



**THE USC THORNTON SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
& THE LA PHIL, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
THE LOS ANGELES CHAMBER ORCHESTRA,  
PRESENT A 10-DAY CELLO EXTRAVAGANZA,  
SHOWCASING 26 INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS  
REPRESENTING 15 COUNTRIES & 4 CONTINENTS.**

**MAY 13-22, 2016**  
**PIATIGORSKY**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
**CELLO FESTIVAL**

**RALPH KIRSHBAUM, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**  
**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**



# PIATIGORSKY INTERNATIONAL CELLO FESTIVAL

Friday, May 13 - Sunday, May 22, 2016

Los Angeles, California

Ralph Kirshbaum, Artistic Director

*Presented by the*

**University of Southern California**

**Thornton School of Music**

*and the*

**Los Angeles Philharmonic**

*in partnership with the*

**Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra**

.....  
**LA Phil May 13-15**

Leonard Slatkin, Conductor

Three Opening Concerts, Three Cello Concertos

Featuring Kirshbaum, Mørk and Gabetta  
.....

**Gala Opening Concert at USC May 15**

Antonio Lysy's *Te Amo, Argentina*

Audio-Visual Journey combining Music & Dance

Performances by Sollima, Schmidt and Maintz  
.....

**Colburn Celebrity Recitals**

**Walt Disney Concert Hall**

May 15 - Yo-Yo Ma, cello and Kathryn Stott, piano

May 17 - Schubert, Dean, and 100+ cellists

performing works by Clyne and Villa-Lobos  
.....

**Baroque Conversations May 21**

with Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra

Featuring Carr, Demenga, Queyras and Sollima  
.....

**Closing Gala May 22**

Beethoven Extravaganza with

Carr, Demenga, Haimovitz, Leonard, Lesser, Maisky, Queyras and Shulman

.....

## **Premieres**

LA Phil commission of World Premiere by Anna Clyne  
West Coast Premieres by Lera Auerbach and Anatolijus Šenderovas

.....

## **Chamber Music Series**

Calder String Quartet & Emerson String Quartet  
Perform String Quintets by Boccherini, Onslow, Schubert and Tanayev

.....

## **Master Classes and Workshops**

12 Master Classes  
Improvisation Workshop with Sollima  
Workshop for Young Cellists with Lysy

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**For Immediate Release** - March 16, 2015

In honor of the legendary cellist, Gregor Piatigorsky, the **Piatigorsky International Cello Festival**, presented by the **University of Southern California Thornton School of Music** and the **LA Phil** in partnership with the **Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra**, brings together masters of the cello and young cellists from around the world for an unparalleled celebration of the cello, its music and its musicians. The Festival takes place in Los Angeles, California from May 13-22, 2016 showcasing 26 international artists representing 15 countries and 4 continents, and unveiling several premieres during the course of this outstanding 10-day event.

The Festival opens with five exciting concerts - an **LA Phil** subscription series conducted by **Leonard Slatkin**, featuring renowned soloists **Ralph Kirshbaum, Truls Mørk and Sol Gabetta** performing Bloch, Elgar and Martinů. The **Gala Opening Concert at USC** will present its own unique program including an improvisation by cellist/composer/improvisor **Giovanni Sollima**, cello duos performed by **Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt** and **Jens Peter Maintz**, as well as a multidisciplinary work of **Antonio Lysy, *Te Amo, Argentina***, featuring music and dance that draws on the fascinating and diverse culture of Argentina. That evening Festival attendees have the opportunity to hear **Yo-Yo Ma** and **Kathryn Stott** in recital at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

The Piatigorsky Festival also partners with the **Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra** for the final concert of LACO's 2015-16 "Baroque Conversations" series, a program of Baroque and Early Classical cello concertos led by

Festival soloists **Colin Carr, Thomas Demenga, Jean-Guihen Queryas** and **Giovanni Sollima**. The grand finale of the 2016 Piatigorsky International Cello Festival comprises the **complete works for cello and piano by Beethoven** - five sonatas and three sets of variations, each performed by a different renowned cellist.

This year the Festival presents a **new chamber music series, Quintet+**. Each program features the **Calder String Quartet** performing a string quintet with a Festival artist, paired with a complementary program given by another Festival artist. The Festival's **Lunch Series recitals** provide an exciting diversity of works ranging from contemporary compositions to rarely performed masterpieces. USC Thornton School of Music's Chamber Singers and members of the Wind Ensemble collaborate with **Li-Wei Qin, David Geringas** and **Raphael Wallfisch** in a concert of 20th-century works by Gulda, Gubaidulina and Ibert, conducted by Uriel Segal.

One of the Festival's main attractions is the Colburn Celebrity Concert at Walt Disney Concert Hall featuring the Emerson String Quartet, with Ralph Kirshbaum, performing the Schubert Quintet, a performance of Brett Dean's *Twelve Angry Men*,

and over **100 cellists on the stage of Walt Disney Concert Hall** performing the **world premiere of a new work by Anna Clyne**.



**Artistic Director, acclaimed cellist Ralph Kirshbaum**, leads the Festival which honors the memory of Gregor Piatigorsky, one of the legends of the cello who heralded a period of incredible vibrancy in the cultural life of Los Angeles when he settled there in the final years of his glittering international career. Piatigorsky taught at the University of Southern California for many years. USC supports the Festival through *Visions and Voices*, a university-wide arts and humanities initiative begun in 2006. Emphasizing the university's commitment to interdisciplinary approaches, the initiative features a wide range of events throughout the year.



"A Festival such as this ideally serves as a great adventure. In that spirit, I encourage everyone to explore it to the full, finding excitement and inspiration in the discovery of lesser known artists and works as well as experiencing the deep satisfaction of hearing artists and composers we know well and love." -Ralph Kirshbaum

The Festival's roster includes some of the world's most celebrated cellists – **Yo-Yo Ma, Mischa Maisky, Truls Mørk, Jean-Guihen Queyras, David Geringas, Frans Helmerson, Colin Carr, Sol Gabetta, Giovanni Sollima** and **Raphael Wallfisch** among others - some of whom directly studied under Gregor Piatigorsky.

Many of the world's most recognized and accomplished cellists will converge on Los Angeles to collaborate, perform and educate through a series of master classes, concerts and talks. Over 40 young cellists from around the world will be selected to participate in these master classes in which the artists/teachers work with individual cello students in a public forum. The Festival includes a **Young Cellists Workshop**, coordinated by Antonio Lysy, and an **Improvisation Workshop** led by Giovanni Sollima. In honor of the Festival's namesake, a panel made up of Gregor Piatigorsky's former students will discuss his teaching and his legacy.

Bringing together three prestigious Los Angeles musical organizations—USC Thornton School of Music, the LA Phil and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra—the **2016 Piatigorsky International Cello Festival** aims to highlight the cello against the backdrop of one of the most culturally innovative metropolitan areas in the United States.

For more information about the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, go to [piatigorskyfestival.usc.edu](http://piatigorskyfestival.usc.edu)

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## **Cellists**

**Zuill Bailey · Colin Carr · Robert deMaine · Thomas Demenga · Sol Gabetta · David Geringas · Matt Haimovitz · Narek Hakhnazaryan · Frans Helmerson · Ralph Kirshbaum · Ronald Leonard · Laurence Lesser · Antonio Lysy · Yo-Yo Ma · Jens Peter Maintz · Mischa Maisky · Truls Mørk · Amit Peled · Li-Wei Qin · Jean-Guihen Queyras · Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt · Andrew Shulman · Giovanni Sollima · Jeffrey Solow · Raphael Wallfisch · Wendy Warner**

## **Conductors**

Uriel Segal · Leonard Slatkin

## **Ensembles**

Calder Quartet · Emerson Quartet · Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra · LA Phil · USC Chamber Singers · USC Wind Ensemble

## **Collaborative Pianists**

Ayke Agus · Bernadene Blaha · Rina Dokshitsky · Kevin Fitzgerald · Jeffrey Kahane · Lily Maisky · Christopher O'Riley · Noreen Polera · Kathryn Stott

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## RNCM MANCHESTER/PIATIGORSKY INTERNATIONAL CELLO FESTIVAL HISTORICAL INFORMATION

**1988** – Three-day inaugural **RNCM International Cello Festival**, founded by Ralph Kirshbaum as a means to raise money for the Pierre Fournier Award. The Festival's featured concert included Six Suites of Bach by six renowned cellists: Frans Helmerson, Thomas Demenga, Roman Jablonski, Ralph Kirshbaum, Wolfgang Boettcher and David Geringas.

**1990** – **Manchester International Cello Festival**. Fourteen cellists participated in three days of masterclasses and concerts. Event highlights included Beethoven's complete works for cello and piano performed by Antonio Meneses, Thomas Demenga, Zara Nelsova, Wolfgang Boettcher, David Geringas, Frans Helmerson, Steven Isserlis and Ralph Kirshbaum. The inaugural cello-making competition was added this year.

**1992** – **Manchester International Cello Festival**. Twenty cellists participated in the four-day Festival. The first Awards of Distinction were presented to Zara Nelsova and Paul Tortelier. Highlights included a Festival-commissioned World Premiere of Tristan Keuris's Double Concerto performed by Ralph Kirshbaum and Gregor Horsch, as well as the Cello- and Bow-making competitions. A gala concert in aid of the Jacqueline du Pré Memorial Fund featured the complete works for cello and piano by Brahms, Mendelssohn and Schumann performed by acclaimed artists including Mischa Maisky, Boris Pergamenschikow, Anner Bylsma and Arto Noras.

**1994** – **RNCM Manchester International Cello Festival**. Eighteen cellists participated in the five-day Festival "Cellists and their Music from Around the World." Participants and compositions hailed from Russia, Japan, Scandinavia, America, Switzerland, Germany, Britain and France. The Award of Distinction honored Janos Starker. The Festival's second commission was a World Premiere of *Prologue and Narrative* for cello and orchestra by Yehudi Wyner (Ralph Kirshbaum and BBC Philharmonic). Participants included Yo-Yo Ma, Karine Georgian, Janos Starker, Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, Colin Carr, Heinrich Schiff, Raphael Wallfisch and Philippe Muller.

**1996** – **RNCM Manchester International Cello Festival**. Twenty-five cellists from fifteen countries participated in the five-day Festival. Award of Distinction honors went to Mstislav Rostropovich and Bernard Greenhouse. Featured events included the annual Strad Cello- and Bow-making Competition, "Homage to Piatti" program and three Festival commissions: a piece by Alexander Goehr for Ralph Kirshbaum and the cello section of the BBC Philharmonic; Sally Beamish's *Duel for Two Celli*; and a World Premiere of Dmitri Smirnov's Cello Concerto performed by Karine Georgian. Artists included Erling Blondal Bengtsson (Denmark), Lluís Claret (Spain), Christophe Coin (France), Natalia Gutman (Russia), Truls Mørk (Norway) and Miklós Perényi (Hungary).

**1998** – **RNCM Manchester International Cello Festival**. Twenty-five cellists participated in a French-themed festival. Awards of Distinction were presented to Raya Garbousova and Siegfried Palm. Featured events included the Cello- and Bow-making Competitions and the first Young Artist Recital Series featuring Wendy Warner, Jian Wang, Alban Gerhardt and Quirine Viersen. Festival commissions included Alexander Knaifel's *Lux Aeterna for Two Psalm Singers* (two cellos); Cheryl Frances-Hoad's work for cello and piano; Anthony Gilbert's work for cello and piano and Peter Sculthorpe's *Cello Dreaming* for cello and orchestra. Guest artists included Alexander Baillie, Patrick Demenga, Janos Starker, Miklós Perényi, Natalia Gutman, Frans Helmerson, Zara Nelsova, Boris Pergamenschikow, Arto Noras and David Geringas.

**2001 – RNCM Manchester International Cello Festival.** Thirty-six cellists participated in “Exploring the American Influence.” Twelve masterclasses and eight workshops gave opportunities to young cellists from around the world. Awards of Distinction were presented to Aldo Parisot and Erling Blöndal Bengtsson. Highlights included the Cello and Bow-making competition and the Young Artist Recital Series featuring Monika Leskovar and Daniel Müller-Schott. Festival commissions included Nicholas Maw’s *Narration* for solo cello performed by Ralph Kirshbaum; Marc Neikrug’s *Petrus* for cello and piano with Gary Hoffman and Marc Neikrug; Christopher Rouse’s *Rapturedux* for an ensemble of 150 cellos; and Robert Stern’s *Recitative* for solo cello with Matt Haimovitz. Participants included Zuill Bailey, Timothy Eddy, Joel Krosnick, Laurence Lesser, the Yale Cellos, Liwei Qin, Bernard Greenhouse, Janos Starker, Natalia Gutman, Truls Mørk, David Geringas and Maria Kliegel.

**2004 – RNCM Manchester International Cello Festival.** Thirty-six cellists participated in “Finland and the Far East.” The Award of Distinction was awarded to Anner Bylisma. Featured events included the Strad Cello- and Bow-making Competitions and the Young Artist Recital Series. Frans Helmerson and Jan-Erik Gustafsson performed the world premiere of a Double Concerto by Finnish composer Kalevi Aho. Participants included Erling Blöndal-Bengtsson, Anner Bylisma, Colin Carr, Han-Na Chang, Patrick Demenga, Thomas Demenga, Karine Georgian, Natalia Gutman, Frans Helmerson, Gary Hoffman, Mischa Maisky, Arto Noras, Miklós Perényi, Boris Pergamenschikow, Heinrich Schiff, Janos Starker, Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, and Jian Wang.

**2007 – RNCM Manchester International Cello Festival.** Thirty-seven cellists participated in “From Britten to Britain.” Awards of Distinction were presented to Natalia Gutman and Yo-Yo Ma. Artists making their first appearance at the Festival include Ivan Monighetti, the Manchester Camerata with Music Director Douglas Boyd, and performers taking part in a new cello quintet afternoon series, featuring the Chilingirian and Michelangelo Quartets. A tribute was made to the recently deceased world famous Russian cellist Mstislav Rostopovich who was to have made his first appearance at the Cello Festival. (He is a previous recipient of the Festival’s Award of Distinction.) Works presented include those by many living composers who were inspired by Benjamin Britten and Frank Bridge including two UK premieres – Colin Matthews’ *Berceuse* with Raphael Wallfisch as soloist and Anatolijus Senderovas’ *Concerto in Do* with David Geringas – conducted by young Scottish conductor Garry Walker.

**2012 –** In honor of the legendary cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, Artistic Director Ralph Kirshbaum inaugurated the first **PIATIGORSKY INTERNATIONAL CELLO FESTIVAL**, a collaborative effort led by USC Thornton School of Music, in partnership with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the Colburn School. Twenty-two artists representing twelve countries participated in the ten-day Festival “Coming Together” for a series of masterclasses, recitals, orchestral concerts, chamber music performances, lectures, panel discussions, workshops and a film “Remembering Piatigorsky”. Featured events included subscription concerts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic with Ralph Kirshbaum, Mischa Maisky and Alisa Weilerstein as soloists; the American premiere of Thomas Demenga’s double concerto, “Relations”, performed by Thomas Demenga and Sayaka Selina; the complete six Bach Cello Suites performed consecutively by Ronald Leonard, Frans Helmerson, Jian Wang, Thomas Demenga, Miklós Perényi and Jean-Guihen Queyras, and Christopher Rouse’s “Rapturedux” with over 100 cellists on the stage of the Walt Disney Concert Hall. Other participating artists included Gary Hoffman, Steven Isserlis, Antonio Lysy, Narek Hakhnazaryan, Andrew Shulman, Peter Stumpf, together with Piatigorsky's grandson Evan Drachman, and his former students Terry King, Laurence Lesser, Nathaniel Rosen, Jeffrey Solow and Raphael Wallfisch.





## ABOUT

For more than 125 years, the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music has prepared students to excel as performers, composers, industry leaders and educators on stages and in studios around the world. Blending the rigors of a traditional conservatory-style education with the benefits of a leading research university, USC Thornton features a curriculum designed to prepare students for successful careers in the 21st century.

Founded in 1884 and the oldest continually operating cultural institution in Los Angeles, USC Thornton is internationally recognized as one of the finest conservatories and music schools in the U.S. Noted for its broad spectrum of outstanding programs, stellar faculty, and top-tier student musicians, the school currently enrolls more than 1,000 students from 40 countries.



Located in the heart of Los Angeles, the school offers students a comprehensive music education in one of the world's most dynamic cultural capitals. USC Thornton is the collegiate partner of choice for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Opera, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the GRAMMY Foundation and The Recording Academy. USC Thornton students are a respected presence in local communities and classrooms, guiding the next generation of musicians through education programs and events, making the school one of the most important cultural resources in Los Angeles.

**USC Thornton**  
School of Music



## THORNTON NUMBERS

**Number of students:** 1021

**Undergraduate:** 573

**Graduate:** 448

**Master's degree program:** 144

**Doctoral degree program:** 197

**Graduate certificate and artist diploma:** 107

**Geographic representation:** over 40 countries

**Student/faculty ratio:** 5:1

### PROGRAMS OF STUDY:

• **3 undergraduate degrees (BA, BM, BS)**

25 areas of study

• **3 master's degrees (MA, MM)**

27 areas of study

• **2 doctoral degrees (DMA, PHD)**

28 areas of study

• **2 certificate programs (GCRT, ARTD)**

24 areas of study



## THORNTON FACTS

- **Oldest** continually operating cultural institution in Los Angeles
- Presenter of over **500 concerts** annually
- The only music school with a weekly radio broadcast, **KUSC's Thornton Center Stage**, heard regularly in a major media market
- More than **20% of the members of the L.A. Philharmonic** are Thornton alumni and/or faculty members, including principal chairs for cello, violin, bass, viola, flute and harp
- Approximately **20% of the members of the L.A. Chamber Orchestra** are also associated with USC Thornton





## CELEBRATED ALUMNI

Ambrose Akinmusire .....	jazz trumpet
Piotr Anderszewski .....	pianist
Miguel Atwood-Ferguson .....	producer/arranger/studio musician
Alan Baer .....	principal tuba, New York Philharmonic
Peter Boyer .....	composer and orchestrator
Calder Quartet	
Benjamin Jacobson ( <i>violin</i> ), Andrew Bulbrook ( <i>violin</i> ), Jonathan Moerschel ( <i>viola</i> ), Eric Byers ( <i>cello</i> )	
Lucinda Carver * .....	pianist, USC Thornton Vice Dean
Billy Childs .....	composer/jazz pianist
Rozzi Crane .....	pop vocalist
Gerald Clayton .....	jazz pianist
Daedelus (Alfred Darlington) .....	electronic DJ/producer
Grant Gershon .....	conductor, Los Angeles Master Chorale
Rod Gilfry * .....	baritone
Jerry Goldsmith .....	film composer
Donald Green .....	principal trumpet, Los Angeles Philharmonic
Ben Hong * .....	assistant principal cello, Los Angeles Philharmonic
Sara Gazarek * .....	jazz vocalist
Los Angeles Guitar Quartet	
John Dearman, Matthew Greif, William Kanengiser *, Scott Tennant * .....	guitar
Lionel Hampton .....	jazz musician
Marilyn Horne .....	mezzo-soprano
James Horner .....	film and television composer
Tommy Johnson * .....	tuba
Vimbayi Kaziboni .....	conductor, Ensemble InterContemporain
Michelle Kim .....	assistant concertmaster, New York Philharmonic
Morten Lauridsen * .....	composer, Medal of the Arts recipient
Owen Lee .....	principal bass, Cincinnati Symphony
Ryan Lerman .....	guitarist
Petar Mandich .....	talent manager
Michael Ke Ma .....	assistant principal bassoon, Detroit Symphony
Martha Masters .....	classical guitarist
Bear McCreary .....	film and television composer
Angela Meade .....	soprano
Erica Miller .....	soprano
James Newton Howard .....	film composer
Andrew Norman * .....	composer
Christopher Parkening .....	classical guitarist
Gretchen Parlato .....	jazz vocalist
Dwight Parry .....	principal oboe, Cincinnati Symphony
Norm Pearson .....	principal tuba, Los Angeles Philharmonic
Cynthia Phelps .....	principal viola, New York Philharmonic
Gene Pokorny .....	principal tuba, Chicago Symphony
Vicki Ray .....	piano chair, CalArts
Lee Ritenour .....	jazz guitarist/studio musician
Jessica Rivera .....	soprano
Daniel Rothmuller .....	associate principal cello, Los Angeles Philharmonic
Elizabeth Rowe .....	principal flute, Boston Symphony
Patrice Rushen * .....	pop vocalist/pianist, musical director
Royce Saltzman .....	choral conductor



(CELEBRATED ALUMNI CONTINUED)

Gail Samuel	.....	executive director, Los Angeles Philharmonic Association
Tom Scott	.....	jazz saxophonist
Nadia Shpachenko-Gottesman	.....	pianist
Dale Hikawa Silverman	.....	associate principal viola, Los Angeles Philharmonic
Cheryl Staples	.....	associate concertmaster, New York Philharmonic
Michael Tilson Thomas	.....	conductor, San Francisco Symphony
Sunny Yang	.....	cellist, Kronos Quartet
Cody Westheimer	.....	film composer
Austin Wintory	.....	composer
Lorna Zemke	.....	music educator
Michele Zukovsky *	.....	former principal clarinet, Los Angeles Philharmonic

\* denotes USC Thornton faculty

TOP: Michael Tilson Thomas  
 SECOND ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Marilyn Horne, Andrew Norman, Sunny Yang of Kronos Quartet  
 THIRD ROW: Gerald Clayton, Billy Childs  
 FOURTH ROW: Calder Quartet, Bear McCreary, Los Angeles Guitar Quartet



### **Ralph Kirshbaum 2015-2016 Season Biography**

The distinguished career of Texas-born cellist Ralph Kirshbaum encompasses the worlds of solo performance, chamber music, recording and pedagogy and places him in the highest echelon of today's cellists. He enjoys the affection and respect not only of audiences worldwide, but also of his many eminent colleagues and students.

Ralph Kirshbaum has appeared with many of the world's great orchestras, including the Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, BBC and London Symphonies, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Zurich Tonhalle, Orchestre de Paris and Israel Philharmonic. He has collaborated with many of the great conductors of the time such as Herbert Blomstedt, Semyon Bychkov, Christoph von Dohnányi, Andrew Davis, the late Sir Colin Davis, James Levine, Kurt Masur, Zubin Mehta, Sir Antonio Pappano, André Previn, Sir Simon Rattle and the late Sir Georg Solti. Ralph Kirshbaum has appeared frequently at such prominent international festivals as Edinburgh, Bath, Verbier, Lucerne, Aspen, La Jolla, Santa Fe, Music@Menlo, Ravinia and New York's Mostly Mozart.

In addition to his thirty-year collaboration with pianist Peter Frankl and violinist Gyorgy Pauk, he has frequently appeared with Pinchas Zukerman, Robert McDuffie, Lawrence Dutton, Peter Jablonski and Shai Wosner. Other recent collaborators have included Leif Ove Andsnes, Joshua Bell, Yefim Bronfman, Midori, Lang Lang, Vadim Repin, Joseph Swensen, Pepe Romero, and the Emerson and Takács String Quartets.

This season Mr. Kirshbaum performs Beethoven cycles with pianist Shai Wosner in the U.S. and Great Britain, highlighted by a performance of the complete cycle in London's Wigmore Hall, in conjunction with the celebration of Mr. Kirshbaum's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday. He also appears with the Los Angeles Philharmonic conducted by Leonard Slatkin in a performance of Bloch's *Schelomo* which launches the Second Piatigorsky International Cello Festival in May 2016.

Bach forms an important part of Mr. Kirshbaum's musical activities; he has performed the complete cycle of Bach Cello Suites in London's Wigmore Hall, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and in Sydney, Edinburgh, Lyon and San Francisco. He has also made a critically acclaimed recording of the solo Bach Suites for EMI/Virgin Classics.

In 1988 Ralph Kirshbaum founded the RNCM Manchester International Cello Festival, bringing together the world's great cellists in celebration of the cello, its music, its musicians and its makers. The last festival took place in 2007 and was awarded the prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society's Music Award for Concert Series and Festivals. In 2012 he inaugurated the Piatigorsky International Cello



Festival in Los Angeles to worldwide acclaim. The next festival, already highly anticipated, takes place May 13-22, 2016.

