



Great Cellists • Piatigorsky

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SCHUMANN
Cello Concerto

SAINT-SAËNS
Cello Concerto No. 1

Gregor Piatigorsky, Cello

**London Philharmonic
Orchestra**

John Barbirolli

**RCA Victor Symphony
Orchestra**

Fritz Reiner

Historical Recordings 1934-1950

Great Cellists: Gregor Piatigorsky

Schumann: Cello Concerto • Saint-Saëns: Cello Concerto No. 1 • Encores

When, in 2004, a romantic novel was published based on the early life of Gregor Pavlovich Piatigorsky, lovers of the cello squirmed but were hardly surprised. A huge man in physical stature and musical personality, Piatigorsky told many tales that were even taller than he was, so that it has become impossible to sort out the truths from the myths. If even half the facts in the next paragraph of this note are true, his story was remarkable enough without needing to be embroidered. What can be said about him, without fear of contradiction, is that he was the outstanding representative of the Russian cello school in the generation before Rostropovich. His career, which lasted more than half a century, took him all round the world and won him the respect of his peers. He was also an excellent teacher and many of his pupils made good careers themselves. Sadly, he did not make as many recordings as one might have expected from a man of his reputation: cellists have always rated lower than violinists on the scale of record company priorities, and Piatigorsky had to cope with competition from Pablo Casals and Emanuel Feuermann, not to mention numerous others.

Born in Ekaterinoslav (now Dnipropetrovsk), Ukraine, on 17th April 1903, he was taught violin and piano by his violist father, but in February 1910 he heard a concert by the Imperial Orchestra, featuring the young principal cellist Viktor Kubatsky (for whom Shostakovich later wrote his *Cello Sonata*). Smitten by the sight and sound of the cello, 'Grisha' spent hours in imaginary play, using two sticks to represent a cello and a bow. 'Those magic sticks lifted me into a world of sound where I could call every mood at will,' he wrote. Given a real cello for his seventh birthday, he made such rapid progress with local teachers that at nine he was playing in public with his elder brother Leonid, a violinist. Winning a scholarship to the Moscow Conservatory, where his teacher was Alfred von Glehn, a pupil of Davidov, he was thrown out at one time but then taken back; he also had private tuition from

Anatoli Brandukov. Meanwhile he performed alongside his father Pavel in clubs and cinemas. He joined the Zimin Opera Orchestra, acted as supporting artist in Feodor Chaliapin's recitals and in 1919, aged sixteen, won the competition to become principal of the Bolshoy Opera Orchestra. He played in the Lenin Quartet led by the Auer pupil Lev Zeitlin, gave trio concerts with Issay Dobrowen and Mischa Fishberg and gained experience from working with Konstantin Igumnov, Alexander Goldenweiser and Chaliapin, who told him: 'You *sing* very nicely on your cello, Grisha, but try to *speak* more on it.' With Elena Bekmann-Scherbina he gave the first Russian performance of Debussy's *Sonata* and performed such pieces as Prokofiev's *Ballade* and Goedike's *Improvisations*. Glazunov liked the way Piatigorsky played his *Chant du ménestrel* and *Spanish Serenade*. Refused permission to study and give concerts abroad, in 1921 the cellist escaped to Poland, travelling most of the way in a cattle truck and crossing the border on foot with musician friends, his cello over his shoulder. 'Suddenly bing-bang-bang! Two soldiers shoot at us,' Piatigorsky told an interviewer years later. 'There is with us a lady opera singer. She is very awfully fat. As she hears the bangs she jumps up on my shoulders and puts her big arms round my neck ... my cello is no more.'

In L'vov he found an instrument and worked where he could, then moved to Warsaw and started playing in a hotel. He had a few unhappy lessons from Hugo Becker in Berlin and in Leipzig studied with Julius Klengel, but learnt more from listening to rivals such as Feuermann. By late 1923 he was back in Berlin and was befriended by Schnabel, with whom he took part alongside Boris Kroyt in a performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* sung by Marie Gutheil-Schoder and conducted by Fritz Stiedry. In 1924 he was appointed principal cellist of the Berlin Philharmonic by Wilhelm Furtwängler, and he made his concerto début with the orchestra on 29th January 1925 in the

