

COMPETITIONS, CAREERS, AND ALL THAT CROCK

The fame of great men ought always to be estimated by the means used to acquire it.

- Francois de la Rochefoucauld

"When I was young and foolish," Staryk remembers, "without cares except for practicing, naturally the concert stage was an attraction. Even making trips, no matter where, was exciting. The desire for a solo career came gradually, with many influences from the outside reinforcing inward impulses. Like a racehorse wanting to get out and run, there was a desire within me to leap out of the gates and onto the track."

London promised to give him the chance.

A career in a nutshell

During his Royal Philharmonic years, Staryk made many solo appearances while simultaneously upholding the responsibilities of the orchestra's leadership. His first important engagement was on December 1, 1957, with Jascha Horenstein and the RPO in Royal Festival Hall, performing Paganini's Concerto No. 1. Staryk then paired with pianist Gerald Moore for a Wigmore Hall recital on May 4, 1958 — a career move at the same level of significance as an American recital debut in Carnegie Hall in New York.

On the evening of the 4th, a large audience filled Wigmore Hall, perhaps drawn by Staryk's position in Beecham's orchestra. After a successful first half, Staryk walked onto stage following intermission, ready to tackle Paganini's Caprice No. 5 using the difficult original bowing. As he acknowledged the applause, Staryk spotted Ruggiero Ricci, "the only exponent of this and every other Paganini trick at that time." Ricci's presence would have been unnerving in any event, but Staryk's decision to use a bowing that only a handful of the world's virtuosos had mastered made it even worse. "Luckily I didn't know he would be there," he says now with a laugh.

Staryk performed in every major city in Great Britain, playing the concerti of Mozart, Brahms, Paganini, Tchaikovsky, Sibelius, and Glazunov with conductors Beecham, Horenstein, Pritchard, Dorati, Silvestri, and the Royal Philharmonic, London Symphony, BBC, Hallé, Scottish National, and Royal Liverpool orchestras. Just prior to his departure for Amsterdam, Staryk performed the London premiere of Kurt Weill's Violin Concerto.

In spite of his extensive concertizing, gaining access to certain microphones at the BBC studios proved difficult for Staryk. The BBC required their players to undergo an audition. "There is a well-known story about violinist Szymon Goldberg, whose recordings were played on the BBC for years," writes Setterfield. "Finally he came to do an actual on-air recital and of course had to go through the official audition. Much to everyone's chagrin, he was rejected."⁷⁴

Staryk underwent a similar experience: "I auditioned with Celia Arielli, the wife of Eric Gruenberg. They were a sonata team until they split and Eric decided to play concertos. There was a type-casting system at the time in Great Britain and if you played sonatas you didn't play concertos and vice versa. I had given some public recitals with Celia and found her excellent, but I was apparently still a concerto player in the eyes of those in Broadcasting House. We auditioned, but were rejected. The BBC was not very flexible at that time."

Displaying a distinctly 20th Century bias, the BBC sought out specialists to fill holes in the programming. "For a while," says Staryk, "my appearances on the BBC were mostly in Russian concertos, perhaps because of my Ukrainian background. They wanted the Tchaikovsky, the Glazunov, and that was all. Eventually I did break out of Imperial Russia, and played sonatas, normal mixed programs, and recitals, in addition to continuing concerti performances with the BBC Symphony (London), and the BBC Northern (Manchester). I hadn't re-auditioned for any category so maybe they were just getting short of fiddlers!"

After moving to the Netherlands and taking up responsibilities at the Concertgebouw, Staryk returned several times to Canada. He performed a CBC-TV recital in Montreal, then played the first Bach and Prokofiev concerti in Toronto, followed by the Sibelius in Winnipeg. He concertmastered a variety of programs, including a televised CBC performance of Bach's Fifth Brandenburg with Glenn Gould, Oscar Shumsky, and Julius Baker.

It wasn't until 1967, however, that Staryk dropped other commitments to place his solo career at the forefront of his activities. Prior to

this, Saryk had attempted to gain exposure largely through recordings: "The frustrating thing about the recording business is that I basically used it as a compromise outlet for solo performances, accepting the problems and disappointments, and telling myself that 'at least this is where they can occasionally hear me alone.' The only alternative was to keep to the somewhat more serious, sane, and stable side of the business, playing in orchestras and teaching.

"But someone would always come along, get excited about the recordings, write great reviews, promise an exciting breakthrough on disc, and wind me up again. And I went round and round, since, as they say, as long as there is life, there is hope."

Armed with hope and a grant from the Canada Council, Saryk resigned from the Chicago Symphony and left once more for Europe. "I just felt it was time to reorganize my career," he said at the time. "I want to return to Europe to re-establish my contacts there in the solo concert and recording field." Of course, as this door opened, others shut: "Last year I turned down the concertmaster post with the Philadelphia Orchestra," he told an interviewer, "and in January I refused a similar offer from London's New Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Otto Klemperer."

And so, returning to the milieu of his first successes, Saryk performed his second Wigmore Hall recital with Mario Bernardi on October 16th, 1967, playing on the "ex-Papini," "ex-Duc de Camposelice" del Gesù in a program of Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy, Papineau-Couture, and Prokofiev.⁷⁵ The remainder of the concert year was spent recording in London and performing in England, Holland, Germany, and Switzerland, primarily on state radio.

But Saryk's return to London did little to calm his restlessness or satisfy his desires. He came to realize during this period (which included the EMI experience), that "solo careers are not unlike political campaigns for election," and, convinced that this was not his "cup of tea," he began to search out a steady current for his life.

Saryk entered into negotiations with U.S. schools to secure a teaching position for the 1968-1969 school year. Earlier inquiries sent to Canadian institutions and individuals had turned up nothing: "The Canada Council is very anxious to see you remain in Canada in 1968-69 and we would be quite ready to help in some way or another," wrote an assistant to the Associate Director of the council. "However, at this point, I have no idea of how it could be done, but I would appreciate it if you would maybe let us know the outcome of some of the discussions you had with other people."

