GREGOR PIATIGORSKY

written by S. and S. Applebaum
for Celloheaven

GREGOR PIATIGORSKY

PART A – Biographical Details

By Celloheaven

One of the pre-eminent string players of the 20th century, Gregor Piatigorsky was born in Ukraine in 1903, and died in Los Angeles in 1976. His international solo career lasted over 40 years, and especially during the 1940's and early 1950's he was the world's premier touring cello virtuoso -- Casals was in retirement, Feuermann had died, and the three artists who were to succeed Piatigorsky (Starker, Rose, and Rostropovich) were still in their formative stages. His one true peer, Fournier, was limited in his travelling abilities by polio. Thus, Piatigorsky had the limelight almost to himself. He was gregarious, loved to travel and perform anywhere, and he hobnobbed as easily with farmers in small towns as he did with Toscanini, Stravinsky, Rubenstein, and Schoenberg. It was a legendary career.

Piatigorsky was not a "child prodigy," perhaps, but his talent manifested itself early and carried him quickly upward. He began to play at age 7, and was accepted as a student at the Moscow Conservatory two years later. By age 15 he was principal cellist of the Bolshoi Opera. Escaping the upheaval of the Russian Revolution in 1921, he studied with Julius Klengel (also Feuermann's teacher) in Leipzig, and at age 21 became principal cellist of the Berlin Philharmonic under Furtwängler. In 1929 he left the orchestra to pursue a solo career. His first marriage (to Lyda Antik) ended in divorce (she later married Fournier!). He then married Jacqueline Rothschild and moved to America in 1939, becoming a US citizen three years later.

He lived first on some property he had bought in the Adirondacks (and helped found the Meadowmount School with Ivan Galamian), then moved to Philadelphia (where he succeeded Feuermann as cello professor at Curtis), and finally settled in Los Angeles in 1950, where he taught with Heifetz at USC. He was a dedicated teacher, and the quality of his studio was legendary. His pupils included Lorne Munroe, Mischa Maisky, Nathaniel Rosen, Stephen Kates, Lawrence Lesser, Dennis Brott, John Martin, Christine Walewska, Rafael Wallfisch, Leslie Parnas, and countless others.

There are too many highlights in his career to mention them all. His annual tours took him throughout the world, appearing with the greatest orchestras and conductors of the time. He made the first recording of the Shostakovich Sonata, collaborated with Stravinsky on his Suite Italienne, premiered the Hindemith Concerto of 1940 and Sonata of 1948, and commissioned or premiered many other works including the Walton Concerto in 1957. He was also a prolific arranger, and many of his transcriptions are published and performed the world over. Piatigorsky always loved chamber music, and was a member of three different piano trios - first with Artur Schnabel and Carl Flesch, next with Vladimir Horowitz and Nathan Milstein, and finally with Artur Rubenstein and Jascha Heifetz!

Piatigorsky's recording career was fairly prolific, if somewhat spotty. His earliest recording, the Rococo Variations from 1925 on Parlaphone, already displays a well-formed sense of style and virtuosity, an "electric" sound that would become his hallmark. In the 1930's and 40's, he did most of his recording in London, for HMV or Columbia; in the 1950's and 60's he was an RCA artist. Among his finest solo recordings are an especially beautiful Don Quixote with Munch and the Boston Symphony, the Brahms E minor Sonata with Rubenstein, the Walton Concerto with Munch, the Debussy Sonata with Lukas Foss, and many of his short pieces from the HMV period. The specter of Casals kept him (and his classmate Feuermann) from recording any solo Bach, but otherwise his recordings covered all facets of the repertoire: Beethoven, Brahms, and Strauss sonatas, Dvorak, Saint-Saëns, Schumann, and Brahms Double concertos, encore pieces, etc. The bulk of his work for RCA consisted of chamber music recordings with Heifetz; they focused on works with piano or string repertoire other than quartets.

Piatigorsky was a very tall man, well over six feet, and he handled his Stradivarius like a toy. He would stride briskly onstage through the orchestra, holding the instrument horizontally with one hand, like a lance. He often closed his eyes and turned his handsome face to his right as he played, giving a regal bearing to his performing profile.

