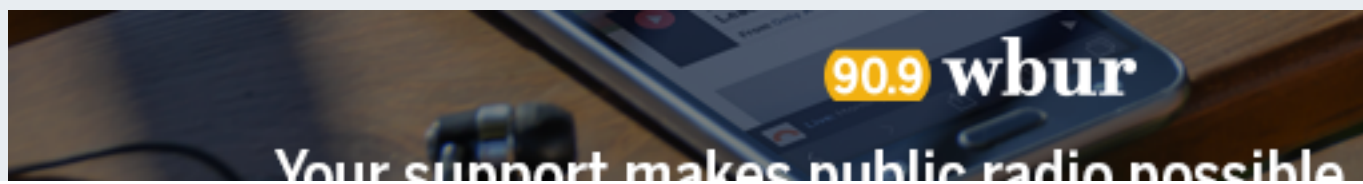


Support the news



BSO's Jules Eskin, Whom Yo-Yo Ma Calls A 'Legend' Among Cellists, Dies At 85

November 16, 2016 By [Keith Powers](#) 



The Boston Symphony Orchestra has lost an onstage leader. Principal cellist

Jules Eskin, who joined the BSO in 1964, died Tuesday of cancer at his home in Brookline. He was 85.

Eskin performed under five music directors with the BSO, beginning with Erich Leinsdorf, and continuing through the tenures of William Steinberg, Seiji Ozawa and James Levine. Under current music director Andris Nelsons, Eskin most recently performed on the Grammy Award-winning recordings of Shostakovich's Symphonies 5 and 10.



Jules Eskin. (Courtesy Boston Symphony Orchestra Archives)

Invoke any of the great musicians of the late 20th century, and Jules Eskin had some personal relationship with them. Born in Philadelphia, his first teacher was his father, Samuel. At 16 he joined the Dallas Symphony, under Antal Dorati, and studied there as well with Lev Aronson and Janos Starker. He also studied with Gregor Piatigorsky and Leonard Rose at the Curtis Institute.

In 1948 he was a Tanglewood fellow, performing under Serge Koussevitzky. In 1954, he was awarded first prize in the Naumburg Competition, and made his New York debut at Town Hall, followed by a European tour. He served for seven years at the City Center Opera (later called the New York City Opera), and as principal cello of the Cleveland Orchestra, under George Szell, for three years before joining the BSO.

As a collaborator, Eskin performed with violinists Isaac Stern and Arnold Steinhardt, the Guarneri String Quartet, pianist Leon Fleisher and many esteemed colleagues at Marlboro and at the Casals Festival in Puerto Rico. He made recordings with Thomas Beecham, Victoria de los Angeles and Jussi Börling.

Eskin was a founding member of the first chamber music ensemble comprised entirely of principal players from a major orchestra: the Boston Symphony Chamber Players. Formed under the urging of Leinsdorf in 1964, the chamber players toured the world on numerous occasions, including visits to the Soviet Union in 1967 and South America in 1998. The ensemble recorded extensively, including a 2011 release of French music that was nominated for a Grammy. They celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2013-14 with a series of commissions and performances.

Eskin is survived by his wife Aza Raykhtsaum, a BSO violinist, his sons Alexander and Daniel, his step-daughter Anna Raykhtsaum Tratt, and their families. The extended BSO family, and many of his colleagues, remembered Eskin fondly.

Nelsons called Eskin “a profound link to the past.” Concertmaster Malcolm

Lowe, Eskin's stage-mate for more than three decades, said "Jules embodied the heart and soul of our string section." A legend himself, Yo-Yo Ma called Eskin "a legend in the cello world." Steinhardt, Eskin's roommate as young players with the Cleveland Orchestra, and with whom Eskin frequently performed in a trio that also included pianist Lydia Artymiw, remembered Eskin as "a close friend of mine for more than 50 years. Some of the most beautiful sounds that I've ever heard came out of his cello."



Yo-Yo Ma and Jules Eskin with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 2011. (Courtesy Stu Rosner/BSO)


The BSO's managing director Mark Volpe said "There is no doubt that Jules Eskin will be counted as one of the legendary cellists of the 20th and 21st centuries. He will take a prominent place in the orchestra's storied history, and his loss will be felt by the classical world at large for generations."

Eskin truly was a link to a musical world that has passed. In [an interview with fellow BSO cellist Blaise Déjardin](#), published on Déjardin's blog OpusCello, Eskin remembered earning his first professional position as a teenager with the Dallas Symphony.

“In that era, orchestra conductors would come in town to conduct auditions. I played for Antal Dorati, conductor of the Dallas Symphony, and they offered me a contract. I was starting my life at 16! I can still see my mother at the train station in North Philadelphia. She was so sad to see me go so early. I had my cello, my father’s immigrant suitcase from the old country, as well as a huge bag full of sandwiches my mother made for the 3-day train trip from Philadelphia to Dallas.”

Thus, almost 70 years ago, began the long and remarkable career of Jules Eskin, principal cellist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Services will be held at [3 p.m. Wednesday](#) at Stanetsky Memorial Chapel, 1668 Beacon St., Brookline.

Keith Powers  Music Critic, The ARTery
Keith Powers is a music critic for The ARTery.
More...



Join the discussion



[View comment\(s\)](#)

Next Up

Doppelgänger Dance Collective's Kindred Spirits Come To Cambridge

The Providence-based performance project features self-proclaimed spirit doubles performing contemporary work by commissioned choreographers.

Anna & Elizabeth Bring Old Songs To Life In Colorful Moving Pictures Called 'Crankies'

"I think a lot of people come to folk music because it's nostalgic, and because they think it's cute and sweet," says Anna Roberts-Gevalt of Anna & Elizabeth. "Ballads are not always about the good old days."

Where to now?

More [The ARTery](#) or [Explore Audio](#).