Hopping deftly from this sinking ship to the land of the Mayflower, Saryk moved his base of operations to Ohio in the Autumn of 1968, accepting a full professorship at the Oberlin Conservatory. At the age of thirty-six, he was the youngest Full Professor in the school's history.

A rogues' gallery

Saryk's position as concertmaster inevitably put him in contact with that limited group of musicians who tour and give concerts. His recollections of these individuals portray vivid personalities and exciting collaborations, and in listening to Saryk's anecdotes, one senses that he was in contact with a golden age of musicians and musicianship.

"Giorgi Chiffra was one of those nineteenth-century style pianists with a stunning technique, and a very dynamic approach," Saryk recalls. "He was a Liszt specialist, and although he was young, his playing was really from another era, like something you read about. It was a memorable experience to hear him."

Another virtuoso pianist, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, was famous for canceling his engagements at the last moment and for his generally eccentric and difficult personality. "Through his repeated cancellations he created an incredible aura around himself," says Saryk, "but to my taste, it was a bit like a circus. I don't know whether he traveled with his own piano, or how it was arranged, but the legs were not the normal height and the registration, or the hammer heads or whatever, were adjusted so that the instrument had a ring that was quite different from the usual. For Scarlatti and similar music, it was quite effective, but not for everything."

When Michelangeli failed to fulfill a 1970 engagement with Karel Ancerl and the Toronto Symphony, Glenn Gould was brought in to play Beethoven's Emperor Concerto on a day's notice. Ancerl, reportedly dismayed, remarked to a Czechoslovakian CBC employee in Czech: "Michelangeli? Gould? Where do you people get such kooks?"⁷⁶

As concertmaster, Saryk worked with a number of other pianists, including Artur Rubinstein, Leon Fleischer, Rudolf Serkin, Alfred Brendel, Hans Richter-Haaser, Wilhelm Kempf, Moura Lympany, Clifford Curzon, and Emil Gilels. He recalls that Gilels "would be having a conversation below stage with the piano tuner, who, by coincidence, was from the same area in Russia. They would be talking, then the call would come and Gilels would go up onstage, play the concerto, then come right back down and continue his conversation as if nothing had intervened. Of

course, for Gilels it probably would have been about the sixth time through the piece that day because he was one who constantly played.

"One pianist, Benno Moiseiwich, seemed to have the same eyes, the same face as Rachmaninoff, only he was very small and had more hair. He was of the old romantic Russian school and played many concerts in England, but I don't know if he ever went outside that country. I do remember that he was known for his Rachmaninoff. At rehearsals he smoked cigarettes non-stop, putting them down beside him where they would burn holes in the Steinway. He also gambled away his fees for future concerts long in advance. Another romantic I met in Chicago was Paul Stassevitch, who was known both as a violinist and pianist."

Russia, at this point, was producing the majority of the world's great instrumentalists, especially violinists. Probably the most beloved Russian violinist was David Oistrakh. Saryk recalls a number of performances with Oistrakh. Among them was a Chicago Symphony performance that paired Oistrakh with his son, Igor. Together they played the Bach Double Concerto, after which the senior Oistrakh, who was also conducting, performed Mozart's A Major Violin Concerto. "It was an exceptionally good concert," says Saryk. "Stylistically it was questionable, but David Oistrakh was a gifted musician and his conducting was like his violin playing, musical and naturally intelligent. He got the orchestra to sound and there were no problems; even when he was playing the violin at the same time and just making the odd gesture, it still came together."

As Leader of the RPO, Saryk participated in the first major recordings made in the West by Mstislav Rostropovitch. On top of his concertmaster duties, Saryk fulfilled the role of interpreter for the cellist. He recalls a session spent recording the Dvorak Cello Concerto with Sir Adrian Boult: "Rostropovitch had a system that he used in which he divided the work into sections. He knew where all the obvious places for splicing were, so he never even attempted to play the entire piece right through, he simply did it in sections, playing one part through six or seven times, then moving on to the next. He would stop at each pre-arranged place, regardless of whether it had been better or worse."

The orchestra didn't understand the cellist's method, and no explanation was offered to them. During a session for Prokofiev's Symphonia Concertante with Sir Malcolm Sargent, Rostropovitch repeatedly stopped just before playing the last few bars of the piece. "This really turned everyone hyper," says Saryk with a smile. "They just didn't know what was going on and Rostropovitch wasn't concerned. The coda is ex-

remely difficult, right at the top of the instrument, like a fiddle, and he had carefully calculated not to expend any more energy or take any more chances than necessary. He got everything else out of the way, leaving only this very last little bit, then away he went, hell for leather, over and over until there were enough takes to cover any misses, then said, 'Thank you very much, we are done.'

"I remember we had gone overtime and there were jokes and comparisons about unions in the U.K. and U.S.S.R. Much, of course, was overlooked on an occasion such as this, especially since Rostropovitch was cleverly using the (supposed) language barrier to his advantage!"

While acknowledging his abilities, Saryk found Rostropovitch's stage mannerisms distracting: "There is no doubt that he is a great instrumentalist and showman. There are all kinds of gestures — kissing, embracing, bowing — it's all part of the hype for this man. I remember when I first heard him in Toronto, in concert as well as on recordings. Some of the classic repertoire he played, Haydn or Bach for instance, was questionable to say the least. But the Dvorak was legitimate: beautiful and honest playing, the piece had become his 'song.'

"His stylistic choices aside, there was an undeniable commercial orientation to Rostropovitch's thinking. Upon arriving in Australia for a tour, his first statement was reportedly, 'I played more concerts and made more money than David Oistrakh last year.'"

