

EDROM CASALS CENTRE

PRESIDENT: STEVEN ISSERLIS C.B.E.

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The Ethos of Pablo Casals

Casals was a selfless idealist who put humanitarian principles above everything, even his music-making, and certainly his illustrious career. He recognised the basic human need for music and its higher purposes other than mere entertainment. He often compared the ideal of human freedom combined with responsibility, or honour, to the application of Rubato in Tempo in music. Casals saw in his role of musician a craftsman who, by practising and seeking to understand the intentions of the composer, serves music which increases universal awareness of our individual uniqueness and sensitivity to the situations and needs of others. His cello was his tool and his attitude to instrumental technique was that it was not to be acquired as an end in itself but as a means to achieve the perfect service of the music. It was to be remembered in teaching but forgotten in performance.

There is no doubt that Casals was one of the greatest instrumentalists of the last century. Because music was such an integral part of his life it seems invidious to consider technical aspects of his playing separately, but it might make understanding him easier. He was a great innovator and made the playing of the cello as a solo instrument in concertos etc. accessible to a much greater number. As a young man he rejected some of the dogmatic practices of the times. For instance, the teaching of aspiring cellists to bow whilst keeping a book under their right arm!



Amongst his technical innovations were the following:

Bowing Bowing was a form of choreography to Casals, requiring the transference of relaxed arm weight to the point of contact rather than contraction of smaller muscle groups. He played his cello from his back. Bow changes were made subtly at each end of the bow so that the listener is unaware of them in legato passages, and yet his incisive attack, when needed, was equalled only by Feuermann.

Fingering Casals introduced a fingering system based on the natural physical characteristics and capabilities of the left hand, including the use of double extensions to avoid awkward and unmusical shifts of position. It is also interesting that Casals would sometimes use fingering to serve the expressive needs of the music, such as the slow movement of the 5th Beethoven Cello Sonata, where he adopts a more difficult fingering to make the passage sound less facile.

Shifting Casals was an absolute master of the classical slide which he employed with great taste and artistic insight. This involves subtle co-ordination between left and right hands to avoid the vulgar 'swoop'.

Expressive Intonation This is a big subject, impossible to explain concisely. Suffice it to say that Casals did not play with the tempered intonation of the piano. On the cello C sharp in the key of D is not the same note as D flat in the key of A flat.

Casals was warm and gentlemanly, forced at times by circumstances to be political (he was republican by nature, yet befriended Monarchs). He worked hard to serve his art until a month before he died at the age of 97.

When he was 95 a journalist asked him why he still practised so hard.

Casals replied....."Because I think I am improving".

DMcD

The Memorial Concert – Autumn 2006

Those who attended the concert on Saturday, 18th. November to commemorate the lives of Jane, Christopher, and Francis Cowan, and Janie Beeston, will have witnessed an event of profound musical integrity. We were fortunate to be in the magnificent XVIIIth. century elegance of the music room of Marchmont House, Greenlaw, so fitting for the programme presented.



In the J.S. Bach's D Minor Concerto for two violins Maeve and Lucy were the supremely matched soloists, exchanging melodic phrases in a unified dialogue of moving intensity. They were admirably supported by an ever-alert orchestra of friends and former pupils. Maeve had travelled from her home in Vienna to be present on Michael Beeston Sinfonia violin and viola. listened to each the unfolding conversation. encouraged the (permitting) to committed



this memorable occasion. joined Lucy in Mozart's Concertante in E Flat for Here again the soloists other intently, balancing lines into a musical In turn the two of them orchestra (bars rest enter fully into the deeply interpretation.



Donald gave a fulsome tribute influence they have exerted on so interval, Michael spoke movingly about the life and work of his wife, Janie, who is equally loved and remembered by the numerous people who knew her. Their daughter, Jessica, performed a movement of Brahms' Viola Sonata In E Flat, partnered on the piano by Andrew Johnson. Currently

studying the viola in Salzburg, she is proof that there is considerable optimism for the future of string playing among young musicians. The opening allegro movement of Mendelssohn's Octet In E Flat rounded off an afternoon of supreme music making, Informal in presentation, but intense in feeling and artistry. It was most gratifying to see the warmly enthusiastic audience and orchestra who were so clearly uplifted by the whole enterprise. Credit must be given to Lucy and Donald for the long-term planning involved in the arrangements for this occasion.



[On-the-spot sketches by kind permission of M.E. Batstone (Milford)]

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The History of the I.C.C./ E.C.C.:..... Continued from July Newsletter

John Gwilt writes.....

.A funny thing about the I.C.C. is that the handover to Jane and me almost never happened ! When Maurice had a minor stroke on his last visit to London, his doctors advised him to give up his twice-yearly visits to the U.K. So Maurice and Milly started looking for someone to take over. It was very important to find someone with a Casals connection, and my having played in master classes with Casals in Zermatt provided this link. Also I had studied with Maurice, been his assistant in summer schools in Caiscais, and taught at the I.C.C. before the handover, so they asked me to be the successor. Jane and I already had a close working relationship at this stage, and it seemed natural for us to take it on together, so I suggested to Maurice and Milly that we would make a good team. They had no doubts about her wonderful gifts as a player and teacher, but the critical point was that she had studied with Emmanuel Feuermann, and did not have direct connections with Casals, and so they hesitated. It was decided to ask Casals for his opinion. He well remembered playing with her during one of Tovey's interpretation classes at Edinburgh University and gave his wholehearted thumbs up. So the new era of the I.C.C. was born !

