VIOLINISTS AND CRITICS: NEW YORK CITY, 1900 TO 1930

FAMOUS VIOLINISTS AND THEIR CRITICS:
NEW YORK CITY, 1900 TO 1930

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a number of significant violin performances which took place in New York City between the years 1900 and 1930, as seen through the writings of five prominent American reviewers. In so doing, it illustrates, not only the developing trends in violin playing at that time, but also critical reaction to those trends and, as well, exposes the individual characteristics, both musical and literary, of the critics themselves. Short biographical sketches on the violinists and critics have been included. An analysis of early recordings has been added at the end of each chapter as a means of comparing critical statements with examples of actual recorded sound.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION		1
CHAPTER I.	Joseph Joachim and Pablo Sarasate	20
CHAPTER II.	Henri Marteau	34
CHAPTER III.	Fritz Kreisler	40
CHAPTER IV.	Jan Kubelík	55
CHAPTER V.	Jacques Thibaud	73
CHAPTER VI.	Eugène Ysaÿe	87
CHAPTER VII.	Franz von Vecsey	103
CHAPTER VIII.	Mischa Elman	114
CHAPTER IX.	Jascha Heifetz	125
CHAPTER X.	Willy Burmester	142
CHAPTER XI.	Albert Spalding	148
CHAPTER XII.	Toscha Seidel	155
CHAPTER XIII.	Váša Příhoda	161
CHAPTER XIV.	Yehudi Menuhin and Ruggiero Ricci	167
CHAPTER XV.	The Critics	178
CONCLUSION		189
BIBLIOGRAPHY		193

INTRODUCTION

Although the beginning of the twentieth century was marked by the ever-increasing social unrest and international tension which was to culminate in the hostilities of the First World War, these years were, nevertheless, marked as well by economic prosperity in Europe and elsewhere. Musically speaking, the European economy supported more full-time composers of serious music than it ever had before. By the same token, it encouraged a greater number of performers than it could reasonably support and hence public concert life quickly developed into a major industry, the international ramifications and complexities of which threatened to rival those of the metal and textile industries. Improved techniques of transportation and communication encouraged the dissemination of new music and musical ideas across international boundaries. Opera companies, symphony orchestras, military bands, church choirs, festival choruses, theatre groups, dance ensembles, and institutions for musical education on many levels expanded rapidly. The grandiose opera houses and concert halls built in world capitals during the latter half of the nineteenth century were now copied in provincial cities. Even string quartets began to make concert tours, following in the lucrative paths of famous opera divas, virtuoso pianists and violinists.

Around the turn of the century, accepted ideas in many fields were challenged. Physicist Albert Einstein clearly refuted the previously-held distinction between matter and energy. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud posited that man's thoughts and actions were directed by

unconscious fantasies and dreams. Anthropologists such as Sir James Frazier pointed out the parallels between the customs of Western civilization and those of so-called primitive societies. At the same time and in the same way, artists began to question the traditional ideas and assumptions basic to their own fields of study and thus many thinkers in all forms of art - music, literature, painting - began to stretch their techniques and imaginations as far as possible in attempts to break away from familiar formulae and routines. This phenomenon proved true in the realm of performance, the interpretative side of the musical art form, as well as in composition, the creative side.

During the nineteenth century, there appeared a strong impetus towards the development of extreme instrumental virtuosity. The artist was often looked upon as one possessing a kind of superhuman mastery over his instrument. Both Franz Liszt and Niccolò Paganini offered astounding examples of virtuosity on their respective instruments. Both were willing and able to supply the musical entertainment demanded and financed by the middle-class European audiences who, with limited musical backgrounds and taste, "expected a mixture between the concert hall and circus."[1]

With the turn of the century, there appeared, first in France, a certain emphasis on "the natural" as the source of all beauty in music. For the French musician, it was imperative that logic and good taste dominate every branch of musical performance. Composers sought perfection

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[1]Frederick Dorian, The History of Music in Performance (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1942), p.251.

in simplicity. According to Claude Debussy, "a performance that falsified life, that was not humane and true to nature, was meaningless."[2] Virtuosity for its own sake, as well as public demand for it, were subjects of derision in the eyes of the French artist:

> The attraction of the virtuoso for the public is very much like that of the circus for the crowd. There is always hope that something dangerous may happen. M. Ysaÿe may play the violin with conductor Colonne on his shoulders, or Mr. Pugno may conclude his piece by lifting the piano with his teeth.[3]

The French quest for, and emphasis on, truth of expression in performance gradually spread throughout the rest of Europe, and across the Atlantic to America.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the population of New York City, compared with that of other American cities, was unusually large, diverse and ever-changing. The metropolis contained more than its share of the very wealthy, of bankers, lawyers and others who provided professional services to business. Merchants, shipowners, speculators and industrial magnates were drawn in ever-increasing numbers to this burgeoning commercial centre. Until approximately 1910, the harbour symbolized New York's economic prosperity. Ocean-borne commerce from across the Atlantic dominated the financial and corporate activities of the metropolitan economy. By 1910, however, New York was more extensively involved in the management of

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[2] *Ibid.*, p. 299.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 299.

American industry than in the Atlantic trade. Its manufacturing activities kept New York in its dominant position as the largest urban region and the most important business district in the nation's economic system for the next forty years. New York's superior market facilities and its enormous collection of financial, legal, professional and technical services brought to this city the greatest concentration of wealth in the United States. According to a New York Tribune survey of 1892, New York City contained 1,265 millionaires - thirty percent of all millionaires in the United States. Another twelve percent lived in the nearby New York State portion of the metropolitan region and still more lived in southern Connecticut and northern New Jersey. These figures suggest that the concentration of American wealth in New York rivaled the concentration of British wealth in London at this time.[4]

The economic changes and developments that brought such wealth to late nineteenth-century New York also attracted a rapidly growing and increasingly heterogeneous middle and lower-income population. Gradually but unmistakably the region's economic, social, cultural and political resources were more widely dispersed among its population as New York's less wealthy professional men, small manufacturers, petty entrepreneurs, officials, semi-professionals and technicians comprised an increasing proportion of its population. Collectively, if not individually, these people controlled an increasing share of its wealth as well as a great many organizations, social and political.[5]

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[4]David C. Hammack, Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982), p. 46.

[5]Ibid., p. 60.

The Arts could not help but thrive in such a milieu. In the 1880's the Academy of Music, at the corner of Fourteenth Street and Irving Place, boasted the largest concert hall in the city. The installation of electric lights, an asbestos curtain, an elevator stage, folding seats and an air-conditioning system in the recently opened Lyceum initiated a new era in the world of theatrical entertainment. The Metropolitan Opera House, which opened its doors to the public in 1883, had been built by Wall Street financiers who had not been able to obtain boxes at the fashionable Academy of Music. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in Central Park opened in 1880. The National Academy of Design, occupying the corner of Fourth Avenue and Twenty-third Street, was built with even greater opulence than was the Society of American Artists, which was erected but nine years earlier. Whereas, in the mid-1880's, the lack of sophistication in American musical taste had been the plague of foreign performers,[6] concert life in New York at the turn of the century differed little from that of most large European cities. In a January 5, 1902 article for the New York Times, music critic William J. Henderson proudly cited the city's increasing interest in the music dramas of Wagner, its patronage of chamber music and the establishment of the Musical Arts Society as positive proof of New York's musical maturity. Audience enthusiasm for "the intellectual" could also be seen entering the domain of the solo recital at this time:

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[6]Irving Sablosky, American Music (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 56.

> The spectacle of an audience which filled Mendelssohn Hall on Tuesday afternoon applauding most enthusiastically a violinist's performance of an unaccompanied movement by the chastest [sic] of all composers, Johann Sebastian Bach, was one to delight any lover of music. To be sure, it was not the largest auditorium in the city . . . but the audience at Mendelssohn Hall was as large as one would have found at a similar concert in Berlin, where people go to concerts just as freely as they go the the theatres here.[7]

With a population of about three-and-a-half million, improved transportation and assured audiences, the city's musical life blossomed. Increasing economic prosperity, combined with the strenuous educational activities of great and dedicated musicians such as Leopold Damrosch (1832-1885), Anton Seidl (1850-1898), Theodore Thomas (1835-1905) and Franz Kneisel (1865-1926) placed New York firmly on the musical map. By 1900, New York rivaled London, Paris and Vienna as the most important "debut" centre of the world.

As in other fields of artistic endeavour, criticism doggedly accompanied, observed and interpreted the musical developments in this booming metropolis. Formal music criticism in the United States began in the mid-nineteenth century in the city of Boston. The proximity of Harvard University and the collection of poets, philosophers, artists and academics of all kinds who congregated there provided an intellectual atmosphere that hovered over all aspects of the city's life. John Sullivan Dwight (1813-1893), considered by many to be the founder of music criticism in the United States, was the guiding light of the Harvard Musical Association which, founded in 1837, supported the cause of music in Boston.

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[7]New York Times, "Twentieth Century Musical Taste," January 5, 1902.

In 1852 he published the first issue of his Dwight's Journal of Music. This periodical was made up of critical reviews, analyses, reports on concert life in both Europe and the United States, essays on music history and theory, translations from German and French music treatises, biographies and journals. Dwight's claim that music needs "a faithful, severe, friendly voice to point out steadfastly the models of the True, the ever Beautiful, the Divine"[8] came to symbolize his ethical approach to music criticism. Marked and hampered to a degree by extreme conservatism in taste, he fought for more than thirty years on behalf of what he conceived the beautiful in music to be, and through his writings, succeeded in interesting musically untrained and even indifferent readers.[9]

When Dwight died in 1893, the mantle of Bostonian music criticism fell upon the shoulders of William Apthorp and Philip Hale. Apthorp (1848-1913), though a long-time admirer of Dwight, did not agree with his dogmatic style:

> The critic's true position is that of an interpreter between the composer, or performer, and the public, and to a certain extent also the guardian of popular taste, but it is not for him to try to play schoolmaster to the artists . . . sitting in judgment on music like an aesthetic Rhadamanthus and deciding ex cathedra that this is good and that is bad - this seems to me about as preposterous a position as a fallible mortal can well assume; and in this, as in most serious matters, it is hard to be preposterous without doing more harm than good . . . Authority perhaps! but it is the question in my mind, whether a critic should

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[8]Max Graf, Composer and Critic: Two Hundred Years of Musical Criticism (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1969), p. 307.

[9]Ibid., p. 307.

> properly have any authority at all. Dogmatic and authoritative criticism would be all very well if the critic were possessed of one thing - omniscience! . . . To my mind, criticism should be nothing but an expression of enlightened opinion - as enlightened as possible but never dogmatic.[10]

Philip Hale (1854-1934) brought a high degree of academism and literary virtuosity into the field of American music criticism:

> To read Hale's program notes is to read the best book on music old and new, written by a man of the highest culture, of extensive learning, and one gifted with a fascinating literary style. He quotes Juvenal, Samuel Johnson and Sir Charles Napier to illustrate Saint-Saëns, William Blake and Walt Whitman to illustrate Schubert, and Richardson to illustrate Richard Strauss, with perfect ease. He handles facts as a good golfer handles his club. If experience, wisdom, loftiness, nobility and literary virtuosity make a master, the extraordinary man who looked down upon the landscape of music from the balcony of Boston's Symphony Hall as from a high mountain must be called one of the greatest masters of musical criticism.[11]

The influence of the great leaders of Bostonian music criticism was of course keenly felt in nearby New York. Two of New York's important critics, Henry T. Finck and Richard Aldrich, had studied at Harvard and had thus spent their student years immersed in the spiritual and aesthetic ideals of Boston. Lawrence Gilman claimed to have learned the art of writing programme notes from Philip Hale. The so-called "Golden Age" of New York music criticism began in the 1880's when the "Great Five" - Henry T. Finck, Henry E. Krehbiel, William J. Henderson, James G. Huneker and Richard Aldrich - were active on that city's papers

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 308.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 309.

and periodicals.

American newspapers generally regarded the music critic as a specialized reporter. The practice of hastily writing a review immediately following a performance to ensure that it appeared in the next morning's paper was as much a part of the American critic's life in the 1880's as it is today. William Henderson regarded himself primarily as a newspaperman, a reporter possessing a special knowledge of and interest in music. He in fact had other specialties as well, including yachting, and throughout his journalistic career, wrote several books and many articles on navigation. Richard Aldrich had been a news reporter during his early years in journalism and in later years "never lost the news touch in his manner of shaping a review."[12] Although early American music criticism shows much evidence of free and authoritative expression of opinion as well as the factual recounting of detail, the critic was expected to avoid spewing forth great quantities of wisdom and learning. Thus, when a new opera was staged at the Metropolitan, American readers were not required to plough through a prolonged dissertation on the operatic art form, as was frequently the fate of their European counterparts.[13] Generally speaking, American journalism required direct expression to ensure quick, easy reading and instant assimilation and comprehension. Although music criticism generally fell into line with this dominant and dominating characteristic, the great critics did not "write down" to

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[12] Ibid., p. 430.

[13] Ibid., p. 431.

their readers but rather wrote to "communicate assimilable ideas as from one intelligent person to another."[14] In fact, newspapers of that time (more than in later years) regarded their special departments as concerns of the elect. There was little thought of music as something of general or mass appeal, and critics frequently wrote with the assumption that their words would be read chiefly by musicians or by laymen of studious and ambitious natures.

Although there were many influential critics standing guard over the musical happenings in New York in the early twentieth century, this paper will consider, for the most part, the selected writings of the five whose work appeared in the New York Times, the New York Tribune and the New York Sun, between the years 1900 and 1930.

Henry Edward Krehbiel (1854-1923), known as "The Dean" among his colleagues in New York City, spent forty-three years of continuous service (1880-1923) on the staff of the New York Tribune. Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Krehbiel received his primary education within the public school system of his native state and later studied law (1872-1874) in Cincinnati, Ohio. There too he undertook extensive study of the violin, music theory and harmony. In 1874 he forsook the corridors of justice for the frenzied world of journalism. From 1874 to 1880 he worked on the staff of the Cincinnati Gazette, first as general reporter (he always took great pride in the fact that he was considered an excellent reviewer of baseball) and later as music editor. Although he was invited to New York in 1880 to

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[14] Ibid., p. 431.

succeed John R.G. Hassard as music critic on the Tribune, he served for a short period as a general reporter before Hassard's retirement. Krehbiel was involved in many branches of newspaper work at this time. He regularly acted as replacement for the night city editor, covered a wide variety of general news stories from murders to shipwrecks, interviewed politicians and, even after he had gained his reputation as the Tribune's music critic, he was regularly sent to cover the summer yacht races at nearby New London and Poughkeepsie. In other words, Krehbiel was, first and foremost, a newspaperman. He esteemed journalism as a liberal profession and was incessantly jealous of its honour and high standing. He was proud of his calling as a journalist, proud to be known as one, and proud of his range of experience and competence in this highly competitive field.[15] Although his position in New York as music journalist and critic was a demanding and prestigious one, Krehbiel wrote, in addition to his regular columns, a variety of books on opera, folksong, the New York musical seasons, and piano music. These works include, among others: Notes on the Cultivation of Choral Music (1884); Review of the New York Musical Seasons: 1885-1890 (1890); Studies in the Wagnerian Drama (1891); The Philharmonic Society of New York (1892); How to Listen to Music (1896); Music and Manners in the Classical Period (1898); Chapters of Opera (1908); A Book of Operas (1909); The Pianoforte and its Music (1911); Afro-American Folksongs (1914); A Second Book of Operas (1917); More Chapters of Opera

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[15] New York Times, March 25, 1932.

(1919). In addition he wrote, for twenty years, programme notes for the New York Philharmonic Society. Along with Richard Aldrich, who was his assistant on the Tribune until 1902, he was American editor of the second edition of Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians. He also served for a time as editor of the music department of the Annotated Bibliography of Fine Arts. In addition, Krehbiel edited and completed A.W. Thayer's Life of Beethoven for English-language readers (1921). His English translation of Wagner's Parsifal was a helpful contribution to the restoration of that master's works at the Metropolitan after the war. An English version of Mozart's Der Schauspieldirektor was followed, shortly before his death, by a translation of Mozart's Così Fan Tutte. Krehbiel also translated, for American publication, Lavignac's Music and Musicians and Courvoisier's The Technics of Violin Playing.

William J. Henderson (1855-1937), the last of the "Old Guard" of New York music criticism, was born in Newark, New Jersey. His father, a theatrical manager, produced plays and operettas, including those of Gilbert and Sullivan. His mother had been an actress. Thus, from the time he was a small child, Henderson had been intimately involved with the stage and with music. This eventually led to the serious study of piano and voice at Princeton University, from which he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 1876. He received a Master of Arts degree from Princeton ten years later and, at the age of sixty-seven, the honourary degree of Literary Fellow. During his undergraduate years, Henderson entered the newspaper business, reporting for the Monmouth Democrat during the school term and spending his summers as a reporter for the Long Branch Daily News in New Jersey. Upon graduation in 1876, he moved to New York, where he

joined the staff of the New York Tribune as a general reporter. Although he did not write music reviews at this time, he did make the acquaintance of Henry Krehbiel, from whom he received his first grounding in the nature and function of music criticism. There followed four years as a general reporter for the New York Times after which he became music critic for that paper in 1887. In 1902 Henderson joined the music department of the Sun, replacing James Huneker. He wrote continuously for the Sun until 1920, at which time he moved onto the staff of the New York Herald for a period of four concert seasons. He returned to the Sun in 1924.

Henderson, though a music "specialist," wrote on other subjects as well and, as stated earlier, was a well-known authority on navigation and yachting. His short stories, written mainly for the young reader, include: Sea Yarns for Boys (1894); Afloat with the Flag (1895); and The Last Cruise of the Mohawk (1897). The year 1895 saw the publication of his Elements of Navigation, which was used for many years as a textbook in American naval training schools and led to his appointment as a naval instructor during World War I. He also acted as a naval lieutenant during the Spanish-American War.

His exhaustive knowledge of music history and style included the purely theoretical and technical aspects of the art. Possessing an innate love for the human voice, Henderson made, throughout his life, in-depth studies in this field and loved to compare and discuss his findings with the great masters of the vocal art. A specialist in the intricacies of vocal technique and style, he was, for a time, well known as a singing teacher and coach, and for many years lectured on the history

of singing at the Institute of Musical Art, which, in 1923, became the Juilliard School of Music. Henderson's books on music include: The Story of Music (1889); Preludes and Studies (1891); How Music Developed (1898); What is Good Music? (1898); The Orchestra and Orchestral Music (1899); Richard Wagner, His Life and Dramas (1901); Modern Musical Drift (1904); The Art of the Singer (1906); Some Forerunners of Italian Opera (1911); Early History of Singing (1921). In addition, Henderson used music as a passport to purely literary pursuits. His book of poems, Pipes and Timbrels was published in 1905 and a novel, The Soul of a Tenor, was published in 1912.

James Gibbons Huneker, New York's "critical coloratura,"[16] was born in Philadelphia on January 31, 1857. Both his parents were prominent members of that city's cultural life and from an early age, Huneker found himself involved with, and influenced by, actors, painters, writers and musicians. During his teenage years, besides struggling through Latin literature in the original and Greek in translation, he gave a great deal of time to the study of Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, Bunyan, Bossuet and Lacordaire. Although his Irish mother had hoped he would find a career in the Church, he left America in 1878 for the Paris Conservatoire with hopes of becoming a concert pianist.[17] During this time, Huneker totally immersed himself in the art and culture of late nineteenth-century France.

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[16]Oscar Thompson, "An American School of Criticism," Musical Quarterly, XXIII/4 (October 1937), p. 433.

[17]His piano studies under Georges Mathias in Paris were followed by lessons with Rafael Joseffy in New York. Although Huneker's ambitions were not fully realized, he taught piano as an assistant to Joseffy at the National Conservatory in New York for ten years.

During the next three decades, he returned to Europe again and again, embracing its literature, painting and philosophy as well as its music.

Huneker actually entered the field of music criticism in his late teens to compensate for the boredom of studying law. He made his journalistic debut in 1875 with Philadelphia's Evening Bulletin, reviewing amateur string quartet performances. His first professional contributions were as music and drama critic for the Recorder (1891-1895) and for the Morning Advertiser (1895-1897), both New York daily newspapers. To a great extent he made his reputation as "The Raconteur" columnist for the Musical Courier (1889-1902). He was also music critic for the weekly magazine Town Topics (1897-1902) and at the New York Sun was successively music critic (1900-1902), drama critic (1902-1904), art critic (1906-1912) and general critic (1916-1917). For two years (1912-1914) he was foreign correspondent for the New York Times. This was followed in 1914 by a two year term writing the "Seven Arts" column for Puck, for which he became widely known in Europe as well as America. Subsequently he was music critic for the Philadelphia Press (1917-1918) and the New York Times (1918-1919). He was on the staff of the New York World from 1919 until his death in 1921 at the age of sixty-four.

Throughout his lifetime Huneker wrote prolifically and brilliantly about his many cultural encounters and experiences. His books include Mezzotints in Modern Music (1899); Chopin: The Man and His Music (1900); Melomaniacs (1902); Iconoclasts (1904); Egoists (1909); Promenades of an Impressionist (1910); Overtones (1904); Visionaries (1905); Franz Liszt (1911); Old Fogy (1913); The Pathos of Distance (1913); Ivory, Apes and

Peacocks (1915); New Cosmopolis (1915); Unicorns (1917); Bedouins (1920); Steeplejack (1920). A privately printed art romance entitled Painted Veils was issued shortly before his death. Several of his critical works were translated during his lifetime and successfully published abroad in French, German and Italian. The French Government made Huneker an officer of the Legion of Honour in recognition of his services to the literature and art of France among English-speaking peoples the world over. Throughout his professional lifetime, Huneker also strove to popularize, in America, modern European composers, notably Richard Strauss.

Richard Aldrich (1863-1937), a native of Rhode Island, was born into an American family of great wealth and social prestige. At Harvard, from which he graduated magna cum laude in 1885, he studied economics, with the hopes of following a career in political journalism. Nevertheless he retained, from early childhood, a great love for and devotion to music (he was, even as a youth, a highly accomplished pianist) and while at Harvard, studied under John Knowles Paine. Gradually, his interests turned more and more in the direction of music, eventually leading him to further study in Germany. Following his return to America in 1885, he joined the staff of the Providence Journal as reporter, editorial writer and editor of dispatches, as well as critic of art, drama and music. Four years on the Providence Journal were followed by two years as private secretary to United States Senator Dixon. While in Washington he pursued his interest in music and wrote the occasional music review for the Star. In 1891 he joined the staff of the New York Tribune as assistant to its distinguished music critic, Henry E. Krehbiel, from whom he received

valuable advice relating both to the practical and aesthetic problems of the music reviewer. During this period, Aldrich collaborated with Krehbiel on various projects, including the editing of the American articles for the second edition of Grove's Dictionary. He also gained experience in general reporting, as well as in the areas of art criticism and literary editing. In 1902 he joined the staff of the New York Times as its music critic on the recommendation of William Henderson, who had left for the Sun. With the exception of a year's leave for war service (from February 1918 to May 1919 he was captain in the United States Army Intelligence Division, General Staff, in Washington), he retained the Times position for two decades. In the spring of 1923, he became "critic emeritus" and, in that capacity, he contributed articles for several seasons. As well as his regular reviews and extended Sunday columns, Aldrich wrote several books on music. These include: Guide to Parsifal (1904); Guide to the Ring of the Nibelung (1905); Musical Discourse (1928); A Catalogue of Books Relating to Music in the Library of Richard Aldrich (1931);[18] and Concert Life in New York: 1902-1923 (1941).

Olin Downes, yet another critic on the staff of the New York Times, was born in Evanston, Illinois on January 27, 1886. He was educated, for the most part, in Boston. Although his formal education did not go beyond elementary school, he developed his inborn love of music, studying privately with a number of eminent musicians, including the German pianist

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[18]Aldrich possessed an extensive collection of books - one of the richest private collections of its kind. It remains intact in the possession of his heirs.

Carl Baermann (1839-1913), a student of Franz Liszt. While still in his teens, Downes taught piano, played the viola in a string quartet and worked as an accompanist in Boston vocal studios. At the age of twenty he became music critic for the Boston Post, where he remained for the next seventeen years. The thinning in the ranks of the "Old Guard" critics of New York provided him with further professional opportunity and in January 1924, he succeeded Richard Aldrich as critic for the New York Times. During the three decades he remained at this post (from 1924 until his death in 1955), Downes was also guest lecturer at such institutions as Boston University, the Lowell Institute, Harvard University, the Curtis Institute and the Metropolitan Opera Guild. He also acted as commentator for concerts at the Brooklyn Academy of Arts and Sciences (from 1932 to 1934) and at the Berkshire Music Festival (1937). He was also well known for his quiz programme during the intermissions of the Metropolitan Opera Saturday afternoon broadcasts. In 1939 he received an honorary doctorate from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and was, this same year, head of music programming for the New York World's Fair. Throughout his career, Downes was the author of numerous articles as well as large-scale works on music. His books include: The Lure of Music (1918); Symphonic Broadcasts (1931); Symphonic Masterpieces (1935); Sibelius the Symphonist (1956);[19] Olin Downes on Music (1957).

These five men were among the leading critics in New York during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Each brought to his

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[19]Olin Downes wrote books and innumerable articles championing the music of Sibelius, in regard to which he was recognized as an authority. He was made a Commander of the Order of the White Rose of Finland for his early appreciation of the composer.

assigned task not only a wealth of literary skills and accomplishments, but a background of extensive musical training that included the theoretical, the historical and the practical. As has been discussed, the early twentieth century was indeed a period of advancement in many fields. Musically speaking, the developments in instrumental performance, in styles of interpretation and composition demanded from the critic a quick ear and an open mind. Whereas music criticism frequently proved incapable of coming to terms with modern tendencies in composition, it fared much better with developments in the field of instrumental performance. A study of the criticism of solo violin performances in New York during this period offers a good overview, not only of the formation of modern performance styles and critical reaction to it, but the musical, literary and philosophical characteristics of the critics themselves. An analysis of the early recordings made by each of the prominent violinists considered in this paper has been included as a means of comparing critical reaction with actual recorded sound. James Creighton, Chief Archivist of the University of Toronto's record library and internationally-acclaimed scholar in the area of violin performance, was most generous in supplying me with historical recordings from his own Masters of the Bow label. With the exception of "lesser lights" such as Willy Burmester, Albert Spalding and Váša Příhoda, the violinists chosen for discussion are presented in order of their first appearance in New York after 1900. I have also included a discussion of the two late nineteenth-century giants of the violin, Joseph Joachim and Pablo Sarasate, as these men can be seen as a kind of foundation for what will be discussed throughout the paper. I would like to thank Professor Z. Koníček, Dr. A. Walker and Mr. James Creighton for their patient assistance in the preparation of this paper.

CHAPTER I

JOSEPH JOACHIM AND PABLO SARASATE

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Joseph Joachim (1831-1907) and Pablo Sarasate (1844-1908) represented "two poles of the axis around which the world of violin performance turned."[1] Joachim stood for the serious, the expansive and the profound in violin playing. Matters of instrumental technique and pure beauty of sound were merely the means towards an artistic end, never the end itself. Sarasate on the other hand was the master of unemotional euphony. His fame rested on extraordinary refinement and polish of technical details. Neither virtuosos however corresponded totally to the developing taste of the time, which yearned for a synthesis of technical perfection and intensity of expression.

Joseph Joachim was born in 1831 in the Austro-Hungarian village of Kittsee, the son of a Jewish merchant of modest means. In 1833 his family moved to Pesth (now part of Budapest) where, at the age of five, he began his violin studies under the polish virtuoso Stanislaus Serwaczyński (1781-1850). Within two years he appeared in public playing Franz Pecháček's solo work Variations on Schubert's Trauer Walzer and, with his teacher, Friedrich Eck's Double Violin Concerto. At the age of ten he entered the Conservatoire in Vienna, studying under Hellmesberger, Hauser and Böhm.

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[1]Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 79.

In 1843, after auditioning for Mendelssohn, he was accepted at the newly established conservatory in Leipzig, studying under Ferdinand David (1810-1873). In 1847 he was given appointments as teacher in the Leipzig Conservatory and assistant concertmaster of the Gewandhaus Orchestra. During these Leipzig years, a strong friendship developed between Joachim and Felix Mendelssohn and the latter's unexpected death in 1847 dealt him a heavy blow. In 1850 Joachim accepted an invitation by Franz Liszt to become concertmaster of the court orchestra in Weimar and shortly thereafter he found himself embroiled in a musical controversy that pitted the ideals of absolute music against those of the New Weimar School, with its new harmonies and forms. It soon became apparent that Joachim could not reconcile himself to the philosophies of Weimar and he was offended by contemptuous and disparaging remarks directed at Mendelssohn and Leipzig academicism by members of the Weimar establishment. He removed himself from the centre of this controversy by accepting, in 1853, a position at the court of King George V at Hannover, and it was here that he firmly established his reputation as a conductor, solo violinist, teacher and composer. The astounding success of his solo debut in Vienna eight years later is mirrored in the words of the influential Viennese critic, Eduard Hanslick:

> The most important event of the past week was the appearance of Joseph Joachim. . . . Joachim, young as he is, has for nearly ten years been considered as the greatest living violinist, and if Vieuxtemps is sometimes placed in comparison by his side, this standard only proves his greatness. . . . Joachim, with all his bravura, is so completely lost in the musical ideal, that one might almost describe him as having passed through the most brilliant virtuosity to perfect musicianship.

