

by [ROBERT BATTEY](#) (active Washington DC area cellist, teacher and writer)

János Starker's all-embracing legacy is unique. No one impacted so many different facets of the art, craft, and literature of the cello, and no one gave so freely of himself to advance the cause of music at all levels.

As a solo artist, he was simply nonpareil. He traveled the globe scores of times, appearing in the world's great concert halls, and with the most prestigious orchestras. His recording career spanned nearly half a century, and covered an astounding range of repertoire. Whether on stage or through recordings, the technical and musical standards he upheld never once wavered or compromised. The standards of execution he set have quite simply changed the way we listen to the cello now, and what "virtuoso" playing means. His teaching generations of cellists will ensure that the principles and standards will be carried forward, and his many ancillary activities enriched and enlivened the musical life, in so many spheres, and will continue to do so as long as there are practitioners and aficionados of the cello.



artist & teacher

by [EMILIO COLÓN](#) (Jacobs School of Music):

The teaching genius of Janos Starker launched at the early age of eight when he gave lessons to his first student, the then six-year-old Eva Czako. Since then, Starker's teaching has influenced generations of cellists for well over eight decades. Throughout his unprecedented performance career, which began in 1938 at the age of fourteen as a solo cellist playing the Dvorak Concerto and then as of principal cellist of the Budapest Opera and Philharmonic Orchestras, Janos Starker always shared his time between being an artist and teacher. He stated: "I can not perform without teaching and can not teach without performing." Since leaving his native Hungary, Mr. Starker held positions as principal cellist of the Dallas Symphony 1948-49, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra 1949-53, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, 1953-58.

In 1958, Mr. Starker came to Indiana University for one year as an Artist-in-Residence to see how things would work out with teaching at the University. A year later he was appointed a full professor, and in 1962 he was named a Distinguished Professor of Music. Starker and Joseph Gingold were the first musicians ever to receive the honor at the School of Music. Starker holds this rank to date as he continues his cello class at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

Janos Starker was born on July 5, 1924 in Budapest, Hungary. Starker's first cello teacher was Fritz Teller. After a few months, his parents decided to take him to Teller's teacher Adolph Schiffer; Schiffer had been David Popper's student and succeeded him at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music where Starker studied. In 1931 Starker's mother took him to his first concert in which Pablo Casals played. Shiffer introduced the young Starker to Maestro Casals and mentioned his talent. Casals kissed him on the cheek and his fate was sealed. In 1933 while attending the preparatory division of the Liszt Academy, Starker attended a recital with Bela Bartok on the piano and Emmanuel Feuermann on the cello. To him, this was a revelation as he felt this was how the cello should sound! Starker's other teaching influences at the academy at this early age were Imre Waldbauer, who taught him how to play string quartets and Leo Weiner, who taught him piano and chamber music.

Janos Starker performed concert tours on all continents in recitals and as soloist with orchestras. He received every accolade known to the world of music on the stage and as a recorded artist from the 1948 *Grand prix du disque* (France), for his recording of the Kodály Sonata for solo cello, Op. 8 (Pacific label) to the 1997 "Grammy" award for the Best Instrumentalist Soloist Performance (without orchestra) for his Bach: Suites for Solo Cello Nos. 1-6 (BMG/RCA Victor Red Seal) with hundreds of awards in between. He recorded Over 120 LPs, CDs and DVD's on Angel, Phillips, Mercury, Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, Victor Japan, Japan Columbia, Star Records, Louisville Series, RCA, and Erato amongst others.

The success of Janos Starker's artistry in teaching is a matter of record and evident in the fact that students of his have won posts in every major orchestra in the world. Institutions have honored him with honorary degrees since 1961: Chicago Conservatory, Chicago, Illinois; 1978: Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, Iowa; 1982: East West University, Chicago, Illinois; 1983: Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts; 1990: Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin; 2006: New England Conservatory, Boston, Massachusetts; 2008: McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Other important teaching honors amongst many others include the 1986 Tracy Sonneborn Award for Distinguished Performance and Distinguished Teaching, Indiana University; and the

1988 American String Teacher of the Year, awarded by *The American String Teacher* magazine. His constant desire to improve the playability of the cello led to his Invention of the Starker Bridge: In 1966, Time Magazine called it “a major innovation in 300 years of instrument making.” Research showed that the bridge helps activating over-tones.

Starker's students make up a list of who's who in the world of music including international concert artists, prominent professors and principal cellists around the world. His passion for spreading the information to aid musicians led to the publication of countless articles and books on the art of cello playing. His book: *An Organized Method of String Playing*, 1965 came to life as a way to help a fellow cellist and dear friend, George Bekefi. Bekefi asked for help as his nerves were shattered and he could no longer play. Starker wrote exercises for him to build up his strength and confidence.

core principles

By [EMILIO COLÓN](#):

The concepts that Starker instilled upon me indelibly mark every cellist who studied with him. These concepts include, but are not limited, to the following underlying rules of string playing. When a player reaches a certain level in utilizing the bow and an understanding of the geography of the fingerboard, countless possibilities become available to perform a passage. The decisions, therefore, are directed by musical considerations, which are subjective, and mechanical issues which are definable.



