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NEWSLETTER  
Spring 2018



# LONDON CELLO SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## Beethoven's Cello

• *Nancy Green*



Authors R. Larry Todd & Marc Moskowitz (L and R)

In October of 2017, the landmark new book by Marc Moskowitz and R. Larry Todd, *Beethoven's Cello: Five Revolutionary Sonatas and Their World*, was released by the U.K. publisher Boydell and Brewer. In Steven Isserlis's preface, he states that, as he sees it, 'Bach's six suites for solo cello are understandably often referred to as "the cellist's bible"; but actually, our bible, like the other, somewhat older one, consists of two books. The second comprises Beethoven's sonatas for cello and piano... A monumental contribution to the cello repertoire, these works changed the course of history for the instrument.'

Approaching the task of recording this musical genius's complete works has, for me, been accompanied by a deep sense of

sacred responsibility, since these works have such an important place in our repertoire. The challenge of bringing to this music all the love and devotion in one's possession has been at once inspiring and humbling.

It's hard to believe that in the time these historically all-important works were written they had, at best, a small fraction of the attention and appreciation that we now give them. The context within which one brings a new recording into the musical world in the 21st century is, of course, jarringly different to the context into which the works were actually born when first composed by Beethoven. The musical ears of the public were accustomed to what we now consider to be light-weight virtuosic fluff, clearly meant to entertain instead of plumb the depths of the human spirit. One can



Carl Schloesser, Pinx.

D. Appleton & Co. 1

Photogravure Goupil

*Beethoven in his Study*

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imagine the shock it must have been for audiences of the time to hear even the early Op. 5 sonatas on first performance; No. 1 in F major, with its minicadenza near the end of the first movement, or No. 2 in G minor, with its extremely long rests at the end of the first movement, must have left the audiences of the day completely confounded. And imagine hearing for the first time the strange drone-like effect in the F major sonata (which Beethoven also revisited in the later Op. 102 No. 1 C major sonata) or, a few short years later, the Op. 102 No. 2 D major sonata with its transcendent fugue, and middle Adagio movement that is as heart-wrenching and profound as

anything ever written for the instrument, before or since. As the title of Moskowitz and Todd's new book suggests, Beethoven's ground-breaking sonatas were indeed revolutionary, and clearly the precursors of the modern cello sonata. They opened the door and laid the groundwork for the great sonatas of Mendelssohn, Chopin, Richard Strauss, and Brahms, among others.

Bernhard Romberg premiered Beethoven's Op. 5 sonatas in F major and G minor in Vienna with the composer at the keyboard, but apparently never performed them again. In fact, for the first two thirds of the nineteenth century Beethoven's cello sonatas



were rarely played. It was with dismay and shock that I first read in Todd and Moskovitz's book that Bernhard Romberg, one of the most prominent cellists of Beethoven's time, declined Beethoven's offer to write a cello concerto for the cellist, because Romberg only played concertos he himself had written. If only Romberg had appreciated the enormity of what was being offered to him. What a pity for future generations of cellists that we were so close to having a concerto by Beethoven in our repertoire!

Interestingly, all five sonatas were published as piano sonatas with obbligato cello parts, and they were issued in two separate parts, as was the custom of the day. But Beethoven's writing was complex and the cello and piano fundamentally interdependent. It quickly became clear that this parity caused not only difficulty in rehearsal, but major problems for the performers in trying to understand the piece as a whole. So when Nikolaus Simrock released Op. 102, he hit upon a novelty in the music publishing business: now the piano part included the cello part above, creating a score for easy reference. When learning pieces by Ferdinand Ries, a student of Beethoven's, I experienced first-hand the difficulties of trying to learn complex works in this way since there was no published version with the cello and piano in the same score. I came to realize how much I had taken for granted having a modern score.

Since Beethoven's five cello sonatas and three sets of variations represent the sweep of his creativity, from his early (Op. 5) to middle (Op. 69) and late styles (Op. 102), recording the entire cycle has felt like a task of epic proportions. The closing statement in Moskovitz and Todd's new book reads, 'as we look to the future, these monumental works will no doubt continue to meet us halfway, ever demanding the most profound interpretations we can summon, and in return, granting players and listeners alike something akin to a Homeric odyssey - a voyage for the mind, the soul, and the human spirit.' Their statement couldn't ring more true; it has been a monumental journey. I feel deeply privileged as an artist to have been able to spend the last two years living, breathing, and experiencing these works on a daily basis.