Due to his size, all the basic playing actions were simple for him; he had a huge sound, and drew full bows with same effort and extension that a smaller player like Casals needed for only half the bow. He could produce the widest spectrum of colors, from any spot on the bow. He delighted in quick changes of articulation, even if just for a few notes. Most dazzling of all was his staccato stroke, which is wonderfully showcased in a Kultur video entitled "Heifetz/Piatigorsky." There, in an arrangement he made of some Schubert Variations, he displays both a down- and up- bow staccato that is almost beyond belief, along with many other signature effects. His own set of variations on the famous 24th Caprice of Paganini is a minefield of specialized bowing challenges; no one has been able to play it with his ease and flair, though many have tried.

His left hand too was a law unto itself; reaching 1-4 octaves in the lower positions was easy and natural for him, and he ambled nimbly and effortlessly around the fingerboard. Trills were, again, "electric," and he drew incomparable richness from the lower strings. However, not all listeners were taken with his vibrato. Given his size, he apparently had trouble controlling the full-arm motion that most cellists learn, and was more comfortable producing the vibrato from a wrist motion alone. This gave the sound a nasal quality at times. And, since he had to work less hard to produce the vibrato, he did not always attend to it with the care that someone with more ordinary gifts would, and some passages in his recordings grate on listeners brought up on the buttery sounds of Rose or Fournier. In his later years, this technique also began to effect his intonation. On balance, though, his playing displays a combination of stylishness, verve, and humanity that no one has ever matched.

All of Piatigorsky's concerto and chamber music recordings for RCA are available on CD; there are at least two discs of recital works that have not been reissued, however. Most of the earlier material is also available on various historical labels such as Testament, Biddulph, Arlecchino, and Pearl. Interesting historical tidbits include the octave-jumping in the repetitive bridge passage leading into the 5th Rococo variation (1925); the inexplicable blending of pizzicato and arco triplets in the string accompaniment to the slow movement of the Schumann Concerto (1934); the added embellishments in the Chopin Polonaise, much different than the standard Feuermann version (1940); and another version of the passage that now consists of glissando harmonics in the second movement of the Shostakovich Sonata (1940).

As mentioned, the Don Quixote with Munch is one of the greatest recordings ever of the work (which has had many great recordings, all of them on RCA for some reason), and the Kultur video belongs in every cellist's collection. There is a spectacular BBC film of the UK premiere of the Walton Concerto; God willing, someday they will see fit to make it available to the general public. For me, though, the quintessential Piatigorsky is heard on his live recordings and airchecks, despite sometimes poor reproduction. When onstage he seemed to draw energy and inspiration from his colleagues and from the audience; despite the occasional technical slip the music-making is always white-hot. There is, or used to be, a CD available of Schelomo with Rodzinsky and the NY Philharmonic from 1944. While Piatigorsky forces the sound sometimes, and ensemble is not perfect, it is a spellbinding portrait of a great performing artist at the peak of his powers, captured in full flight. Experiences like that heard on this recording are simply not to be had today; no one gives so much of himself anymore.

Piatigorsky's legacy is deep and broad. Aside from the transcriptions that we all play, the annual seminar in his name at USC, where gifted young cellists from all over the world come to learn from top solo professionals, and the wonderful recordings and films, above all there is the legacy of spirit. Every Piatigorsky pupil I've ever spoken to had only the warmest praise for the man, his teaching, and his devotion to the fullest development of each student. His artistic vision has been passed down through younger artists, and thence to their pupils throughout the world. He has left the music world incomparably richer for having passed through it, and all of us are beneficiaries of his life.

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PART B – An Interview with Piatigorsky

An Excerpt from The Way They Play, Vol. 1
by Samuel and Sada Applebaum
Published in 1972 by Paganiniana Publications

Soon after our arrival to talk with Gregor Piatigorsky, he began to speak softly about the Chaliapin Memorial and I could easily see that Piatigorsky was deeply moved. His first manager in Russia was the man who arranged the memorial, and was also Chaliapin's first manager.

Piatigorsky told us of his meeting and playing again with Vladimir Horowitz aftrer seventeen years...