> His playing is great, noble and free. The smallest mordent does not suggest virtuosity; what in the usual solo playing is suggestive of vanity or a seeking for effect, is here completely effaced. The greatness of Joachim's artistic conviction holds one in such power, that it is only afterwards that one thinks of his extraordinary technique. What a power and fulness there is in the tone which Joachim's sure bow draws from his instrument. It seemed to us to be the first time that, in the most emphatic passages in the lower register of the violin, no trace of the peculiar scraping and jangling of the string was to be heard, which we have here and there perceived even in the playing of the most celebrated violinists. Joachim's trills are incomparable for purity and equality; his doublestopping is so confluent, and at the same time the parts are so clearly defined, that one could often imagine there were two players.[2]

As his fame as a soloist spread, Joachim began to attract a number of fine students, one of the most celebrated being Leopold Auer (1845-1930), who was destined to become the mentor of such twentieth-century luminaries as Mischa Elman, Efram Zimbalist, Jascha Heifetz, Nathan Milstein and Toscha Seidel. In 1868 Joachim moved to Berlin where, shortly afterwards, he was appointed the first director of the Königliche Hochschule für Musik, a new branch of the already existing Academy of Arts. For nearly forty years Joachim was the dominant string pedagogue in Berlin. Many aspiring violinists came to the German capital with the express purpose of studying with him, including the Hungarian Jenő Hubay (1858-1937), who in turn led such violinists as Franz von Vecsey, Emil Telmányi, Eddy Brown, Jelly d' Arányi and Joseph Szigeti onto the concert stages of Europe and America. Joachim remained in Berlin until his death in 1907.

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[2]Barett Stoll, Joseph Joachim: Violinist, Pedagogue and Composer (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1978), p. 69.

Joachim's career as a performer lasted an amazing sixty-eight years (from 1839 through 1907), though in latter years he concentrated on quartet and chamber music rather than the solo repertoire. His style of playing was in complete contrast to that of the majority of violin virtuosos of the nineteenth century. Though he could praise and admire the technical achievements of such players as Vieuxtemps, Ernst and Wieniawski, his own art was based on the purity and sincerity of his musical concepts:

> As a performer, Joachim considered himself a servant of music. It was his task to recreate the works of great composers. There was no personal vanity in his playing, no effort to dazzle the public with technical display or tonal sensuousness. His interpretation was spiritualized, rhythmic yet free, and totally involved in the stream of music. He had dignity and nobility, yet he was modest and unassuming. His tone was not large, but extremely pure and capable of infinite shadings. He used vibrato very sparingly and avoided sentimental slides. His aim was objectivity, and the composer's manuscript was his law; to change a composer's directive was unthinkable.[3]

Before Joachim's arrival on the concert platform, great violinists usually performed their own music, which was, of course, tailor-made to suit their technical abilities and highlight their personal styles. Although, by the mid nineteenth century, virtuosos were slowly beginning to take a guarded interest in the music of other composers, their main concern continued to be the manifestation of their own musical and technical abilities. Joachim, however, was willing to submerge his personality in the work of the

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[3]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 259.

composer, thereby serving the cause of great music through his own musicianship.[4] Even in the relatively early stages of his career, Joachim's sincere and intense musical integrity was noticed and was acknowledged as something new. During Joachim's 1859 concert tour of England, a reviewer for the Musical World wrote:

> So long as virtuosi walked (or galloped) in their proper sphere, they amused by their mechanical "tours de force," charmed by their finesse and did no great harm to musical taste. They were accepted "cum grano salis," applauded for their dexterity, and admired for the elegance with which they were able to elaborate thoughts in themselves of very slight artistic worth. But recently our "virtuosi" have been oppressed with a notion that, to succeed in this country, they must invade and carry by storm the "classics" of the art, instead of adhering exclusively as of old to their own fantasies and "jeux de marteaux." One composition after another by the great masters is seized upon and worried. If they were things of flesh and blood and could feel the grip, be conscious of the teeth and appreciate the fangs of these rapid-devouring "virtuosi," concertos, sonatas, trios etc. would indeed be in a pitiable condition. Happily, being of the spirit, they bleed not, but are immortal.
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> One great result attending Herr Joachim's professional visit to London is, that it enables both professors and amateurs opportunity after opportunity of studying his manner of playing the works of the giants of music. How Herr Joachim executes these compositions, how differently from the self-styled "virtuoso," how purely, how modestly, how wholly forgetful of himself. . . Not a single eccentricity of carriage or demeanour, not a moment of egotistical display to remind his hearers that, although Beethoven is being played, it is Joachim who is playing, ever escapes this truly admirable. . . and most accomplished of virtuosi.[5]

Many years later, London reviewer H.P. Morgan-Brown gave the following retrospective assessment of Joachim's distinctive sound and musical approach

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[4]Ibid., p. 259

[5]Leslie Sheppard, "Joachim - The Academic Virtuoso," The Strad, LXXXIX/1061 (September 1979), p. 479.

in an article for the December 1924 issue of The Strad:

> Joachim was sphinx-like, he maintained sphinx-like reserve in the musical feelings he outlined in his playing - an unfathomable patience and faith, a gracious mastery in expressing fine shades of massive emotion. His tone was cool, glassily transparent, pure and patient in effect. His tact of omission was unerring and subtle, and this enabled him to keep the mode of feeling he wished to evoke free from all alien disturbance. There was that in his peculiar tone which sent a tremor of dim religious gloom through one's heart - just the feeling which strikes one entering under the shade of tall dark pines.[6]

By the same token, not everyone was totally enamoured with Joachim's playing, as can be seen in an 1889 review by George Bernard Shaw for The Star of London:

> Joachim was never to me an Orpheus. Like all the pupils of Mendelssohn he has seldom done anything with an Allegro except try to make speed do duty for meaning. Now that he is on the verge of sixty he keeps up the speed at the cost of quality of tone and accuracy of pitch; and the results are sometimes, to say the least, incongruous. For instance, he played Bach's Sonata in C. . . . The second movement of that work is a fugue some three or four hundred bars long. Of course you cannot really play a fugue in three continuous parts on the violin; but by dint of double stopping and dodging from one part to another, you can evoke a hideous ghost of a fugue that will pass current if guaranteed by Bach and Joachim. . . . Joachim scraped away frantically, making a sound after which an attempt to grate a nutmeg effectively on a boot sole would have been as the strain of an Aeolian harp. The notes which were musical enough to have any discernible pitch at all were mostly out of tune. It was horrible - damnable! Had he been an unknown player, introducing an unknown composer, he would not have escaped with his life. Yet we all - I no less than the others - were interested and enthusiastic. We

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[6]H.P. Morgan-Brown, "Wilhelmj, Joachim, Sarasate and Ysaÿe," The Strad, XXXV/416 (December, 1924), p. 520.

> applauded like anything; and he bowed to us with unimpaired gravity. The dignified artistic career of Joachim and the grandeur of Bach's reputation had so hypnotized us that we took an abominable noise for the music of the spheres.[7]

Throughout Joachim's career, negative reactions to his playing almost always centered around problems with intonation, and reviews of his playing in the latter years indicate that by 1900 his intonation was not at all reliable.[8] His recordings, believed to have been made between June 25 and June 27, 1903 (shortly before his seventy-second birthday), though primitive in sound, do not generally support this criticism.[9] With the exception of some elaborate double-stopped passages in the Bach, the intonation is surprisingly clean. One of the most striking features of his playing is the absence of vibrato, thus confirming written reports that vibrato, and therefore richness of sound, were not salient characteristics of his playing. Despite the fact that in these recordings there is little evidence of any attempt to produce or project a singing tone, the Hungarian Dance No. 2 by Brahms is marked by high-spirited and propulsive playing,

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[7]George Bernard Shaw, London Music in 1888-89 (New York: Vienna House, 1973), pp. 331-332.

[8]Barrett Stoll, Joseph Joachim: Violinist, Pedagogue and Composer (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1978), p. 117.

[9]Johann Sebastian Bach, Sonata No. 1 in G minor, Adagio (1st movement) BWV 1001; Partita No. 1 in B minor, Bourrée (7th movement) BWV 1002. Johannes Brahms, Hungarian Dance No. 1 in G minor (arranged for violin and piano by Joachim); Hungarian Dance No. 2 in D minor (arranged for violin and piano by Joachim). Joseph Joachim, Romance in C major: originally recorded by W. Sinkler Derby and recently brought together on Masters of the Bow, MB 1019. These represent the only listed recordings of Joseph Joachim.

thus lending support to American violinist and critic Henry Roth's statement that "even without a modern vibrato, Joachim could play with red-blooded vigour."[10] More important, however, is the sincerity of purpose that is evident in these five recorded examples. There is no sign here of either virtuosic display or emotional affectation. The Bach is played in a straightforward, intellectual fashion and the Hungarian Dances are played with agility and spirit. His own Romance proves, however, to be his downfall. In keeping within the bounds of academic restraint, he renders sterile what one assumes was, in its conception, a "romantic" work.

In general it can be said that Joachim inaugurated what was to be a new era in the art of violin performance - the era of interpretation. By foresaking the well-worn paths of virtuosity, he offered to the concert-going public, honest, sincere and carefully-thought-out interpretations of the great masterpieces of the violin literature. He became a kind of prophet of truth, regardless of the fact that the European audiences were not quite ready for his musical puritanism. Only in German-speaking countries and in England did he receive any great amount of popular approval. His immediate, and probably greatest, competitor was Pablo Sarasate, who, through his extraordinary displays of virtuosity, was better attuned to the public taste of the time.

According to the Hungarian violinist and pedagogue Carl Flesch, the modern obsession with sound technical precision and reliability dates from

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[10]Henry Roth, "On 'Masters of the Bow'" The Strad, LXXXVII/1041 (January 1977), p. 763.

the performance years of Pablo Sarasate. Before Sarasate, a display of frothy brilliance was the main attraction of the violin virtuoso, with accuracy of somewhat secondary importance. His extraordinary technical accomplishment was cause for considerable rethinking both in terms of what the virtuoso should offer to his audiences, and what audiences could demand from the virtuoso.

Pablo Sarasate (1844-1908) was born in Pampelona, Spain and began his violin studies at the age of five under the scrupulous guidance of his father. He later studied under Manuel Rodríguez in Madrid. From 1856 to 1859 he studied at the Conservatoire in Paris under Jean Alard (1815-1888). In 1859 he began a concert tour of Spain, followed shortly thereafter by performances in Italy, North and South America, and the Orient. His sensational debut in Vienna in 1876 marked the formal beginning of a new epoch in violin playing.

According to contemporary sources, Sarasate's character was not one blessed by genuinely deep emotional feeling, and his playing reflected this. Joseph Szigeti, who heard Sarasate play in 1906 or 1907, recalled his "fixed gaze beyond the heads of the audience and a feeling that he was somewhat absent from, and not deeply involved in, the music."[11] A review by London's George Bernard Shaw gives the same impression:

> He played Mendelssohn's Concerto last night. But I had as lief hear him play "Pop Goes the Weasel" as any classic masterpiece; and what is more, I believe he would himself just as soon play one as the other. . . . He never interprets

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[11]Joseph Szigeti, Szigeti on the Violin (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979), p. 170.

> anything; he plays it beautifully and that is all. He is always alert, swift, clear, refined, certain, scrupulously attentive and quite unaffected.[12]

A true virtuoso of his day, Sarasate was strongly opposed to the idea of playing a concerto in which the soloist is not at all times the dominating force. In a letter to German violinist, teacher and musicologist Andreas Moser (1859-1925) he wrote:

> Leave me alone with your symphonic concertos like the Brahms. I won't deny that it is pretty good music, but do you really think I'll be so insipid as to stand there on the stage, violin in hand, to listen while the oboe plays the only melody in the Adagio?![13]

In his Memoirs, Carl Flesch states that Sarasate's vibrato was broader than had hitherto been customary in the nineteenth century. This suggests that his tone was probably more "sensuous" in quality than that of his predecessors. The American violinist Albert Spalding (1888-1953) who, as a student in Florence, frequently heard Sarasate play, mentions this unusual tonal quality, but again, the inadequacies of his interpretative skills seem to be foremost in the writer's mind:

> Sarasate was a bewitching violinist. His prodigious facility was coupled with an elegance of style impossible to describe. His tone had a silvery sheen and a piercing sweetness. There must, however, have been a curious quirk in his musical approach, for here you had the paradox of a player who made trivial music sound important, and deep music sound trivial. He played Beethoven with the perfumed polish of a courtier who doesn't quite believe what he is saying to Majesty. But when he reached a piece like La fée d'amour, by Raff (hardly ever performed nowadays) or his own Spanish Dances,

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[12]George Bernard Shaw, London Music in 1888-89 (New York: Vienna House, 1973), p. 132.

[13]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 237.

> he was completely in his element. The violin sang like a thrush, and his incomparable ease tossed aside difficulties with a grace and insouciance that affected even his gestures. There was a kind of studied sophistication in the way he tripped onto the stage aping the airs and graces of Watteau's L'Indifferent. I don't think I ever heard a forte passage from his bow, his palette held pastel shades only.[14]

On the other hand, Sir George Henschel (1850-1934), first conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, gives unqualified and enthusiastic approval to an 1877 performance of the Mendelssohn Concerto:

> Altogether the Cologne Festival of that year was of a somewhat international character, for Spain too, was represented by one of her most famous sons, the matchless Pablo de Sarasate. His interpretation of the Mendelssohn Concerto came to German ears like something of a revelation, creating a veritable furor , and indeed I doubt if in lusciousness of tone, crystalline clearness of execution, refinement and grace, that performance has been or ever will be surpassed.[15]

Spalding's brief reference to Sarasate's "palette of pastel shades" holds great significance in an assessment of his overall tone production. Violin enthusiasts of the nineteenth century, still accustomed to the scraping sounds of virtuosic fiddlers, were shocked by the apparent lack of friction in Sarasate's tone. After carefully observing his technique over a period of time, Carl Flesch testified to being particularly intrigued by Sarasate's bow, which appeared to cling "constantly and firmly to the exact middle between the extreme regions of the bridge and the fingerboard," rarely approaching either for the sake of piano or forte passages.[16]

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[14] Albert Spalding, Rise to Follow (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1943), p. 36.

[15] George Henschel, Musings and Memories of a Musician (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919), p. 166.

[16] Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 43.

Sarasate's recordings date from 1904 - four years before his death.[17] Despite their own tonal drawbacks, they show him in good form and clearly demonstrate why Sarasate was considered spellbinding by audiences of his time. Although emotional projection remains cool and at times even superficial by modern standards, the degree of technical achievement demonstrated here is astounding. Finger and bow dexterity amaze the listener and intonation is impeccable. In general, the playing is marked by exceptional clarity of sound, despite the fact that tempos are at times extraordinarily fast. Most of the works he recorded give ample opportunity for technical display. Trills, double stops, double-stopped runs, harmonics, left hand pizzicato and innumerable varieties of bowing are all executed with panache and finesse. Somewhat reminiscent of an étude or finger exercise, however, is his high-speed performance of Bach's Prelude from the E major Partita for solo violin. His playing here suggests that music of this nature was alien to his temperament, that he had neither affinity nor affection for it.

It has been said that the Spanish virtuoso Pablo Sarasate exercised both positive and negative effects on the art of violin playing. On the one hand his influence on the technical development of violin playing was nothing short of epoch-making. Frequently touted as "never having played an out-of-tune note," his unswerving demand for purity of intonation raised

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[17]Johann Sebastian Bach, Partita No. 3 in E major, Preludio (1st movement) BWV 1006. Frédéric Chopin, Nocturne No. 2 in E-flat major (arranged for violin and piano by Sarasate). Pablo Sarasate, Caprice (from Introduction and Caprice-Jota, Op. 41); Caprice basque, Op. 24; Habanera, Op. 21 No. 2; Zapateado, Op. 23 No. 2; Introduction and Tarantelle, Op. 43; Miramar-Zortzico, Op. 42; Zigeunerweisen, Op. 20. All recordings recently brought together on Masters of the Bow, MB 1003.

the technical level of violin playing to unimagined heights. It was the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe who stoutly insisted that it was Sarasate "qui nous a appris à jouer juste." On the other hand, the far-reaching effects of his playing can be considered detrimental to the expressive and interpretative aspects of violin performance:

> His continually mild, passionless, smooth, eely tone production brought into fashion a certain worldly-wise, weary elegance, whose hypnotic effect on the oncoming young violinists was almost irresistable until Ysaÿe's appearance. His influence was so enduring that everybody who had once succumbed to it found it thereafter extremely difficult to free himself from it.[18]

Flesch refers to Sarasate as "the ideal embodiment of the salon virtuoso" yet readily admits that as one of the greatest and most individual figures of the nineteenth century, "the history of modern violin playing cannot be imagined without him."[19]

Thus it can be seen that Joseph Joachim and Pablo Sarasate, the two reigning monarchs of the violin world in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, were the direct antithesis of each other. Throughout his career Joachim placed profundity of spirit and musical integrity over what he considered to be the more mundane concerns of technical perfection and tonal glitter. Sarasate, with his unrivalled purity of intonation, lightning dexterity and euphony of sound (if superficial musical inclinations) stood boldly and securely at the opposite end of the performance pole. Neither, however, played with the vibrant intensity of tone that was soon to develop

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[18]Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 43.

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 43.

into one of the major performance concerns of the twentieth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, the musical world was ready for the artist who could combine technical mastery with a new beauty of sound, and, furthermore, add to violin playing in general, a wider dimension of impassioned emotionalism.

CHAPTER II

HENRI MARTEAU

The French violinist Henri Marteau (1874-1934) was the first important violinist to draw his bow in the concert halls of New York in the new century. He was born in Rheims of a French father and a German mother, and although he spent most of his life vacillating (both physically and emotionally) back and forth between his parental nations, his schooling was entirely French. Though for the most part a pupil of Hubert Léonard (1819-1890), he entered the class of Jules Auguste Garcin (1830-1896) at the Paris Conservatoire in 1891 and became first-prize winner there in 1892. According to Carl Flesch, Henri Marteau was regarded, at the turn of the century, as one of the finest violinists of his time. Reviews emanating from his New York appearances during the first decade of the new century suggested a general stylistic trend towards the performance theories of Joseph Joachim, emphasizing the importance of interpretation over virtuosic display. In reviewing a joint recital by pianist Vladimir de Pachmann and Henri Marteau, the Times critic, William Henderson, was quick to pinpoint the important differences between the two artists:

> M. Marteau is an artist of such warmth of style that perhaps the greatest interest of the afternoon was in noting the contrast between his manner of playing and that of the pianist. The one [Marteau] was all fire and sincerity and the other [de Pachmann] was all finish and search after effect.[1]

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[1] Times, March 29, 1900.

Later in the same review, a discouraged Henderson formally registered his complaint with regards to the performance style of de Pachmann, while at the same time casting some aspersion on the musical taste of the New York public:

> It is too late in the history of the world to say anything new in these columns in regard to the piano playing of M. de Pachmann. It may be sufficient to record at this time that his work yesterday afternoon was marked by all the wonderful mastery of finger technique and the ravishing beauty of tone which always are to be found in his performances. It is a pity that he deems it advisable to indulge in antics at the piano and to take liberties with compositions so well known to every schoolgirl as the D-flat waltz of Chopin. But peculiarities of this kind have been commented on here and elsewhere ever since M. de Pachmann first revealed himself to Americans and he has not yet seen fit to change his methods. Probably as long as the public continues to applaud his pretty playing, in spite of his whimsies, he will be the same Pachmann.[2]

Marteau's remarkable "breadth of tone, warmth and elegance of style, continence and dignity" were obviously to be preferred. On the other hand, Henderson was not unappreciative of the virtuosic capabilities of the French violinist:

> In the Wieniawski selection he displayed the most brilliant and dazzling technique and quite carried away his hearers by the splendid dash and spirit of his performance.[3]

During Marteau's performance years in New York, however, frequent mention was made of poor intonation. It would appear that, like Joachim before him, Marteau was willing to sacrifice technical perfection for the sake of important interpretive effects. Henry Krehbiel, the only violinist in the

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[2]*Times*, March 29, 1900.

[3]*Times*, March 29, 1900.

group of critics studied, was the most vocal with regards to such matters:

> Unfortunately for the first movement [Beethoven's Violin Concerto], M. Marteau seemed in it to be striving for breadth and willing to sacrifice purity of intonation for the sake of attaining it. So marked was his departure from intervallic justness that one might almost have thought at the beginning that he had neglected to set his tuning pegs with exactness.[4]

In general, New York reviews suggested that Marteau's tone was distinguished by purity, fullness, timbre and modulation, though Flesch felt that it was somewhat marred by a "slow and slack" vibrato. His bowing, though heavy, was "physiologically correct and a completely serviceable medium for his kind of feeling."[5] He was highly regarded as an interpreter of Mozart, and his performances of the Mozart violin concertos were distinguished by "simple, noble and pure feeling."[6] Marteau is said to have reached his highest powers around the age of thirty (1904). In 1908 he was appointed successor to Joachim as principal professor of violin at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, but from this time on he, according to Flesch, suffered an uninterrupted decline in his powers as a violinist. Richard Aldrich of the New York Times gave some indication of Marteau's "growing weakness" as early as 1906:

> His Bach playing is broad and big. In the Chaconne [D minor Partita] he obtained some magnificently full sonorities and made clear the various kinds of contrapuntal treatment it contains. Unfortunately his tone, never nowadays sensuously pleasing, was especially rough at times.[7]

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[4]Tribune, March 3, 1906.

[5]Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 90.

[6]Ibid., p. 90.

[7]Times, April 10, 1906.

In the eyes of Carl Flesch, Marteau's premature decline as a performer was a result of his associations (both before and after his appointment at the Hochschule) with the German school of violin playing:

> He succumbed all too easily to insinuations and did not hesitate to trim his sails to the wind. . . . He was much too easily influenced not to be restricted in his artistic development. Andreas Moser attempted to persuade him to change his bowing technique, and also subtly to influence his interpretations, to Germanize him. The charming and healthily sensual Frenchman, full of "joie de vivre" was to transform himself into a stern and conscientious German "classic". . . . Marteau was thrown out of his natural course, disorientated; he had aided and abetted a falsification of his own personality. What, around 1900 had been the characteristic and partly most attractive elements of his style had largely vanished ten years later.[8]

Marteau did not appear again in New York after the spring of 1906. His solo career was seriously damaged in 1914 due to the outbreak of hostilities between France and Germany. A Frenchman teaching in Berlin, he was a deserter in the eyes of the French, and an enemy alien in the eyes of the Germans. He eventually moved to neutral Sweden and became a Swedish citizen in 1920. In his remaining years he concentrated on a teaching career, without much notable success.

An analysis of the recordings of Henri Marteau reveals certain discrepancies between written reports and the actual sound of his playing.[9] First of all, contrary to the general impression established by the New York reviewers, Marteau's intonation, while not absolutely perfect at all times, remains remarkably clean throughout all of his recorded performances.

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[8]Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 91.

[9]The complete recordings (1912/1929-1932) of Henri Marteau have been reproduced on Masters of the Bow, MB 1020.

Secondly, whereas Flesch pinpoints Marteau's best years as those from 1898 and 1908 and laments the violinist's steady decline from 1908 on, these recordings, all made after 1912, show little evidence of this well-publicized "violinistic decay." His performance of the first movement Preludio of Bach's Partita No. 3 is a good illustration of a strong left-hand technique in combination with a well-schooled bow arm. His performance of the Brahms-Joachim Hungarian Dance No. 6 in B-flat major is most impressive technically and he concludes Sarasate's Habanera Op. 21 No. 2 with a dazzling display of digital virtuosity. His two recordings of Sarasate's Carmen Fantasia Op. 25 show him in top technical condition and provide excellent illustrations of his virtuosic capabilities in the bravura repertoire. It is interesting to note that the second group of recordings, made up of those produced between 1929 and 1932, offers more evidence of Marteau's technical capabilities than do the 1912 recordings. This is hardly in keeping with assertions regarding the decline of this French virtuoso.

On the basis of recorded evidence, it is possible to interpret such criticism as a reflection of the developing ideals of twentieth-century violin playing. To modern ears, Marteau's playing does not support the impression offered by early reviews of his New York performances. Whereas articles from the year 1900 speak of Marteau's remarkable breadth and beauty of tone, and his warmth and elegance of style, the modern listener is struck, first of all, by his extremely dry tone, which lacks any semblance of either brilliance or intensity, partly due to the fact that there is little use of vibrato. Generally speaking, his playing is academic and prosaic, showing little sense of elegance and few attempts at

emotional projection. Such deficiencies are particularly evident in Schubert's Ständchen (arranged for violin and piano by Reményi), the Bach-Wilhelmj Air on the G-string and Benjamin Godard's Adagio pathétique Op. 128 No. 3. It is unlikely that these inadequacies are the result of his "decline" for, as mentioned earlier, his playing was in fine shape technically at this time. They are more likely representative of deficiencies in his whole musical approach and it is probable that they were as much a part of his playing in 1900 as they were when the recordings were made. The reviewers who awarded Marteau unreserved accolades in 1900 likely based their judgments on standards familiar to the late nineteenth century. As the critics gradually became exposed to more progressive styles of violin playing, their measurements changed and players like Marteau were left behind. Nevertheless, Marteau's 1929-1932 recordings, relatively free of the misplaced portamentos that liberally graced his earlier recordings, suggest that he too had begun to feel the influence of the more modern players. One such player who greatly influenced the course of twentieth-century violin development was the Austrian, Fritz Kreisler. Though only a year younger than Marteau, Kreisler belonged, musically speaking, to an entirely different generation.

CHAPTER III

FRITZ KREISLER

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962) began his first important American concert tour in December of 1900. He had previously performed in New York on November 10, 1888 at the age of thirteen, during the course of a shared concert tour with the celebrated pianist Moritz Rosenthal. The critics at that time responded with only mild enthusiasm, as most saw him as another in a long line of European child prodigies, ultimately destined for musical oblivion. At the age of seven, Fritz Kreisler had been admitted to the Vienna Conservatory, where he studied under Joseph Hellmesberger, Jr. (1855-1907). At the age of ten he was accepted as a student at the Paris Conservatoire, entering the class of Belgian violinist Lambert Massart (1811-1892), who had taught Wieniawski. Kreisler later recalled that, as a teacher, Massart laid stress on emotional projection rather than the actual techniques of violin playing. Kreisler graduated from the Conservatoire in 1887 at the age of twelve, having achieved First Prize in violin. This was followed a year later by his first concert tour in America, a tour which was uneventful, both financially and artistically. Upon his return to Vienna, Kreisler abandoned the violin to pursue a career in medicine. This unsuccessful venture was followed by a year of army service (1895-1896), after which he returned once again to his chosen instrument. In 1900 he returned to the United States for a second concert tour, making his debut at Carnegie Hall on December 7 playing Max Bruch's _Concerto in G minor_ with the Philharmonic Orchestra, and an orchestrated version of Tartini's _Sonata_

in G minor (Il Trillo del Diavolo). Although cautious in his initial assessment, William Henderson, writing for the New York Times, was quick to realize that Kreisler had successfully made the precarious transition from boy fiddler to mature artist:

> It is sufficient to say that the young man returns to us a full-fledged artist, with a big, though not perfectly pure tone, abundant technique, and a warm, if somewhat exaggerated style.[1]

Kreisler's first solo recital, on December 19, 1900 gave the New York critics ample opportunity to take measure of his growth as an artist. His programme, well suited to the full revelation of his powers, included a suite by Bach, Vieuxtemps' Concerto in F-sharp minor and short pieces by Mozart, Nardini, Corelli and Chaminade. In his review of this performance, William Henderson offered a thorough assessment of Kreisler's playing, overlooking neither positive nor negative aspects:

> It is true that Kreisler is a technical wonder worker. He plays with great dash and assurance and attacks alarming difficulties with a boldness that must astonish more cautious players. He shows uncommon recklessness in rushing up the fingerboard to the high positions but his seemingly wild shots at harmonics only rarely miss their mark.
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> He plays a very fast and clear staccato and his double stopping is clean and generally accurate. It must be admitted however, that his intonation is not always impeccable. It has uncomfortable moments and his tone is big but neither noble nor melting. It is a heroic tone, and its robustness is well paired with the performer's general style of playing. The suave and serene do not appear to lie comfortably within the grasp of this violinist. He is happiest when he is storming the heights, when he can declaim in rhapsodical passages or flash along in chromatic trickiness and hazardous leaps. But behind all his work

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[1] Times, December 8, 1900.

> there is warmth of temperament which prevents his playing from descending to the level of mere technical display. His warmth is communicative and he should always be heard with interest, albeit the mature hearer will surely long for more of the repose and finish and authoritative poise of a refined art.[2]

Henry Krehbiel, failing to detect any "warmth of temperament" in Kreisler's playing, feared that his reckless spirit was threatening to overpower his sense of musical integrity:

> At the recital of violin music in Mendelssohn Hall yesterday afternoon Mr. Fritz Kreisler created the impression that he is inclined to trust to his great gifts rather than to the results of careful study for his effects. He played with fine dash and accomplished some notable things; but never gave the impression of serious artistic purpose, to say nothing of the finish which would seem to be at the easy command of so talented a technician and musician. His playing of Bach had little dignity and no repose.[3]

Kreisler's engagements of the 1901/1902 concert season elicited the same general response from the critics. While happy to acknowledge his "exquisite finish both in phrasing and accentuation," most remained skeptical when faced with his unusual tonal qualities and somewhat reckless violinistic behaviour. Upon his return to New York in January of 1905, however, Kreisler's playing showed evidence of some refinement and the New York Times' Richard Aldrich eagerly welcomed him with open arms:

> He has grown in every way - in technical power, in depth of feeling and poetic insight, in repose, in largeness of view, in breadth of sympathy that put him upon the level of the highest mastery. . . . If there ever was any of the dross of virtuosoship [sic] in Mr. Kreisler's artistic nature, he has purified himself of it; and he showed himself . . . as a true

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[2]Times, December 20, 1900.

[3]Tribune, December 20, 1900.

> interpreter in the highest sense, standing always sincerely for the music he was engaged with and concerned not at all with that which makes for display. . . . He plays with a delightful positiveness [sic] and virility. His interpretations abound in manifold poetic touches and rarely lose the sweep of line and the larger symmetry. He possesses the indefinable quality of style and there was stamped upon his playing always the mark of unquestionable authority.[4]

Henderson, though generally pleased with Kreisler's development, obviously sought more on purely artistic grounds than did his good-natured colleague:

> Mr. Kreisler made a valiant essay at it [the Brahms Violin Concerto]. His performance was what might properly be termed a splendid effort. It was beautiful violin playing . . . poetic and polished in all. Yet it missed the great note of profundity which makes the continued organ bass of Brahms' conception and it never soared into those lofty realms of ethereal serenity where the spirit of that wonderful genius sits in royal contemplation. . . . Mr. Kreisler was more successful with the larger part of the Beethoven concerto. . . . Yet even here there were arid spots that were not watered with the celestial dew of comprehension. . . . Kreisler's hot and rebellious temperament is still with him, but he has better control of it than of yore. High intellectual attributes seem to be still wanting in his playing.[5]

Reviews such as the above indicate that in these early years, Fritz Kreisler's playing did not take musical New York by storm. Many articles during the winter of 1905 testify to the fact that the audiences which gathered in the great concert halls of New York to hear Fritz Kreisler play were frequently "moderate" in size. The characteristics of Kreisler's playing which were later to be recognized as the reason for his world-wide success,

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[4]Times, January 4, 1905.