Embarking on the spiritual journey of recording Beethoven's complete cello works, one starts with the early sonatas, youthful in their exuberance and vitality. The op. 5, no. 1 and 2 sonatas in F major and G minor respectively, written for the King of Prussia Friedrich Wilhelm II, were in the grand, elevated style, suitable

for the monarchy. In both sonatas, their extended *adagio* openings with dotted rhythms (considered since the seventeenth century a musical metaphor for the literal or figurative presence of royalty) were followed without pause by an energetic *Allegro* movement. The piano writing in both of these early sonatas is virtuosic, with cascading scales and arpeggios. In contrast, the relatively simple cello line is often lyrical or engages in playful dialogue with the piano. The piano is the dominant force, although there are occasional outbursts of brief melodic statements and memorable themes in the cello.

In the sweeping grandeur of the Op. 69 A major sonata, the third of the five, which owns a special place in history as an important precursor to the modern cello sonata, the cello finally plays an especially prominent role, an equal partner to the piano. In fact, the opening statement belongs entirely to the cello, all alone. This gesture was something quite revolutionary for its time.

The two opus 102 sonatas, in C major and D major, are the culmination of Beethoven's writing for the cello. Although listeners and reviewers struggled to understand Op. 102 (one reviewer described them as 'among the most remarkable and strange piano works written in a long time', and found the 'melody often rough, the harmony sometimes harsh'), they are now a treasured and important part of the standard repertoire. Moskovitz and Todd's book states that 'freedom vs. control became the watchwords of his last sonatas. The first of the two, in C major, Beethoven actually labeled in the manuscript a *'freie Sonate'* ('free sonata'). The sweet tenderness of the first movement of the C major sonata, where long, singing lyrical lines predominate, is followed by a playful and humorous *Allegro* movement, which seems to begin as if it were a cat and mouse chase. Also radical for its time is the rustic-sounding drone in the cello; first one note, then the fifth as a double-stop. When the piano tries to approach, the cello jumps right after it in a whimsical chase.

The D major sonata, Op. 102 No. 2 is, to my mind, one of the most sublime works we cellists have in our repertoire. But just three years before Beethoven's death the two Op. 102 sonatas, especially challenging and way ahead of their time, had still not yet been accepted. One critic wrote of the incredible *Adagio* middle movement of the D major as 'sustained in a gloomy, almost weary and diseased mood', and, of the last movement, 'a fugue such as the one in question will hardly be liked by anyone, not by the expert and even less by the dilettante.' The



Nancy Green

fugue was considered to be not only incomprehensible but unplayable, with its complex mirror inversion, *stretti*, and pedal points, in stark contrast to the emotional intensity of the slow movement.

In my experience, the slow middle movement is possibly the most profound music ever written for our instrument. It starts with an aching chorale, as if we are speaking our last words in the face of impending death. The stern starkness of the chorale melts into a middle section of a totally different sentiment, a loving caress, as if remembrances of those we have loved and who have loved us are being held gently and lovingly in the heart for the last time. And as we turn to face death, there is almost a commanding quality to the dotted rhythms in the cello, as the piano continues the movement's original chorale theme. The dotted rhythm has a power and nobility, a commanding poise, and we are pulled inexorably with it until we ultimately arrive at long, held notes in the cello and piano. Here we feel as if we no longer know where we are, as if we have lost our bearings and are suspended in mid-air. As the harmonies slowly unfold, there are two expressive hairpins, swells, as if our last breaths are being exhaled. Then the breath stops and we are resting on an A. There is a long rest, then an A an octave below. Yet another long rest, and then, at the final breath, we sink to a long G#.

This incredible moment in the last of Beethoven's sonatas for cello is inexpressibly profound and a revelatory moment of transformation. From this pivotal moment, all the lines begin to rise. First the cello seems to resolve to a C#, and as it holds this pitch, the piano harmonies seem to be searching for direction, at once hopeful and more light-filled. Then the cello speaks in a series of rising arpeggios, holding its breath and

resting finally on a fermata E, before spilling gently, all alone, into a fugue that begins with a rising scale that pauses mid-air like a question mark. The piano answers similarly. They then join hands and embark into a transcendent fugue, a world of pure abstract thought, untethered from physicality. Rhythmically, in the last bars of the fugue, the listener loses momentarily the feeling of where the strong beat is, only for the movement to end with an unmistakable placement of the strong beat as if to say, yes, we are home now.

The unworldly ecstasy of this fugue must have been bewildering to listeners in Beethoven's time, and probably still confounding to many even today. But in its sublime transcendence, what a spectacular way to close the last cello work of one of the most visionary creative geniuses of all time.