A renowned pedagogue, he served on the faculty of the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester for 38 years, and in 2008 accepted the Gregor Piatigorsky Chair in Violoncello at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music. Ralph Kirshbaum has recently assumed the Chair of the String Department at the Thornton School. He continues to serve as Artistic Advisor of IMS Prussia Cove and is Founder/Honorary President of the Pierre Fournier Award, as well as Honorary President of the London Cello Society. He recently served a five-year term on the United States President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

Ralph Kirshbaum's many recordings have included a Gramophone Magazine "Record of the Year" world premiere recording of Tippett's Triple Concerto for Philips, the Elgar and Walton Concertos for Chandos, the Ravel, Shostakovich and Brahms Trios for EMI, the Barber Concerto and Sonata for EMI/Virgin Classics and the Shostakovich and Prokofiev Sonatas with Peter Jablonski for Altara Music. Also noteworthy is his recording of the Brahms Double and Beethoven Triple Concertos for BMG Classics with Pinchas Zukerman, John Browning and the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Christoph Eschenbach, and the recent Hyperion release of the Schubert Quintet with the Takács Quartet.

The rare Montagnana Cello that Ralph Kirshbaum plays once belonged to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century virtuoso Alfredo Piatti.

**AT THE REQUEST OF THE ARTIST, PLEASE DO NOT  
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**AUGUST 2015 - PLEASE DESTROY ALL PREVIOUSLY DATED MATERIALS.**

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

## The New York Times

September 10, 2015

### Fall Arts Preview

### **The New Season** | Classical

Classical Music Listings for the Fall Season and Beyond

By Zachary Woolfe

#### **PIATIGORSKY INTERNATIONAL CELLO FESTIVAL**

This orgy of all things cellistic, led by the prominent musician and teacher Ralph Kirshbaum of the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music, extends over Los Angeles for 10 days and includes orchestral concerts, recitals and master classes. May 13 to 22, [piatigorskyfestival.usc.edu](http://piatigorskyfestival.usc.edu).



**KIRSHBAUM  
ASSOCIATES INC.**

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

## Los Angeles Times

May 10, 2016

### Why are 102 cellos in Disney Hall? Ralph Kirshbaum is happy to tell you

By Rick Schultz



Cellist Ralph Kirshbaum, artistic director of the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, rehearses with pianist Izumi Kashiwagi at his Los Angeles home earlier this month.

The second Piatigorsky International Cello Festival — four years in the making — begins Friday, and though the 26 cellists coming to Los Angeles from around the world include some famous names in the classical world, such as Yo-Yo Ma and Raphael Wallfisch, others are less familiar.

Festival founder Ralph Kirshbaum, who has held the Gregor Piatigorsky Chair in Violoncello at USC's Thornton School of Music since 2008, hopes audiences will discover new artists amid the rich variety of events. The festival, running until May 22, includes performances at Walt Disney Concert Hall and USC in

collaboration with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the Calder and Emerson String quartets. The extravaganza also offers master classes open to the public, panel discussions and even a marketplace of exhibitors including instrument and bow makers.

For this edited conversation, Kirshbaum discussed what's new in this second festival and why Piatigorsky, who taught at USC until his death in 1976, is still such a force among cellists.

**The L.A. City Council recently proclaimed this Piatigorsky International Cello Festival Week.**



**KIRSHBAUM  
ASSOCIATES INC.**

**What made you think you could build an entire festival around Piatigorsky's name?**

Piatigorsky was the first cellist in this country to open the doors for the cello to be considered a solo instrument. He had an outsize personality, wonderful sense of storytelling on the instrument and a beautiful sound. He was a captivating performer and undeniably one of the most important musicians of the latter half of the 20th century. It's one thing to master your instrument, but another to be truly beloved. Piatigorsky was truly beloved.

**Did you study with him?**

After I performed a concert with the L.A. Phil, Piatigorsky invited me to his home. I was in my 20s. He was my boyhood idol. One of my most influential teachers as a teenager was a Piatigorsky pupil, and I played for Piatigorsky in a master class in Texas when I was 13. There were all these links.

**The first L.A. cello festival in 2012 concluded with a concert of 100 cellos filling the Disney Hall stage. How do you top that?**

We're doing the 100 cellos again, on a mid-festival Disney Hall concert on May 17 that includes "Threads and Traces," a world premiere by Anna Clyne, a young British composer who has a background as a cellist. We're starting the concert with Schubert's Quintet in C Major, one of the great chamber pieces, featuring two cellos, with myself and the Emerson quartet. Then there's 12 cellos in Brett Dean's "Twelve Angry Men," inspired by the book and film. And we finish with, actually, 102 cellos.

**What else is new about this festival?**

We have 13 new artists. One thing I try to impress on audiences: They should have the courage and curiosity to come and listen to some of those artists whose names they are not so familiar with. And trust that they're here because they are great artists.

**Can you give us an example?**

Giovanni Sollima, an Italian cellist and composer. It's Yo-Yo Ma's first time at the festival, and he's performing one of Giovanni's pieces, "Il bell'Antonio," at



Ralph Kirshbaum, whose cello festival opens Friday.

his Disney Hall recital on [Sunday]. And Giovanni's going to be at the USC festival gala opening at Bovard Auditorium, also on [Sunday], featuring Giovanni doing improvisation. We've never had improvisation at the festival.

**What can you program only in festivals like this one?**

You can hear the Jacques Ibert "Concerto for Cello and Wind Orchestra," Friedrich Gulda's quirky "Concerto for Cello and Winds" and Sofia Gubaidulina's "Canticle of the Sun" for cello and chamber choir. You might hear one, but to hear all three in a concert — that's something you can only do in a festival. We also have a new Quintet+ Series — three concerts in the early evening on the USC campus, in which the Calder Quartet and one of 26 international cellists joins them to play a two-cello quintet.

**You just turned 70. Are you doing anything special to celebrate this milestone?**

The opening concert of the festival is me performing Ernest Bloch's "Schelomo" from his Jewish Cycle with Leonard Slatkin and the L.A. Phil. That's my birthday present to myself. It wasn't necessarily the intention at the time. I just wanted to play this great work.

**The festival closes with Beethoven's complete works for cello, each performed by a different cellist. How important is Beethoven to cellists?**

His sonatas have been at the core of everything I've done. Beethoven is a pivotal composer. If you follow his compositional development through the five sonatas, the cello emerged as an equal partner to the piano. Musically



and technically, Beethoven was the first composer who really opened up the next level of possibility for the cello.

**Deciding on a career in music is more difficult than ever. Are you optimistic about the future for young, upcoming cellists?**

I am. I tend to be an optimist. I had an uncle who studied violin at Juilliard, but he became an engineer. Near the end of his life, he told me one of his greatest regrets was not continuing with the violin. So it's not a new phenomenon. If somebody is passionate, committed, determined and creative enough, they're going to find a way to make a living as a musician.

**You have told a story of how Piatigorsky once played a difficult opening movement from a Locatelli sonata for Pablo Casals ...**

Casals couldn't quite match his technique. A week later, Piatigorsky

went to a Casals recital, which began with this sonata. Piatigorsky told me Casals performed the opening movement perfectly. Casals had found a way to match the sound as written with an alternative bowing. Piatigorsky looked at me and said, "That, Ralph, is art — and that was Casals." This is one great artist acknowledging the artistic breadth of another great artist.

**That kind of humility seems to inform the upcoming festival.**

That's what this cello festival is about: the ability to recognize and celebrate the artistry of many different cellists from all over the world. To do away with competition, and celebrate those differences. That's what motivated me to develop a festival like this. To find ways of showing the diversity — the wide color spectrum and range of artistry we have in the cello world.

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival



April 27, 2016

## Piatigorsky International Cello Festival comes to L.A. in May

By Pauline Adamek

In honor of the legendary cellist, Gregor Piatigorsky, the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, presented by the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music and the LA Phil in partnership with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, brings together masters of the cello and young cellists from around the world for an unparalleled celebration of the cello, its music and its musicians. The Festival takes place in Los Angeles, California from May 13-22, 2016 showcasing 26 international artists representing 15 countries and 4 continents, and unveiling several premieres during the course of this outstanding 10-day event. The Festival opens with five exciting concerts – an LA Phil subscription series conducted by Leonard Slatkin, featuring renowned soloists Ralph Kirshbaum, Truls Mørk and Sol Gabetta performing Bloch, Elgar and Martinů. The Gala Opening Concert at USC will present its own unique program including an improvisation by cellist/composer/improvisor Giovanni Sollima, cello duos performed by Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt and Jens Peter Maintz, as well as a multidisciplinary work of Antonio Lysy, Te Amo, Argentina, featuring music and dance that draws on the fascinating and diverse culture of Argentina. That

evening Festival attendees have the opportunity to hear Yo-Yo Ma and Kathryn Stott in recital at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

The Piatigorsky Festival also partners with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra for the final concert of LACO's 2015-16 "Baroque Conversations" series, a program of Baroque and Early Classical cello concertos led by Festival soloists Colin Carr, Thomas Demenga, Jean-Guihen Queryas and Giovanni Sollima. The grand finale of the 2016 Piatigorsky International Cello Festival comprises the complete works for cello and piano by Beethoven – five sonatas and three sets of variations, each performed by a different renowned cellist.

This year the Festival presents a new chamber music series, Quintet+. Each program features the Calder String Quartet performing a string quintet with a Festival artist, paired with a complementary program given by another Festival artist. The Festival's Lunch Series recitals provide an exciting diversity of works ranging from contemporary compositions to rarely performed masterpieces. USC Thornton School of Music's Chamber Singers and members of the Wind Ensemble collaborate with Li-Wei Qin, David Geringas and Raphael Wallfisch in a



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concert of 20th-century works by Gulda, Gubaidulina and Ibert, conducted by Uriel Segal.

One of the Festival's main attractions is the Colburn Celebrity Concert at Walt Disney Concert Hall featuring the Emerson String Quartet, with Ralph Kirshbaum, performing the Schubert Quintet, a performance of Brett Dean's Twelve Angry Men, and over 100 cellists on the stage of Walt Disney Concert Hall performing the world premiere of a new work by Anna Clyne.

Artistic Director, acclaimed cellist Ralph Kirshbaum, leads the Festival which honors the memory of Gregor Piatigorsky, one of the legends of the cello who heralded a period of incredible vibrancy in the cultural life of Los Angeles when he settled there in the final years of his glittering international career.

Piatigorsky taught at the University of Southern California for many years. USC supports the Festival through Visions and Voices, a university-wide arts and humanities initiative begun in 2006. Emphasizing the university's commitment to interdisciplinary approaches, the initiative features a wide range of events throughout the year.

"A Festival such as this ideally serves as a great adventure. In that spirit, I encourage everyone to explore it to the full, finding excitement and inspiration in the discovery of lesser known artists and works as well as experiencing the deep satisfaction of hearing artists and

composers we know well and love." – Ralph Kirshbaum.

The Festival's roster includes some of the world's most celebrated cellists – Yo-Yo Ma, Mischa Maisky, Truls Mørk, Jean-Guihen Queyras, David Geringas, Frans Helmerson, Colin Carr, Sol Gabetta, Giovanni Sollima and Raphael Wallfisch among others – some of whom directly studied under Gregor Piatigorsky.

Many of the world's most recognized and accomplished cellists will converge on Los Angeles to collaborate, perform and educate through a series of master classes, concerts and talks. Over 40 young cellists from around the world will be selected to participate in these master classes in which the artists/teachers work with individual cello students in a public forum. The Festival includes a Young Cellists Workshop, coordinated by Antonio Lysy, and an Improvisation Workshop led by Giovanni Sollima.

In honor of the Festival's namesake, a panel made up of Gregor Piatigorsky's former students will discuss his teaching and his legacy.

Bringing together three prestigious Los Angeles musical organizations—USC Thornton School of Music, the LA Phil and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra—the 2016 Piatigorsky International Cello Festival aims to highlight the cello against the backdrop of one of the most culturally innovative metropolitan areas in the United States.



# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival



## Classical Music News of the Week, October 11, 2015

### Piatigorsky International Cello Festival



In honor of the legendary cellist, Gregor Piatigorsky, the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, presented by the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music and the LA Phil in partnership with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, brings together masters of the cello and young cellists from around the world for

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For more information about the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, go to [piatigorskyfestival.usc.edu](http://piatigorskyfestival.usc.edu)



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# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival



May 9, 2016

## This Week's 'Don't Miss' List

By Dan Johnson



5. The world's cello elite assemble in Downtown Los Angeles this week as USC and the L.A. Philharmonic host the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival for the first time since 2012. Many of the festivities center around USC's Bovard Auditorium, but Downtown proper gets its due with four performances at Walt Disney Concert Hall from Friday-Sunday, May 13-May 15. On Friday, Leonard Slatkin leads the L.A. Phil and cellist Ralph Kirshbaum through Bloch's "Schelomo." On Saturday, four-string

master blaster Truls Mork joins Slotkin and his merry band of musicians for the "William Tell Overture" and Elgar's "Cello Concerto." Sol Gabetta pops in for more "William Tell" and compositions from Martinu and Berlioz before the esteemed Yo-Yo Ma and pianist Kathryn Stott cap off the weekend on Sunday evening. At 111 S. Grand Ave., (213) 972-7300 or [laphil.com](http://laphil.com).

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival



April 28, 2016



ICONOPHILES

## PIATIGORSKY INTERNATIONAL CELLO FESTIVAL

MAY 13 - MAY 22

Calling all cellists! The Piatigorsky Cello Festival was last held in 2012; now it's back, with ten days of concerts featuring 26 visiting artists with 40 students selected from around the world to perform solo, chamber, and collaborative works.

**21CM Takeaway:** Whether you like traditional or cutting-edge cello music, you'll find something to love about this festival. And one of the highlight performances features over 100 cellists performing at once - it's not every day you get to see that!

### Details

**Start:**  
May 13

**End:**  
May 22

[Event website](#)

### Venue

Walt Disney Concert Hall  
111 South Grand Avenue, Los  
Angeles, CA 90012 United States

[Venue website](#)

### Organizer

USC Thornton School of Music

[Organizer website](#)



# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

## VIOLIN VIOLA CELLO BASS FIDDLE STRINGS

NEWS SPOTLIGHT

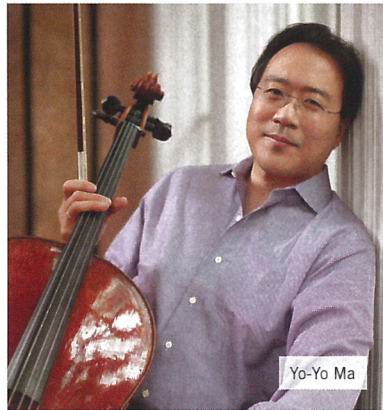
December 2015



Lera Auerbach



Anatolijus Senderovas



Yo-Yo Ma

## A FANTASY LEAGUE

2016 Piatigorsky International Cello Competition announces all-star lineup

By Laurence Vittes

The second Piatigorsky International Cello Festival will be presented by the University of Southern California, Thornton School of Music and the Los Angeles Philharmonic in partnership with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (LACO), in Los Angeles, California, from May 13–22, 2016.

Taking place primarily on the USC campus, with additional concerts at Walt Disney Concert Hall, the festival will feature a fantasy-league's roster of 26 cellists from 15 countries, and West Coast premieres of music by **Lera Auerbach** and **Anatolijus, Senderovas**. **Yo-Yo Ma** will give a celebrity recital, and 100 cellists will play a world premiere by **Anna Clyne** at Disney Hall. Other participants include **Amit Peled**, **Wendy Warner**, and **Zuill Bailey**. The gala opening concert will be highlighted by **Giovanni**

**Sollima** plugging in and improvising on his electric cello, and **Antonio Lysy** mounting his multimedia *Te Amo, Argentina*, complete with tango dancers. "It's ideal for a joyous weekend in Los Angeles," festival artistic director **Ralph Kirshbaum** tells *Strings*.

The closing gala will be Beethoven's complete sonatas and variation played by **Colin Carr**, **Thomas Demenga**, **Matt Haimovitz**, **Ronald Leonard**, **Laurence Lesser**, **Mischa Maisky**, **Jean-Guihen Queyras**, and **Andrew Shulman**. Other highlights include Carr, Demenga, Queyras, and Sollima playing concertos by C.P.E. Bach, Boccherini, Leo, Platti, and Vivaldi with LACO; and the **Calder** and **Emerson** quartets playing quintets by Boccherini, Onslow, Schubert, and Taneyev.

This second Piatigorsky festival will also offer 12 master classes and workshops,

“

When the [students] realize they are really going to be able to play fine instruments, when I hand them my Montagnana [cello], you can see the look in their eyes.

including improvisation with Sollima geared toward helping cellists express themselves more fluently, and a hands-on session for young cellists with Lysy. Lesser, Maisky, **Jeffrey Solow**, and **Raphael Wallfisch** will discuss the career of their great teacher.

Kirshbaum says that Piatigorsky 2016 will offer an intimate atmosphere for musicians, students, and the public to meet and share. "It will be allied to what we had in our Manchester International Cello Festivals," he says.

"People will be able to walk around the events, and the buildings, enjoy local eateries. There may even be shuttle service to Disney Hall, a big plus both for visitors from out of town and locals."

Kirshbaum, who will play Bloch's Schemo with the LA Phil, conducted by Leonard Slatkin, treasures the workshop with young artists on the last morning of the festival most of all.

"When they realize they are really going to be able to play fine instruments, when I hand them my Montagnana, you can see the look in their eyes," he says, referring to the 1729 cello that once belonged to 19th-century cello master Carlo Alfredo Piatti.

"Then to give them the opportunity to talk with prominent instrument dealers and pick up tips and tricks about what to look for when actually purchasing a great instrument—or any instrument—is a great thing. Most people have little idea until they have spent at least two or three years acquainting themselves with condition, longevity, and pedigree.

"It will be a rousing morning!"  
Learn more at [piatigorskyfestival.usc.edu](http://piatigorskyfestival.usc.edu). ■



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# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival



May 4, 2016

## A Different Kind Of Music Festival

By Bruce Britt

Play word association with the name "Malibu" and for many folks a posh Los Angeles suburb abounding with surfers, celebrity residents and palatial beachfront property springs to mind. But if seasoned TV producer/director Doug DeLuca has his way, Malibu will soon conjure yet another indelible image — that of a world-famous annual music festival.

In 2015 DeLuca launched the Malibu Guitar Festival, a four-day shindig styled after the trailblazing communal rock fests of the 1960s. On April 28–May 1 the festival's sophomore lineup featured, among others, GRAMMY-nominated blues guitarist Kenny Wayne Shepherd, GRAMMY nominee and acclaimed pedal steel guitarist Robert Randolph, GRAMMY-winning country music picker Albert Lee, former Paul McCartney & Wings guitarist Laurence Juber, and Orianthi, who has cut her teeth with the likes of Michael Jackson and Alice Cooper.

DeLuca's multigenre lineup cast a large net with a roster credible enough to draw hardcore guitar fans, yet wide-ranging enough to have family appeal. Last year he booked actor Kevin Costner and his band Modern West for the inaugural Malibu Guitar Festival. This year DeLuca tapped former "American Idol" judge Randy Jackson and teen pop singer Cody Simpson as performers.

"We're a mass-appeal music festival with a core of guitar," says DeLuca. "We're celebrating the guitar, but we're not

shutting people out. The guitar seemed like it could be a great unifying force here in Malibu. It conjures up images of Monterey in the early days, where we activate every bar, every restaurant, every nook and cranny — jams breaking out everywhere, on the beaches, in the park. That's where the vision goes."

DeLuca's guitar-themed gala is part of a growing industry trend — festivals devoted to a specific musical instrument or discipline. Stringed instrument festivals run the gamut from symphonic string festivals such as Amsterdam's Cello Beinnale, the University of Tennessee School of Music Violin Festival and the Chicago Viola Festival to the Southern California Slack Key Guitar Festival showcasing native Hawaiian music.

But strings are just the proverbial tip of an ever-expanding iceberg. A plethora of specialized festivals spotlighting keyboards, brass, woodwinds, percussion, and more are springing up across the globe, many offering advanced workshops that attract world-class musicians seeking to further hone their skills. Taking place July 11–22, Poland's International Piano Festival, for example, will draw students worldwide with an immersive combination of performance and intensive study conducted in the homeland of piano virtuoso Frédéric Chopin.

Singapore's upcoming Flute Festival appeals to music lovers by

focusing on six key elements: recital, competition, master class, seminar, production exhibition, and repair. The International Trombone Festival, held this year at New York's Juilliard School, will combine artist clinics, competitions, instrument manufacturer exhibitions, and even an improvisational trombone flash mob. Poland's Meinl Drum Festival is a one-day gala focusing on drums, featuring performances by drummers from across the globe, including Robert "Sput" Searight of GRAMMY winners Snarky Puppy, who participated in the 2015 installment. The list of niche instrument festivals just keeps growing.

Shepherd, who headlined this year's Malibu Guitar Festival, believes themed festivals can be a boon for instrumentalists. The son of a Louisiana radio executive, Shepherd learned the beauty of instrumental expression from listening to recordings by guitar masters such as Albert King, B.B. King and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

"To be able to communicate emotion without words is an incredibly powerful thing, and that's what all [instrumentalists] do," says Shepherd.

With a career now spanning more than 20 years, Shepherd has been part of many guitar-oriented festivals, most notably the traveling six-string extravaganza G3, which was founded by GRAMMY-nominated rock guitarist Joe Satriani in 1996.

"With these festivals, every little bit helps as far as raising awareness of guitar, guitar players, blues music, and music that's real," Shepherd says.

For festival directors, piecing together a successful event can involve approximately a year of planning — a considerable amount of time for events that often last a mere week, or an extended weekend. Some directors invite input from musicians and fans and then use the resulting feedback to construct a well-tempered combination of education, performance and events. In addition to their goal of creating a festival with across-the-board appeal, directors often welcome the paying public to attend master classes, where

world-famous instructors serve up musical knowledge along with inspiring philosophical insights gleaned from a lifelong pursuit of virtuosic excellence.

Master cellist Ralph Kirshbaum is artistic director for the renowned Piatigorsky International Cello Festival presented by the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music. He inadvertently helped launch the instrument festival craze in 1988 when he founded the now-defunct Manchester International Cello Festival, a British event that had become a major stopping point for cellists around the world. Due to his reputation as an instrument festival pioneer, Kirshbaum says he has been tapped as an unofficial consultant to cello festivals worldwide. Over the years he's learned a lot about festivals, and how to optimize them for participants.

"In terms of programmatic ideas, there's so many ideas that can go into a festival," says Kirshbaum. "I think it's important to link teachers and pupils. Truls Mørk is a famous Norwegian musician, and one of the world's top cellists. He was the student of Frans Helmerson, so I had them paired in a recital. Seeing that development and being inspired by those examples, you learn something about life. You learn about how you deal with another human being, how you respect their position and help them forward, as opposed to being demeaning or condescending."

Kirshbaum believes that building a successful instrument festival requires good instincts, fan input and plain common sense. He says the best festivals not only attempt to book reputed masters, but also demonstrate vision by identifying and showcasing up-and-coming talent.

"The festival can highlight that there are a greater number of outstanding exponents of the instrument," he says.

Just as Kirshbaum's festivals helped elevate the status of the cello, Margaret Thornhill hopes her instrument-centric festival brings the clarinet out of the shadows and into solo renown. Her Claremont Clarinet Festival, an



advanced, audition-based program, will be held at Pomona College in suburban Los Angeles on June 12–18.

"Many workshops are basically a teaching situation that doesn't lead to the participants doing any kind of public performance," says Thornhill, who is a Concordia University adjunct professor. "At our festival, all the performances are all done by workshop participants. This is intended to build confidence and self-awareness, empowering [participants] to feel that their performances are quality experiences, as well as connect with the audience."

Thornhill created the festival in 2006 after noting the lack of opportunities for young and semiprofessional clarinetists. "There really wasn't anything west of the Rockies that concentrated on clarinet," she said. "Since 2006, there have been a number of workshops, but ours has this double thrust of being both a workshop for performing participants, with an additional focus on participant's performance in public concerts at the end of the week, which are open to the entire community."

Thornhill has noted an annual increase in festival participants since the inaugural event. She reports fielding applications from players as far away as Spain, Peru and Africa.

Gwen Tuft Hutchings attests to the efficacy of Thornhill's festival curriculum. A performer with a clarinet choir in Medford, Ore., Hutchings holds a master's degree from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. A two-time participant at the Claremont Clarinet Festival, her enthusiastic testimony underscores just how life-changing an intensive and well-organized instrument festival can be.