Saryk grew up with working-class ethics and a working-class sense of propriety. He reached centerstage by way of the section violins and plays music honestly — reaching for the essence of a composition, and portraying it free of excess. Saryk is impatient with performers who wrap the music in layers of personality or performers whose egos corrupt their faculty of self-criticism. He remembers going with Paul Scherman to observe Mischa Elman's rehearsal for a return London recital after many years' absence. Saryk went grudgingly to appease Scherman, who was a friend of Elman, and wasn't impressed with what he heard. The day after Elman's recital, Scherman received a phone call: "How are you, Mischa?" asked Scherman. Came Elman's response: "Did you read the critics? Scherman, culture in Europe is dead."

Fritz Kreisler was another famous performer who didn't immediately impress. "I failed to get the message from old fiddlers like Kreisler," says Saryk. "At that time I was certainly not a sentimentalist! I listened to the historic broadcasts and went to hear him play on two occasions, but by that time Kreisler was practically deaf and playing badly. Kreisler was supposed to be one of the great interpretive masters, but to me he was

only interpretively great in his own salon music, which suited his particular personality, and not in the other repertoire. It may have been that his style was, for me, already *passé*. In my opinion, Szigeti was closer to an ideal interpreter.”

Stryk worked with Yehudi Menuhin on numerous occasions. As a boy prodigy, Menuhin had signed a lifetime recording contract with EMI. In his later years, after the unconscious mechanism of his youthful playing inexplicably disintegrated, this requirement became a burden: “I remember with Menuhin some extremely difficult times,” says Stryk. “In particular, there were the many sessions to record the Tchaikovsky Concerto, which added up to perhaps twelve hours of studio time, but brought us no nearer to completion. Despite every effort — yoga, meditation, standing on his head — the recording was never released. There were many hours of tape that Menuhin, with his schedule, was not likely to edit, so it was suggested that this version be issued as a ‘do-it-yourself-kit,’ something I’m surprised the industry hasn’t yet capitalized on.”

The relatively unknown Zino Francescatti is held in very high regard by Stryk: “To me he was one of the most marvelous human beings. He was an honest, sincere, and unpretentious man, uninvolved in either state or corporate politics. He didn’t try to be a musical ambassador, build empires, or push this or that fad, political opinion, diet, or exercise regimen, as some of his colleagues did. Their lip service becomes more convincing than their musical service, while Francescatti’s consistent playing gave, for me, an honest message.”

And there were many others whose paths Stryk crossed — the magical Igor Bezrodny; the unorthodox Tossy Spivakovsky; that towering Sevcikian edifice, Leonid Kogan; Michael Rabin, the “genius of tomorrow” whose life was cut short at thirty-five; the affable virtuoso Ruggiero Ricci; “Humble Henry” Szeryng who was chauffeured around London in a Rolls Royce; Nathan “The Wise” Milstein; and the refined Belgian, Arthur Grumiaux, who was once so thoroughly dismayed by the unruliness of the Netherlanders during a Concertgebouw recording session that he complained to Stryk: “The next thing you know, they’ll be dancing!”

A polished musician of great taste and natural talent, Grumiaux was short on stamina: “If there were two sessions booked for one day,” recalls Stryk, “he would complain about being tired, and yet the sessions were not long and there was a lot of time spent sitting and listening to the tapes. But Grumiaux was not accustomed to long periods of work; he was not a person to practice an extraordinary amount, keeping the fiddle up for a long time was hard on him.

“Grumiaux did a couple of tours in North America, but he, and his best repertoire, were too subtle to create the superficial impact that is required here. His style and repertoire project better on recordings. He also hated traveling, particularly flying.”

The French violinist Christian Ferras involuntarily inspired a fear of flying in Stryk. Ferras was a favorite of Herbert von Karajan and recorded frequently for Deutsche Grammophon with the Berlin Philharmonic. Although a gifted violinist with a beautifully refined sound and a successful career, Ferras suffered depressions and ate and drank heavily. Stryk recalls an incident involving Ferras in Victoria, British Columbia: “While in Victoria, he suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized for several days, including that of his scheduled concerts with the Victoria Symphony and Laszlo Gati.” On the day of the first performance, an anxious Gati phoned Stryk, who was living in Vancouver, to ask him to fulfill the engagement on Ferras’s behalf. Stryk agreed and arrangements were made to fly him across the harbor by seaplane in time for the matinee performance. Stryk arrived at the dock that drizzly morning, met his pilot, and jumped into the waiting plane with three hours to spare before the start of the concert on the other side of the water. Inside the two-seater, Stryk had the Mendelssohn Concerto open across his knees, but found himself losing the line of the music as the pilot flew underneath the low-hanging clouds along the coast line, seemingly just above the masts of the boats appearing out of the mists. Stryk repeatedly assured the pilot that there “really is no need to arrive at the destination if there is the least hint of danger!”

The concert was enthusiastically received. Stryk relates that expectations generally placed on the soloist are perhaps lowered on such occasions, so that if one performs well under the difficult circumstances, it often creates a sensation with the public: “Francescatti began his career in such a way. He was sitting in the violin section of a French orchestra when he was called on at the last moment to replace a scheduled performer; a career was suddenly created. The riskiness of these situations appeals to the audience and the critics. It also can lower one’s anxiety, as just doing it at a moment’s notice is already a partial victory.”

Life in flight

“I’ve traveled around the world and seen the airports and hotels, which is all you see when you concertize. You arrive at the airport, get your room, go to the concert hall, and then you’re off to the next place. You look at

the list. What's next? Kalamazoo? You hope that you will be able to get out of the town, that you will not be snowed in. The amount of enjoyment is minimal. The only reward is to play with good orchestras, good chamber groups, good pianists, and there aren't all that many of those."

Zino Francescatti shared a similar view of traveling: "Francescatti told me once, as we were standing together backstage at the Concertgebouw before a performance, 'At this hour, I would wish to be in my living room sitting in front of the fireplace reading a book. When I was young and wanted to play more, there was less. Now I am old and I am tired and I wish to be at home.'"

Staryk was drained by the rigors of traveling and concertizing while simultaneously holding down a teaching position, or an orchestra job, or both. "I suppose if one was traveling with an entourage, or, like Szeryng with his diplomatic passport, staying at the Savoy, being chauffeured here and there, everything very first class, traveling would not be so bad."

