

RONALD ROBBY, CELLO



Ronald Robby began performing with the SDSO in 1970, and the next year with the San Diego Opera. His early teachers included SDSO veterans Paul Anderson and Vivian Bark, whose 1779 English cello Robby plays today. His principal later teachers were Gabor Rejto and Rafael Druian. Robby attended UC San Diego and counts composers Kenneth Gaburo and Pauline Oliveros as mentors, as well as conceptual artist/filmmaker Eleanor Antin. He was also assistant to instrument inventor Harry Partch, helping refurbish Partch's visionary creations.

Robby's mother worked as a synagogue music director, and from her he developed an appreciation of Jewish music. He became an early figure in the klezmer revival and was leader of The Big Jewish Band and other experimental groups in the 1970s and 80s. Now a scholar of Yiddish theater music, he has taught Yiddish literature at UCSD and presented his research at academic conferences internationally. A current interest of his is the music of Yiddish films, on which he has been lecturing extensively.

(See <http://conneyproject.wisc.edu/videos-2009/ronald-robboy/>)

As Senior Researcher for conductor Michael Tilson Thomas's Thomashefsky Project, Robby conducted archival research, translated texts, and reconstructed musical numbers for Tilson Thomas's Yiddish theater evening at Carnegie Hall in 2005. He has collaborated with numerous artists, composers, and writers, and has presented his own music at venues as varied as The Kitchen and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the San Diego Jewish Film Festival, who commissioned his score for a silent Yiddish film of the 1920s.

With recording credits on Warner, Innova, and New Tone (Italy), Robby is also a contributor to the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and has written for numerous arts journals and CD liner notes as well as small-press magazines and anthologies. Ron is married to SDSO violinist Susan Robby.

Getting to know Ronald Robby...

Q: What are your favorite three tunes or pieces on your iPod/Mp3 or CD collection?

A: As a listener, there are just too many favorites, an ocean of them. But to be a convincing artist, on the other hand, one's favorite piece needs to be the one he or she is playing at the moment.

Q: How did you choose your instrument?

A: My mother had played harp in high school, but never owned her own instrument. When I was twelve, she met a retired music teacher—Jack Epstein was his name, and my memory is that he said he had formerly run the Palm Beach Conservatory of Music, maybe in the 1930s or 40s—who had a harp to sell. I think the old guy liked my mom, because he offered her several other instruments for a very nominal price. For whatever reason, my folks went ahead and bought them, a cello included. I had taken lessons on a series of instruments, none with much commitment, but somehow this one stuck.

Q: What are three of your favorite movies?

A: *Overture to Glory* (USA, 1940, in Yiddish); *Make Mine Mink* (UK, 1960); *Hunt for Red October* (USA, 1990)

Q: What good book have you read most recently?

A: *Why Translation Matters* by Edith Grossman

Q: What is your choice for dining in San Diego?

A: Venice Pizza (City Heights)