Growing up in a country town in Massachusetts, Nancy Green was more inclined to ride horses than to play the cello. Although she eventually studied with Leonard Rose, Lynn Harrell, Jacqueline du Pré and Johann Gottschalk, it wasn’t until she was nearly 19 that her music ranked in importance above her passion for horses and hikes in the woods. Instead, she spent years practicing only 20 minutes a week, the night before her lesson.

Green lived in her home town of Woburn for 37 years, one of five children in a family of achievers. Her father is a prize-winning computer scientist at IBM, a sister was a doctoral student on a National Science Foundation Award, and a brother scored 800 (a perfect mark) on his SATs. Accustomed to the family’s string of success, the atmosphere that nurtured the children to excel had a profound effect on the lives they chose to lead: four of the five ultimately rejected the obvious route to success in favour of excellence on their own terms. At the same time, however, Nanci acknowledges that her parents did not press her to play, and that it was, in fact, a decision begun by her father that served as an early musical influence.

“There has always been a special love of Bach in my family. My dad built a pipe organ and I always remember him playing Bach. It was one of his hobbies. He’s built an extension to the house where he puts the organ, and has spent years building up a collection of pipes. Every year my family, a Bach birthday party, famously called ‘Althoff and Beer’. We grew up with him as part of the family. Because there are so many musicians in the area, everyone comes over and we sit around and sing cantatas with a distance. She laughs ‘we’ve even had a picture of him holding a mug of beer and “1675 to inf’’. It’s written below!”

After deciding she wanted to take music seriously, Nancy Green enrolled at Ithaca College in New York, where she spent a year of intensive work prior to auditioning for a conservatory. ‘I was incredibly lucky because I basically chose a school out of the каталог because I had just started to practice seriously and didn’t feel ready to audition for a place like Juilliard. By chance, the cello teacher...
IN TUNE WITH NATURE

Nancy Green speaks to Madelyn Cohen about her career, influences and artistic ideals

Growing up in a country town in Massachusetts, Nancy Green was more inclined to ride horses than to play the cello. Although she eventually studied with Leonard Rose, Lynn Harrell, Jacqueline du Pré and Johannes Goritzki, it wasn’t until she was nearly 18 that her music ranked in importance alongside her passion for horses and hikes in the woods. Instead, she spent years practicing for only 20 minutes a week, the night before her lesson.

Green lived in her home town of Weston for 17 years, one of five children in family of achievers. Her father is a prize-winning engineer at IBM, her sister was a doctoral student on a National Science Foundation Award, and a brother scored 800 in perfect mark on his law exams. Accounted to the family’s history of success, the atmosphere that motivates the children to excel had a profound effect on the lives they chose to lead; four of the five ultimately rejected the obvious route to success in favour of excellence on their own terms. At the same time, however, Nancy acknowledges that her parents did not pressure her to play, and that it was, in fact, a tradition begun by her father that served as an early musical influence.

‘There has always been a special Bach interest in my family. My dad built a pipe organ and I always remember him playing Bach. It was one of his hobbies. He’s built an extension to the house where he put the organ, and has spent years building up the collection of pipes. Every year my family has a Bach birthday party, fondly called “Bach and Beer.” We grow up with him as part of the family. Because there are so many musicians in the area, everyone comes over and we sit around and sing cantatas with a conductor.’ She laughs, ‘we’ve even had T-shirts printed several times with a picture of Bach holding a mug of beer and “1675 to infinity” written below it!’

After deciding she wanted to study music seriously, Nancy Green enrolled at Ithaca College in New York, where she spent a year of intensive work prior to auditioning for a conservatory. ‘I was incredibly lucky, I basically chose a school out of the hat because I had just started to practice seriously and didn’t feel ready to audition for a place like Juilliard. By chance, the cello teacher there, Elmar Hofn, was a wonderful musician and a great person. He lent me a beautiful Viennese cello for eight years. Jeff, as he calls himself, had worked earlier with Leonard Rosé and Casals, and had spent summers at Meadowmount, Ivan Galamian’s summer school in upstate New York. I spent two very fruitful summers there. People always said that in the eight weeks at Meadowmount one got more work done than during the entire year and it was definitely true. Most people practiced all day because there was not very much else happening.’