But few artists can afford to travel in this manner. Staryk recalls that "Szigeti used to cut corners by looking for moderately-priced hotels, things of that sort, right up to the end of his career, because he had become accustomed to doing that from the beginning."

Less fortunate violinists have been known to circumvent the costly hotel stay altogether. "There was an early Galamian student," says Staryk, "an excellent fiddler who had one or two appearances with the Concertgebouw, even did the whole Beethoven Sonata cycle in Salzburg, and was playing around in Europe, not the top dates but the minor circuit. He lived in Amsterdam and drove around to many of his concerts in his little Simca. In order to save money, he would pack his sandwiches and sit out in his car eating them, waiting for concert time. If the engagement was close enough to Amsterdam, he would not book a hotel room. He would change his clothes in the dressing-room, warm up, do the concert, jump into the Simca and drive all night back to Amsterdam. He was an example of a man who played very well. Perhaps not the most magical playing, but good. He certainly deserved more than he got. In my view it was a very sad situation; however, he may have been quite happy in 'following his bliss,' as Joseph Campbell advises."

Even for those with sufficient pocket cash, existence on the road is a grueling series of obstacles and physically uncomfortable situations: "If you are doing it the usual way, taking care of your own bags, struggling through customs, fighting with the airlines about taking a fiddle on the plane with you, then putting it under the seat so there's nowhere left for your feet, getting rooms that are adequate but not great, killing time

alone in strange cities, eating grease, salt, and sugar because there is no time or alternative, cutting corners, it is simply not so glamorous. Then there is always the abnormal family life; perhaps the wife can do her own thing, but what of the children?"

More subtle than baggage-claim skirmishes, yet equally disturbing in the life of the concert artist, are the post-concert intricacies. "Often the party is more taxing than the job itself!" says Staryk. "Most are simply a bore. You are very tired in the first place, and often encounter the so-called experts who begin telling you all about music, or those who haven't a clue: they just came for the party. Then there are the hosts who have invited their friends who all know each other; they sit around and discuss the local gossip and you wind up being a wallflower, standing in the corner wondering 'What the hell am I here for?'" A Kreisler story is very telling in this respect: "My fee is \$1,000 for the concert," he would say, "\$3,000 if it includes a party."

"There are occasions," Staryk admits, "when the conversation is interesting and skirts around the topic of music, and the food is good. If the atmosphere is congenial, I forget that I am tired and simply have a late evening out. But usually I try to put in just as much time as is necessary so as not to appear rude, and then I excuse myself and leave; the plane, after such occasions, always leaves very early in the morning!"

"There was very little I found glamorous, except for the music — if it was good. Undoubtedly there are romantic episodes for some. (After all, the whole story of the performer, on any instrument, concerns virtuosos and their swooning fans.) My most memorable romantic episode occurred with my wife Ida, who collaborated in a concert with me in Montreal. As I recall, all our performances were excellent — pre-concert, concert, and post-concert — and we stayed at the Ritz Carlton Hotel!"

Some artists would occasionally avoid the scene altogether. "I remember watching Milstein make his escape at intermission after playing his concerto with the Chicago Symphony," says Staryk. "The orchestra was still trickling off the stage as he was heading out the door, so you know how quickly he packed up. I asked him, 'Aren't you waiting for your fans?'"

"'No,' he said, pointing to his watch, 'there's a good movie on TV tonight and I'm not going to miss it.'"

"There is a common conception that great things are happening at a concert, magical moments, that something significant is occurring in which everyone is taking part. In the meantime you, the soloist, could be

looking down thinking, 'I need a new pair of shoes,' or, 'I forgot to press my pants.' Somebody in front is yawning, that woman in the third row is knitting, and everybody is wrapped in their private world."

"One can too easily become enamored of the glamour, which I think is nonexistent," wrote Staryk's fellow Torontonians and Royal Conservatory-mate, Glenn Gould.⁷⁷ Gould quit the stage only a few years after attaining international star status; he despised traveling and playing before live audiences. To avoid this, he channeled the remainder of his pianistic output entirely through a studio microphone. "Performing in the arena had no attraction for me," said Gould. "Even from what little I then knew of the politics of the business, it was apparent that a career as a solo pianist involved a competition which I felt much too grand ever to consider facing."

Of course, the young and famous Gould had already faced the gladiators. He performed a recital in New York, at Town Hall, to an audience which included David Oppenheim of Columbia Records. A contract and *The Goldberg Variations* followed and Gould's career was underway, conspicuously without the events considered by some to be the prerequisite of a concert career.

Competitions

"There has lately developed in *la province* a disconcertingly continental tradition of *musique sportive et combative*," wrote Glenn Gould for *High Fidelity* in December 1966, following a Montreal violin competition. "The festival was a particularly alarming event upon the Canadian musical scene because until recently, such international tournaments have been virtually unknown in this country. In the English-speaking provinces such events are discouraged through both a tacit understanding of the futility of musical jousts and an entirely credible concern with the showing of the home team."

Canadian violinist Jane Charles (now living in Ireland), a former student of Erica Davidson, attended Staryk's Toronto masterclasses. When she placed in the Canadian Music Competition provincial finals, she notified Staryk by letter. Charles was ten years old and competing with musicians as old as twenty-four. There were three jury members present: a violinist, a singer, and an oboist. "Thank you so much for your letter, and BRAVO! on your competition placement," the opening of Staryk's reply read. "Sixth out of thirty-three in a category which could include contestants twice your age with a mixed-bag jury is quite an accomplish-

ment. With this success, I would seriously advise, no more competitions for awhile!

"Music competitions are very dangerous," he explains, "especially at an early age. Making music should not be placed on a level with athletics. What comes through in a competition ultimately is more horsepower than anything else. The jury members sit there, hearing one after another, and the subtleties get lost. The more subtle, the more it's bound to lull the jury to sleep (especially at the end of the day). Competitions are political gatherings, and the politics depend a great deal on where the competition is being held."