Under Maurice and Milly the Cello Centre year centred around Maurice's twice-yearly visits from the USA. These visits included concerts and master-classes, to which many other cello teachers brought their students; Leslie Sutton, Antonia Butler, and Julia Pringle, to name just a few. In between times Milly was actively involved with teaching, writing, reviewing concerts for "The Strad", etc. When Jane and I took over the running of the I.C.C., there was just a handful of students, and so we started with a clean slate. One of the first things we instituted was a weekly cello club for all comers, with everyone joining in, from beginners to us. Christopher Cowan and David Gwilt, as well as Jane and I, set to arranging music for this ensemble. We also started Saturday morning Chamber music and Saturday afternoon playing classes. Through word

of mouth the number of students increased. At this stage we still lived in Winchester, commuting to London for three days a week. Gradually, as the Cello Centre expanded, we moved full time to London. When Christopher inherited Edrom House, we were able to start residential Easter courses for children there, and when we finally moved up to Scotland the I.C.C. took on a new direction, as we now taught full-time students for three eight-week terms in the year. Jane and I alternated fortnightly visits to London for a time to continue our connection there.

(To be continued.....)

JG.

Moira Phillips writes.....

[In Search of the 'Edrom Course']

In the late spring of 2002, those of us who had signed up for the Edrom summer course were phoned, and were devastated – not too strong a word – to learn that Edrom House had been sold. "But" said Penelope Lynex firmly "there is hope". Francesca Loening had persuaded a musician friend, Sir Francis Ogilvy, that the Ogilvy family seat, Winton House, in East Lothian, would make an ideal home for the 2002 course. The Ogilvys were attracted by the prospect of filling the house with music for a week and a deal was done, including residential accommodation in an adjacent farmhouse, and additional B & B accommodation with neighbours arranged by Francesca.

But a problem remained. Who would cook and cater for us all? "Don't worry" said Francesca, "I'll do it". And so lovely memorable meals appeared on the farmhouse table every day. A tour-de-force! Alison brought over as much music from the Edrom collection as her car would hold, and with Penelope, Jessie Ridley, and Christopher Roberts, gallantly organised an excellent course, catering as ever for a wide range in competence and skill offered by course participants. To crown it all, one golden afternoon there was a tour of the Loenings' garden, laid on to follow the course recital, held that year at their 'House with Arches'.

And so the 2002 course against all odds survived. It went on to be repeated very successfully in 2003. Then recognition of the limitations of Winton House in terms of size, cost, and availability, led to postponement of the 2004 course, and eventually to its relocation to Little Benslow Hills in Hertfordshire in 2005 and 2006. This venue is ideal in every way, excellent residential and performing accommodation and catering, a wonderful garden, and, most importantly, an extensive chamber music library. The cost is reasonable since Benslow Music Trust is an educational charity.

Geography only separates this successor course from its origins in Scotland. The I.C.C. continues as the E.C.C., firmly rooted in the Borders, and linked to the Scottish Borders Community Orchestra, started by Donald MacDonald ten years ago. There remains a close-knit group of people committed to the continuation and development of the original Edrom course in the Borders (see the July newsletter)

Clearly, Jane Cowan's influence has been inestimable both in the U.K. and abroad. Each course usually has one or two students from overseas, and many have gone away with fresh ideas, encouraged to start something new, a quartet, an ensemble, a class, even an orchestra. The Benslow course is a natural part of this process – both as a result of it, and as an instrument for its continuation, so it is hoped that the creative links with the parent body in the Borders will continue to flourish.

Good luck to the Edrom course from a grateful participant !

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Interesting Things You Might Like to Know About.....

No 1..... **Paganini**

In October 1831 Nicolo Paganini (1782- 1840) arrived in Edinburgh where he gave six concerts in the Assembly Rooms in George Street. Although the evenings were well received by the audiences, on one occasion a hostile crowd gathered outside the hall. They were protesting against the high price of tickets, which were far beyond what most residents of the city could afford. After breaking several windows, the rioters were dispersed by the authorities.

Rossini and Paganini

By 1821 Rossini and Paganini had become great friends. During the Rome carnival of that year, they dressed up as blind beggar women, accompanying their grotesque falsetto singing on guitars. Rossini had stuffed his costume with straw, drawing sympathetic responses from the crowd in the street who suspected 'she' was pregnant.

According to Massimo d'Azeglio in his Memoirs (Florence 1867), the gaunt Paganini was 'as thin as a door with a face that resembled the neck of a violin'. The writer Richard Osborne suggests they must have looked like Laurel and Hardy in drag!

(More to come in July)

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