

Piatigorsky was born in Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk) Russia on April 17, 1903. He studied violin and piano as a young child with his father, until he saw and heard the cello at an orchestra concert, and became determined to be a cellist. He constructed a "play cello" of two sticks, a long stick for the cello, and a short stick for the bow, and enjoyed pretending to perform. When he was seven years old he was finally given a real cello, and began his remarkable life as a cellist.

A student of Klengel told him he had no talent whatsoever, and to stay clear of the cello. Piatigorsky ignored the unwanted advice, and won a scholarship to the Moscow Conservatory, where he studied with Gubariov, von Glehn (who had studied with Davidov) and Brandoukov. While studying at the conservatory he earned money for his family by playing in local cafes.

The October Russian Revolution occurred with he was only 13 years old, and he began playing in a string quartet shortly thereafter, appropriately named the "Lenin Quartet." At the age of 15 he was engaged to be the principal cellist of the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow.

Despite his success as a cellist, or maybe because of it, the Russian authorities would not allow him to travel abroad to further his studies, or to perform. He therefore defected into Poland by taking a cattle train to the frontier, and then fleeing across the border with his cello. Unfortunately his cello didn't make the crossing intact. Border guards were shooting at him and his companions, one of which happened to be a large lady opera singer. When the shots rang out, she grabbed Piatigorsky, crushing his cello. Neither Piatigorsky or the soprano were injured, as he helped her across the border.

Piatigorsky, now 18 years old, traveled from Poland to Germany, and studied for a short time in Berlin and in Leipzig with Becker and Klengel, neither of which were much appreciated by him. He found employment playing in a trio in a Russian cafe in Berlin, frequented by the likes of Feuermann and Furtwangler, who heard him play and hired him as principal cellist of the Berlin Philharmonic. He kept that post until 1929 (now 26 years old), when he decided to pursue a career as a traveling concert artist. When Richard Strauss heard him perform Don Quixote with the Berlin Philharmonic, he said, "I have finally heard my Don Quixote as I thought him to be." That same year he made his debuts with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Stowkowski, and the New York Philharmonic, with Mengelberg. (He loved the United States, and became a citizen in 1942.)

He formed a chamber group with pianist Artur Schnabel, violist William Primrose and violinist Jascha Heifetz. The group became very famous and recorded at least 30 long playing records. Privately he enjoyed playing chamber music with Horowitz and Milstein.

Both the concert going crowds, and composers loved him, and many works were written especially for him, even as we now see in the case of Rostropovich. Both Piatigorsky and Rostropovich have a relationship with Prokofiev's Symphony Concerto Opus 125. Prokofiev had written a Ballade in 1938, for Piatigorsky, which he premiered with the Boston Symphony under the baton of Koussevitsky. Prokofiev later reworked his material into the Symphony Concerto, which he dedicated to Rostropovich. Piatigorsky collaborated with Stravinsky on a transcription of the Pulcinella Suite, which became known as the "Suite Italienne" for cello and piano.

He became an influential teacher. From 1941 to 1949 Piatigorsky was head of the cello department at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, and taught chamber music at Tanglewood. The years 1957 to 1962 saw Piatigorsky heading up the cello department at Boston University, and then in 1962 continuing his teaching at the University of Southern California, where he remained until his death in 1976. In 1962 and also in 1966 he was a member of the jury of the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. It was also in 1962 that the Cello Society of New York honored him by beginning the "Piatigorsky Prize," awarded every other year to a deserving young artist.

Piatigorsky owned two Stradivarius cellos: the "Batta" dated 1714, and the "Baudiot" dated 1725. He died August 6, 1976 from cancer, and was buried in Brentwood Cemetery, near Los Angeles.