"The time has passed when a win at an international competition could bring top managers to an artist's door," reported *Newsweek* in February of 1986. "There are so many competitions, so many former winners with prematurely fizzled careers that a big win has lost most of its buying power."

"Also, it is a matter of lean years and fat years," continues Staryk. "That first prize winner can be a mediocre talent who is rated the same as a great talent who appeared in a previous year; they both hold the same prize, but the former is only the best of a meager talent crop while the latter is truly worth taking note of. The juries sometimes withhold first prizes for good reasons, but just as often for bad."

Though Staryk himself competed as a teenager in Toronto, and later in London and Geneva, he feels that the impact of a win has changed with the times. "It appeared for awhile that international competitions would bring back some sanity to the performer seeking a solo career," says Staryk. "To a point they have, but between the political machinations behind the scenes and the rash of new competitions, it is no wonder that their influence is diminished. My experiences have been frustrating. Since I take these responsibilities very seriously, I could not continue on the jury circuit. Playing God in too flippant a manner can harm more than an individual's career."

The problem is not just the huge number of competitions, but the meager returns harvested by the winning competitors. Prizes rarely cover the costs of entry fees, travel, and hotel bills, not to mention the financially unprofitable hours spent in preparation. Not all competitions command universal respect, nor will they necessarily finance a start on the recital circuit and/or management fees: "The stakes in Montreal were high," relating to the Tchaikovsky competition, wrote Gould, "as the Carling Cup relates to the British Open — a bit short on prestige, perhaps, but distinctly long on cash."⁷⁸ And to top it off, in the smaller, less

prestigious competitions, there is no guarantee that the jurists will be well-suited to their task, or even agreeably disposed toward the more talented competitors.

Gould, again for *High Fidelity*, wrote: "In certain European competitions (the Tchaikovsky and the Queen Elizabeth of Belgium among them) the jury is empaneled from a list of stellar performers of the day — artists who, because of the security of their own worldly success, are often as not astonishingly liberal in the dispensation of their judgments." For the most part however, continued Gould in the Canadian publication, *Music Magazine*, jurists "are generally very conservative and not exactly on the ascendancy of their careers. They rarely vote for real originality, but recognize a certain kind of performer, a certain mean of ability and stylistic approach."⁷⁹ Staryk, himself once a Tchaikovsky Competition juror, adds that "Jurists, in general, are obligated to select efficiency over musicality. They consist of less-than-phenomenal performers and are now largely the same group, moving from one place to another."

Of course there are often extra-musical biases affecting the choices of the jury. David Oistrakh received second place at the Wieniawski Competition in 1935. Two years later, at the age of 28, a decisive first-place victory in Brussels launched his career. Of the Warsaw loss, a former Oistrakh student confided: "[Oistrakh] hinted more than once (in his closest circle, of course), and with visible bitterness, at the anti-Semitic tint of the Warsaw jury's verdict, and added that many of the judges (in his words) 'had reserved their opinion . . .'"⁸⁰

Sometimes jury members simply cannot agree. "My instinct is I would like to give the prize to all of them," concluded jury member Mieczyslaw Horzowski after listening to five finalists perform in Carnegie Hall for the 1976 Leventritt Piano Competition. William Steinberg, also on the jury, felt differently: "I am the only person here who does not play the piano, and I would have refused to conduct these people," said Steinberg. Mitsuko Uchida was one of the five.

For some, competitions do more to limit than expand their career: "I understand very well that competitions seem like the only way out for many performers," said Gould. "They provide a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. The tendency, though, for certain winners of competitions has been to hone that handful of pieces that they have played since they were sixteen. That is a very sad situation."⁸¹ Sad, but it is not difficult to understand why this approach has evolved. Lydia Artymiw competed in the Leventritt Competition: "In a concert, if you miss a note, you don't worry," she said. "Here you immediately feel that it's fifty

points against you."⁸²

The vast majority of First Prize winners of important competitions are quickly forgotten unless their musical and extra-musical skills are promoted through extensive managerial follow-through and publicity or by some external factor that impresses the win on the mind of the public. Such an impressive win was Van Cliburn's 1958 Tchaikovsky Competition victory. Van Cliburn was the first American to capture the top prize at that competition and the timing of the event, occurring as it did during the Soviet/American Cold War, gave the victory a political spin. For the American public it was clear proof of the ascendancy of Democracy over Communism and was capitalized upon by RCA and Van Cliburn's promoters. Staryk comments that "because of the political interests involved, the Van Cliburn victory turned into the perennial Van Cliburn Competition, even though Van Cliburn the performer is essentially a one-concerto pianist whose career soon petered out. Beryl Senofsky, winner of the Queen Elizabeth Competition, is largely forgotten, even though he broke the same Soviet domination in the violin world. Eric Friedman, who to some extent was concertizing and recording with RCA, was ill advised to boost his career by entering the Tchaikovsky Competition; not winning did him more harm than good."

Examples of others who slipped out of the limelight encircling the world's handful of top performers after winning a major competition include Igor Bezrodny, who won the Tchaikovsky Competition, Sidney Harth, first prize winner in the Wieniawski Competition, and Miriam Fried, who placed first in the Queen Elizabeth.

Staryk formulates a possible response to the enigma of these player's limited post-competition success: "There may have been ingredients, necessary for the role of superstar, which were missing." Rudolf Serkin's cryptic explanation of why the jurists of the 29th Leventritt failed to award a First Prize mirrors Staryk's assessment: "Each of the finalists is absolutely equipped to perform in public and the booing of the audience was perhaps justified," he said. "But we felt that none of the finalists was quite ready for this prize, that each one had something but not one had everything."⁸³ "Nonetheless," continues Staryk, "in the past there were some well-known stars who lacked one or more of the ingredients of today's consummate artist: the personality, the social facility of the world ambassador, the omniscience of the divine giver, and who yet played the fiddle amazingly well.