"The highlight for me was getting the one-on-one coaching from [Thornhill]," says Hutchings. "She found some things that I'd been doing incorrectly all my life and I made very quick progress because of the intense focus of study. Since doing Claremont, I've soloed with two different bands and an orchestra. It really helps you build the confidence to go out there."

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

# Los Angeles

MAGAZINE

May 5, 2016

## You Should Be Listening to Cello Music in L.A., and Here's Why

We're about to play host to one of the most innovative cello festivals in the country

By Jessica P. Ogilvie



Next week, some of the best cellists in the world will descend upon Los Angeles for a ten-day festival. The Piatigorsky International Cello Festival — named after the celebrated Ukrainian cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, who spent much of his adult life in L.A. and taught at USC until his death in 1976 — will take place in downtown L.A. and at USC from May 13 – 22.

For L.A.-based musicians, the festival is an opportunity to study with some of the greatest artists in the world, at master classes hosted over the course of the ten

days. For those of us who dropped the ball on our music lessons at a young age, it offers up a chance to see a rare combination of greats: Artists slated to perform include cello legend Yo-Yo Ma, as well as international superstars Mischa Maisky, Truls Mørk, and Sol Gabetta, among many others.

Concerts are happening daily and nightly throughout the week (the festival runs May 13 – 22), and take place at three primary locations: Bovard Auditorium at USC, Alfred Neuman Recital hall at USC, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown. Tickets are available [here](#), and come in a variety of packages.



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# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

## VIOLIN VIOLA CELLO BASS FIDDLE STRINGS

December 22, 2015

### **Antonio Lysy's Carbon Fiber Cello Plumbs Bach's Deepest Heart in Six Cello Suites at The Broad Stage**

By Lawrence Vittes

A nearly full house of culturally-inclined Angelenos, young, old and in between, heard Antonio Lysy play Bach's Six Suites for solo cello entirely by memory Sunday afternoon, at The Broad Stage in Santa Monica. Lysy dressed simply, in a wine red shirt open at the neck and black trousers for the first three Suites and the same after intermission except the shirt was blue. He played a Luis and Clark carbon fiber cello made in Boston in 2014.

Throughout the concert, still and sometimes slowly moving images were projected onto the theater's movie screen; these included time-lapse shots of the Northern Lights, red-rock Arizona caves, the interior of a real wooden cello, parched deserts and a virtual tour of the Sistine Chapel. The effective impression it gave, of Lysy playing in a variety of alternative, surrealistic/sci-fi settings, subtly contextualized the nexus between Bach's music and his devotion to his faith. Along with that, it liberated each audience member's mind to soar along with the music, each on their own private plane.

Lysy and his instrument sat on a platform raised like a conductor's podium above the stage. In addition to the audience, he faced a inconspicuous video monitor on stage so that he could watch the pictures too. Stylistically, Lysy played the Suites straight and mostly unadorned, at moderate speeds;

he did not take the usual repeats of each movement, which would have been historically correct but would also have made the concert twice as long.

As the houselights dimmed and Lysy rocked into the opening bars of the engaging Suite Number One in G major, the screen behind him filled with slowly shifting images, zooming at glacial rates in and out of different perspectives, of Technicolor photographs of light streaming through deep, Sedona-like canyons. The images had no apparent association with the music nor did Lysy play as if he were aware of them to the extent that they were linked in any way. Indeed, for the entire night, he played with almost painful humility, often with his eyes shut or gazing down.

The Second Suite, in D minor, brought forth the awakenings of a different, more engaged response from Lysy. He occasionally threw in an ornament or two, but put himself firmly on the modern side of the original instrument debate by not improvising on a key series of whole-note chords at the end of the first movement. After a short breather, Lysy returned to play the Third Suite in C major. It is the first Suite many young cellists play, because the key signature has neither sharps nor flats, so playing in tune is sort of guaranteed. It is a grand, splendid piece but cellists often fail to find the warmth Lysy did.



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A lengthy intermission, billed optimistically as a party in the lobby, preceded Lysy playing the last three Suites, the meat of the evening, the main bout, the crucible. Each of the three has its own fiendish difficulties, none of which are possible to solve except through extraordinary feats of will. In fact, Suites Four through Six plot out such different regions from the first three in sheer musical complexity, technical difficulty and emotional impact — except for the Sarabande in Suite No. 2 — that it has been supposed they were by a talented student of Bach's or even his extremely gifted wife.

What makes the challenge of playing the last three Suites live is that audiences are likely to know the Suites not as individual pieces but as vague 60-minute swaths of solo cello. Played from a CD or listened to on public radio, the effects can help you get through the day; heard streaming, all six in a row make sense as a cycle. But recordings are different from live.

For example, the Fourth Suite in E flat major sounds like something that Bach originally had in mind for a keyboard instrument; lots of jumping around in ways that cellos were never meant to do. The opening movement, especially, makes no sense at all on the cello and requires such an extraordinary amount of ungainly, inorganic movement that the theories of Bach composing the Suites as a set of increasingly difficult studies for a smaller size cello played on the shoulder like a viola begin to make sense. And in fact, the Six Suites, if you can live without the cello's gravitas and human voice aspects, speak more fluently on a viola. Additionally, the key of E flat major is an unfriendly key for cellists, testing even the greatest virtuosos' ability to let the music flow as if it were a stream rather than an obstacle course.

The Fifth Suite is in the ominous sounding key of C minor, and Bach directs the cellist to use a scordatura re-tuning of the A string down to G, for easier double stops and deeper sonority. Then, in this most complex of the five Suites, Bach seems to write a concerto

for cello but without any supporting instruments. The music is written, however, so that the one solo cello line is rumored to "imply" the rhythm and harmonies of the other instruments. Normally, it takes a leap of faith, a heightened imagination and almost improbable technical facility — the intoxicating delirium Lysy found in the second Gavotte was unreal — to create the effect.

Lysy took another route by bringing in another cellist, Charles Tyler, a student of Lysy's at UCLA, to play with him in two of the movements the underlying rhythmic and harmonic structure Bach is implying. It was a revelation. Lysy still played the familiar solo part, but way the pulse regularized when Tyler was playing together with the muddled sound of two cellos playing together in their middle registers, gave the music an unexpectedly medieval, scholastic cast. I can't imagine this is what Bach had in mind, but it was musically intriguing and convincing evidence of the benefits of having as your goal, which Lysy stated in his program note, "to further explore the possibilities of presenting traditional music in a fresh light, while preserving its pure, aural integrity."

The bottom line for each of the last three Suites is how you play it. Lysy played Number Five by tackling the music from the first measure on as if he were hewing it out of stone. Where appropriate, he added the humanity of his carbon fiber cello's supplicant pleading voice. In Lysy's hands, the opening movement was as mighty as any prelude and fugue Bach wrote for the organ.

When Lysy sat down at 4:35 p.m. to play the Sixth Suite, in the glorious (for cellists) key of D major, it was at a point physically and emotionally where both he and the audience were fatigued but unstoppable; the whole Broad Stage environment was ready to proceed with the six dance movements which remain the greatest challenge a cellist can face. Before launching into the audacious heraldic drone of the opening Prelude, Lysy sat silently in a moment of deep meditation, stretched his body and

wriggled his fingers like coming out of a yoga exercise, and invited the the audience to follow him into the immense world of Bach at full stretch. It's like what we now call the "zone," where he's writing music so difficult to play that new musical frontiers emerge in the process, like diamonds forming under the pressure of the earth's mantle.

The large, enthusiastic and knowledgeable makeup of the audience will be hot prospects for attending next May's International Gregor Piatigorsky Festival at USC Thornton and Disney. And they won't be surprised when they hear Lysy's touring multimedia show, Te Amo, Argentina, will be the opening act on the Festival's opening night.

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

USC Thornton School of Music

October 22, 2015

## Q&A with cellist Jeffrey Solow

By Jonathan Shifflett



This May, the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival returns to USC for a 10-day cello extravaganza that will showcase over 25 artists from around the world. In preparation for such a momentous gathering, we have begun profiling the many renowned artists that will descend on Los Angeles to celebrate what festival artistic director Ralph Kirshbaum has called “a remarkable expression of music at its ecstatic best.”

In this first profile of an ongoing series, we spoke with cellist Jeffrey Solow. As a performer, he has played with the top symphonies and given solo recitals across the globe. His writings are regularly featured in *The Strad*, *Strings* and *American String Teachers* magazines. The chair of Temple University’s cello and chamber music departments and president of the Violoncello Society, Inc. of New York, Solow still makes time to foster interests in paleontology, fossil collecting and scuba diving.

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**Thanks so much for taking the time to interview with us. Can you tell us about how you first got started playing the cello?**

My older brother played cello and I wanted to copy him because he was my older brother. The family story goes that, because my mother was a professional violinist and my father a very good amateur pianist, they wanted my brother to play the cello so that they could have a family trio. They even named him Gregory as part of that plan: if he was an OK cellist he would be “Greg Solow” but if he turned out to be really good he



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could revert to the original family name and become known as “Grisha Soloveichik!” “Soloveichik” is “Little Nightingale” in Ukrainian.

**There’s a great photograph of you as a child standing next to Gregor Piatigorsky. Do you have a favorite memory of him you can share?**

I remember the first time I saw him: my parents took me to an LA Phil concert because he was soloist in the Dvořák Concerto and I had just started cello lessons (this must have been in 1956 or 57). I only remember one thing from that concert—his jowls shook when he played the impassioned parts! The photo you mentioned is from 1961 when Jay Rosen, Alan DeVeritch and I entered the Coleman Chamber Music Competition. Our trio was coached by Manual Compinsky. Heifetz and Piatigorsky were the judges. I look rather sad in the photo because we did not win. There was no winner in the junior category and we were told confidentially that Mr. Heifetz felt no group was good enough.

**One of the great features of the upcoming Piatigorsky International Cello Festival will be the cello masterclasses. Can you recall the first one you played in? What did you play?**

The first master classes in which I played were at the Music Academy of the West when I was studying with Gabor Rejto. He held weekly classes and I know that I played the Dvořák Concerto in one of them. (The Dvořák, along with the Brahms F Major Sonata, was the most frequently chosen repertoire during the first Piatigorsky Festival, in 2012.) Slightly off topic, it was at the Music Academy where I auditioned for Mr. Piatigorsky, although I did not realize at the time that it was an audition. Gabor Rejto arranged a special student concert for him when he visited in 1965 and I played the Rococo Variations. Later, when I was a senior at Beverly Hills High School, I was thinking of going east to study with Leonard Rose. My mother, however, thought that I should study with Piatigorsky so she tracked down his phone number and called him. He remembered me and my playing from his visit to the Music Academy and accepted me on the spot.

**What’s on your reading list lately?**

I recently finished Stephen Jay Gould’s *Wonderful Life*, Henry Petroski’s *Engineers of Dreams*, a history and construction of great bridges, and Andy Weir’s *The Martian*. I am in the middle of *Letters Home: A Reflection of a Man’s Survival* by Maxwell Andler, Jr., M.D. It is a WWII memoir by my neighbor when I was growing up about being a Japanese POW. I just bought actor Woody Strode’s autobiography, *Goal Dust*. I start every day by checking out what is new on *ScienceDaily*.

**Where does your interest in paleontology come from? Tell us a little more about your particular focus in this field.**

Somehow, I became interested in rocks and that was only a short step to fossils and paleontology. The longest period during which I did not touch a cello was when I was 12 years old and went on a five-week fossil hunting/camping trip organized by the Webb School in Claremont, California and run by Dr. Raymond Alf. Their museum is now named after him. We went as far as the badlands of South Dakota and Nebraska and I still have many fossils that I found on that trip!

**You’re an active scuba diver. Can you tell us about your first experience with diving? What other reefs would you like to visit?**

My grandfather Martin Jackson was an artist who had a studio in the Bradbury Building in downtown Los Angeles. He had built a small vacation house in Laguna Beach back when it was an artist colony with dirt roads. (Martin Jackson, by the way, designed and painted the program for the LA Phil’s very first concert, in 1919!) My family spent half of every summer in Laguna when I was growing up and I learned to skin dive and use a snorkel when I was 9 or 10. My very first scuba dive, when I was 12 and before I was certified, was in Acapulco to the wreck of the Argentinian freighter, the Rio de la Plata. 80 feet down! I became a certified diver in 1965 at Laguna Seaports (my mother was certified at the same time even though she had already dived many times in Acapulco). I have dived in the Caribbean, Hawaii, California, the Florida Keys and even in Sitka, Alaska! I would love to go to the Great Barrier Reef and to Palau.

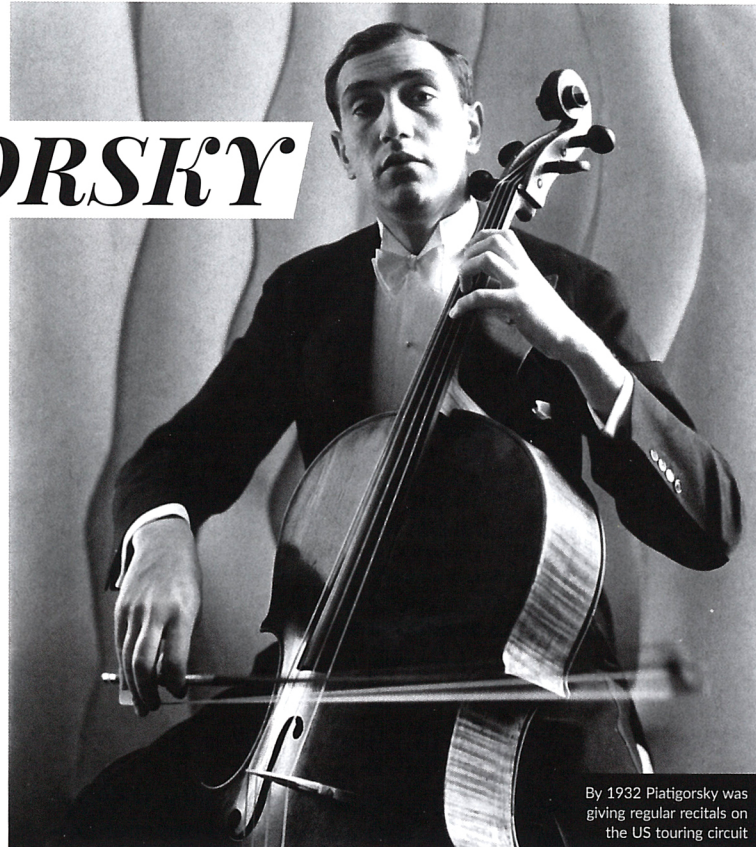
June 2015

## GREGOR *PIATIGORSKY*

Matthew Rye pays tribute to a musician whose panache and technical prowess helped popularise the cello in the US as a solo and recital instrument

GREAT  
*Cellists*

**G**regor Piatigorsky was an example of the all-round cellist: orchestral principal, concerto soloist, chamber collaborator, renowned teacher and generally inspiring figure. He was musically very well connected, playing with all the great conductors of the century and forming lasting trio partnerships first with Carl Flesch and Artur Schnabel, then more flexibly with Nathan Milstein and Vladimir Horowitz and later, in what *Life* magazine dubbed the 'Million Dollar Trio', with Jascha Heifetz and Artur Rubinstein. He collaborated as a performer with Stravinsky, Strauss, Rachmaninoff and Bartók, and was also probably only second to Rostropovich in his procurement and advocacy of new works from a wide variety of the leading composers of his day. 'Grisha', as he was familiarly known, also mixed in wider cultural circles; he was



By 1932 Piatigorsky was giving regular recitals on the US touring circuit

friends with Albert Einstein, Stefan Zweig, Aldous Huxley and many other great names, and was a keen collector of art.

Even more than his older contemporary Pablo Casals, Piatigorsky was key in popularising the cello as a solo and recital instrument, touring the US in particular, and taking the cello to places where concerts were rare enough in themselves. His career also coincided with the rise of both film and television, which gave even wider exposure – his *Bell Telephone Hour* appearances, as well as performances with Heifetz and Rubinstein, can be found on YouTube.

### PEDAGOGICAL BACKGROUND

Piatigorsky received his first cello for his seventh birthday and began learning from his father, a keen violinist, but he soon moved on to the local conservatoire, unperturbed by a visiting orchestral cellist

who condemned him with the words, 'Keep away from the cello. You have no talent whatsoever.' He was soon good enough to earn his first money as a cellist, playing in a brothel and a cinema orchestra while still only eight, until, according to his anecdote-filled autobiography *Cellist* (1965), he was provoked into smashing a chair over the conductor's head. He then won a scholarship to study at the Moscow Conservatoire with Alfred von Glehn and was still only 15 when he competed for, and won, the role of principal cellist in the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra amid the aftermath of the 1917 revolution.

When Piatigorsky's attempts to continue his studies abroad were thwarted by officialdom, he used a concert tour with fellow musicians from the Bolshoi to get himself smuggled across the Polish border and ended up in Warsaw, where he made his living for a while.



# THE PHYSICAL OPENNESS OF PIATIGORSKY'S PLAYING STYLE GAVE WARMTH AND CLARITY TO HIS TONE

Arriving in Berlin, he managed to arrange to have private lessons with Hugo Becker, the cello professor at the Hochschule für Musik, who improved his bow hold, but linguistic complications led Piatigorsky unintentionally to insult his teacher once too often and he was out on his ear (he would say '*Gott sei Dank*' at the end of each lesson, thinking it meant 'God be with you' – he was in fact saying, 'Thank God!'). Instead, he moved on to Leipzig where he studied under the great Julius Klengel, until problems with his immigration status and penury in the face of Germany's rampant inflation drove him back to Berlin. Here Wilhelm Furtwängler invited him to lead the cello section of the Berlin Philharmonic – at the age of 21 he had arrived, and this august position also provided the springboard for his solo career, which took off in 1928 with concerto debuts in Germany and elsewhere.

After achieving his dream of settling in the US (being Jewish himself and married to a member of the Rothschild family meant leaving his European home in Paris following the German occupation in 1940), he became a renowned teacher himself, first at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, then at Boston University, and later at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. He effectively trained whole generations of cellists, numbering among his pupils Mischa Maisky, Jeffrey Solow, Raphael Wallfisch and Erling Blöndal Bengtsson.

## TECHNIQUE AND INTERPRETATIVE STYLE

Piatigorsky's patrician bearing and lofty frame give the visual impression of him offering the cello – which almost looks diminutive in his hands – and its music to his listeners. There's none of the protective cradling of the instrument that some other players present. This sense of generosity also characterises his interpretations, which are open and welcoming, based around good old Russian-style expressiveness and emotional involvement. His height meant that he could get around the instrument with ease, though strangely even he complained about the large size of Stradivari's cellos and the relative difficulty of negotiating their fingerboards. His long arms enabled free-flowing bow movement and – as he advised his pupils – he tended to hold the bow with his fingers together rather than spaced apart.

## SOUND

The physical openness of his playing style gave warmth and clarity to his tone – a sound that was creamy yet not cloying, though it can sound more shrill than it perhaps was via the dated and less than ideal technology of most of his recorded legacy. But on the whole, it could be big and spacious for projecting a concerto as easily as it could subsume itself to the more inward needs of chamber music with his colleagues in a piano trio.

## STRENGTHS

Piatigorsky always projected a natural sense of a piece of music's tempo (he was known to fall out with conductors on differences of opinion here) and his phrasing exhibited a similar artless ease that hid a conscious avoidance of archness. He may have been averse to the idea of being a showman, yet his technique had tricks of its own, notably an ease with down-bow staccato and spiccato to match that of his up bow, as seen in his filmed recording of his own arrangement of Schubert's *Introduction, Theme and Variations* D968a.

## WEAKNESSES

The cellist was the first to agree that he was not a technical perfectionist with a view to clinical intonation. He was more concerned with conveying the composer's emotional meaning than sacrificing it in favour of note-for-note accuracy. His style of vibrato has not always been to everyone's taste, its speed and narrow range arguably being the result of his large build making it difficult for him to use the whole forearm to shape the tone, instead vibrating from the wrist alone. He was very much an 'old school' player, maintaining a certain 19th-century freedom of approach to music throughout his career, showing no interest in attempts at period authenticity or editorial rigour. It should be added that his advocacy of new music was very much geared, especially in later years, towards the more conservatively tonal composers. ▶

## CHRONOLOGY

**1903**

Born in Ekaterinoslav, now Dnipropetrovsk, in Ukraine

**1918**

Becomes principal cellist at the Bolshoi Theatre

**1921**

Escapes Russia and moves to Berlin

**1924**

Appointed principal cellist of the Berlin Philharmonic

**1928**

Embarks on solo career

**1929**

Makes US recital debut at Oberlin College, Ohio



## INSTRUMENTS

Piatigorsky relates in *Cellist* how he made his own first cello out of a couple of pieces of wood, how a later proper instrument got crushed by a drunk in a café and how he came to buy his first decent cello when a generous gift from a rich patron enabled him to purchase a fake Guarneri 'del Gesù' for 9,000 roubles. Next came a possible early Stradivari or Amati formerly owned by the Hungarian player Arnold Földesy, then he re-awoke the 1739 'Sleeping Beauty' Montagnana from its slumbers (gaining the instrument as a gift from Alfred Hill). However, its fragility made it unsuitable for modern repertoire so he sought a companion for it and landed the first of his two authenticated Stradivaris, the 1725 'Baudiot'; it was later joined by the 1714 'Batta', of which he wrote: 'Bottomless in its resources, it spurred me on to try to reach its depths, and I have never worked harder or desired anything more fervently than to draw out of this superior instrument all it has to give.'

## REPERTOIRE AND RECORDINGS

Piatigorsky's repertoire was wide-ranging but largely serious. He was generally disparaging of show for its own sake and only reluctantly conceded to his managers' requests to include encore-like pieces in his concert programmes. The concertos of Haydn, Schumann and Dvořák, Brahms's 'Double' and Strauss's *Don Quixote* were the mainstays of his Classical–Romantic fare, but he also launched later works himself, including the Walton, Prokofiev and Hindemith concertos, all premiered under his bow. In chamber music, too, he combined classic piano trio and sonata repertoire with new works, partaking in an early performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* and being among the first to take to Ravel's Piano Trio, both in his Berlin years.

Piatigorsky's solo discography is not vast, perhaps reflecting the relatively small concerto repertoire available to him, and he

is more often to be found in recordings with his great friends and colleagues such as Horowitz, Heifetz and Rubinstein, in collections sold under their names rather than his. Some key works of the cellist's armoury are notably absent: no complete Bach Cello Suites, for instance, though he had often included such works in recitals. His Beethoven sonata cycle with Solomon is preserved, however. One of his earliest recordings is of the Schumann Concerto under Barbirolli (1934), complete with London Philharmonic oboist Leon Goossens's unerasable 'bravo' at the end. Otherwise, his major stereo concerto recordings, mostly for RCA, were made with American orchestras, the Dvořák and Walton, in Boston under Charles Munch, the Brahms 'Double' with Heifetz and the RCA Victor Orchestra under Alfred Wallenstein (1960), and Strauss's *Don Quixote* with Reiner in Chicago. However, some of his other earlier mono recordings, such as his 1946 Dvořák with Ormandy and the Philadelphia and a 1951 Brahms 'Double' with Milstein, exhibit superior, more secure playing.

