IMAGINE!' Pablo Casals once said. 'They call me a great cellist. I am not a cellist; I am a musician. That is much more important.'

During the last decades of his life, Casals rarely appeared as a soloist; he devoted himself principally to conducting and teaching, passing on the depth and scope of a knowledge and understanding culled over a lifetime dedicated to the art of interpretation. He repeatedly stressed certain fundamental concepts which he sometimes called 'laws of music' or 'laws of nature'—concepts which he considered to be essential elements of meaningful interpretation and applicable to all forms of musical expression. My purpose in writing this book is to provide a study of these principles and, by giving selected examples from the repertoire, to draw a portrait of Casals the interpreter at work. Thus this book is not a biography, although the luminous strength of personality which so animated Casals and replenished his art cannot be entirely excluded from its pages; nor is it a manual for cellists, although it does incorporate the basic features of Casals' teaching in regard to string playing. It is an attempt to record in print the oral tradition of Casals' teaching of interpretation, to preserve this heritage for a new generation of musicians to whom he is now a legend.

Casals would sometimes refer to the innovations in technique which he had introduced—ideas which revolutionized cello playing in the twentieth century. However, he did not consider his musical concepts to be innovations. He was, in fact, in the historical mainstream of great interpreters. Casals' teaching shares much in common with the writings of C. P. E. Bach, Quantz, the Mozarts, father and son, Czerny's account of Beethoven's
playing, Liszt's description of Chopin's performance, the treatises of Wagner. If Casals' ideas sometimes seemed startlingly new, it was, as he pointed out, because 'the old natural rules have been forgotten'.

While 'Casals the cellist' is a household expression, some words may be in order about Casals, the conductor. Conducting was for him not an occasional avocation as it has often been for many famous instrumentalists. 'If I have been happy scratching away at my cello,' he once wrote to Julius Röntgen, 'how shall I feel when I can possess the greatest of all instruments — the orchestra?' His conducting career, which began with the Lamoureux Orchestra in 1908, extended over sixty-five years. In 1920 he founded the Orquestra Pau Casals in Barcelona, which he conducted until the outbreak of the Spanish civil war. Sir Adrian Boult, who attended Casals' rehearsals in 1923, comments, '... the rehearsals were really lessons ... every member of the orchestra was made to feel the passage himself in its inevitable relation to the expression of the moment and the style of the whole work. ... We all know Casals' playing of the classics. Casals, the conductor, is no less great an artist.' During this period, Casals also made frequent appearances as guest conductor with such ensembles as the London Symphony Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic. From 1950, his principle form of public performance was in the capacity of conductor, whether at the Prades or Marlboro Festivals or with the Festival Casals Orchestra of Puerto Rico, an ensemble drawn from among the finest of America's musicians, many first-desk players in major orchestras taking secondary positions for the privilege of playing under his direction. At no time did Casals communicate his ideas about music more clearly or eloquently than when rehearsing an orchestra. For this reason I have devoted much space to this aspect of his music-making. The rehearsals in question, unless otherwise stated, took place when he was conducting the Festival Casals or Marlboro Festival orchestras.

In planning the format of this book I have divided the material under chapter headings which are, I believe, representative of the
main aspects of Casals' teaching. Music being what it is, much of the material is interrelated, and some overlapping is unavoidable. To cite but one instance, the principles of clarity of articulation, as set out in Chapter III, are closely related to string technique, discussed in Chapter V. The final chapter, 'A Casals Rehearsal: The Pastoral Symphony', provides an example of how the various elements of interpretation, which are dealt with individually during the course of the book, join together in performance.

The musical examples are taken in nearly equal proportion from among the cello and orchestral works which Casals taught and performed. If, in writing this book, I have been obliged to select only a limited number of musical quotations which I thought would best exemplify the text, the reader is not so bound. This book could serve no better purpose than to stimulate the reader to discover for himself, among the vast repertoire of great music, the way in which Casals' principles may find extensive application. When, in the progress of the text, a piece of music is examined in a new context, I have occasionally repeated an example rather than impose a frequent need for cross-referencing. Since not every music lover is well versed in the C clefs, the musical examples are quoted in the G or F clef; (cellists will, I hope, forgive me). The music of transposing instruments has been written at actual pitch.