"Take the case of the more private and austere Heifetz, for instance; who knows if he would have achieved the fame today that he

enjoyed earlier in the century? His was a time when socializing and politicking were not as necessary as presently. It appears that simply doing it better than the competition will no longer suffice."

Careers

High-profile music careers in this age do not happen of their own accord in response to purely musical catalysts; they must be cultivated through aggressive marketing. Often the selling point will be an aspect of the player's personality: physical appearance, temperament, vivacity. Sometimes the traits are ones normally considered liabilities: fickleness, physical disability, and even mental instability, as in the case of medicated pianist David Helfgott, made famous by the movie *Shine*. "All of it was shapeless and utterly incoherent," wrote Richard Dyer in the *Boston Globe* after Helfgott's March 1997 recital, "entirely in the present, without memory of what has happened in the past or movement toward fulfillment. It was without phrasing, form, harmonic understanding, differentiation of style, and often basic accuracy; worst of all it was without emotional content."⁸⁴

In a musical utopia, the development of an artist would be a matter involving only the artist and his or her mentors, colleagues, and students, in combination with blind luck or fate — or, for some, a practiced and vigilant awareness: "Luck can be assisted, it is not all chance with the wise," as Baltasar Gracian once wrote — and that chief whetstone, the audience. Ivan Galamian, for one, didn't believe in the business of careers, advising Ani Kavafian to "play your violin well and hope for the best."⁸⁵ The somewhat disingenuous Isaac Stern asserts that "there is no way that you can create a career for someone without talent and no way to stop a career of someone with talent."⁸⁶ (Saryk calls on Napoleon for a different viewpoint: "Ability is nothing without opportunity.") Yet Stern represents to many the quintessential networking, politicking superviolinist, separating the sheep from the goats in the violin world. He is certainly the most powerful of the career-makers. Stern protégé Yo-Yo Ma recommends, perhaps with the optimism engendered by Stern's advocacy and his own early success, that aspiring musicians avoid competitions and play in local venues to build their careers.

At least part of the game of creating a name for oneself in music lies in making and nurturing contacts, in learning how the circuit operates, in politicking. If an individual is unwilling or unable to operate on a political level, the services of an agent can be purchased. This agent or

manager is expected to make the phone calls, act as press agent, and do whatever money or influence can to manufacture a star. He or she must be chief critic, advisor, and psychologist to the performer.

Discovering, early in his career, that it is impossible to sell oneself alone, Saryk solicited the help of an agent in London by the name of Wilfrid Van Wyck. Van Wyck managed some of the high profile artists of the time; among his clientele were Rubinstein, Szeryng, and Milstein. Saryk found his relations with this manager agreeable, always straightforward and businesslike: "In the first place, Mr. Van Wyck himself was a gentleman, pleasant to deal with, always completely honest about the situation. I was never under an exclusive contract with him, which meant I was free to do work apart from that which he lined up. He simply took his percentage, a standard ten percent out of any fee I received for engagements which he arranged."

In the Netherlands, Saryk tried a number of managers, including Beek and Koning, who represented the Columbia circuit operating out of New York's 57th Street. He ultimately chose De Freese in Amsterdam, "who, like Van Wyck," writes Setterfield, "handled foreign artists but functioned outside of the major international culture cartels."⁸⁷

Management in Europe worked more efficiently with fewer material resources to find performance venues for their clients and, when an engagement was secured, they took a smaller piece of the pie: "The business arrangement was, again, simply a ten percent commission on the fee," recalls Saryk, "with no charge for the expenses of mailing, phoning, etc. You supplied your own brochures, photographs and reviews, and, if available, recordings. De Freese, for example, booked a tour of German and Swiss State Radios, in one mailing, with just this material.

"There is very little chance (in fact none at all) of a concertmaster of a major U.S. orchestra getting a similar deal from even a one-man operation on 57th Street. But suppose you decide to play the game and go for one of the bigger managers. You have the same bagful of reviews, brochures, etc., and he agrees to accept you *for a retainer*. This means that you are on his list, and perhaps he gets you a few dates on his B or C circuit if he has one. *You* pay for all the publicity flyers, promotion, telephone calls, postage stamps, meals, travel, and hotels; *he* takes twenty per cent of your concert fee, and you keep paying the retainer on top of everything else!

"Finally, of course, all your money is used up (or if you are lucky, all the sponsor's money is used up). So after a bit of splash with the community concert series in the boondocks, provided that you continue paying

the retainer, your name will remain in his books (but not on the posters). If you are naive enough to believe that good reviews and favorable audience response to what comes out of the instrument are enough, you will be very disappointed when fame and fortune don't materialize."

The lack of fortune is most immediately felt: "It's not a big money-making business, being a concert soloist, unless you happen to be one of the handful at the very top, the big attractions,"⁸⁸ says Ronald Turini, former Quartet Canada member and current professor of piano at Western University, London, Ontario. *Newsweek* reported on that top handful who are (or were) shamelessly in the money: "If closely guarded figures can be believed, there may be as few as half a dozen singers (Kathleen Battle, Jessye Norman, Kiri Te Kanawa, Montserrat Caballè, Plácido Domingo and, of course, Pavarotti), a handful of pianists (Rudolf Serkin, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Vladimir Horowitz) and a couple of violinists (Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman) who command top dollar. Music's current heavy-weight champ, Pavarotti, impeccably groomed for the title by manager Herbert Breslin, gets a reported \$100,000 for two hours on a concert stage."⁸⁹ And that was in 1986. Norman Lebrecht recently placed Luciano's yearly income at between sixteen and eighteen million dollars.⁹⁰

Stereo Review critic George Jellinek wrote to Staryk in 1969 advising him to contact Herbert Breslin, mastermind of the extensive machinery supporting, in addition to Pavarotti, Joan Sutherland, Alicia de Larrocha, and Marilyn Horne. Jellinek warned Staryk: "The way Breslin puts it, it is more or less impossible to build a name without a considerable financial sacrifice on the part of the artist. Of course all managers tell you that, but Breslin may be more honest about the situation." Staryk wrote back to say that asking for assistance was "going against the grain for me," and that "my colleagues and I have been exploited and continue to be exploited by agents, managers, and public relations people of one sort or another."⁹¹

However, Staryk admits to the limited possibility of arrangements made outside the 57th street circuit. "There are some things you can do yourself. If you are a concertmaster, for example, you can cultivate contacts with conductors. This is sometimes based purely on the musical collaboration; other times, the conductor may believe that he/she has something to benefit from the relationship as well. You might get some solo appearances, but only up to a point, because the conductors themselves are controlled by the big agencies.