[5]Sun, January 4, 1905.

seemed, in these early years, to be the overall cause of public reticence and hesitation. A possible reason for this is the fact that Kreisler's playing was revolutionary and the musical world at the turn of the century was simply not ready for it. Critics, no less than the average listener, needed time to grow accustomed to it.

Most scholars and authorities on the art of violin playing agree that Kreisler was far from the greatest technician of his time. Hence it is no wonder that, during the years when many of his colleagues concentrated all their efforts on sterile instrumental virtuosity and digital perfection, reviewers constantly complained about his "poor" intonation. For Kreisler however, virtuosity was never an end in itself:

> Technique is decidedly not the main essential of the concert violinist's equipment. Sincerity and personality are the first main essentials. I don't believe that any artist is truly a master of his instrument unless his control of it is an integral part of a whole. The musician is born - his medium of expression is often a matter of accident.
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> To me, music is an entire philosophy of living. What I say in music is that part of my deepest inner being that can never be put into words. . . . One feels deeply in one's heart and one transfers that meaning into tone.[6]

The most unusual element in Kreisler's playing was his tone. As early as the mid-1890's, Carl Flesch was given some insight into Kreisler's originality in this area:

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[6]Louis P. Lochner, Fritz Kreisler (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1981), p. 91.

> His performance of this piece of saccharine [Adagio religioso by Thomé] was one of the strongest impressions in my life. Of religious feeling, to be sure, there was no trace: rather, it was a "chant d'amour lascif." It was an unrestrained orgy of sinfully seductive sound, depravedly fascinating, whose sole driving force appeared to be a sensuality intensified to the point of frenzy.[7]

In later years, Flesch defined the tone of the young Fritz Kreisler as the "personification of sin."[8] It is not difficult to imagine the consternation of a public faced with such throbbing intensity for the first time, and many rejected his style as being exaggerated, overwrought, unrhythmic and even unmusical.

The most logical explanation of Kreisler's unusual tonal qualities can be found in his use of vibrato. In his Gründliche Violinschule (published in Vienna in 1831), the influential German violinist and pedagogue Ludwig Spohr (1784-1859) encouraged the use of "vibrato" only in passionate passages and for the emphasis of all notes marked fz or >. He explicitly cautioned that vibrato "should neither be used too often nor in the wrong place."[9] From 1831 until the beginning of the twentieth century, this warning was generally respected in violin teaching. Although violinists before Kreisler (for example, Ysaÿe) had begun to use vibrato more and more, Kreisler is credited with being the first to employ its use constantly - not only in lyrical sections but in passage work as well. However, it was also the speed and the quality of his vibrato that separated him from his colleagues:

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[7]Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 118.

[8]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 297.

[9] Werner Hauck, Vibrato on the Violin (London: Bosworth & Co. Ltd., 1975), p. 18.

> Others could "shake their arms off" and never approximate the Kreisler sound. That is because Kreisler's vibrato was not a "shake" in the sense that that word is generally used to describe the vibrato movement, but an "impulse" fingertip quiver. And it was utterly flexible, devoid of any stiffness or angularity in sound projection. He was able to manipulate the impulse from finger to finger and position to position . . . and could sustain it the full range of the fingerboard.[10]

As explained by Flesch, Kreisler's continuous vibrato was the inevitable result of his highly individualistic need for an increased intensity of expression. His bowing was also a challenge to violinistic tradition. Exercising great economy in its usage, Kreisler played mostly in the middle of the bow, using short strokes in combination with slightly accentuated pressure.[11] He rarely used a flautando stroke, preferring rather the solid adherence of hair to string. For this reason he kept his bow hair unusually tight. All of these characteristics contributed to an uninterrupted intensity of sound as well as a powerful rhythmic vitality.

By 1910, New York audiences and critics had turned wholeheartedly to the new ideal of violin playing offered by Fritz Kreisler. Concert halls were now filled to the brim with cheering throngs and critics praised him as one who had grown "many sided in his sympathies and discernment," and who now possessed a "larger view of his art, a greater depth of poetic insight, a richer temperament and the technical equipment that goes hand in hand with higher artistic powers."[12] Even complaints about Kreisler's intonation had become conspicuous by their absence. During the month of

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[10]Henry Roth, "On 'Masters of the Bow'" The Strad, LXXXVII/1034 (June 1976), p. 151.

[11]Kreisler explained that he rarely used the tip of the bow because his arm was too short and he avoided the frog because he was afraid of damaging the corners of the violin.

[12]Times, October 23, 1909.

October, 1912, Kreisler was engaged for thirty-two American concerts in the course of thirty-one days. New York City's critics, in one loud, unanimous voice, sang of the warmth and breadth of his tone, the unapproachable beauty of his phrasing and the vigour, verve and rhythmic elasticity of his performances. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 halted Kreisler's career temporarily, as he was called into active duty by the Austrian army. By the end of 1914, however, he was back on the American concert stages, having been declared unfit for further military duty following an injury on the Russian front. American audiences welcomed the war-torn hero with long and hearty salvos of applause while the critics waxed poetic:

> The fine-spun beauty of his tone has warmed and deepened. The old suavity and smoothness have become a graver richness. The pile of the tone, so to say, has thickened. Its warmth is less bright, but soberly glowing. It is still the voice of instrumental song; but of song . . . that is the voice of human longing . . .
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> And this tone is the fruit of a technique that in itself has changed and ripened. It is as variously resourceful as it ever was and the end of its resources is the end of the resources of the violin. . . . But now into it has come a new mood of rhapsodic impulse, of creative fire. Under it the music undergoes a new birth.[13]

Reviews such as the following by Richard Aldrich became the norm in New York City and elsewhere:

> Mr. Kreisler played with the extraordinary distinction and vitality of style, the artistic warmth and the intensely musical quality that have so often been admired in him; and with all his fullness, beauty and searching quality of tone. Whatever he undertakes he makes beautiful, absorbingly interesting, touches it with ardent imagination and gives it poetic significance. He played yesterday with repose, sincerity,

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[13]Louis P. Lochner, Fritz Kreisler (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1981), p. 156.

> and intensity of style, with a fine sense of proportion and beauty of phrasing.[14]

In the eyes of America, no less than the rest of the world, Kreisler had reached the pinnacle of violinistic excellence:

> Until last night, Ysaÿe stood alone and exalted in our appreciation; now Kreisler stands with him, or he with Kreisler; in either case they stand together.[15]

By 1915, any negative comments made by the New York critics centered for the most part around Kreisler's programming. Kreisler had, throughout his career, been active as a composer and arranger as well as a violinist, and thus he had provided himself (and others) with a wealth of short, sometimes virtuosic, violin pieces which proved useful both as encores and programmed selections. These "ear-tickling" vignettes proved to be extremely popular with the vast majority of the listening public, though the guardians of musical taste frequently cautioned against over-doing a "good thing." Even the amiable Richard Aldrich was moved to register his complaints in this regard:

> He gave much that was interesting to music lovers of the more serious sort and much, perhaps too large a proportion of his program that delighted a much more easily satisfied taste. It need not be said that any one of these agreeable morsels was unworthy of an artist of Mr. Kreisler's powers. There was nothing that did not have some distinction, especially in his hands, but man does not live and thrive artistically on too many boxes of confectionary tied up with pink ribbons. They were of course rapturously received and in the meantime some of Mr. Kreisler's most ardent admirers were wishing that a catastrophe might happen to him in the shape of losing his mute.[16]

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[14]Times, December 31, 1914.

[15]Louis P. Lochner, Fritz Kreisler (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1981), p. 157.

[16]Times, December 13, 1915.

The Tribune's more aggressive Henry Krehbiel frequently accused Kreisler of allowing his penchant for musical trifles to spill over into his performances of more serious works:

> The beginning of the program had a dignified look in a sonata by Tartini and concertos by Vivaldi and Viotti, but in playing these classics Mr. Kreisler already opened his box of prettinesses, his crisp and piquant rhythms and bowing effects, the "nods and becks and wreathed smiles" which in his performances take the place of the strong grace with which we believe the composers thought they had filled their works.[17]

He also held Kreisler responsible for the fostering of a degree of musical immaturity among members of the listening public:

> To Mr. Kreisler, more than any other artist, belongs the credit (or responsibility) of having attuned the popular taste to pretty trifles. That training is the fruit of his mature popularity. It is enough to say that it reflects the spirit of the times. The reader may characterize it more fully if he feels disposed to do so; we shall not seek to destroy his delight in superficial titillation of his tympanum.[18]

Nevertheless, throughout Kreisler's career, a vast multitude agreed with Aldrich's conclusion that Kreisler's masterly performances of these small works more than made up for any triviality of content:

> Mr. Kreisler has been, perhaps fairly, charged with "favoring" these pretty trifles, but it would have been well for many young fiddlers to have heard how he performed them, with what musicianly sincerity, what finish of phrase, never a cheap twang at the strings, no making a bit of melody "showy" above its station.[19]

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[17] Tribune, October 27, 1919.

[18] Tribune, October 27, 1919.

[19] Times, December 6, 1920.

Aldrich's heir, Olin Downes, provided perhaps one of the best summations of the phenomenon that was Fritz Kreisler in his review of a January 1928 recital:

> His Bach was unconventional in certain details, especially when once he had warmed to his task. The rousing spirit of the familiar Gavotte was after a well-accepted tradition, but the performances of the beautiful Loure and the lively Gigue were inimitably Kreisler, and none other. There was nothing especially new in these revelations, which repeated the characteristics of many of Mr. Kreisler's interpretations. There was simply the innate, natural, simple but profound musicality of the man; the extraordinary charm which emanates from his personality and his art; the sense of clarity, ease, balance and unforced expressiveness which make him great whether he is playing a big piece or a small one. . . .
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> There is one Fritz Kreisler. When he is gone - and may we long be spared the event - we shall not see his like again. There are few more striking exemplifications on the platform of the sheer power of a musical personality. Mr. Kreisler has always had his peculiarities of technic and style, and even, as a general rule, certain slight flaws which lesser musicians have not in performance; yet he remains one of the greatest artists before the public and it is seldom that he fails to turn what he touches to gold.[20]

Fritz Kreisler began recording when the gramophone industry was in its infancy. From 1910 on, he recorded regularly with the Victor Talking Machine Company and although he was never completely satisfied with the results, he was able to approach the recording studio with the same "joie de vivre" that was characteristic of his concert performances. Eighteen of Kreisler's early recordings have been gathered together on the Masters of the Bow label, MB 1012, and with these, the listener is thrown into the modern world of violin performance. Fifteen of these early Kreisler recordings were made during or before 1915 and the other three were made in

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[20]Times, January 19, 1928.

the middle or late 1920's. All are taken from the Victor and HMV labels. In addition to his unique tonal quality, these recordings testify to Kreisler's remarkable sense of timing and rhythm, his masterful handling of the bow, his nobility of style and intensity of spirit, as well as his unabashed love of making music.

The listener who has dutifully steeped himself in the recorded sound of Henri Marteau can only be astonished by Kreisler's tone. Each and every note, no matter how short or how quickly played, is marked by an unforgettable richness, fullness and inner strength. He rarely pushes his tempos, almost as if to ensure that both he and his listeners have time to appreciate every note. A comparison between the recordings made by Marteau and Kreisler of Bach's Prelude from the Partita No. 3 in E major illustrates this well. Both were made around the same time, but the differences are the differences between nineteenth and twentieth-century playing. Marteau's performance, as we have already seen, is sure-fingered and strong. The intonation is, for the most part, clean and accurate, but with regard to beauty of tone, there is absolutely none. The tempo is extremely fast and the bowing is scratchy. Notes (seldom perfectly clear) tumble one over the other in a headlong race to the end. Kreisler's performance (for which he wrote a piano accompaniment) is the exact opposite. It is a highly disciplined, highly organized performance, marked by clean intonation and a strong sense of linear direction. The tempo, though unquestionably fast, is much more restrained than the one chosen by Marteau. Kreisler's remarkable tonal qualities are very much in evidence here and unlike Marteau's performance, each note, played from its very core, is

assured of its own importance and significance.

All the recordings on this disc are marked by an elegance, refinement and spirit unmatched by any violinist, before or since. Some vestiges of the old world (for example, the occasional slow, drawn-out portamento) are still in evidence, but on the whole, these performances speak of a new era in violin playing. The Tchaikovsky-Kreisler Chant sans paroles in F minor No. 3 illustrates Kreisler's technical precision and polish as well as his elegance of style. His harmonics, as sure and as accurate as any fully-bowed first position note, sparkle. The double-stopped passages of the Brandl-Kreisler Old Refrain are as strong and clean as single-note passages. Kreisler's performance of Jules Massenet's Méditation from the opera Thaïs provides an excellent example of his beauty and intensity of sound. He has no difficulty maintaining these qualities throughout, regardless of string or position. In the double-stopped passages of his own Caprice Viennois Op. 2, each voice, beautifully in tune, sings simply and naturally, in apparent disregard for the technical complexities of execution. The frisky peasant dance from Smetana's From my Homeland is played with a sense of exhilaration that is truly infectious. Despite vigorous bowings and frenzied passages, each note is clearly articulated with no evidence of strained "scrubbing." The flying staccatos in Kreisler's own Schön Rosmarin are played with tidy precision and possess the strength and control of "on-the-string" passages. The Grieg-Kreisler To the Spring provides an excellent example of Kreisler's evenness of vibrato on all strings and his ability to sustain tonal intensity in position changes. The warmth of tone he draws from his G-string is overpowering. Kreisler's performance of

Stephen Foster's Old Folks at Home is filled with poignancy, intensity and musical significance, despite its extreme sentimentality. Again, the G-string sound is indescribable. The Albéniz-Kreisler Malagueña in B minor and the Falla-Kochański Canción (both recorded in the mid-1920's) are perhaps too relaxed and restrained in tempo to achieve much semblance of the Spanish idiom, but the sound is beautiful nonetheless. The 1928 recording of the Dohnányi-Kreisler Ruralia Hungarica is marred by a few technical imperfections, particularly in terms of intonation, but the enthusiasm and intensity of the performance is such that the irregularities appear irrelevant.

Listening to these recordings, it is difficult to believe that the New York critics were justified in their complaints about Kreisler's intonation. With the exception of the Ruralia Hungarica the intonation on these recordings, all "one-take" performances, is excellent. In general, the disc provides ample illustration of Kreisler's almost unfailing ability to grasp each note at its very centre, its core. This quality, in combination with his intensity of vibrato and his agility of bow, results in the beauty and strength of sound which surprised audiences and critics alike at the turn of the century. Generally speaking, his performance style as illustrated in these recordings is an interesting blend of polished discipline and casual sentimentality. Never subservient to any composer's "intentions," Kreisler's personality is emblazoned on every bar of his playing. The academics complained that the composer's text was so firmly wedded with Kreisler's unique style, it was difficult to tell where one ended and the

other began. Hence he was never really a favourite of musical scholars.[21] Nevertheless, throughout his long career, Fritz Kreisler remained a firm favourite of almost everyone else,and his impact on twentieth-century violin playing remains immeasurable.

[21]Henry Roth, "On 'Masters of the Bow'" The Strad, LXXXVII/1034 (June 1976), p. 151.

CHAPTER IV

JAN KUBELÍK

Kreisler's major competition at the turn of the century came in the person of the Bohemian virtuoso Jan Kubelík (1880-1940). Kubelík arrived for the first time in America on November 28, 1901 amid a torrent of sentimental and sensational press coverage. Newspaper articles dealt with all matters of import, ranging from his nasty bout with seasickness during the eight-day voyage across the Atlantic, to the length of his hair. His instruments and the medals presented to him by European royalty preceded him to America and were placed on exhibition upon his arrival in New York. Kubelík's actions and mannerisms were carefully orchestrated to steal the hearts and minds of the New York audiences long before he even set bow to string, and the American press was quick to capitalize on as many examples of sentimental trivia as it could find:

> He also carries with him his first violin, which is little more than a toy. It was made by his father, who cut it out with a penknife. He has not used it now in fifteen years.[1]

Jan Kubelík had begun his study of the violin at the age of five and had made his first public appearance in Prague at the age of eight, playing a concerto by Vieuxtemps and some pieces by Wieniawski. The teacher who exerted the most influence on Kubelík was the Czechoslovakian pedagogue Ottokar Ševčík (1852-1934), with whom he studied for six years at the Prague

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[1] Times, November 29, 1901.

Conservatory. Ševčík's approach was based on the principle of separating the mechanical from the artistic aspect of performance. Primarily interested in the technical complexities of violin playing, he developed special exercises to strengthen finger and arm muscles and to achieve co-ordination of motions. These exercises were designed exclusively for efficiency; they were not meant to be musical. According to some violinists, they were "antimusical" and his fanatical methods, which demanded upwards of eight practice hours a day on the part of the student, crushed the musical sensitivities of many a young violinist. The Viennese violinist Wolfgang Schneiderhan (b. 1915), who also studied with Ševčík, gives the following brief profile of his famous teacher:

> Ševčík was like a man obsessed when it came to effective and technically polished violin playing. . . . He was a fanatic; he would have liked to make a Paganini out of every one of his students. His aim was - brilliance of effect (often at the expense of fidelity to the work), impressive violin position, unfailing technique, and the achievement of an international career.[2]

Kubelík, the greatest exponent of the Ševčík method, was undoubtedly his most famous student (or in the opinion of the French violinist Jacques Thibaud - his most famous victim). His stunning technical feats, as exhibited at his 1898 debut in Vienna, earned him the title "Paganini redivivus." His international career began in 1900 in London, where he quickly became the idol of England's high society, and where he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society. The only violinists to

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[2]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 396.

have received this honour before Kubelík were Joachim and Ysaÿe. Although his repertoire embraced most of the standard favourites of the time, Kubelík made his reputation by performing the music of Paganini and other composers of that style. Within two years, his pyrotechnical displays conquered the audiences of Vienna, Budapest, Paris and of course, London. His many successes included an Italian tour during which he received the Order of St. Gregory from Pope Leo XIII. Kubelík made his well-publicized New York debut in Carnegie Hall on December 2, 1901. Four thousand three hundred and sixty people crowded into the hall for the event - the largest paying crowd ever gathered there up to that time. While the audience was wildly enthusiastic, critical response was for the most part cynical, and reviewers seemed to delight in non-musical issues. Henry Krehbiel of the New York Tribune began by taking issue with the publicity surrounding the artist:

> Were all the incidents connected with his first appearance to be written down, the narration would occupy more time in the writing than the occasion allowed and fill more space than the occasion justified. An enterprising management has not permitted much that Jan Kubelik has done, outside of his lyings down and his gettings up, to remain unknown to the newspaper reading public during the last year. An enterprising management has indicated a desire to continue the policy of publicity here. It is a pretty appreciation of the notion that the world of today, in spite of all that is seen, said and written of its sordid commercialism, is still fond of a hero and needs only to be told with sufficient assiduity and emphasis that the hero is arrived, to believe the statement and adopt the attitude of adoration.[3]

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[3]Tribune, December 3, 1901.

The flamboyant James Huneker, writing at this time for the New York Sun, saw fit to direct his journalistic talents against the young virtuoso's appearance and manner:

> The newcomer, who has been heralded as a second Paganini, is a youth of interesting appearance. He is fragile, feminine-looking and his personality savors of the exotic. This girlish action is caught in his music, for he is desperately sentimental and saws passion of a "falsetto" sort into all his lyric episodes. Even old Spohr does not escape Kubelik's saccharine devotion. He trips daintily to the front of the stage and stands before his audiences, dark haired, the hair rolling over his collar, the face broad, slavic, the eyes dark and dreamy, of course.[4]

Later in the article, however, Huneker relates such observations to the overall musical approach of Kubelík's performance:

> And as it is in the physical, so it is with the psychical. He is a graceful technician, but never once sounds the note virile or stirs one below the average emotional varnish. A virtuoso, not a great violin artist, is Jan Kubelík.[5]

William Henderson of the Times was another who traced Kubelík's popularity to an extra-musical source:

> Jan Kubelik, whose advent has been heralded in the most excited language by cable and mail arrived in this city a few days ago and made his first appearance last night in the concert given at Carnegie Hall. That there was a large audience goes without saying. That there was also enthusiasm of the most voluminous and vigorous sort is a matter of course. Such things as large audiences and applause are not left to chance when a new musical performer makes a debut. Society, however, is not at the beck and call of managers and there was evidence last night that society had decided to interest itself in the newcomer. The "toasts of Bohemia" emptied themselves into the galleries and standing room. Hence there were cheers. . . . Care has been taken to make known the fact that her Majesty the Queen was overcome by Kubelik's

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[4]Sun, December 3, 1901.

[5]Sun, December 3, 1901.

playing and that London society had gone quite wild about him.

> A great deal of industry and money has been expended in getting such facts before the public. . . . Meanwhile their industrious and somewhat heated circulation has gone toward inspiring the musical cognoscenti with the suspicion that Kubelik was a mere fiddle trickster, a mountebank of the jumping bow and the sliding finger. It transpired last night that this suspicion was not far wrong. . . . As to his success, let a plain truth be told. He was taken up by the social set in London and made the fashion, and there was convincing evidence last night that society here intends to treat him just as he was treated in the capital of Edward VII. This means that no matter what musical connoisseurs may choose to think of the young man, no matter what the attitude of the general public may be, his future here is assured.[6]

Nevertheless, no one, not even Henry Krehbiel, could ignore the fact that from a technical point of view, Jan Kubelík's performance was astonishing:

> There were proofs incontrovertible not only of marvellous talent, but extraordinary genius. It is genius that is yet unclarified and unconscious of its true mission. But it is genius. His playing is full of demoniac daring and demoniac skill. He revels in vanquishing technical difficulties as if he were at play. . . . His double-stopping is impeccable and his intonation generally so. . . . The accord between his bow arm and his left hand is perfect, automatically perfect, and his tone is a miracle in its fullness and sonority; also in its purity and beauty when unforced.[7]

William Henderson described Kubelík's playing as a "catalogue of the technical tricks of violin virtuosi." As astonishing as they were, however, they lacked, in his opinion, subtlety and refinement:

> He has an extraordinarily large tone. He is apparently in love with it and accordingly often forces it, so that the bite of the frog of his bow is disagreeably audible and there is a certain amount of rasping of the strings, especially the fourth. . . . Double stopping in all its complications, harmonics and chromatics, octaves and double octaves, this youth handles with wonderful brilliancy. In short, he is what some German critics have dubbed a "finger hero." His bowing

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[6]Times, December 3, 1901.

[7]Tribune, December 3, 1901.

> is free and vigorous but it is used nearly all the time to produce a big tone. Of the more intimate witcheries of the pliant wrist and of the finer secrets of the pressure of the first finger of the right hand, Kubelik . . . has no high command or at least no tender love. He is a brilliant, dashing, astonishing performer, a Rosenthal of the violin, but not a Paderewski.[8]

James Huneker, while quite taken with Kubelík's technical gymnastics, was also quick to realize that underneath all of this, the violinist had, musically speaking, very little to say:

> Evidently the young man's enormous fiddle talent does not lie in the direction of the temperamental, the dramatic. When he attacked Spohr's famous Gesangscene, Kubelik's limitations became apparent. Here no marvellous agility of the left hand, no tricky bowing will save a violinist. It is naked music and unornamental, and must be exposed to the hearing without the artifices of rhetoric, the prestidigitation of the virtuoso. And the concerto [Spohr's eighth] was clearly executed . . . but the breadth, the nobility, the lofty idealism and passion of an Ysaye were missing. . . . At present the Bohemian may be called a virtuoso. In little things - technically difficult - things not demanding tonal breadth, deep musical feeling, or any intellectual capacity, he has rare mastery.[9]

Record crowds flocked to Carnegie Hall only five days later for Kubelík's second New York appearance. Violin recitals, even today, seldom draw the crowds that piano recitals draw. Hence the Kubelík phenomenon was an unusual one. However, the critics tenaciously maintained that Kubelík's audiences were not representative of New York's musical elite:

> Almost as large an audience assembled to Carnegie Hall yesterday afternoon to hear Kubelik play his violin as was there on Monday night when he made his debut. One would like also to record that it was more discriminating and more truly representative of New York's musical public. But whether he played well or ill, salvos of tremendous applause were his invariable reward, and when he finished a cheap but glittering

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[8] Times, December 3, 1901.

[9] Sun, December 3, 1901.

> paraphrase of the sextet in "Lucia di Lammermoor" smarting hands no longer sufficed. It was necessary to use the voice. The seeker of sensations, who has been repressing his emotions, who has been waiting for several years, has found a long-desired idol in this young Czech, and is going to make hay while the sun shines.[10]

Again Henderson found Kubelík wanting in areas of musicality:

> In the Bach air [from Suite No. 3 in D major] the youth was by no means dignified in style. There is no use trying to sentimentalize Bach; he will not stand it. The Beethoven number was simply stupid in Kubelik's hands.[11]

With his performance of works by Paganini, however, Kubelík gave the audience what it had really come to hear:

> Finally the boy came to the Paganini stuff - for stuff is just what it is. . . . Armed with it, Kubelik rattled off left-hand pizzicati with the greatest of ease. He played harmonics in double stopping as if they were first exercises. He distributed arpeggios over the entire fingerboard. He did tricks of double stopping with pizzicato accompaniment and hopped up and down from low positions to high ones and back again with the greatest agility. He dazzled his hearers with passages of combined bowing and pizzicati. It was all exceedingly clever, but it was not new and, still worse, it was not music. Nevertheless the audience went into raptures over it.[12]

Another well-known American critic, Henry Finck, who wrote for the Evening Post at this time, expressed his displeasure with Kubelík's particular brand of showmanship:

> But where there is so much to suggest the circus, would it not be well, for the sake of consistency, to have sawdust on the floor and peanuts for sale in the lobby?[13]

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[10]Tribune, December 8, 1901.

[11]Times, December 8, 1901.

[12]Times, December 8, 1901.

[13]Henry Roth, Master Violinists in Performance (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1982), p. 78.

Henderson frequently expressed concern that the New York public, having been dazzled by the performances of Kubelík, would take some time to adjust to the "true conception of violin playing." He felt confident, however, that no matter how many people would eventually jump onto the virtuoso's bandwagon, the truly musical among them would never really be fooled by the likes of a Kubelík.

Although the New York critics obviously had justifiable reasons for complaint, they seemed to minimize the unarguable fact that the violin "circus," just as the piano "circus" or any other kind for that matter, provides masses of people with entertainment. On its own level and in its own way, therefore, Kubelík's performance style was perhaps more justifiable than most critics at the turn of the century cared to admit. Surely the disciplined determination which is the usual prerequisite for attaining such supreme technical mastery merited some serious consideration and commendation, rather than the flippant, sarcastic statements that abound in these early reviews.[14] Although Kubelík used sensational effects to overwhelm his listeners, these effects were perfectly legitimate violinistically. In Kubelík's day there were numerous second and third rate technicians who rattled off difficult show pieces with little regard for accuracy. Kubelík on the other hand was a technician of honourable and thorough integrity. He practiced slowly, patiently and accurately, emphasizing at all times the importance of rhythmic precision. He never

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[14]Kubelík's virtuosity did not come easily. Practicing was an obsession with him and it is said that he worked up to twelve hours a day on his violin.

rushed his tempos. His runs were precisely timed and because of his extraordinary control, they seemed faster than they actually were.[15] By the time he had reached the height of his career (between 1900 and 1910) Kubelík had achieved an almost automatic perfection which was unfailingly reliable. Most critics seemed determined to ignore this achievement, however, preferring to dwell on nonessentials. Huneker insisted on nuturing his preoccupation with Kubelík's appearance:

> He has not the measured magnetism of Ysaye, nor as yet the glacial perfection of Willy Burmester; and he never draws from his instrument the penetratingly sweet tone of Sarasate. Yet - yet he is a dainty morsel for the ladies. He is pleasing to gaze upon. He is modest, dignified with a pale, sweet dignity that matches his neckcloth. . . . Feminine America, ever quick in its notation of the rare, the orchidaceous in personalities, has picked out Kubelik by preference. . . . Carnegie Hall looked like a Paderewski field day. And yet Jan of the tripping toes played no better, no worse than at his debut.[16]

Only occasionally were critics willing to look more deeply into the Kubelík phenomenon:

> Young Mr. Kubelik has already been described as a reincarnation of Niccolo Paganini. This is not fortunate for Mr. Kubelik, because it conveys to the minds of many persons the impression that the youth is a mere trickster of the fiddle. . . . Kubelik is not a mere technical juggler. He has extraordinary technical facility, to be sure, but he has something more. He has dash, vigor, brilliancy, incisiveness. He has a gorgeous tone. He has an instinct for the externals of his art. He is very young. At twenty-one he need not be expected to show maturity of style. Later in life he may care less for the externals and more for the internal beauty of music. Just now he is a young man rejoicing in his youth.[17]

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[15] Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 397.

[16] Sun, December 19, 1901.

[17] Times, December 8, 1901.

Even so, the unnamed author of the above (who in style and tone sounds more like Richard Aldrich than William Henderson) felt obliged to add that Kubelík "shows no perception of the deeper properties of his art. He is a violinist for the Philistines and the Philistines will throw themselves at his feet." He concludes by stating that while Kubelík's offering is indeed an art, it is nonetheless "a low order of art."