Dvořák *Concerto*, under Fritz Goldschmidt (in 1926 he repeated this work in Berlin under Furtwängler and in 1928 he played the Brahms *Double Concerto*, partnered by Carl Flesch). He played in a trio with the violinist Josef Wolfsthal and the pianist Leonid Kreutzer, made his Leipzig Gewandhaus début in 1928 (Haydn's *D major Concerto*, with Furtwängler) and stayed with the Berlin Philharmonic until 1929, when he took his first trip to America. His début occurred in Oberlin, Ohio, but he also played with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Stokowski and gave three performances of the Dvořák *Concerto* with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony under Mengelberg. Back in Berlin, he met Casals and linked up in a trio with Flesch and Carl Friedberg, and in 1930 Schnabel joined Flesch and Piatigorsky for a trio concert in Berlin and Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* at the new Courtauld-Sargent Concerts in London. Another trio, with Nathan Milstein and Vladimir Horowitz, dated from the same year. In 1931 Piatigorsky met Artur Rubinstein, who thought him 'certainly the best cellist I had heard since Casals'. A performance of *Don Quixote* in Frankfurt, under the composer's baton, brought a written commendation from Strauss. In both Berlin and Frankfurt Joseph Szigeti and Piatigorsky presented a programme framed by Kodály's and Ravel's duos, with a Bach violin partita and a Reger cello suite in between. In 1932 Piatigorsky, a skilled writer for his instrument since his silent movie days, collaborated with Stravinsky on the *Suite italienne*, based on *Pulcinella*.

Through the 1930s Piatigorsky's fame grew and early in 1935 he gave the première of the Castelnuovo-Tedesco *Concerto* in New York, with Toscanini. Later that year came his London recital début, with three concerts at the Grottrian Hall. In 1940, by now based in the United States, he gave the first American performance of Prokofiev's *Concerto* with Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony, and the next year he performed Hindemith's *Concerto* with them. In 1942 he took American citizenship. In 1949 the so-called Million Dollar Trio was formed, featuring Artur Rubinstein, Jascha Heifetz and Piatigorsky; later the

string trio with Heifetz and William Primrose came into being, and in 1961 the Heifetz-Piatigorsky Concerts were established in Los Angeles. Besides those mentioned above, Piatigorsky had works with orchestra written for him by Stan Golestan and Milhaud, a sonata by Hindemith, and the *Variations on a Theme of Rossini* by Martinů. His cellist colleagues Enrico Mainardi and Gaspar Cassadó dedicated pieces to him. His most successful commission, William Walton's *Concerto*, was first given in 1957. Piatigorsky taught at the Curtis Institute, Philadelphia, through the 1940s, was associated with the Berkshire Music Center, Tanglewood, was at Boston University from 1957 and from 1962 was professor at the University of Southern California. In 1962 and 1966 he returned to Moscow as a Tchaikovsky Competition juror. His seventieth birthday was marked with a Carnegie Hall concert at which ten cellists performed, and in 1974 he visited London for the last time, to play sonatas with Daniel Barenboim. He died in Brentwood, near Los Angeles, on 6th August 1976. Early in his career Piatigorsky played a bastard Amati-Stradivari cello, the 'Arlecchino', with which his pre-war records were made. Then he had a Montagnana which he dubbed 'The Sleeping Princess', because it had not been played for more than a hundred years before he acquired it. Later he owned three Stradivaris, the 1696 Lord Aylesford (used by Janos Starker after him), his favourite 1714 Batta and the 1725 Baudiot.

Piatigorsky had few invitations to record concertos and he refused to do the *Concerto in B flat* by Boccherini, a composer he revered, because he hated Grützmacher's reworking. The Schumann *Concerto*, featuring his own cadenza, was his only pre-war orchestral recording, although in 1932 the first movement of the Dvořák *Concerto* was recorded live in Copenhagen, with Nicolai Malko conducting the Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra. Made with the then new London Philharmonic under John Barbirolli, himself a cellist, the Schumann shows off Piatigorsky's tonal lustre and technique. At the end the oboist Leon Goossens cannot resist uttering an audible

