

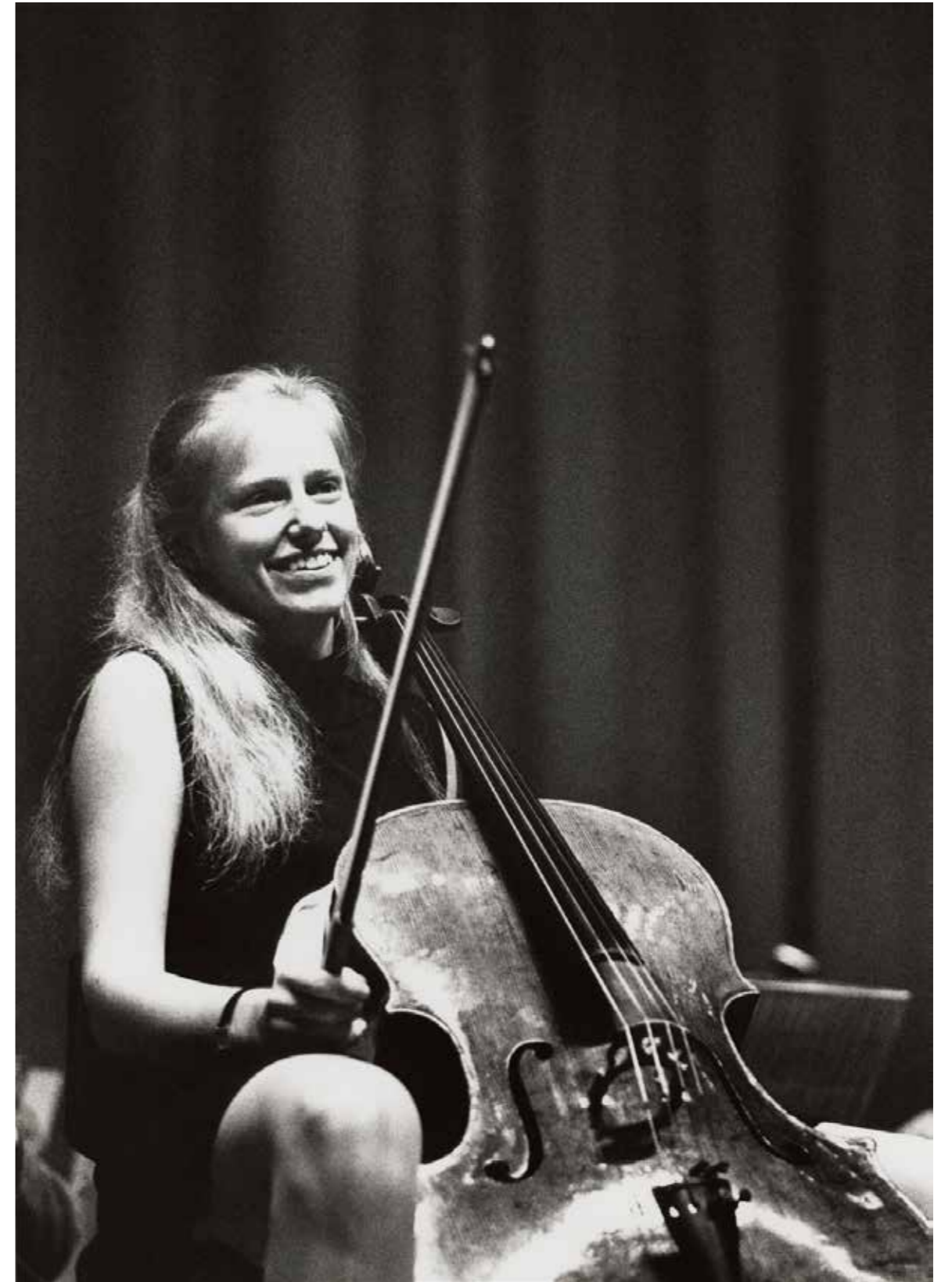
Personal reflections... on Jacqueline Du Pré

By sculptor Glynis Owen

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My school diary as a six-year-old records that, “when I grow up I am going to be an artist. I am going to share a studio with my cousin in Paris.” If art was my first love, music was a close second. Growing up, music-making was a joyful part of family gatherings. Throughout school and later, at art college, I played cello in local orchestras. I followed with interest the emerging career of a brilliant young English cellist, Jacqueline du Pré, who happened to be the same age as me. I marvelled at her Wigmore Hall debut, aged just seventeen, and her highly praised concert the same year at the Royal Festival Hall.

