

Michael Atiyah

I first met Gel'fand more than 40 years ago, and kept in touch with him over the years, in Moscow, Oxford, Cambridge (UK) and in the US. I was glad to be able to contribute to his 90th birthday conference on the Unity of Mathematics, something in which we both believed strongly. His own work covered an extremely wide range of topics and he was enormously influential, not only among young Russian mathematicians.

He remained active throughout his long life, partly on account of the many young collaborators he attracted. He was also a pioneer in opening up many new and fertile fields. He was one of the major figures of the twentieth century, to be compared with earlier giants such as Hermann Weyl and John von Neumann.

My clearest memory is of the times I took part in his famous Moscow seminar - a unique experience. I counted him among my friends and was pleased when in 1973 I was able to persuade Oxford University to give him an honorary degree, enabling him to leave the Soviet Union for the first time.

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