George F. Bristow
Concertmaster, 1850-55
Philharmonic Member 1842-84

b. New York, 1825
d. New York, 1898

A founding member of the New York Philharmonic from 1842, George Bristow was the first Concertmaster to succeed U.C. Hill, the founder of the Orchestra. A working musician for most of his life, Bristow began playing in the Olympia Theatre orchestra at the age of 11, and maintained an eclectic performance career even after he joined the Philharmonic six years later.

In addition to his work as a violinist, Bristow was conductor of the Harmonic Society from 1851 and director of the Mendelssohn Union. He was also an active church organist and a dedicated composer, writing cantatas, overtures, quartets, anthems, songs, piano pieces and an opera *Rip Van Winkle*. The Philharmonic has performed eight of his works, the most recent being his String Quartet Op. 2 performed in 2002 at a Philharmonic Ensembles concert.
German violinist Richard Arnold was an important leader of the Philharmonic both as musician and administrator. In addition to his duties as Concertmaster he was a Director of the Society from 1879-95, and Vice President from 1895-1918. Under his watch the Philharmonic made its seminal transition from self-governing organization to modern business administration in 1909 with a managing staff and board. It was at this time that Gustav Mahler was hired as Music Director, and it was with Richard Arnold that Mahler did much of his corresponding.

Prior to his Philharmonic tenure, Arnold was a pupil of Ferdinand David in Leipzig after which came to the United States and accepted a position as first violinist in the Theodore Thomas Orchestra.
Theodore Spiering was Mahler’s Concertmaster at the New York Philharmonic from 1909 to 1911, even filling in as conductor for a gravely ill Mahler after February 21, 1911. Born in St. Louis, Spiering studied in Berlin with Joachim, performed for Brahms, and was a member of Theodore Thomas’s Chicago Symphony from 1892 to 1896. He was teaching at the Stern Conservatory in Berlin when he became aware of Mahler’s search for a new concertmaster and, upon auditioning for the conductor in Vienna, was hired almost immediately. Following Mahler’s death, Spiering left the Philharmonic and in later years conducted the Neue freie Volksbühne in Berlin, returning to America to lead the Women’s Orchestra Club of Brooklyn and teach at the New York College of Music.
Mishel Piastro
Concertmaster, 1931-43

b. Kertz, Russia, 1892
d. New York, 1970

The famous St. Petersburg Conservatory pedagogue Leopold Auer ranked Mishel Piastro among his other students Heifetz, Elman, Zimbalist, Seidel and Eddy Brown, as one of the outstanding artists of the “new Russian School of St. Petersburg.” Indeed, the saying at the Philharmonic during his tenure was—“if Piastro can’t play it, it can’t be played.” Piastro grew up in St. Petersburg where he studied with his father as well as with Auer. He began touring internationally in 1915 and made his Carnegie Hall recital debut in October, 1920. The following season was chosen by Richard Strauss to play with him in sonata and trio recitals on the composer’s only tour of America.

In 1925, Mr. Piastro became Concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony where he stayed until he joined the Philharmonic in 1931 under Toscanini. He remained at the Philharmonic until newly appointed Music Director Artur Rodzinski fired 14 Philharmonic musicians, among them six principals including Piastro. Afterwards he continued his career as a soloist and conductor of the Longines Symphonette.
Corigliano would go on to have the most prominent and visible career of any Philharmonic concertmaster to date, performing annually as a soloist with the Orchestra and serving under music directors Rodzinski, Walter, Stokowski, Mitropoulos and finally Bernstein before his retirement in 1966. He is a familiar face on the Bernstein Young People’s Concerts telecasts.

Corigliano grew up near Washington Square and originally began on the mandolin before studying the violin with Leopold Auer, Piastro’s former teacher. He made his debut in 1919 and was soloist with the Philharmonic two years later performing Bruch’s first violin concerto with Josef Stransky.

A particularly memorable moment in his career was his performances of the Beethoven Triple Concerto on the Philharmonic’s first tour to the Soviet Union in 1959 with Principal Cellist Laszlo Varga and Leonard Bernstein at the piano—a piece they would go on to perform at Opening Night of the 1959-60 season to rave reviews in New York. The Triple Concerto is also the piece that current Concertmaster Glenn Dicterow chose for his very last performances before his retirement, June 24-28, 2014.

After leaving the Philharmonic in 1966 Corigliano subsequently served as concertmaster of the San Antonio Symphony. His son John is a prominent composer based in New York and has been commissioned several times by the Philharmonic.

John Corigliano
Concertmaster, 1943-1966
Philharmonic Member, 1935-66

b. New York, 1901
d. Norfolk, Connecticut, 1975

It was John Corigliano, Assistant Concertmaster under Toscanini from 1935 who replaced Piastro after the notorious Rodzinski firings in 1943. He won the promotion after Rodzinski heard his performance of Dvořák’s violin concerto with Fritz Reiner over the air.