At Goldsmith’s College, London, I united these two interests by writing my thesis on Wassily Kandinsky’s study of the links between music and art in his paintings, inspired by his experiences and the effects music had on him. In 1967, I married an artist and, in the same year, Jacqueline married the acclaimed pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim. Their clear delight in one another’s musicality and career echoed my own sense of the pleasure in sharing a creative understanding and relationship in art.



Above: Jacqueline du Pré, 1969, ph. © National Portrait Gallery, London



Above: Glynis Owen, Jacqueline du Pré, 1990, phs. © Stephen Coe



Four years later came the concerning news that Jacqueline, aged just twenty-six, was losing sensitivity in her fingers and had been forced to cancel a concert. Two years after that, it was confirmed that she had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). At this time – balancing my life between looking after two small boys, sharing exhibitions with my artist husband, accepting sculpture commissions, teaching, and working on sculpture books – I found this news heart breaking. How could this happen to someone with so much talent so early in her career? In 1973, Jacqueline played her last concert. She died, in 1987, at the age of 42.

One morning in 1997, as the sun streamed in through my studio window, I stepped back to look at a clay sculpture I was finishing. A BBC radio recording of Jacqueline du Pré playing the Elgar cello concerto filled my studio. My overwhelming feeling that gloriously sunny morning, listening to Jacqueline's sublime music, was of the tragedy of her short life and the loss of everything she might

have achieved. This was the moment I decided to sculpt a full-length portrait of the young cellist playing her instrument, as a tribute to her extraordinary life.

I wanted to work from images of Jacqueline du Pré playing the second movement of her iconic performance at the Royal Festival Hall. Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor, written in 1919 following the First World War and towards the end of Elgar's life, conveys a sense of the composer's own mortality. It seemed extraordinary that a cellist so young could communicate this emotion so convincingly and I wanted to convey something of this sense in my portrait of her.

Jacqueline's personality is described as embracing a curious combination of natural shyness and absolute conviction. To try to capture her likeness and her mesmerizing spirit, I needed imagery of her playing. Making a portrait without a model is a challenge. EMI sent me some beautiful photographs of Jacqueline playing her 1712 Davidov Stradivarius cello. These were invaluable but I also

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needed to study her in action to appreciate the essence and dynamism of her playing.

Music documentarian Christopher Nupen kindly gave me a copy of his 1987 film *Jacqueline du Pré in Portrait*, with a message for me: “This is for your soul”. It certainly was! I couldn't have made my full length, half-life size sculpture without his film. I watched it repeatedly, freeze framing and replaying certain actions, studying Jacqueline's face, her movement and flowing blonde hair. There was an extraordinarily transitory change of expression as she played – from strong determined focus to serene calm. It was quite a challenge to recreate those emotional states in clay.

What set Jacqueline's playing apart? The answer probably lies in the passion and emotion she brought to her work, which elevated her remarkable talent to another level. On her death, Nupen had written that her loss touched “the hearts of millions of people all over the world, because this great cellist had ways of reaching the heart, which are given to the very, very few.” At every point in the research and creation of this portrait sculpture, I felt overwhelmed by the kindness I received, which reflected the depth of feeling she elicited in people from all walks of life.

As it would not be possible to make a small-scale bow and pegs in clay, J & A Beare, the violin makers who had introduced Jacqueline to her much-loved Stradivarius, generously resolved the problem and made beautiful miniature pegs and a bow carved to scale in wood for the sculpture. They said they did it for Jackie who was their

friend. Even London cab drivers, transporting the sculpture to exhibitions, refused to take the fare, saying this was for Jackie!