- *Beethoven's Cello – Five Revolutionary Sonatas and Their World* by Marc D. Moskowitz and R Larry Todd. Published 2017 by Boydell Press, UK  
<https://boydellandbrewer.com/beethoven-s-cello-five-revolutionary-sonatas-and-their-world.html>
- *Beethoven – Complete Works for Cello and Piano*  
 Nancy Green, cello  
 Frederick Moyer, piano  
 JRI Recordings  
 catalogue number - J143  
<https://www.jrirecordings.com/index.php>
- [www.nancygreencello.com](http://www.nancygreencello.com)

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Boydell & Brewer, the music book publisher, is delighted to offer members of the London Cello Society a 25% discount on Beethoven's Cello: *Five Revolutionary Sonatas and Their World* by Marc Moskowitz and R Larry Todd. As the first English-language book to explore the beloved cello repertoire of Beethoven, it is the ideal companion for cellists, pianists, and chamber-music devotees. The book explores the changes that string instruments underwent during Beethoven's lifetime, including the newly-invented Tourte bow, and looks at a cello owned by Beethoven. You can read more about the book here: <http://boybrew.co/2umK3LN>. The discount will make the price £22.46, instead of £29.95 RRP.

Simply quote the promotional code BB529 when prompted at the checkout at [www.boydellandbrewer.com](http://www.boydellandbrewer.com) or via telephone when calling 01243 843291 or emailing [customer@wiley.com](mailto:customer@wiley.com). Offer ends 31 March 2018.

# Of Special Interest

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## For the Love of Learning

An interview with Kim Mackrell,  
incoming Director of the Amateurs and Adult Learners Division

*Kim Mackrell studied cello at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Leonard Stehn, where she won the Guildhall School Cello prize. Work abroad followed, in Bermuda with the Guildhall Quartet, and as principal cellist in the Las Palmas Philharmonic Orchestra.*

*She joined the BBC Philharmonic in Manchester, leaving after six years to freelance with Orchestras in the north. Since returning to London her freelance work has been an eclectic mix of genres; regular LSO concerts and tours; solo cellist with the Kosh Dance/Theatre Company; twenty years with contemporary music group Harmonie Band performing original scores for silent film, taking projects to schools, and giving concerts; twelve years a member of the Solarek Piano Trio; founder of the Pisces String Quartet in 2004.*

*Her teaching practise began to attract adult amateurs, and through the cello section coaching and group work that followed, Chamber Cellos Courses was formed in 2008 <http://chambercellos.co.uk>. Her recent appointment with the London Cello Society has been a very happy one.*

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### ***How did you come to the cello?***

At primary school there was only one music teacher. He was completely dedicated to the task of getting as many kids playing as was possible. He taught all instruments, wind included, in order to have an orchestra. He was ferocious, passionate, and large. We decided he was six feet round the waist. Both he and the headmaster believed strongly in music as a vital part of children's development.

### ***What reasons do you hear from adult learners about why they pick it up later in life?***

Many adults gave up in their early teens or earlier and have always regretted it. Picking it up again often coincides with a time in life when a space opens up, like kids going to school or leaving home, or a job change or retirement. They want some 'me time'

and the absorption of learning an instrument is perfect. It is sociable, challenging, fun. Some players continued as far as music college before settling for other careers, but have carried on playing at a high level in the amateur world. Those who decide to start from scratch later in life have usually fallen in love with the sound of the cello and want to be a part of the cello world.

### ***What do you enjoy about teaching adult learners?***

I hugely enjoy their enthusiasm and the fact that they will do anything for a playing opportunity. I find it so interesting to find out their different backgrounds and how they came to the cello.

### ***Are adults more disciplined about practice than children? How do you motivate regular practice for people with many responsibilities?***

Busy adults can have difficulty finding time to practice regularly. But unlike children, they don't feel the need to pretend they've practiced! I think it's something they want to have more time for; after all this is something they are doing for enjoyment. The trick is to not worry if there are only fifteen minutes spare in a day, but to do that short practice and enjoy it. Playing is a physical thing and short and often is far more effective than one long session a week.

### ***Do you think pitch is something that can be trained or must there be an inherent aptitude for it?***

I think it can be trained. It may just take a while longer for intonation to become secure, and it may be that the subtleties are difficult to perceive. The fingers can learn where the 'in tune' spot is and players who aren't blessed with a refined ear can still play perfectly well. Ensemble playing is revealing and extremely good for learning to tune in to others.