"The management companies working out of New York control or

have much influence in the entire business on a global scale. The days of the latest talent appearing in salons are gone. Now it is practically all orchestrated from Manhattan." Within this scheme, there is some room for advancement through luck or good timing. Staryk quotes Berlioz: "The luck of having talent is not enough, one must also have a talent for luck.' There are a lot of things that have to come together, and money alone won't necessarily do it, nor will talent alone. Of course, there's always the unfortunate who finds himself at the wrong place at the wrong time, like the player who carefully scheduled his debut in advance only to find on the day of the concert that the special, previously unannounced concert by David Oistrakh would hit town that very same night."

Many musicians attempt to garner support through the foundation and grant systems. This often will involve dealing directly with individual donors, not always a pleasant task. "Take egotism out," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson, "and you would castrate the benefactors." Staryk is skeptical about the possibilities of even locating these moneyed persons: "There are fewer and fewer of those people around with that kind of money and willingness to spend it on some unknown or even relatively unknown violinist or pianist. The expenses are horrendous for a violin soloist; for example, aside from all the other requirements, the violinist will ideally need a Strad, a del Gesù, or at least a Guadagnini, in order to even begin the race with an acceptably competitive vehicle. Then, even with a sponsor, the competition is tremendous and the internal politics among the major New York managers ever fickle. There is never more than a very small group concertizing. Once, when asked about this, Sol Hurok is said to have replied: 'Why should I invest x amount of dollars and speculate when I only have to post STERN on the billboards and sell out?'"

The crock: isolated observations

Drama is a legitimate element of the voice recital and Jessye Norman captivates her audiences with it, entering fully, at times frighteningly, into whatever role the music and text demand. Her largesse absolutely envelopes those watching her; with expressive hands and face, she determines when, and even if, there will be applause. But for Ms. Norman, the drama begins backstage with her treatment of the stage hands and supporting staff who, when they fail to meet her demands, are treated to rages and insults. Seymour Bernstein's words of criticism for a tyrannical conductor could apply to any musician at her level of influence: "In

reality," he writes, "all this amounts to using music as it was never meant to be — as a weapon for power — and, what is worse, as a divider of the person from his own humanity. For nothing — and least of all, music — entitles anyone to behave cruelly to others."⁹²

"He was rough, rude, and conceited, and once told me he was going to have a career even if it meant walking over dead bodies," reported violinist Cecilia Arzewski of Pinchas Zukerman.⁹³ (Arzewski was a fellow Galamian student and a member of that group of violinists sent to the U.S. from the Tel Aviv Conservatory with scholarships from the American-Israel Cultural Foundation. Others in the group included Zukerman, Miriam Fried, and Itzhak Perlman.)

Perlman displays amazing facility and naturalness on the violin and the audience reciprocates his charisma onstage with true adoration. But there is a strong underlying element of showmanship to his performances that can at times force the music into a secondary role. For his encores, Mr. Perlman has a six-inch stack of music brought onto the stage for him, from the middle of which he ostentatiously extracts one or two pieces, like a magician with his cards.

Pavarotti, employing his own sleight of hand, spent nearly as much time receiving adulation as singing during a 1997 Key Arena concert in Seattle. His promoter padded the concert's program with unannounced guest artists — a machination that left the audience holding expensive ticket stubs, but cheapened memories of the artist.

The tickets for *Shine* pianist David Helfgott's performance in Boston were \$50 apiece. "One's disappointment should not be directed at Helfgott," concluded critic Richard Dyer in his Boston *Globe* review. "Instead one feels anger at a film that created a myth so powerful that no individual could possibly live up to it. And even more anger should be directed at the exploitative market forces that are now pushing the real Helfgott to deliver something only the film Helfgott could to a public that will pay for whatever it gets."⁹⁴

Those same market forces are continuously at work to exploit the virtues of the female body; the image of a woman in varying stages of undress selling a product is so common a sight that we rarely give it a second thought. Until recently, the classical scene had managed to keep itself somewhat unsullied. Ironically, a Canadian violinist, Lara St. John, among others, is helping to bring the industry up to date. On the cover of her debut release through Well-Tempered Productions, the youthful Lara St. John stands before the public eye wearing only a violin. The image is somewhat artful, but we are clearly buying more than just Bach.

"There are people who want to keep our sex instinct inflamed in order to make money out of us," wrote C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*. "Because, of course, a man with an obsession is a man who has very little sales-resistance."

Vanessa-Mae's 1995 recording, *The Violin Player*, sports a photograph of the violinist frolicking with her instrument in the surf. With her befunked renditions of Bach, Vanessa-Mae is enjoyed by the mainstream and is not specifically addressing her work to the admirers of art music. However, when her recordings have crossed into the serious repertoire, she has attracted trouble from the critics. "There are actually two Vanessa-Maes," wrote Henry Roth in his *Strad* review of one of Mae's recent recordings for Angel. "One is a fetching, scantily clad teenager who saws away cleanly and ecstatically on an electric fiddle, with no serious artistic purpose . . . The other Vanessa-Mae is a conscientious student of modest talent who deigns to record major works previously recorded by such superstars as Heifetz, Oistrakh, Milstein, Perlman and a veritable legion of formidable artists. The result is performances characterized by a pleasant but thin tone propelled by a slowish vibrato, and a sound which seldom communicates more than one color. Vanessa-Mae's intonation is reasonably on target, her facility adequate and her training good, but it would be easy to name 20 or 30 violinists of her generation who are far more accomplished ["200 to 300 violinists," Staryk contends and adds that "perhaps Vanessa-Mae's recording should have appeared on the label Totally Unnecessary Productions,"⁹⁵ rather than Angel.] . . . Vanessa-Mae is essentially a vaudeville-type performer and would be wise to remain in that field. ["This is another example of what is presently called '**classical crossover**.' Diluting serious music to sell to that segment of the public who are unable to swallow the original."]