Nancy Green then went to Juilliard, where she studied with Leonard Rose and Lynn Harrell. New York was a shock to the system after the natural beauty of both Westover and Ithaca. ‘I’m a real country person. The first time I went to New York for my Juilliard audition I had a headache all day being in New York City. Obviously it didn’t go on for six years, but I never got used to the city. I worked hard there but would have gone mad if I hadn’t been out to my parents’ country home often. I used to think, “New York is where it’s at, quality’s here.” But my first summer travelling in Austria I heard a marvellous quartet I’d never heard of before play. In this tiny Austrian I discovered that there’s really just as good quality in places you wouldn’t expect. It was a real eye-opener: “It was the beginning of a continuing fascination with Europe, though, ‘how much of it is illusion and how much reality I don’t know’, she says, adding, “but now I try to avoid New York City!”

Green was a star pupil at Juilliard, and seemed destined for a successful solo career, winning the Concert Artists Guild Award which led to her debut in Carnegie Recital Hall in 1975 as well as major prizes in the J.S. Bach and Washington International Competitions. Gradually, though, she became aware of a growing unhappiness with the path her career seemed about to follow. ‘I look back on competitions with embarrassment at my naive attitude. I actually believed then that if I played well I would succeed and if not, I wouldn’t. After one year where I played in almost every competition in New York City I found myself completely disillusioned and faced with having to admit to myself that, although I had both won and lost, the results seemed to be independent of how much I had played. I’ve slowly learned that the music business is often dominated by people who are less musical than the people whom they are supposed to be judging. There is also a tendency to glorify young artists. Oscar Shumsky once said to me, “Don’t show me what you can do at 20, show me what you can do at 50.” One only has to think of the disastrous consequences an age limit would have on other art forms like painting, sculpture and literature to see its ridiculousness.’

As a student I believed that I would find satisfaction in winning competitions, but from my family atmosphere I understood the danger of that mentality. You have to be true to yourself when playing. I was actually once told to practice smiling in front of a mirror because I didn’t smile enough on stage! An artist must have integrity – one’s playing reflects one’s inner being. One can’t be halfway sincere or it sounds like it. I don’t want to pay that kind of price. Today many women artists succeed as much as they can and plaster on the make-up. What would be the place in this world for someone like Dame Myra Hess, who wore black and who wasn’t interested in effect at all?’

Green slowly came to the realisation that she no longer wanted to stay in New York, and now feels that her studies at Juilliard only touched the surface of music-making; “Juilliard led to the mentality of career and ego, and used the instrument as a means of achieving it. Only after that attitude fell by the wayside did artistic development take precedence. Instead of expending energy on publicity leaflets and the concert circuit, I studied further and saw beautiful places’.

In 1978, Green left New York, receiving a grant to study for a year and a half in London with Jacqueline du Pré. She remembers them their work together fondly. ‘Jackie had such a sense of humour and fun and loved to “be naughty”, a phrase she sometimes used to describe how one should execute certain pieces. Jackie had me bring in a different concerto every week or two. We worked a lot on legato playing, most memo- rably on Dvorak’s Slavonic Dances, which is very simple but has to be beautifully sus- teined and must sound as if time has stopped. Jackie believed that really beautiful legato
playing was the sign of a great cellist, not fast and brilliant playing.

In the lessons, Jackie demonstrated fingers and bowings with very free movements but from one week to the next she suddenly couldn't hold a coffee cup without shaking. As times she would become very dreamy. Sometimes she put on her own recordings during or after lunch. It was such a part of her still, to share herself with another person through her cello-voice. Perhaps my most memorable and touching moment with Jackie was when she played me her recording of Slow Woods. Seeing that I was trying hard to hold back my tears, she took my hand and gave me the most tender look.

I never forget her.