### ***Which piece would you recommend to an adult learner who wanted to hear something they are unlikely to already know? How do you seek out new and interesting repertoire?***

If 'astounding' is what they want then Kodály's *Sonata for Solo Cello* (Opus 8) is one to listen to. It is almost impossible to believe it's coming from just one instrument. There is a live performance by Janos Starker on Youtube and it's worth watching. He is one cool dude, giving no hint of the extreme technical difficulties involved.

Word of mouth opens up repertoire, discussions with other players and enthusiasts. I find that many amateurs know more about repertoire than I do! Following up on music heard in passing on the radio is also a good way to expand.

***What's your greatest success story or surprise so far during your adult teaching career?***

I have recently begun to teach a lovely man, an ex professional wind player who was a member of one of the London orchestras for 28 years. Since retirement he has taken up the cello with real enthusiasm and determination. I am finding it so interesting teaching a musician, and am enjoying seeing the progress he is making.

***When you run workshops, what drives your planning? What are the important factors about the day or weekend?***

The enjoyment and inclusivity of the players is foremost in planning. The venue must be a pleasant place to be, warm and with enough space for cases

and the all important tea urn. Programming is based on the level of ability, and all parts are individually allocated to ensure challenges are within the player's range. I've found that support amongst the players for others seems to be the norm, which makes for a lovely warm atmosphere. And there must be enough tea and cake to sink a ship!

***Is there anything you'd like to add for members of the LCS Adult Learner division?***

I'm very much looking forward to meeting all the members and hearing their thoughts and ideas. I hope the division will grow in a form that works for all, with events that appeal to a range of interests. Playing together is going to be at the heart of planning, with as many hands-on events as can be squeezed into a year. I hope friendships will form over time, and that the events become a social occasion as much as a musical one.

***Can you share any thoughts about the next divisional event?***

This will be a day of making music, all hands on deck. There will be time for discussion and idea swapping, but the main objective is for everyone to have a really good immersive play. I will send parts out in advance so those who have time can have a look at what's in store. For some players the day could be a bit of a reunion, for others a chance to meet like minded people.

## Cello Talk

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### Viva Vivaldi!

• Sue Sheppard

I am always surprised that most of my students at the RNCM and Trinity Laban have never played a Vivaldi sonata. This is extraordinary! Vivaldi is one of the world's most famous composers, he wrote nine sonatas (all very good pieces) and they are not technically too challenging. Maybe that is the problem: teachers at the colleges are focused on perfecting a student's technique and perhaps they don't consider practising Vivaldi will help much towards that end. Of course, if you can manage Brahms and Beethoven sonatas you won't have much

trouble playing the *notes* of Vivaldi but there is so much more to learn than that.

Firstly, we should put Vivaldi in the context of the solo cello repertoire. In the 17th century the cello was mostly an accompanying instrument, playing the bass line for the flashier ones, e.g. the violin, or for dance music. But towards the end of the century its solo possibilities began to emerge. Have a look at the seven Ricercars of Domenico Gabrielli, written c.1680, and see how, though the first piece is almost





a complicated and fascinating subject but fear not, the principles are easy to understand.

Just as effective speakers do not speak in a monotone or without emphasis on important words, so in music we have to vary our expression constantly. The listeners should be on the edge of their seats waiting for the next surprise, great or small, and should never have the feeling that the music is trundling on like a well-oiled machine. Just as in speech, the music consists of syllables, words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs.

No two notes should be played identically, just as when we are speaking, a word of two or more syllables will have a natural stress on one of them. Baroque composers loved variety and inequality—a group of eight semiquavers, for instance, is not technically ‘better’ if played exactly equally in a machine-like way, however perfectly in tune they are. They need the quality of a human voice, which can never achieve such consistency.

like a bass line, by the time you reach the seventh, Gabrielli is imaginatively exploiting the cello’s potential. By the 1720s the cello was often used in its solo capacity and Bach was writing the most sublime music of the whole solo cello repertoire—in my opinion!

Vivaldi was writing his sonatas at around the same time (though they were not published until c.1740) and they clearly show the advance in Italian cello technique from those early works by Gabrielli. The slow movements are expressive and lyrical, the fast movements full of variety of articulation and excitement. However, there are no dynamic markings and most of the sonatas are designated *largo* for all the first and third movements and *allegro* for the second and fourth. It is quite possible to look no further, play the right notes at the right time and produce very boring performances. So how do we find the secret to exciting Vivaldi?

