanowski, Mendelssohn, Bruch 1, Tchaikovsky, Vaughan Williams' The Lark Ascending and Chausson's gorgeous Poeme.

There is a problem with her which is certainly not her fault. She is proclaimed as a glamorous and beautiful woman and there are men and women who will buy anything that is glamorous and one hopes that her CDs are purchased for the quality of the music. However, I have to say that some of her pictures on her albums are not very flattering.

Many years ago, I was one of the adjudicators of a cello competition in which Alun Hoddinott was the chairman. The best cellist was a very, very large girl with a disfigured face. Her playing was impeccable but Hoddinott said that another girl was the winner because she had lovely legs and was pretty!

Nicola is very positive about good music and seeks to encourage children and young people in serious music appreciation and playing. She has been likened to the movement in Venezuela in encouraging children but she would have been this advocate in her own right. She has given master classes for children.

She is also to be commended for her wide range of repertoire. She stresses the need to promote music of quality and that music needs to be performed and performed well. The notion that music speaks for itself is not always so. It needs its champions and must not suffer because it is out of fashion and not in vogue. However, she does seem to want to bridge the gap between serious music and pop music which is a pity as they should be separate entities.

To most of us, for example, Gershwin and Piazzolla (1921-1992) are not classical or serious composers and should not be equated with the likes of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven et al. Piazzolla was a tango composer and a bandoneon player.

I hope Nicola does not reduce or lower herself to playing lesser music.

At the Menuhin School, Benedetti met her partner, the German cellist Leonard Eischenbroich.

In Raploch, in Stirlingshire, she was a founder of the Big Noise Orchestra, an unfortunate name.

I wish her well and hope she remains eminently successful and will serve the best of music.