# Charles Munch Boston Symphony Orchestra Richard Strauss

**Till Eulenspiegels Merry Pranks - tone poem for orchestra Op 28**  
**Don Quixote Op. 35 tone poem for cello and large orchestra**

**Gregor Piatigorsky, cello**



Program music, purely instrumental music describing or "inspired by" a literary text, was a notion both popular and highly controversial in the late-19th century. The polemics were fueled by the waspish critic Eduard Hanslick, champion of absolute music; to wit, a portion of his review of an early Viennese performance of the Strauss tone poem *Don Juan*:

"These outwardly brilliant compositions are nothing if not successful. I have seen Wagner disciples exalting [it] with such enthusiasm that it seemed as though shivers of delight were running up and down their spines. Others have found the thing repulsive... This is no 'tone painting' but rather a tumult of brilliant daubs, a flailing tonal orgy... The tragedy is that so many of our younger composers think in foreign languages - poetry, philosophy, painting - and then translate their thoughts into the mother tongue, music."

Strauss confessed that he needed a story to stimulate his musical imagination, whether for an opera, which is obvious, or for an orchestral work, a concept that did not make its presence fully felt until the mid-19th century and the arrival of Franz Liszt. That composer's symphonic poems were based on literary texts and intended to evoke specific feelings and ideas, without ever going so far as to create musical theater without singing, speaking, or scenery, e.g., a Strauss tone poem, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Ein Heldenleben* - or the present work.

*Don Quixote* was inspired by Miguel de Cervantes' ageless 17th-century novel. Let Cervantes tell us briefly about his character and how he became who he was: "Through too little sleep and too much reading of books on knighthood, he dried up his brains in such a way that he wholly lost his judgement. His fantasy was filled with those things that he read, of enchantments, quarrels, battles, challenges, wooings, loves, storms..."

In the Strauss score, the knight himself, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, is "played" by the solo cello, the character's theme a thing of nobility and rueful grace. *Sancho Panza's* theme is a more proletarian affair, introduced by bass clarinet and tenor tuba before the solo viola becomes the voice of the Don's servant.

In the introduction, the knight's beclouded brain is suggested by the momentary use of mutes in all the instruments and strange harmonies, bordering on the atonal. In the first variation, we are introduced (via woodwinds and strings) to the Don's unattainable love, *Dulcinea*, and there ensues the fight with evil giants, in fact windmills, ending with the Don's graphic fall from his horse (harp glissando). Variation II is the infamous contest with the army of the "Great Emperor *Alifanfaron*," in actuality a flock of sheep (you can't miss them). Critics of Strauss' time were particularly outraged by this all-too-realistic cacophony.

Variation III is a quiet dialog in which the Don reproves *Sancho* for his lack of ideals. IV is another battle scene, this time a losing battle against a procession of penitents, whom the Don mistakes for a band of robbers, bent on abducting a statue of the Virgin Mary. Variation V: The Don has been solidly trounced, but hardly defeated. He conjures up a vision of *Dulcinea* to give him courage (horn, harp, violins).

Variation VI "relates" a trick played on the Don by *Sancho*, who leads his master to believe that the first hip-swinging, tambourine-slapping *señorita* they encounter in the street is *Dulcinea*. The Don fulminates against the wizards who have turned his goddess into this floozy. Variation VII finds the Don and *Sancho Panza* seated on hobby-horses, imagining themselves flying through the air, the atmosphere created by a relative newcomer to the orchestra's battery in 1897, the wind machine. VIII: In this wacky F-major *barcarolle*, the Don and *Sancho* are floating in an oarless boat toward a threatening water-mill (oboe and violin). The boat capsizes but the two manage to save themselves; they thank God in a passage marked *religioso*. Religion - a most confusing subject for the Don - is likewise a part of IX, where he encounters a pair of monks, conversing in the strict counterpoint of a pair of bassoons, who he thinks are evil wizards. He puts them to rout in his routing key, D minor.

