

# RICHARD HARWOOD

## *Cellist*

*talks to Judith Monk & Caitlin Bell*

**H**ow many police officers does it take to create a top cellist? Two apparently!

Award-winning cellist Richard Harwood doesn't follow the usual trend coming not from a family of musicians, but from a family of police officers! He did, however, follow the trend of most music prodigies by choosing to become a musician early in life; at the tender age of 4. Initially wanting to play the violin, Richard was disappointed when the violin teacher told him he had no vacancies but suggested his sister, who taught cello, could take another pupil. Richard was already studying piano at this time and quickly showed great proficiency in both instruments, achieving Grade 8 in cello at the age of 8, and in piano, at 11.

When he was seven, Richard's parents were advised by a number of eminent musicians not to send him to music school but to seek a good all round education. He attended Ditcham Park, a private day school near Petersfield in Hampshire.

At 8, Richard began taking private lessons in London, sometimes thrice-weekly, with Joan Dickson who was to have a seminal influence on his life both musically and personally.

Richard told me: "Joan protected me from too much early exposure. She insisted that before you launch yourself into a major career you must really know your repertoire thoroughly, your technique must be right and you must never do too much too soon. She was incredibly supportive; sort of like a musical grandmother to me. She also loaned me her cellos; initially, she loaned me her spare instrument, a Joseph Hill, but then, when I was around 13, she didn't think it was good enough so asked me whether I'd like to use her 1682 Rugeri. As if I needed to be asked! I never needed any convincing that she had belief in me but for her to be teaching with her spare cello whilst I was performing on her beloved Rugeri – well, this just typifies the generosity and kindness she always showed me."



After Joan Dickson's death, the instrument was bought by two anonymous donors who still allow Richard to play it. The instrument once belonged to Steven Isserlis, a musician Richard has enormous respect for.

"Steven is great – he's a truly unique musician and someone who always knows every detail of the score. I've had many masterclasses with him – most often at IMS Prussia Cove. I don't think the Rugeri worked so well with gut strings so Steven didn't play it for very long. It also provides a very good reason for me not to switch my string set-up at the moment!"

Richard gave his first concert at 7 and gave his first concerto performance at 10, playing the Kabalevsky G minor at the Adrian Boult Hall, Birmingham. He then went on to make his BBC Radio 3 debut at the age of thirteen with the Elgar Concerto, which he subsequently performed on a tour of New Zealand; he has also recorded Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* for BBC Radio 3.

Richard has won numerous awards including the 2004 Pierre Fournier Award for 'cellists and in July 2004, became the first British 'cellist ever to be awarded the title "Bachpreisträger" at the International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition, Leipzig.

To have won so many awards not only says a lot about Richard, but also his teachers.

"Each of my teachers has influenced different aspects of my playing; after Joan died, I studied for five years with Steve Doane and David Waterman [Endellion Quartet]. It worked extremely well and there were never

any major differences in the direction they were taking me. This was largely because they, along with Steven Isserlis, had studied with Jane Cowan at the International Cello Centre so technical approaches and musical ideas were never at odds with each other.”

In 1998, Richard went away to study in Vienna with Heinrich Schiff at the University of Music and Dramatic Art.

“My four years spent in Vienna were life changing. Culturally it’s a city you can’t beat and it was a huge privilege to be able to study with Schiff. It was a major turning point for me musically and cellistically. He had a small ‘elite’ class and we all worked extremely hard.”

Richard has only recently completed his official studies, having spent the last two years with Ralph Kirshbaum at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester.

“It’s so inspiring to work with Ralph. He has such a lot of time for all his students. He’s so helpful and laid back – we are really good friends in addition to being teacher and student. It’s a great feeling to have a teacher you find you can talk to about anything; someone you can call up at any time. He’s someone who really cares about his

students. Our work has focused primarily on creating sound worlds. It has been so beneficial for me to be in his class in Manchester. I didn’t mind being in Manchester at all but I still deeply miss Vienna and the lifestyle I had over there.”

At this interview, I was accompanied by Caitlin Bell, a young music student on work experience. We were all laughing about the *Private Eye* article detailing Richard’s unfortunate experiences on his return from performing the Elgar Concerto at a British Council event in Ekaterinburg, Russia. His instrument must always have a temporary export licence whenever it leaves the EU. When leaving Heathrow, customs wouldn’t stamp his licence unless he filled out an additional form – a C88 – as the cello was a tool of his trade. Never having required one before, he strongly questioned it but, nevertheless, agreed to fill it out with the help of a friendly customs officer who put in all the correct export codes for leaving the country. Although he had been told he would probably need to fill out a different C88 on his return – one for returning – he wasn’t expecting to be met by rather less helpful people who refused to tell him the correct codes for re-entry. He

was shown several files full of codes and told to work it out for himself or get an import/export agent to do it for him, as it wasn’t a Customs Officer’s job to offer any assistance! He was held, on pain of arrest, until the forms were completed. The story ends after Richard, refusing to be browbeaten, was finally permitted to receive help and was eventually released after being held for several hours.

There is no doubt that Richard Harwood is intelligent and resourceful and his playing has been compared to that of Jacqueline du Pré’s by *Strad* magazine. What charmed both Caitlin and I though, was the fact that he is also personable, witty, handsome, sweet natured and friendly and we think he definitely deserves to go to the top in his chosen career. Having recently secured a debut recording with EMI, to be recorded at the beginning of 2006, he seems to definitely be on his way!

For more about Richard, visit his website at [www.richardharwood.com](http://www.richardharwood.com)

A rogue draft article printed in our Sept/Oct issue contained several errors and inaccuracies. We therefore apologise to Richard and here print the corrected version.

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