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Mstislav Rostropovich — The Baby in a Cello Case

Friday, May 4, 2007



Cellist Mstislav Rostropovich died April 27. His death, announced by Russia's Federal Culture Agency, brought an end to one of the great lives of the last century. Rostropovich was a musical genius, but his life was about much more than music. He was a great defender of human rights and human dignity within the former Soviet Union.

At great risk, he defended his friend Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn during the darkest years of the Cold War. Later, he stood with Boris Yeltsin at the barricades in defense of Russian democracy.

He was born into a family of musicians in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1927. He was first trained to play the piano, but later was taught to play the cello. He became one of the world's most famous cellists, though he was also known for his skills as a pianist and conductor.

A story from Rostropovich's infancy tells another side of the story and points to the incredible power of a father's love and influence. Rostropovich's father was himself a cellist, but not of world renown. His dream was that his son would become a world-class musician — a great cellist. He dedicated much of his life to Mstislav's musical education and preparation.

But he also did what no music teacher could do — he made the infant Mstislav feel right at home with the cello — even placing the baby in his instrument's case as a cradle. The picture itself is a parable of sorts. There we see a loving father's hopes, cradled in a cello case.



Recommended Mstislav Rostropovich recordings: *Shostakovich, Cello Concerto No. 1 in E flat major, Op. 102*, Mstislav Rostropovich, cellist, Eugene Ormandy, conductor. *Rostropovich: Master Cellist, The Glory of Rostropovich: 80th Birthday Tribute.*

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