There is a secret, though it’s easy enough to find. The most vitally important piece of information you will ever learn about how to perform baroque repertoire is that composers were imitating speech. The magic word is RHETORIC, not in the rather derogatory sense we often use it now but in its true meaning: the art of *persuading* your audience. There is plenty to read on the internet about rhetoric in music, particularly an article from New Grove, which explains how baroque composers turned the techniques of verbal rhetoric into musical ones. It’s

Baroque composers wanted to engage the listener to experience many different emotions in one movement, so deciding that ‘this movement is sad’ or ‘this one is happy’ is too simplistic. Have a look at any movement of a Vivaldi sonata and see how you can make the mood change within four bars. These mood changes are helped by the great variety of articulation (bowings) that is in the early printed editions. Never try to iron out the differences and make the bowings too similar.

You have great freedom, also, in the use of ornamentation. There are quite a few trills marked in the cello part but you can put in extra decorations wherever you like, especially on the repeats. Listen to lots of recordings to hear how and where this can be done and notice that there is huge variation between performers. This is as it should be! Roel Dieltiens is particularly imaginative and sometimes breathtaking in his ornamentation, making his performances sound as if they are improvised on the spot.

Finally, always buy a good edition of any piece you are studying. That means an edition that gives you all the information contained in the manuscript or first edition and is very clear about the additional markings made by the modern editor. The one to buy in this case is Bärenreiter BA 6995. It is a meticulous edition of 2003 by Bettina Hoffmann and armed with that, and lots of imagination, you will have a wonderful time exploring these delightful sonatas.

# From our Members

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## • From Wendy Max

### **Accidentally On Purpose: Becoming A Cello Teacher**

To celebrate 40 years of teaching, I recently published the story of how from nowhere I became a reasonably well known cello teacher for children. I began to learn to play the cello myself aged 32 in 1972 in order to help my own children who were just starting violin and cello lessons. I went to work with Sheila Nelson on the Tower Hamlets Strings Project in 1978 and then taught at the Royal Academy of Music from 1985 until 2008. I started the First String Experience and Primary Academy programmes, there as well as teaching in many countries and on many childrens' strings courses; I still run my own for very young un-auditioned string players at Frinton on Sea every summer.

As well as telling the story of how I became a cello teacher, the book is full of tips for aspiring music teachers, insights into what talent is, and how media attention affects people. It also has appendices that share many of my music learning games and some of the (downloadable) sing and play songs that I still use with my pupils.

The book costs £15, but I am happy to let LCS members purchase it for £10 plus postage. To do this you should go to my website [www.wendymax.com](http://www.wendymax.com) and download and send the completed form back to me with a cheque for £15.50 (incl. 5.50 p&p). Or you can email me on [wendymmax@aol.com](mailto:wendymmax@aol.com) or telephone 0208 4559308. Please telephone me if you need my bank details.

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## • Ellen Moerman

### **ProQuartet Chamber Music Course in the Luberon (France)**

Last August, I attended a five-day chamber music for amateurs course organised by ProQuartet in Apt (Luberon). The idea is to turn up as a group, with one piece of your choice, which is performed in public at the end of the course in the lovely Baroque church next door. Two coaches (both professional chamber musicians) share the task of getting you ready, in the form of a 90-minute session every day. You pay the course fee and sort out your own accommodation (information is available) and food solutions.

Apt is a small town where almost everything can be done on foot, including visits to the local restaurants (if meals aren't taken as improvised pique-niques) and the cave cooperative (for lunch and wine tasting!). Car parking is not really a problem either.

The course runs in conjunction with the Conservatoire in Apt. There is plenty of (cool!) rehearsal space, the pianos were good and the Conservatoire staff made us feel very welcome. Pierre Nentwig (Marseille Conservatoire) was our inspiring cello coach. We were also welcome to attend the string quartet masterclasses for young professionals which took place at about the same time.

Cooperation between ProQuartet, the Conservatoire and the Luberon String Quartet Festival meant we could also easily go to the concerts taking place on most evenings in the various picturesque Luberon village churches. Of the concerts I attended, two stand out in particular. The first was the all-Shostakovich programme offered by the David Oistrakh Quartet. Serious stuff, beautifully played with breath-taking technique whilst doing full justice to the sharp and rough edges of the music. The second was given over two successive evenings by the joyful and versatile Modigliani Quartet, with Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky (sextet) and Mozart, Shostakovich and Brahms. If that doesn't make you want to play chamber music, nothing will.

If you're tempted to try this great course, it's taking place this year between 20 and 24 August. For more information, see <https://www.proquartet.fr/en/luberon-workshop>.

How about an all-cello ensemble this year?

ProQuartet also organizes courses for young professionals and runs a data base for amateur musicians across Europe which can be found at <https://www.proquartet.fr/en>.

Details of this year's String Quartet Festival will soon be available on <http://www.quatuors-luberon.org/>