These studio accounts have been supplemented in recent years by the resuscitation of some of his radio recordings, including a 1940 Elgar Concerto with Barbirolli and the Hindemith Concerto from 1943 under its composer, highlights of a West Hill Radio Archives set also featuring long-forgotten 78s and unpublished studio takes; and Tanglewood has released a download of a 1953 festival performance of *Don Quixote* with Munch and the Boston Symphony. Many of Piatigorsky's classic RCA recordings are in limited supply, and sadly owner Sony Classical doesn't even recognise Piatigorsky's name in its online catalogue of artists. But the fruits of the Heifetz–Piatigorsky concerts – an extensive, starry series of largely chamber recordings made relatively late in the two musicians' careers – are at least available again. ●

## RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

The Art of Gregor Piatigorsky  
WEST HILL RADIO ARCHIVES  
WHRA-6032, 6 DISCS PLUS DVD

The Heifetz–Piatigorsky  
Concerts  
SONY/RCA 545145, 21 DISCS

Schumann/Saint-Säens: cello  
concertos/Bloch: Schelomo  
TESTAMENT SBT 1371

Dvořák/Walton concertos  
SONY/RCA LIVING STEREO 66375



Strauss: *Don Quixote*  
BSO CLASSICS/TANGLEWOOD,  
DOWNLOAD ONLY

Brahms: 'Double' Concerto  
(1951)/Strauss: *Don Quixote*  
SONY/RCA LEGENDARY PERFORMERS  
09026-61485

Brahms: 'Double'  
Concerto (1960)  
SONY/RCA VICTOR RED SEAL 88697  
04605 2 (HYBRID SACD)

Beethoven/Brahms/  
Weber: cello sonatas  
TESTAMENT SBT 2158, 2 DISCS

Mendelssohn/Chopin/  
Strauss: cello sonatas  
TESTAMENT SBT 1419

Ravel/Tchaikovsky: piano trios  
SONY/RCA VICTOR RED SEAL 63025

**1940**

Settles in  
Elizabethtown,  
New York

**1941**

Becomes head  
of cello at Curtis  
Institute of Music

**1949**

Forms 'Million Dollar  
Trio' with Heifetz  
and Rubinstein

**1957**

Heads cello  
department at  
Boston University

**1962**

Settles in Los Angeles  
to teach at University  
of Southern California

**1976**

Dies of lung cancer  
in Los Angeles

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

## Los Angeles Times

March 14, 2012



### Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME



## Piatigorsky Cello Festival blends learning with performance

By Jamie Wetherbe

Niall Ferguson's YouTube tastes are admittedly a little bit different from his peers at Santa Monica High School.

"I search cellists on the Internet and whatever pieces I'm interested in hearing, and I've created a library of my favorite cellists," says Ferguson, a senior.

The 17-year-old recently added himself to the cellists on YouTube as part of an

audition for a spot in the inaugural Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, a 10-day extravaganza that began Friday night. Ferguson will be one of 110 cellist performing at Walt Disney Concert Hall in the finale of the festival.

"This is the first time I've ever put anything of myself playing solo out there for the world to see," says Ferguson,



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dressed in a pressed black button-down shirt and matching trousers before a chamber music performance at the Colburn School. “You upload those two pieces, and they watch it, and you hope you get it.”

About 30 students applied via YouTube, and 22 made the cut, including Ferguson. Using the medium also pulled in young cellists from across the country.

“It was intended to be for cellists under college age in the immediate L.A. area, but we started getting applications from Florida, New York and across California,” says Antonio Lysy, a festival artist who helped plan the online auditions.

The festival — which includes some 45 recitals, concertos, workshops and discussions — has an international emphasis, with cellists representing all continents except Antarctica.

Young cellists are paired with professionals for public master classes, and the festival will wind up Sunday with the 110 cellists from both experience levels playing the West Coast premiere of a Christopher Rouse piece at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

“It’s pretty fantastic to be able to say I played at Disney Hall with, not only a group of other talented young cellists, but the world-renowned big dogs,” says Ferguson.

The festival — a collaboration of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Colburn School, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the USC Thornton School of Music — was three years in the making. “To my knowledge, there’s never been a festival of this dimension on the West Coast,” says artistic director Ralph Kirshbaum. “And we hope it’s the first of many.”

The festival is also a tribute Gregor Piatigorsky, one of the great cellists of the 20th century and a USC music teacher from 1949 until his death in 1976.

“We have several of his former students who are playing very significant roles in this festival,” says Kirshbaum, who holds the Piatigorsky Chair of Violoncello at

USC, “so the spirit of Piatigorsky is there.”

Kirshbaum was putting the finishing touches on the 110-person (plus cello) seating chart a few weeks before Sunday’s final show.

“It’s figuring out how they can actually fit collaboratively and successfully onstage at the same time,” says Kirshbaum. “The younger cellists, in almost every instance, I have them sitting next to a much more experienced player so they’ll feel the security of someone who’s a little more advanced than they are.”

Although the sheet music was handed out weeks ago, the cellists will have only two hours to rehearse as a group before the finale.

“The music that we’re playing is not only difficult on an individual level, but putting it together with 100 other cellists is an intense feat,” says Ferguson.

Ferguson, whose musical range (and vocabulary) is well beyond his years, chose the cello on a whim after spending time with another instrument.

“After two years of the shrill voice of the clarinet, I figured I needed to hop on the other end of the spectrum for a little while to low-registered, string instruments,” he says. “The cello is the primary instrument, at least for now.

When asked how many instruments he plays, Ferguson pauses briefly. “I hate this question,” he says before counting on his fingers. “We’ll count percussion as just one,” he says, deciding on five.

Ferguson comes from a long line of musicians — his father, Scott Ferguson, produced a Grammy-nominated contemporary blues album and has scored independent films. His distant cousin Allyn Ferguson co-wrote the themes for “Charlie’s Angels” and “Barney Miller.”

Niall Ferguson is applying to college as a performance major on cello. “Ultimately, I want to get into film composition and arranging,” he says. “Very much like Dad.”



# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

## The New York Times

September 18, 2011

**THE NEW SEASON**

**THE Arts**



### March

**PIATIGORSKY INTERNATIONAL CELLO FESTIVAL** The American cellist Ralph Kirshbaum, long resident in London, founded the respected Manchester International Cello Festival at the Royal Northern College of Music in 1988, which ran at two- or three-year intervals, and oversaw it to its end, in 2007. Mr. Kirshbaum has since moved to Los Angeles, where he teaches at the University of Southern California and now unveils a successor event, a partnership involving the university's music school, the Colburn School and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. More than 20 noted cellists are scheduled to appear, and 6 of them will divvy up the Bach solo suites in a single evening (March 11). Three will perform concertos in Philharmonic concerts conducted by Neeme Jarvi in the Walt Disney Concert Hall: Mr. Kirshbaum in the Dvorak Concerto (March 15), Mischa Maisky in the Shostakovich First (March 17) and Alisa Weilerstein in Tchaikovsky's "Rococo" Variations and Respighi's "Adagio con Variazioni" (March 18). March 9-18. Various locations in Los Angeles, (213) 740-3129, [usc.edu/piatigorsky\\_festival](http://usc.edu/piatigorsky_festival).



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# GRAMOPHONE

March 2012

## *The insider's guide*

Gramophone selects March's unmissable musical events

**9** | **Los Angeles, Cello Festival**  
The Piatigorsky International Cello Festival runs from March 9-18 under the direction of Ralph Kirshbaum and brings together established artists and young musicians for 10 days of performances and masterclasses. Taking part this year are the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Neeme Järvi, Steven Isserlis, Mischa Maisky and Raphael Wallfisch.  
**[piatigorskyfestival.com](http://piatigorskyfestival.com)**



# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

## VIOLIN VIOLA CELLO BASS FIDDLE STRINGS

March 2012



NEWS

: NEWS & NOTES

Back row: Rachel Fine, left, executive director of the LA Chamber Orchestra; Ralph Kirshbaum, artistic director of the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival; Richard Beene, dean of the conservatory at the Colburn School. Front row: Robert Cutietta, dean of the Thornton School of Music at USC; and Deborah Borda, president and CEO of the LA Philharmonic

## USC THORNTON SCHOOL OF MUSIC LAUNCHES PIATIGORSKY CELLO FESTIVAL

Cellist and educator  
Ralph Kirshbaum pays  
tribute to the legendary  
cello master

By Corinne Ramey

Cellist **Ralph Kirshbaum** remembers the first time he heard a recording of his boyhood idol, cellist **Gregor Piatigorsky**. "I was literally rooted to my chair," he says. "I'd never heard a sound like it—so rich, vibrant, and concentrated."

These days, Kirshbaum is rooted to Piatigorsky through a slightly more metaphorical chair. Since 2008, he has held the Piatigorsky Endowed Chair in cello at the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music and is the artistic director and founder of the first Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, to be held in Los Angeles from March 9–18.

"Piatigorsky was definitely one of the greatest cellists of

the 20th century," Kirshbaum says, "and was very influential in establishing the cello as an important solo instrument."

The festival is a collaboration between the University of Southern California, the **Los Angeles Philharmonic**, the Colburn School, and the **LA Chamber Orchestra**. It will feature 22 artists hailing from 12 countries.

"My idea was to bring together the musical community of LA," he says. The festival consists of master classes, recitals, and orchestral concerts, including Kirshbaum performing the Dvorak concerto with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

This isn't Kirshbaum's first festival-founding experience. From

1988 to 2007, he organized the Manchester Cello Festival, held at the Royal Northern College of Music in England. The Piatigorsky festival differs because of its inclusion of the regional musical community and its duration—ten days instead of five.

Some of the Piatigorsky festival's 22 guest cellists were students of Piatigorsky, including cellists **Mischa Maisky**, **Laurence Lesser**, and **Jeffrey Solow**.

"Because this is the first, I wanted as many direct ties to Piatigorsky as possible," Kirshbaum says.

It's great to have this focus on the cello in Los Angeles, says LA Chamber Orchestra principal cellist **Andrew Shulman**. "Los

Angeles is becoming a center for cello here in the US,” he says. “When you look at all the people that have lived here—like Lynn Harrell and Ralph Kirshbaum—there have been great cellists in LA ever since Piatigorsky.”

The festival will conclude with a mass cello ensemble, with more than 100 student and faculty cellists playing works by Bach and Rouse, Kirshbaum says. “The sound is so glorious,” he says, “and I can only imagine this on the stage of Disney Hall.”

Perhaps the greatest impact of the festival will be connecting the younger cello students with the established cellists, Kirshbaum says. “It opens so many doors for further study for students,” he says. “Before, some of these great cellists were just names.”

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*For more details and the complete festival schedule, visit [piatigorskyfestival.com](http://piatigorskyfestival.com).*



# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

## INTERNATIONAL artsmanager

March 1-14, 2012

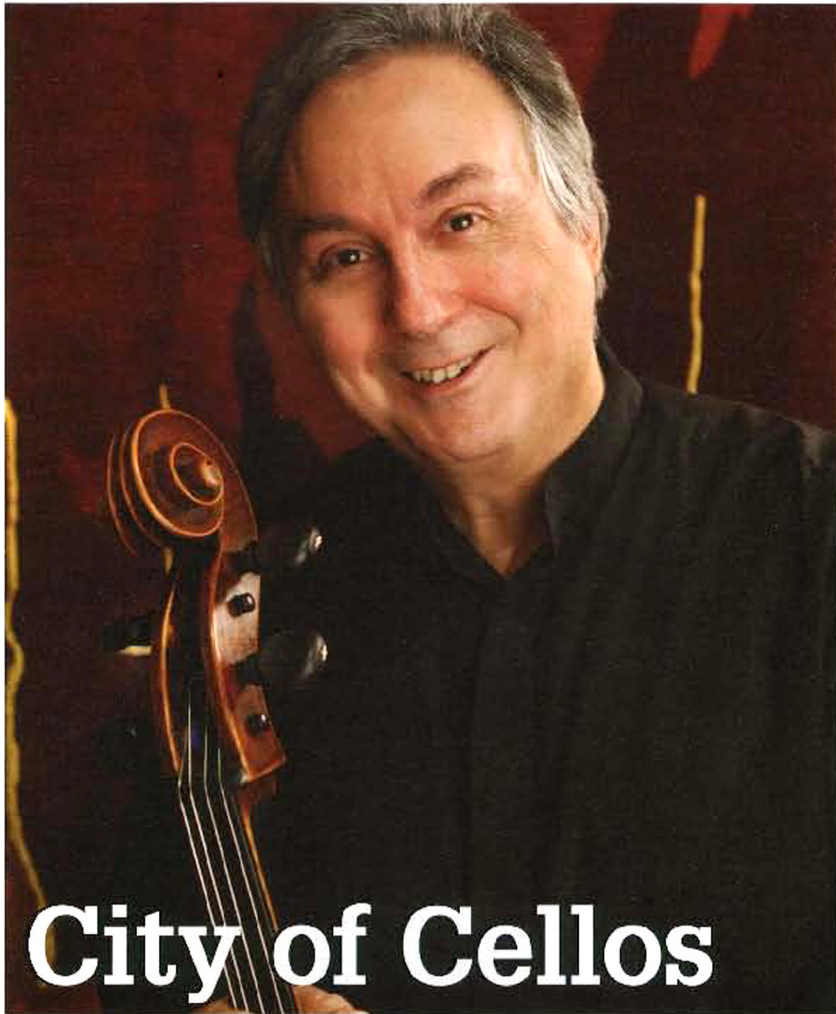


Photo: © Steve Chitt

# City of Cellos

### Ralph Kirshbaum's LA festival

#### Artistic director of the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

There's one story that involves Piatigorsky during my very first year at RNCM, recalls celebrated American cellist Ralph Kirshbaum of his 35-year tenure at the Royal Northern College of Music. This would be the fall of 1975 when I was teaching in Manchester. I met a student in the hall and I could see that she was a cellist, so I asked if she was going that Tuesday to London to see Gregor Piatigorsky play. She looked at me with a look I'll never forget: it was one of total non-recognition. She didn't know who Piatigorsky was, and he was still alive – this was one of the giants of the cello from any generation. I was shocked, but it was a salutary lesson about fleeting fame, even when one is still alive.

Ralph Kirshbaum now holds the Piatigorsky Chair at USC Thornton School of Music.

An accomplished cellist and maestro in his own right, he is the driving force behind the first Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, which will take place in Los Angeles on 9 March for 10 days. At the opening of the festival, Piatigorsky will be inducted into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame.

The project is the result of collaboration between the USC Thornton School of Music and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, in partnership with The Colburn School and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and will feature 22 cellists, from 12 different countries who will come together to share stories of Piatigorsky through a series of orchestral concerts, chamber music performances, master classes and interactive events.

The opening concert will feature the American premiere of Thomas Derrenga's *Double Concerto* performed by the composer and his brother Patrick, and the appearance of the 2011 Tchaikovsky Competition Gold Medalist, Narek Hakhnazaryan, performing

'He was my boyhood idol. From every point of view it makes sense for me to pay homage to him in this way'

Saint-Saëns' *Cello Concerto No 1*. The festival will also present the American premiere of Miklós Perényi's *Scherzo with Introduction*, continuing the tradition of cellist-composers exemplified by Piatigorsky.

The concluding concerts will form part of a Los Angeles Philharmonic subscription series conducted by Neeme Järvi, with performances of Dvořák, Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky, and a festival finale where 100 cellists will step onto the stage of the Walt Disney Concert Hall for the West Coast premiere of *Rapturedux* by Christopher Rouse.

By now Kirshbaum should be an old hand at programming; throughout his tenure at RNCM, he initiated a series of successful cello festivals: 'In Manchester, over 20 years, we had nine festivals and each one grew larger and more dense in terms of activities than the last.'

He says that the combined experience of musicianship, performance and pedagogy has allowed him to be a sensitive artistic director. 'I think it's good that I'm an active artist and I know what makes an artist comfortable in every regard: from the simplest thing such as what's happening backstage, to how comfortable are they with the timetable, and how we can make it easier for them to get where they need to get – it can be a terrible experience for a musician if you've been told you're going to be picked up, then 20 minutes later you're on the phone and the driver isn't there. It's being aware of little practical things like that.'

The Piatigorsky International Cello Festival in LA has been three years in the planning, a stark contrast to the arrangement of the first cello festival Kirshbaum programmed in Manchester. 'When I began that festival it was literally on six months' notice and came from my idea to do a cello festival. I then started calling my friends across Europe and we found a common weekend we could get together, this was in the fall of 1987.'

But LA, he says, is a whole new world and he has needed time to get to grips with a new musical landscape and culture. 'The scope is larger, we're bringing together four major institutions and a creative team that has been working from scratch.'

His vision is supported by Deborah Borda, chief executive of the LA Philharmonic: 'I felt that if it was going to be a festival that would make a significant impact, we needed the LA Philharmonic to be involved and fortunately she was enthusiastic about the idea and worked very creatively to establish what that relationship would be,' he says.

'Because this is an inaugural festival that bears the name of Piatigorsky I wanted references to him, and so many of the artists that have agreed to come were students of his, or artists like myself that had more tangential relationships with him – visited Piatigorsky one very memorable afternoon when I was in my 20s and we spent a couple of hours together at his home. He was my boyhood idol. From every point of view it makes sense for me to pay homage to him in this way.'

[www.piatigorskyfestival.com](http://www.piatigorskyfestival.com)



## Chamber Music

March/ April 2012

The festival is new, but its tradition stretches back to the middle of the last century, when the great cellist Gregor Piatigorsky served on the faculty of the USC Thornton School of Music. He was not only a great performer, but a dedicated teacher with an avid interest in the generations of cellists following him—including the 13-year-old Ralph Kirshbaum, who played for him in a Dallas masterclass and who now holds Thornton's Piatigorsky Chair in Violoncello.

After Piatigorsky died in 1976, his widow set up an endowment to continue his legacy of teaching. The endowment supported the Piatigorsky Seminar, which every two years would bring together three leading cellists and a dozen top students in Los Angeles. But when Kirshbaum assumed the Piatigorsky chair, he decided he wanted to expand the seminar's scope. As chairman of the cello department of the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, England, Kirshbaum ran the Manchester International Cello Festival from 1988 to 2007.

Kirshbaum's new venture, the **Piatigorsky International Cello Festival**, moves the idea to Los Angeles

on a grand scale. The event will be a virtual bacchanalia for cello fans. Starting March 9, leading cellists and a host of top students will convene in L.A. for ten days of recitals, orchestral concerts and masterclasses. "I never in a million years knew it would be this big—or this expensive," says Robert Cutietta, dean of the Thornton School. The festival's \$700,000 budget has been achieved through the school's collaboration with three other major local musical organizations: the L.A. Philharmonic, the Colburn School and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

The festival has been conceived above all else as a celebration for the musicians themselves. "Instead of a 'cello festival,' it might be better to call this a 'cellists' festival,'" says Cutietta. "This is about the *players*."

"Cellists enjoy *being together*," says Kirshbaum. "It isn't that we don't have egos—of course we do. But by and large, cellists have a generosity of spirit, a warmth about them." Kirshbaum cites an evening in 2008, at Mizra Festival in Israel, when a conversation between Janos Starker and Bernard Greenhouse stretched into the wee small hours. "I sat there and

listened to the two of them talking about their experiences with genuine affection for each other, and it was wonderful."

Like Piatigorsky, Kirshbaum has forged a significant path as both teacher and performer. He taught in Manchester for 35 years; when he returns there, he often encounters his former pupils, now teachers themselves. "When I hear their students, it's like I'm hearing my musical grandchildren." That sense of connection to predecessor cellists, and those rising now, lies behind Kirshbaum's vision for the festival. "I'm concerned about the younger generation," Kirshbaum says. "Sometimes their field of vision doesn't extend past their own age. They need to know their roots, the great heroes—what they had to say as musicians. You need to envelop yourself in that musical language, care for it and preserve it. Those are values that haven't changed."

The Piatigorsky Festival will be a splashy celebration of the cello and its players. But as Kirshbaum sees it, it will also be a means of preserving—and instilling—the great cello tradition. ■ [piatigorskyfestival.com](http://piatigorskyfestival.com)

Ralph Kirshbaum (left) and Robert Cutietta, with a bust of Piatigorsky



12 March / April 2012



**Piatigorsky International Cello Festival**

# Los Angeles Times

March 4, 2012

## **The curvy beauty of the cello**



Starting March 9, 22 of the world's top cellists will converge on Los Angeles along with students and enthusiasts for the first Piatigorsky International Cello Festival. Named for the cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, who taught at USC from 1962 to 1976, the 10-day festival will feature premieres of new compositions, master classes and concerts. Known for its warmth and collegiality, the cello community puts great emphasis on good teaching, said the festival's artistic director, Ralph Kirshbaum, who travels often to conservatories around the world. The result of this investment: "The mean level of cello playing is so, so high now. There are two or even three very fine teachers at each major conservatory who have had the benefit of good



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teaching. You multiply that knowledge by 25 institutions —*et voila!*" Some facts about an instrument that may soon be giving the violin a run for its money.

—*Marcia Adair*

## **\$ 6,000,000**

The highest confirmed price to date paid for a cello, the 1692 Bonjour Strad (bought in 1999 by an anonymous American). That's roughly \$1,100 per cubic inch. In comparison, the Lady Blunt Strad violin recently sold for \$15.9 million.

**Gambas.** The cello and the viola da gamba were the VHS and Betamax of the 17th century. Gambas were aristocratic, expressive and delicate, while the cello was considered rustic, crude and loud.

**a.k.a.** The cello's full name is violoncello, but only people who don't know it very well still call it that.

**6 1/2** The maximum weight in pounds of a full-size cello.

**Take a bow.** Festival events will take place at USC, the Colburn School and Walt Disney Concert Hall. Details at <http://www.piatigorskyfestival.com>.

'The cello is like a beautiful woman who has not grown older but younger with time, more slender, more supple, more graceful.'

—Pablo Casals, cherished Spanish cellist (1876-1973)



# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival



March 8, 2012

## With New Cello Fest, L.A. Honors a Master

By Chester Lane



“Gregor Piatigorsky was my childhood idol,” says cellist Ralph Kirshbaum, artistic director of the newly established Piatigorsky International Cello Festival set to debut March 9-18 in Los Angeles. Indeed there are few artists who loom as large in the annals of 20th-century cello performance and pedagogy as Piatigorsky, who built a towering career, first in Europe and then in

the U.S., after surreptitiously leaving the Soviet Union in 1921 at the age of eighteen. The new festival, presented by the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music and the Los Angeles Philharmonic in partnership with The Colburn School and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, aims to “highlight and bring awareness to the cello against the backdrop of one of the most

culturally vibrant metropolitan areas in the United States.”

Piatigorsky’s legacy has long been honored at USC, where he taught from 1962 until shortly before his death in 1976, and where



Festival partners (clockwise from top left): Rachel Fine, executive director, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra; Ralph Kirshbaum, artistic director, Piatigorsky International Cello Festival; Richard Beene, dean, Conservatory of Music, The Colburn School; Deborah Borda, president and CEO, Los Angeles Philharmonic President; Robert Cutietta, dean, USC-Thornton School of Music. Photo: Steve Cohn

Kirshbaum currently occupies the Thornton School of Music’s Gregor Piatigorsky Chair in Violoncello. The inaugural Piatigorsky International Cello Festival includes ten days of masterclasses, recitals, orchestral concerts, chamber music performances, lectures, panel discussions, and workshops. A “Remembering Piatigorsky” evening will feature the screening of a film about Piatigorsky and a panel discussion involving six of his former students; included in the film is footage from Piatigorsky’s masterclasses selected by one of those students, Terry King. (King is also author of the biography *Gregor Piatigorsky: The Life and Career of the Virtuoso Cellist*, which came out in 2010.) The festival’s roster of cello teachers and soloists ranges from veterans like Kirshbaum and two previous holders of the Piatigorsky Chair, Lynn Harrell and Ronald Leonard, to rising stars such as Narek Hakhnazaryan, winner of the 2011 Tchaikovsky Competition, and Alisa Weilerstein, who was awarded a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship last year at age 29.

For Kirshbaum, directing an international cello festival is in one sense a *déjà vu* experience: he had established such a venture at the Royal Northern College of

Music in Manchester, England, during his two decades on the faculty there. But now that the Texas-born Kirshbaum has brought his teaching talents stateside and is charged with filling Piatigorsky’s shoes at USC, honoring his “childhood idol” is a challenge he couldn’t resist. He talks about the upcoming festival below.

**Chester Lane:** *How and why did this festival come about?*

**Ralph Kirshbaum:** The motivation behind it was my own arrival in Los Angeles. I’m now into my fourth year of teaching at USC’s Thornton School of Music. Part of my job has been overseeing the Piatigorsky Seminar, which has taken place here periodically for 20 years. Each seminar had twelve hand-picked students and three “masters” who came to USC for a week; there were classes and individual lessons, performances by the students, and usually a performance by the masters. I told the dean, Robert Cutietta, that I’d been to that seminar myself and had thoroughly enjoyed the experience, but that I thought we could do something that was even more significant, not just in the cello world but in the music world: a festival that was a celebration of what music means in our lives. The idea was for something on a far larger scale than the Piatigorsky Seminar. And it was the kind of thing I had been very much involved with for twenty years in Great Britain.