In Variation X a townsman of the Don's, *Sanson Carasco*, disguised as "The Knight of the White Moon," challenges the Don to combat and emerges victorious. *Sanson* has in fact devised this as a way of leading *Don Quixote* back into sanity. In the Finale, the veil indeed lifts and the Don, sadly perhaps, is again in possession of his cognitive faculties. He is ready for death, and, as Cervantes writes, quoting the notary in attendance, "Never has a mind died so mildly, so peacefully, so Christianly." Strauss reflects the scene in six brief, gentle measures, which convey a mood touchingly similar to that of the final passages of Brahms' Third Symphony.

The first performance of *Don Quixote* was given in March of 1898 by Cologne's Gürzenich Orchestra under Franz Wüllner, with cello soloist Friedrich Grützmacher.

## Charles Munch

Born: September 26, 1891 - Strasbourg, Alsace, France

Died: November 6, 1968 - Richmond, Virginia, USA

The eminent Alsatian-born French conductor, Charles Munch (originally, Münch), was the son of the Alsatian organist and choral conductor Ernst Münch (1859-1928). His elder brother was the choir-master and professor of music, Fritz Münch. Charles studied violin at the Strasbourg Conservatory and with Lucien Capet in Paris. At the outbreak of World War I (1914), he enlisted in the German army; made a sergeant of artillery, he was gassed at Peronne and wounded at Verdun; after the end of the war (1918) and his return to Alsace-Lorraine (1919), he became a naturalised French citizen.

Having received further violin training from Flesch in Berlin, Charles Munch pursued a career as a soloist; was also professor of violin at the Leipzig Conservatory and concert-master of the Gewandhaus Orchestra there. In November 1932, he made his professional conducting debut in Paris with the Straram Orchestra. He studied conducting with Szendrei in Paris from 1933 to 1940. He quickly rose to prominence; was conductor of Paris's Orchestra de la Société Philharmonique from 1935 to 1938, and in 1936 became a professor at the École Normale de Musique. In 1938 he became music director of the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire de Paris, remaining in that post during the years of the German occupation during World War II; refusing to collaborate with the Nazis, he gave his support to the Resistance, being awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1945.

Charles Munch made his USA debut as a guest conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in December 1946; a trans-continental tour of the USA with the French National Radio Orchestra followed in 1948. In 1949 he was appointed Music Director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which he and Pierre Monteux took on its first European tour in 1952; they took it again to Europe in 1956, also touring in the Soviet Union, making it the first USA orchestra to do so. After retiring from his Boston post in 1962, he made appearances as a guest conductor; also helped to launch the Orchestre de Paris in 1967.

Charles Munch acquired an outstanding reputation as an interpreter of the French repertoire, his performances being marked by spontaneity, colour, and elegance. French music of the 20th century also occupied a prominent place on his programs; he brought out new works by Roussel, Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, and others. He wrote *Je suis chef d'orchestre* (1954).

# Richard Strauss

**Till Eulenspiegels Merry Pranks - tone poem for orchestra Op 28**

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# Charles Munch

**Boston Symphony Orchestra**

**Cello – Gregor Piatigorsky Viola – Joseph De Pasquale Violin – Richard Burgin**

**1-Till Eulenspiegels Merry Pranks 14:50**

*Don Quixote Op. 35 tone poem for cello and large orchestra*

**2-PART I 19:26**

*Introduktion (Mäßiges Zeitmaß)*

*Don Quixote, der Ritter von der traurigen Gestalt - 3. Sancho Panza*

*Variation 1 (Gemächlich)*

*Variation 2 (Kriegerisch)*

*Variation 3 (Mäßiges Zeitmaß)*

**3-PART II 21:09**

*Variation 4 (Etwas breiter)*

*Variation 5 (Sehr langsam)*

*Variation 6 (Schnell)*

*Variation 7 (Ein wenig ruhiger als vorher)*

*Variation 8*

*Variation 9 (Schnell und stürmisch)t*

Transferred from a RCA Stereo 4-track and monophonic 2-track tape

Date of Recording: Till Eulenspiegel 1962 Produced by Max Wilcox Recording Engineer Lewis Layton

Don Quixote recorded 1953 (This is a monophonic recording)



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