Perhaps we need not be alarmed by these new currents in classical music; after all, there is historical precedence for glam. "The lack of any serious musical endeavour is such that even Sir Thomas is reduced to peddling Tchaikovsky around the suburban cinemas," wrote a London journalist of Sir Thomas Beecham in 1940. "When, by some means or other, a fair audience is attracted to a good concert, their reaction soon betrays that it is a case of casting pearls before swine. A sign of our musical ill-health is the increasing vulgarity of musical announcements. One of our more notorious pianists now adorns her bills with a portrait in colours."

Then again, there is an unnerving element of reverse evolution to the changes we are witnessing. Vladimir Spivakov, a violinist whom we

had come to take seriously, appeared in full color but something much less than full concert dress on the cover of a recent Russian publication.⁹⁶

Outstripping her shivering colleague Lara St. John, violinist Linda Brava, a former pupil of one of Staryk's colleagues, displayed herself in simple, natural hues for *Playboy's* April 1998 Sex and Music issue. The accompanying article, "Brahms Bombshell," drew comparisons between the euphoric experience of sex and that of listening to Mozart and Beethoven. "There must be," says Staryk, "for the sake of sanity, some boundary between *Playboy's* sex and Bach's Passions!" And succinctly capturing the spirit of the times, an inset from the *Sunday Times*, in this same issue of *Playboy*, reads: "Playing Dirty, the Latest Babe to Sell Us Bach."

"We have to promote classical music for both the wrong and the right reasons just to survive," Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg told *Strings* in a May 1994 interview. "The days when you could let the music sell itself are gone . . . If the cover said *It Ain't Necessarily So and Other Encores by Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg* and had a picture of a tree, it wouldn't sell."⁹⁷ Salerno-Sonnenberg's solution to this commercial concern was to present a moody image of herself on her CD cover wearing a tight black skirt and stiletto heels. According to the violinist, the cover was intended to elucidate the character of the pieces selected.

Despite her evident talent, and in keeping with the marketing strategy described above, the fabric of Salerno-Sonnenberg's reputation was spun out of her personality and stage mannerisms. Her smoking, laughing, gyrating, baseball-loving self wins admirers and fills concert halls. However, the doors are open to the critics as well as the adoring public and each gobbles her up in their own way. When the chief critic of the *New York Times* caught her act, he labeled Salerno-Sonnenberg "moderately gifted."⁹⁸

"Her stage mannerisms were out of control," wrote *Seattle Post Intelligencer* critic R. M. Campbell after a May 1997 performance. "She often bounced up and down, side to side. Sometimes her legs, dressed in black toreador pants, were so far apart it would appear she was riding a quarter horse. She made faces — smiles and grimaces — an ingénue in a silent film showing trepidation, excitement, happiness. She shook her hands before playing in an exaggerated fashion, twisting her shoulders." Campbell went on to complain about Salerno-Sonnenberg's activities during the orchestral *tuttis* and her violation of the tacit understanding among musicians that what is most difficult in the practice room should be made to look easy on the stage. "Of course," concluded Campbell,

"the concert stage has a long history of eccentrics. But she outdoes them all, and on Monday her art was not sufficient compensation."⁹⁹

Why didn't Steven Staryk have a major solo career?

"His body remains immobile as he plays slow movements, his face impassive — as if he were looking down at a display case in a department store instead of at the keyboard," wrote Helen Epstein of Vladimir Horowitz. "When he plays fast movements, the pianist of necessity moves more, but there is rarely a flicker of recognizable emotion across his face. The emotion goes into his fingers."¹⁰⁰

Staryk exhibits a similar reserve onstage. There is even something reminiscent of the daguerreotype in his presence, in the aura of dignity and purpose he projects. He is not a manufactured product or a legendary figure who is able to counter the current trend of exaggerated exhibitionism or offer the alternative of impassivity. Staryk was caught between eras, between periods of performance style, between Horowitz and Heifetz on one side and Perlman and Salerno-Sonnenberg on the other.

"Steve's an honest person, straight ahead, no tricks, no phony interpretations in his playing," says Victor Feldbrill. Whereas "Stern leans over the stage, sending messages to the audience, . . . Steve is more like Heifetz, reserved, serious; it's efficient, straight playing . . . He doesn't try to sell himself."¹⁰¹ Pianist John Perry adds this description, born of close collaboration: "Some musicians take a piece of music and fit it to their strengths, avoiding what shows their weaknesses, evolving a style that supersedes the style of the music. Steve is conscious of any such self-imposed boundaries, making any sacrifices to do what the music intends. There are no cute little gimmicks, no holding the note an extra long time for effect. Steve's music-making flows with the line of the music, it is full of temperament, feeling, passion." Despite having earned the respect of colleagues, Staryk, like Salerno-Sonnenberg, has been criticized for his performing personality. Unlike Salerno-Sonnenberg, Staryk's reserve has been at the center of the debate.

This matter of stage presence is a crucial issue for him, and one which ties directly into the problem of recognition as it relates to his career. Staryk's was a fame spread not by the publicity machine or by dollars, but by word of mouth, almost clandestinely. But his fame has been limited to colleagues and students and to the concert-going public of the cities in which he has lived. In terms of widespread recognition, Staryk's career path failed to reach the elevation of "superstar." Why?