**Lane:** *That was at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where you taught for 35 years.*

**Kirshbaum:** Yes. I had begun an international festival there—in 1989, I believe—and it grew into a very substantial event, drawing not only young artists but enthusiasts from around the world. The last one was held in 2007, which coincided with my decision to move to Los Angeles. And once I’d made that decision, people started to ask, “When are you going to have an international festival there?” It was an obvious question that started with my wife, extended to my inner circle of family and friends, and then to colleagues. I said, “Are you crazy? After doing this for 20 years? I loved every one of those years, but that was

enough, I've got new responsibilities in L.A." But obviously the bug was still there. So having gone to the dean and gotten his enthusiastic approval to explore this idea, I turned to Deborah Borda, president and CEO of the Los Angeles Philharmonic; to Sel Kardan, president and CEO of the Colburn School; and to Andrea Laguni, who was then executive director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. That position devolved to Rachel Fine, with whom I carried on the conversation. They all came on board and became enthusiastic partners.

**"Thomas Demenga's double cello concerto is called *Relations*, and the title is a reference to himself and his brother, cellist Patrick Demenga. But our performance [with Sayaka Selina] will be about another kind of relation: teacher and protégé. And that's so much at the heart of what a festival like this is about."**

**Lane:** *The festival includes fifteen masterclasses. How many students are attending those, and where are they from?*

**Kirshbaum:** We'll have 45 students, with each masterclass giving three of them a chance to play repertoire that they have chosen. They're coming from every continent in the world except Antarctica. Fifteen are from outside North America; I went to colleagues at music schools in Europe, Asia, Australia, wherever, asking them to recommend students. From within North America there are sixteen students who represent the finest music schools and conservatories in this country. But I wouldn't really call these people students. Most of them are still involved in postgraduate study, but not all, and many already have careers. There are at least three international prizewinners among the masterclass participants.

**Lane:** *There's an extremely broad range of repertoire being performed at the festival. It not only includes many of the great standard cello works but a number of very new pieces, including a double cello concerto that will be given its American premiere by your festival orchestra.*

**Kirshbaum:** Yes. The composer is a fantastic cellist named Thomas Demenga. He was going to play that piece with his brother, Patrick, also a fabulous cellist. Unfortunately Patrick got pneumonia and had to cancel. So the other soloist will be Sayaka Selina, who has come to many masterclasses of mine and now studies with Thomas in his class in Basel. The piece is called *Relations*, and the title is a reference to himself and his brother. But this performance will be about another kind of relation: teacher and protégé. And that's so much at the heart of what a festival like this is about.

**Lane:** *One of the concluding works, Christopher Rouse's *Raptured*, will receive its West Coast premiere. Isn't that scored for 100 cellos and nothing else?*

**Kirshbaum:** Yes. We commissioned it for the Manchester International Cello Festival in 2001. It's a very effective piece, beautifully scored.

**"Rouse's *Raptured* [for 100 cellists] will involve all the students, plus members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Opera Orchestra, the Pasadena Symphony, the Los Angeles Cello Society, and various people who are coming from abroad. It'll be a very happy gathering."**

**Lane:** *And the performance involves pretty much all the students?*

**Kirshbaum:** All the students, plus members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Opera Orchestra, the Pasadena Symphony, the Los Angeles Cello Society, and various people who are coming from abroad to attend the festival. It'll be a very happy gathering.

**Lane:** *There's another West Coast premiere, a piece by Brett Dean called *Twelve Angry Men*.*

**Kirshbaum:** Fabulous piece. We'd never programmed it in Manchester, but I had a



chance to hear it in Norway. He was inspired by Sidney Lumet's 1957 film *Twelve Angry Men*. And there's some very angry writing in the piece!

**Lane:** *I understand that this is a landmark year for honoring Piatigorsky—he's being inducted into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame on the opening night of your festival. And six of his former students, as well as cellist Evan Drachman, his grandson, are participating in a panel on March 16.*

**Kirshbaum:** Yes, and they will have interesting things to say about Piatigorsky, from every point of view. He was obviously such a warm-hearted, generous, and thoughtful human being. I spent two different brief periods of time with him. I played for him in a masterclass in Texas when I was thirteen and studying with a former pupil of his. The second time was here in Los Angeles, when he very kindly and graciously welcomed me to his home for a visit. I was in my twenties, and he was near the end of his life. It was an unforgettable two hours.



*Piatigorsky portrait ca. 1975*

**Lane:** *Some of the great teachers have been somewhat martinet-like, dictatorial. It appears that Piatigorsky was not one of those.*

**Kirshbaum:** No. He was very strong, but when you watch excerpts from his masterclasses you can see how he exuded care and concern for his pupils. He stressed in so many ways that they needed to be servants of music. Ego was something that he very much kept in check.

I often get asked by people who aren't cellists, "why would I go to a cello festival, or a cello masterclass?" Of course it's a celebration of the cello, but also of the life of a true master cellist and a great personality. You learn so many things about life when you're in a room with a great artist. This exchange of ideas—the mutual respect, the way an idea can be taken and enlarged upon and engaged with by a young artist, the transformation that can take place in 45 minutes—is an amazing thing to witness. I love teaching, but I also love listening to classes, for that reason. In Manchester, the core of the audience were cello lovers and enthusiasts, of course. But there were an equal number who knew very little about the cello, and they came out equally charged and excited and inspired by what they witnessed. It's not just a cello with four strings and somebody pressing their fingers up and down. These are life values and life experiences that one's talking about.



*Piatigorsky performing in 1972 with violinist Jascha Heifetz and pianist Daniel Pollack*

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival



March 8, 2012

## Meet Ralph Kirshbaum, Who's Bringing World's Finest Cellists Together in L.A. For the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival



*Artistic Director Ralph Kirshbaum with bust of Gregor Piatigorsky. Photo by Steve Cohn*

Ralph Kirshbaum, world renowned pedagogue and performer, recently moved to Los

Angeles to take over the Gregor Piatigorsky Endowed Chair in Violoncello at the USC Thornton School of Music. The USC Thornton School is partnering with the LA Phil, The Colburn School, and LACO to bring the world's finest cellists to take part in the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, from March 9th-18th.

We got to chat with Kirshbaum (who you can catch with the LA Phil on the 15th) about his role as the artistic director for the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, and the music scene among other things in Los Angeles. The festival will take place at USC, the Colburn School, and at the Walt Disney Concert Hall, For tickets and information, [click here](#).

### **What was your inspiration for this festival, and why in Los Angeles?**

Well, I directed a series of international cello festivals in Great Britain when I lived there and when I came to LA to take the Piatigorsky Chair at USC, it was in a way a natural extension, to propose the idea of an international cello festival here. The thing that was different was that I wanted to make it as all encompassing as possible and partnered with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Colburn School, and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

**And what was it like to come from teaching at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and teaching in London? Any major differences in the schools of playing?**

Well I'm American, so it's a return home for me. I lived for over 40 years in Europe, so it was time to come home.

And Piatigorsky being my boyhood idol, it was a great honor to assume this chair and I believe I am the fifth holder of this chair at the Thornton School. Different schools of playing like the Russian, the European, certainly the French have been passed down for generations, it's a wonderful thing. But if you lined up 10 of the greatest cellists, they would all sit differently, hold the cello differently, and sound differently. There has always been a broad spectrum, and sometimes we might think because recorded performance is much more accessible, and that you can hear everyone at the touch of a button, that there would be a standardization of approach, but it hasn't done so. It's the multiplicity of talent that a festival like this can show these differences.

**How was the festival curated? In terms of artists and program selection.**

As the artistic director for this festival, I think of the sequence of events, and of artists that would enlighten those events and be a real catalyst for the cello and the music of the cello, for this inaugural festival in Los Angeles. The actual works, are many of those that I have in my mind and I also work directly with each artist, in putting together a program that they are happy to be performing.

**And more specifically on the program, Alisa Weilerstein (which Kirshbaum performed with LACO recently) is performing the Rococo and you the Dvorak...**

Well with the LA Phil, I'm playing the Dvorak concerto, Mischa Maisky the Shostakovich concerto, and Weilerstein is performing the Rococo Variations and a wonderful companion piece, the Respighi

Variations ...and that's what we felt made the most compelling subscription.

**So you didn't just call dibs on the Dvorak Concerto?**

It's a very unusual thing, that I've never heard of, to have 3 subscription concerts of a world class orchestra like the LA Phil and having a different cello soloist with each concert. We discussed that and what the best order might be, and together we came up with that solution.

**I was just joking, since a lot of cellists love and would consider the Dvorak to be the greatest work in the cello repertoire...**

Even though Dvorak wrote this piece in 1896 well over 100 years ago ..for me it's still our greatest concerto, so I'm very happy to be performing it. *(ed note: I wholeheartedly agree, and here is my favorite recording because you asked)*

**And for the opening concert, there are five cello concerti (both Haydn, Saint-Saëns, Vivaldi, and an American premiere by Demenga). You're also bringing in over 20 world class cellists in a 10 day span, and the finale will include a piece featuring over 100 cellists on stage...the logistics must have been a nightmare, where would you find 100 cellists in LA?**

Well most of these cellists are traveling soloists, and some of them arranged their schedule so that they could be a part of this festival and that kind of enthusiasm is great for the festival. Most of them have been doing this for upwards of 25 years, and they are quite used to the travel. Except for maybe Weilerstein and Hakhnazaryan, who are younger. I believe Narek Hakhnazaryan is only 23 years old, he is the recent winner of the Tchaikovsky Competition *(ed note: the Olympics of Classical music)*. We could have had double the number of cellists, but the final count is 110 that we can manage on the stage. Most are not based in Los Angeles, quite a few of them are traveling from all



over the world to perform in the masterclasses, and will perform along with 13 of the guest artists in the piece...so it's a very broad based ensemble, which makes it really exciting.

**It says in your bio that you love Tex-Mex and American football, things LA is not particularly known for, have you found a substitute here? What do you end up doing?**

No I wait until I go to Texas and for football, you can watch that anywhere. I watched the Super Bowl and the matches that led up to it. I have to say though my favorite sport is tennis, that's what I played most of my life and I love watching someone like Federer on the court, he is a true artist. We love to go to movies and you can go at the very beginning of runs of movies (*ed note: European movie releases are often delayed*), but we don't have much time to do it. I somehow imagined that moving here I would have some more free time, but I'm actually busier than I've ever been in my life. Some of it is of my own doing, since i was the one that proposed this festival. There are long days.

**And will there be any recordings or broadcasts of these performances?**

The opening concert is going to be live on Classical KUSC ,and they are also taping other concerts for later broadcasts. We will be doing some recordings of our own, for documentary purposes.

**Sounds great... I feel that cello music in Los Angeles is very underrepresented.**

I think that's true. One of the great things again about events like this, is that every concert is a unique opportunity to hear cellists that they simply would never hear. There's a limited number of cellists or violinists, though many more violinists who would come to an area like Los Angeles in the course of a season. For cellists, you might be talking about a half dozen (*ed note: it's far fewer than a half dozen*) who would come abroad or wherever to play. Here we have over 20 cellists in one 10 day period, many of whom have not played in Los Angeles for a long time. So it's a great opportunity and I hope people really avail themselves to it.

April 2011

## NEWS

### New cello festival for California

**RALPH KIRSHBAUM IS TO BRING** together some of the world's finest cellists next year for the inaugural Piatigorsky International Cello Festival in Los Angeles. The project comes out of Kirshbaum's responsibilities as the Piatigorsky chair of cello at the Thornton School of Music and picks up where he left off when he stopped organising the UK's Manchester Cello

Festival in 2007. Twenty cellists, including Mischa Maisky, Steven Isserlis, Jian Wang and Miklós Perényi, will perform and give masterclasses. There will also be an evening during which Piatigorsky's former students celebrate their teacher, which Kirshbaum described as 'the emotional heart of the event'. He hoped that the great 20th-century cellist would have enjoyed

the festival: 'Piatigorsky was larger than life. He loved to tell stories and was fantastic at doing that. The festival is larger than life and will tell an interesting story, so I hope he would be pleased.'

According to Kirshbaum, specialist music festivals are an important addition to the musical landscape. He said: 'The older I get, the more I realise that the concentration on any subject that brings us more to the heart of the matter of that subject is a good thing. In this case it's the cello but that focus could be brought to bear on any instrument and have that impact.' The festival will run from 9 to 18 March 2012.



Ralph Kirshbaum,  
organiser of the  
new LA event

VIOLIN VIOLA CELLO BASS FIDDEE  
STRINGS

June 2011

# NEWS BRIEFS

## KIRSHBAUM TO HELM NEW CELLO FEST

Cellist and professor **Ralph Kirshbaum** will direct the inaugural **Piatigorsky International Cello Festival** March 9–18, 2012, in Los Angeles. The festival will feature cellists **Mischa Maisky, Steven Isserlis, Jian Wang, Alisa Weilerstein**, and more in orchestral concerts, chamber music performances, and master classes.



May 2012

## LETTER FROM... LOS ANGELES

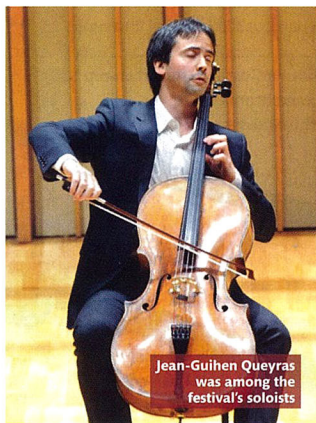
### City of angels

Cello celebrities gathered en masse to share their music and wisdom at the recent Piatigorsky Festival, but the real superstar was the man they came to honour, as **Ariane Todes** reports

**MOST MUSICIANS ARE GRANTED** a certain immortality as soon as they make a recording. Some live on in a more personal way through biographies, anecdotes and magazine articles. And then there are the true legends, whose personalities permeate entire generations of musicians in such a way that their presence is still palpable many years after their death. Such is the towering figure of Gregor Piatigorsky, the inspiration for the recent eponymous international cello festival in Los Angeles, where he taught from 1962 until his death in 1976.

The festival, an assemblage of 22 top cellists and 44 aspiring ones, as well as cello lovers and music industry types, was the brainchild of Ralph Kirshbaum. As such, it represented a natural follow-on from his Manchester Cello Festival, which ended in 2007 with his move to the University of Southern California (USC) Thornton School of Music, to take up Piatigorsky's own chair.

The structure of the LA festival was similar to that of the old Manchester one – two masterclasses, a lecture and a concert each day. Being LA, a city where you need a car to get out of bed, everything was on a massive scale, with activities spread out between the peaceful, elegant USC campus, and the Colburn School, based



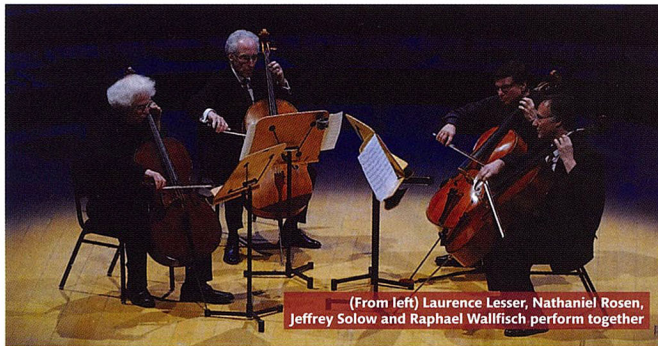
Jean-Guhen Queyras was among the festival's soloists

in downtown LA, an area that has rather less soul despite the recent addition of the impressive Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Many of the invited professionals had been Piatigorsky students, and the masterclasses were peppered with wistful memories of things he'd talked about in lessons. Sometimes these were general, often they were surprisingly specific,

of him teaching, it brought his enormous personality and musical spirit to life.

We heard of his quest for new hobbies to avoid boredom, from chess through spiders to oceanography, and his views on ageing: 'The thing that prevented me from observing my ageing was music. We should regard the passage of age as an achievement.' We heard about his concept



(From left) Laurence Lesser, Nathaniel Rosen, Jeffrey Solow and Raphael Wallfisch perform together

given that he died nearly 40 years ago. Over Schumann's Adagio and Allegro, Steven Isserlis remembered Piatigorsky explaining why a particular section provoked his love of the composer: because he could never finish a phrase. Laurence Lesser recalled how Piatigorsky instructed him to play a passage with the bow hovering above the string and encouraged a student to try it, saying 'No sound comes out except in your ear.' The trick proved remarkably effective. Lesser also remembered one of Piatigorsky's sayings: 'Never play for the cellists in the audience – they always have another idea.' Raphael Wallfisch recalled his teacher's exhortation to use the full length of the bow: 'You paid for the hair!'

**PIATIGORSKY'S PRESENCE** was made physical in one of the events at the climax of the festival, a tribute to him that included a moving biographical film. With archive photographs and footage

of vibrato as the 'window on a person's soul', and his teaching philosophies: 'You don't have to be a genius to know your shortcomings, but you have to be clever to know your strengths.'

Wallfisch picked up this last point in the subsequent discussion with Piatigorsky's former students, explaining, 'Knowing what is good about yourself is such a great thing to teach. So many of the things that he told us we didn't understand at the time, but every day we benefit.' They talked of his generosity (Mischa Maisky still has the watch Piatigorsky gave him at the age of 26, which he had bought with his first concert fee) and his dedication – he would call students up at all hours with a solution to some problem they had. As Kirshbaum described in his introduction to the show, this evening was indeed 'the soul of the festival', and a highly emotional one at that.

The phrase 'star-studded' is a terrible cliché, but in this context it is rather an understatement, with the opening





A mass cello ensemble played a specially written work by Christopher Rouse

concert alone featuring the likes of Antonio Lysy, Thomas Demenga and Jean-Guihen Queyras, leading to a climax of concerts at Walt Disney Concert Hall with Isserlis, Kirshbaum and Maisky. The only disappointment was the presence of only one female cellist on the bill, Alisa Weilerstein, although this perhaps reflects the Piatigorsky connection and the social norms of previous generations.

With playing of such quality and diversity it may seem invidious to single out particular performances, but it's hard not to mention the mastery and integrity of Miklós Perényi's Kodály Solo Sonata, which left an indelible memory, and the specialist audience baying for an encore. Indeed, one of the delights of such expert listeners was the utter stillness throughout all the festival performances – I don't think I've ever experienced such quietly intense listening before. If only all concerts were like that.

The professional cellists also seemed to enjoy listening for a change, but without competitiveness, often sitting in on the classes and concerts of their colleagues and referring to what they picked up there in their own sessions. With personalities as large and diverse as these ones, no one had cause to worry. A performance by six of the players of the complete Bach Suites made this clear, with six entirely different sounds and conceptions, and audience members entirely split over which of them they preferred.

Diversity was to be found in masterclass styles, too, which varied between asking leading questions, telling illuminating stories, offering visual imagery to help understand the music, going through the score detail by detail, analysing a player's style and offering solutions, or interpreting musical theory. Some students were

**The phrase 'star-studded' is a cliché, but in this context it is an understatement**

able to catch on quickly to what the mentors were saying and change accordingly, others not. I always wonder how this capacity relates to their ultimate success. For me, one of the most instructive parts of the experience was to hear a player explain how they understand the music or the technique required, and then play it directly with that in mind. It was like seeing the cogs working behind what one usually hears as a seamless performance.

**WHILE EACH OF THE PROS** had a distinct personality, there were only a few students who offered glimmers of such character, however well they played and no matter how high the overall standard. This led me to wonder at what point these fresh young players turn into the musical personalities

they're here to learn from. I was struck by Isserlis's exasperated sigh of 'The younger generation!' when a student in his masterclass couldn't tell him the key of a particular section of Tchaikovsky's 'Rococo' Variations. Throughout the classes, such questions were rarely answered successfully, let alone with confidence. And even the gentler version of 'What does this mean to you?' was often met with a bemused look – even though those students are studying with some of the best teachers around, often including the ones here. So where is the disconnect? Are teachers trying to instil such discipline but giving up? Or not trying? Are students so focused on technique that they can't buy into the theoretical side?

But exposure to such inspirational figures is no doubt an invaluable part of development, and I'm sure that none of the young players left LA the same as they arrived. As Lesser explained in his class: 'We all come together at different stages of our careers and hear the way other people play – we like some things but not others and go home taking something from this remarkable collection of people.' A remarkable collection indeed, in the name of a remarkable man. ■

To read a blog and quotes from the masterclasses of the Piatigorsky Festival go online at [www.thestrads.com](http://www.thestrads.com)





# The New York Times

March 16, 2012

## California Concerts, Awash in Cellists

Piatigorsky International Cello Festival at Walt Disney Concert Hall

By James R. Oestreich



Ralph Kirshbaum performing with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

LOS ANGELES — On its face, the Los Angeles Philharmonic's subscription concert at Walt Disney Concert Hall on Thursday evening might have seemed routine. The program, conducted by Neeme Jarvi, followed an old formula — overture, concerto, symphony — and the repertory was familiar: Dvorak's "Carnival" Overture and his Cello Concerto, with Ralph Kirshbaum as

soloist, followed by Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony.

But far from being routine, the program called further attention to a new vitality in the classical music scene of Los Angeles, for the related concerts this weekend will be transformed, sandwiching different cello works and soloists between the overture and the symphony.



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Saturday night Mischa Maisky will play Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto and a transcription of a Tchaikovsky aria; Sunday afternoon Alisa Weilerstein will play Tchaikovsky's "Variations on a Rococo Theme" and Respighi's "Adagio con Variazioni."

Los Angeles, it seems, is awash in cellists at the moment, and if Mr. Kirshbaum was crowded out of those concerts, he has only himself to blame. The occasion is the first Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, which Mr. Kirshbaum organized to succeed a series of cello festivals he founded in Manchester, England, in 1988 and directed until 2007.

The Texas-born Mr. Kirshbaum, 66, who taught at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester for 35 years, took over the Gregor Piatigorsky chair in cello at the Thornton School of Music of the University of Southern California in 2008, a distant successor to that old cello wizard himself, who died in 1976.

Mr. Kirshbaum relocated to the United States in 2010 and has now inaugurated the festival as an outgrowth of both his English festivals and the longstanding Piatigorsky seminars that became part of his new charge. Never one to hog the spotlight, and undoubtedly swamped with logistical difficulties, Mr. Kirshbaum is playing relatively little at the festival, which began on March 9 and ends on Sunday.

Though a persuasive champion of Bach's unaccompanied cello suites, he turned them over to six other players last Sunday. But he took on the choice Dvorak assignment as a sort of centerpiece and pulled it off with aplomb.

"Of the cellists of his age group," his elder colleague Janos Starker once said of Mr. Kirshbaum, "he speaks the language of music with the least theatrics."

Listeners used to having cellists try to overpower them with the Dvorak concerto's bravura proclamations, or dazzle them with its virtuosic flights, found something different: a cellist with a warm, well-centered

tone trying to make the best musical sense of the whole. Bravura and virtuosity were all in place, to be sure, but were well integrated into a reading perhaps more compelling for its lyrical and thoughtful moments.

And to judge from the clamorous ovation Mr. Kirshbaum received, he had drawn the audience into complete sympathy with his more intimate approach.

Here, surely, was a place for a movement of Bach as an encore that none of today's young lions would have missed, but that is not the kind of artist Mr. Kirshbaum is. He had done justice to Dvorak, and that was enough of a night's work.

For a belated first-time visitor to Disney Concert Hall (which opened in 2003), the evening held other fascinations. From the splashy opening of "Carnival" to the hammering ending of the Shostakovich symphony, the hall showed an ability to yield bright, reverberant sonorities in wide-ranging dynamics and an equal ability to blend and contain them.

The most impressive sounds in some ways were the quietest. Midway through the Largo, Shostakovich breaks out of a clamor with quiet tremolos in the violins that sounded subdued and distant, yet so vital that they seemed to emanate from the walls.

This was sustained through beautifully played solos on oboe (by Ariana Ghez), clarinet (Michele Zukovsky) and flute (David Buck). The violins finally grew even quieter, as the merest thread of sound behind the celesta (Joanne Pearce Martin).

The stunning effect spoke well for the ability of the veteran maestro Mr. Jarvi and the players to trust one another, and for the ability of the hall to deliver the faintest of sounds. Here was a level of mystery and atmosphere that was never quite achieved in the Boston Symphony Orchestra's performance of the work at Carnegie Hall last week.

*The Piatigorsky International Cello Festival runs through Sunday at various locations in Los Angeles; [piatigorskyfestival.com](http://piatigorskyfestival.com).*

# Los Angeles Times

March 11, 2012



## Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME



## Music review: Piatigorsky Cello Festival opening concert at USC

The Piatigorsky International Cello Festival began big Friday night at USC's Bovard Auditorium. Seven cello soloists played five concertos (two were double concertos) in an exhausting and often spectacular showcase concert. And it was just the start of what promises to be an inimitable 10-day nonstop cello orgy that will end March 18 at Walt Disney Concert Hall with a piece by Christopher Rouse for 100 cellists.

