

The bouquet of flowers of musical passion

by Eliane Magnan

The following autobiographical essay was written as part of a birthday tribute published in the form of a "Festschrift" dedicated to Lyndon LaRouche on the occasion of his 65th birthday in September 1987. Written in French, it appears here slightly abridged in translation. It is directly addressed to Mr. LaRouche and his wife, Helga Zepp-LaRouche.

Once upon a time there was a little girl with a 'cello, who promised to be true to it alone, like a motto engraved upon her heart.

Today, there is a constellation of violoncellists who play this instrument magnificently; but around 1927, there were few 'cellists, especially women, and in fact when the little girl, who had meanwhile become a young lady, presented herself before Pablo Casals, his first "consoling" words were: "This is not an instrument for women," but after hearing her: "You can play this instrument."

Another time, around 1948, when she was scolded for not playing in an orchestra (to earn a living), she posed the question in confidence to the dear Maestro, who answered in the following words: "Do not take away what God has given you."

Dear Lyn, it is a surprise for me to write in this book for your birthday. I am not a woman of letters, but I know myself through certain reviews that have been written, and I give you these remarks and personal memories. I hope that the years of my life which have led me toward you and Helga will be gathered like a bouquet of flowers which I leave in your house, which welcomes me with so much trust and affectionate friendship.

Whereas, through the Schiller Institute, I have been able to follow the growth of your movement, which goes hand in hand with the growth of attacks and misunderstandings about your person, you know but very little of the course of my life which led me, through curiosity, to you.

The driving force of this curiosity is the search for the perfectability of man. With open eyes toward love, hope. Sharing all that which is given to man to share.

Action is necessary. It must be lived. Thus you listen even to death, to make room for the unlimited spirit.



Through another's eyes

Here is the testimony of Antoine Goléa, as it appeared on the dustjacket of the record which I made with the Lebanese Musical Cooperative:

"It will soon be thirty years that I have known Eliane Magnan. She was then—it was in Marseille during the war—a very young girl, but she already had a superb mastery of the violoncello. Not only was she a first prize winner at the Paris Conservatory; she had also been crowned at the International Vienna Competition, where she carried off the laurels in 1935, while still a child.

"One would already have wondered, hearing her play during that period, what in her playing was still to be perfected. Technically, she was flawless; and musically, there was an absolute certainty of taste and style, and yet. . . .

"And yet, throughout her life, Eliane Magnan has remained a seeker, a seeker and a restless person. Throughout her life she has wanted to go further, to transform herself, to evolve, to do something else; and this always by looking higher.

"In this regard, her interpretation of the Bach violoncello solo suites may be considered as a test, as an example.

"These are frightening works, not only on the technical plane, but also, above all, on the musical and spiritual plane. One need only compare the interpretations of the greatest 'cellists of our day, to realize the diversity of conceptions that can be applied to them. And then, in the face of these differences, what could a young competitor, such as Eliane Magnan was at the time, around 1950, do, when for the first time she dared to approach these exemplary works—exemplary precisely because of their difficulties of every order?

"She could either try to imitate this or that great master; or to overlook everything they proposed and seek her own path; or to make a synthesis between all of their teachings and her own conceptions.

"In reality, Eliane went through all those phases. She searched—one must always come back to that notion—over the years. Modestly, as befitted a young musician, respectful of the masters' teaching, she set herself to learn in their

school; and in so doing she occasionally erred, by taking as a model this one or that, who could give her absolutely nothing, so great was the difference between what they proposed and what Eliane Magnan herself felt and thought.

“These searches, these hesitations lasted more than ten years. In the course of the difficult period of feeling-out, of discoveries, and also of marking time, she never tried to impose herself. But one day, enlightenment came. After having listened to everything, and assimilated everything, except for what was manifestly inappropriate to her, she set herself down, as if despoiled of all impurities, before these masterpieces. She no longer questioned anything but the texts . . . and listened to her heartbeats. And then, instinctively, she felt what she could retain of all that which she had heard; by the depth of her most intimate, most personal, experience, and to offer the synthesis which embodies for the moment her interpretation of the First Suite, in G major, recorded on this disc. Everything there is dictated by the breadth of respiration; both the tempo of the different parts, the rhythmic accentuation, and that song of the depths which, at certain moments, confounds Bach’s music with that of the invisible choir of angels; with that also, of a humanity which, with all the strength of its unavoidable flesh and its imperfect spirit, seeks to attain the shores of the ineffable.