"It brought so many memories too emotional to express in words. I recall-Chaliapin asked me to have luncheon with him, and to bring my cello. When we met he impressed me as a giant from another world-his large head, his dynamic features, care-free dress-I can see him now, his striking face above a strong neck exposed by the unfastened collar!... 'Play for me,' he said. 'Some arias. Yes, I would like you to play some of my favorites.' I played a number from Russian operas, elaborating and making fantasies of them; he expressed his pleasure by raising as I ended each one, embracing me and asking for more! Finally, when I stopped to rest a moment, he said, 'You sing too much! Most of you string players sing too much. Why don't you speak more on your instruments?'

"Ah!" with a wide gesture he exclaimed, "Chaliapin was a genius-incomparable-I must say I learned more from him than from any other." Piatigorsky took up his cello and said, "Here, let me show you what I mean." He demonstrated..."It was the same when I played for Richard Strauss. In Don Quixote there is an aria in one of the variations-I thought of Chaliapin and his suggestion 'to talk,' for Strauss also wanted 'talk' from the cello! Here, like this," and he again placed the bow on the strings of his magnificent instrument, first playing for us lovely legato passages which filled the room with luxurious sound. "That is singing," he declared.

He began to play, enunciating the same lovely music, infusing it with articulate passion, while we listened breathlessly. He spoke ..."you hear...it is a love appeal...so...so," and his body bent forward tremulously with the motion of the bow, so that each successive tone created not only exquistite sound, but also an urgency of human expression. And, nearing the end, "and the closing phrases... a choking...it is almost inarticulate...hopeless...so...so" and the bow lifted softly and yearningly.

That same yearning was apparent in his face when we looked up at him.

Restoring the cello to its case Piatigorsky sat down near us. He crossed his long legs, folded his arms, and fixed upon us a most earnest expression.

"Yes, it is of utmost importance that we realize that although singing all the time because it is melody may be beautiful, it may also be only so much senseless sound." Then, "and if you hear a Caruso recording, you will be astonished to note how little legato he used...Yes, astonished!"

His daughter had entered the room..."Jephta dear, you have come in to say good-night?" and he kissed her fondly.

It was so touching to witness the absorption of such a great artist in his child. We remembered seeing him at the Friends School Auditorium, all expectancy, evidently enjoying the singing of the young girls on the stage. His Jephta was among them, and he stayed to praise her as well as our Lois and the other eager girls crowding about him.

During our second visit with Piatigorsky we broached a subject that had been foremost in our minds for sometime: the paucity of cello soloists in the concert ranks.

"There are a number of reasons for this," he said, "and, realizing the situation, I am making my effort to correct it. To that end I devote a certain amount of my time to teaching in order to find hidden talent and develop it and thus arrure a future school of concert cellists. I contend that the cello is not any more difficult to master than the violin-or the viola! No, assuredly, the difficulties it presents are not insurmountable when approached by an earnest student."

We asked about the teaching material that is available for the cello. He replied, "Ah, that is the sad lack, there is not nearly enough. In fact, it is really a great pity that so little has been composed for the cello. And it is appalling to see how little some of our composers know about cello playing and its technique!" I interrupted to say that it was obvious few violinists have a clear conception of cello technique. "That is a sad truth," Piatigorsky assented. "Composers in general have a fair knowledge of the violin and it is an easier medium for which to compose. So you violinists are fortunate there. But for the cello there is a dearth of teaching material, great teachers and great works." He concluded, ruefully. "If Beethoven had only composed a work for the cello to become just as popular and as legendary as the Moonlight Sonata!"

We wondered if such a work might soon be expected?

"I have a feeling that it will be soon. I reason that some of the things I have done and will continue to do must bear fruit. I have succeeded in interesting contemporary composers to more deeply concern themselves in the cello. But, further than that, I am doing more in making it my business, at the same time, to see that they acquaint themselves with the technique of the instrument. As an instance, when Prokofieff wrote his concerto for me, he had me play to him many, many times. He became absorbed in the cello, thought in terms of the instrument, with the result, as you know, in our now having his wonderful concerto.

"The same may be said about Stravinsky. In my opinion," Piatigorsky continued, "the cello really has a broader future than any other instrument. The surface of its musical and technical potentialities has only been scratched." To this we agreed, realizing the vast possibilities open to composers and players which, as violinists, we know have been privileged largely for our instrument. "Our concert audiences are only beginning to realize this, to appreciate the beauty of the cello tone quality, the tremendous range and the many and varied effects the instrument permits. And further, every art of the bow known to the violinist is also at the command of the cellist." He laughed heartily when I facetiously interjected... "even the staccato-I certainly enjoy yours!"