But, hey, USC has the reputation for knowing how to party, and I overheard one student cellist in the audience say she was prepared to become *cello-ed* out.

Cellists have come from all continents except Antarctica, Ralph Kirshbaum, the festival's artistic director, noted in his introductory remarks at Bovard. That includes 22 soloists and 45 young cellists who will participate in public master classes. It also means a bonanza for the

airlines, since cellists must buy an extra seat for their fragile instruments. The festival -- which will include a great many recitals, workshops, three concerto performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and, no doubt, endless cello schmoozing -- is meant as a tribute to Gregor Piatigorsky, one of the greatest and most beloved cellists of the 20th century. He taught at USC from 1949 until his death in 1976, and appeared in regular chamber music series with violinist Jascha Heifetz at Bovard. Student tickets, in the front row, were a dollar, and there was no better introduction for a teenager to music's power than to hear, close up, the incredibly physical warmth of Piatigorsky's cello sound wrapping itself around Heifetz's soaring intensity.

The program of the opening concert featured some pretty great cello playing. It didn't unfortunately embody the Piatigorsky who premiered a number of important and some unjustly neglected concertos, but it did remind us of his strong role as a pedagogue -- several of the international soloists in the festival were his students.

A chamber orchestra was organized with principal players from the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra along with USC and Colburn School students, and conducted with striking incisiveness and sensitivity to a wide range of soloists by Hugh Wolff.

The first work, Vivaldi's Concerto for Two Cellos in G Minor, was an obscurity and a minor find. The soloists, Antonio Lysy and Peter Stumpf -- representing, respectively, the UCLA and USC cello faculties -- played with engaging unanimity, especially in a sweet, short slow movement.

The most attention-getting soloist was Narek Hakhnazaryan in Saint-Saëns' First Cello Concerto, the evening's one work that was closely associated with Piatigorsky. This young Armenian cellist won the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Russia last summer, but his victory was sadly overshadowed by a scandal. Mark Gorenstein, music director

of the State Academic Symphony Orchestra, which accompanied Hakhnazaryan in the competition, made anti-Armenian slurs against the cellist that led to the conductor being ousted from the competition and dismissal from his orchestra.

Hakhnazaryan, who got a near rock star ovation from an audience of screaming cellists in Bovard, is, in fact, a controversial player. His command of the instrument is extraordinary, and he is clearly going places. He is an assured, flamboyant, old-school Romantic. His vibrato is hyper-expressive, but it didn't appear to make his exacting audience squirm.

Both of Haydn's cello concertos were on the program, and they got very different types of treatments. Jian Wang was the stern, straight-forward, stylistically unimaginative soloist in the D-Major Concerto.

In contrast, Jean-Guihen Queyras' fresh, alert and original performance of the earlier C Major concerto was, I thought, the highlight of the evening. The French cellist's tone is light and fragrant. He plays with not only a sense of pert 18th century style but also a modernity as if this were music newly composed. Perhaps that is because Queyras also pays attention to new music; it was a shame that he was not asked to play one of the interesting contemporary concertos he has premiered elsewhere.

The evening's new music came, instead, from cellist and composer Thomas Demenga, whose "Relations" received its American premiere Friday. The double concerto was written for himself and his brother Patrick, who has pneumonia and was replaced by Sayaka Selina (a cello student of the composer). A stylistically Postmodern concerto, which also features prominent roles for percussion and prepared piano, it cleverly dabbles in this and that.

The first movement contains intriguing exoticism allusions to Indonesian gamelan,



and the incorporation of sung syllables (taken from the soloists' names) by the percussionist and soloists was amusing. A dreamy second movement, though, sounded thin and a jazzy final movement, slighter still.

But the cello parts dazzled, especially the

way two cellists often played as one. That is something clearly in the blood of cello brothers, and Selina here proved an honorary Demenga, an impressive perfect fit.

Now for a week-long parade of cello personalities.

VIOLIN VIOLA CELLO BASS FIDDLE  
**STRINGS**

March 11, 2012

## Fans Go Wild for the Piatigorsky Cello Festival

By Laurence Vittes

Although the 1st annual Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, which kicked off March 9 and runs through March 18, is commemorating a time when giants strode the land, it was the kids who were served on opening night. There were so many cellists in the University of Southern California's Bovard Auditorium aisles it was hard not trip over them. A sizable contingent were USC students, cool dudes who are generations removed from Piatigorsky and eager to make their own mark on the music world.

It was like being at a college football game. The cello kids screamed when 2011 Tchaikovsky Competition prize winner Narek Haknazaryan played Saint-Saens' Concerto No.1 and they roared when Jean-Guihen Queyras, making his L.A. debut, finished the evening with a blistering, insanely brilliant Haydn's Concerto No.1.

Another high point was the American premiere of Thomas Demenga's *Relations*, a concerto for two vocalizing cellists, one vocalizing percussionist, a prepared piano,

and orchestra. Despite echoes snatched from Kodaly and Debussy, and a colorful orchestration with lots of wood block, snapping things, snazzy brass, and curlicue woodwinds, Sayaka Salina, a student of Demenga, was the story. Substituting on last-second notice for the composer's brother, Patrick, Salina played the music's myriad onslaught of half-jazz, half-classical notes and moans with near-perfect command.

Although Demenga towered over her in stature, she equalled him in sound and impact—together they fused their two solo lines into one.

The festival, organized by USC Thornton School of Music cello faculty member Ralph Kirshbaum, is already resonating with mainstream media: Mark Swed covered it for the *Los Angeles Times* and Stuart Isacoff flew out from New York for the *Wall Street Journal*. And the opening night concert went out live over classical FM powerhouse KUSC.

There is definitely cello in the air.

VIOLIN VIOLA CELLO BASS FIDDLE  
**STRINGS**

March 12, 2012

## **From the Piatigorsky Fest: All the Bach Cello Suites, All in a Row**

By Laurence Vittes

Thomas Demenga and Miklos Perenyi dominated an evening of the six Bach Suites played by six cellists at the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival on Sunday night at the Colburn School's Zipper Hall. After the professional basketball Lakers and Clippers, playing down the road at Staples Center, this was the toughest ticket in town. It was not an occasion for original performance practice, but sexy Swiss cellist and composer Demenga in Suite No 4, so tall he uses an angled endpin (Stahlhammer's brand new model), evoked throughout an improvisatory sense of the music's flow that felt like Bach was somewhere near.

Demenga found dread in the opening Prelude, pausing dramatically before the exhilarating 16th-note riffs. His ornamentation transformed the complicated depths of the Sarabande.

In the two Bourrées, Demenga flashed dizzying speed and orchestral dimensionality. He found liquid gold in the Gigue before struggling through to the finish line, as all six cellists did, beset by minor memory lapses and intonation problems.

The impassive septuagenarian Perényi took the most dour of the Suites (No. 5) and

made it dourer still, tracing the music's dogged emotional lines with a grandeur that was both simple and mighty, using his own toolkit of ornaments to extend and illuminate the music's line. His deliberate speed for the first movement fugue was mesmerizing; he kept his bow on the strings for the whole Suite as if he were a musical Antaeus whose strength came from Bach's musical ground.

His occasional rolled trills were like little miracles.

Within conventional limits, Ronald Leonard, Frans Helmerson, and Jian Wang all experienced varying amounts of success in the performance. French heartthrob Jean-Guihen Queyras, however, finishing up the evening with the Sixth Suite, explored an intriguing number of directions, but never found one he stuck with—against all odds, he was even bewildered occasionally by the impossibility of playing music written for five strings on only four.

The only deficit on the scorecard: of the 23 cellists assembled to teach or perform at the week-long festival, only two are women (and one of those was a last-minute substitute).

What must the woman cellists in the audience—pros and students—have been thinking?





# The New York Times

May 13, 2007

## Remembering Rostropovich, The Master Teacher

By MICHAEL WHITE

MANCHESTER, England  
**I**T is a truth upheld by many in the music world if not universally acknowledged that pianists are neurotic, violinists vain and cellists ... well, cellists are nice. Straight-forward. Sociable. They'll tell you so themselves.

Whereas other solo-status instrumentalists tend to come together only in competitions, cellists swarm like bees at big international meetings. The Kronberg Festival in Germany is one. And for the last two decades another has been the Manchester International Cello Festival, where Ralph Kirshbaum, the American head of the cello department at the Royal Northern College of Music, has pulled in star players every two of three years to perform, teach, talk and stay up until 3 a.m. comparing Strads, spikes and Piatigorsky stories.

Last weekend the festival was back in business, with Yo-Yo Ma, Mischa Maisky, Colin Carr, Thomas Demenga, Natalia Gutman and some 40 other participants jostling like angels on a pinhead in endurance concerts that began at 7 and ran till after midnight. Students, amateurs and aficionados packed the halls. Good times were had.

But there was a ghost at this feast, benign but insistent. It was the ghost of Mstislav Rostropovich, who had planned to be in Manchester too but died the week before.

From the beginning Mr. Kirshbaum said he didn't want the festival to turn into a wake; the scheduled theme was English music, and it wasn't to be hijacked by this death. But as Mr. Ma said of Mr. Rostropovich in an interview:



Jon Super for The New York Times

Top, from left, Gemma Rosefield, Ralph Kirshbaum and Li-Wei at a tribute concert to the late Mstislav Rostropovich, right, at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, England.



“There can scarcely be a cellist here, or anywhere, who wasn’t affected by him. He was supreme. He was loved. He was a wake-up call for every one of us. You can’t get away from that.”

And there was scarcely a cellist of distinction here who didn’t claim to be some kind of student of the great man, or a student of a student. Most impressive was the number who had actually participated in his legendary classes in the 1960s at the Moscow and Leningrad conservatories: Ms. Gutman, Mr. Maisky, David Geringas, Karine Georgian, Ivan Monighetti. An elite corps, they were honored here like surviving next of kin.

“It’s true,” Ms. Gutman said. “We were his family. We have lost a father.” And their collective testimony made it clear that, in the words of Mr. Maisky: “He was a great cellist but perhaps an even greater teacher. This was his ultimate gift.”

For obvious reasons Mr. Rostropovich’s teaching was less well known to the world than his concert work. But a biography just published in Britain, by Elizabeth Wilson, herself a Moscow Conservatory student from the ’60s, emphasizes its importance. And in hindsight it can be seen as central to his sense of self as a musician.

Mr. Rostropovich began to teach at 15, taking over from his father, a distinguished cello teacher who died young. Then for 25 years, from 1948 until he left Russia in 1974, he taught in both Moscow and Leningrad, with a particularly famous class in Moscow: Class 19.

At a time in the Soviet Union when speech was guarded, opinions were monitored and life was gray, Mr. Rostropovich’s Class 19 was provocative, energized and, Mr. Geringas said, “a ray of light, opening up possibility.” His students called him Sunshine. And 40 years later they talk

## *Cellists at a gathering in England celebrate a life and legacy.*

of the experience as if it had happened yesterday, with vivid recall of events and recurring images of natural upheaval — torrent, hurricane, tsunami — to describe the impact on their lives.

Less closely involved students, the ones who knew Mr. Rostropovich only through master classes in the West, tend to describe his influence on them in technical terms. Mr. Ma talks of “the will to make a phrase last”; Mr. Kirshbaum of “the plasticity of a left hand moving so fast it encompassed new levels of difficulty”; and Mr. Demenga of “a bowing arm so agile it was like a snake, the bow a natural continuance of the arm, flesh melting into wood.”

But for those who were with him in Russia in the ’60s the memories are more emotional, overwhelmed by the huge, driven, scrutinizing personality that swept them up and left them reeling.

“Such power, such intensity,” Ms. Gutman said. “He could look at a person and see so clearly what was hidden within. It was the genius to awaken genius in others.”

For Mr. Maisky it was a question of attitude: “He taught us to remember that the cello, or any other instrument, is only what that word implies: an instrument to reach the ultimate goal of music, not the other way round. Musicians are under such pressure to succeed — to play louder, faster, more brilliant — that the music becomes a way of showing how wonderfully you play. This, for Rostropovich, was wrong. What matters is generosity of spirit, to open your heart. And his spirit was so great, his heart so open, this is what he gave us in his classes.”

Not that they were easy. All of his students talk of being required to learn a concerto in two days or to come back and play the Bach cello suites from memory in a week. No excuses.

“Let’s be honest,” Ms. Georgian said. “We were quite afraid of him. For the first two years I was terrified. It’s strange to look now at the photos taken at those classes and realize that he was a relatively young man, still in his 30s. To us he was a god. We hung on his every word, and it wasn’t always kind. I never forget him saying to me when I played Brahms in his class, ‘You haven’t cried enough tears in your life to play this music.’ Actually he was right. I hadn’t. But I learned.”

For Mr. Maisky the price of attending Class 19 turned out to be more than just tears. It was one and a half years in a labor camp, resulting from his habit of taping everything Rostropovich said.

“The class was so incredible, and he worked at such speed, it was impossible to absorb,” Mr. Maisky said. “So for years I took along an old secondhand tape recorder, and eventually I needed to replace it. But these things were hard to get: only from the special shop with special certificates.”





Jon Super for The New York Times

From left, foreground, the cellists Ivan Monighetti, Thomas Demenga, Gemma Rosefield and Li-Wei at a Rostropovich tribute concert rehearsal in Manchester, England. Ralph Kirshbaum stands second from right.

Getting the certificates involved a black-market currency deal for which Mr. Maisky was arrested and put on trial. "The whole thing was a setup," he said. "They'd been watching me because my sister had emigrated to Israel, and they expected me to do the same. It was their revenge. But one and a half years was lucky. I could have got eight."

Whether Mr. Rostropovich was instrumental in getting the sentence reduced is not clear. Mr. Maisky thinks not. "Because this was 1970," he said, "when his influence had collapsed because of his support for Solzhenitsyn. Until then he had power. He could ring up Brezhnev. After Solzhenitsyn his power was lost, so there was nothing he could do for me, except in personal terms. In that sense he was like a father. He sent money, he maintained my spirit, so many things."

Mr. Maisky was in a hotel in Munich when he heard of Mr. Rostropovich's death. "It came up on the TV news, and I was devastated," he said. "The only thing I could think to do was take my cello out and play a Bach suite. For him."

But for all of that, did Mr. Rostropovich generate a discernible school of playing? He himself avoided talk of schools; and although he could trace a direct musical ancestry back to Karl Davidov, the founder of the so-called Russian tradition, he was by general agreement such a giant personality and such a universal figure that he outgrew any allegiance.

"It isn't meaningful to talk of schools these days," Ms. Georgian said. "I'm never sure what



people mean when they speak of the Russian school beyond something that's loud, Romantic and more from the heart than the head, which is not necessarily a compliment. With Rostropovich there was no school. And though we are in many ways close, there are big differences in the playing of his students, no?"

Listening to everyone in Manchester, one could hardly disagree. The hard, compacted, unadorned intensity of Ms. Gutman bore little obvious resemblance to the mellow sheen of Ms. Georgian; still less to the liquid brilliance of Mr. Maisky. Could these people really be the family they claimed to be?

"Yes, definitely," Mr. Maisky insisted. "Different as we are, we have a shared blood transfusion that doesn't determine how we play or present musical ideas but does affect basic quality of sound, which for Rostropovich was the most important thing."

The Rostropovich sound is hard to put in words. Mr. Kirshbaum called it "powerful, with an inner life that sustained its intensity even at the most delicate and soft dynamic." And regardless of the terminology, it has certainly inspired successive generations of young cellists. For Natalie Clein, one of Britain's rising stars here last weekend, "it was the sound I searched for through my teen years: electric, incandescent, large but never forced, the sound that brought me to the cello in the

first place."

Bringing people to the cello ranks high among the legacies Mr. Rostropovich leaves behind. He raised the profile of the instrument; he raised the standard of performance. And for Ms. Georgian he single-handedly rescued the cello from its also-ran status as a solo instrument that lagged behind the violin and piano, largely because of the shortage of first-rank repertory.

It was the constant complaint of cellists that they had no Beethoven or Brahms concerto to themselves, and no Mozart at all, while pianists and violinists had so much. Mr. Rostropovich begged, pestered and bullied composers of distinction to write for him. Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Britten, Lutoslawski, Bernstein, Penderecki, Schnittke and Walton (the list runs on) obliged him with what amounts to a near-comprehensive catalog of 20th-century cello music.

Mr. Rostropovich gave the premieres of 224 new works, large and small. "And that means we cellists owe him maybe 40 percent of our current repertoire," Mr. Ma said, "which for me is the greatest legacy of all."

One other item on the checklist of bequests is the very fact that massed events like Manchester exist. They're just the kind of thing Mr. Rostropovich loved and fostered. He encouraged cello clubs. He liked the camaraderie of fellow players. And in a short filmed speech made for a previous Manchester festival and poignantly replayed at this one, he com-

mended (with his heavy Russian English) the "enormous, brilliant friendship, very rare" of cello gatherings. He even offered a reason for the friendliness of cellists: "We carry heavy instruments and suffer so much planes and trains. This makes us sympathetic people."

Participants here offered other explanations. Ms. Clein thought it had to do with spending your life playing bass lines. "You're supportive," she added, "always helping someone else to shine."

Whatever the reason, cellists manifestly do enjoy one another's company. And if Mr. Rostropovich's death weren't bad enough, the participants were hit with more bad news when rumors that this year's festival would be the last were confirmed.

"Things have their time frame," said Mr. Kirshbaum, the director, "and the festival has grown so much it's reaching saturation point. Back in 1987 it was meant to be a one-off. I never imagined I'd still be doing it 20 years later. And now, after 36 years of living in Britain, I'm thinking about moving my base, quite possibly back to the U.S."

Could someone else pick up the ball? Any successor to Mr. Kirshbaum would need to have an international profile big enough to lean on friends and call in favors. And the owners of big international profiles tend not to have the time for such ventures.

What Manchester needs, clearly, is a Rostropovich. So far there are no contenders.

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

theguardian

May 8, 2007

## BBC Philharmonic/Nosedá

By Tim Ashley

Festivals are usually celebratory occasions, but a bitter-sweet atmosphere hung over this concert, part of the Manchester International Cello festival, founded in 1988 by Ralph Kirshbaum. The concert was dedicated to Mstislav Rostropovich. However, the previous evening, Kirshbaum announced his intention to stand down as the festival's artistic director, a decision greeted with considerable sadness.

The concert, with Gianandrea Nosedá conducting the BBC Philharmonic, consisted of four concertos by 20th-century English composers. The cello's ability to encapsulate heightened, tragic emotion made it a preferred instrument in a century of war, revolution and totalitarianism, and three of the four concertos effectively constitute musical responses to political convulsion.

The centrepiece was Elgar's Concerto, his tremendous elegy for a vanishing world, which Kirshbaum played in a performance of great nobility, grace and

nostalgic sweetness. Britten's Symphony for Cello and Orchestra is darker and more uncompromising. Written for Rostropovich in 1963, it is a lean, spectral piece, at odds with Rostropovich's energetic personality. Natalia Gutman was the soloist, probing its shadowy world with grave brilliance, and Nosedá examined its pungent textures, though neither could overcome its impenetrability.

The programme's comparative rarity was Frank Bridge's Oration, a harrowing, angry tribute to the first world war generation. It pitted the soloist - the outstanding Colin Carr - against grieving woodwind and mechanistic marches.

To remind us that the cello need not always be associated with tragic solemnity the evening closed with Yo-Yo Ma playing the Walton Concerto - the work of a master entertainer, performed by a virtuoso of infinite charm.



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# The New York Times

April 29, 2007

## Dear Virtuoso, I Wrote This One Just for You

By DANIEL J. WAKIN

**P**EOPLE who pay the least attention to classical music probably know Mozart's clarinet concerto and quintet, two indelibly beautiful works. But how many remember the name Anton Stadler? He was Mozart's fellow Freemason in Vienna, a clarinetist for whom the works were written. The history of music is littered with Stadlers, great virtuosos whose artistry inspired the repertory we live with today. An outstanding example of such an artist, Mstislav Rostropovich, died last week.

Mr. Rostropovich played a number of extraordinary roles in his life: brilliant cellist, conductor, thorn in the side of the Soviet regime, champion of artistic and political freedom, mentor and humanitarian.

One of his greatest legacies, though, will probably be a prodigious body of cello music composed for him or inspired by him.

He was the recipient of five pieces by Britten; two cello concertos by Shostakovich; and Prokofiev's Sinfonia Concertante. He gave the first performances of works by Penderecki, Dutilleux, Lutoslawski, Schnittke, Messiaen, Bernstein, Auric and Walton and a host of other 20th-century composers.

Ralph Kirshbaum, an American cellist living in London, recalled a car ride with Mr. Rostropovich two years ago. The Russian said he was working on a new Penderecki piece. How many premieres had Mr. Rostropovich given, Mr. Kirshbaum idly asked. "It is No. 224," Mr. Rostropovich answered — mostly cello works, but also pieces for orchestra, chamber ensemble and voice and piano (he was a capable accompanist).

"He is the supreme example of a practicing musician, an internationally renowned artist, who brings into the world so many new compositions," said Mr. Kirshbaum, who runs an international cello festival in Manchester, England. The festival begins May 2 and will include a tribute to Mr. Rostropovich.

"He made it his business to know these composers and goad from them these compositions," Mr. Kirshbaum said. "He would insist, 'Must write piece for me!'"

Visual artists, of course, have always had muses, and the inspiration is obvious: they painted them. Picasso had his lover Dora Maar; Bonnard had his wife Marthe, whom he painted hundreds of times; Rembrandt, a genius of self-portraiture, had himself. Elsewhere in the world of performing arts, the great example of performer inspiration is George Balanchine, who built ballets on a succession of great dancers, some of whom became wives.

In music, the relationship between performer and composer is less intimate but no less powerful, although opera is something of an exception. Composers have long written operatic roles with specific singers — their voices, their looks, their personalities — in mind. Mozart several times added and subtracted arias based on who was singing in a particular production. Composers of that era also tended to write concertos for themselves or their students to play.



Cristina Quicler/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

**Inspiration** Mstislav Rostropovich made sure there were plenty of new pieces for him to play.

In our age, the importance of the performer as muse has grown, for several reasons. Technical advances in instrument-making over the last 100 years have broadened the range of what musicians can play. And musicians have become better. They want more music, and composers are stimulated to write for them. All this music helps keep the classical scene vibrant.

The oboe is a good example. Its modern form dates back only 100 years, meaning the 19th-century Romantics produced few solo works of note for oboe and orchestra. The Strauss concerto, a landmark, came in 1945, and since the 1960s, the Swiss soloist Heinz Holliger has played a major role in raising the oboe's profile and inspiring myriad works by composers including Berio, Carter, Martin, Henze, Lutoslawski and Stockhausen.



"All of us guys with big jobs are always looking for new pieces to play," said Eugene Izotov, principal oboist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. "When a composer, no matter whether famous or not, sends me something, I'm very excited about it."

New musical markets have arisen as the newer members of the modern symphony orchestra have come into their own. The trombone has a huge new body of re-

*Which comes first, the notes or the note master? Even a tuba player, if he's great, can inspire solo works.*

cent solo literature. Much of it came about because of the Swedish trombone virtuoso Christian Lindberg, who counts at least 82 works written for him. Oystein Baadsvik of Norway, a tuba soloist, has given the premieres of some 40 works.

Even percussionists have a library of solo literature, born almost exclusively in the last 75 years. This month, the combined percussion ensembles of the Juilliard School and Manhattan School of Music performed a pillar of the repertory, an entire symphony of percussion by Charles Wuorinen.

Playing an instrument brilliantly is not the only quality that leads to new works. Often, the performer is a composer too, like Mr. Holliger and Mr. Lindberg. Energy, a persuasive personality and plenty of commitment are also necessary, and Mr. Rostropovich excelled in these areas (and even composed a bit too).

Once, in the middle of a punishing schedule of concerts and travel, he appeared at a rehearsal with the English Chamber Orchestra to perform a new work at the Aldeburgh Festival, with Britten conducting, Mr. Kirshbaum said, recounting a story told by a member of the orchestra. He had not completely polished the piece, and Britten took offense. Mr. Rostropovich spent the night practicing. The next day, he played it perfectly. From memory.

