

# Newsletter

## Vancouver Cello Club



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**JUNE 1988**

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VANCOUVER CELLO CLUB NEWSLETTER

### REPORTS AND COMMENTS ON THE 1ST WORLD CELLO CONGRESS

The First World Cello Congress! Conjures up visions of every cellist's heaven . . . everything and everyone you've always wanted to hear, see, meet, play . . . a virtual who's who of the 'cello world. It had the potential to be one of the most exciting events of this decade. Unfortunately, too many balloons either burst early or never got blown up, leaving this delegate with an overall slight feeling of disappointment and minor irritability.

First of all, I feel that when some 700 cellists travel thousands of miles, they should be welcomed verbally by the President himself, Rostropovich - a man and musician held in deep affection and respect by all of us. Secondly - to this day, we have never received a list of delegates nor the country they represented. I would like to have seen the representatives from each country publicly introduced the first evening, instead of being left to drift around at a no host bar. These are small points for some people, but to me, they set the tone for the entire Congress. During the past 25 years I have done a fair bit of organizing and this event needed a firm administrative hand at the very top. There were either too many chiefs or not enough. As one official delegate to the American Cello Council, I was as ignorant as anyone from Sri Lanka concerning the mechanics. Having attended two Congresses, I also feel very strongly that a meeting of members of the American Cello Council should be automatically a part of the agenda. (After all, the V.C.C. pays 1/3 of its annual budget to belong to this organization.) It really was a shame that administrative problems and bad manners prevented one from assimilating the full potential that was possible.

However, there were many memorable moments and the benefits one gains from rubbing shoulders and exchanging ideas with musicians from all over the world far outweighs any of the negative aspects. In the end, it's the "windbagging" over coffee at breakfast; the listening to pedagogy panels (Joan Dickson, Orloff, Sadlo, Tortelier, Wiesel); being stimulated and excited by a concert "New Dimensions in Cello" (3½ hours); hearing Maria Kliegel (she teaches at Cologne) and Steven Isserlis (don't miss his recital here in Vancouver next March 12 with VR Series); being stunned by one of the best 'cello sections ever (God bless what the Berlin Phil 'cello section has done for us all!) give the world premiere of David Ott's "Dodecacelli" - commissioned by themselves, The National Symphony Orchestra Cello Section; just being there for Paul Tortelier (alone worth every penny of the fare!), for Zara Nelsova (Schumann Fantasy Pieces), for the quirk of Ron Leonard's eyebrows at the end of Concert Waltz (Fitzenhagen) performed by The Los Angeles Violoncello Society and especially for the endearing little mistakes that the Mighty do make as well as the rest of us mortals. I enjoyed so much the ingenious vitality and great showmanship of Sean Grissom (a friend and colleague from Julliard days of Desmond Hoebig) with his electric 'cello strapped to the upper left leg! And sizzling with "Stone's Rag" (his own composition). Wonderful to hear Colin Hampton with Bonnie Hampton, Jeff Holmes and Irene Sharp talk about the Canals Master Class 1960, and the far reaching effects of his teaching. I'd just like to mention the opening night slide show and symposium, "The Cello: Its History and Heroes" - written and produced by Brad Oldenburg and narrated by Martin Bookspan ("Life from Lincoln Centre"). It was excellent and I hope will be made available for the 'cello clubs and music education outlets. The panel (Aronson, Margaret Campbell - author of an excellent new book "Great Cellists", Garbousova, Greenhouse, Sadlo, Scholz - notable collector of 'cello/gamba bows, and Tortelier) contributed much to a most stimulating evening.

One just has to say a few words about the magnificent Gauguin exhibit at the National Gallery that we were so fortunate as to be able to view. It was simply stunning - vast and too much to absorb in one visit (I made it three times). We were all amazed to find it was FREE! The new wing where the Gauguin collection was mounted is a striking building (the new Canadian Embassy is kitty corner) and the Calder mobile in the three storey foyer entrance is impressive.

Another very moving emotional moment came with the Vietnam War memorial - simple black marble, poignant and somehow so full of the anguish of war never captured in the more traditional memorials that seem rather to glorify.

This Congress also gave the Vancouver five (Armstrong, Carmack, Duckles, Fraser, Nodwell) an opportunity to learn more about one another and exchange musical ideas, humour, Roy Rogers breakfasts, Metro transfers, photo poses, new 'cello stops, several beers! and make many new friends.

**Judy Fraser**

### What an Experience!

Washington, D.C., the North American mecca for cellists! Who would have suspected! Yet the city which usually draws government officials by the hundreds during the week of June 7-11 also brought droves of cellists flooding from all over the globe. We were to be entertained, educated and amused by mentors, friends and colleagues.

The days were generally divided into 3 sessions; morning and afternoon panel discussions, and evening concerts. Some sessions were formal with very directed panel discussions; others were relaxed with one person taking the stage either talking or performing or in the case of Tortelier, doing both at great length! The highlight form of this part of the conference was the pedagogy panel. One of the main ideas was that "one should teach from the inside going out, not the outside going in." "The teacher should draw the child/student out creatively, artiscally rather than just imposing a technique on him." - an understanding that should be championed in today's era of high tech.