'Bravo!', forgetting that the recording machine is still running. Piatigorsky named Barbirolli as his favourite accompanist, although this was the only time they collaborated in the studio. Saint-Saëns's *A minor Concerto* was done with Fritz Reiner conducting a pick-up group of New York freelances and players from the Metropolitan Opera and Philharmonic-Symphony (Piatigorsky also recorded *Don Quixote* and the Brahms *Double Concerto* with Reiner, Milstein being the violinist in the latter). The encore pieces, with Piatigorsky's usual accompanist Ralph Berkowitz, were

chosen by the cellist to show off his tone and phrasing rather than his virtuosity; only his own Weber transcription extends him at all. Several of the Russian pieces were originally for the human voice (Rachmaninov's wordless *Vocalise* was written for Antonina Nezhdanova, with whom Piatigorsky worked at the Bolshoy) and they give the cellist a chance to show off the 'speaking' tone he learnt from Chaliapin.

Tully Potter

Mark Obert-Thorn

Mark Obert-Thorn is one of the world's most respected transfer artist/engineers. He has worked for a number of specialist labels, including Pearl, Biddulph, Romophone and Music & Arts. Three of his transfers have been nominated for Gramophone Awards. A pianist by training, his passions are music, history and working on projects. He has found a way to combine all three in the transfer of historical recordings.

Obert-Thorn describes himself as a 'moderate interventionist' rather than a 'purist' or 're-processor,' unlike those who apply significant additions and make major changes to the acoustical qualities of old recordings. His philosophy is that a good transfer should not call attention to itself, but rather allow the performances to be heard with the greatest clarity.

There is no over-reverberant 'cathedral sound' in an Obert-Thorn restoration, nor is there the tinny bass and piercing mid-range of many 'authorised' commercial issues. He works with the cleanest available 78s, and consistently achieves better results than restoration engineers working with the metal parts from the archives of the modern corporate owners of the original recordings. His transfers preserve the original tone of the old recordings, maximising the details in critical upper mid-range and lower frequencies to achieve a musical integrity that is absent from many other commercially released restorations.

Producer's Note

In addition to providing a survey of Piatigorsky's art from the 1930s to the 1950s, the present release also spotlights three phases of the development of recording technology. The Schumann *Concerto* was recorded by EMI directly to 78 rpm wax matrices, and is here transferred from American Victor "Z" pressings, its most quiet form of issue. The first set of encores from 1945 was recorded by American Columbia on lacquer master discs at 33 1/3 rpm. These masters were the source of both their original 78 rpm release (on an album called *Russian Melodies*) as well as their later issue on an LP in Columbia's *Encore* series. Since the wider frequency range and relatively quieter surfaces of the lacquers can better be appreciated from the LP issue, that has been chosen as the source for this transfer. Some noise from the original lacquers (not from the LP) remains, although the low frequency thumping heard during the Rachmaninov track is due to the accompanist's energetic pedalling rather than any defects in the disc sources. The 1950 recordings of encores and the Saint-Saëns *Concerto* were recorded by RCA Victor on magnetic tape. The concerto was transferred from LP, while the encores came from a combination of an LP and the 45 rpm release.