It is significant that in his programming, Kubelík showed a decided preference for works that enabled him to exhibit his technical might. Much of this music was deemed unworthy of serious attention and hence, "however the crowd may receive him, the musician, professional and amateur, cannot accept him as a serious artist until he plays better music than he has yet put on his programme."[18]

Despite all the complaints registered by the musical press against Kubelík, there can be no question that this young violinist was a tremendous success wherever he went, not only in America but throughout Europe as well. Thus perhaps the "musical inadequacies" should more properly be placed at the feet of Kubelík's audiences, managers and agents. In a brief assessment of Kubelík's first month in America, William Henderson (in an article entitled <u>The Unmusical Season</u>) brought to light the materialistic and commercial sides of the issue:

> On Wednesday, young Mr. Kubelik, a much misused violinist, gave another exhibition of his technical skill. It may be that somewhere in the makeup of this peculiar youth there is

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[18] <u>Times</u>, December 19, 1901.

> a divine spark of real musicianship, but it is carefully screened by the methods of his managers. The boy is being exhibited as a musical curiosity and he is being heard and applauded by thousands of people who are unfamiliar with artistic violin playing and who have no standards.
>
> Kubelik's performance of the Beethoven violin concerto has been reserved for tonight's concert at the Metropolitan, when it will be heard by a miscellaneous Sunday night audience and applauded to the echo. Then the news will be sent out over all the telegraph wires East and West that Kubelik achieved a tremendous success in New York with this standard work. Truly we live in a great country. Musical managers are learning a lesson from this Kubelik business, which, if it means anything at all, means that the right way to make money out of music is to pretend that you are a freak and appeal to the unmusical masses. It is a pity to see this done in the case of Kubelik, for there is reason to believe that the boy himself is honest and would prefer to pose as an artist. But he will be shown that in this country the person who prefers the preservation of his self-respect to the rapid accumulation of dollars is regarded as fit for incarceration in an asylum.[19]

In another article entitled Twentieth Century Musical Taste, Henderson makes the following assessment of the state of solo performance in New York:

> Piano playing stands in public esteem very high but the demand of our audiences is extortionate. Virtuosity has supplanted sound and scholarly art. In other words, for the playing of a good pianist who offers a plain and intelligible interpretation of masterpieces there is no fondness. The public must have a wonder-worker of the keyboard or nothing. This is not a healthful state of taste, but it is the state into which taste is likely to fall at any time in regard to any branch of art in which the artist can claim precedence to his interpretation. Violin playing is regarded in the same way. The Kubelik craze is an exhibition of this sort of taste. No one seems to care for the music the boy plays, but only for his extraordinary displays of technic and brilliancy of style.[20]

At the end of Kubelík's first season in America (during which time he had given over seventy concerts to large and astonished audiences), critical

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[19] Times, December 22, 1901.

[20] Times, January 5, 1902.

opinion had not changed at all:

> Nothing constructive can be added to what has already been written about Kubelik. That he has real genius in the management of his difficult instrument has been evident since the first moment he began to play in this city. His stopping is so sure in the most intricate passages, his tone so beautiful and his technic in general so brilliant that he stands in the first rank of virtuosi. His performance of harmonics is the most remarkable ever exhibited here. And withal there are in his playing dash and spirit which are thoroughly invigorating. But of the deeper qualities of musical insight he has not shown any evidence. He is a dazzling, captivating performer but he is not the proclaimer of any such musical gospel. His playing is of the kind which achieves easy success with a bewildered public but it carries no conviction to the more serious observers of musical art.[21]

Upon his return to New York in November of 1905, Kubelík, though still a magician of fingerboard and bow, showed signs of development in overall artistic power.

> His performance last evening showed unmistakably that he has reached a higher standard in some things and that his artistic horizon in some respects is wider than it was. . . . Mr. Kubelik's tone has gained in warmth and expressiveness and variety of color. It was always a large tone but it used to be cold. It now has body, roundness and fullness throughout the compass of the instrument and he has it at his command in all nuances and shades of expression. . . . In his playing of the Mozart concerto, he showed a style of unaffected sincerity and strength. It was a performance at once graceful and dignified.[22]

Nonetheless Richard Aldrich, the author of the above, was forced to admit that there was a certain restraint in Kubelík's performance of the Mozart concerto, a restraint that immediately disappeared when he began Wieniawski's more brilliant concerto. Yet again he attracted an audience more interested in his personality than in the music he played. He was of course frantically applauded - usually at wildly inappropriate times. Henry Krehbiel's review

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[21] Times, January 5, 1902.

[22] Times, March 22, 1902.

of this same recital suggests a change of heart on the part of this usually stern critic:

> It is not given to the people of New York often to hear such a performance of a classic work as Mr. Kubelik offered last night when he played a concerto in D major by Mozart. . . . Perhaps more depth and emotionality of tone might have warmed the hearts of the listeners more, but for beauty, absolute in quality of tone, in symmetry of phrase, in equability of timbre from the lowest tone within the utterance of the instrument, up to the highest reaches, in a sustained and easy grace, in a reposefulness which banished all thought of effort, Mr. Kubelik's performance was impeccable. It was much easier, but also much less profitable, to marvel at his mastery of the bristling difficulties of Wieniawski's D major concerto which followed, but the artistic nature in the wonderful young Bohemian disclosed itself paramountly in the performance of the Mozart piece, with its gentle protest against the erratic tendency of the art of the modern violinist. It was classic in everything except its interpolated cadenzas. . .[23]

Nevertheless, despite the obvious signs of improvement, Kubelík, always the technical virtuoso, was still found wanting in areas of interpretation and emotional projection:

> Mr. Kubelik's tone sounded even more beautiful and freely produced than it did at his first concert. Yet when he comes to music of an emotional character, he seems not yet able to strike deeply into the heart of the mystery. Thus in the nocturne by Chopin . . . he sang charmingly on his instrument but there was little of the poignant intensity of the melody liberated from it.[24]

When Kubelík returned to New York for the 1907/1908 concert season, William Henderson, now on the staff of the Sun, remarked tersely that he could find no evidence of any progress in his playing - that he remained a technical virtuoso hampered by the unfortunate inability to express

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[23]Tribune, December 1, 1905.

[24]Times, December 3, 1905.

himself musically and emotionally. Richard Aldrich was, however, much broader in his assessment of Kubelík, and he was thus better able to appreciate the positive qualities of the young virtuoso without in any way denying the negative aspects of his playing:

> Mr. Kubelik's artistry is of the most remarkable kind. He is not a deeply moving player; he has not the power of touching profoundly and immediately the hearts of his listeners, nor of laying hold of the inner mystery of the greatest music. There is something aloof in him as he plays it; yet few have the power of so ravishing the senses with the sheer beauty of his tone, the charm of his cantilena, the elegance and ease with which he masters all the technical difficulties of what he is playing so that they no longer suggest themselves as difficulties. Octaves, thirds, and sixths drop from his instrument in a tone of honeyed sweetness and oily smoothness; not a large tone but one of indescribable roundness and purity; his runs and passages of all sorts are as pearls from his hands. There is something of feminine grace and charm in Mr. Kubelik's playing and he seldom compels by its authority or stirs by its passion and virility; but in its way it is wholly delightful.[25]

Kubelík did not appear again in New York for another four years. When he did return in October 1911, he elected to play in the Hippodrome.[26] Sometimes referred to as the "architectural pachyderm of the amusement world" this immense auditorium was hardly the ideal location for a violin recital. As noted by Henry Krehbiel, Kubelík was compelled to exaggerate his mannerisms and force his tone in order to be seen and heard by the gigantic audience. Under such circumstances there could be no room for any refinement of his art. The financial significance of the event was of course not lost on the reviewers:

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[25] Times, November 11, 1907.

[26] Kubelík had also played at the Hippodrome on his previous visit to New York (1907/1908 season) but for some reason, the critics did not make an issue of it at that time.

> It would be difficult to imagine a more inartistic thing than for a solo violinist to play in such an audience room as the Hippodrome. However good its acoustics may be, many of the finer and subtler qualities of violin playing must needs be lost and were lost last night in its vast and vacuous reaches. Probably for both the player and his managers the final and conclusive answer to any such finicking considerations was to be found in the sight of the serried thousands that sat and listened and applauded till the end and in the $8,100 which, by the managers' own confession, was the sum of the evenings's receipts.[27]

From about 1913 on, Kubelík's technique began to show signs of wear and tear. Though his audiences remained as large and enthusiastic as ever before, the critics began to find technical inadequacies in his playing that had not previously been in evidence:

> There were occasions when a lack of power and vigorousness or the breadth of phrasing that belongs behind mere beauty of tone in a cantabile passage, made themselves more noticeably felt than has been the case in past seasons with the player and one could have wished for more of the "grand manner."[28]

Carl Flesch maintained that even before the age of thirty (1910) the astringency of Kubelík's tone had developed into dryness, the absolute reliability of his technique had already begun to break down and his chaste detachment had developed into a certain, almost tangible, coldness.[29] Kubelík retired from the concert stage in 1915, in order to devote his time to composition. This sabbatical saw the birth of six violin concertos, many small pieces for violin, transcriptions, concerto cadenzas and a symphony, none of which is currently performed. He returned to New York in the fall of 1920, giving a recital there on October 31 - his first in

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[27] Times, October 16, 1911.

[28] Times, October 20, 1913.

[29] Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 176.

seven years. William Henderson on this occasion painted a melancholy picture of a great virtuoso from a former age, left in the wake of the unrelenting passage of time:

> The Kubelik of our youth - that slim flasher of diamonds and swarthy gypsy passion - is gone. The Kubelik of today still wears his hair long - Dalila's are absent perhaps from Praha - but it does not mean eternal strength. There came upon the stage last night a correct, quiet-humored gentleman of sober age and cautious bow who treated his strings with the utmost of gentility and sensibleness [sic]. . . . He played Paganini's concerto in D major and two numbers from Saint-Saens. His performance of the latter continued to be undistinguished by anything excepting a small, dispirited tone. It was cruel to bring him back. Artistically cruel, that is. For he will no doubt continue to fill great houses with great audiences and go away again with numberless testimonies to the rate of exchange. But America is violinist-ridden today. It teems with geniuses of the strings and young ones like Piastro, Heifetz (name your own young favourite) whose strings are still taut and whose bows are still adventurous.[30]

When he made his final appearance for the 1920/1921 concert season, the event was hardly even acknowledged by the musical press, much less reviewed. Kubelík made his final comeback appearances in 1935 and although the audiences were of good size, very few members of the musical intelligentsia took any notice of him. He died in Prague five years later.

Kubelík's recordings provide a clear explanation as to why this virtuoso, a favourite with mass audiences the world over, was of little interest to the educated public other than as a "musical" curiosity. As compared with the previously-examined recordings of Fritz Kreisler, Kubelík's offerings represent a gigantic leap backwards in time. The Masters of the Bow recording, MB 1001, presents eighteen short pieces

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[30] Sun, November 1, 1920.

selected from Kubelík's total of about forty-eight different recorded works. The performances, all with piano accompaniment, are undated, but nearly all were originally recorded for Fonotipia and HMV and are believed to have been made between 1906 and 1915. These eighteen works, without exception, introduce a virtuoso of marvellous technique and discipline. His digital facility is alarming. He is in absolute control of fingers and bow at all times. His inner pulse is unfailingly steady and the purity of his intonation (even in very high positions and harmonics) is exceptional. However, Eugène Ysaÿe, Fritz Kreisler and others had, by this time, offered to the world a style of playing that went beyond the merely technical. Kreisler's tone throbbed with life and vitality and his violin sang as if it were an extension of the human voice. Such qualities appear to have been beyond the realization of the Bohemian virtuoso. Once the listener adjusts to Kubelík's technical wizardry, he soon realizes that the tone is paper-thin. There is little evidence of inner strength and life. His vibrato, when discernible, is of the most rudimentary kind and as such, adds nothing to the expressivity of his playing. Almost any work on the recording illustrates this. In the outer sections of Wieniawski's Scherzo-Tarantelle Kubelík demonstrates the flashy, yet controlled efficiency of his playing. However, within the lyrical middle sections, he clearly shows his difficulty in sustaining tonal quality. There is no warmth, no life in his sound and his tone does not carry. Even the intonation, which is usually beyond criticism, suffers somewhat in these passages. His vibrato is practically nonexistent. In the Danse hongroise No. 1 by

Tivadár Nachèz, Kubelík shows no sign of possessing any Hungarian fire or even of being able to simulate it. Here his rudimentary, almost child-like, vibrato is exposed. Nevertheless, his intonation is excellent. It is especially impressive in the high positions on the E-string and in short harmonic passages. The accusation that Kubelík had no musical sensitivity at all however is not entirely supported by these recordings. His performance of the Gluck-Wilhelmj Melodie from Dance of the Blessed Spirits (Orphée et Euridice) possesses more warmth of sound and emotional projection than one would expect from Kubelík's playing, judging by the reviews examined, and his performance of Franz Drdla's Souvenir compares favourably with Kreisler's performance of the same work.[31] Although Kreisler's playing is generally more vivacious and more buoyant than Kubelík's, the young Bohemian displays good tonal qualities here and a fair semblance of vibrato. In his phrasing and melodic direction, he shows sensitivity to musical considerations.

It cannot be denied that Kubelík was more at ease in the virtuosic repertoire, and as a result of his total concentration on the technical side of his art, he quickly found himself on the outside of the twentieth-century artistic circle. Nevertheless his virtuosic achievements were astounding and, though more properly a part of a previous century, they have maintained their legitimate, if somewhat restricted, place in the development of twentieth-century violin playing.

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[31] Masters of the Bow, MB 1012.

CHAPTER V

JACQUES THIBAUD

The French violinist Jacques Thibaud (1880-1953) made his New York debut at Carnegie Hall on October 30, 1903, playing Mozart's Concerto in E-flat major and Saint-Saëns' Concerto in B minor with the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra. Unlike Jan Kubelík, his arrival in the city went largely unnoticed and his first performance, a fairly successful one, illicited none of the stormy controversy that had surrounded the debut of his Bohemian colleague two years earlier.

Born in Bordeaux, France in 1880, Thibaud first studied the violin with his father. At the age of thirteen he was accepted as a student at the Paris Conservatory where he studied under Martin Marsick (1848-1924). In 1896 at the age of sixteen, he won the coveted Premier Prix for violin performance, though to his great disappointment he was placed fourth among four winners. As the prestige attached to the First Prize failed to open the doors to a career, Thibaud earned his living by playing in the Café Rouge Orchestra in the Paris Latin quarter. He was later invited by Edouard Colonne (1838-1910) to join the violin section of his celebrated orchestra and when, in 1898, Thibaud was asked to play the violin solo in Saint-Saëns' Prélude to Le déluge, he scored a sensational success. This was followed by his appointment as concertmaster and as a consequence, he appeared as soloist with that orchestra fifty-four times during the winter season of 1898, thus establishing himself in Paris. Known as the French violinist, he was soon acclaimed throughout Europe as well. He set

out on a fifty-concert tour of America in 1903.

The reviews emanating from his first New York appearance were gracious, but mixed in feeling. Richard Aldrich was delighted with the newcomer:

> Since Mr. Thibaud was the central point of interest in the concert, let it be said first that he produced an extremely agreeable impression and made it clear that he is an artist of fine fiber and uncommon accomplishment. He has youth and the insouciance and buoyancy that go with youth, and especially with French youth; yet his temperament is poetic and gracious rather than impassioned or impetuous. His playing is truly serious and sincere, and his artistic nature has warmth and spontaneity, but his ebullient flow of spirit, which was disclosed amply last evening, never invalidates the elegance and refinement that are clearly among his essential characteristics. . . . Mr. Thibaud's tone is of beautiful warmth and purity, of fine expressive potency; his style is finished, and his technical methods are admirable, especially his bowing, which is large, free and firm.[1]

Aldrich goes on to describe the "absolute fitness" in Thibaud's conception of Mozart's concerto. In the reviewer's opinion, he played the Adagio movement with deep tenderness and imparted to the finale a sense of urbane gaiety. The concerto as a whole was marked by a freshness of mood as well as the elegant charm that has come to be associated with the music of Mozart. In the Saint-Saëns concerto as well, Thibaud showed himself well able to grasp and reproduce the characteristic spirit of the composer. William Henderson was highly impressed with Thibaud's technical mastery:

> His mastery of the fingerboard is large. His stopping is clean and accurate. He seldom played a note out of tune last night. His bowing is elegant and instinct with graceful vivacity[sic]. His spiccato is as clear as crystal and his staccato as crisp as the sparkle of a frosty morning. His

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[1]*Times*, October 31, 1903.

> andante is fluent, pretty in nuance and delicate in character. . . . He has a most excellent tone, albeit its quality is unique in its reediness. . . . He certainly brings out the tone quality with fulness and beautiful smoothness.[2]

However, he was far from satisfied with Thibaud's overall sense of style and interpretative ability:

> Mr. Thibaud made an agreeable impression but it is not likely that he disturbed the equanimity of old concert goers. . . . There is nothing of breadth in the style as revealed last evening. The Mozart concerto was sadly deficient in repose and simplicity. There was too much dainty drawing-room brilliancy in the rapid passages and an overplus of sentimentalizing in the slow movement. It was natural to expect after hearing this performance that the young man would be more at home in the Saint-Saens number. He was; but even here he fell short of the breadth of style possible in the opening theme and of the poetry attainable in the second melody of the first movement. In short, Mr. Thibaud is a charming performer of the salon variety, who does everything with politeness and gentility, but nothing with passion or puissance. Future performances may disclose powers not in evidence last night; but as to this there is at present large space for doubt.[3]

The Tribune's Henry Krehbiel, on the other hand, chose to look beyond the "politeness and gentility" of the "salon" and found there a violinist to be reckoned with:

> His style is not large, like that of Ysaye for instance, but refined and peculiarly ingratiating. Back of its gentleness, back of its caressing amiability, there is wonderful strength and warmth of temperament, and it is easy to imagine him growing soon to a stature which will place him among the Titans.[4]

For Krehbiel, one of the finest proofs of the French violinist's genius was his strong desire to win affection by his playing rather than to compel

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[2] Sun, October 31, 1903.

It is interesting to note that whereas, according to Henderson, Thibaud "seldom played a note out of tune last night" Aldrich complains that despite his fleet and dexterous left-hand technique, "his intonation was not flawless."

[3] Sun, October 31, 1903.

[4] Tribune, October 31, 1903.

amazement. Thibaud gave his first recital on November 20, 1903 at Carnegie Hall, playing César Franck's Sonata for violin and piano, the Prelude and Fugue from Bach's Sonata in G minor and the last half of Saint-Saëns' Rondo capriccioso as well as a number of pieces of lesser moment. This recital served to increase his musical stature even further in the eyes of Richard Aldrich:

> Mr. Thibaud's playing of Franck's sonata was of altogether remarkable beauty; it was full of atmosphere and of the indefinable quality of charm; it was full of sentiment and romantic feeling, yet never verging upon sentimentality. The impassioned allegro and the finely vigorous canonic finale he played with splendid energy and directness, and through it all his tone was of silvery clearness and searching expressiveness. He rose to the level of Bach's sonata through the grave and tender beauty of his performance of the prelude and the breadth and masculine energy of his treatment of the fugue that showed a new side to his talent. Technically it was clean, beautifully articulated and of unerring certainty. In this Mr. Thibaud added much to the appreciation that must be given to his style, to the response and maturity that characterize it. And yet he can play brilliant and lighter pieces in a brilliant and lighter vein, as he did the group headed by Saint-Saens's Rondo capriccioso; here were elegance and grace and an authentic expression of the Gaelic spirit. . .[5]

William Henderson, however, remained unimpressed:

> The sonata grows with repetition. It is a work of much beauty and of fine musicianship. It was by no means perfectly performed yesterday.
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> Mr. Thibaud's style lacks the reposeful elevation necessary for a work of this kind and, furthermore, there were too many occasions yesterday when his intonation was faulty. . . .
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> The violinist's second group consisted of the prelude and fugue from Bach's unaccompanied G minor sonata. . . . Here again his style fell short of the requirements of the music. Bach is inexorable in his demand for profundity. Mere polish will not do for the old cantor of Leipzig.[6]

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[5]Times, November 21, 1903.

[6]Sun, November 21, 1903.

Henderson went on to say that his treatment of the Rondo capriccioso was neither brilliant nor authoritative and complained that the higher positions on the E-string were clouded by false intonation. He sarcastically suggested that Thibaud would be better to reserve such errors for the Sunday night concerts at the opera house "where music out of tune is popular."

For his December 26, 1903 recital, Thibaud (unlike Kubelík) moved into the much smaller Mendelssohn Hall. Here, the musical effect of his playing was greatly enhanced and, according to the critics, the intimacy established between artist and audience enabled him to exercise a greater influence through his playing than had been possible in the spaces of Carnegie Hall. Following the 1903/1904 concert season, Thibaud returned to Europe and did not reappear in New York until January 5, 1914. On this occasion Richard Aldrich, though somewhat disappointed by Thibaud's occasional lapses from accurate intonation, was happy to note development in his playing:

> He has indeed gained in artistic maturity; he still possesses the qualities that characterized his more youthful days, but showed perhaps something less of the youthful buoyancy and insouciance that those who heard him then will remember. His temperament still is more poetic and gracious than impassioned or impetuous. His playing is truly serious and sincere without affectation or the display of a mere virtuoso and there are warmth and spontaneity in it. Elegance and refinement are clearly among his essential characteristics.[7]

William Henderson, who had had little good to say musically about Thibaud in earlier years, was also quick to acknowledge his artistic progress:

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[7]Times, January 6, 1914.

> Ten years have not been lost on Mr. Thibaud. He is still characteristically a French player. Elegance and grace continue to predominate in his performance, but he has gained in repose, in dignity and in understanding. No one could have doubted this who heard him play the Lalo "Symphonie espagnole" yesterday. But the larger extension of his musicianship was most brilliantly displayed in the Bach "Chaconne." Mr. Thibaud could not have interpreted this composition so well ten years ago.
>
> His performance of it yesterday was admirable as a piece of technical accomplishment. It had beauty of tone and accuracy of finger work, together with pliant strength and nuance in the bowing. Better still, it had a fine and interesting dignity of style which went far toward doing full justice to the thought of Bach. . . . Mr. Thibaud was in danger of being taken for a matinée idol ten years ago, but he has matured and risen above that popular but unfortunate state.[8]

With the outbreak of World War I, Thibaud was obliged to return to France. In 1916, following a year's service in the French army, he again journeyed to the United States where he rapidly gained recognition as a violinist of international stature. His November 16th recital revealed a tone of "great fullness and beauty, of a searching and poignant quality, and a wide range of shading."[9] From this point onwards, Jacques Thibaud became a regular and frequent visitor to the United States. Despite the onslaught of the "Russian Wave" which totally swamped the careers of many established players, Thibaud was able to maintain and protect his position and artistic stature. His playing combined technical efficiency with beauty of tone, grace, elegance and repose. His performances were

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[8]Sun, January 6, 1914.

[9]Times, November 17, 1916.

marked by sincerity of conviction, a delicate play of imagination and, of course, the irrepressible charm and sophistication that have come to be associated with French music and musicians. Despite the furor and hysteria engendered by the startling perfection of Jascha Heifetz, Thibaud, approaching the age of fifty, was, in the mid-1920's, charming a whole new generation of music critics. Olin Downes was lavish in his praise of a 1926 performance in New York:

> The violin recital of Jacques Thibaud yesterday afternoon in Town Hall found an admirable artist in the exceptional fullness of his powers. Very few unite with the musicianship and sincerity of Mr. Thibaud his fineness [sic] of taste and style. Few can summon at once such seriousness and profound understanding with the refinement and distinction native to his school of violin playing. Mr. Thibaud is always reverent to the composer, but he played yesterday with a communicative fire and warmth of feeling that created afresh whatever he undertook to play.[10]

Nevertheless, Mr. Downes' assessment of the audience suggests that, like many of his colleagues, Thibaud was feeling the impact of the influential Russian superstars:

> Mr. Thibaud was received with unusual enthusiasm by an audience of generous proportions that included many musicians. He deserved an audience still larger but perhaps he will always be a violinist for the smaller, more select public.[11]

Following a New York recital in 1947, Irving Kolodin, music critic for the Sun, observed that Thibaud's interpretation found its source in Ysaÿe and was "much more moderate in pace and accent than we usually hear from Russian hands."[12] Such remarks pinpoint the revolutionary change in musical taste

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[10] Times, February 15, 1926.

[11] Times, February 15, 1926.

[12] Sun, February 18, 1947.

caused by the ascent of players like Heifetz, Elman and others of the Russian school. According to Boris Schwarz, the French style of violin playing, refined and elegant, had by this time lost out in public favour to the impassioned and incisive style of the Auer disciples and it never really regained its once dominant position.[13] Nevertheless, despite the changing musical tides so evident during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Jacques Thibaud's faithful adherence to his own path brought him success throughout his entire career. William Henderson, the critic who was the most hesitant in his acceptance of Thibaud in the early years, provided, in a 1926 review, an excellent overview of the French violinist's place in the annals of string performance:

> Jacques Thibaud, amid the changing conditions and swirling currents of the contemporary music world, seems to follow his own artistic lights as faithfully, as serenely and as enjoyably as ever. . . .
>
> Mr. Thibaud's art has never produced high blood pressure among audiences seeking to hurl applause in excited bursts of approbation. His world of interpretation is somewhat restricted, but it is a warm, congenial world. His continent faithfulness to melodic line, the polish of his phrasing and the refinement of his taste resulted in a performance yesterday worth ten recitals by "talented" violinists of more robust schools. The tonal colours of his art were subtly woven yesterday. The texture of his work was finely wrought, resilient and suggestive of a fascinating range in shifting shades of nuance and mood. And the remarkable ease and facility of his technical equipment always enable him to stress these delicate iridescent aspects, the quick pulsing rhythms and colours of his offerings.[14]

Jacques Thibaud died suddenly and tragically in an airplane crash on September 1, 1953, while on route to Indochina for a concert tour.

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[13] Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 355.

[14] Sun, February 15, 1926.

Even though Thibaud's style of playing was eventually overtaken by that of the younger Russian players, he must still be considered one of the "moderns" of the new era. According to the Rumanian violinist Georges Enescu, Thibaud's playing was distinctly personal, even in his early years:

> I was fifteen when I heard him for the first time [1896]. I honestly admit that it took my breath away. I was beside myself with enthusiasm. It was so new, so unusual. . . Thibaud was the first among violinists to reveal to the public an entirely new sound - the result of a complete union between hand and string. His playing was marvelously tender and passionate. Compared to him, Sarasate was just a cold perfectionist. . . . I pity all young violinists who have not heard Thibaud: in their book of memories, an irreplaceable image is lacking.[15]

Carl Flesch maintained that "at the age of twenty-two, Thibaud was the youngest violinist of great stature - his tone fascinated audiences with its uniquely sweet and seductive colour, literally unheard of at that time."[16] As in the case of Fritz Kreisler, Flesch was struck by the "unadulterated eroticism" of the sounds emanating from the Frenchman's violin, and he carried this analogy on into his overall assessments of Thibaud's style:

> However unconsciously, his art as well as his thoughts and actions were dominated by the eternal feminine. His playing was imbued with his yearning for sensual pleasure, with an unchastity that was all the more seductive for its refinement. . . . He could not be compared to any other violinist.[17]

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[15]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 357.

[16]Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 196.

[17]Ibid., p. 197.

As with Kreisler, Thibaud's vibrato was a natural extension of his personality. In contrast to some of the well-known French violinists who produced an excessively rapid fingertip vibrato with highly arched fingers (resulting in a somewhat nervous, whinnying sound), Thibaud's vibrato originated exactly on the core of the note and was narrow in oscillation. The resulting tone was sweetly modulated and delicately glittering, well suited to the small-scale, subtle works that were Thibaud's forte. However, his intonation, though reputedly excellent, seemed to be cause for some disagreement among New York reviewers throughout his career. Thibaud's G-string sound, neither powerful nor refined, was his weakest point. The New York Tribune's Henry Krehbiel, a violinist himself, was the only critic of the five who seemed to take any notice of this.

Important elements in the personalization of Thibaud's playing were his slides and position changes. He tended to overuse these effects, regardless of the type and style of the music. Although most of these mannerisms are considered outmoded and distracting by today's standards, Thibaud's execution of them was never ugly or unpleasant. Such effects added a touch of the French café fiddler to his playing, though it was artfully tempered by an air of nobility and sophistication. Thibaud was seldom very serious or profound in character - his playing exuded buoyancy of spirit and spontaneity. He also possessed a good measure of Kreisler's rare ability to utilize rubato without destroying the rhythm.[18] Despite many

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[18]Henry Roth, Master Violinists in Performance (Neptune City: Paganiniant Publications, Inc., 1982), p. 103.

favourable testimonies concerning Thibaud's basic technical equipment, Flesch points out that his art was rooted in his innate talent rather than in the acquisition of a solid technical ability. Thus he lacked the manual routine which would have kept him afloat on days of physical or mental indisposition.

Eugène Ysaÿe was Thibaud's idol and the great Belgian in turn was not only personally fond of his younger colleague but was genuinely impressed with his abilities as well. Ysaÿe maintained that Kreisler and Thibaud were "two violinists from whose playing I can always be certain of learning something."[19] He dedicated a sonata to each of them - the Sonata No. 2 in A minor to Thibaud and the Sonata No. 4 in E minor to Kreisler. Thibaud's relationship with Ysaÿe was profitable not only on the personal level, but in the development of his art as well. Fortunately his own violinistic individuality was pronounced enough that he was not overpowered by the influence of the mature Ysaÿe, twenty-two years his senior.

Early recordings of Jacques Thibaud as a solo performer are not plentiful, but the 1930 Trianon disc provides a good example of the French virtuoso's musical characteristics. The recording opens with an intense, almost muscular performance of Antonio Vitali's Chaconne, which is not only light years away from the sterile perfection of Kubelík, but is also a good distance removed from the "elegant femininity" often associated with Jacques Thibaud himself. The sound, emanating from the very heart of the instrument,

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[18]Henry Roth, Master Violinists in Performance (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1982), p. 103.