Unfortunately, there was a certain amount of disorganization and quite a bit of change in the programming. the concerto concert with the National Symphony Orchestra was cancelled, though we did hear the twelve cellists from N.S.O. play. They performed "Dodecacelli" by David Ott conducted by "Slavi". What a section!! But, as one of them said, "With Rostropovich conducting the orchestra, one can't afford to play in the wrong position, let alone play a wrong note!" Needless to say, the conference was not entirely serious. One concert included fiddle times on the 'cello (Nancy Blake) and rags by Sean Grissom, someone not to be missed, especially if you're in New York City. Apparently he performs on the corner opposite Lincoln Centre! On the same programme was Monsieur Baquet, a French Victor Borge on the 'cello; a hilarious cellist, who studied with Hekking at the same time as Tortelier. The diversity of programming was extreme from Baquet to Steven Isserlis playing scenes from Jewish Life by Bloch, Tortelier playing excerpts from the Lalo Concerto on Greenhouse's Strad at the Library of Congress and Tom McVetty playing his electric six-stringed 'cello, to 250 cellists conducted by Rostropovich led by Tortelier, playing Casals' Sardana.

My impressions and memories of the Congress are varied in the extreme, heightened by the back drop of D.C. and several visits to the National Gallery of Art, a cursory viewing of two or three of the buildings known as the Smithsonian Institute and a moving experience walking beside the black marble wall of the Memorial to the Vietnam Veterans. Six days of unforgettable cultural stimulation in a city predominantly known for its dry government policies. What an experience!

**Catherine Carmack**

The First World Cello Congress, held this past June at the University of Maryland, was attended by five of Vancouver Cello Club's finest: Judy Fraser, Kristl Armstrong, Audrey Nodwell, Catherine Carmack, and myself, Lee Duckles.

Arriving by limousine in 90° weather, senza luggage, we plunged with five days of concerts, symposia, socializing, and sightseeing with the 650 other delegates from around the globe.

Although a somewhat uneven week in retrospect, both in the quality of programs and in the organization of the Congress, a few events were particularly memorable. Here are, briefly, some of those events.

The first evening was devoted to a narrative review and slide show entitled "The Cello: Its History and Heroes"; a wonderful selection of slides and recordings from the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institute, followed by reminiscences by Raya Garbosova, Bernard Greenhouse, and the irrepressible Paul Tortelier.

The second evening features a stunning performance by the 12 cellists of the National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Rostropovich, in a new work "Dodecacelli" by David Ott, commissioned for the Cello Congress. Although it is expected that the National Symphony would be a mecca for cellists, nothing prepared us for this virtuostic display of talent.

Another special event was a concert featuring an array of international artists such as one never has the privilege of hearing in one concert. These included: Mario Brunello, Tsutsumi, Frans Helmerson, Stephan Isserlis, Gary Hoffman, Arto Noras, and Maria Kliegel.

The fun event of the Congress was a marathon concert described as "New Dimensions in Cello" - featuring, in almost 4 hours, country-cello, jazz-cello, rag-time cello, sit-down cello, stand-up cello, take-out cello, acoustic cello, electric-cello, up-right cello, out-of-tune cello, ponticello, and vermicello.

On the whole we had a marvelous week seeing old friends, making new ones and rekindling our enthusiasm for music making and teaching.

**Lee Duckles**

#### AND SOME IMPRESSIONS BY KRISTL

This Congress had enormous potential for communication and inspiration for cellists from all over the world. Unfortunately it was plagued with various last minute changes of plan and various communication breakdowns.

High points, for me, included trying out the many 'cellos and bows made by modern makers (the only 'cello playing I did all week).

Listening to the marvelous 'cellos owned by the Smithsonian and the Library of Congress . . .

Hearing the National Symphony Orchestra's 'cello section performing David Ott's Dodecacelli, written especially for them . . .

Hearing some very different approaches to 'cello playing at the "New Dimensions" recital, especially the energetic and musical playing of Sean Grisson and Eugene Friesen . . .

And (although it had nothing to do with the Congress) the wonderful Gauguin exhibit at the National Art Gallery.

**Kristl Armstrong**

## FIRST WORLD CELLO CONGRESS

Attending the Cello Congress was very inspiring for me, from a musical point of view. The fact that it was the most poorly organized event I have ever attended has faded to the background. What stands out for me, three weeks after the Congress, is a sound concept that I intend to remember forever. With a recital or concert every evening, and often one in the afternoon as well, I was truly exposed to the sound possibilities of the 'cello. There was a variety in style, from Bach through Brahms, to Penderechi and on to electric 'cello and jazz 'cello improvisations straight from June 1988. The performances were excellent. String crossings and shifts were so smooth that they didn't exist aurally - just visually. Maria Kliegel, from Germany, performed the Schubert Arpeggione Sonata with so much refinement and elegance, that one car buff in the audience was moved to compare her playing to "a huge Mercedes-Benz just rolling down the highway - everything smooth, with no bumps or jolts." Paul Tortelier was absolutely delightful. His excitement, exuberance and joy in the 'cello shone through the whole Congress.

With over six hundred other cellists milling around, this was also a social-paradise, where I could talk about anything cellistic that I wanted to and everyone would understand and contribute something. It was particularly fun socializing with the other members of the Vancouver Cello Club who attended the Congress.

All in all, a very great experience.

**Audrey Nodwell**