"Oh, yes! In fact we can in many respects, do even more than the violinist. Modern composers will prove my point before long. I do wish they would give us some short works...they think, I find, generally in terms of large forms, certainly always so when writing for the instrument in chamber music, neglecting the need for salon pieces.

"Who would you name from the past as the greatest cellist?"

"For me," Piatigorsky replied, "there was only one supremely great cellist in early times and, in the same person, a great composer for the instrument. He was Boccherini. Of course, we have had some marvelous works by later and contemporary composers."

"I would be inclined to agree with you. I remember you introduced the Hindemith and the Prokofieff concertos in their premiere performances."

"Don't forget the Berezowsky," added Sada.

"Yes," said Piatigorsky, "and also the Dukelsky and the Castel-nuovo-Tedsco!"

"Judging form your extensive repertoire you memorize very quickly?"

"In the main, it is my guess that when one does so much of his work from memory, memorizing becomes a natural accomplishment-a matter of unconscious absorption."

I was curious to know why, after attending so many cello recitals, I failed at times to distinguish the low tones on the C string, especially in pianissimo passages. I think many musicians find this a disturbing factor in their performances.

"You have touched upon an important problem, and one which I am happy to discuss. I feel that it is one which should be solved, both for the benefit of cellists as well as for the auditors, who hear them play.

"You know, of course, that such low tones do not carry as fast as, we will say, the more piercing high tones produced by the violin. My suggestion to cellists, therefore, is to develop a better sense of timing when playing in the low registers, to give consideration to the fact that their sound will not reach the far recesses of large auditoriums instantly. It must also be considered that the piano, used in accompaniment, has an uncanny faculty of covering, or absorbing the low tones of the cello. After all, the cello was originally a chamber instrument, built to be played in intimate surroundings, in small halls, and with light accompaniment, such as provided by the harpsichord. We hear it now in huge auditoriums, with the accompaniment of concert-grand pianos, and against the background of tremendous symphonic orchestras!

"Therefore," insisted Piatigorsky, "the cellist must be watchful that he has a well-balanced accompaniment; the best player-one who is capable of extracting the fullest tone form his instrument, could not possibly make himself heard in those low registers if competing with the modern piano, with its rich sonority and its pedals, unless the accompanist permits the cello to dominate. I will go so far as to say that when a cellist plays fortissimo on the low strings the piano should be played pianissimo-yes, I mean just that-not merely piano, but double-piano, pianissimo.

"Playing with an accompanist is far different than performing unaccompanied, as in a Bach Partita. In such playing the most delicate tones in pianissimo passages will be heard. If the finger action is good and if there is a co-ordination between the left and right hands, nothing is lost."

I asked if he would explain his method of approach when starting a new composition.

"Ah! that is a highly important matter; more than one angle should be considered prior to learning to play a new piece, one which a player considers important to study as an addition to his repertoire. Too often, I feel that the performance of musicians indicates that their approach to the study of their solo numbers was via a technical rather than a musical course.

"One of the incorrect steps is to write in fingerings and bowings when beginning the study of a new piece. Following that method one is apt to become a slave to the technical markings. If adhered to persistently, the habit becomes fixed and if the markings are inflexibly bound up with his playing they tend to prevent musical expression.

"We must never forget that a worth-while piece of music can be made to display emotions, varying moods, sometimes simple, at others complex. It should be the purpose of the performer to express these moods. Yet so often we hear performances with the player absorbed primarily with the exposition of technical problems, making their execution a paramount feature."

Mr. Piatigorsky would offer the following advice to a pupil about to embark on the study of a new work:

"The first thing I impress is the need of a thorough understanding of the musical thought to be conveyed: that the work should be memorized and performed mentally. It should be sung in the mind. The structure of the composition should be studied and understood, and each phrase weighed as to its meaning in the whole. I would say to the pupil, 'Try to love that peice of music. Allow it to inspire you. Spend much time with it in your thoughts. Following such procedure your eventual performance of it will be ever so much more successful.' The value of this advice will be immediately apparent then, when you take your instrument and play it. Marks and fingerings you may then decide would be helpful will be decided by your emotional grasp of the work.