[19]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 357.

possesses the warmth and intensity of that produced by some of the most passionate representatives of the modern school. Thibaud handles the technical demands of the work with aplomb: the trills are clear and crisp, double-stopped passages (incorporating trills and chromatics) are clean, confident and in tune. The performance is carefully graded dynamically and the musical lines are never without direction. Some occasional "scrubbing" in a few of the rapid, arpeggiated passages is easily rendered superficial and of no consequence by the overall strength and character of this performance. On the other hand, the tonal quality evident in his performance of an Adagio from an unnamed concerto by Vivaldi is of a vastly different kind. Though the vibrato remains intense and impassioned, the sound, emanating this time as if from the top of the strings, is superficial and weak. While the double-stopped passages are well in tune, they do not possess the marvellous organ-like warmth so evident in the Vitali work. Though Thibaud demonstrates a gentle elegance which is highly complimentary to the dotted rhythm of the piece, too many overexposed portamentos betray his salon-like tendencies. This is followed by a complete sonata for accompanied violin by the early eighteenth-century English violinist and composer Henry Eccles (1670-1742). In the opening Grave, Thibaud somehow manages to combine worldly elegance with intensity of expression. The Courante which follows is marked by buoyancy, spirit and spontaneity on the one hand and uncompromising strength on the other. Technically, it is clean and tidy. Thibaud achieves better tonal quality in the Adagio than in the Grave, but even so, it must be admitted that the overall effect is one of refined elegance rather than warmth. Again, the

slow portamentos lend a kind of café-like quality to the performance. The final Vivace movement is most impressive. This technical twister presents no problems for Thibaud. He performs it with Kubelík-like assurance and perfection. However in quality of sound and musical direction, Thibaud shows his affiliation with the modern school. His performance of Maria-Theresia von Paradis' Sicilienne is marked by an elegance and suavity highly reminiscent of Fritz Kreisler. Saint-Saëns' Havanaise Op. 83 gives Thibaud the opportunity to demonstrate all facets of his art. The opening section is marked by rich tonal warmth in the low registers and a ringing bell-like clarity and intensity in the upper registers. Over all of this is the ever-present charm and spontaneity of the Gallic spirit. His rubatos, subtle and unobtrusive, sway gently within the natural rhythm of the piece. The technical precision of the fast sections is truly impressive. The intonation here is irreproachable, and the playing remains firmly in hand at all times, despite high speeds. In the lyrical passages of Granados' Andalousie (arranged by Kreisler) Thibaud demonstrates his ability to sing on the violin and he sails through the treacherous waters of Manuel de Falla's Danse espagnole No.1 with grace, elegance and ease.

Though Thibaud unquestionably belongs in the company of Ysaÿe and Kreisler, he never achieved their supremacy. A possible reason for this is the fact that he was seriously limited by his repertoire, which was probably the least prolific of any of the leading twentieth-century violinists. He excelled in the works of French composers and was an exceptional interpreter of Mozart. Nevertheless he was, generally speaking, a rather

small-scale player, who carefully avoided the great romantic masterworks. With regards to his repertorial inclinations, Thibaud once remarked: "I would not exchange the first ten measures of Vieuxtemps' Fourth Concerto for the whole of Tchaikovsky's. I consider the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto to be the worst thing the composer has written."[20] Nevertheless, despite such limitations, Thibaud was able to maintain his position as one of the century's foremost violinists.

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[20]Henry Roth, Master Violinists in Performance (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1982), p. 102.

CHAPTER VI

EUGENE YSAŸE

The great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931), more than any other, symbolized the violinistic bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the height of his career (between 1895 and 1912), Ysaÿe was the undisputed idol of the young generation of violin virtuosos, for he represented a synthesis between the technical perfection of Sarasate and the musical integrity of Joachim.

Born in the Belgian city of Liège, Ysaÿe began his violin studies at the age of four under the tutelage of his father. His musical education steadily progressed under Désiré Heynberg at the Liège Conservatoire but, unlike so many of the world's great virtuosos, Ysaÿe was never a child prodigy. In 1869 he was forced, because of family circumstances, to leave the Conservatoire, though he continued to study the violin repertoire on his own. In 1872, the fourteen-year-old Ysaÿe was taken under the protective wing of the Belgian violinist and composer Henri Vieuxtemps (1820-1881), who succeeded in obtaining for him a government subsidy, thereby enabling him to continue his studies at the Liège Conservatoire. Under the watchful eye of Rodolphe Massart (nephew of the famous Parisian professor Lambert Massart), he graduated with the Premier Prix for performance. At the age of sixteen, Ysaÿe began his studies with the Polish violinist and composer Henryk Wieniawski (1835-1880), but two years later he journeyed to Paris to study under his friend and compatriot, Henri Vieuxtemps. Throughout his student years and beyond, Ysaÿe played in numerous orchestras including

(from 1879 to 1882) Berlin's well-known Bilse Kapelle, which later was to become the Berlin Philharmonic. Although his appointment as concertmaster of this orchestra (1880) provided him with numerous solo opportunities, he found his orchestral experience far from satisfying and so, encouraged by the Russian pianist Anton Rubinstein, he embarked on a solo career. In 1881 he began a concert tour of Norway and the following year he set out on his first of many Russian tours. A successful Parisian debut took place in 1885 and in 1886 he accepted a post in his native Belgium as professor of violin at the Brussels Conservatory. He gave a memorable debut performance in London in 1889, playing the Beethoven Concerto for the Royal Philharmonic Society. However it was not until his sensational debut in Vienna in 1890 (at the age of thirty-two) that his reputation was securely established on the highest international level. During the 1894/1895 concert season, Ysaÿe made his triumphant American debut. Critics were immediately taken with the remarkable purity and fullness of his tone, particularly in the face of the most strenuous violinistic gymnastics. Even so, it was clear from the beginning that Ysaÿe was not destined to be known for his technical facility. Though he was certainly not hindered by the mechanical demands of his instrument, he seldom chose to compete with the virtuosic pyrotechnics of certain colleagues on the American and world concert stages. Rather, it was as an artist that Eugène Ysaÿe made his chief appeal, an artist of marvelous power, of grace and delicacy:

> In the brilliant passages Mr. Ysaye is strong and satisfactory but does not develop the leonine power and magnificence one might expect, from a glance at the man, to be the chief characteristic of his playing. It is in the remarkably delicate phrasing and shading, continued throughout every measure of all that he plays,

> and the depth of feeling and sentiment with which his playing is imbued that the real excellence of his work is found. And herein again is the listener surprised and treated to grace and finish of which he never dreamed. He possesses temperament in a strongly marked degree. From the instant the first note comes singing from his instrument you feel the influence of a masterful personality. You realize the presence of great temperamental energy, and know yourself to be at once under the sway of conscious power.[1]

According to Ysaÿe's Russian biographer Lev Ginsburg, the integrity of his interpretation, the urge to fully comprehend and project the composer's ideas and the skill with which he molded his technique in deference to the work's artistic message were the most significant traits of this musician. Such characteristics were in marked contrast to the hordes of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century virtuosos whose primary concern lay in showing their skill to the best advantage, regardless of musical requirements.

Ysaÿe's temperament made him unique as an artist and as a man. According to Henry Roth, this temperament, overtly sensual, dominated and shaped all facets of his art:

> The Ysaye sensuality could be both flagrant and extremely sensitized, and the range of his sheer emotional inspiration has been rivalled by few violinists of any era. His playing ran the gamut of moods: joy, tenderness, passion, bluster, bravura, poesy, fantasy and expansive lyricism. And underlying this panorama of dispositions was a strange smoldering character, like that of a volcano about to erupt into flames. Ysaye could also project a rare aura of melancholy, a quality that is practically nonexistent today. At times he was capable of ridiculous mawkishness, outrageously overstepping the boundary between sincere sentiment and sentimentality. He also possessed a sense of healthy vulgarity which served to infuse his playing with the human touch. If ever an artist could be characterized as playing from the heart, it was Ysaye. When at his best, he could move his audience as profoundly as any violinist who ever lived, and

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[1]Lev Ginsburg, Ysaÿe (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 264.

> it was not uncommon, in those bygone days of extravagant emotional responses, for individuals among his audience to break into audible sobs.[2]

Early reviews show that Ysaÿe's "overt sensuality" won him the adulation of a twentieth-century "pop" star:

> "This violinist, Ysaye, will outrank Paddy [Paderewski] himself as a matinée idol." It was one of the few men in Carnegie Hall yesterday afternoon during the third recital of Eugene Ysaye. The hall was filled, nine women to one man, and the enthusiasm began when the violinist had finished the fourth movement of the first number . . . and culminated in a hysterical storm which brought Ysaye out on the stage six times after he had played the last work on the programme. . . . If he had been kindly disposed he would have had excuse for continuing to appear and bow until hunger drove his admirers home, for it was not until the anteroom door behind which he had disappeared had remained unresponsively closed for five minutes that the sighing multitude of women slowly and regretfully left the hall. . . .
>
> He is a much more manly looking man than Paderewski. Ysaye seems to take the adoration of the fair sex with considerable surprise; not as a matter of right, as "Paddy" did. It may be a difference of hair. The pianist . . . manipulated his hair . . . until it stood out like a sunset cloud agitated by the evening breeze. Ysaye's hair is almost in the present style.
>
> It is only a little longer than the locks of the smart young men, but he does not part it in the middle as they do. He parts it far down on the left side and from there it loosely crosses his forehead and dances, as to its ends, when he fiddles.
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> Yesterday the most persistent and the loudest applauders were girls, really girls, from 14 to 18. One, between those ages, shredded her gloves in the violence of her applause. . . .
>
> When the last of the programme had been played, a hundred of the women crowded to the edge of the stage, and leaned there facing the anteroom door, soulfully longing until their applause brought Ysaye forth. Then they looked as if they were inclined to throw things at him - flowers and ribbons and gloves - as they did at "Paddy"; but the craze has not quite reached that point yet.
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> "It will though" said the man in the lobby. "He's fit to beat Paddy in a walk, but the girls are a little shy yet."[3]

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[2]Henry Roth, Master Violinists in Performance (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1982), p. 55.

[3]Sun, January 24, 1895.

At the turn of the century, Ysaÿe was noted for his pure and expressive tone, his exceedingly wide range of dynamics, and his highly original and poetic rubato. However, it was his vibrato that lent his tone its inimitable colour. Joachim (and the German school in general) had advocated a small, thin quiver on long, "expressive" notes only:

> The pupil, however, cannot be too emphatically warned against its habitual use, particularly in the wrong place. A violinist whose taste is refined and healthy will always recognize the steady tone as the ruling (normal) one, and will use vibrato only where the expression seems to demand it.[4]

The "French" vibrato of the later nineteenth century, which was pioneered by Wieniawski and Vieuxtemps, was taken up and developed with great enthusiasm by Ysaÿe and later, Kreisler. It soon became much wider in oscillation and was used more abundantly. In this way, the violin became a more sensuous-sounding instrument. Ysaÿe's vibrato was a direct extension of his personality. Seldom crassly extroverted, it was sensitive and diversified in speed and colour. Nevertheless, he often played lyric phrases with no vibrato at all, producing a so-called "white" tone. This practice was artfully blended within an entire range of vibrato speeds, which he applied for expressive purposes. Another hallmark of Ysaÿe's art was his "portamento." Although this "expressive" technique was widely used throughout the nineteenth century, it was frequently condemned because of the whining sound it tended to produce. Ysaÿe, however, perfected a technique by which his finger moved quietly onto a note from below, thus avoiding the slow, deliberate shift from one position to another. In Ysaÿe's hands, the portamento

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[4]Werner Hauck, Vibrato on the Violin (London: Bosworth & Co. Ltd., 1975), p. 37.

became a more expressive, almost sensuous device. Jacques Thibaud was quick to incorporate this device into his own playing and it later became one of the hallmarks of Jascha Heifetz. This so-called "French portamento" became synonymous with the notion of modern violin playing, thus rendering the German-style shift obsolete.

The British conductor Sir Henry Wood was a fervent admirer of Eugène Ysaÿe:

> I can never say enough - in fact, words utterly fail me when I think of Ysaÿe's performances. The quality of his tone was so ravishingly beautiful and it is no exaggeration to say that, having accompanied all the great violinists in the world during the past fifty years, of all of them Ysaÿe impressed me most. He seemed to get more colour out of a violin than any of his contemporaries and he was certainly unique as a concerto player, especially in his use of the three positions of the bow on the strings and his intensity of tone when playing with the full hairs of the bow near the bridge. I remember his flautando playing, particularly, in a work by Rimsky-Korsakoff, and still treasure the memories of this most lovable man.[5]

Carl Flesch, who identified Ysaÿe as "the most outstanding and individual violinist I have heard in all my life," was also lavish in his praise of the great Belgian:

> His tone was big and noble, capable of modulation to the highest degree and of responding to his impulsion as a horse to its rider. His vibrato was the spontaneous expression of his feeling, a whole world away from what had been customary until then. . . . His portamentos were novel and entrancing, his left-hand agility and intonation was of Sarasate-like perfection. Intuitively, he adapted his bowing technique to his expressive needs. There was no kind of bowing that did not show tonal perfection as well as musical feeling. His style of interpretation betrayed the impulsive romantic, who was concerned not so much with the printed note values,

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[5]Henry J. Wood, My Life of Music (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1938), p. 173.

> the dead letter, as with the spirit that cannot be reproduced graphically. He was a master of the imaginative rubato. . . .[6]

Even so, Flesch was not one to avoid consideration of the somewhat less admirable traits of this extraordinary musical personality:

> In classical compositions the rubato which had become second nature to him was frequently misplaced. . . . Similarly, in his hands the Beethoven Concerto suffered an imaginative remodelling of the original into a personal experience, which did not leave much of the unadulterated Beethoven spirit. If we may define the ideal reproduction as a fusion of the composer's intentions with the mood evoked by the work in its interpreter, Ysaÿe often did not achieve this final end because in certain works he could not avoid putting his own personality before that of the composer.[7]

Such criticisms were not in the minds of the reviewers during the 1904/1905 concert season when Ysaÿe returned to New York after an absence of six years. Despite technical mishaps, they were quick to see and point out the real strength behind the Belgian violinist:

> Mr. Ysaye returns in the plentitude of his powers which are those of a supremely great master, an interpreter in the highest sense, who glorifies and ennobles all he touches, with the communicating flame of his ardent musical temperament. Greater technicians there may be, but none who have spoken with a higher and nobler eloquence, with deeper poetic insight; none who can so pluck the heart out of the mystery of great music and impart that mystery so fully and unreservedly as he.[8]

In fact, some opinions expressed appear to be the exact antithesis of those published a few years later by Flesch:

> The personality of the executant is sunk and merged in significance of what he is doing; and it is as if the listener were put into immediate communion with the music for its own

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[6]Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 79.

[7]Ibid., p. 80.

[8]Times, Friday, December 9, 1904.

> sake alone. So it was in his interpretation of Bach's concerto [E major].[9]

However, the writer of the above (Richard Aldrich) goes on to describe the performance of the Bach concerto in a decidedly "romantic" fashion, thus indirectly lending support to Flesch's criticism:

> It is music of imperishable beauty, as fresh and vital today as when it was written and Mr. Ysaye's playing of it presents it with all its throbbing vitality, all its infinite tenderness. His reading of the first movement is of magnificent breadth and muscularity, romantic and deeply appreciative of the poetry that finds utterance in it.[10]

Likewise, the artistic strength and power of the violinist was able to transform that which Mr. Aldrich considered "dull" and "futile":

> After this, the concerto of Bruch [D minor] seemed dull and futile. Yet the great artist's touch transfigured this music with a sort of added glory; and it seemed worthwhile, if only because he had done it. As to how he accomplishes this, much might be said; of his heart-searching tone, rich in indefinable shades of emotional expressiveness and colour; of his broad and sensitive bowing, of his subtle plasticity of phrase, his instinctive following of the melodic line, and his infinitude of nuance. But all these things yield to the general impression and the irresistible magnetism that is the great artist's mysterious possession.[11]

Henry Krehbiel rejoiced in the return to New York of an "old and delightful friend" and praised his performance of the Bach despite the fact that "the wealth of tone and cherubic serenity came to the fore only in the slow movement." The Bruch, though played with "superb breadth," was, according to Krehbiel, riddled with technical slips and impurities of tone. As keenly observant as ever, Krehbiel accused Ysaÿe of sentimentalizing the sustained

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[9] Times, December 9, 1904.

[10] Times, December 9, 1904.

[11] Times, December 9, 1904.

melodies of this work "most incomprehensibly." Krehbiel was more satisfied with his December 19th performance of the Beethoven Concerto, which, though again not executed in a technically flawless manner, "was so permeated with lofty beauties that its defects are forgotten as soon as they are observed."[12] Aldrich was, as usual, most enthusiastic in his response:

> Mr. Ysaye is now more than ever not a mere performer but an interpreter and expounder of music. His marvelous power of seizing a composer's thought and uttering it as if spontaneously deprives the hearer of all inclination to consider virtuosity or technique. It is the music which he listens for, drawn as if by magic from the master's violin. Player and instrument are forgotten. They seem to be merely a natural vehicle designed to give voice to the soul of the composer's thought.[13]

Despite his enthusiasm, however, he was again forced to admit that Ysaÿe's intonation was "uncertain." The reviews throughout the winter of 1905 developed along much the same lines. Although almost every article makes some reference to technical mishaps and imperfect intonation, the writers were quick to assert the fact that such irregularities counted for little in the face of such extraordinary artistic and interpretative power. Only once did Richard Aldrich complain of any excess in Ysaÿe's musical approach:

> His performance of Mozart's concerto [E-flat major] abounded in beauties of phrase and touches of poetic insight; yet he scarcely seemed to preserve all the symmetry of outline and of proportion, all the urbane gayety and freshness of mood that belong to it. Least satisfying was Mendelssohn's concerto, in which he fell into extravagances and an overladen dramatic style that ill consorts with its straightforward and clear-cut

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[12] Tribune, December 19, 1904.

[13] Times, December 19, 1904.

> outlines; and in addition it must be said that he lapsed more frequently here into a slipshod and unfinished technical way than in either of the other compositions he undertook . . .[14]

Eugène Ysaÿe did not return to New York for another eight years. Hence his reappearance on November 19, 1912, was marked by the excitement and enthusiasm of a debut. Richard Aldrich found himself reiterating, almost word for word, his review of Ysaÿe's December 8, 1904 performance:

> The ravages of time have had little effect upon the essential qualities of his playing which make him a great master, an interpreter in the highest sense. Such a one glorifies and ennobles what he touches with the communicating flame of an ardent temperament and roused it to the higher levels of art. Greater technicians there may be but few who speak with a loftier and nobler eloquence, a serener [sic] or intenser [sic] spirit, when he is at his best. As he plays considerations of technique recede from the foreground and the processes by which the deeds are done are forgotten. The personality of the executant is sunk and merged in the significance of the music; and it is as if the listener were put into immediate communion with it, for its own sake alone.[15]

Nevertheless, despite his unbounded enthusiasm, Aldrich was quick to notice that "there were moments when the tone lost its beauty and his bowing arm its firmness" - a portent of things to come. Ysaÿe was at the time fifty-four years old. Henry Krehbiel also made note of increased instability in Ysaÿe's performance:

> As when he first came, there were some technical obscurities in his playing, and, except in the noble Chaconne by Vitali . . . there seemed to be a little less depth and solidity of tone than formerly.[16]

However, such observations, though significant in the end, did not dampen

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[14] Times, January 1, 1905.

[15] Times, November 20, 1912.

[16] Tribune, November 20, 1912.

Krehbiel's enthusiasm, and, in the same article, he firmly placed Ysaÿe upon the throne of artistic supremacy:

> For years the public has been led more and more into sidewise excursions, into primrose paths, to loiter in pretty dalliance with fiddle trifles. Mr. Ysaye brought his audience back into the great classic highway [Sonata in A minor, Veracini; Sonata in B minor, Geminiani; Chaconne, Vitali; Concerto in G major, Mozart] and expounded for them the cardinal principles of artistic beauty. In tone and phrase and expressive melodic line, he exemplifies as no other violinist of our time exemplifies it, the supreme, the divine law of repose.[17]

Ysaÿe's return during the 1913/1914 concert season brought forth contradictory reviews from the Times and Tribune reviewers. Aldrich was at his complimentary best, stating that the violinist was "in excellent vein" and enumerating, yet again, the characteristics of the great Belgian's playing:

> He is an interpreter in the higher sense, one who glorifies and ennobles what he touches. . . . His tone is of rare warmth, colour and richness; there are breadth and repose as well as fire and energy in his playing. There is purity, an identification with the spirit of the composer.[18]

Brief, passing notice was given to irregularities in intonation and the wavering tone during the course of long, sustained bow strokes. Henry Krehbiel, on the other hand, gave clear indications that things were not as they should have been with the virtuoso:

> The New York public heard a great deal of music from Eugene Ysaye last season and are likely to hear a great deal more from him this. There will be cause for gratification only in the circumstance if the great violinist will always play at his best. When he does that he is as admirable an exemplar in his

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[17] Tribune, November 20, 1912.

[18] Times, December 28, 1913.

> way as Mme. Sembrich is in hers or Mr. Paderewski. But M. Ysaye is an artist of moods and, though there is never a time in which he does not illustrate some fine lesson in art, there are occasions in which his purposes as well as his performances fall short of the standard which he has set and by which alone he must be measured. . . . The fine, large stamp of authoritativeness which M. Ysaye last year placed upon his readings of old Italian works was lacking in this performance.[19]

What the critics were marking at this time was, in fact, Ysaÿe's relatively early decline as a violinist. Carl Flesch maintained that the cause for this was to be found in a lack of stability in his bowing. From close observation, Flesch discovered that Ysaÿe did not use the little finger of his right hand on the frog but rather clasped the bow with three fingers only, using an iron-tight grip. Thus the combination of an unbalanced hand and extreme tension produced the tremor in his bow. As his main concern was now, by necessity, to avoid or mask the tremor in his bow, interpretation was relegated to a back desk and spontaneity was crushed:

> The primary cause of the trembling bow is usually of a technical nature, i.e. physiological; secondarily, it soon becomes a devastating psychical infection, an anxiety state, which then results in an unspontaneous and mannered style. . . . His end as a violinist provided a striking proof of the absolute need for correct technical foundations even where the artist is endowed with genius.[20]

Other scholars feel that nervous tension was the source of Ysaÿe's bowing problems. Evidently Ysaÿe, despite his vast experience as a performer, was bothered by nerves before a concert and frequently nurtured a fear of not being able to control his hands. Sometimes this affected the fingers of his left hand, which at times became almost paralyzed, but it could also

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[19] Tribune, December 28, 1913.

[20] Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 81.

have been the cause of his trembling bow. It should also be remembered however that by 1912, Ysaÿe was already quite sick with diabetes as well as with a weakened heart due not only to the diabetes but to his strenuous life style and his overabundance of weight. A late appearance during the 1916/1917 concert season marked Ysaÿe's last solo engagement in New York. Between 1918 and 1920 he appeared three times in collaboration with Mischa Elman at the Hippodrome. He was, by this time, long past his prime. He died in Brussels on May 12, 1931.

A small selection of recordings made by the Belgian virtuoso around 1912 have been reissued on the Rococo label, 2035. Though produced in the fading light of the master's power, these recordings nevertheless offer fitting testimony to his artistic personality. The disc opens with a sensitive performance of the Wilhelmj arrangement of Wagner's Prize Song from his opera Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. The tone is warm and full in the low registers and rings clear and pure in the high registers. The intonation, very secure throughout, is particularly impressive in these very high passages. Though the portamentos sound "old-fashioned" to modern ears, they are played with a grace and refinement that add charm to the performance. Ysaÿe's use of vibrato is particularly interesting here. Never overdone (some notes are actually played without vibrato), its speed and intensity are molded to the expressive needs of his musical direction. His performance of Chabrier's Scherzo-Valse begins with high-spirited enthusiasm that is truly infectious. Though some of the faster passages seem in danger of "running away," the level of technical achievement demonstrated here makes one wonder what the critics had to complain about.

The intonation is excellent and the tone, barring a bit of "scrubbing" on occasion, is of good quality. Nevertheless, things start to deteriorate somewhat halfway through this three-minute confection. The tempo in the fast passages becomes more and more frenzied and as pianist and violinist scramble to the finish line, the intonation naturally becomes blurred and the bowing unsure. Nonetheless, it is an exciting, if hectic, performance, filled with spirit and vigour. Ysaÿe's recording of the final movement of the Mendelssohn Concerto is a large-scale reflection of the Chabrier work. He begins with a well-controlled but high-spirited enthusiasm which eventually deteriorates into a headlong dash to the end. The early sections of the movement, though taken at quite a fast tempo, are well controlled and show Ysaÿe at his best technically. The intonation is good, the tone is strong and virile. But as the piece degenerates into a frantic jumble of notes, it would almost seem that Ysaÿe's strength and energy are too much for even him to handle. The elaborate double-stopped passages in Wieniawski's _Mazurka No. 2 in D major_ are not executed with the facility and clarity so evident in the Kubelik recording of the same work. However, Ysaÿe moves years ahead of his Bohemian colleague in the slow, lyrical passages. Where Kubelik produces a dry, matter-of-fact sound with little hint of vibrato, Ysaÿe sings with a warmth of sound and inborn spontaneity that must have been incomprehensible to his pyrotechnical confreres. The Brahms-Joachim _Hungarian Dance No. 5_ is filled with strength, energy and temperament. It is, for the most part, well in hand technically. Although Ysaÿe's performance of Kreisler's _Caprice viennois Op. 2_ does not have the light-hearted spontaneity of Kreisler's own performance, it is marked by tonal beauty and

intensity of sound. The intonation, excellent throughout, is particularly impressive in the double-stopped passages. Despite the extraordinarily slow tempo chosen for this performance, Ysaÿe demonstrates complete control over his instrument at all times. In Wagner's Albumblatt, he again demonstrates beauty and richness of sound, even in the higher registers, though there are times, in extremely high passages, when his intonation begins to falter. The Ave Maria by Schubert is played with a prayerful simplicity that belies the power of the famed Belgian and the main theme of Dvořák's Humoresque, played at a very slow tempo, is marked by a quiet gentility that gives way to a warm, rich sound in the lyrical passages. It is clear from these few recordings that technical display was seldom a priority with Eugène Ysaÿe. The tempos chosen are frequently on the slow side, thus giving him the opportunity to concentrate on the beauty inherent in the works themselves. The beauty of his tone and the poetry inherent in his interpretations changed the course of violin performance in the early twentieth century, and those players who could not acclimatize themselves to this change fell by the wayside.

Throughout his career, Ysaÿe had a clear picture of his own position within the development of the art of violin performance:

> When I take the whole history of the violin into account, I feel that the true inwardness of violin mastery is best expressed by a kind of threefold group of artists. First, in the order of romantic expression, we have a trinity made up of Corelli, Viotti and Vieuxtemps. Then there is a trinity of mechanical perfection, composed of Locatelli, Tartini and Paganini or, a more modern equivalent, César Thomson, Kubelik, and Burmeister [sic]. And, finally, what I

> might call in the order of lyric expression, a quartet comprising Ysaÿe, Thibaud, Mischa Elman and Sametini of Chicago (the last named a wonderfully fine artist of the lyric or singing type.)[21]

He also possessed an all-encompassing ideal of what the real violinist must be:

> He must be a violinist, a thinker, a poet, a human being, he must have known hope, love, passion and despair, he must have run the gamut of the emotions in order to express them all in his playing. He must play his violin as Pan played his flute.[22]

Eugène Ysaÿe appeared before his audiences as a sincere, inspired artist, who shared with his listeners emotions and moods which could not but reach their hearts. His audiences responded to him as they had to no other violinist. The critics saw it, as did his colleagues. With Eugène Ysaÿe there dawned a new era of violin performance, an era which would demand not only beauty of sound, not only integrity of interpretation, but a musical and emotional combination of the two.

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[21]Frederick H. Martens, Violin Mastery - Talks with Master Violinists and Teachers (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1919), p. 11.

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 12.

CHAPTER VII

FRANZ VON VECSEY

The concert season that saw the triumphant return of Eugène Ysaÿe to New York also witnessed the debut of a twelve-year-old Hungarian virtuoso who, despite his tender age, was marked with the characteristics of a fading era.

Franz von Vecsey was born in 1893 in Budapest. He received his first lessons on the violin from his father, became a pupil of Jenő Hubay at the age of eight and embarked on his first concert tour by the time he was ten years old. Through the recommendation of Joseph Joachim, lessons followed in St. Petersburg with the famed Hungarian pedagogue, Leopold Auer. While in Russia, Vecsey made the acquaintance of another young virtuoso, Mischa Elman, who was destined to be a serious rival for the attention of European and American audiences. Despite the influence of Auer and the "Russian school," Vecsey retained his old attachment to Hubay, valuing his musical guidance as well as his friendship.

Franz von Vecsey made his American debut in New York City on January 10, 1905. Despite the fact that his arrival was preceded by hordes of enthusiastic, almost frenzied reports from Berlin and London, the important New York critics remained, for the most part, cool. The Sun's William Henderson as a matter of fact, waxed sarcastic:

> Local music lovers were invited to go forth last night and be astonished once again by the feats of a juvenile prodigy. The infant's name this time is Franz von Vecsey, and he plays with the violin. The musical prodigy disease

> is one hard to cure. It breaks out in Europe periodically and affects the critical brain of the Continent sadly; consequently all sorts of heated accounts of the performances of young von Vecsey have been freighted across the already overburdened Atlantic.[1]

The Tribune's Henry Krehbiel followed his 450 word tirade against the evils and dangers of the child prodigy with a sensible, thoughtful assessment of the child's playing. Though quick to condemn the extravagance of the European reviewers, he was equally quick in giving the boy credit where credit was due:

> He is certainly a phenomenon from a technical point of view and as such he excites amazement, for he plays music which has caused and always will cause vast labor in mature virtuosi with an ease and composure that must be maddening to them. He plays it with amazing purity, with a volume and quality of tone that are ravishing, but he plays like the boy that he is. All the talk that has come to us from Europe of his capacity for emotional expression and his mature interpretation is so much absurd balderdash. There is not a nuance either of tempo or expression in his playing which does not proclaim itself as mere imitation. The miracle is that he can imitate as well as he does. The lad's command of both the technical elements in violin playing - tone formation and tone production - is bewilderingly perfect, but there is no individuality in his readings, no emotion in his tones. All the charm comes from the beauty of his tone, the purity of his intonation, his rhythmical incisiveness. . .[2]

Krehbiel explained Vecsey's European popularity as a result of "the dominance which virtuosity in mechanical technique has gained in the executive branch of music." Sophisticated Americans, he hoped, would look for more. Unlike Krehbiel, Henderson proved unwilling even to acknowledge the technical supremacy of the boy and, of music talent, there was of course no evidence whatsoever:

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[1]Sun, January 11, 1905.

