



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 prizewinning engineer at IBM, a sister was a doctoral student on a National Science Foundation Award, and a brother scored 800 (a perfect mark) on his law exams. Accustomed to the family's history of success, the atmosphere that motivated 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 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 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, Einar Holm, was a wonderful musician and a great person. He lent me a beautiful Vuillaume cello for eight years. Jeff, as he calls himself, had worked earlier with Leonard Rose 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 practised 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 Weston 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 début 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 naïve 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 I had played. I've slowly learned that the music business is often dominated by people who are less musical than the players 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 15, 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, sculpting and literature to see its ridiculousness.

'As a student I believed that I would find satisfaction in winning competition, but from my family atmosphere I understand 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 undress 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 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 glissandos. Jackie had me bring in a different concerto every week or two. We worked a lot on legato playing, most memorably on Dvorák's *Silent Woods*, which is very simple but has to be beautifully sustained 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 fingerings and bowings with very free movements but from one week to the next she suddenly couldn't hold a coffee cup without shaking. At these 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 *Silent Woods*. Seeing that I was trying hard to hold back my tears, she took my hand and gave me the most tender look. I'll 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 vibrato 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 "parlando" or speaking quality, while a certain passage in a Beethoven sonata would have a "judgmental" sonority. Goritzki is very repelled by the sort of playing where one is constantly "showing what one can do". After all my years of playing the cello, working

'Just as one must tune into the natural tendencies of the bow, one must also do the same in one's attitude to music, nature. It is a whole way of being, not just cello technique'

with Goritzki was like opening the doors 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 meditation an asset to her playing, as it 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 lacking in many musicians of today, and what she finds so special about musicians of the past. 'Wilhelm Fürtwangler has been the greatest inspiration 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 assertion 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 thirds so beautifully vibrantly and articulately as Kreisler did. His bowing, in particular, has an incredibly alive 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 criticised 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 Enesco, Szigeti and Shumsky which were so beautiful and moving that I tried to pinpoint what it was that gave it this special quality. I started to notice that not one single note was actually static and that there was a breathing quality and flexibility that permeated every note. This is a central factor, I find, in the difference between the general tendency in modern



DR. THOMASTIK-INFELD/WIEN

P.O.B. 206, A-1051 VIENNA, AUSTRIA

playing style and that of the earlier generation. With the teaching of Ivan Galamian and Leonard Rose the ideal seemed to be the perfect sustaining of a note from the frog to the tip and back without any detectable lapses in sound. Although this is very important to be able to do, it can be overstressed, the result being static and bland playing with little speaking quality. By plastering the bow on the string and drawing a lush 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 analagous to hearing newscasters today who read their scripts with a kind of sing-song inflection with ups and downs in the most random places, as though they are reading something in a language they don't actually understand.'

As a result, Green carefully passes on the 'breathing quality' that she learned with Goritzki to her own students. 'I teach the bow 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 which takes a lot of work to achieve since it goes against many habits built up over the years. The feeling must be one 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 healthy tension which feels like no tension. But one has to work on very specific things to achieve this. 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 Goritzki 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 being, not just cello technique.'

Predictably, Green is more concerned with producing a good sound from the equipment she has rather than with spending hours sampling many different instruments. She plays a 1732 Paolo Antonio Testore cello with a beautiful Fétique bow (her back-up is a Hill). However, she isn't 100 per cent satisfied with either combination, and would like to find another bow. 'The right bow is nearly as important as the right instrument. Things I thought were problems with the cello weren't to do with the instrument at all, and different bows solved different problems. My cello is an interesting instrument in that the sides look long and straight and the top looks unevenly planed.' She says with a smile that, 'a friend once said about the scroll, which in keeping with the rustic look of the rest of the cello, is outrageously clumsy, that it was concrete evidence that LSD was used in 1732.'

It has now been ten years since Nancy Green came to Europe. She remembers with a fresh sense of wonder some of her performing experiences since leaving New York, 'Playing chamber music at Prussia Cove made an incredible impression. Just imagine,

a house on a cliff in Cornwall, overlooking the sea, playing music with sheep outside the window!' She is equally glowing in her memories of performing in festivals in Switzerland. 'We were near Montreux in a chalet overlooking Lake Geneva, and all sat around 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 learning about myself. Career-wise, though, it's been hard having no roots. I have a duo with pianist Diana Kacso, who lives in Brooklyn, and it is very difficult since, because we live in different places, we're only available to rehearse and 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 has been the birth of her son, Rafael. 'It was pretty much of a struggle to maintain my level of playing while caring for Rafael. On one hand, I feel guilty about all the times I was engrossed in my work. On the other hand, he's developed a certain independence and self-sufficiency, and doesn't have a frustrated mama who has given herself up for him.

'I did a fairly extended tour of recitals and concerto appearances in the United States when Rafael was only four months old, and both he and my husband Matthias came along for the entire nine weeks. When I look back, I don't know how I managed it! It was hard for me when, ten minutes before I had to start, I would have to feed him rather than warm up and concentrate. Matthias is a violinist and understood how important it was for me to play, so I was very lucky to have his full support through that time. Now that Rafael is two and a half, I'm finding it less and less difficult to get to the cello. Also, I'm told that there is a new dimension in my playing, more spontaneity, freedom and depth. I suppose when one opens oneself to a new experience that gives one a deeper connection to life, it inevitably makes some kind of deep unconscious change. I'm also very lucky that Rafael has two sets of doting grandparents, and when I have engagements in the US or Europe he stays happily with either my parents or with Matthias's in Germany.' Green has no particular wish for her son to take up the cello, but he already appears to be musically inclined. Says the proud mother indulgently, 'He takes the cello when it's within reach and doesn't hit it, and puts the bow in the right place. He's even got a good tone and he's only two and a half! Because everyone who comes to the house has an instrument with them, he probably thinks that everyone in the world plays!'

After searching for a musical environment that suited both Nancy and Matthias, the family was drawn back to England two years ago. Nancy now teaches at Chetham's in Manchester, and speaks highly of her students there. Now settled in a home not far from Heathrow, Nancy Green seems to have found the place where she can nurture her family and her career, without compromising her artistic ideals. 'There are woods nearby, and we can just see Windsor Castle faintly from the window. I feel like I've come full circle. I've finally made it out to the country again.'



Suttler
Strad-Pad
(It 'breathes'!)
U.S. Pat. 2675726

ABSOLUTELY

**NO IRRITATING SYNTHETICS
OR FABRICS TO HARDEN
OR PERSPIRATION STAIN!**

ONLY

**PURE LATEX
ULTRA-SOFT. SAFE FOAM**

**RELIEVES
Muscular Tension
of
DANGEROUS JAW IMBALANCE!**

(See M. Somborac Report, pg. 123
THE STRAD, JUNE 1984)

**ELIMINATES or DIMINISHES
DANGEROUS DISFIGURING
CHINREST MARKS.**

Professionals say.

"I can't play without my Strad-Pad!"

AMAZING LONG LIFE!

Seldom needs washing!
Instant Removal

Standard size [approx. 4" x 5" or 10.2mm x 12.7mm] \$13.95
Large size [approx. 5 1/4" x 6 1/4" or 13.2mm x 15.7mm] \$16.95
Outside U.S.A. add \$2.50 shipping
U.S.A. or Canada add .95 shipping
California only add .06 sales tax
Money order or check - U.S.A. currency

FEATHER-LIGHT

Strad-Pad

40 South Circle Drive
Santa Cruz, California 95060
U.S.A. (408) 423-3414