It is always an exciting time when a finished portrait sculpture in soft, vulnerable clay is sent away to be cast and some weeks later returns to the studio transformed into bronze.

In 1989, the completed bronze portrait sculpture of Jacqueline began to develop a life of its own when it became part of the fundraising for an exciting new music building and concert hall to be built in Jacqueline's memory at St Hilda's College, Oxford. A limited edition of ten sculptures were available for sale, with profits donated to the Jacqueline du Pré Memorial Fund to help disabled musicians. A program of fund-raising London concerts followed, with the sculpture on exhibition at each venue. The concert at the Barbican Centre was particularly memorable as there I had the pleasure of meeting Mstislav Rostropovich – one of the greatest cellists of all time – which reminded me again of the esteem in which Jacqueline was held.

The final concert was part of a very special Soiree Musicale in the State Apartments of St James's Palace with renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who movingly played the famous Davidov Stradivarius cello previously owned by Jacqueline. It was a memorable concert for me because I was presented to HRH the Duchess of Kent and, at the beginning of the concert, walking through the audience to her seat, she stopped to tell me how much she loved my portrait of Jackie.



Glynis in her studio, 2024, ph. Andy Fallon

By 1995, the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building at St Hilda's College, Oxford, was nearing completion. Louisa Service, a fellow of the college who was involved with the fund raising for the music building, purchased the sculpture as a gift for the venue. It excitingly began to feel a reality when van Heyningen and Haward Architects came to my studio to discuss where the sculpture should be displayed. We agreed it would be appropriate for it to sit at the side of the stage creating an ever-present memory of Jacqueline.

The Gala Opening of the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building in September 1995 was a wonderful celebration and, for me, a fitting conclusion to the project. What could be better than to see my Jacqueline du Pré sculpture on the stage surrounded by musicians making music? I felt Jacqueline would have appreciated this.

Jackie was a prodigy who knew from earliest childhood that she would be a cellist. Although her musical career was cruelly cut short far too soon, she left an indelible legacy. I have been fortunate to have continued with the career I chose as a child, and throughout my life, there have been prompts reminding me of Jacqueline. For the last forty years, I have lived in the same road where Jacqueline lived following her MS diagnosis in 1971. She moved here to be near Hampstead Heath, which she enjoyed so much, as do I. Sadly, our paths never crossed, but neighbours have described to me the poignant scene of Jackie, with her distinctive flowing hair, being pushed down the road in her wheelchair to the Heath by her husband. I often walk past her house with its commemorative plaque. Some years ago, I received a call from the 90-year-old former owner of my house. Having seen a photograph of my portrait of Jacqueline, she rang to tell me she had given Jacqueline physiotherapy for her MS. This was in the exact place in my studio by the sunny bay window where I work and where I had been moved to sculpt the portrait.

Next year, I will be celebrating my eightieth birthday and quietly commemorating the eightieth year of Jacqueline's birth. In my teens, I had so admired her focus, self-assurance and commitment to her music in a competitive world. In my early twenties, watching Jacqueline's confidence and single-mindedness, as a young female cellist was formative in my own development as a young woman sculptor. My days of carrying my cello to orchestras is long past, but I still think of Jackie when moving heavy sculpture to exhibitions and remember the film of her swinging along the street carrying her cello, travelling to international concerts by train and plane with her instrument on its own seat beside her. I am reminded of my teenage years, sitting on the bus with my cello next to me, causing people to joke, "Who's your friend?" I wondered if this ever happened to Jacqueline.

Finally, as I sit at my computer in my studio, finishing these 'Personal Reflections', a last serendipitous moment completes the circle as a BBC Promenade Concert live from the Royal Albert Hall broadcasts a performance of the Elgar Cello Concerto. To my delight the announcer mentions Jacqueline du Pré, who sixty years ago made that concerto her own.

Glynis Owen FRSS

Glynis Owen is a sculptor and printmaker who works from her studio in Hampstead, London. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Sculptors and a member of the Printmakers Council. An author of books on the techniques of sculpture, she is also a consultant and designer of awards. Her work has been commissioned and widely exhibited and is held in both public and private collections in the UK, US, Europe and China.