[2]Tribune, January 11, 1905.

> His tone is big, impure and raw. His intonation is uncertain and in many rapid passages he smeared along the strings like a child out for a slide on the ice. His bowing is generally good, but wholly without spirit. It is purely mechanical. He played everything straight along in a dead flat manner, without a shadow of nuance. It is said that he is eleven years old. He did not show as much musical instinct as a talented child of six might show.[3]

Henderson's caustic wit however was not reserved for Vecsey alone. He was also careful to point a disparaging finger at the audiences who so enthusiastically encouraged such a spectacle:

> The appeal to astonishment is the lowest appeal that can be made by musical performance. Yet it was certainly all that little Franz von Vecsey made, and even that he made feebly. . . . After hearing him play the first [Concerto in E major by Vieuxtemps] it was unnecessary to hear him play the last [Wieniawski's Faust fantaisie]. His measure had been taken. The boy is a well schooled little parrot. So far as could be seen from his playing last night he has no more real musical talent than an organ grinder. He has an ingenious boy's cleverness at finding out how a fiddle works. He has learned that if you draw a bow back and forth in certain ways and work the fingers of your left hand correctly on the fingerboard, the thing comes out right and the stunt is done. He is a mere fingerboard acrobat. . . .
>
> It is absolutely impossible to say why a little boy of this kind, who looks like an amiable, hearty, sturdy young chap, capable of sailing a boat or riding a pony, should be set up on a platform to fiddle at people. However, here he is and no doubt many persons who would not go to listen to grown up violinists able to interpret the masters will sit at his feet lost in wonder.[4]

Richard Aldrich, on the other hand, seemed to be genuinely touched by the "spectacle" and his review was marked by the sort of naive sentimentality loved by unsophisticated readers everywhere:

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[3] Sun, January 11, 1905.

[4] Sun, January 11, 1905.

> Many remarkable reports had preceded the little Vecsey of the excitement he had created in Berlin and in London at his recent appearances in these cities - which there is good reason to believe were not overdrawn - and of the remarkable qualities he shows as a violinist. Many of the latter he justified by his playing last evening which was in truth, in most respects, wonderful. He is a little Hungarian boy, scarcely looking his age, and as he came out last evening upon the platform in a white sailor suit with knee breeches and stood gravely bowing with the utmost simplicity and unconsciousness, it seemed evident that the excitement he has aroused has in no way spoiled him. Nor is there any trace of affectation or mannerism in his playing; he goes ahead with the business at hand with aplomb and intense concentration; and not without evidence of love for what he does.[5]

Unlike most of his critical colleagues, Aldrich found much in Vecsey's playing to admire, both musically and technically:

> His musical gifts are truly astonishing. . . . His technical powers are certainly of the highest kind, especially those of the left hand. The brilliant passage work of Vieuxtemps' concerto he played with the greatest dexterity and clearness. There was something almost incredible in the dash and cheerful assurance with which he attacked the elaborate successions of double stopping in thirds, sixths and octaves and with which he executed the arpeggios, the chromatic scales and the flying leaps - not always with absolutely pure intonation but with surprisingly few slips and with real brilliancy. His bowing has considerable freedom and elasticity; the rapid staccato with the up bow he achieves crisply and delicately - in a way that is simply masterly. One of the most noteworthy features of his playing is the power of his tone, its clearness and sweetness. . . . Of the secrets of violin technique, there is little that he has not mastered or is not in the way of mastering.[6]

Aldrich was, however, willing to state clearly and forcefully that, contrary to European reviews and assessments, Vecsey "does not play with the authority, ripeness and depth of feeling of a mature artist." This fact of course presented no cause for alarm - a precocious child remains a child, despite

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[5]Times, January 11, 1905

[6]Times, January 11, 1905.

his unusual powers in selected areas. Aldrich saw Vecsey as an innately musical boy and predicted great things for the future of his art, despite the mindless furor he was creating at this time.

In view of the above, it is surprising to see Aldrich's sudden shift in opinion after Vecsey's second performance only one week later. The other reviewers spoke in much the same vein as they had previously, though perhaps they showed a bit more generosity in their assessment of his technical prowess. Musically however, there was again nothing to discuss:

> The more familiar one is with the art of violin playing, the greater the wonder at the prodigy's skill must be for he performs his most prodigious feats with a nonchalant ease that must deceive the uninitiated as to the character of his performances. He is a child, and partly because of the absence of all affectation in his manner, partly because it would be too unnatural were he to disclose maturity of thought and feeling, there can be no discussion of his conception of the music which he performs. . . . The one thing to be borne in mind is that so far as the mere technical performance of the compositions which he plays is concerned, he ranks with the best of his contemporaries among mature virtuosi. In the department which transcends the mechanical he is interesting in inverse ratio to the interest invited by his music.[7]

In general, they stood by their initial opinion that Vecsey concerts should be labelled under the heading "Exhibitions for the Curious." The Times review however marks a drastic "about face" in the opinion of Richard Aldrich with respect to the young Hungarian. The musical gifts that were "truly astonishing" the previous week seemed to have suddenly disappeared and even the boy's technical skills were in question:

> Only in the Mendelssohn concerto was there anything of serious musicianship, of sentiment and of interpretation in the higher sense demanded of him and in this he showed even more immaturity than in the concerto by Vieuxtemps with which he introduced

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[7] Tribune, January 18, 1905.

> himself. In fact, it suggested in many places only the barest outline of what the significance of the music really is. Technically it was rough and in intonation, frequently false. Indeed, not to put too fine a point of it, it was a pretty crude performance of a well known classic.[8]

It is interesting to note that there were no complaints on technical grounds from the other critics reviewing this performance. Although Aldrich softened his approach somewhat by suggesting that "perhaps even infant players have their off nights," he ended his review with a strong affirmation of earlier critiques:

> Paganini's colossal piece of trickery [Witches' Dance] he approached with boyish unconcern and far from boyish dash and dexterity. Many of its once fabulous effects in the way of flageolet passages and alternating staccato and pizzicato runs he accomplished with a skill that must remain bewildering. This kind of skill, however, this peculiar and very decided talent for all the most exacting demands of violin technique, remains so far as has yet been disclosed, the sum and substance of this remarkable boy's musical endowment.[9]

This is a far cry from the previous week's assessment of the boy's "thoroughly musical" playing. It is possible that, after recovering from his initial astonishment, Aldrich was able to make a more objective assessment of Vecsey's playing. Nevertheless one cannot help thinking that the strongly-voiced views of other critics may have influenced him. By the time Vecsey made his third New York appearance, Aldrich was firmly established in his new position:

> His playing remains . . . . chiefly a matter of technical power, the power of mastering mechanical difficulties that other and older players must acquire with unceasing and long-continued labor. These difficulties scarcely exist as a barrier between

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[8]Times, January 18, 1905.

[9]Times, January 18, 1906.

> this young player and the music he attempts to interpret, and had he the intellectual comprehension and the artistic ripeness, there is nothing he could not master. What he may be able to do in the future only the future can reveal, but he has yet given little warrant for calling the power he possesses genius, in the higher sense of that word.
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> His playing is wonderful enough however, when he is at his best and the bewilderment and delight with which he was observed yesterday are only the natural expressions of an inevitable attitude toward such an appearance as he is. Musical enjoyment, the enjoyment of great art, it is not.[10]

Franz von Vecsey returned to America sixteen years later, a fully-matured artist, aged twenty-eight. His European career had been interrupted by the First World War in which he had served in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces. The Russian/American violinist and historian Boris Schwarz remembers his reappearance in the early 1920's in Berlin's Philharmonic Hall:

> The performance was sold out, the audience demonstrative and adoring. Vecsey, looking pale and aristocratic, played a comparatively short program with long intermissions. It was rumored that he still suffered from the aftermath of his war injuries; but nothing of this kind could be detected in his playing, which was utterly perfect and icy cold. He performed with classical purity and inner detachment, letting the music speak for itself, as it were, without interjecting his own personality. His technique was absolutely perfect and effortless. He used a very narrow vibrato, and that sparingly; the unadulterated silvery sound of his beautiful Stradivarius seemed to be drawn by a magic bow. He held his elbow rather low, in the old manner of Joachim. Though his musical taste was pure and noble, his interpretation lacked individuality, unless that seemingly "impersonal" touch was what he intended.[11]

Reactions to Vecsey's reappearance in New York on November 1, 1921 were mixed, although considering the impressions he had left behind as a child

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[10]Times, January 22, 1905.

[11]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 384.

of twelve, the critics were generally pleased with his development. Everyone testified to the quality of his tone,and his technique was, as before, irreproachable. The fears and apprehensions of earlier years were dissipated by proof of his musical development. Nevertheless, reviews suggested that Vecsey was not at this time enjoying the popularity and success of some of his colleagues. Richard Aldrich provided a possible and probable reason for this:

> Mr. Vecsey has gone far in the development of his technique which is extremely brilliant and accurate. Brilliancy, accuracy and a high development of technique are not uncommon possessions in well trained and talented young violinists today and need not be a cause of excessive wonder. More elusive and less obvious qualities are the ones that call for tributes of respect and admiration, musical feeling, penetration, an understanding of the rarer qualities of style and taste, the possession of eloquence and imagination. Mr. Vecsey is not deprived of these qualities, but they are not so predominant in his playing as to make it profoundly engrossing or to stir deeply the enthusiasm of musical listeners.[12]

In other words, Vecsey had been overshadowed by the demands of twentieth-century performance. By 1920, technical perfection was no longer cause for wonder - everyone played with near-perfect technique - and because Vecsey's strictly musical and interpretative qualities were limited, he was unable to hold his ground against the surging tide of young violinists whose playing possessed all of these characteristics to a seemingly unlimited degree.

Vecsey's recordings provide ample support for the statements made by the American reviewers. The Masters of the Bow recording MB 1002 presents Franz von Vecsey in twelve pieces selected from the thirty-two

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[12]Times, November 2, 1921

different works he recorded during the course of his career. The recording dates range from approximately 1910 to 1920.

The first work encountered on the recording is Beethoven's Sonata Op. 12 No. 3 in E-flat major, a complete performance. The listener is immediately struck by the clean, precise, effortless but bland quality of Vecsey's playing. The first movement, marked "Allegro con spirito" shows in fact very little spirit. It is straightforward, objective, detached playing and, with the exception of the coda, it is found wanting in any sign of enthusiasm. The tonal quality, while far from objectionable, is colourless, due mainly to the fact that Vecsey uses very little vibrato and the vibrato that does occasionally emerge is shallow and narrow in oscillation. The second movement, marked "Adagio con molto espressione" is seriously deficient in any form of expression. Again, with the exception of a somewhat more lyrical middle section, the sound is bland, colourless and for the most part, cool. The final Rondo movement is the only one of the three that shows much sign of life. However the enthusiasm of his performance does not camouflage his heavy-handed approach. His playing, though lively, does not possess the brilliance and sparkle of the great twentieth-century virtuosos. Vecsey's performance of Tartini's Sonata in G minor (Il Trillo del Diavolo) and Paganini's Caprice No. 2 in B minor illustrates his technical superiority. Despite the fiendish demands these pieces make on the violinist (extended trills, double-stopped trills, staccato and spiccato passages (at all speeds and in all positions), string crossings, harmonics, chromatic passages, double-stopped chromatic passages, etc.) Vecsey's intonation remains impeccable, and his rhythm retains its clockwork

precision throughout. In Schubert's Ave Maria, Vecsey shows unexpected warmth and depth of sound, particularly on the G-string. However, his vibrato (shallow and slow) and his slides (slow and in several instances ungainly) harken back to an earlier style of violin playing. His recording of Schumann's Träumerei provides an excellent demonstration of the tonal quality of the mature Franz von Vecsey. This performance is marked not only by warmth of tone (particularly on the lower strings), but by sensitive, communicative playing as well. Vecsey plays well into the strings on this recording and immediately perceivable is the increased, more intensive vibrato. Nor are his slides as tastelessly lugubrious as in some of his recordings. All this tends to suggest that this recording was likely made closer to 1920 than 1910 and that Vecsey, by this time, had been influenced by some of his more "modern" contemporaries. In the recordings of the Larghetto movement of Handel's Sonata Op. 1 No. 1 in B minor and of the Air from Bach's Suite No. 3 in D major, there is evidence of the same warm, in-the-string sound, and sincerity of expression. However, his vibrato (even in oscillation but very slow) coats the entire proceedings with a honeyed sweetness that is a far cry both from the vibrant intensity of players such as Elman and Heifetz and a true Baroque interpretation. In both the Handel and the Bach, Vecsey's shifting is again annoyingly obvious. His performances of his own Foglio d'album and Wieniawski's Souvenir de Moscou and Fantaisie brillante (on themes from Gounod's Faust) are fine examples of his extraordinary technique. Combined, they contain all the technical trials that are the plague of violinists to this day. Vecsey sails through such obstacles with a relaxed nonchalance that places each note, no matter

how short, no matter how high in pitch, whether harmonic, stopped or double-stopped, neatly in its own well-tuned place. However, there is a cool detachment and lack of involvement evident in his playing. As the critics stated time and time again, technical perfection was no longer a novelty in 1920 and although the mature Franz von Vecsey (as his recordings indicate) was not totally without musical sensitivities, they were not as magnetic as were those of his more successful colleagues.

Carl Flesch heard the Hungarian virtuoso for the first time in 1910. Vecsey was seventeen years old at the time. His assessments not only mirror those of the New York critics, but provide a possible explanation for Vecsey's musical deficiencies as well:

> Purely as a violinist, to be sure, he made a spotless impression: his tone production was brilliant, his movements were correct, and his technical ability altogether was of a high order. But his playing did not seem to contain much. It was primitive and undistinguished musically. He seemed a pupil of unusual talent with all the necessary spiritual potentialities which, however, were destined to remain latent. He had been removed from the supervision of his teacher at too early an age, and his musical and ethical education was left to chance - to the vagaries of concert life. The outcome was an impoverishment of his personality which prevented his full artistic development.[13]

From 1920 on, Vecsey's appearances were infrequent. According to Flesch, his last years were wrapped in mystery and "it was not known quite how he spent his time." He died in 1935 at the age of forty-two, following surgery.

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[13]Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 252.

CHAPTER VIII

MISCHA ELMAN

Vecsey's major competitor during his early years as a "child wonder" came in the person of yet another precocious virtuoso, Mischa Elman. The two boys had met in St. Petersburg early in 1904 under the watchful eye of Leopold Auer, and frequently played together both privately and in school recitals. Although it was noted that Elman's violin tone consistantly overshadowed that of Vecsey, it was not until Elman's formal Berlin debut on October 14, 1904 that professional comparisons became unavoidable. German critics conceded to the fact that both youngsters were near-perfect technically, but they were swept away by Elman's extraordinary tone, his warmth and vitality, his irresistible lyricism, and the spontaneity of his communication. In fact, after Elman's triumphant Berlin debut, Vecsey's manager left him to represent Elman and arranged for the young Russian's London debut several months later. The rivalry between Franz von Vecsey and Mischa Elman was, in effect, the confrontation between the old and the new.

Mischa Elman was born in Talnoi, Russia, near Kiev, on January 20, 1891. His father, a Hebrew teacher, gave the boy his first few violin lessons. Shortly afterwards he enrolled his son, aged six, in the Imperial Music School in Odessa, under the guidance of violinist Alexander Fiedemann, a former pupil of Leopold Auer. Elman's progress was astonishing and by the year 1903 he was himself studying with the great master in St. Petersburg. Elman displayed such incredible technical and musical prowess that the

the perplexed Professor Auer decided to drop all preparatory training and taught the child as if he were a senior student. Unfortunately, this resulted in certain weaknesses in Elman's technical foundation which created problems for him in later years.

The thirteen-year-old Elman scored a tremendous success when Auer formally introduced him to St. Petersburg musical circles. This was followed shortly thereafter by the sensational Berlin debut of 1904, as well as concerts in the Scandinavian countries and Austria. His London debut at Queen's Hall on March 21, 1905 was the musical event of the season and he was invited to Buckingham Palace to play for King Edward VII. During the summer of 1905, Auer journeyed to England to keep a watchful eye on the young virtuoso and they spent three months together working on new repertoire. Elman, however, never returned to his formal studies in St. Petersburg. By the age of thirteen, he had already embarked upon a full-time, professional career.

Mischa Elman made his New York debut in Carnegie Hall on December 10, 1908 playing the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with the Russian Symphony. The requirements of the "new age" were clearly expressed in the enthusiastic review by the usually stern Henry Krehbiel:

> His playing disclosed not only a mastery of violin technique, but the instinct and accomplishments of a musician, as distinguished from a mere virtuoso. Elman's tone is large and it is also pure, with an element approaching nobility. His notes were produced with penetrating clarity and beauty and with a precise faith to the pitch that was comforting to hear. Flexibility, smoothness and energy marked all that he did. . . and there was a constant suggestion of reserve force. In his

> double stopping, his octaves and especially the rapid passages the violinist reached a lofty standard of proficiency, while his cantilena was admirably full and sustained.[1]

Krehbiel's colleagues were equally generous in their reviews. One week later, Mischa Elman gave his first solo recital in New York. This time, the ever-watchful critics had the opportunity to observe the violinist quietly, thoughtfully, and at greater length. Only William Henderson continued on in a purely positive vein:

> Mr. Elman is without question a great violinist. He is yet very young, and the most prominent features of his equipment as a technician are associated with immense ardor, quick sensitiveness [sic] and a passionate love for the tonal resources of his instrument. . . . This young violinist has first of all a tone of ravishing beauty, clear, pure, rich and vital. His cantilena is filled with the lights and shadows of the most skillful bowing and it is a joy to hear him make his instrument sing a melodic theme.
>
> With his notable tone Elman joins inspiring certainty in passage work of all kinds, playing the more intricate measures of his numbers not as if they were feats of technical achievement but like integral parts of the composer's song.[2]

With this last paragraph, Krehbiel and Aldrich were now no longer in total agreement. Although still eager to acknowledge Elman's extraordinary powers, Krehbiel was disappointed to find a streak of exhibitionism in his playing and warned that this tendency to "show off" stood in the way, not only of artful interpretation, but of pure, accurate technical performance as well:

> With every faculty finely developed which makes not only the great virtuoso, but also the great artist, he nevertheless showed a tendency yesterday to play for the ears of the groundlings - to amaze and bewilder by an exaggeration of qualities which normally are great enough to compel the utmost admiration from

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[1] Tribune, December 11, 1908.

[2] Sun, December 18, 1908.

> the judicious. And in this overaccentuation of his abilities he disturbed some of the enjoyment. . . . His playing has something in it in the nature of a challenge: it seems to demand comparison, not only with that of the youthful virtuosi of the last decade, but even with that of the veterans of the past. . . . The pity of it was that the young player seemed to be so fond of startling his public by his dash . . . that he sometimes forgot that there were persons in his audience who would have preferred rather to be charmed by purity of intonation in association with such a splendid volume of sound than by brilliancy with an impure alloy.[3]

Aldrich too, after graciously enumerating the talents and accomplishments of the young Russian,was blunt in his final assessment:

> But this extraordinary talent has unfortunately been diverted from a sound and normal artistic development into fields where it counts for less than it might and should as an artistic force. . . .
>
> There are serious defects in his playing, upon the purely musical side, that prevent him . . . from taking the position of a really great artist. He has in abundance what is known as "temperament" and his playing suffers from its lack of poise and restraint.
>
> He is too apt to force the note of pathos, of sentiment, of "expression" generally. Thereby comes a lack of breadth, simplicity and naturalness into his playing. He will deliver a passage with incredible facility and brilliancy, only to spoil it by the next phrase.
>
> A natural result of these qualities is a rhythmic uncertainty which runs through much of his playing. A still more serious and fundamental fault is found in his intonation. There are times when he plays whole movements sharp in pitch. . . .[4]

However, he attributed most of Elman's musical "problems" to "the shadow of his early exploitation as a prodigy," rather than to innate musical deficiencies. Elman's performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra two weeks later served to re-enforce Aldrich's opinion. While his playing was truly remarkable in many ways, both

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[3]*Tribune*, December 18, 1908.

[4]*Times*, December 18, 1908.

technically and musically, the critic's main attention was now centered upon the limitations as he saw them:

> There were many beautifully played passages. What was missed was the lofty serenity of the music, the repose and breadth that are its essence. There was still the trace of restlessness in Mr. Elman's playing. There was not always the perfect security of rhythm that this music needs above all other.
>
> While there were certain exquisite bits of cantilena he did not keep it always on the plane of higher nobility. These are things that, with all the brilliancy and remarkable talent of this bewildering young man, disconcert those who would see him reach the place to which his rare gifts and accomplishments entitle him[5]

Krehbiel shared these thoughts but was not as direct in voicing them. For the time being, he was satisfied to rejoice in the extraordinary powers of the young Russian and to wait for the musical maturity that would surely come with the advancing years.

Elman returned to New York in January of 1910 for another round of concert engagements. Audiences welcomed him with a degree of enthusiasm that bordered on hysteria. The critics, somewhat perplexed, stood their ground:

> So conscious is he of his ability to amaze and bewilder with his technical accomplishments that he forgets that technique is, or ought to be, a servant to interpretation. He played the concerto [by Tchaikovsky] last night with such extravagance of sentiment. . . . And yet his playing, by its dash, brilliancy, splendor of tone and correctness of intonation, made captives of all his listeners. It was an evening of virtuoso achievements; and it would be vain to try to find a complete explanation for it.[6]

William Henderson complained not only of Elman's musical extravagance but

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[5]Times, January 8, 1909.

[6]Tribune, January 14, 1910.

of his "physical" extravagance as well:

> To be sure there were some personal peculiarities in his playing not a few of which addressed themselves to the eye instead of the ear. But these could be avoided by the easy process of not looking at him. Still for a few moments at the outset there was enough to raise a question as to whether he was playing a violin solo or giving a demonstration of some new method of physical culture.[7]

By the end of January, however, a somewhat relieved Richard Aldrich began to detect some response by Elman to the criticisms of the New York reviewers:

> There was less of mannerism and affectation of the virtuoso that has marked some of Mr. Elman's playing in the past. And in fact the two most serious numbers on the programme, Lalo's Symphonie Espagnole and the sonata by Handel [in D major] were treated by him with seriousness and dignity. There was real nobility and stateliness in his interpretation of Handel's music and the larghetto movement he delivered with splendid richness of tone and sustained power.[8]

The following season again brought signs of increased musical maturity in the young Russian's performances:

> Mr. Mischa Elman, the violinist, made his reappearance in New York as the soloist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra concert and it was a notable occasion. This is the third season that Mr. Elman has played here and his return each time showed him as a more finished artist, with ideals a little higher and with the anxieties of a mere virtuoso a little more subdued. Greater technical mastery he hardly could have; yet it may be thought that in a way his less obtrusive accomplishment of astonishing things is itself a sign of greater mastery of them. . . . It is unquestionably the playing of one of the most remarkable artists now before the public.[9]

By this time, Elman had won a degree of popularity unmatched by any of his rivals. At every concert it became necessary to relinquish stage space for the accommodation of overflow crowds. He had, by 1911, surpassed even

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[7] Sun, January 14, 1910.

[8] Times, January 20, 1910.

[9] Times, January 13, 1911

Fritz Kreisler as a box office attraction in the United States.

By 1914, Elman had, even in the eyes of his critics, reached full maturity as an artist:

> Mr. Elman has rarely or never played better since he has been coming to New York than he did at this recital. . . . His tone was of incomparable bigness [sic], warmth, vitality and searching power; a tone that veritably filled Carnegie Hall as a violin seldom can. How noble and how emotionally fervid is this tone in Mr. Elman's cantilena, when he sings a passage with true distinction of style and without a desire to sentimentalize and to tap the listener's tear ducts! It is to be said that . . . he has put away much of this desire, and his playing was franker and manlier, more sincere and more truly musical, governed by a better taste, than playing he has offered before in New York.[10]

The colourful James Huneker added his voice of approval to that of the multitudinous throng:

> Elman is a magician of many moods. United to an amazing technical precision there is still more amazing emotional temperament, all dominated by a powerful musical and mental intellect that is uncanny. In the romantic or the virtuoso realm he is a past master.[11]

Nevertheless, Elman could never really shake himself totally of the desire to demonstrate his technical prowess and throughout his career, complaints occasionally resurfaced:

> The Beethoven violin concerto looms up so monumentally that it has always been a welcome feature of every concert of serious import; and Mr. Elman who played it yesterday, has played it before to the obvious admiration of his hearers. We don't know that his technical equipment was ever displayed in it to finer advantage than on this occasion. But must we be content with brilliant mechanism in this work, even though mixed with a considerable modicum of something higher and better? Were we not entitled to a finer aesthetic poise, to a loftier

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[10] Times, February 1, 1914.

[11] James Gibbons Huneker, Unicorns (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), p. 158.

> serenity, to greater dignity and reposefulness of utterance than were vouchsafed us?[12]

New York critics constantly complained about his cadenzas which appeared to have been constructed for the sole purpose of technical display. Hence they were frequently found wanting in taste, bearing little relationship to the work as a whole. It is interesting, in light of the overall reactions of the New York critics, to consider a statement made by the virtuoso himself in conversation with Samuel Applebaum, American violinist and pedagogue:

> There is something radically wrong in our teaching methods which permit talented students to be obsessed with the idea that speed and rapidity are the great essentials. . . . Velocity is - used in its proper place - a genuine requirement. Yet I feel that genuine development of technique can be retarded by overindulgence in speed for speed's sake. . . . This very desire to play at fast tempos causes slovenliness in execution, a lack of co-ordination between the two hands, and a perverted approach to the emotional content of the music. Today there is too much stress on sheer mechanics.[13]

How ironic this sounds coming from a violinist who was so frequently chastised for his own technical flamboyance. However, further in the conversation, we come to the heart of Elman's approach to violin playing - the beautiful tone:

> Students are prone to lose sight of the nature of their instrument as a medium second only to the human voice as expressive of tonal beauty. I would place strong stress on impressing pupils with the fact that the violin is a singing instrument - appreciation of its musical function should be cultivated and they should not be carried away by dazzling technical display.[14]

Tonal beauty was of the utmost importance to Mischa Elman and anything - rhythmic precision, musical structure, tempo - could be sacrificed for its

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[12] _Times_, November 5, 1917.

[13] Samuel Applebaum, _The Way They Play_, Book I (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1972), p. 10.

[14] _Ibid._, p. 10.

sake. The critics saw this and even though musical discipline was not yet the dominating force it was to become in the not too distant future, they objected to his distortions and excesses as he coaxed from his violin the distinctive "lava-like" tone that so thrilled his audiences.

Elman, like many artists then and now, was not overly appreciative of the music critic:

> Critics, it seems to me, often assume the position of possessing an ability to tell artists how to improve their performance and give the impression that they know as much or more about compositions as the player does himself! One welcomes criticism by a qualified critic. Unfortunately, however, we know that newspapers are not as careful in choosing a music critic as they are in picking a sports writer or one on political affairs. If a political writer would make the mistakes a music critic frequently does, he would be summarily dismissed. The newspapers seem more concerned about the music critic's journalistic style than about his musical knowledge. . . . One wonders, when a man spends a lifetime, or a student spends years in preparation for public performance. . . if it is fair reward to be "torn apart" without, too frequently, sense or justification. Especially since this disservice is so often from people unfit to judge either the player or his performance.[15]

With the arrival of Jascha Heifetz in 1917, the "ideal" in violin playing suddenly, overnight, became the reality and Elman's popularity began to wane. By the mid-1920's Elman was significantly superseded by Heifetz and Kreisler (one of the few violinists who managed to survive the phenomenon of Heifetz). Nevertheless, although the number and importance of his engagements steadily dwindled (along with the fees he commanded), he retained a small but intensely loyal audience right up to his death at the age of 76.

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[15]*Ibid.*, p. 17.

The Masters of the Bow recording MB 1006 presents seventeen short pieces recorded by Mischa Elman early in his career, between 1909 and 1920. Most are from the Victor and HMV labels and provide the listener with a fine introduction to the unique violinistic personality of this Russian virtuoso. The recording opens with Kurt Schindler's Paraphrase on Fibich's Poem Op. 41 No. 14. Immediately evident is the golden warmth of Elman's tone and the delicacy of expression. The intonation, even in extended double-stopped passages is impeccable. His performance of Anton Rubinstein's Romance in E-flat major, though marked by greater intensity and urgency, exhibits the same tonal qualities. Kreisler's Rondino on a Theme by Beethoven is light and buoyant in spirit and possesses the grace and delicacy of Fritz Kreisler himself. The decidedly romantic flavour of an arrangement for piano and violin of Domenico Scarlatti's Sonata in E minor, L. 413 again bears witness to Elman's penchant for beautiful sound. All Baroque characteristics are boldly pushed aside here in favour of tonal richness. Although there is much technical agility displayed in Elman's performance of Ignaz Brüll's Scène espagnole, his tone is weak and sterile - either an example of a poor quality recording or proof that even the greatest of virtuosos have their off days. The same can be said of Sarasate's arrangement of Chopin's Nocturne No. 2 in E-flat major which is marred by annoying slides and a couple of glaring errors in intonation as well as poor sound quality. With Dvořák's Humoresque No. 7 in G-flat major we return to the real Mischa Elman. The tempo chosen (reminiscent of that taken by Ysaÿe) gives him ample opportunity to display his tonal wealth. His intonation, consistently pure, is particularly impressive in his own embellished double-stopped and

harmonic passages. In César Espejo's _Airs tziganes_, Elman displays not only the golden richness of his tone and the virile intensity of his vibrato but his technical agility as well. The fast passages of this work are played with great facility, verve and vitality. Each note remains perfectly in tune and perfectly placed as Elman races up and down the fingerboard at a furious tempo. Despite the fact that Ysaÿe's _Rêve d'enfant_ suffers slightly from a loss of tonal intensity in the highest registers, there is much evidence of Elman's distinctive colour throughout. It is among the most lyrical performances on the album. Although Max Vogrich's _Dans le bois_ (based on Paganini's _Caprice No. 9 in E_) is fraught with technical perils, particularly in the form of double stops, Elman retains his purity of pitch and intensive sonority with grace and spontaneity. The recording ends with an artful performance of Kreisler's _Sicilienne et rigaudon_ - a performance that clearly juxtaposes Elman's lyricism and warmth with his technical purity and vitality. Because there are no great masterworks on this album, there is little to support critical complaints regarding Elman's personalized interpretations - interpretations that placed beauty of sound before all else. Rather these recordings introduce Elman in light of what he played best. In the performance of such musical miniatures, he was inimitable.