"I must confess," Piatigorsky divulged, "that I have often fingered passages which I later feel, though solving a problem technically, do not allow me to fully express the mood I would convey. So...the course is clear, I keep working and changing until finally I achieve the desired results.

"Before I discuss any phase of cello technique further, I wish to stress an important point," said Mr. Piatigorsky. "Important, because of its effect on technical development, and because of the fact that cellists are often handicapped by habits they hold on to from past tradition. I speak of the importance of correct finger action. We still frequently hear the expression, 'lift the fingers very high and bring them down on the string in a hammer-like blow.' This advice, I fear, is not only incorrect, but quite dangerous.

"Dangerous because the finger then becomes a percussive instrument. And this percussion has absolutely no place in cello technic. Of course, you understand that I do not necessarily mean that there should be a lack of firmness in finger action. We want strength and we want the fingers to fall on the string with much firmness, but without percussive blows. The hammer-like blows are responsible for much trouble in left-hand technique."

"Yes, I can see that," I agreed. "we would appreciate it if you would discuss the problems encountered in shifting. Some time ago you made a statement about shifting in relation to the bow arm. Cellists should more fully understand that relationship."

"I agree!" he replied. "Not only should more be known about shifting, but cellists should constantly listen to each of their shifts while practicing. Of course we know the main problem in connection with the cello is to determine when to shift and how to do it. The fundamental principle of shifting, naturally, is an elementary one. It can be learned from any good teacher. But when cellists shift from one position to another they concern themselves with the left-hand, without realizing what an important part the bow arm plays in the shift."

"Perhaps we should analyze this problem?"

"Of course! Firstly, the pupil must decide in each specific case whether the shift is to be heard, or whether it is not to be heard. In each instance, the musical phase must guide the decision. Some shifts should be heard very distinctly. Others not at all.

"First we will consider the shift where we do not wish to hear any slide at all. Here we shift in the usual manner, but at the same instant that we perform the shift we make a careful diminuendo with the bow arm. Thus, the shift becomes inaudible.

"Let us suppose, however, that we wish to hear the shift. What then? Well, at the instant we perform the shift, the bow arm must make a definite crescendo as the next note is approached. The left hand just plays, but it is the bow arm, by crescendo and diminuendo, which determines the nature of the shift."

He drew his cello to him. "Let me show you this interesting example from the Schumann Concerto. In this phrase," and he demonstrated, "I play the first note on the second string with the first finger. While playing this first note, I put my third finger on the A string for the F natural, which is tied over. In the meantime, my second and first fingers are all ready for the next two notes. As I play the D," he continued, "with the first finger, my third finger is poised to shift and to replace the first finger on the next note, which also is D. At the last instant, I make a diminuendo with the right hand. What happens? The shift is absolutely inaudible!"

"This same process continues. The only shift in this position which I allow to be heard is the one from C to B flat, the last two notes. To accomplish this, I make a slight crescendo with the right hand."

"In order to discuss tone production, might it not prove helpful if we go back to the very beginning? I mean to the actual way of holding the bow?"

"Yes, that would be the very best way to approach the problem. Cellists often struggle to develop a bow grip which conforms to a particular school of string playing. The theory and tradition that we get from these schools, however, can be dangerous. Why not adopt a natural method of holding the bow? Let us take the right thumb. Cellists would do well to experiment with the thumb. Perhaps, it should be less curved!

"For if we line up one hundred cellists, probably we would find only five or so who have good natural grips. In the traditional manner of holding the bow, we do not get enough strength. By adjusting our bow grip to a more natural one, we get fifty per cent more volume. You see, if you open your hand and then close it, you do something that is very natural. Now, that same natural impulse should be applied to the bow. The more the fingers touch each other, the better. It is natural, also, for there to be a straight line between the elbow and the wrist, and of course, this natural element should be applied to the cello."

"How do you feel about the wrist during the actual bow change?"

"I am not inclined to favor the wrist in going from one bow to another."

"Is there a danger of weakening the tone, particularly in a forte passage?"