Mark Obert-Thorn

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

GREAT CELLISTS • PIATIGORSKY

- SCHUMANN:**
Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 129 24:37
- ① Nicht zu schnell 11:18
 ② Langsam 4:01
 ③ Sehr lebhaft 9:18
- London Philharmonic Orchestra •
 John Barbirolli**
 Recorded 18th May, 1934
 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London
 Matrices: 2B 6931-2, 6932-2, 6933-1, 6934-2,
 6935-1 and 6936-2
 First issued as HMV DB 2244 through 2246
- ENCORES**
- ④ **RUBINSTEIN (arr. POPPER):**
Melody in F, Op. 3, No. 1 2:51
- ⑤ **RACHMANINOV:**
Vocalise, Op. 34, No. 14* 3:17
- ⑥ **RIMSKY-KORSAKOV:**
Song of India (from *Sadko*) 3:11
- ⑦ **CUI: Orientale, Op. 50, No. 9**
(from *Kaleidoscope*) 2:32
- ⑧ **TCHAIKOVSKY:**
Chanson triste, Op. 40, No. 2 2:58
- ⑨ **TCHAIKOVSKY:**
None but the lonely heart, Op. 6, No. 6 2:23
- Ralph Berkowitz, piano**
 Recorded 24th October, 1945 and
 *18th October, 1946 in New York City
 Matrices: CO 35354, 37025, 35341, 35352,
 35353 and 35340
 First issued as Columbia 17412-D through
 17414-D in album M-684
- ⑩ **SAINT-SAËNS: The Swan**
(from *Carnival of the Animals*)** 2:35
- ⑪ **SCHUBERT: Moment Musical**
in F minor, Op. 94, No. 3 1:48
- ⑫ **TCHAIKOVSKY: Valse sentimentale,**
Op. 51, No. 6 2:14
- ⑬ **WEBER: Rondo (from *Sonata No. 3***
for Piano with Violin *Obbligato*)** 2:25
- ⑭ **RUBINSTEIN: Romance in E-flat,**
Op. 44, No. 1 3:07
- ⑮ **GRANADOS: Intermezzo (from *Goyescas*)** 4:51
- Ralph Berkowitz, piano**
 Recorded 18th and **19th September, 1950
 in Hollywood
 Matrices: E0-RB-3784-1C, 3780-1A, 3781-1A,
 3785-1, 3779-1A and E0-RC-398-1
 First issued on RCA Victor LM-1187 (LP)
- SAINT-SAËNS:**
Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33 19:10
- ⑯ Allegro non troppo 5:38
 ⑰ Allegretto con moto 4:35
 ⑱ Molto allegro 8:57
- RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra •
 Fritz Reiner**
 Recorded 7th December, 1950
 in Manhattan Center, New York City
 Matrices: E0-RC-1961 through 1964
 First issued on RCA Victor LM-1187 (LP)
- Gregor Piatigorsky, Cello**
- Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer:
 Mark Obert-Thorn**

Playing
Time
77:58

Gregor Piatigorsky
(1903-1976)
Concertos and Encores

- | | | |
|--------------|---|--------------|
| 1-3 | SCHUMANN: Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 129 | 24:37 |
| | London Philharmonic Orchestra • John Barbirolli | |
| 4 | RUBINSTEIN (arr. POPPER):
Melody in F, Op. 3, No. 1 | 2:51 |
| 5 | RACHMANINOV: Vocalise, Op. 34, No. 14 | 3:17 |
| 6 | RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: Song of India (from <i>Sadko</i>) | 3:11 |
| 7 | CUI: Orientale, Op. 50, No. 9 (from <i>Kaleidoscope</i>) | 2:32 |
| 8 | TCHAIKOVSKY: Chanson triste, Op. 40, No. 2 | 2:58 |
| 9 | TCHAIKOVSKY: None but the lonely heart,
Op. 6, No. 6 | 2:23 |
| 10 | SAINT-SAËNS: The Swan
(from <i>Carnival of the Animals</i>) | 2:35 |
| 11 | SCHUBERT: Moment Musical in F minor, Op. 94, No. 3 | 1:48 |
| 12 | TCHAIKOVSKY: Valse sentimentale, Op. 51, No. 6 | 2:14 |
| 13 | WEBER: Rondo
(from <i>Sonata No. 3 for Piano with Violin Obligato</i>) | 2:25 |
| 14 | RUBINSTEIN: Romance in E flat, Op. 44, No. 1 | 3:07 |
| 15 | GRANADOS (arr. CASSADÒ):
Intermezzo (from <i>Goyescas</i>) | 4:51 |
| | Tracks 4-15 with Ralph Berkowitz, Piano | |
| 16-18 | SAINT-SAËNS:
Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33 | 19:10 |
| | RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra • Fritz Reiner | |

This release provides a comprehensive survey of the art of Gregor Piatigorsky from the 1930s to the 1950s. The outstanding representative of the Russian cello school in the generation before Rostropovich, and hailed by Rubinstein as "certainly the best cellist I had heard since Casals", Piatigorsky performed all around the world, winning the respect of his peers. Since the record companies considered cellists to be less important than violinists, Piatigorsky received few invitations to record concertos. The Schumann Concerto, Piatigorsky's only pre-war recording of a complete orchestral work, amply demonstrates his 'speaking' tone and virtuoso technique. At the end the oboist Leon Goossens could not resist uttering an audible "Bravo!", picked up by the microphones.

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
Full recording details can be found on page 6 of the booklet

Special thanks to Michael Gray for discographic information
and to Don Tait for providing source material

www.naxos.com

Cover Photograph: Gregor Piatigorsky (The Tully Potter Collection)



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