There are a number of rules that come from the teachings of Janos Starker concerning the left hand, most of them having to do with position changes: avoid unnecessary motions; change at smaller distances; avoid contrary motions in succession; in distant connections use higher fingers to lower fingers or the same finger, so as to allow the rotation of the forearm, and to continue to touch the strings at an identical angle. This aspect has been the foundation of his approach, so as to discern centered intonation and controlled vibrato. The decision to use anticipated or delayed shifts is a musical one. It requires the knowledge of timing, finger choice, and bowing. Each player is different; differences in body, size, and stretching abilities necessitate diverse solutions.

In conversation with Colon, Starker shared further thoughts on his teaching:

- “Considering that in almost 80 years of teaching, starting with a six year old when I was only eight, I should therefore ought to be able to summarize my beliefs. That start at the age of eight with today’s eyes, I would not consider teaching; I would consider it coaching. As I gradually realized what I was doing, the approach to the increasing number of students changed. I began to explain what to do with the bow and left hand, not just imitate what I was doing.”
- “As I was performing as a soloist and ensemble player, the musical aspects of the literature came fore, in the decades to follow my search for answers, as to the role of the body, muscles, breathing, etc. bore fruit. In the eyes of many, I became a sort of doctor who could detect and solve problems. As my soloist activities reached the hundred per annum on stage, my core beliefs in making music were purity of sound, taste, simplicity and balance to recreate real and also lesser masterpieces.”
- “My interest in Urtexts was minimal; I consider it publishing sales gimmicks. I strove to understand the intentions of the composers based on familiarity of their output, not just on their contributions to the cello, but most of their other works. But, preceding the musical aspect became imperative to obtain complete control of the instrument, and the ability to have choices. There are many ways to play a given piece, many different bowings, dynamics, fingerings, and choice of strings. The choices depend on the mind and physical attributes of the player, and often the quality of the instrument.”
- “As a teacher, I first assess the strength and/or weakness of the individual, then I focus on the weaknesses. In rare instances, if the strengths are dominant, I may choose repertory for them so as to let them “shine” and be different from my views. Many occasions, when lack of familiarity of the cello by a composer caused less than pleasing sounds, I made changes, though I did not insist on following my solutions by my pupils.”
- “I repeat: I want my disciples to have choices, listening to others, broadening their ability to make decisions. I never wanted to raise carbon copies of me, but let them fulfill their potential, whether soloists, ensemble players, or teachers. My dream of popularizing my instrument has been well nigh attained, and friendship among the practitioners has risen as well. At the end of my life I fell satisfaction and pride about my contributions to the cello and music.”

tributes

By [MARK KOSOWER](#) (*Principal Cello, The Cleveland Orchestra; The Cleveland Institute of Music*):

Janos Starker's teachings encompass the most comprehensive and complete instruction to music making on a stringed instrument that I have ever observed. While he is widely recognized internationally for having been one of the major contributors towards raising the standard of cello playing in the 20th century, for his organized approach to cello playing, and for having helped to identify and solve the physical ailments of countless string players of every physique and technical background, these great achievements are only components of the very essence of his teachings that lead to the ultimate goal – the complete marriage of mind, body, and soul put into the service of music. While the goal can be achieved through innumerable approaches to the cello it is my view that the goal is most efficiently achieved through instrumental playing rooted in the science of the human body and its functions. Although instrumental playing cannot be the musical means in and of itself it provides the missing link between the creative process and musical execution offering the string player limitless options while providing the best opportunity towards longevity of playing through healthy playing practices.



Janos Starker's teaching genius lies in his ability to teach people from all walks of life on all levels – from beginners to the most sophisticated players and artists, based on more than a lifetime of innovative teaching and performance at the highest level. His instruction appeals to all of the senses through articulate explanations and vivid demonstrations that continuously draw the connections between the rules and regulations of music making – in accordance with the designated musical language and style – and the realization of music in the never ending search for possible solutions to musical problems through instrumental playing. Instrumental playing is not a fixed way of handling the instrument. It is merely an approach to playing that, when both employed in union with and executed as a consequence of musical thought, provides for limitless expressive possibilities. However, it is the rules and regulations of music (and thus of nature) that govern instrumental procedure. Thus, true musical freedom is achieved through the discipline of mind and body.

I am personally grateful to Janos Starker for having liberated me from my talents so that I could be the musician that I have chosen to become. His teachings along with that of a few other great teachers have continuously propelled me forward in my own quest for musical truths and excellence.



by [TSUYOSHI TSUTSUMI](#) (*International Concert Cellist, President - Toho Gakuen*):

I feel truly fortunate to have been able to study with him (Janos Starker), and so indebted to him. I have learned and am still learning so much from him as an artist, as a teacher, and as a person. I shall try to continue spreading his great teaching as broad as possible.



By [EMILIO COLÓN](#):

I feel blessed for I have spent the last twenty-five years working with Mr. Starker. I came to study with him in 1986 and from the time we met there was a chemistry that was not to be denied. On our first meeting for my audition into his studio, he argued that I was too young for a Masters Degree as I was only 18 at the time. After intense discussions between him and our beloved colleague Helga Winold he asked, "How long are you planning to stay at Indiana University?" to which I replied, "How long would you like me to stay?" He immediately responded, "Do not make any plans..."