"Yes. On the cello I feel that the wrist has been very much misused. Much more than any other part of the arm. You know, the wrist is a pretty weak joint. Using the wrist also has a way of placing the bow in the wrong direction. Why don't cellists forget about the wrist and develop the knack of bow change with the fingers? It can be done." Here he again demonstrated bow changes with the fingers exclusively, first in double forte, then in double piano. Just listening to him made me feel that the entire problem is easily solved when one develops this finger manipulation.

"In the matter of tone production, cellists as well as violinists err in not placing enough emphasis on the right arm. Let us forget the vibrato for a moment. There still remains something of such great importance with a solution so obvious that it is hard to believe it is not taken seriously enough. And that is the speed of the bow.

"There is a relationship between the strength of the tone and the speed of the bow. The stronger one wants to play, the faster one must move the bow. It sounds simple, doesn't it? Yet why do we hear so much scratching? Why so many tones that are not clear? A cellist will say, 'but I press my fingers very firmly!' We all want a big tone at certain times. Of course we do. Press the bow as much as you wish. Press unlimitedly. Fill the auditorium with the gloriousness of tone that only a cello can produce, but move the bow quickly.
"If the tone breaks or is scratchy, the bow is not moving fast enough. Why are tones that are soft often flimsy, and without body? I shall tell you why. It is because the bow is moving too fast.

"Now let us add the vibrato. There is so much we can say about it. The job of teaching the vibrato to a young student requires experience, yet I wonder if it can really be taught, after all? I feel that all the teacher can do is guide the position of the pupil's hand so that he oscillates correctly and rhythmically. From then on, the beauty of the vibrato depends upon his own musical personality and his own conception of tone. To me, the vibrato seems more or less like human noses. People are born with a certain type of vibrato, just as they are born with a certain type of nose. Nothing is so characteristic of any player as his vibrato, and nothing so much differentiates one string player from another.

"But it goes without saying that one cannot vibrate successfully without having a definite musical idea behind the vibrato he is using at the moment. We vibrate with the fingers, at times with the wrist, at times with the whole arm. He who has only one vibrato for all types of expression is certainly grossly undeveloped. Then there are places where one hardly vibrates at all.

"Yes," he reiterated, "many use the vibrato as a habit, almost like an 'eye-tick.' When a person has mastered the fundamentals of the vibrato, he can only improve his tone by improving his whole musical stature! What I do not like to hear is a cellist who will use the wrong vibrato in a certain type of passage."

I have discussed the problem of practicing with many artists. String players will spend years developing a technic and then be apprehensive at the time of public performance. One artist told me it was particularly encouraging to read what we had written about Kreisler's attitude on practicing.

From past discussions, I knew that Piatigorsky had a very positive attitude toward the maintenance of technique.

"I do not feel," he now remarked, "that artists have to spend hours a day to keep their technic efficient. If that were the case one would not be in a position to participate in the other joys of life. Nor could he enrich his art. Of course, mind you," he added, "I am not saying that one should not work. But definitely I say that if one has developed a firm technic, it is not necessary to slave over the instrument for the rest of his life in order to keep in good form. As a matter of fact, one does not have to work nearly so much as he himself feels impelled to!

"Now, when a person steps out on a platform to play, he may be troubled because of a difficult passage near the beginning, or he may find that his vibrato doesn't function with as much smoothness as always. Or that he cannot draw steady bows. So naturally, he feels that by practicing more and more, he will conquer these difficulties.

"But, it is not practicing that will do it! It is all mental! He must train his fingers and his bow arm to work well under tension! He must train the fingers to follow! It is a question of directing his emotions, and the development of his will!

"And I feel that way also about the bowings. Once we have mastered them, they require very little work to maintain." Then jocularly, "That goes for the staccato too! Do you want to know how I mastered the staccato? All I did was try and vibrate with the right hand. As soon as I felt that I actually was vibrating with the right hand, I knew I had mastered the light staccato bowing."

Mr. Piatigorsky feels very strongly about the emotional phase of the art.

"The student must learn to feel, and he must be taught the ability to portray various emotions. For the entire art, is, after all, an emotional one. Thousands of emotions, subtle, strong, delicate; so many emotions. We know that temperament cannot be instilled or taught; it is easy to say one is, or is not, born with temperament; yet the teacher has a responsibility. He must devote more energy towards the emotional message of the works the student is to play. Even the very advanced player spends more time with technical considerations than with problems of artistry. And that is too bad!"

