

# Cellists' Corner

## Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

*prepared by David Johnstone from public information*

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## SPECIAL FEATURE on GREAT DUKE CONSTANTIN NIKOLAIVICH OF RUSSIA

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1827-1892

Russia

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Important Activity:

He was the second son of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia. Dedicated to the arts, and playing 'admirably' the cello. He married the Princess Alexandra of Saxe-Altenburg, herself a pianist!.He is a direct descendent of the cello-loving Queen Sofia of Spain. He was both a patron of Russian art and an artist in his own right. Apart from a cellist he was also a talented pianist.....

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In 1873 he succeeded the Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna (1807-1873) as President of the Imperial Russian Musical Society and counted Tchaikovsky among his closest friends. Indeed, after meeting the Grand Duke at a reception in May that year, Tchaikovsky reported that "he was extremely friendly with me, full of enthusiasm for my symphony, and paid me many compliments"

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Firstly though, he was a man of letters. He founded several Russian literary societies. He translated foreign works (including Schiller and Goethe) into Russian, and was particularly proud of his Russian translation of Hamlet. An accomplished poet and playwright, he also took great interest in the direction of his plays. The Grand Duke actually appeared in his last play, "King of Judea," playing the role of Joseph of Arimathea. He wrote under the pen name "K.R.", initials of his given name and family name, Konstantin Romanov.

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As exemplary and dedicated (and even conservative) as KR's public life was, his private turmoil was intense. Had it not been for the publication of KR's strikingly candid diaries long after his death, the world would have never known that this most prolific of Grand Dukes, the father of nine children, was tormented by his homosexual feelings.

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KR married in 1884 in St Petersburg Princess Elisabeth of Saxe-Altenburg, his second cousin. Upon her marriage, Elisabeth became the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Mavrikiievna. She was known within the family as "Mavra."

The couple would have a total of nine children:

- Prince John (1886-1918)
- Prince Gabriel (1887-1955)
- Princess Tatiana (1890-1979)
- Prince Konstantin (1891-1918)
- Prince Oleg (1892-1914)
- Prince Igor (1894-1918)
- Prince Georgy (1903-1938)
- Princess Natalia (died at exactly two months, 1905)
- Princess Vera (1906-2001)

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The outbreak of World War I found KR and his wife in Germany, where they were taking the cure in Wildungen. Caught in enemy territory, the couple attempted a quick return to Russia. Their plans were disrupted by German authorities, who claimed the Grand Duke and his wife were political prisoners. Grand Duchess Elizaveta sent a message to the German Imperial couple asking for their help. Eventually KR and his entourage were allowed to depart Germany and transported to the first Russian station.

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The first year of the war took a cruel toll on his immediate family. Five of his six sons served in the Russian Army, and in October 1914, his fourth and most talented son, Prince Oleg, was mortally wounded fighting against the Germans. The following March, his son-in-law Prince Bagration-Muhransky was killed on the Caucasus front. His health and spirit were broken by these blows, and he died on 15th June [O.S. 2 June] 1915.

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Dedications:

Tchaikovsky dedicated two of his large-scale works to the Grand Duke:

\*\* The Oprichnik, opera in four acts (1870-72)

\*\* String Quartet No. 2 in F major, Op. 22 (1874)



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