From our first meeting he was concerned about my development. When time came for my first lesson, it actually did not take place for he expelled me from the studio without playing a note! As it turns out, he was trying to teach me a lesson in punctuality for I apparently missed the time that was on his lesson planner. I did not believe I had missed my lesson time and said, "No, my

lesson is now.” To test me, we agreed to have early morning lessons to prove my commitment. On my first lesson, I brought Saint-Saens Concerto, which I had just played with an orchestra. Immediately he began to work on my overgrown ego by pointing out the many intentions of the composer I sacrificed for self-gratifying “flashiness”. In that one lesson he taught me I had to balance the intentions of the composers with my musical persona; simplicity and purity were stronger values than overindulgence. From that moment on he concentrated on the transparency of technique to allow my musical thoughts to develop. The rest is history, for I studied with him in the studio for the next four years and to this day I continue to learn something from him every moment we are together.

In 1993 we became colleagues at the University upon his request. We have worked side by side since, teaching, playing concerts together, collaborating in compositions, honoring great cellists and teachers for their lifetime contributions to the cello and it’s practitioners through the Eva Janzer Memorial Cello Center Foundation, and through books, and music publications.

One day, circa 2005 as it is customary every time we meet at his home, he asked what I would be playing in upcoming concerts and without any hesitation I responded that my first concert at an upcoming festival was to included the Arpeggione Sonata. I was not prepared for his reaction and story to follow: During his tenure as principal cellist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Fritz Reiner asked him to play something else after two performances of the Dvorak Concerto. Starker suggested the Arpeggione Concerto written by Gaspar Cassado as he used to play it with piano with Gyorgy Sebok. Due to the Viennese rubati that make up the character of the work, the concert did not turn out as well as expected. That led to what follows. As I visited his house often at the time, knowing I was soon to perform Arpeggione, he would ask for me to play it on his cello. I always had the excuse that I already had a scotch with him and did not feel I could play. One day, he tricked me into checking his cello for he heard a buzz. As I checked the cello and had yet to have a drink he said, “Now, play the first movement of the Arpeggione.” Having yet to drink a scotch, I did not have an excuse and proceeded to play it for him. Suggestions followed of alternative fingerings and phrasings. As soon as we were finished he then said, this Friday you are coming to the house with a pianist to play the Sonata for visiting cellists from the Atlanta Symphony, St. Louis Symphony and other distinguished guests. The pressure of this will be higher than any concert you play and will prepare you for any eventualities! His concern for the welfare and playing standards of his students never ends. I cherish our conversations about life, history, cello and everything in between, for his teachings are a part of my daily life.



By [MARIA KLEIGEL](#) (*Cologne Musikhochschule*)

A moment of tense, expectant silence – to me it seemed to be an eternity. A couple of silent smoky clouds floating in the teaching room. Janos Starker looked at me in his typical manner, a gaze so full of intensity that I could feel it under my skin, followed by a shattering comment, uttered with a cool slowness and a stony, unchangeable look on his face: “if you ever play as inaccurately as you just did, I will deny ever having been your teacher.” And again, an eternal moment of silence, this time I sat horrified in my chair, not being able to breathe or move. Silent smoky clouds.

One of my lessons in Bloomington ended this way – the Haydn D major concerto.

I was 19 and more than eager to learn from Janos Starker, whom I adored and respected endlessly, and of course I was full of pride and happiness to be part of a group of chosen students. It is easy to imagine with how much force his words struck me. Of course he knew that and used his brilliant pedagogical skills in order to safely put me on the road, not to hurt me or cut me down.

Janos Starker was an extremely intelligent teacher who not only passed on excellent cello technique, but also had an extraordinarily caring way of guiding young people, including all psychological means and tricks. His aims were extremely high and almost impossible to reach. There always was struggle, but at the same time satisfaction as well from trying to reach the top and please the master. He set me on fire, burning with inspiration to reach his goals, to fulfill his demands.

This came to be one of my golden rules of life: “ If you want to become a musician who is characterized by individuality and true expressiveness, you have to train yourself, your muscles, your brain, your imagination, your ears, your taste on the highest level and in all dimensions of self-criticism and experience, so to eventually let your soul shine through. Music exists to touch and deeply move, not simply to show off or try to be everybody’s darling. Don’t get lost in being an actor on stage, showing how exciting and fantastic you are; create excitement for the audience but stay behind modestly with a cool and controlled mind.”

Janos Starker was an elegant human being and musician, full of honesty, dignity, responsibility, famous for his unforgettably subtle humor, loving, caring, guiding, demanding. His purity of tone and phrasing overwhelmed. He taught me love and respect for mankind and music. He woke up my senses, planted seeds for my entire life. He helped me organize and discipline myself, taught me to analyze and enjoy, to find my own frame looking for solutions and making decisions.

I feel endlessly privileged to have received the most precious of gifts – to know him, to have crossed his path, learned from him. Logically, it is now my turn and responsibility to carry his unique heritage to the next generation.