Nancy Green continued her studies in Dusseldorf with Johannes Goritzki, and found in him a teacher who encouraged her individuality and brought out in her playing the qualities she'd been seeking. He made the most important and deepest changes in my approach to playing the cello. Through him I learned to tune into deeper levels of the music and myself. Instead of using the same warm and intense vibro in every passage, I was challenged to find the sound to reflect a particular passage. It might not be the most intense and exciting sound one could produce, but it would be the suitable one for that particular phrase. For example, he would describe the first cello entrance in the G minor Sonata of Chopin as having a "parlante" or speaking quality, while a certain passage in a Beethoven sonata would have a "tender" or nurturing character. Goritzki is very repliqued by the sort of playing where one is constantly "playing what one can do." After all my years of playing the cello, working with Goritzki was like opening the door onto a huge, beautiful world. I looked back at my earlier times with the instrument as having actually very little to do with music. Goritzki has a remarkable ability to express a musical idea in terms of a visual or poetic image. I remember a lesson on the Schumann Concerto at Prussia Cove where he urged me to look out the window at the waves below to find the right mood in the passage with the double stops in the slow movement. This was typical of him.

After her studies Green served as a teaching assistant to Goritzki. She also was appointed as principal cellist in his chamber orchestra, the Deutsche Kammerakademie where she remained for three years. While in Dusseldorf, Green became still more committed to a natural approach to life and to her music. She found a modus on aton to her playing, as it is allowed her to relax completely and to concentrate fully.

Today people react immediately to the slightest flaw in pitch or scratchy tone but if there is a blatantly unnatural phrasing or a wrong accent it goes unnoticed. It is this emphasis on natural expression that Green finds one of the greatest inspirations for me in this regard. His performances are so deeply moving that they are spiritual experiences rather than musical performances.

Among string players, Green naturally admires Jascha Heifetz. "The common assumption that his playing is cold is based on his appearance and manner, and consequently projected onto his playing. For me, he is one of the most intensely expressive musicians to be heard. Another is Fritz Kreisler. It would be difficult finding a string player today who could play a passage three so beautifully vibrantly and artificially as Kreisler did. His bowing, in particular, has an incredible live fabric and speaking quality. The illusion that people today play technically better than in earlier times would be shattered if people would regard technique as inseparable from expression. Kreisler is criticized for faulty intonation, but it is far easier to play with perfect intonation if one's playing is musically bland. It's a matter of where your priorities are."

"In my Juilliard days I remember listening to recordings of Eisler, Szigeti and Shadows which were so beautiful and moving that I tried to pinpoint what is that special quality. I started to notice that not one simple note was actually static and that there was a breathing quality and this looking in many musicians of today, and a central factor, I find, in the difference between the general tendency in modern playing style and that of the earlier days. With the teaching of Ivan and Leonard Rose the ideal seems to be that a musician is perfect in sustaining of a note from top to bottom without any detection of a sound. Although this is very admirable to do, it can be overdone by being static and bland playing does it not have speaking quality. By playing the string and drawing a bow a hair bowing a few notes, one can control the whole bow and colouring of a vibrato, one gives a superficially beautiful playing, but the depth is missing. The other side of the coin, that in which all the subtleties are left out, is also indiscernible. The effect is hearing newswriters today, who read scripts with a kind of sing-song with ups and downs in the sentences, as though they are reading a language they don't actually use."

As a result, Green cared for what she called the "breathing quality" that she found in many of her teachers, especially exactly as he taught me. I find the healthy, balanced, involves no tension and, quite simply, students, I start by concentrating on breathing, dividing the bow into its last drawing long bows. My own development the ability to pull a very full and free sound from the instrument near the bridge and absolutest from frog to tip with round bow. They must do this with a very deep, wide arch. The bow moves up and down, goes against many habits built over years. The way of using the sound, the balance of sound, which comes from using back in the shoulders and back with the hand. One has to develop a feel of control so that what is healthy tension which feels like. But one has to work on very specific to achieve this. When the student had this, we work on breathing within one bow. Just as one onto the natural tendencies of the bow, as Goritzki was not to attempt to manipulate it at all. One must also do the same in the way towards music, music, etc. It is a way, the last, not just cello technique.

