

Boris Pergamenschikow

Gifted cellist generous with his time and humour

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The Russian-born cellist Boris Pergamenschikow, who has died of cancer aged 55, was a sought-after soloist and teacher, as well as being one of the best-loved figures on the European chamber music scene. He was mentor to many of today's finest young players, while musical partners praised the profundity of his performances and his bigheartedness as a friend.

Pergamenschikow, who was born in Leningrad (now St Petersburg), came from a musical family; his father was also a cellist, and gave him his first lessons. His principal teacher for 12 years, first at a specialist music school and later at the Leningrad Conservatory, was Emmanuel Fischmann: Pergamenschikow told me, in an interview for the *Strad* in 2000, that Fischmann was "like a second father" to him.

He also studied composition and was a fine pianist, on one occasion giving a concert in Germany with cellist Heinrich Schiff in which each accompanied the other on the piano in the Brahms cello sonatas.

In 1974, Pergamenschikow won the gold medal in the Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow, which launched his international career. He emigrated to the west in 1977, and made his New York debut in 1984, when the *New York Times* wrote that he was "a world-class cellist by any reckoning ... his performances were on a technical, tonal, musical and interpretative level that only a small handful of cellists could match". He went on to perform as soloist with many of the world's finest orchestras and to record for Chandos, Decca, EMI, ECM, Hänssler and Sony Classical.

Pergamenschikow's warm, intelligent playing and personality made him a popular guest artist at chamber music festivals, working with such artists as Andras Schiff, Yehudi Menuhin, Gidon Kremer and Mstislav Rostropovich. The pianist Lars Vogt recalled the cellist's fascination with history, literature and politics, as well as his kindness and sense of humour. Their last recital together, in September last year, fell on Vogt's birthday and, on the last note of the encore, Pergamenschikow suddenly began to improvise a cadenza, which turned into Happy Birthday.

In 1991, Pergamenschikow founded the European Chamber Music Association to promote musical dialogue between young performers from western and eastern Europe; from 1990 to 1995, he organised the Finale Chamber Music Festival in Cologne. From 1977 to 1992, he gave masterclasses at the Academy of Music in Cologne, and, in 1998, he was appointed professor of cello at the Hanns Eisler Academy in Berlin. He also gave numerous masterclasses throughout Europe and Asia.

He had a strong interest in contemporary music; his recording of Dutilleux's *Tout Un Monde Lointain* won the Diapason d'Or, and, in June 2001, he gave the world premiere of Krzysztof Penderecki's *Concerto Grosso* for three cellos with Truls Mork, Han-Na Chang and the NHK Symphony Orchestra under Charles Dutoit in Japan. His last concert, in Warsaw in December 2003, was conducted by Penderecki.

He is survived by his wife, Tatiana, whom he married in 1973, and their violinist son Daniel.

· Boris Pergamenschikow, cellist, born August 29 1948; died April 30 2004