Another insight into his dedication to new works came from Patricia O'Kelly, the longtime spokeswoman for the National Symphony Orchestra, which Mr. Rostropovich led as music director from 1977 to 1994. In an interview once, he wondered with mock anger why no cellist had ever asked Mozart, "Write for me cello concerto!" in Ms. O'Kelly's paraphrase.

It was an accusation he never wanted made about him.

# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

## Manchester Evening News

March 12, 2004

### Young cellists get their chance

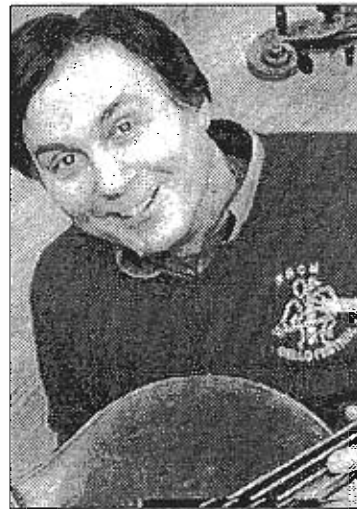
IT has been three years since the last one, now no one in Manchester is going to be allowed to forget that the countdown has started to the next Royal Northern College of Music International Cello Festival.

A series of 10 concerts begins next Thursday in the build-up to the festival proper, which will bring hundreds of cellists from all over the world, including leading soloists such as Mischa Maisky, Heinrich Schiff and Anner Bylsma, to the RNCM for the International Cello Festival, May 5 to 9.

Part of the reason artistic director of the festival Ralph Kirshbaum has initiated the pre-festival series is to give some of the 65 cellists at the burgeoning RNCM department in which he is professor, a chance to have a go. Only a handful of students actually get to play in the five-day festival in May.

One of the highlights of the pre-festival series will be an outdoor event on May 1 or 2 when an ensemble of 12 cellists will perform in Manchester city centre.

But there are many other intriguing events such as the concert sponsored by the Swiss Consulate in which Laura Dowling will play *La Voce* by Louis Andriessen, requiring her to sing at the same time as play the cello (St Mary's Church, Stockport, April 2, 7.30pm). A touch of Latin American fire is injected at a concert on April 17 at Emmanuel Church, Didsbury, when Argentinian cellist Leandro Silvera will be soloist in Piazzola's fiery *Le Grand Tango* (used in



■ FESTIVAL ORGANISER:  
Ralph Kirshbaum

the film *The Tango Lesson*) with a cello ensemble.

The penultimate concert at St Ann's Church in central Manchester (April 28) includes a clue to the theme of this year's festival, Finland and the Far East, when Julia Tom plays a piece by Chinese composer Zhou Long called *Wild Grass*.

■ For more information about the pre-festival programme ring Sally Smith at the RNCM Cello Festival office on 01625 571091.

# THE TIMES

May 8, 2004

**Concert** Premieres sparkle in cello heaven in Manchester;

## International Cello Festival

RNCM, Manchester

★★★★☆

**Matthew Connolly**

THE Royal Northern College of Music has had that noblest of instruments, the cello, between its knees for the past week. The eighth RNCM Manchester International Cello Festival, a five-day jamboree of concerts, has featured more than thirty leading performers, seven premieres, workshops, masterclasses and even a cello-making competition.

On the opening night the college foyer was transformed into a mini-marketplace of the world's cello-sellers and makers. Inside, something even more spectacular was on display, as virtuoso cellists turned an eclectic programme — from the avant-garde of Magnus Lindberg to the *avant-hier* of Tchaikovsky — into an electric evening, helped by a lively BBC Philharmonic under a

wonderfully spirited Rumon Gamba.

Saint-Saëns's Concerto in A minor opened the proceedings, performed by Erling Blöndal Bengtsson, a Scandinavian veteran who has premiered for Walton and Lutoslawsky. Bengtsson played mellifluously, but there was a lack of muscle, and he was soon eclipsed by the Japanese cellist Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, who fleshed out Takemitsu's rumbling and mysterious *Orion and Pleiades* with controlled power.

Both muscle and flesh rippled in the world premiere of the Finnish composer Alevi Aho's Double Cello Concerto. Frans Helmerson and Jan-Erik Gustafsson, a Swede and a Finn, gave a show-stopping performance of this powerful one-movement work, in which the soloists follow two electrifying lines of melody, entwined harmonically and contrapuntally, sparking off each other in passages of, by turns, searing intensity and languid melancholy. It is all set above an orchestral part barking with excitement, and the

result is a composition of clarity, simplicity and real force.

More awe was to come, with Lindberg's Cello Concerto, performed by the Finn Anssi Karttunen, for whom the composer wrote it. Lindberg's devilishly unplayable score takes the soloist and his cello to the point of collapse with its lightning runs, unearthly screeches and numerous other molestations. Then it all does collapse, into moments of unbearable, time-stopping stillness — during one of which Gamba held his score frozen in mid-page-turn for what seemed like minutes, as if terrified of breaking the cruel spell Karttunen had cast.

After that wickedly avant-garde spectacle, Tchaikovsky's Variations on a Rococo Theme seemed at first ridiculous, but in the hands of the Russian cellist Alexander Rudin, whose gorgeously rich tone and elegant delivery won the fickle hearts of the audience, the ridiculous sounded sublime in the end.

*The festival ends today.  
Box office: 0161-907 5555*



# Piatigorsky International Cello Festival

GRAMOPHONE May 2004



JYTTIE NIELSON

Manchester throngs with cellos and cellists for five days in May

What is the collective noun for a congregation of cellists? A rainbow, perhaps, to judge from the pulsing, variegated vibrations of 147 of them arrayed on Bridgewater Hall's stage at the end of the last Manchester International Cello Festival. That was three years ago, but artistic director Ralph Kirshbaum stresses the continuity of atmosphere that the festival generates: 'Many people have been before, and those that haven't have heard a lot about it. When Ehrling [Blömdahl-Bengtsson] picks up his bow for the Saint-Saëns at the beginning of the festival, it will be like the intervening years haven't even happened.'

Kirshbaum founded the festival in 1988 after the death of Pierre Fournier, in order to fund a scholarship for young cellists: it has since become a triennial mecca for the world's cellists, and now fills five days with recitals, concerts and masterclasses. As well as the big names familiar to *Gramophone* readers like Mischa Maisky and János Starker, there are those who, like Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi and Blömdahl-Bengtsson, only appear at the fringe of the RED catalogue but are talked about with awe.

Previous festivals have covered most of the cello's standard repertoire: this year's turns to Finland and the Far East for both performers and music – so lots of new composers are also on the menu. Kirshbaum is especially taken with the civic and corporate commitment to music in Lahti, a town of 35,000 –

'about the same size as the Texas town in which I grew up' – in which 3000 children learn an instrument. 'There are so many fabulous Finnish talents, like Marko Ylönen and Jan-Erik Gustafsson – both in their early 30s. They have a complete mastery of the instrument and a musical honesty – and of course the same applies to [players from] the Far East.' He has secured the European début of the Sejong Soloists, a punchy, conductor-less string ensemble of young, mostly Asian players based around New York's Juilliard School where most of its members studied.

Amid all this performing, the important cello-making competition offers a rare insight into the interface between playing and making. This year Rocco Filippini and Sonia Wieder-Atherton are the playing judges, trying out one cello after another as the audience crane their necks to see and hear the differing qualities of the final-round instruments.

The festival's variety and vibe are overwhelming (I speak as a devotee): students (lots of them), teachers and performers dashing, chatting and listening. And of course there's all those cellos to contend with: just try not to bump into a Gofriller.

Peter Quantrill

The RNCM International Cello Festival is at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, May 5-9. Tel +44 (0)161 907 5555; e-mail [boxoffice@rncm.ac.uk](mailto:boxoffice@rncm.ac.uk)



# The New York Times

May 27, 2001

## 147 Cellists in Need of a Repertory

By MICHAEL WHITE

MANCHESTER, England

**P**UT seven cellists in a room together, and you get a keen debate about the virtues of bent endpins (as opposed to straight ones), gut strings (as opposed to steel) and new developments in pizzicato technique. Put 147 cellists on a stage, and you get "Rapturedux," a piece by the American eclectic Christopher Rouse. (Influences: Bruckner, Berlioz and Led Zeppelin.) And when "Rapturedux" had its premiere here recently, it provided a numerically impressive if sonically impenetrable climax to five days of talking, playing, learning and exposure to a cavalcade of virtuosity that was the Manchester International Cello Festival,

*Michael White is a former chief music critic of The Independent in London and a commentator on BBC.*

val, directed by Ralph Kirshbaum in its seventh biennial season.

Mr. Kirshbaum, 55, grew up a Texan, as you might suspect from his distinctive performance style: he doesn't so much play his instrument as ride it. But as one of the outstanding cellists of his generation, he is now a citizen of the world, living in England and teaching here at the Royal Northern College of Music, which, largely thanks to his involvement, has become a leading European center for advanced string studies.

As the home of Mr. Kirshbaum's festival, its blandly boxlike 1970's building on the southern fringes of Manchester is besieged by cellists. Famous, not so famous, young and old, they come in plane loads, generating chaos in hotels and taxi queues with tangled barricades of cello cases. This year, on an average visit to the college cafeteria, you might have found yourself sharing a greasy table with the likes of Truls Mork, Anner Bylisma, Raphael

Wallfisch, Boris Pergamenschikow, Natalia Gutman, Gary Hoffman, Christophe Coin, Matt Haimovitz, David Geringas, Janos Starker, Karine Georgian—The list runs on, including for good measure the cellophile conductor of the Manchester-based BBC Philharmonic: Yan Pascal Tortelier, the son of the master cellist Paul Tortelier.

In fact, most of the visiting cellists, and certainly most of the music, came from the United States, in response to this year's festival theme, "The American Influence." Hence the Rouse commission, together with others from Marc Neikrug, Robert Stern, Nicholas Maw and Christoph Neidhofer, which all had premieres during the five days. But consider those names, and you'll realize that "American" was broadly defined here to include Europeans with American residence. Mr. Maw was born in England, Mr. Neidhofer in Switzerland. And if there was one story to be told by this festival, it was that of the New World giving house room to the migrant cultures of the Old.

For British audiences, the biggest draw was probably the living legend Mr. Starker, who arrived in the United States from Hungary and France in 1948 and has for the last half-century run the world's most celebrated cello class, at Indiana University. At nearly 77, he remains formidable in both the good and the bad senses of that word. Decades away from Hungary have scarcely softened the staccato of his Central European accent, which accompanies a daunting presence. And in Manchester, after an elegant but cool account of Dohnanyi's "Konzertstück" in the opening concert, he resurfaced the next day for master classes with three plucky students and an audience of the kind you find at horror movies: scared but captivated.

Mr. Starker's master classes are unquestionably scary. While the student plays, the master sits and stares, either impassively or, worse, wiping his face with his hand. Then he speaks, so quietly that the audience can barely hear. He waves aside the offer of a microphone. "If I talk quietly," he says, "you can assume it's not important." Which is no consolation to several hundred people with open note pads, poised to take down every word of wisdom.

But from what we could hear, it was clear that

*Continued on Page 25*



Keith Hammett

*A'do Parisot leading a rehearsal for the recent premiere of Christopher Rouse's "Rapturedux."*

Mr. Starker's wisdom had little to do with interpretation. Almost all his comments were about technique: about holding the bow lightly ("There is just one rule of bowing: Don't grip"); about extracting maximum tone from full use of the bow ("As Mr. Rostropovich says, 'If you don't use all the bow, why don't you cut the end off?'"); and above all, about posture. "Stand up," he said to one student, who turned out to be the height of several policemen. "I thought so. You're too tall for that stool. Next time, sit on a telephone directory. Maybe two telephone directories." And so it went. This was public teaching of the old school.

But since almost every celebrated cellist in the festival was giving master classes, there were other, less intimidating methods to observe. Like Mr. Kirshbaum's own, which stressed personality and broad musicianship.

He explained in conversation: "I think it's great to watch Janos at work. He's a master analyst, he's spent a lifetime doing it, and it's why at 77 he can still play cleanly. And of course he's right. If a player sits or holds the bow in a patently wrong way, it creates a tension that you have to address. But for me, the mechanics of playing aren't so central. I don't just want my students to play five notes evenly. I want them to make shape, color and nuance in the phrase. And most important, it should be *their* nuance, not mine. I want to help them find that."

One of Mr. Kirshbaum's pupils playing in the festival, the fast-rising young Korean cellist Yoohong Lee, confirmed his point: "Ralph's teaching is holistic. He helps you to find the moment when you know you're making music rather than just playing to an audience, when everything comes into focus. I can't put it into words, but you know that moment when it comes."

Mr. Kirshbaum's own mentor, the veteran Aldo Parisot, who teaches at Yale and the Juilliard School and was (almost needless to say) in Manchester for the festival, talked in similar terms: "Some people analyze, others enjoy. And I know which I'd rather play for. Thank God, professional musicians make up only 2 percent of an average audience."

But at Manchester, the relentless day-and-night turnover of performances was scrutinized by audiences as "professional" as they come. When Mr. Mork, Mr. Geringas and

Mr. Hoffman and their colleagues weren't on stage, playing, they were in seats, observing. And with programs like the grand finale, where six star instrumentalists shared the six Bach unaccompanied cello suites among themselves, it was hard not to sense competition creeping into an event conceived as noncompetitive. But not, apparently, for Mr. Kirshbaum.

"Call me naïve, but I really think people come here to celebrate expertise rather than mark it out of 10," he said. "Take the opening concert, something you wouldn't hear anywhere else in the world: five different concertos played by five different cellists, one after the other. Maybe you'd say X played with a good legato, Y with strong attack. But I don't think anyone here is judging X against Y. We're too much friends and colleagues."

Friendship was the festival's great leitmotif. "You couldn't have a gathering like this with violinists or sopranos" was a standard comment: "Too much ego." Cellists, it was generally agreed, do not have ego. Or if they do, it's of a more attractive kind. Cellists, as the official festival T-shirt didn't say but might as well have, are nice people.

"And there's some truth in that," Mr. Kirshbaum said. "When I started playing, at the age of 6, I was attracted to the instrument by its size. I loved the feel of it, the vibration, the warm tone. It's extremely sensuous. And that attracts a certain kind of personality. Not that we aren't driven — cellists have careers like anybody else — but we get on together. Which is why you get cello ensembles. I don't think any other single instrument does that. At least, not in our sort of numbers."

Ah, yes, the 147 cellos. In fact there was a good deal of ensemble playing to be heard in Manchester, mostly provided by Yale Cellos: a group of dazzlingly well disciplined if earnest protégés of Mr. Parisot. They played arrangements of Mussorgsky and Ravel. And frankly, it was a mite kitschy, although Mr. Kirshbaum leapt to their defense.

"O.K., the musical content of these ensemble arrangements may not be

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## Happily, the death of national schools of cello playing hasn't meant a loss of personality.

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illuminating, but the sense of color and phrasing you get from Yale Cellos is fantastic, and you can learn a lot from that, as the players do themselves," he said. "Aldo Parisot is one of the great teachers. He's an inspiration to us all."

As his pupil, Mr. Kirshbaum would inevitably say so. Cellists have a singular respect for the historic hierarchies of who taught whom, as though it were a priestly laying-on of hands. Someone at Manchester compiled a family tree that mapped the pedigree of every notable performer of the 20th century. It proved a sub-

ject of obsessive interest and pride for any who could trace their teacher-pupil lineage back to Feuermann or Piatigorsky or the other cello royalty of the past. And as always, it was interesting to note how many of that royalty, from whichever corner of the world, were drawn to live and work in the United States.

The concentration of great cellists in America has in fact hastened the death of national schools of cello playing in the last few decades. With so many masters from diverse traditions close at hand, students have played the field, stylistically. So it means less and less to talk of a Russian method, a French or a German. What survives is international American eclectic.

But that hasn't also meant the death of personality. To hear, successively, the muscular aggression of Ms. Gutman, the incisive clarity of the superb (American-based) Japanese Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, the vinous resonance of Mr. Hoffman and the sharp, dark-chocolate tone of Mr. Mork was to hear diversity alive and flourishing. And it's a mark of how distinctive individual players are these days that the Manchester program managed to include an hour of standup cello comedy (if that is not a contradiction in terms), with a comedienne impersonating Yo-Yo Ma and Mr. Rostropovich. Recognizably.



Cellists being nice people, the laughter was, of course, affectionate. There seemed to be general agreement at Manchester that Mr. Ma and Mr. Rostropovich were largely responsible for the recent popularity of the cello, as confirmed by several surveys that identify it as the fastest-growing instrumental interest worldwide. Rostropovich eulogies flowed fast and free, not least from Mr. Mork, who describes him as "a dominating influence in my life."

"The huge dynamic register, the combination of power and control that makes that massive sound," Mr. Mork said, "these were things I was raised on, and they are still, for me, a benchmark."

One other point of agreement was that recent years have seen an increase in the quality as well as the quantity of cellists. Bernard Greenhouse, formerly of the Beaux-Arts Trio, was an early champion of Elliott Carter's demanding Cello Sonata. "It took me three months to come to grips with it," he said. "My students today learn the entire score to performance level in two to three weeks. Things have improved."

The only respect in which things haven't improved for cellists — apart from airline traveling arrangements, which remain an endless source of sorry tales — is the solo concerto repertory. It is small and always has been, with just four mainstream Romantic works — the Dvorak, Schumann and Elgar concertos and Tchaikovsky's "Rococo" Variations — that come around persistently, and a second tier of the two Haydn and two Shostakovich concertos, the Walton and the Barber, and Prokofiev's "Sinfonia Concertante," which surface from time to time. "This is where we envy pianists and violinists," Mr. Mork said. "They have so much more that general audiences want to hear: the Mozarts, Beethovens, Rachmaninoffs. If we had all these things——"

I waited for him to tell me cellists would be even nicer people, but he didn't.

"If we had these things, life would be richer." And I think he meant a different kind of richness from the sound of 147 cellists making sonic treacle courtesy of Mr. Rouse. □

# Ralph Kirshbaum

## THE INDEPENDENT

April 21, 2001

There's lots to look forward to in the RNCM's cello festival, says Christopher Wood

### In tune with Manchester's string fellows

This year the Royal Northern College of Music Manchester International Cello Festival has a theme – “the American influence”. The strand runs through five days of intensive music-making – including five world and three European premieres – that get underway this week. America is meant in the broadest sense – including not just American-born composers and performers, but those who have studied there or sought refuge.

The festival's opening concert neatly illustrates this breadth, featuring the second cello concerto of Victor Herbert, an Irish composer and cellist who settled in America in 1886, and whose concerto inspired Dvorak's own; the *Concertstück* of Erno Dohnanyi played by Janos Starker – both Hungarians who emigrated to the US; and the cello concerto written by Hindemith in 1940, shortly after his arrival in America from war-torn Europe.

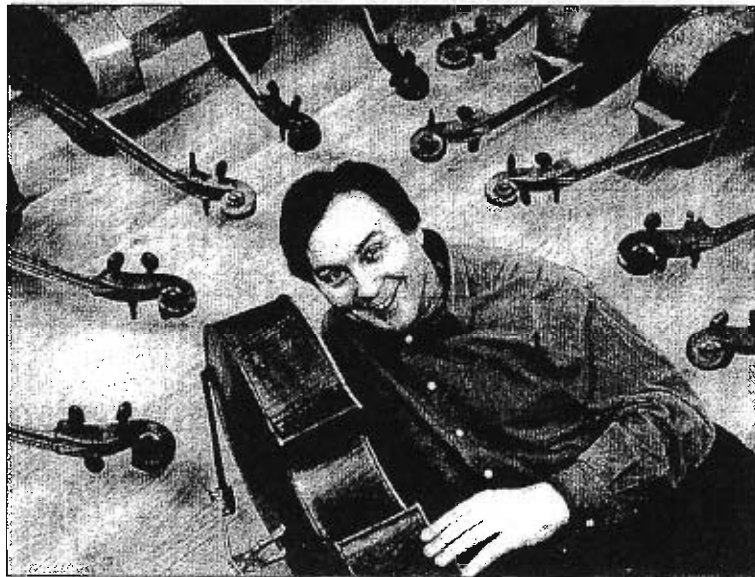
The festival was set up in 1988 by its artistic director, the cellist Ralph Kirshbaum, running every two years until 1998, when Kirshbaum's playing commitments prompted a three-year break. It now finds itself happily solvent, with a variety of private sponsors and the

BBC this year supplying its Manchester orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, for two concerts and coughing up funds to commission a new work.

His idea of a cello festival at the RNCM, where the American had been teaching since 1976 – after studies at Yale and in Paris – resulted from a concert he had organised in London to raise money for a Pierre Fournier award following Fournier's death in 1986. “A colleague in Manchester said, ‘Let's do the same thing here’,” Kirshbaum remembers. “Without thinking I said, ‘We've al-

ready done a concert. Why don't we do a festival?’ It had never crossed my mind before. It was a momentary madness – I had no idea what it would involve.”

Detecting resonances between composers and players is for Kirshbaum part of the fun of being a festival director. “With Starker and Dohnanyi, let's say I presented that as an option. I don't go to a player and say, I would like you to play this piece, but I go with an idea and say think about it and come back with suggestions.” Another marriage Kirshbaum enjoyed brokering is that between



Take a bow: cellists' champion Ralph Kirshbaum

*Continued*

Joel Krosnick and the Sonata by Elliott Carter, which Krosnick plays on Friday. "He has recorded it twice and worked on the piece extensively with Carter. That appeals to me. It brings another level of authenticity to the performance. It's not the only way to play the piece, but it's interesting to hear a performance that has that kind of history to it."

Someone Kirshbaum has been trying to bag for his festival for nearly a decade is Nicholas Maw, a long-time resident of Washington DC. "He put the screws on me," jokes Maw. "He said this was the last of these festivals he was going to do." (Kirshbaum has since changed his mind.)

The recording of Maw's Violin Concerto recently picked up a little-publicised Grammy award, and its composer is currently working flat out on an opera for Covent Garden in 2002 based on William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* ("It's a heck of a job. It's been sitting on my back like a 500-pound gorilla for the last several years"). As a result, *Narration*, his festival piece (which Kirshbaum will play on Thursday), is for solo cello, rather than the full-scale concerto he would one day like to write.

Maw has already written a number of single-instrument works – for flute, for double-bass and for violin – but denies it's part of a grand scheme. Nonetheless Maw takes them seriously. "Writing for solo instruments is very demanding," he says. "It forces you to think about the question of musical narrative. They're like musical monologues."

Maw's piece will slot into a programme that promises cellists' heaven, with masterclasses, a bow-making competition, a comedian who imitates famous exponents of the instrument, and the almost obligatory festival item – a piece for over 100 cellos. But is there anything for non-cellists? "I've asked myself, is this just an elitist exercise?" says Kirshbaum. "But I've spoken to non-cellists who find it quite intoxicating. You don't have to be a cellist to sit in on a masterclass and appreciate the dialectic that's going on. A total non-musician can appreciate the relationship that's built during that 45-minute period. It's a very exciting thing to see in operation."

*Manchester International Cello Festival: RNMC and Bridgewater Hall, Manchester (0161 907 5278), Wednesday to 6 Mar*



# Ralph Kirshbaum

# THE TIMES

**Saturday May 2 - Friday May 8 1998**

## THE BIG CONCERT: MANCHESTER CELLO FESTIVAL



THE BIENNIAL Cello-Festival organised by **Ralph Kirshbaum** (*above*) never ceases to astonish with its roster of artists and amazing musical mixes on the concert platform: how many pianists and violinists of the calibre of Kirshbaum, Geringas, Isserlis, Maisky and Harrell would dare to grace a single concert, pitting their playing against each other? It is a tribute to Kirshbaum that year after year he has created an atmosphere

where all feel happy to perform. It has never felt like a ghetto event - the quality of the concerts are simply too high. This concert features veteran Hungarian cellist **János Starker** in one of his specialities, *Don Quixote*; Kirshbaum and **Zukerman** form a robust partnership for the meaty Brahms.

- Helen Wallace

# Ralph Kirshbaum

## INDEPENDENT

### The cello takes a bow

MAY 8, 1996

From tree to trio, Rob Cowan celebrates every aspect of the cello's life at an international festival held in its honour

You may not have noticed, but this is the cello's century. Roughly 80 percent of the instrument's solo repertory dates from the last hundred years, so when some of the world's finest cellists gathered together last week for the sixth Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM)'s Manchester International Cello Festival (organised in association with the BBC and held at the RNCM), they certainly weren't short of interesting pieces to play.