“But Eliane Magnan does not stop at this most pathos-laden, face-to-face encounter with the work of the greatest among the great. Far from the attitude of her illustrious colleagues, she has always pored with sympathy over the works of her contemporaries, of those musicians of the twentieth century who find themselves also placed at the dangerous crossroads of permanent searching. . . .

“And then she went further. For about a decade, Eliane Magnan attached herself to the musical life of that Lebanon where, without forgetting France, she has meanwhile put down roots, and to that Lebanon Quartet which owes its existence to her, she has opened doors and hearts on the immense perspective of Western music. For that action, Lebanon was at that time the predestined country: crossroads of civilizations, the blessed land where two great religions have made Peace, thus bearing witness, despite all the political and social vicissitudes, to the profound unity of the human race in its eternal dialogue with God.

“And this action has borne its fruits. Today, Lebanon is opening up to musical creation which, as always in a country of ancient and illustrious tradition, can only be a work of synthesis. . . .”

My early years

From the age of seven, regularly every Saturday, I used to get up at 5 a.m.; my mother and I used to catch the 6:20 train from Saint Quentin which arrived in Paris at 9:10 a.m. It was one of those trains with wooden seats, crowded with workers, who used to make room for us in the chaotic car. That did not stop my mother from embroidering lingerie on

China silk, to pass the time.

Arrival in Paris: breakfast at the Rapide du Nord. Solfège class at 10 a.m. Lunch at the Berkeley on the Champs-Élysées where a cousin was the director, before creating the Colisée. When the weather was fine, I had the great joy of taking a carousel ride, mounted on a horse, baton in hand, and trying to catch the brass ring as I passed it! My youth was not to make me lose all the rights of my childhood.

At 2 p.m., ’cello lesson with Paul Bazelaire, professor at the National Conservatory of Music of Paris, and then we headed back home. The studies became more important every year, and it was decided, when I got to be nine, that I should go to boarding school in Paris.

My solfège teacher was Mme. Samuel-Rousseau (to whom we had to bow!), who lived on Rue de Clichy, Number 50, Institution Saint-Louis, directed by the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of the Presentation, of Tours. The proximity of the Paris Conservatory, in Rue de Madrid, gave this convent the vocation of boarding the female music pupils and teaching them to adhere to strict schedules at an unusually young age.

My childhood friends were Lola Bobesco, of Romanian origin, and Marie-Thérèse Chailley. . . . Lola was so gifted! She made so little of it that I wondered why I should not do the same. The Attitude and Principle of Least Action. It was necessary to convert, so to speak, “the numerous hours of so-called missed work.” The teachers never stopped telling you, “It is difficult, so very difficult! Difficult to succeed.” Fortunately, I had the protection of my young age and went through it all without being scared by the bogeyman.

The days of competitions, for me were marvelous! Big outing! I dressed up in a pleated navy-blue skirt, buttoned to a white blouse, with a navy jacket, and patent leather pumps. The sight of this blue jacket at the competition became legendary. “Oh, it’s the little Magnan! Oh! She is going to get the first prize!”

Let’s get back to the principle of “least action,” because to be sure, it was not a question of being a bad pupil, and it was absolutely necessary to make up those missed hours. The replacement was to know how to evaluate the minimum time needed to be ready for certain obligations, such as the lessons, the Conservatory class every five days where we had to know everything by heart, or else—what a disgrace!—we were not allowed to play. All that was “crowned” by the examinations and competitions. This evaluation necessitated learning mental concentration, a very precise choice of work, a mental willingness, self-confidence, and self-control. For self-control, I have often recognized that without the discipline of the boarding school, and having to overcome the painful separation from my family, I would not have been so able to dominate my feelings, my attitude, and my action.

Our schedule was as follows: getting up at 6 a.m., Mass at 6:45, bedtime at 8 p.m. Horrible—but a godsend.

Every day we heard, without rigidity, the words of moral-

ity, obedience, love of one's fellow man. The smile on the lips which I have kept, which brings a kind of freshness, willingness, can only have come from that protected childhood in a convent of nuns dressed in white, with their long black aprons with their ample folds, and in that time, on their heads, a very pretty white coif which was rounded at the top, falling in double folds at the sides of the head. These white coifs represented for me a flight of the spirit toward heaven.

