

Tribute to 'Cellist Ennio Bolognini - Renaissance Man! 'Cellist Janice Foy, Ph.D.

The greatest 'cellist that ever lived according to Feuermann, Casals, and Piatigorsky was the Argentinian-born Ennio Bolognini. Wherever Ennio performed audiences couldn't believe their ears. "He had enormous hands and could play anything at will and with a fantastic tone - his style was unique," said 'cellist Stephen Kates. Born in 1893 in Buenos Aires, Ennio first studied with his father, continued at the St. Celia Conservatory, debuted at twelve, and won a Rovatti 'cello as First Prize, at fifteen. When his 'cello, inscribed with famous musicians' signatures, was stolen from his car, it was recovered from a pawn shop, unharmed. The signatures rendered the instrument unsaleable!!

Before his 'cello career took off, Ennio was Maestro Bolognini conducting throughout Chile and why not? His godfather was Arturo Toscanini! Having soloed with many American orchestras, played the 'Swan' with Saint Saens at the piano then with Richard Strauss in his 'Sonata', Maestro Bolognini (Honorary Doctorate, Univ. Buenos Aires), emigrated to the U.S. as a prizefighter in 1923. He was the sparing partner and interpreter for the "Wild Bull of the Pampas," prizefighter Luis Firpo before his match with Jack Dempsey. Nothing like "ring time" before that Dvorak Concerto!

When Ennio wasn't fighting (in the ring), he got entangled in 'unusual' escapades. During a Ravinia Festival rehearsal, Bolognini was fired by the conductor during a heated argument. In response, Ennio used his stunt pilot techniques to get even. During the concert, he flew his plane so low that the noise completely wrecked the performance and he was arrested by several police when he landed his plane in the parking lot! I couldn't top that!!

How could an extensive language knowledge, (he conversed in Hungarian, Greek, Japanese, Hungarian, Russian and knew 15 Italian dialects,) get one into trouble? Ennio was Principal 'Cellist of the Chicago Symphony where he was asked to interpret for Glazounov who suffered from extreme stage fright. Bolognini came to the podium to calm down Glazounov so often that the Manager thought Ennio was trying to take over. His Argentine temper flared up, an argument ensued, and the orchestra lost its Principal 'Cellist. I don't know if he flew a plane that night or not!!

Ennio and Dorothy, his wife of 18 years, founded the Las Vegas Philharmonic Orchestra in 1963. Ennio continued to teach and play with his pianist Donald Kemp, until his death in 1979. Donald surreptitiously recorded their concerts since Ennio didn't like recordings. Christine Walevska said that Bolognini "told me exactly how many vibrations per second for the perfect bel canto vibrato and he had the most precise directions on bowing technique." He dedicated to her his flamenco guitar-styled, 'Serenata del Gaucho' featuring his signature guitar pizzicato. Only Christine possesses this piece, as Bolognini had wished.

Intrigued? Check the internet, read Margaret Campbell's 'The Great 'Cellists' and 'The Strad' Jan. 1979, to unearth more on this handsome, erudite, patriotic, Renaissance man and great 'cellist. Please note correction: In the December 2005 issue of the Overture, as reported in the reprint of the Glendale News-Press, the 'cello piece, "Echo Serenade" is not by Don Ferrara but by Maestro Ennio Bolognini. Dr. Foy said it was an honest mistake as the music she had showed Don Ferrara, not Maestro Bolognini's name, on the cover. Ferrara was his copyist! Kudos to Bolognini's widow Dorothy for bringing this to Dr. Foy's attention.