Each time we visited Piatigorsky we saw evidences on his piano or his desk, or his stand, of transcriptions he was working on.

"I should like to talk to you about the field of transcribing," I told him, "you have done so much important work in this area. The whole matter of transcriptions is a peculiar one. I know, for example, that we seldom hear a violin program without a number of transcriptions."

He interjected, "I have a lot to say about transcriptions. There are a great many people, musical snobs or musical purists, who feel that they want only originals. In some respects, they cannot be blamed. There have been so many distasteful transcriptions. I agree too that there are a great many masterworks that should not be touched. I also agree that transcriptions for orchestra are seldom justified.

"But there are times, when a transcription, done carefully and musically, will enhance the original work. Consider the Sonatas for violin and piano by Weber. Do you ever hear them in public? Yet they are beautiful. Yes, the violin part is easy, but they are very charming. I transcribed two of them for the cello, and they have been widely used. And do you know," and he smiled understandingly, "not only are they being used for cello, but we now hear them performed frequently in the original for violin and piano.

"Suppose," he went on, "we take the Introduction and Theme and Variations by Schubert, originally written for one piano, four hands. You must concede that this beautiful composition will go unheard, or seldom heard, as this type of performance is out of fashion for concert use. Don't you agree that a cello transcription of it is justified? Particularly as the cello literature requires additional material?

"I worked more than two weeks on the Ballet by Stravinsky, and transcribed it for the cello. Stravinsky heard it, and liked it a great deal. He added a few things, and what was the result? My transcription has become, so to speak, an original work. Yes, there are times when a transcription becomes a great work of art, such as Ravel's transcription of Moussorgsky's 'Pictures.'"

"One of your transcriptions of a Mozart Sonatina for cello and piano was especially interesting to me, Mr. Piatigorsky," I said.

"Yes, that is an interesting work. Mozart wrote a group of things often referred to as Divertimenti, for two clarinets and bassoon. On the other hand, Mozart's wife published some of these Divertimenti for piano, and it is not known who wrote the piano parts. The Sonatina you refer to is from this group."

The spacious room we sat in was filled with the mementos that revealed his exciting life. Modern French masterpieces hung on the walls along with pictures of his musical get-togethers with famous colleagues. A lovely portrait of his wife, the former Jacqueline de Rothschild, hung between two sensitive companion-portraits of his daughter Jephta and his son Joram. A lively, articulate room which offered instant comfort, it contained his massive desk, placed in one corner looking work-a-day, yet neat. The piano top was bare with the exception of the children's pictures. A truly fastidious man, we felt, as we sat quietly to talk with him.

His voice is moderately soft, a bit deliberate, yet expressive, and complemented by frequent flashing of the eyes. His very expressive hands were always in motion. Those hands that had so early attached themselves to cello strings, since the age of six! That was in the tiny town of Ekaterinoslav, Russia, where he was born on April 17, 1903.

Piatigorsky took the oath of allegiance to America on August 29, 1942, in the legendary town of Elizabethtown, New York. (John Brown's body lies there.) He had come here for the first time in 1929. His first engagement was in Oberlin, Ohio. Performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Stokowski was followed by playing under Mengelberg with the New York Philharmonic.

This was the beginning of this magnificent artist's list of appearances here, as soloist and with orchestra.

After our interview, Sada and I sat in the little park in Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia. Our mood was reflective as we sat facing the home of Gregor Piatigorsky whom we had just left.

"A wonderful man...A great artist," said Sada.

"I certainly enjoyed our visit," I replied. So intense, and yet with a touch of naivete; his obvious love of concert life.

"Oh yes, I think so too! He is so tall, expressive and strikingly handsome! said Sada. "It touched me when he said: 'My life? It is an open book. What does it tell? My wife, my children my work! And my concert life...I love every minute of it.' It gave me a slight feeling of sadness. So much summed up so simply, so much unsaid yet felt, so much deep meaning in the slow, sensitive gestures of his large 'cello' hands, and in the sudden softness of his brown eyes!"