All this brought us to the First Prize of the National Superior Conservatory of Paris.

Toward a solo career

I had just turned 15. I was also the pupil of Maurice Maréchal who was a very great violoncellist. He was always on concert tours: Malaysia, Russia, the United States. At that time airlines were rare, which made him say: "In this profession, you really need railroad health."

Having gotten my prize in 1936, I gave my first recital at the Salle Cortot in February 1937, where my teacher Paul Bazelaire was at the piano. This is how he wanted to present me to the Parisian public. I gave this concert under difficult conditions. My health suddenly gave way; a few days later, I was immobilized by a serious attack of rheumatic fever. On April 13, my birthday, some wonderful yellow tulips from Holland brightened my sickroom—thanks to my mother. In May, I started to get impatient. Learning that there was an international competition in Vienna, Austria, it seemed to me impossible not to go there. If I recall rightly, there was a stormy conversation with the doctor on this subject. I could not play much, but mentally yes! I chose the concerto by Lalo, the Fifth Suite of Johann Sebastian Bach, some Schumann pieces, and above all, the formidable Prelude and Fugue for three voices for solo 'cello by Louis Abbiate. I had to leave in June alone for the competition; my father had just lost his job as the manager of a business, and for economy's sake, I had to do without my mother's presence.

At this international competition, I won a Prize of Honor, fifth in the category. First prize went to André Navarra, who was 13 years my senior.

My parents heard me on the radio broadcast of the prize-winners' concert. There was that success, and the invitation to play as a soloist with the Vienna Philharmonic. In Vienna I had only the time to give myself the present of the "imperial box" at the Opera. The misfortune, the great tragedy of the war was at the doors and borders of Europe.

Following the exodus, I played on French Radio, and repeated the concert in Toulouse and then in Marseille, where I spent three years, before returning to Paris.

Meetings with Casals

In Marseille, in the "Domaine de la campagne de Montredon," the Countess Pastré became particularly interested in helping artists. She became for me "Mamie Pastré." The entourage was quite curious: cultivated people, recounting

their memories of the past.

Residing there were Lanza del Vasto, Luc Dietrich, writers; Clara Haskill, Your Güller, pianists. It was wonderful for me to hear them or to play with them. Casals came to give concerts in Cannes and Montredon with Clara Haskill. Yvonne Lefèbre introduced me to Casals: "But, I have already met her."

In fact, I had been traveling from Ariège where undoubtedly I had visited my aunt, a Carmelite nun at the Pamiers monastery. In Toulouse, some Catalonian students were paying their respects to Casals. I went to seek him out in the train, and I found him. Casals got up . . . I bowed, told him my name, my titles, concerts, etc. It was in returning to my place that I realized that during my whole proud introduction, the dear Maestro had remained standing.

Another person who had the same attitude is Lyndon LaRouche. After a conference in Wiesbaden where I played for the first time, with my friend Marie-Pierre Soma, before rejoining the guests at a reception, he waited for us to be ready, to congratulate us. That is something that cannot be forgotten.

It is a privilege to be treated as a person who works for Art, for beauty. Is not Art the salt of the earth, to bear witness to the soul of men above matter, which is necessarily the ordinary substance of our daily lives?

Thanks to Mamie Pastré, I went several times to visit Casals in Prades. The first time at Villa Colette, in a bare room: three chairs, a wooden table; and the next year in his "Gardian house," a very lovely property. We were still under the occupation regime. Casals did not want me to settle in Prades, since he did not know from one moment to the next whether he would be forced to quit the region.

Looking back, there is no need to regret the short term of my meetings with Casals. I had already imitated Maréchal's playing so much that Madame Maréchal, with her slightly drawing American accent, used to say: "I don't know how to tell any more whether Eliane is playing, or my husband." Wouldn't I have done the same with Casals? Which would have risked being a frightful caricature, since the style of Casals was absolutely unique and inimitable.

In 1946, I wanted to present myself at an international competition in Geneva, having been able to reap the benefits of the one in Vienna. The stupidest thing happened to me. The dampness of the lake gave me a bad cold, and kept me from playing at the precise time of the tryouts. Incredible.

