


Rebirth of a Classic



Speakers Corner re-issue the Starker Bach 'Cello Suites

by Richard S. Foster

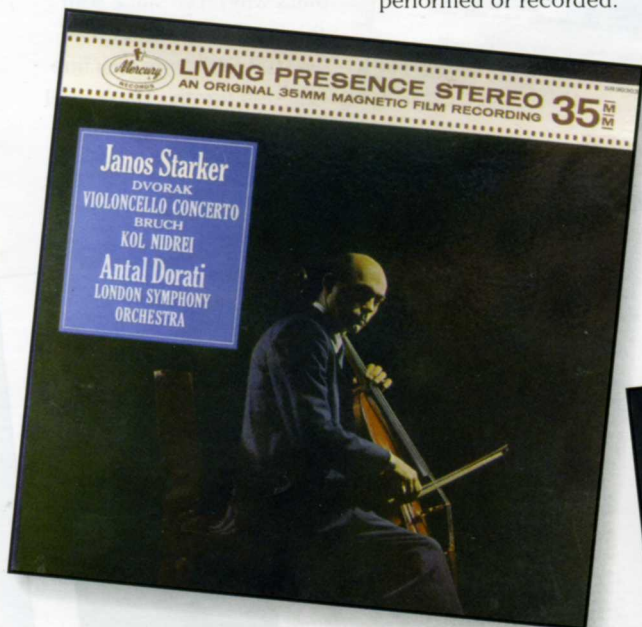
Janos Starker happens to celebrate his 80th birthday, as I write this, tomorrow, July 5, 2004. Starker was born in Budapest, Hungary July 5, 1924. He is a graduate of the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. During his career as an orchestral musician, he was a solo cellist at the Budapest Opera House and Philharmonic, The Dallas Symphony (under Antal Dorati), The Metropolitan Opera and then The Chicago Symphony (both with Fritz Reiner). He's maintained an active career not only as a soloist but a guest artist with Orchestras around the World. He teaches, he lectures, he founded the Eva Janzer Memorial Cello Center Foundation to honour his former teacher. He's published countless articles and many of his students are world-renowned.

He joined the School of Music faculty at the University of Indiana in Bloomington in 1958. Four years later he was awarded the title of Distinguished Professor of Music. His awards include the prestigious Grande Prix du Disque in 1948 for the Kodaly *Suite for Unaccompanied Cello*, Opus 8, first released on 78's in France on the Pacific label. Shortly thereafter, Pacific re-released this performance on LP. His justly famous recording of this heretofore-thought-to-be-impossible-to-play work was recording again in the US by Period on SPLP 510. It was re-released on Period SPL 510 with Kodaly's *Duo for violin and violoncello* with Arnold Eidus playing violin.

In 1997 he won a Grammy Award for his performance of the Bach *Suites for Unaccompanied Violoncello* on RCA/BMG: compact disc only (61436). This was the fifth time he performed the Bach *'Cello Suites*, however only four of the five sets are complete. He recorded four of

▶ the six for the US company Period (released in the UK on the Nixa label), he then recorded a complete set for EMI on their Columbia label in mono only. The first stereo releases were in the mid 1960's for the Mercury Living Presence Label. In the late 1980's he recorded a complete set in digital on the Sefel label and as indicated earlier, the last time for RCA/BMG. He's premiered many concertos as well as other recital works. He's recorded chamber works for Decca (the Brahms *Trios*) as well as Bloch's *Schelomo* and *Voice in the Wilderness* with Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

There is almost no information I have been able to uncover that suggests there is a work he has not performed or recorded.



There are even a half-dozen wonderful records on the STAR label (STARKer?) released primarily as teaching aids rather than mainstream issues that have become cult classics. The original releases were pressed on beautiful translucent vinyl by JVC.

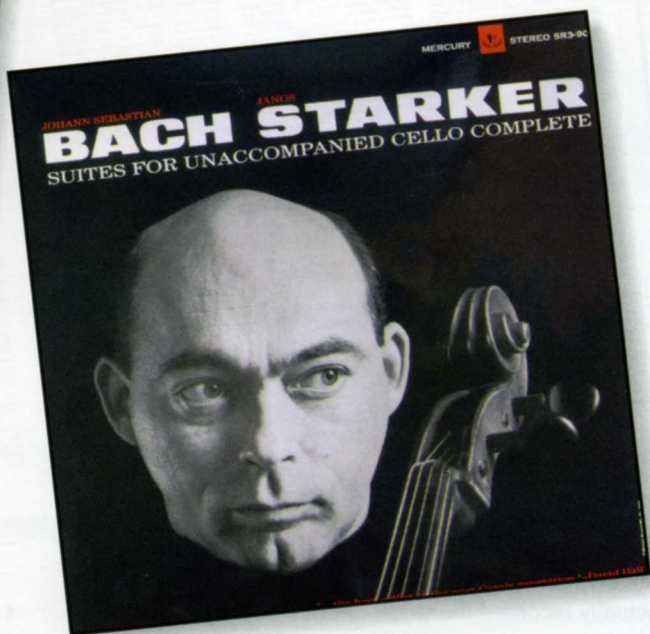
It was in 1948, shortly after he came to America from France (by Dorati's invitation in Dallas) where he first met Wilma Cozart. He moved to The Met shortly thereafter with Reiner and then in 1952 again with Reiner to Chicago. Based upon World events at the time, his plans changed as he had to get himself established, however he stayed an additional year with Reiner to help bring his parents to America.

Starker was at the Met when he made his first American recordings for Period. Following this brief relationship, he recorded several superb performances on a handful of records for Walter Legge. While his

Kodaly for Period (and the earlier Pacific release) was a stunning performance, he really began to establish himself under Legge. These records are highly sought after by collectors, but it appears his recordings for Mercury are some of the most coveted today - especially his Bach.

Starker has a great love for chamber recordings and made several as the cellist in a group called the Roth String Quartet. Later he began the famous Living Presence Stereo recordings with the Bach being among his last recordings for Mercury. All in all, he recorded four chamber works with his friend, the pianist Gyorgy Sebok, one record with Stephen Swedish at the piano, two with Dorati and the LSO, one with Stanislaw Skrowaczewski and the LSO and his *Bach Suites for Unaccompanied Violoncello*. Nine legendary recordings. (This of course does not include SR90370 which is a re-issue of two of the 'cello suites from the box set, SR3-9016).

When I began collecting these records I knew nothing, and I mean nothing about classical recordings, performances, etc., etc. We all have moments in time where we can recapture what we were doing when a certain event occurred. For me it was the first time I heard the Dvorak 'cello concerto with Starker,



Dorati and the LSO, SR90303.

There was a time when you could purchase the right pressing and in the right condition from reliable sources - yes David it was you. When I cued the record, it was one of those experiences of sonic wonderment and although unbeknownst to me at the time, one of the greatest performances of this composition I would ever hear. Can you imagine? To be given the privilege of hearing ▶

