

Fodor: An All-American

Virtuoso



Lawrence Davis—The Washington Post

Eugene Fodor—America's next first violin?

THE WASHINGTON POST

Monday, Nov. 18, 1974

...

## By Judy Bachrach

He's what they say every mother wants in a son. Pepsodent smile. Casually but carefully groomed, partial to herringbone and paisley bow ties. And he says "gosh" and "darn" instead of those other words, and Turkey Creek, Colorado (which Eugene Fodor calls home) has cause to be mighty proud of this 24-year-old kid. Who does not like to be called Gene.

(And he is a kid, too, because when you ask, "Are you rich?" he'll reply, "No. I'm Eugene." And when you ask, "Do you date only musicians?" he'll say, "No, they come from all walks." And he also pokes a finger in a lady's ribcage when he's making a point).

This is the guy who triumphed with his violin in Moscow last July at the International Tchaikovsky Competition, and whose performance with the Buffalo Philharmonic tonight at the Kennedy Center is sold out.

He didn't get first prize in Moscow. Nobody did. But he tied for second and did better than any American since Van Cliburn, whom Eugene Fodor has never met. And he became the first artist to perform at the Ford White House. Don't ask him if he was nervous. He says he never gets nervous.

Eugene Fodor started off as a child prodigy, a dangerous thing for any child to be, considering what often happens to them in adulthood.

"I think a lot of what you need is individual," says Fodor. "Aside from technique of the highest caliber, you need the glitter. The conviction of your own style. The polish. This is what separates the men from the boys."

And does Eugene Fodor have all that?

"Yes—yes I do."

So. No false modesty here. And few would deny Fodor has glitter. Just

two weeks back he made his debut in New York City with a repertoire that included Paganini, Wieniawski, and Sarasate, among others. A prominent critic reported, "An unkind way (to look at the repertoire) would be to say that he was out to prove himself the greatest cocktail violinist among the new generation. Another viewpoint would be to characterize it as a very shrewd move."

"It's not that I get bored (by more traditional repertoires)" says Fodor. "It's just that I've seen other people get bored." The big brown eyes grow serious, the lips close over the perfect white teeth. "And then I get fried by the critics. But I find it more important to please the audience than the critics . . ."

His father, an amateur violinist himself, calls his son a ham.

"Well, maybe I am." Fodor shrugs. "Being an extrovert helps in a performance. But it isn't—now what's the right word?—it isn't *contrived*."

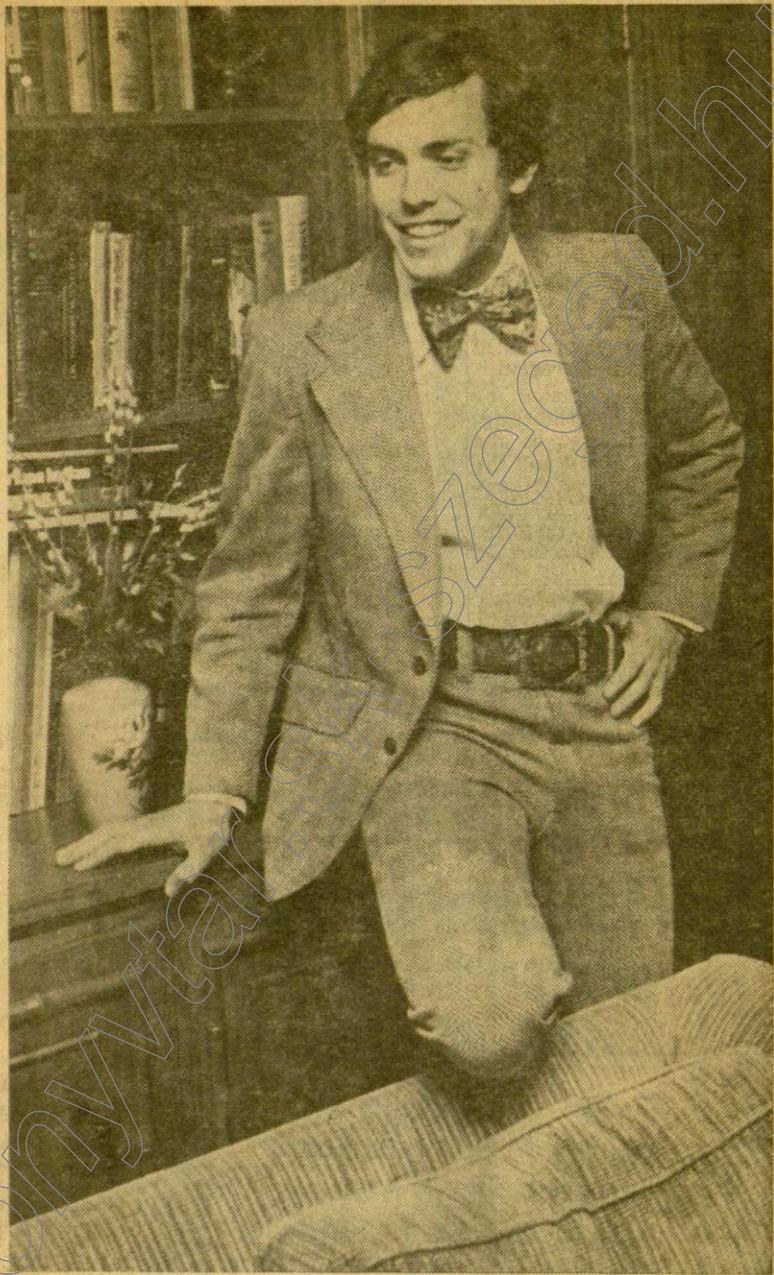
He flashes a smile, cocking an ear to the sound of a record of himself playing Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto.