Casals' interpretative indications are contained within curved brackets that they may be distinguished from composers' markings, which remain unbracketed. Generally, where Casals' indications elaborate upon those of the printed score, I have left the two sets of markings standing side by side. The insertion of the composers' markings has presented certain problems, since unanimity is often lacking among the various sources. Where possible, I have consulted Urtext editions. (One notable exception is the Boccherini Bb major Concerto which Casals played in the Grützmacher edition – the only one available during the first part of this century, and which, despite the publication of an authentic score, is still popular today among cellists.) With
Casals' indications other difficulties arise. There is, in any case, the general problem posed when one attempts to translate a living re-creation into signs and symbols. Furthermore, Casals' interpretations were not set in an inflexible mould; bowings and fingerings were frequently changed; expressive inflections were subject to subtle variation. To the extent that an imperfect system of notation permits, I have endeavoured to indicate Casals' interpretation as it was at a given point in time. The reader should take the bracketed markings to be butterflies observed for a moment while on the wing – not when pinned down in the lepidopterist's case.

The great majority of Casals' statements quoted in this book were originally spoken in English; his use of this language, while sometimes imperfect, was always expressive and compelling. Only in those few places where I felt that his grammatical usage left his meaning unclear have I slightly modified the syntax. The epigraph placed below each chapter title is quoted from Casals.

Although I began to write this book in 1975 it was, in a sense, born twenty-two years previously when, as a student, I first visited Prades. My notes were taken at rehearsals and master classes in Prades, Zermatt, San Juan, Marlboro, the University of California, in private discussions with Casals and at chamber music rehearsals at his home. But this has been for me more than 'note-taking'. Casals brought a love and dedication to every phrase he played; he transmitted an aura of tangible joy in his music-making which touched one not only at a cerebral level. One cannot write of these things in a spirit of abstraction and I make no apology if, in setting down these recollections, I have not withheld my own enthusiasm. However, it goes without saying that the information presented about Casals' teaching is recorded as faithfully and accurately as possible.

As with all great artists, Casals' approach to a given work could be highly individual. Obviously there will be more than one way to interpret any piece. However, it is the aim of this book to set forth Casals' ideas as clearly as possible, and it is beyond its province to discourse extensively upon alternative
ways of teaching and performing.

What Casals left to us was not a doctrinaire system but an open door to our own experience. The strength of his spirit worked not to confine but to liberate; he guided a younger generation not towards a rigid copying of his ways, but towards an enriched understanding of the art of interpretation. He showed us, through his example, how we might open a musical score even for the hundredth time and yet never lack courage – as Shelley expressed it – ‘to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know’.

I wish to express my gratitude to Antony Hopkins without whose encouragement this book might never have been written; to Peter Gras for his discerning attention given to my literary effort; to Bernard Greenhouse for his invaluable musical advice; and to Emile Ellberger, Beaumont Glass and Geoffrey Sutton for their many helpful suggestions. Among others who have kindly provided counsel or assistance are Orlanda Brugnola, Isidore Cohen, Prof. Vincent Duckles, Clive Fairbairn, Sidney Harth, Michael Kennedy, Nathan Kroll, Aurora Natola-Ginastera, Menahem Pressler, Franz Walter and Wolfgang Zuckermann. The photographs of Casals teaching were taken by Perren-Barberini, Zermatt, and provided by Constant Cachin.

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Vandœuvres,
Switzerland 1976

David Blum

NOTE: the English terms ‘minim’, ‘crotchet’, ‘quaver’, ‘semiquaver’ and ‘demisemiquaver’ are equivalent to the American ‘half note’, ‘quarter note’, ‘eighth note’, ‘sixteenth note’ and ‘thirty-second note’ respectively; while ‘semitone’ and ‘tone’ correspond to ‘half step’ and ‘whole step’ (or ‘whole tone’).