The week's events embraced master-classes, lectures, workshops, concerts and recitals (invariably focusing on French music), archival film of 'Great Artists from the Past', exhibitions, The Strad Cello and Bow Making Competition and an amusing, 'cello-free' late-night cabaret by Kit and the Widow. The overriding impression suggested warmth, camaraderie and a feeling of joys or problems shared. You could drop in on the venue at virtually any moment in the day and see eager students rubbing shoulders with – or casually chatting to – acknowledged masters such as Janos Starker, Zara Nelsova, Steven Isserlis, Arlo Noras, Miklos Perenyi, Siegfried Palm, the extraordinary Demenga brothers and the Festival's artistic director Ralph Kirshbaum. "He's like a rabbi tending his congregation," as Nelsova put it – and with good reason.

Kirshbaum told me how the great Pierre Fournier's death had prompted the idea of a Fournier Award, which in turn led to the first Cello Festival in 1988. "Fournier wasn't the strongest person physically," he recalled, "and when I attended a recital of his in the early 1970s, he said to me, 'why do you come to hear the old Fournier?' And I replied, 'because to hear you play one note means more to me than to hear most people play thousands of notes'. When he drew his bow across the strings, something would really hit me. So what if he missed notes? Who cared? What he had to say about the piece, about what the piece means, what he brought to it – that special dimension – was still wonderful."

These words are worth quoting in full because they convey Kirshbaum's key musical priorities. "I used to give master-classes in Switzerland with Sandor Vogh," he continued, "and I asked him if he took pleasure in the number of American students who have such wonderful technique. He immediately took exception to that remark. 'It's not true that they have wonderful techniques... they have wonderful mechanics. Technique is what you learn and grow with every day.'"

While Kirshbaum might beg to differ, Janos Starker will put

you straight. A spry 73-year-old, Starker is a man with strong views – and he's still a remarkable player. "I speak about this subject all the time and try to correct a misinterpretation of the facts," he says, regarding the well-worn notion that 'old masters' have a monopoly on interpretative greatness. He blames it all on Artur Schnabel, "who was the first to ask what had happened to yesteryear's 'greats'. However, what he forgot is that only a handful of greats appear at any one time in any particular area." The truth, according to Starker, is that nowadays there is probably more cello talent around than ever before; all that has changed is the ratio of the 'great' to the 'good'.

This year's Awards of Distinction went to Siegfried Palm and, posthumously, to cellist and teacher Raya Garbousova. Palm, who views standard repertory as his 'job' and new music as his 'hobby', still carries a torch for the creative innovations of the sixties and seventies, lunging and lingering among such fascinating scores as Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Solo Sonata* and Penderecki's *Capriccio*. He played both at the Festival, but should Penderecki's piece really have raised a titter? "That was at the place where I play a C major chord then make a real naughty noise with the bow....," he said mischievously, "which means, 'be surprised by C Major!' I know that they laughed, and that speaks for the audience. I don't have that very often, but last night it happened and I was proud of them: they understood the music's humour."



'Like a rabbi tending his congregation' – a Kirshbaum masterclass Photograph: Peter Oldham

At 71, Palm is more adventurous than most pop musicians half his age and his audiences adore him. He applauds the creative freedom that young composers currently enjoy. "When I meet with friends who taught with me at the Darmstadt centre for contemporary music, we might listen to a piece together; and if we don't know who wrote it, rather than ask 'is it by Mr. Smith?', we say something like 'that was Darmstadt 1978!' I am very glad that sort of thinking doesn't exist any more."

Palm is by no means unique in his promotion of modern music. Among numerous premieres at this year's Festival was Cheryl Francis-Hoad's starkly dramatic *The Prophecy*, played by the 1994 Fournier Award winner Rebecca Gilliver (this year's winner is Alice Neary). Gilliver, herself an ex-student of the RNCM, had challenged the composer on "some insanely fast tempos", but the performance worked well. "I enjoy trying to persuade people that listening to new music isn't really that bad," she told me. "Most usually think they're going to hate it."

Commitment is the principal key to any musician's success. At the opening concert, a grim-featured Natalia Gutman thrust hell-for-leather at Shostakovich's *Second Concerto*, then virtually deconstructed a student's handling of the *First Concerto* the next day. Would the average student find that sort of approach humiliating? "If the teacher isn't careful, you might get a bit discouraged," says Gilliver, "but you usually bounce back after a day or so and realise the good things that were said." Gutman could be seen striding the University's grounds wearing her cello like an over-size back-pack, stopping now and then to accept a gesture of gratitude. She is a genuine original.

But being original isn't enough. You have to be tough, and you also need to be humble. The young German cellist Alban Gerhardt is saddened that "the music business is all about money". He tells me that he and his wife have decided that if he ever makes a fortune, they'll donate half of it to the homeless. Gerhardt worries about the dangers of self-satisfaction. "I had a

good day in London recently," he said. "My manager told me about a favourable review; I had a brand new engagement and lots of other good things happened to me. But then I started to feel proud, so when I arrived at the tube station, rather than take a cab, I decided to take the bus then walk. It was an exercise in humility; in character building."

Clearly, the Manchester International Cello Festival is about much more than playing the cello. Would it be conceivable to organise a parallel festival among, say, violinists? "The cello has the widest range," says Gerhardt's teacher Boris Pergamenschikow "and we cellists feel all the possibilities of the tonal spectrum. The poor violinists don't have access to the lower registers. They always have to be soloists; even in string quartets, they take the most important roles. We are sometimes kings, sometimes peasants; we have to do everything between extremes – we have to learn to be more flexible."

Nelsova claims that there's more friendliness in the cello world than among any other

group of instrumentalists, but although Kirshbaum takes her point, he freely confesses that in the early days of the festival "there were one or two who expressed concern about the concept, who felt they going to be judged in relation to their colleagues."

The 1998 Manchester International Cello Festival encapsulated all that is nourishing in the world of 'classical' music. Quite apart from the personalities and the playing, the teaching and the endless rounds of dialogue, there was the Cello Making Competition, with an international team of judges subjecting 48 instruments to the closest critical scrutiny – though without knowing who had made what. Competition coordinator Charles Beare earmarks some essential credentials: "fine craftsmanship, good design, good sculptural effect, good tone – in other words, the sort of instrument that's still going to be desirable in a couple of hundred years". The Bow Making Gold Medal went to Noel Burke but it seems that no-one was good enough to earn the coveted Cello Making Gold Medal, only Silver being awarded to Wolfgang Schnabi.



# Ralph Kirshbaum

## The Daily Telegraph

SATURDAY, MAY 11, 1996

At the fifth Manchester International Cello Festival **Brian Hunt** finds that the players make good company

# Playing the cello makes you mellow

**U**P IN the Conference Room at the top of the Royal Northern College of Music, René Morel is wrestling with a problem. Two brand-new cellos, one honey yellow, one nut brown, are propped against the wall. "There is no doubt in my mind which one I prefer," he says in his French accent. "This is the instrument I want to play. Yet this one has higher marks. So do we go back and alter the sheets?"

"No, we've agreed we have to go by the score sheets," says Leeds-born Roger Harrave. That the judges of the cello-making competition, part of the fifth Manchester International Cello Festival, should be agonising over fine points of distinction between two instruments is ironic: cellos fill every nook and cranny of the college. Spread out across the Conference Room floor, about 50 lie on their sides awaiting judgment.

Below, in the college concourse, snatches of Dvořák, Jgar, Haydn and every cello concerto ever written mingle in a stew of sound as dealers invite passing trade to test their wares. The festival's 60 full delegates, swelled by INCM students and visitors to the concerts, are a cello-maker's dream.

There are amateur cellists, teachers, rank-and-file orchestral players, representatives of every living generation of fêted masters: Patrick Demenga, Truls Mørk, Tim Hugh, Steven Isserlis, Heinrich Schiff, Karine Georgian, Natalia Gutman, Zara Nelsova. The senior figure, honoured this year with the festival's Award of Distinction, is veteran chamber-music player Bernard Greenhouse, once Casals's only pupil.

That so many soloists should converge on Manchester for five days is a tribute to the charm of Ralph Kirshbaum, the Texan-born, British-based cellist who is the festival's artistic director. He set up the biennial event in 1988 in response to the death of Pierre Fournier.

"We wanted to celebrate what the instrument and its repertoire have to offer," says Kirshbaum. "But I was also aware that many fine cellists were not sufficiently well-known. Young players did not recognise the names I recommended. By gathering in one place we have made connections."

This year's festival will have impressed Frans Helmerston's name on the mind of anyone watching his masterclass on the Dvořák Concerto. "I could see from your

body movements what you wanted to say," he tells his pupil, "but the inspiration was leaking into the body instead of going through the instrument."

Bruno Weinmeister, a student from Berlin, offers a strong, grave sound and an interpretation of Bach's Sixth Suite that is both original and convincing, but his true maturity shows in his willingness to absorb Kirshbaum's suggestions. A sparky session evolves, in which cello speaks to cello as eloquently as man to man.

**L**ESS EASY to grasp is Eugene Friesen's improvisation workshop. His approach is as free-ranging as his title: artistic director of the Center for Music and the Earth at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven. After quoting John Cage on making the mind susceptible to divine influence, he asks us all to sigh, "Yeah".

"That's the spirit in which I want us to listen. And we should listen with our bodies, with the ears in our knees and elbows," he says. Oddly enough, he draws interesting and inventive work from students who have never improvised before.

(over)

Picture: HOWARD BARLOW



From morning to night the dark-brown voice of the cello is heard in masterclasses, workshops, vintage recordings and concerts of a richness as priceless as the Montagnana, Guadagnini and Stradivarius instruments the world's greatest soloists bring with them. The youthful Vellinger Quartet combine with Bernard Greenhouse to balance epic emotional tension with flowing classical line in Schubert's C-major Quintet. In one night alone, we hear Isserlis, Helmerson, Georgian, Bengtsson, Kirshbaum, Gutman and Geringas.

At the beginning of the century Casals gave the cello new dignity; Feuermann then took technique to limits unsurpassed since his early death in 1942. Yet the breadth and depth of talent continues to increase — the current young generation of soloists represents an explosion.

Asked for a reason, Kirshbaum says: "We all have our heroes. In Feuermann's time there were maybe one or two who approached his level. Ten years later there were five or six. After another 10 years, perhaps 15 or 20. The more heroes there are, the more their influence spreads.

"Rostropovich has been a great inspiration. In England there was Jackie; Jacqueline du Pre was adored worldwide. If you talk to players around 40, some would like to emulate her in everything. Others have great reservations about some of her music-making; fair enough, you have to be objective. But all would say they listened to her, they were taken by her energy, élan and charisma.

"We all realise we have chosen a difficult road. There are still people in positions of power who feel cellos are bad box office. Feuermann was having that said to him in the Thirties. With all the cellists around today who are themselves good box office, there remains a finite number of engagements. It comes back to that difficult road. But we've chosen to follow that road because of a passion we can't shake."



May 9, 1994

TIME



**AMONG CELLISTS:** A unique fraternity including, from right, Pergamenschikow, Starker, Ma, Tsutsumi and Kirshbaum, the festival's founder

■ FESTIVALS

## Not Second Fiddle

*In Britain a galaxy of the best showcases the glitter of a golden era of cello playing and the esprit of its masters*

By **BARRY HILLENBRAND** MANCHESTER

**Y**O-YO MA LEANS BACK IN HIS chair, flashes an elfin smile that promises both mischief and enlightenment, then asks the student, "Can you make the audience feel red?" Ole Akahoshi ponders the question and, without saying a word, puts the bow to his cello. Out comes the familiar theme of Haydn's *D major Cello Concerto*. The audience listening to Ma's master class in the concert hall of Britain's Royal Northern College of Music is delighted. Ma's face lights up again. The music has enough passion in it to qualify as red, proclaims Ma, and Akahoshi has definitely conveyed his feelings to the audience.

Last week Ma and 19 other prominent cellists were busy splashing buckets of musical color and loads of feeling over the enthusiastic audiences attending the biennial Manchester International Cello Festival. The festival's success reflects the stature that the cello—once considered a mere orchestra workhorse—has achieved in the past 20 years. The five-day nonstop celebration of the cello featured a galaxy of stars, master classes, concerts, workshops, a cello- and bowmaking competition—plus much endless congenial chatter among the hundreds of cello students, teachers, ordinary players and fans who flocked to Manchester to attend.

The instrument's virtuosos are a congenial lot. "This close friendship among cellists is almost unique," observes Hungarian-born Janos Starker. "With the possible exception of tuba players, no other group of instrumentalists has formed this kind of fraternity." Part of the bond is due to the nature of what they play, says London-based cellist Ralph Kirshbaum, founder and artistic director of the festival. "Cellists share a kind of kinship which comes from the deep richness and warmth of the sound of the instrument."

Producing that sound is not easy. The cello is notoriously challenging to learn, much less to master, and so players tend to huddle together to commiserate. "We share the same cross," says Kirshbaum. Most of the best in the field teach. "We all struggle to manage the instrument, and so we want to pass on what we know," says American Steven Doane.

Until recently, cellists have suffered obscurity as musicians. For centuries they played, well, second fiddle to violinists and pianists, who luxuriated in an enormous repertory that allowed them to be on center stage. Thanks to the popularity of Pablo Casals and Gregor Piattigorsky in the first part of this century, the cello gradually began to develop into an important solo instrument. The emergence of a generation of charismatic players like Jacqueline Du Pré, Mstislav

Rostropovich and Ma coaxed orchestras into scheduling more cello pieces. Composers began writing new works for the instrument and rearranging old ones. Students are now flocking to study the instrument. "Today there are hundreds of outstanding, gifted young cellists," says Starker, 69. "The kids in the conservatories play far better than the so-called renowned cellists of yesteryear. This is the golden era of cello playing." Starker notes that one of the particular joys of the Manchester festival is that it allows him to meet so many emerging talents.

In turn, the draw for the hundreds of cello aficionados who swarmed to Manchester for the festival was the rare convergence of the biggest names of the cello world: Ma, Kirshbaum, Starker, Austria's Heinrich Schiff, Britain's Steven Isserlis, France's Philippe Muller, Japan's Tyuyoshi Tsutsumi and Russian-born Boris Pergamenschikow. They played solos, and they played together; when they were not performing, they sat in the audience listening to one another. "This could never happen with violinists," says Charles Beare, the eminent London instrument dealer who judged the cello-making competition. The egos in the violin world are just too fierce. But great cellists seem unfettered by petty jealousies.

The music at Manchester was sublime. The master classes were largely devoted to the cello chestnuts of the repertory like the Haydn concertos or the Bach suites, but the concerts were studded with infrequently played works like Lalo's *D minor Concerto* and a host of 20th century compositions. Kirshbaum premiered a new work by Yehudi Wyner, professor of composition at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. Ma played *The 'cellist of Sarajevo*, written by David Wilde, a British composer. Wilde was inspired by the story of Vedran Smailovic, a Bosnian cellist who would visit the site in Sarajevo where 22 people had been killed by a grenade in 1992 and, wearing full evening dress, play in their memory, oblivious to sniper and mortar fire. When Ma finished Wilde's haunting, sad lament, the audience sat stunned into momentary silence. Then Ma gestured to the back of the hall. Smailovic, who escaped from Bosnia last year, came to the stage to share the applause. "It was the first time I heard the work," says the composer, a great bear of a man with a droopy mustache. "The melody is the cry of the people of Sarajevo. We must not forget them." If cellists have their way, they will not be forgotten. ■



# Cellists of the world unite

Joanne Talbot reports on the RNCM International Cello Festival in Manchester



Cello fellowship (left to right): Boris Pergamenschikow, János Starker, Yo-Yo Ma, Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi and Ralph Kirshbaum.

Every two years cellists journey to Manchester, as if driven by some strange migrational programme. Black, brown and grey wheeled beasts emerge from trains, buses and taxis and glide towards the Royal Northern College of Music. Another International Cello Festival has begun.

Inside the college, a cacophony of concertos saturates the air: a myriad of timbres imbue each fragment, as the new cellos are tried by students and professionals. Five days later these instruments would be put under the spotlight in THE STRAD'S Cello and Bow Making Competition. In the

meantime cellists thronged to master classes and concerts, given by a veritable world-cup squad of cellists, including Yo-Yo Ma, Zara Nelsova, Heinrich Schiff, Karine Georgian, Thomas Demenga. Steven Isserlis, Colin Carr, Aldo Parisot, Raphael Wallfisch, Ralph Kirshbaum, and János Starker – the latter honoured this year for his distinguished services to the cello. 'At one time in my life I was called cold-blooded. I'm not so cold-blooded at this second,' said Starker as he received the award. 'If one lives long enough honour comes, but it's nothing like the honour from one's peers.'

Wisdom permeated through everything. There was no escape, even in the dinner queue, where audiences freshly intoxicated with knowledge chattered with new-found colleagues. 'But I spent my entire life doing it that way,' sighed an exasperated student. 'Well, the Cello Festival should give you something to think about for the rest of your life,' laughed Ralph Kirshbaum, mastermind behind the whole event.

Everyone, even the performers, was there to absorb ideas and fresh stimuli – to banish the cobwebs. This was perhaps best exemplified in Eugene Friesen's improvisation workshops. 'I

want you to give free reign to your own innate dramatic sense for the ebb and flow of music,' he instructed the students. 'Suddenly you're a creative artist.' A little later along the path, students learnt that improvisation also requires discipline. It may not be tortuous practice of thirds or sixths – but even free expression needs a rigorous knowledge of harmonic and rhythmic parameters.

Discipline and technique are almost twin sisters, although, as in any family, there are unique personal factors. The basics need to be fine tuned to suit the individual's personality and physique. Aldo Parisot cited a short-armed cellist he once taught who had to modify his style of bowing. But technique must serve the music as well as the player. 'You know,' said Yo-Yo Ma to a student, 'if I was a conductor I'd shoot myself. You're too erratic with rubato. Look at the score. The excitement in the Dvořák is the rhythmic variety. We all know the tunes, but you have to draw our ears to the new rhythms under the melody all the time.' In another hall, a difficult passage arises. The student tries a shift. It works... but Starker interrupts. 'Look up!' he implores. 'Lift



Expert guidance from Yo-Yo Ma

up your body instead of looking down. Singers don't look down when they sing a low note.'

Another session saw Parisot coaching: 'Both sides of the body must understand each other. Play with non-tension and tension all the time. If there's no tension you're like a banana peel. You must constantly interchange.' Down the corridor pearls were being cast by Boris Pergamenschikow. 'Be

your own conductor with the bow,' he suggested. 'This long phrase should be like a measuring tape, gradually being pulled out.' And so imaginative allusions gathered from all these master classes like soldiers ready for battle. Few would leave unequipped with intellectual armoury.

Any string playing career needs planning, and a session was devoted to this subject. What makes a top professional?

'Technique!' announced Starker. 'But what does it mean? It means to free yourselves so that you can express musical intentions. In my teaching I try to make movements and actions conscious so that they can become sub-conscious. Of course aspiring soloists need more – much more. They need digital and aural memory, stamina, charisma, and at least 40 other qualities. But today you need to win a competition. Then you'll get an engagement, and if you're good you'll be asked back.'

It could be that the world's been at your feet for years – everything seems to be working so well – and then suddenly there's pain or an injury. There are many possible causes. Techniques



János Starker (centre) receives his Award of Distinction from Zara Nelsova and Ralph Kirshbaum



## Manchester Cello Festival



Aldo Parisot: 'if there's no tension, you're like a banana peel'



Judges for the STRAD Bow Making Competition. Left to right: Tim Baker, Bernard Millant and Charles Espey

might be inappropriate, or lifestyles may simply be inducing stress. Often such injuries are ignored because the cupboard is bare, the landlord is raging about the rent, and the dog needs to be fed. This might seem irrelevant for anyone starting their career, but being aware of potential problems is 90% of the answer, said Dr Jochen Blum in a fascinating session on medical problems and how to solve them. As in any other walk of life, ups and downs are a reality, and it's imperative to remember that 'the body is an important part of your instrument.'

Another hurdle along the road to success is finding the right cello. How do you decide once you've ruled out the 'golden period' Strads? Charles Beare explained the criteria used by the STRAD competition judges in considering the new instruments. 'These instruments are judged not only on patterns, but also on results. There is always the danger that the imitations become crude.' It might be tempting for a rising soloist to opt for a glorious instrument, but as Raphael Wallfisch said, 'the carrying qualities are not so tested in a studio. Nor are all the qualities magnified by microphones. A fantastic instrument doesn't necessarily shine in a recording, but can be wonderful in a hall.'

In addition, each player makes a very individual sound, and what suits one may not suit another. In the playing session, Steven Doane and Raphael Wallfisch often elicited different qualities from the same instrument. Sound may be subjective, but the assessment of the maker's technical skill is more scientific. Here the judges examined the rib joints, the purfling, the cut of the sound holes and scroll, the evenness of the varnish and so forth. Gold and silver medals in the cello making section went to Patrick Robin-Frandsen and Frank Ravatin (both of France), and in the bow making section to David Samuels (USA) and Peter Oxley (France).

It was a festival where new and old co-existed – not only with regard to instruments. It would have been easy just to air the well-worn favourites from the repertoire; but the programmes took 20th century works as their theme. On the evidence of

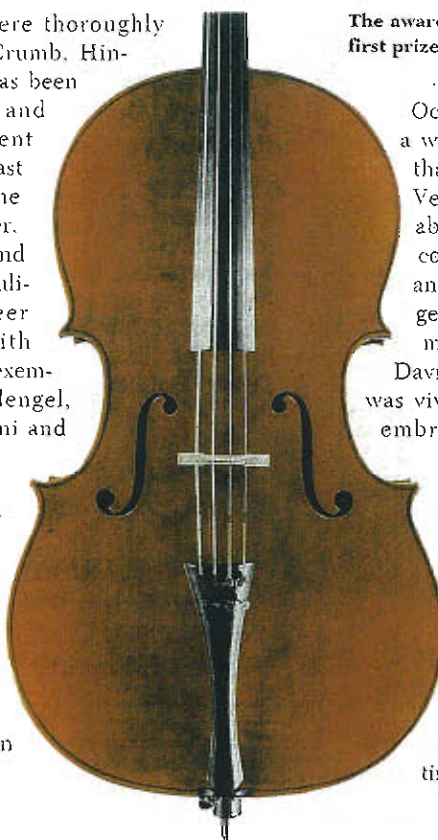


## Manchester Cello Festival

these five concerts, the audiences were thoroughly enraptured. Works for solo cello by Crumb, Hindemith and Britten proved that there has been much exploration of the expressive and dynamic possibilities of the instrument since the hallowed Bach Suites. The feast of contemporary music ranged from the powerfully taut *Trema* by Heinz Holliger, to the mesmerically beautiful, sinister, and plaintive sound worlds of Sofia Gubaidulina's *In croce*. These moments of sheer magic were shoulder to shoulder with humour and bonhomie – perhaps best exemplified in the *Impromptu* by Julius Klengel, where Ma, Pergamenschikow, Tsutsumi and Kirshbaum delighted one and all.

On a more serious note, the commitment to new music was matched by a special festival commission for Yehudi Wyner. His work, *Prologue and Narrative* performed by Kirshbaum and the BBC Philharmonic, under the baton of Yan Pascal Tortelier, experimented with texture and orchestral sounds, suggesting an improvisatory feeling, but within a cohesive unity. It's certainly a composition that deserves further performances.

The award winning cello by Patrick Robin-Frandsen, first prize winner in the STRAD Competition



Occasionally, the original inspiration behind a work can ignite the imagination in a way that transcends the music. So it was with Vedran Smailovic, who seemed uncomfortably conspicuous amidst the Manchester cognoscenti, with his battle-worn clothes, and slightly wild appearance. His defiant gesture against mindless violence in the former Yugoslavia provided the inspiration for David Wilde's *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, which was vividly performed by Yo-Yo Ma. A hearty embrace, and a wave of comradeship from Smailovic sealed and secured the warmth existing amongst the highest echelons of the cello profession – a generosity of spirit that filtered through the audience and students.

Finally, Aldo Parisot took to the stage to direct Villa Lobos's *Bachianas Brasileiras* no.1. A swarm of cellists from the RNCM – 32 in fact – gathered around him like bees to a honey pot. Pulsating Latin rhythms and richly vibrant timbres signalled the end – until next time. □



Photo: Andrew Clarke

Photo: Simon Brown