Predicarly, Green is more with producing a good sound from moment she has rather than with sampling many different sound. She plays a 1732 Paolo Antonio Testa or a 1744 by Hibi. However, she isn't 100 per cent satisfied with either combination, and to find another bow. The right bow is as important as the right instrument thought were problems with the instrument at the bows solved different problems, an interesting instrument can look long and straight and the sound doesn't planed. She says with a friend once said about the scrupulous with the music, look of the cello, is outrageously clumsy, the more evidence that LSO was used. It is now been ten years that Green came to Europe. She merits a sense of some of the playing experiences since leaving. Playing chamber music as it has made an incredible impression. In
playing style and that of the earlier generations. With the teaching of Ivan Galamian and Leonard Chinese bowing and finger movements. The perfect sustaining of a note from the frog to the top and back without any desirable fingers in sound. Although this is very important to be able to do, it can be overemphasized, the result being that the playing is static and bland. The playing is with little or no speaking quality. By placing the bow on the string and drawing a harsh sound through the whole bow and colouring it with a warm vibrato, one gives a superficial impression of beautiful playing, but the depth of expression is missing. The other side of the coin is playing where articulation and inflection is used indiscriminately; the effect is analogous to hearing amateur players today who read their scripts with a kind of song-singing inflection with ups and downs in the most random places, as though they were reading something in a language they don't actually understand.

In a result, Green carefully avoids on the 'breathing quality' that she learned with Gorinski in her own playing. "I think the breath exactly as he taught me. I find that this way is healthy, balanced, involves no unnecessary tension and, quite simply, works. With my students, I start by concentrating on bow changes, dividing the bow in half at first and later drawing long bows. My students must develop the ability to pull a very centered but full and free sound from the instrument quite near the bridge and absolutely consistent from frog to tip with round bow changes. They must do this with a very definite feeling. I take a lot of work to achieve since it goes against many habits built up over the years. The feeling must be of effortlessness which comes from using muscles far back in the shoulder and back and not in the hand. One has to develop a feeling of letting go control so that what is left is only a bowing movement which feels like no tension. But one has to work on very specific things to achieve that. When the student has mastered this, we work on breathing and inflection within one bow. Just as one must tune into the natural tendencies of the bow ('Follow the bow,' as Gorinski would say), and not attempt to manipulate it at every moment, one must also do the same in one's attitude towards music, nature, etc. It is a whole way of life, not just cello technique."

Predictably, Green is more concerned with producing a good sound from the instrument than with teaching bowing and finger movements. She plays a 1732 Paolo Antonio Testore cello with a beautiful Piras violin - a Hill. However, the isto 100 per cent satisfied with either combination, and would like to find a better solution. "The bow is new and it is important as the right instrument. Things I have used are fine, but I just don't know how to do with the instrument at all, and different bows solved different problems. My cello is an interesting instrument in that the sides bow long and straight and the top looks翘翘. It is a 'friend once said about the scroll, which in keeping with the rustic nature of the cello, is worryingly clumsy, that it was concrete evidence that LSD was used on it."

Green received her training in Europe since leaving New York. "Playing chamber music at Gorinski made an incredible impression. Just imagine, a house on a clifftop in Cornwall, overlooking the sea; playing music with sheep outside the window." She is equally bowing in the side-by-side or solo performances in festivals in Switzerland. "We were near Montreux in a chalet overlooking Lake Geneva, and all over a huge table at meals, surrounded by inspiring scenery. I think being in the mountains in Switzerland was the happiest time for me."

Green admits that her lack of base for more than a year or two at a time has hindered her career. "It's been good for artistic growth, and leaving about myself. Carefully, though, it's been harder than I thought because she has a duet with pianist Diana Kasc, who lives in Brooklyn, and it's very difficult to keep in touch, since we live in different places, we're only available to rehearse to give concerts for very limited periods of time. I also play frequently with Caroline Palmer, who lives here in England."

Another reason for the recent lull in Green's solo career is that she is very much interested in the music of her own time, some of which is not very well known. For instance, she has recently given a number of performances of the music of the Baroque period, and has planned to give a performance of the music of the 18th century, some of which is not very well known. For instance, she has recently given a number of performances of the music of the Baroque period, and has planned to give a performance of the music of the 18th century.