CHAPTER IX

JASCHA HEIFETZ

On October 27, 1917, during the intermission of Jascha Heifetz's New York debut recital, Mischa Elman, it was reported, complained to pianist Leopold Godowsky, "Isn't it awfully hot in this hall?" "Not for pianists!" came the reply. The prophetic overtones of Godowsky's "smart" remark soon became evident as Elman's uncomfortable evening turned into an uncomfortable half-century for violinists everywhere. Heifetz's debut was far more than just another event in the course of a great city's musical life. It was an historic occurrence which initiated a revolution in violin playing "fully as profound as that brought to birth by Paganini in the nineteenth century."[1]

Jascha Heifetz was born on February 2, 1901 in Vilna, Lithuania, a part of Tsarist Russia. Though his father was a violinist of only moderate achievements, he was perceptive enough to recognize and guide his son's prodigious talent. Heifetz began his violin studies informally at the age of three and by the age of five was ready to enter Vilna's Royal School of Music where he studied under Ilya Davidovitch Malkin, a pupil of Leopold Auer. At the age of six he performed the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in public. He graduated from the Conservatory before he was eight years old. Soon after, Malkin arranged an audition for the boy with Leopold Auer.

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[1]Herbert Axelrod, Heifetz (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications, 1981), p. 35.

The celebrated professor was, not surprisingly, delighted to welcome the young virtuoso into his class in St. Petersburg. During the next few years, Heifetz frequently played privately and publicly with yet another precocious young Russian, Toscha Seidel (1900-1962). However, Heifetz's clear-cut supremacy was not long in manifesting itself. Even before his public debuts in world capitals, reports about a super-prodigy began to trickle out of Russia. The American violinist Albert Spalding (1888-1953) tells of attending an Auer class in St. Petersburg during the course of his 1913 concert tour:

> I remembered that some weeks earlier Kreisler had been full of praise for a small boy he had heard there. . . . A small boy stood up to play. He had only recently graduated to a full-sized violin; and it made him look even smaller than he was. . . . He played the Ernst Concerto. . . . Its technical difficulties tax the most seasoned veteran. What a cruel test, I thought, for a child!
>
> But I quickly found out that there was no need for apprehension. The first flourish of fingered octaves was attacked with a kind of nonchalant aplomb; the tone was firm, flowing and edgeless, the intonation of fleckless purity. A kind of inner grace made itself felt in the shaping of the phrase. I completely forgot the tawdriness of the piece in the elegance and distinction of its delivery. I had never heard such perfect technique from a child. . . . While the boy was playing Auer strode nervously about the room, glancing at me now and then to appraise my reactions. His dark, restless eyes danced with delight as the wonder boy threaded his effortless way through the tortuous technical problems. He expected nothing less than paralyzed astonishment from me - nor was he disappointed. He would turn away with a helpless shrug of the shoulders, as if to say: "Was there ever anything like it?" Other talented students performed later, but they were eclipsed by this miniature wizard in his early teens.[2]

As a child, Heifetz's astonishing technical facility was a source of confusion and consternation to all, not in the least Professor Auer himself. At one

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[2]Albert Spalding, Rise to Follow (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1943), p. 202.

particular examination at the Conservatory the boy was said to have attacked Paganini's Moto perpetuo at such a fast tempo that Auer winced, saying under his breath: "He doesn't even realize that it cannot be played that fast."[3] In 1913, the twelve-year-old violinist made his first professional foray into the western world playing the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with Arthur Nikisch and the Berlin Philharmonic. Nikisch then invited him to appear in Leipzig, after which he performed in various cities of central Europe to high acclaim. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 interrupted his burgeoning career and he returned to Russia to resume his studies with Auer. After a series of highly successful concerts in Norway in 1916, an American impresario offered to present the young violinist to American audiences. The entire Heifetz family forthwith emigrated to the United States.

Jascha Heifetz's official American debut took place on October 27, 1917 in Carnegie Hall. Young virtuosos at this time customarily made their New York debuts as guest soloists within the course of a regularly scheduled orchestral performance. Their recitals generally followed one week later. The seventeen-year-old Heifetz, however, made his debut with a recital. His programme, according to the custom of the day, was "short on musical depth, long on showmanship": Chaconne by Vitali (with organ), Concerto No. 2 by by Wieniawski, six short pieces (mostly transcriptions), and Paganini's Caprice No. 24. According to Heifetz's biographer, Herbert Axelrod, every violinist of note within a radius of two hundred miles was present. Though

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[3]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 434.

the critics themselves may not all have been aware of the ultimate significance of the event, their reviews indicate that they had indeed heard something unusual. Richard Aldrich chose to dwell on technical matters:

> Mr. Heifetz produces a tone of remarkable beauty and purity; a tone of power, smoothness and roundness, of searching expressiveness, of subtle modulation in power and colour. His bowing is of rare elasticity and vigor, excellent in many details; as is his left hand execution, which is accurate in all sorts of difficulties. In his technical equipment Mr. Heifetz is unusual.[4]

It was also clear to Mr. Aldrich that the absolute perfection of the player's technique was also manifested in non-technical matters:

> He is young. . . but in his art he is mature. There is no suggestion in his appearance or his manner or his performance of the juvenile or the phenomenal. There was never a more unassuming player who demonstrated great abilities, or one more intent upon his art and so oblivious to his listeners as he stands upon the platform. . . . He plays with great repose and dignity, with simplicity and directness, with purity of taste.[5]

Here indeed was something new - a player of astounding technical facility whose aim appeared to be other than dazzling his audiences. The nature and format of Henry Krehbiel's review suggests that he, for one, was aware of the significance of this particular debut. To begin with, the title with which he highlighted his extended article - The American Debut of a Violinist Who is a Musician - casts doubt on the musical merits of those who preceded Heifetz. His article in effect traces the development of violin performance within his professional memory, beginning with Vieuxtemps,

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[4] Times, October 28, 1917.

[5] Times, October 28, 1917.

Wieniawski and Wilhelmj and continuing on with Sarasate, Ysaÿe and Fritz Kreisler. He is merciless in his criticism of the younger generation of violinists whose only aim is to "titillate the ears of the groundlings." Although he admits that he knew nothing of Heifetz previously, he already, after one hearing, sees in the young Russian the culmination of all the great masters that preceded him and, as such, an artist unpolluted by the sensationalism of his contemporaries:

> He came as a surprise - as a surprise of an unusual character, because there was nothing sensational about him or his playing. We are used to sensations, but there was none in his playing, because in it there seemed summed up all the fine qualities which we have admired in the older artists. . . . In their case we took the great qualities for granted, because they were not only violinists, but musicians as well. There was so much beauty in the playing of Mr. Heifetz that we did not care to think about his impeccable intonation, his loveliness of interpretative phrase, his gracious attitude on the stage, as if a musician might be an unobtrusive gentleman who had concluded that extravagance of conduct was no more essential to music than long hair and violence of gesture; his intellectual as well as his emotional poise, even his exquisite loveliness of tone, though that is a quality which is usually bestowed by genius.[6]

With his absolute control of his instrument, Heifetz had risen well beyond the bounds of mere violin playing into the rarely attained heights of true art:

> In short, it was only in a secondary sense that the newcomer made us think of him as a violinist, for, if he ever had them, he had put off every affectation and mannerism that we ordinarily associate with the tribe to which he nominally belongs. He rose above his instrument and the music written for it, and therefore we are glad to associate him in memory with the best of his kind that we have listened to in twice twenty years.[7]

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[6]Tribune, October 28, 1917.

[7]Tribune, October 28, 1917.

Here then, for the first time, was a violinist whose bravura technique and intensity of expression complimented, rather than interfered with each other.

The second recital of Jascha Heifetz served to further strengthen the impressions he had established earlier in the season:

> The significant works that he offered Mr. Heifetz played with authority, with great repose, and fine expressiveness. In Handel's sonata [in D major] there were breadth, a touch of the grand manner, facility of bowing and a tone not only powerful but beautiful and deeply expressive. . . . The performance that he gave of Saint-Saens's concerto [in B minor] was a brilliant one, yet not one that made brilliancy its sole end, but sought for musical values.[8]

Heifetz's performance of the _Chaconne_ from Bach's second _Partita_ for unaccompanied violin was, in Krehbiel's opinion, the perfect embodiment of all that his art represented:

> Bach's unaccompanied Chaconne . . . is justly regarded as the supreme test of all that a violinist has to give. Yet Mr. Heifetz's reading of it was the quietest, the most reserved, that New York has heard in years. The young artist seemed quite unconscious of its astounding difficulties. The great chords rolled from his instrument as easily and as richly as though they had been struck on the manual of an organ.
>
> From these chords emerged the long melodic tones and the delicate tracery work as they might from an orchestral ensemble. Never was the steady flow of the rhythm interrupted to give the performer breath and yet in this unassuming performance, the piece took on a strange and unfamiliar intensity of emotion.
>
> In short, the peculiar fascination of Mr. Heifetz's performance resides in its truthfulness and simplicity. There is no mystery in his playing. It is simply violinism as close to technical perfection as is humanly possible. In his playing "technique" and "interpretation" become one and the same thing. Because he plays with accuracy and purity of intonation, sustains steadily and phrases naturally, Mr. Heifetz creates a

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[8] _Times_, December 2, 1917.

> beauty to which violinists who cultivate "brilliance" never attain.
>
> He needs none of the trickery or false emotionalism which too often hide faulty execution. He effaces himself, and as a result the music speaks through him with unaccustomed eloquence.[9]

Krehbiel noted with relief that crowds of record size flocked to hear the young virtuoso at every opportunity - an indication that even though American audiences had for years been "misled by those who cultivate the art of sensation making" they had not been "perverted" by it, for when, as in the case of Heifetz, true art appeared, they recognized it and responded to it enthusiastically and wholeheartedly.

As was to be expected, Jascha Heifetz performed frequently throughout New York's 1918/1919 concert season and, also to be expected, reactions were marked with the same enthusiasm that was evident the previous year. Richard Aldrich was at this time serving with the American forces in Europe and James Huneker had temporarily taken over his desk at the Times. Huneker found in Heifetz just the phenomenon to tap his own lyrical resources:

> It is now a thrice-told tale, the magic fiddling of Jascha Heifetz, but always a welcome theme. The years may wear this theme threadbare and the gold of his tones may grow grey, but as the Russian artist is now in the prime of his youth, the present chronicler will not live to hear the inevitable march of destiny. Certainly at Carnegie Hall yesterday afternoon no prophetic ravens of ill-omen whirred their wings about the devoted head of the gifted lad, nor were any seen by the audience. . . . Jascha, being very young, must be still provocative to the maids-of-all-play, who haunt his recitals. It may be said in his favor that such flattery has not turned his curly head, nor affected his intonation. . . .
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> Of technique one doesn't speak in the case of Heifetz. Of his tone, silky, sonorous, luscious, appealing, there is nothing

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[9]Tribune, December 2, 1917.

> to be added without gilding gold or painting pansies. His style has not yet burgeoned into the virility of the mature artist. It is essentially feminine in its wooing quality; as penetratingly sweet as was Sarasate's, but revealing a firmer musical fibre. We should not expect the intellectual grasp of a Mischa Elman from Heifetz nor yet the kaleidoscopic coloring and capricious sorcery of a Kreisler. Suffice that he is himself, Jascha Heifetz, violinist by the grace of God.[10]

Although there can be no doubting Huneker's enthusiastic response to the young Russian, the second paragraph of the above raises some interesting questions. Heifetz, to be sure, was not without his detractors. From the very beginning, Aldrich had found him "somewhat reserved in the expression and communication of emotion,"[11] and even Krehbiel, his most faithful and devoted follower among critics, occasionally complained about the "surprisingly superficial quality" of his programming.[12] Aldrich's charge is an interesting one. Whether it was motivated by the purely visual or purely musical aspects of Heifetz's playing (or both) is a much-discussed issue. Violinists both before and after Heifetz have subjected their audiences to a wide range of platform idiosyncrasies including all sorts of unusual body contortions, heavy breathing and facial grimaces. Heifetz, however, remained, throughout his entire career, the perfect model of physical as well as technical control. His somewhat aloof visual image - erect, dispassionate, immobile - became synonymous with the perfection of his musical image. This, in combination with the glittering brilliance of his technique, seemed to make audiences feel as if they were "outsiders":

> He made no attempt to be grandiose, as too many players do in their frenetic endeavors to convey the breadth and nobility of the music, but attained a lofty dignity by playing with

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[10] Times, December 1, 1918.

[11] Times, October 28, 1917.

[12] Tribune, December 2, 1917.

> perfect simplicity. One easily might have fancied him as playing the music at home in the seclusion of his study and for his own aesthetic delight rather than for the entertainment of an audience.[13]

It cannot be denied that Heifetz's playing epitomized the cool, the perfect, the noble and the brilliant rather than the sentimental. Unlike the aggressive volcanic style of Mischa Elman, Heifetz's approach remained objective, unadorned and impeccable. His personal expressivity remained his alone and to this day it bears comparison with that of no one else.

The criticism of his repertoire was one that resurfaced many, many times during the course of his early years in New York. After two years of polite suggestion, critical frustrations began to mount. Even Richard Aldrich was roused to anger:

> Mr. Heifetz's program was one that must be called poor, offering little to interest admirers of his extraordinary art, who would like to hear him play something worthy of his attention.
>
> It is bad enough to see him follow Mr. Kreisler's bad example of filling up the latter half of his programs with insignificant morsels and various odds and ends arranged from piano pieces and other outside sources. It is not in the least necessary for an artist of Mr. Heifetz's standing thus to play down to an imagined poverty of taste and knowledge in his listeners. But if he does follow this deplorable course, he should at least put something at the beginning of his program as a make-weight more worthwhile than Vieuxtemps Fifth Concerto in A, a violinist's concerto true to the type, intended for technical display and of great value for advanced students but in these days not the material for great artists.[14]

The complaints were justified. Heifetz's early programmes were more than liberally dotted with flashy show pieces designed to demonstrate technical achievement. While critics complained however, the audiences rejoiced:

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[13] Sun, December 2, 1917.

[14] Times, November 17, 1919.

> And from a little higher point of view, a great artist does not condescend to give such a program as that of yesterday [Wieniawski's Concerto in D minor, Ernst's Fantasie on Airs from Rossini's "Otello", a group of transcriptions from Chopin, Godowsky and Popper, Cognettene by Joseph Achron, a transcription of Hymn to the Sun from Rimsky-Korsakoff's Coq d'Or]. Mr. Kreisler and Mr. McCormick for instance are great artists who give popular pieces but they put more good stuff first. Mr. Heifetz has something finer and higher ahead of him than sending his audience into ecstasies over such a low average of music as he did yesterday.[15]

To be fair, Heifetz was giving his audiences what they wanted. The pattern of his recital programmes during these early years was standardized: two major works, a sonata or pre-Classical work followed by a concerto with piano accompaniment; after intermission, the shorter pieces followed by a bravura ending. Audience reaction tended to be standardized as well: the applause was usually cool after the classics, warmed up after the concerto and became delirious during the short selections. Heifetz, no less than his colleagues, gave encores freely (even at times in mid-programme) and repeated pieces when audience response demanded it.[16] Unlike Elman, who for the most part resented criticism and who was known to have been involved more than once in personal confrontations with reviewers, Heifetz took stock of what was said. Within the next few years he added the sonatas of Grieg, Brahms and Franck to his performance repertoire. In later years he commissioned and performed more new music than either Elman or Kreisler. These included concertos by Castelnuovo-Tedesco (No. 2, 1933), Walton (1939), Gruenberg (1944), Korngold (1947) and Rózsa (1956). He also played the

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[15]Times, December 18, 1921.

[16]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 436.

underrated concertos of Glazunov and Elgar and popularized the Sibelius concerto.

Around the year 1920, several critics incredulously began to find cracks in the young virtuoso's technical foundation. Heifetz found himself under considerable pressure at this time to learn new works, as the public's insatiable appetite had quickly exhausted the repertoire he had perfected under Auer's guidance. European and Australian tours at this same time added to the pressures of learning new works and when he returned to New York late in 1921, it was felt that all was not as it should have been. The critics made it quite clear that under no circumstance would any allowances be made for the Russian virtuoso - he need not think that he would be given the same consideration as other performers:

> There were of course many of the qualities in his playing that won him so much admiration in past years; there was the tone of wonderful richness, warmth and bigness; the considerable purity of intonation, the marvelous technique of finger and bow arm, to which no difficulty seems to cause effort; the imperturbable repose of style which nothing breaks down.
>
> But were all these qualities remembered from his previous appearances here wholly unimpaired? It seemed as if his travelling had done his artistic powers no good. It seemed as if something had been brushed off from the bloom of his former perfection. His tone did not emerge in all its fullness in the sonata by Beethoven [Op. 30 No. 3 in G major]; and there were more technical slips, more deviations from complete accuracy of intonation than when he was heard here at his best.
>
> They were not such as would trouble the contemplation of a lesser achievement very seriously; but they were such as to be disturbing in the case of one who stands in the very high rank and who has such a remarkable reputation to uphold as Mr. Heifetz. He must have his octaves all perfectly in tune; he must have all his harmonies sound full - not about three out of four as they did in Ernst's trumpery piece [Fantasie on Airs in Rossini's "Otello"]; and there must be no hint of failure in reproducing Beethoven's phrases.[17]

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[17] Times, December 18, 1921.

Again Heifetz took stock of critical opinion and, in later years, not only admitted his "sin" but, in fact, showed deep appreciation to William Henderson for a review that appeared in the Sun around this time:

> And now I'm going to confess something. There came a time when my disinclination to practice caught up with me. After a certain New York recital, W.J. Henderson, the music critic of the "Sun", hinted in his review that I was letting the public and him down, and that I had better watch my step. Though it was hard to hear, the warning came in the nick of time. I began to take a good look at myself. I started to practice seriously. I curbed my youthful extravagances. I shall always be grateful to Henderson. He jolted me out of my complacency and put me on the right path. Critics can sometimes be very helpful.[18]

The negative reviews Heifetz received over the years act as a kind of reverse tribute because they are indicative of the heavy demands placed upon him by critics and observers. It was obvious as early as 1921 that the standards used for judging a performance by Jascha Heifetz were different than the standards used to judge all other players. People learned to expect perfection from Heifetz and thus slight misdemeanors and idiosyncrasies, usually overlooked in other violinists, were emphasized in his case.

For Heifetz, the 1920's were filled with musical triumphs from New York to the Orient. London's George Bernard Shaw had warned him on one occasion: "Nothing may be perfect in this world or else the gods become jealous and destroy it. So you should make a habit of playing one wrong note every night before you go to bed."[19] - a comic reflection on Heifetz as the world saw him, and was to see him, throughout his entire career. His Carnegie Hall recital on January 4, 1928 was welcomed with the enthusiasm

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[18]Herbert Axelrod, Heifetz (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications, 1981), p. 65.

[19]Donald Brook, Violinists of To-day (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), p. 57.

of a debut - he had been away from New York for two years! Olin Downes, the new critic for the Times offered, on this occasion, an excellent summation of the art and personality of Jascha Heifetz:

> He played with his wonted and as it sometimes seemed, almost weary mastery. But perhaps this demeanor is only the reserve of an exceptionally sensitive and truly great artist. Some have claimed that Heifetz is merely a super-technician. It is an estimate which falls far short of his depth and distinction as an interpreter. It is true that he is often aloof from or at least outside of what he does. But this is not coldness and it is anything but superficiality. The Classicism of the Beethoven sonata [Kreutzer] was due to the music. If the variations seemed in some cases trivial and well nigh without need it was because they are in fact trivial for the greater part and no respectful and artistic interpretation could make them otherwise. Other violinists than Mr. Heifetz inject more of what is called "passion" into the first and last movements. . . . Heifetz speaks in his music with a finer sense of proportion; he leaves something to the imagination; and his supreme mastery is art itself, a thing of incomparable beauty of line and proportion.
>
> The art of Mr. Heifetz, which appears to us to grow more distinguished with the years, has back of it a true intellectuality and an aristocratic sense of style which disdains equally what is sentimental or insincere, or in any way solicitious of superficial approval. We may take this phenomenal technic for granted. It would be superfluous and impertinent to discuss it. He is like no other violinist before the public and it will be long before a violinist like him will be seen again.[20]

Sitting attentively in the audience that January evening was yet another young musical phenomenon, the twelve-year-old Yehudi Menuhin, one of the first of the post-Heifetz generation of string virtuosos. Members of this new generation had little chance of musical survival if they could not in some way measure up to the technical and interpretative ideals established by Heifetz and to be sure, many violinists of the older generation fell by the wayside.

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[20] Times, January 5, 1928.

Masters of the Bow MB 1010 consists of twenty Heifetz vignette recordings from this early period (1917-1928). They are taken exclusively from the Victor and HMV labels and offer the listener an exciting glimpse into the phenomenon that was Jascha Heifetz.

The 1924 recording of the English composer Cyril Scott's Gentle Maiden introduces the lyrical side of the young Heifetz's artistry. The delicate, tonal purity of this performance is complemented by a sweet gentility that makes Heifetz, the glittering virtuoso, seem like a figment of the musical imagination. Nor can one help but marvel at the "Gaelic" charm that the young Russian artfully infuses into his performance of this simple Scottish air. Heifetz performes Lili Boulanger's Cortège with a tonal and technical effervescence totally mindless of register or speed. His remarkable singing quality and his intensity of sound, even in the highest registers of the violin, are well demonstrated in the Nocturne, also by Boulanger. The alternating technical glitter and tonal warmth of Falla's Jota is somewhat marred, for modern ears, by an overabundance of slides - a glimpse back at an earlier age. Joseph Achron's arrangement of Edvard Grieg's Puck (a 1928 recording) is played effortlessly at breakneck speed with a control and precision that belies its technical demands. His 1928 performance of Mendelssohn's On Wings of Song (arranged by Joseph Achron) shakes the foundation of those who complain that Heifetz's playing is cool and unfeeling. His playing here is marked by a warmth and strength of string sound that fairly pulsates with inner life. His vibrato, strong and consistently vibrant throughout, lends great intensity to the piece, regardless of string, register or dynamics. The double-stopped passages are played with

the simple assurance and tonal warmth that mark the easiest single-note passages. This is not the playing of a musically insensitive violinistic gymnast. In the last movement of his 1924 recording of Sarasate's Carmen Fantasy, however, we hear one who is in all probability the most nimble violinist in the entire history of the instrument. In fact, the playing here is so fast that it is difficult to make any musical sense out of it. Bazzini's Round of the Goblins, recorded in 1917, is another example of Heifetz's phenomenal technical strengths. Despite the extraordinary demands this piece places on the violinist in terms of finger and bow dexterity, Heifetz sails through with effortless simplicity and energy to spare. His articulation is strong and deliberate, even at fearsome speeds. His double-stopped harmonics are clear, confident and melodious. His left hand pizzicato crackles, always within a strong rhythmic framework. Unlike Jan Kubelik, whose frantic performance of this work suggests the extreme limits of his technical powers, Heifetz's well-structured, totally controlled performance suggests limitless technical vistas. The Baroque offerings on this disc bring into focus one of the major critical charges against Heifetz - that he plays as if the music were fashioned by the composer for the sole purpose of serving him as a performer. His performance of the Two Minuettos from Bach's Partita in E major for solo violin is filled with "un-Bach-like" portamentos and rubatos and in his playing of Couperin's Les petits moulins à vent (Heifetz's own arrangement), it is obvious that a demonstration of his enormous technical facility at super-speeds is of far greater consequence than adherence to the Baroque style. The early Heifetz recording of Sarasate's Zapateado is representative of

of the peak of twentieth-century violin development. In this performance Heifetz eliminates the artificial distinctions between the bravura technician, the lyrical introspective player and the specialized stylistic interpreter. He is all three in one, the complete master over every facet of his art. In the Andante from Lalo's Symphonie espagnole we again experience the warmth and intensity of the young Russian's sound, which, though not passionate, is a far cry from the icy detachment he has been accused of over the years. His critics on the other hand may have some grounds for complaint regarding his 1920 recording of Tchaikovsky's Sérénade melancholique which, though marked by beauty and intensity of sound, is much too straightforward and matter-of-fact to register much wistful sentiment. Again, however, with his 1924 recording of Sarasate's Habanera the listener comes face to face with the perfection of Jascha Heifetz. Technically, there is nothing new to say. It is more highly developed and more highly polished than that of any other player, before or since, and because of his absolute control over the mechanics of his instrument, his playing is marked by an easy grace and sophisticated suavity that is the possession of Heifetz alone.

His detractors have often complained that the Heifetz personality is indelibly stamped on everything he plays. His supporters insist that this is unavoidable simply because the personality of Jascha Heifetz is one with the art of Jascha Heifetz. His critics would do well to realize that the early twentieth century was the era of the great "personalities" of the violin. In our present age, we are surrounded by young virtuosos

who, though they have learned their technical lessons well, have nothing "personal" to say through their instruments or their interpretations. Heifetz, despite the controversies surrounding different aspects of his playing and personality, was, and remains to this day, the epitome of violinistic excellence, the "Emperor" of the violin.

CHAPTER X

WILLY BURMESTER

One notable casualty in the shift from the nineteenth to the twentieth-century style of performance was the German violinist Willy Burmester. Born in the city of Hamburg in 1869, he entered the Berlin Hochschule at the age of twelve as a student of Joseph Joachim. Joachim, noting his obsession with technique, did little to further the boy's career. However, two influential musicians did offer him both encouragement and assistance. Tchaikovsky, after hearing Burmester play his violin concerto in Hamburg in 1887, recommended that he appear in Pavlovsk, a famous summer resort near St. Petersburg. He was such a success there that he was re-engaged for the 1888 and 1892 summer seasons. Around this same time, Hans von Bülow was engaged to conduct a series of concerts in Hamburg. Burmester, who was playing in the first violin section of the orchestra at the time, caught his attention and while in Hamburg, Bülow coached him privately in the sonata repertoire. From 1892 to 1894, Burmester was concertmaster of the Helsingfors Philharmonic Orchestra. It was during his stay in Helsingfors that he decided to present himself as a recitalist in Berlin. In his search for an unusual programme, he hit upon the idea of an all-Paganini recital. He made the claim that during the five months preceding his debut he practiced up to fifteen hours a day. In his autobiography, <u>50 Jahre Künstlerleben</u>, he admitted to repeating a certain Caprice by Paganini 4,276 times during those five months until he could

play the runs in thirds as fast as any other violinist could play single-note scales.[1]

Willy Burmester made his Berlin debut late in October 1894. The reviewers termed it "a violinistic sensation." The all-Paganini programme consisted of the Concerto No. 1, Variations on Nel cor più, Witches' Dance and Caprices No. 13, No. 17, and No. 18. The critics hailed him as "Paganini redivivus" and as the greatest violin technician alive, not excepting Sarasate. It was pointed out that in addition to having extraordinary technique, he also possessed a large and firm tone. At his second sold-out concert in Berlin, Burmester played the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Spohr's Concerto No. 7 and the Faust Fantasy by Wieniawski as proof that he was not to be considered a mere Paganini specialist. For the next decade, Burmester played to sold-out houses almost everywhere he went. His performance of small violin pieces in his own arrangements delighted his audiences and these miniatures, transcribed from works by the Baroque and Classical masters, soon became the musical staple of his recitals. Burmester celebrated the tenth anniversary of his Berlin debut with a sold-out concert in the Singakademie. The German critics were enthusiastic:

> Burmester played the entire work [a Bach concerto?] and the "Chaconne" with wonderful clearness and plasticity. His infallible technic, pure tone, energetic accent and healthy conception revealed his absolute command of the composition and the instrument, and bespoke a potent mentality.[2]

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[1]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 319.

[2]Lev Ginsburg, Ysaÿe (Neptune City: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1980), p. 141.

However, the Hungarian violinist, Joseph Szigeti, tells of being bitterly disappointed upon hearing Burmester play as early as 1905. Szigeti had that same year heard Ysaÿe, Kreisler and the fourteen-year-old Mischa Elman in Berlin. For him, the differences between these three on the one hand and Burmester on the other were irreconcilable.

Burmester had made his American debut at Carnegie Hall on January 14, 1898. Krehbiel found his conception "tiny" and his tone "an amazingly near and generally sweet trickle of sound."[3] When he returned to New York on November 21, 1914, sixteen years later, the papers in question didn't even bother to print reviews of his performance. He did not return to New York until the fall of 1923. The _Sun_'s review, quoted below in its entirety, would hardly have been that accorded a musical celebrity:

> On Saturday, in the evening, in Carnegie Hall, Willie Burmester, whose name for violinistics goes back to the Joachim days, came to give the first New York recital of what is advertised as a world tour. A capital pianist shared his program and took an equal share of the applause.[4]

Richard Aldrich, hardly more generous in his comments, described Burmester as a violinist with a reputation for "marvelous technical feats - left hand pizzicato, rapid runs in thirds and tenths and other matters deemed less musical today."[5] Lawrence Gilman, the new critic for the _Tribune_ identified him as a violinist "justly to be characterized as primarily a technician."[6] Such statements mark Burmester as a member of the "older generation" and, as to be expected, he was rarely heard of in the United

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[3]_Herald and Tribune_, January 15, 1898.

[4]_Sun_, October 22, 1923.

[5]_Times_, October 21, 1923.

[6]_Tribune_, October 21, 1923.

States upon the completion of the undistinguished and uneventful American portion of a world tour which Flesch described as a "fearful failure."