My encounter with two 'cellists, Antonio Janigro and Mirko Dorner, was to make me forget that misfortune. We became inseparable. We had talked about Maestro Mainardi a lot and three weeks later, my father, always agreeable when it was a question of self-perfection, agreed to send me to Lucerne, where Mainardi was finishing his summer course.

Mainardi was very exacting about the purity of his sound. I did not want to hear myself being told: "Lots of noise, but not much music."

It was hard to understand, all the same; the next winter I went to take his course at the Academy of St. Cecilia in Rome. But evenings in Lucerne, in some café or restaurant in the company of our teachers, we found ourselves in the company of either Edwin Fisher, Dinu Lispatii, or Furtwängler. That was not so bad.

From 1946 to 1948, I was named as a Fellow of the Casa Velásquez in Madrid. The memories are so full of friendship and enchantment.

The border was closed between Spain and France. So I was particularly happy to present myself to the public, as a representative of France. Without these lengthy stays in Italy and Spain, I believe I would not have been able to find the right style and to play so well the composers of those countries, who did not come naturally to me: the lightness and the rapidity of the Italians—the reserve, and static pride of the Spaniards. What a privilege to be able to assimilate, on the spot, the ideas and customs of countries, to understand them and not crawl back into my snail shell!

We continued our trips. In summer 1962, on a Turkish skiff, we crossed the Mediterranean from Marseille to Beirut. In Rio de Janeiro, I had attended a Lebanese performance by the famous singer Feirouz. My immediate impression of the dancers, in the Dabké, was that their dance steps expressed a great deal of wit.

So there I was, at the Festival of Baalbek, to see what was really going on. I had several concert tours in Scandinavia—Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. It was time to warm up in the sun. This curiosity lasted for 13 years. The

welcome was warm, as is the tradition in Lebanon. The vivacity of wit was real indeed. Proposals were made to me, and I accepted a professorship at the Beirut Music Conservatory. Around Christmastime, the administration had not yet wrapped up the formalities of my contract. Meanwhile, I had gone to the United States to play the Dvorák Concerto, under the baton of Eugene Ormandy with the Philadelphia Orchestra.



Philip Ulanowky

Eugene Ormandy wrote to Mr. Judson, manager of Columbia Corporation, recommending me as the “Ginette Niveu” of the ’cello. Mr. Judson replied that “the ’cellist market was very difficult. Especially the woman ’cellist market.” In these conditions, I would “not be signed up on the list of artists.”

That confirmed my decision to accept a teaching position for the first time. Settle down a little, and not pack and unpack suitcases in hotel rooms. The charming invitations to lunch at the embassies, which always came at exactly the only possible rehearsal times in the concert halls, the loneliness of those long trips. Filled with this resolution, I was going to keep quiet for awhile, but when I got back to Beirut, lo and be-

hold, the Joffrey Ballet was performing at the Casino, under the patronage of Mrs. Harkness.

The orchestral musicians made neither Joffrey nor the orchestra director happy. Especially not the ’cellos, as it turned out, and so he had me asked to go on tour with them. I hesitated, but I had wanted to go to India for years. So I gave in, since officially my teaching contract was still not ready.

That was a fairytale voyage. One country after the other—Iran, Afghanistan, India. . . . [In India] we passed through Hyderabad, where I found the most beautiful present of my life: Indira, who became my daughter thanks to the intervention of Indira Gandhi.

Years in Lebanon

In Beirut, you have the impression of being always on vacation, when in 30 minutes you can go from 1,000 meters high, blue sky, and mountains, and to the sea on your return.

For the “Lebanon Quartet”—Antoine Saad, Vera Saad, Hossam Mayas, Eliane Magnan—I founded a “Lebanon Musical Cooperative,” registered with the Ministry of Agriculture.

In 1971, Antoine Saad and his wife left Beirut for Berlin, where he was engaged by Radio Berlin. He no longer had confidence in Lebanon’s future.

I continued the activity of the Cooperative with young artists, local choruses, very good amateurs, and the Conservatory professors. The last concert took place one hour after a bombardment. Sixty persons attended, faithful, confident that “music” must pass everywhere and even more, through the trials of life. I would certainly still be in Beirut, if war had not come knocking on the door there, too. Twelve years have gone by. We have not ceased to hear about Lebanon, the Palestinians, the Israelis, the hostages, and the terrorists.