"Dum-do-dum-de-dum," he sings out, flailing his arms about as if leading an orchestra.

He will be playing it again tonight with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Michael Tilson Thomas—who is just five years his senior—will relieve him of the conducting.

He's been confronting his public a long, long time. Back when Eugene Fodor was nine, he gave his first violin performance to 300 nuns. They loved him.





By Ellsworth Davis—The Washington Post

*Violinist Eugene Fodor will play tonight with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, at the Kennedy Center.*

He had been pestering his father, an excavating contractor, for violin lessons just two years before that. At first his father was reluctant.

"See, he was working with my older brother, who was taking violin lessons."

Eugene Fodor's older brother, John, is now playing in the first violin section of the Denver Symphony. So one figures that maybe there was some rivalry in their youth.

Fodor cocks his head. "I imagine there was. You can't get away from it. But I think he's been very good about it. I think he's found his niche."

But Eugene Fodor says that or the most part, his childhood was—well, just like any other Turkey Creek childhood.

"See, a lot of people con-

fuse being a virtuoso with having a demented childhood. I find this ridiculous. When I was a teenager I'd practice two hours a day and have my evenings free to go bowling or play pinball. Yes, yes I am the unrivalled champion of pinball."

From pinball he went on to Juilliard in New York. And from Juilliard to the University of Southern California where he studied for two semesters with Jascha Heifetz who still calls up his old pupil. He finished at Indiana University in Bloomington. And for a while he thought of marriage.

"Oh, I was about 19 or 20 and I was really taken with this girl. Really taken. But our essences didn't match."

He shakes his head slowly. "I'm a real sucker for beauty."

These days he gets mash letters that tear him apart. Bring up the subject and Eugene Fodor goes into convulsive laughter.

"Oooo-hooo, you wouldn't believe it. I was playing out in Denver and this girl—she saw me at two concerts and wrote—arggh 'I loo-ove you.' Sent me her picture. Good-looking too." He straightens up and sobers up. "Its fun."

Well, it doesn't sound too awful. Eugene Fodor totes around a Guarnerius del Gesu violin made in 1736.

He tours Europe (three times this year) which allows him to buy his clothes in London. "Except for my leather."

He indicates a slender belt tooled with a lot of pyramids and profiles of Egyptian figurines. "My leather I always buy in New York."

But the sticky questions, the tough questions remain. Will Eugene Fodor, the all-American kid, become another Heifetz, another Menuhin?

"Well I have the same way of looking at that as I did the outcome of the Moscow competition. No one knows what the future will bring. And when I hear all those statements about myself, I just smile."

And how does he smile?

'Quietly, says Eugene Fodor, smiling quietly.