In Beirut, I was admirably seconded by my friend Antoine Medawar, director of the Carlton Hotel (Lebanese). A music lover and a great scholar, Antoine Medawar was president of the Musical Youth of Lebanon and president of the Lebanon Musical Cooperative. Music evenings, both after the Baalbek Festival and at his house, were followed by suppers, unforgettable banquets. . . .

For a long time, I had been playing one Bach suite per day. With the aid of Antoine Medawar, I recorded a few bands on the radio, and then an agreement was signed with the Chahine recording company in conjunction with Pathé Marconi, to record the suites by subscription.

Like a schoolgirl, I have the habit of making precise charts of my minutes and hours of work, scheduling the passages or the pieces chosen, so as to be ready on the projected dates of performance.

On arriving in Paris, I found that none of that was possible. The studio reserved from Beirut was unsuitable for a musical recording project. I did not have the artistic director I needed. The music critic and friend Antoine Goléa came to the rescue, along with pianist Geneviève Darras, who found me a studio.

Only two suites were recorded when I had to go back to Beirut. I do not know why I rejected the Second Suite. To show my good will to our subscribers, a record did come out, which was very thrown together. On side one was the first Bach suite, and on side two, a solo ’cello sonata by Hinde-

mith and the Oriental Suite by Touffic Succar, the director of the Beirut Conservatory. That was the result, the distillation of all my summer hours, plus improvisation, for the first attempt at recording the six suites of Bach.

My interpretation of these six suites by J. S. Bach is very classical, even purist.

London, *The Times*: “Purists may find equal satisfaction in her firm, clean, always attentive execution of the Suite in D minor by Bach.”

Nice, *Nice-Matin*: “Blessed are they who, knowing how to read to the letter as disciples and not as slaves, penetrate all the way through to the spirit. Such was the case of Eliane Magnan, whose agile fingers and fine musicality succeed in melding that impeccable alignment of abstract constructions into a supple and melodious harmony.”

There is currently a “revival” of a Baroque interpretation. Sometimes I appreciate it, sometimes it bothers me. By training, it is very difficult for me to change the written values of a phrase. I am far from wanting to play in strict time, and sometimes when I listen to my recordings, I find myself not free enough, or too rhythmic in keeping time. A balance is hard to find. In playing the Preludes and Fugues on the piano from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, I also cannot conceive of changing the values written by J.S. Bach.

L’Ame et la Corde, Michel Winthrop, Church of Brilletes, May 13, 1982: “This evening, spent with one of the best ’cellists there is, filled us with serenity, happiness, and emotion. Eliane Magnan plays the way she is. The generosity, the humanity of her playing, are in her own image. In Bach, Eliane Magnan bathes in her internal world, leaves the door wide open for us to look in, and understand, just then. Is it Bach who speaks through her bow—or is it the ’cellist who speaks to Bach, in a sort of extraordinary confession?”

The challenge of musical performance

Before Leonardo da Vinci’s *Adoration*, I have asked myself, “What is it *in particular* that makes a masterpiece?” I seemed to discover that in masterpieces, the straight lines (rhythmic) were the support of the curved lines (melodic).

There were dominants, highlights of colors, gradations, shadows, light, relief—all that within the limits of a frame.

I made the comparison with musical scores and references for the performer. I finally found that the coding of music is very poor. Music is written measure-by-measure on pages which are turned, and turned. How can one enframe the work, and see it as a whole at a single glance?

Since the straight lines and curves are not visible, does not the performer mix the two in his choice of attack on the notes, which follow one another in little black spots. . . . How can one choose shade in relation to light? By gradations. Is it necessary to always do the same **f-ff-p-pp** from when it first appears in the score?

How many performers are despairing on this subject. One must not give in to fantasy; yet does it not require a profound



A life in art

Eliane Magnan (above, left) in the early 1950s, from a concert program; (right) with Eugene Ormandy in 1962 in Philadelphia, on the occasion of her performance of the Dvorák violoncello concerto; (center) directing the Schubert Mass in G at the Salle Cortot in Paris—53 years after her solo debut there in 1937—in March 1990; (below, left) the “Magnan Trio” with the American violinist Seth Taylor and Italian pianist Monica Ripamonti taking a bow after playing for an ICLC conference Taunusstein-Wehen, Germany, in April 1990; (right) with Marie-Pierre Soma during their first U.S. concert tour in July 1983.