Bearing such facts in mind, the recordings of Willy Burmester offer some surprises. The eight pieces preserved on the Masters of the Bow recording MB 1003 are taken from the German Gramophone & Typewriter label. They were recorded in 1909 when Burmester, aged forty, was at the height of his career. The reasons for Szigeti's profound dismay upon hearing Burmester in 1905 are made abundantly clear in these performances. Measured against the musical and emotional strengths of Ysaÿe and Kreisler, the German virtuoso does appear weak. His playing, lacking in emotional intensity and tonal colour, tends towards monotony. Nevertheless, it is not without a certain infectious drive and buoyancy and, technically, it is beyond reproach.

The recording begins with two performances of Bach. The Gavotte from the Partita No. 3 in E major is played with lighthearted spirit as well as drive and direction. Intonation is excellent, despite some awkward double stopping. His tone, firm and confident, is of surprisingly high quality. Burmester's weakness however appears in his apparent inability to vary, modify or subdue this tone. Hence the playing quickly becomes boring. His performance of the famous Air from Bach's Suite No. 3 in D major would unquestionably have benefited from a more highly-developed vibrato. Nevertheless the tone is warm, particularly in low G-string passages. Again, the intonation is impeccable. Unfortunately, the performance is marred by excessive distortions in tempo which may very well be an attempted substitution for honest emotional projection. His performance of an unidentified Minuet by Johann Dussek (1760-1812) is marked by a certain

lighthearted verve, but his straightforward, very strict rhythmical approach leaves little room for breath. The higher passages possess little in the way of tonal depth and in general there is, again, no change of colour. His vibrato, very thin and apologetic, adds little. Despite a certain innocent charm, the performance is superficial both musically and emotionally. This is followed by three small selections from larger works by Handel. The Arioso and Sarabande from Handel's Concerto Op. 4 No. 3 in G minor are marked by a tonal warmth that is surprising considering critical comments on Burmester's playing. He achieves a particularly rich sound on the lower strings. Again, a more highly-developed vibrato would have provided both pieces with much-needed intensity. Nevertheless, the sound, firm and confident, is of good quality and the intonation is impeccable. Burmester plays the Minuet from Handel's Sonata Op. 1 No. 5 in G major with a spirited sense of fun despite the fact that the twentieth-century sparkle and ebullience are not there. Again the playing remains on one tonal level. However the rhythmic precision and clean intonation must be admired on their own terms. The Gavotte from Rameau's opera Castor et Pollux is the only piece in this group of eight in which Burmester makes any attempt to vary tonal colour and dynamics.

Although Burmester's playing does not possess the inner depth and musical sensitivity of the modern players, these recordings introduce a violinist who not only understood and was master of the technicalities of his instrument, but one for whom tonal beauty was of more than passing significance. In view of this somewhat surprising aural experience, the assessments of Carl Flesch appear to be unusually harsh:

> On the credit side, his playing showed a certain fluency, which however was superficial and inexact, and a strong rhythmic sense, at times exaggerated and distorted.
> The specification of his defects calls for far more space. What, above all, one could learn from Joachim, the feeling for a musically logical declamation, he lacked completely. His style was distinctly unmusical, arbitrary, inconsistent and unbeautiful; his tone was cold, his bowing angular and mixed with scraping noises.[7]

Despite the positive qualities which emerge from the actual sound, it cannot be denied that, even as early as 1909, Burmester's playing was not of world-class artistry in the modern sense. His performances in effect centered around the characteristics and qualities of the instrument itself rather than of the music in question. He could not, even in the dawn of the twentieth century, match the artistry of Ysaÿe and Kreisler, and consequently, he could never hope to hold his ground against the crashing wave of the Heifetz "revolution." He died in 1933, almost forgotten and close to poverty, a sad example of a violinist unable to adapt to the demands of a new era.

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[7] Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 141.

CHAPTER XI

ALBERT SPALDING

The American violinist Albert Spalding, though not a luminary in the sense that Ysaÿe, Kreisler, and Heifetz were, was nevertheless able to develop and maintain a successful career, despite competition from some of the greatest performers in the history of the instrument.

Born in Chicago in 1888 into a very wealthy family, Albert Spalding received much of his musical education in Italy where his family spent the winter months. At the age of fourteen he graduated from the Bologna Conservatory. Lessons at the Paris Conservatoire followed. His Paris debut (for which he played Saint-Saëns' third concerto for violin) at the age of sixteen was not a success. However, the following year he played the same concerto in Florence under the baton of Saint-Saëns himself and on this occasion, public and critical reaction were most enthusiastic. This was followed by successful concerts in London and Vienna.

Spalding made his American debut in Carnegie Hall on November 8, 1908 with Walter Damrosch conducting the well-tried Saint-Saëns concerto. Upon hearing Spalding play, Damrosch enthusiastically declared that he was the first great instrumentalist America (!) had produced. Critical reactions, however, were mixed. Aldrich saw in Spalding a young violinist of high (though not the highest) accomplishment whose art was sure to blossom as he himself grew to maturity:

> He is assuredly a young man of talent, of high accomplishment at present and of even greater promise

> for the future. He is well equipped with a high degree of technical skill. . . . There are energy and vitality in Mr. Spalding's playing; and this energy is dominated by a feeling of repose and poise that is altogether unusual for one of his years. . . . His feeling for the music he is interpreting seemed yesterday sound, wholesome and sane. . . . So far as his technical powers are concerned he showed command of correct intonation, fleetness and accuracy of finger, power in bowing that is good but is still susceptible to improvement and a tone that is penetrating, powerful, and expressive, if not of sensuous beauty and charm. It seemed altogether that the present achievements of this still very young man were of the sort to promise an uncommonly rich artistic maturity.[1]

Henry Krehbiel was not as generous in his comments:

> At the outset, kindly disposed connoisseurs no doubt felt that the harsh, raucous,snarling, unmusical tone which he rasped out of his G-string was the result of ignorance of the acoustical qualities of the concert room; but the notion was dissipated when in the progress of the performance it became evident that the trouble came from a lack of appreciation for beauty - for beauty of tone as well as beauty of thought, of symmetry of nearly all the artistic values, in short. There was not a passage of sustained melody in the concerto which was not more graceful in its contours, more varied, more euphonious and expressive as it came from the instruments of the band than when it was uttered by the solo violin in the hands of the virtuoso. And there was as much uncouth and unfinished technical display in the tone formation and tone production as there was lack of taste in the reading of the work. It was disappointing and discouraging.[2]

William Henderson sided with Krehbiel for the most part, but was gracious enough to attribute Spalding's difficulties to inexperience and immaturity. The unqualified enthusiasm with which the critics greeted Mischa Elman's Carnegie Hall debut one month later emphasized the instability of Spalding's position on the concert platform. Unlike many other violinists of the time, however, he was to be neither discouraged nor intimidated. He too

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[1]<u>Times</u>, November 9, 1908.

[2]<u>Tribune</u>, November 9, 1908.

attended Elman's debut performance and was just as excited as everyone else:

> I heard him, and I cheered him with all the rest. . . . It was such a success as I hoped for, would work for.[3]

The impact of Elman's arrival could be seen in all the reviews at this time and thus, by January, even Richard Aldrich had lost some of the enthusiasm he had demonstrated earlier:

> He is a young man of musical gifts, unquestionably, and of sincere artistic aims, but he again showed as he did before that his is not a glowing musical temperament; nor does his playing ever reach any great emotional heights or depths. His tone sounded better than it did in his previous performance, especially in lighter passages but when he makes greater demands upon it the quality is apt to lose and to tend toward coarseness. . . . In the sonata [Kreutzer] Mr. Spalding caught little of the soaring spirit of Beethoven that is imprisoned in it. It was straightforward and direct playing but it gave little stimulus to the hearer. . . . The technical difficulties of the Bach Chaconne are great but the difficulties it presents to the intellect and the musical penetration of the player are greater. It could not fairly be said that Mr. Spalding had made himself master of either sort.[4]

Spalding, however, refusing to be discouraged, studiously applied himself to the task at hand and from this time forward the reviews record steady progress towards his long-sought goal:

> It was with much pleasure . . . that his listeners found evidence of substantial progress towards higher things in his playing yesterday afternoon.
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> Mr. Spalding has gained in technical certainty and command over the mechanism of his art, and still more notably in the more intangible matters of style, finish, insight, musical feeling. . . . He shows perhaps more elasticity and freedom in bowing than he has shown before, considerably to the advantage of his interpretations. There was always a

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[3]Albert Spalding, Rise to Follow (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1943), p. 99.

[4]Times, January 17, 1909.

> sympathetic frankness, sincerity and unassuming modesty in this young man's playing, and they still weigh in his favour. . .[5]

Slowly but surely, the modern demands of violin playing - technical facility, musical sensitivity and interpretative honesty - were met in his performances. The critics were genuinely pleased:

> Mr. Spalding is an American musician whose advance in his chosen art has been observed with gratification. . . . He has fully proved his claim to consideration as an earnest, studious violinist, cherishing high ideals and showing no hesitation before the difficulties of his calling. Uncertain, crude, imperfectly equipped as he was in his early concerts, he has applied himself diligently to the study of his instrument till now his technical resources command the respect of all his fellow musicians.
>
> He had made his progress without acquiring any of the "prima donna" tricks of the mere virtuoso. He plays with fidelity to the text of the composer and with reverence for the intent. His honesty was displayed to the best advantage yesterday in the first numbers on his programme [Corelli's Sonata in D major, Beethoven's Romance in G major and Bach's Chaconne].
>
> In all three of these compositions Mr. Spalding produced from his violin a round, solid tone, and his intonation was almost flawless. He showed a smooth mastery of the technical difficulties. . . . But best of all his playing had sound dignity and strength.[6]

Although it is obvious from such reviews that the "earnest and studious" Albert Spalding was not of the same mold as, for example, Mischa Elman, it is equally clear that his playing offered much more than the digital pyrotechnics of many of his contemporaries. Year after year, his powers, both technical and musical, steadily increased:

> It is hardly too much to say that every time he has played, he has played better than he did the time before. That is something pregnant with significance for an artist's career. . . . His progress has been not only in technical skill; it is

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[5] Times, October 22, 1911.

[6] Sun, October 21, 1912.

> still more significantly and potently shown in more elusive matters that make for an artist's distinction and power; in emotional feeling, in imagination, in maturity and fullness of expression, in subtle differentiations of style . . . It has been a pleasure to note this young American artist's gain in the essentials of his art, in the finish and refinement of his playing, in the certainty and accuracy of his technique, in the beauty of his tone, and especially in the intellectual and emotional insight of his readings.[7]

Henry Krehbiel, in 1915, went so far as to name him "one of the best rounded musicians and one of the sincerest now on the concert platform,"[8] and William Henderson, it seemed, never tired of discussing the "high importance of his interpretative qualities."[9]

Albert Spalding's career was well established by 1916. Considered something of an individual among violinists, his playing exhibited a rare combination of unassailable good taste, seriousness of purpose and musical sensitivity. His technique was, by this time, facile and sure. However, it was his single-minded, unflagging devotion to his own high ideals that kept his career afloat both during and after the deluge that was to come in 1917 with the appearance of Jascha Heifetz. Twelve years after Heifetz's debut, William Henderson referred to Spalding no only as "the foremost American violinist," but "one of the leading players of the world" as well.[10]

Masters of the Bow MB 1009 presents Albert Spalding in fifteen items from his total of 155 different recorded works. Most are taken from the Victor and Brunswick labels and date from the 1920's and 1930's. Ludwig Spohr's Gesangscene which opens the disc, showcases the finest elements

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[7] Times, October 22, 1915.

[8] Tribune, October 22, 1915.

[9] Sun, October 22, 1915.

[10] Sun, February 4, 1929.

of Spalding's playing. The tone, penetrating and expressive, is filled with a unique warmth that is at the same time refined and elegant. The intonation is impeccable throughout. The slides, if somewhat out-of-date, remain firmly within the bounds of good taste. Technical incidentals such as trills and double stops are clean, precise and well-balanced. There is no evidence of any technical strain here whatsoever. It is simple, honest and well-mannered playing from start to finish, free from the emotional and technical extravagance that has been perpetrated on this instrument throughout its history. Though Spalding's performance of Lili Boulanger's Cortège does not have the excitement, the energy or the urgency of Heifetz's recording of this same work, the tone is compelling and the intonation is pure. Where Heifetz's performance is marked by reckless exuberance, Spalding's approach is one of care and gentility. Joseph Suk's Burleska is for the most part a test of finger and bow dexterity, and though Spalding proves to be nimble-fingered, the intonation is not always true and the overall sound is often cloudy due to scratchy bowing. On the other hand, his own Dragonfly, a fiendishly difficult study in arpeggios, is technically virtuosic in its presentation. Spalding's performance of his own transcription of Chopin's Waltz in B minor Op.69 No.2 suggests that he is not one with the Romantic spirit. Though the playing (with the exception of double-stopped passages) is clean and neat, it is far too straightforward, and lacks any hint of the poetic subtlety one normally associates with the music of Chopin. His recording of the Moszkowski-Sarasate Guitarre is much faster, cleaner and more highly polished than Vecsey's recording of this same work. The sound is of far better quality,

the slides are executed with greater speed and precision, the pitch is more consistently accurate - a good illustration of "modern" violin playing. The only area in which Vecsey matches Spalding is in the harmonic passage of this piece. Here Vecsey's intonation is excellent and his tonal control outshines that of Spalding. In Clarence Cameron White's setting of the Negro spiritual Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen Spalding demonstrates the deeply felt emotion and sentiment that his critics often find lacking in his performances. Although Spalding's recording of the Mendelssohn-Achron On Wings of Song is marred by problems with intonation (particularly in passages of double stops) and a small, apologetic E-string sound, there is much warmth in his G-string and his trill-tremolos challenge those of Heifetz himself. Sarasate's Introduction and Tarentelle shows Spalding at his best technically. This showpiece is played with dexterity and brilliance and, along with a clean, vibrant sound, the intonation is flawless. In Wagner's Prize Song, Spalding fails to achieve the warmth of sound that Ysaÿe does in his recording of the same work, mostly because of his rigid observance of bar lines and an extremely fast, overwrought vibrato. On the other hand, Schumann's Träumerei is played with a tender warmth and technical polish that justify his place among the valuable exponents of the "modern" school.

Although Spalding was not destined to reach the, as yet, unmatched heights of Jascha Heifetz, the intellectual penetration, the fastidious musical taste and the unfailing technical finish, as well as the personal charm of this most studious and conscientious of violinists, attracted large audiences both in America and Europe throughout his entire career. He continued to perform publically until about 1950, some three years before his early death at the age of sixty-five.

CHAPTER XII

TOSCHA SEIDEL

As we have seen, the New York reviewers provided extremely accurate barometric readings of the violinistic climate in their city and abroad throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century. The career of the Russian violinist Toscha Seidel however, was one of the few that did not match their early predictions.

Toscha Seidel (1899-1962), another pupil of Leopold Auer, was a contemporary of Heifetz and his closest competitor in the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Though rivals by virtue of their enormous gifts, they remained friends throughout their student years and frequently played together, both publically and privately. Auer himself once remarked that the two boys were not generally regarded as rivals "but shared equally in the general favour accorded them. Their numerous concerts . . . were always filled by an enthusiastic audience."[1] It is generally felt that Seidel, not Heifetz, was Auer's personal favourite and in fact the two emigrated to America together in 1918. Seidel made his highly successful New York debut on April 14, 1918. Krehbiel was immediately taken with the strength, the excitement and the vitality of his performance:

> If any judgment can be made from a first appearance, he will shortly be well known in America for he showed himself an artist of truly unusual qualities. . . . He is distinctly a violinist of temperament, of fire, of rhythmical force. His playing is, however, gratefully free from exaggeration

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[1]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 435.

> and he gives an impression of sincerity and intellectual control. . . . He possesses an abundance of emotion, a freshness of spirit and an extraordinary rhythmic sense. His tone is warm and full, his bowing broad. He is simple in manner. He is filled with a true musical sense.[2]

Though his technique was far from flawless, it was felt that some basic "polishing" was all that was needed. For Huneker, Seidel's poetic vision was such that he could "play false notes and still be interesting."[3] By 1919 New York was well acclimatized to the glacial perfection of Jascha Heifetz. A new ideal had been established and violinists everywhere were feeling (or suffering from) its impact. Seidel's technique was still not without its irregularities, but in the eyes of many, his playing, though not dazzling, was "more satisfying than the chilly brilliance of some of his more showy contemporaries."[4] Like Albert Spalding, most of Seidel's problems disappeared with the passing years. By the mid-1920's his playing was notable for its fire and excitement. According to Henry Roth, the turbulent sensuousness of Seidel's playing in these years made the more controlled sensuality of Elman seem almost introspective.[5] His technique was, by this time, more than adequate for the handling of any of the large-scale masterworks. Seidel's tone, rich and warm, was always cause for critical comment. It was noted for its sweet gentility, its bold virility and, most of all, for its unusual singing quality:

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[2] Tribune, April 15, 1918.

[3] Times, April 15, 1918.

[4] Tribune, October 13, 1919.

[5] Henry Roth, "On 'Masters of the Bow'" The Strad, LXXXVI/1026 (October 1975), p. 427.

> Professor Auer always taught us to play as individuals, and while he never allowed us to overstep the boundaries of the musically aesthetic, he gave our individuality free play within its limits. When playing for him, if once I came to a passage which demanded an especially beautiful legato rendering, he would say: "Now show how you can sing." The exquisite legato he taught was all a matter of perfect bowing and he often said: "There must be no such things as strings and hair in the pupil's consciousness; one must not play the violin, one must sing the violin."[6]

In the eyes of most critics, the mature Toscha Seidel occupied an undisputed place within the galaxy of musical stars which swept across the New York skies:

> He played with admirable tone, technical finish and beauty of style. This player has done much to temper with repose his interpretations since heralded as another bright ascending star from the Auer studio. . . . The general repose, delicacy of coloring, brilliance and poetic insight noted in his reading of both sonata in A major by Fauré and concerto by Conus were such as would now give him an undisputed place among the elect pupils of his great teacher.[7]

Seidel's recordings provide ample support for the enthusiastic critical acclaim. Seventeen of his fifty-seven different recordings have been gathered together on the Masters of the Bow recording MB 1007. Of these seventeen, ten date from the early 1920's and despite a good deal of surface noise, the quality of Seidel's playing is unmistakable. The rich, voluptuousness of his sound is immediately distinguishable in his performance of the Orientale movement from César Cui's Kaleidoscope Op. 50. Its source can be traced to the relaxed, natural weight of the right arm in combination with a very rapid fingertip vibrato. His interpretation of

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[6]Donald Brook, Violinists of Today (Freeport: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1948), p. 163.

[7]Sun, October 19, 1925.

the work is marked by an almost overpoweringly sultry sensuousness that is unforgettable. His performance of Alfred Margis' Valse bleue is notable for its spontaneity and spirited charm. The haunting, soul-searching quality which marks his performance of the traditional Hebraic melody Eili, Eili could only emanate from the Jewish heart. The tempo is unusually slow and deliberate, but a controlled intensity remains throughout. Again the relaxed weight of his right arm can be heard in the depth of string sound, not only in the low registers, but the high ones as well. Each note, shaped and coloured by Seidel's distinctive vibrato, has a soulful life of its own. In the hands of this Russian virtuoso the violin sobs, rather than sings, its heartrending Jewish lament. The Chanson arabe from Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade provides Seidel with ample opportunity to display his lush, in-the-string sound, but in the lighter, more airy sections, he creates an atmosphere of wistful longing that marks him as a master of all moods. In the fast passages of Hejre Kati from Jenö Hubay's Scènes de la Csarda, the listener catches a glimpse of the excitement and vitality in Seidel's more virtuosic playing. Nevertheless, despite the gypsy-like furor in evidence here, there is always a strong sense of rhythmical and musical control. Generally, the beauty of Seidel's tone tends to distract the listener from the mundane details of technique, and in most instances, the Russian violinist displays a well-developed, highly competent technique. His performance of Schubert's Ständchen Serenade (arranged by Mischa Elman) is really the only exception in this group. Here the intonation is not as clean, particularly in double-stopped passages and sustained high notes. Nevertheless the sensuous Seidel sound is still very much in the foreground.

It is interesting to compare Seidel's performance of Kreisler's Caprice viennois with Kreisler's own performance. Kreisler's performance, on the slow side, is fairly straight rhythmically yet retains the urbane suavity so much a part of his individuality. The tone, though warm on the lower strings, is for the most part pure and bright. Seidel's performance on the other hand is much more rhapsodic in nature. He takes many liberties with tempo, particularly at phrase endings. The overall tempo is faster than that chosen by the composer himself and the inner section, filled with double stops and rapid scale passages, is played in an improvisatory fashion, almost as if it were a cadenza. In general, Seidel's tone is much darker than Kreisler's. The Minuet in G from Paderewski's Humoresques de concert Op. 14 shows Seidel at his best technically. Double stops in combination with trills, chromatic passages in single and double stops as well as trilled notes, long trills played simultaneously with legato passages - all are performed confidently, with a minimum of effort, and along with this display, there remains the inimitable Seidel tone.

Surprisingly, despite his many exceptional qualities and his early successes, Seidel's career did not unfold as expected. Concert appearances became less and less frequent during the late 1920's and critical reviews became shorter and less significant. A possible reason for this was the awesome competition he faced at the time (Kreisler, Elman and Heifetz), combined with the fact that his talent, in many ways an instinctive, rhapsodic one, could not match the highly disciplined musical intellect of the new era. The financial restrictions of the Great Depression years finally chased him into the lucrative commercial recording studios of the

Hollywood motion picture industry, where professional violinists today still glorify the "sumptuous Seidel sound." Many artists over the years, including Carl Flesch, have expressed their bewilderment over this musical "tragedy":

> Unjustly, Seidel is not often included in the front rank of the Auer school. I do not know the deeper reasons for this underestimation, but one thing I do know - that the quality of his tone is one of the most beautiful I have heard in my career. Technically too, he is excellently equipped, whence I regard it as an injustice of fate that he is not considered the third in a triumvirate with Heifetz and Elman.[8]

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[8]Carl Flesch, Memoirs (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 338.

CHAPTER XIII

VÁŠA PŘÍHODA

The Czechoslovakian virtuoso Váša Příhoda (1900-1960) is yet another example of a fine violinist who was unable to maintain a successful career because his talents, extraordinary as they were in their own way, did not measure up to twentieth-century ideals. Příhoda studied first with his father and then with Jan Mařák (1870-1932), a well-known student of Ševčík. He made his official debut in Prague at the age of thirteen. The year 1919 however, found him in Milan scratching out a living as a café player. By chance, Arturo Toscanini heard him play and was so impressed with the young fiddler that he took him under his wing, sponsoring his debuts in several European cities where he was hailed as a second Paganini. Váša Příhoda made his successful American debut in Carnegie Hall on November 22, 1920. His programme was, in the words of Richard Aldrich "all fiddler's music or flappers' delights, from purely technical to merely ear-tickling."[1] However it was the perfect vehicle for the display of his marvelous technique and furthermore it was felt that he had successfully allied his technical proficiency with qualities of genuine artistic instinct:

> The newcomer has mastered the mechanical elements of violin playing in at least as thorough a manner as any of the artists who have preceded him this season.
> In a much higher degree than the large majority of them he has learned to put that proficiency in the service of musical taste and elegance. . .

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[1] Times, November 23, 1920.

> Largeness of caliber is not to be found either in his tone or his style, but the former is marvellously clear and beautiful and the latter continent. . . . Grace, ease, taste and elegance make the charm of his playing, for that it is charming can scarcely be gainsaid.[2]

Aldrich, Krehbiel and Henderson all agreed that even higher qualities would likely appear with the performance of more "heart-warming" music. They were to be disappointed. Only one year later they began to notice that his playing frequently lacked spontaneity and that though his interpretations were "of the intellect" they lacked "the glow that holds the listener."[3] Příhoda did not reappear in New York until November of 1930. He was by now a fully matured artist, but the finished product was, musically, disappointing:

> Mr. Prihoda opened his recital with two concertos in D which have figured largely on other virtuosi's programs this season: the Mozart and the Tchaikovsky. His meeting of the technical and musical demands of these standard works immediately presented the identical disparity as did his appearance ten years ago. . . .
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> There was a succession of stunning technical tricks. Mr. Prihoda regaled these with impeccable double third trills, a long fourth finger trill accompanied, whirlwind arpeggios, octave passages of the first water as regards pitch and many other feats. His bow also did some delightful stunts in flying staccato and sticky thrown strokes.
>
> Having disposed of this part of the violinist's equipment, the remainder of the impression and incidentally the most important, was anything but creditable to the violinist. In the Mozart he was manifestly speaking a language the import of which was foreign to his temperament. Substituting slowness for breadth of conception and mere dynamic softness for spirituality he complicated matters by distorting the pitch of cantilena passages through an exaggerated vibrato and accents which caused the G-string to rasp frequently and the pitch of the tone played to suggest the note above and below it. . . .

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[2]*Tribune*, November 23, 1920.

[3]*Tribune*, November 19, 1921.

> In the matter of cadenzas, Mr. Prihoda seemed bent upon gilding the lily. . . . Many of his "improvements" impressed the auditor as wanting in the best of taste and as being anachronistic. The redeeming feature was that whatever technical feat he attempted he did unusually well, though at the expense of introducing passages a la Paganini. . . . This, with other issues of interpretation which might easily be impugned, left a series of confusing impressions.
>
> The playing of these two major works made the hearer feel that if Mr. Prihoda were to limit himself to certain genres of show pieces he would be more at home.[4]

Příhoda's recordings bear witness to such statements. The eleven recordings presented on Masters of the Bow MB 1004 date from 1920 to the late 1930's. They provide an excellent cross section of the artistry of the Bohemian virtuoso. The recording opens with Paganini's Variations on Nel cor più non mi sento, a work which introduces Příhoda in all his technical glory. His performance of this piece, filled with passages of exceedingly awkward double stops, harmonics, double-stopped harmonics, trills, left-hand pizzicato in combination with bowed notes, and literally every type of bowing found in the violinist's lexicon of virtuosity, is truly awesome. The intonation is flawless and finger and bow dexterity is of the highest order. Marked by the bravura flourish of bygone days of virtuosity, it is a performance of which Paganini himself would have been proud. In the Larghetto movement of Příhoda's arrangement of Tartini's Sonata in G minor (Il Trillo del Diavolo), there is much evidence of sensitive playing, with careful attention given to dynamic levels and tonal colour. However, the vibrato does not project the intensity of the "modern" violinist and though the sound is sweet, it is a far cry from the lush

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[4] Times, November 9, 1930.

richness of that produced by Seidel. The Allegro movement is spirited and of course, technically sure (his short trills, crisp and brittle, are particularly impressive) but there is little of the twenteith-century spark or brilliance in his playing. In its technical strength and precision, his performance of the third and fourth movements mirrors Vecsey's recording of the same work. However Příhoda gives more attention to dynamics than does his Hungarian counterpart and whereas Vecsey's tempos are strict and straightforward, Příhoda takes greater liberties. This, combined with the addition of an extended cadenza of technical gymnastics, drags out Příhoda's performance to a trying nine minutes. Vecsey's is only three minutes and nine seconds. The performance of two pieces by Fritz Kreisler provides the most telling account of Příhoda's musical inadequacies. The ever-popular Liebesfreud is heavy-handed and choppy. There is little of Kreisler's charm in this pedestrian performance. If it were not for the actual engineering quality of the recordings themselves, an unsuspecting listener, comparing the Příhoda and Kreisler performances of Kreisler's Liebesleid, would judge Příhoda to be the older of the two. Although Příhoda's intonation is more accurate than Kreisler's,Kreisler's performance is more sophisticated in every way. His sound is filled with a vibrancy that is totally missing in Příhoda's performance and whereas Kreisler's interpretation projects a kind of wistful longing, Příhoda's is filled with a bouncy cheerfulnees that totally misconstrues the spirit of the piece. The young Bohemian also sees fit to add a prolonged and tasteless trill at the end. Riccardo Drigo's Serenade (arranged by Leopold Auer) is notable both for its fine intonation (even in the face of extended harmonic passages) and its exceedingly thin

sound, even on the G-string. Příhoda's performance of Drdla's Souvenir is a pleasant surprise. The pace here is very leisurely and relaxed, slower in fact than both the Kreisler and Kubelík recordings, and the sound is of unusually good quality. This, combined with his unfailing technique, makes for an excellent performance by any standards. His performance of the Air from Bach's Suite No. 3 in D major is, however, a different story. Though the sound is pleasant, his vibrato is too slow to produce any of the much-needed intensity. The enormous liberties he takes with the tempo, combined with a number of tasteless slides and the slow vibrato, lends an air of sobbing romanticism to the performance that is highly inappropriate. The cleanliness of Příhoda's performance of Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen Op. 22 is reminiscent of Kubelík's performance, although Příhoda's fast passages are even faster. In terms of overall sound production, Příhoda, though not quite up to the new twentieth-century standards, is nevertheless miles removed from Kubelík. Kubelík's vibrato is practically nonexistent in his recording of this work and Příhoda's tone has far greater depth. Nor is Příhoda so rigidly bound by restrictions of tempo. In this respect, his playing has much in common with the composer's own recording of the work. The disc ends with another fine demonstration of Příhoda's exceptional technique. His performance of Jota navarra from Sarasate's Danzas españolas is full of vim and vitality and the numerous violinistic knots (including left-hand pizzicato in combination with bowed passages) are tossed off with gay abandon.

Příhoda's playing, though not the twentieth-century ideal, was nonetheless some distance removed from the playing of the older school.

Primarily his tone was of better quality and his vibrato, though lacking the "impulsive" intensity of some of his more successful colleagues, was more highly developed than the earlier players. Technically he was at least the equal of Jan Kubelík (some maintain that he was superior) and had he been born thirty years earlier, he likely would have enjoyed great success.

Váša Příhoda's appearances in America during the 1930's were extremely rare and he never returned after World War II.

CHAPTER XIV

YEHUDI MENUHIN AND RUGGIERO RICCI

The late 1920's witnessed the arrival of two very young virtuosos who, even in their early years, represented two divergent trends in violin performance.

The first to appear in the spotlight was Yehudi Menuhin. Born in New York City in 1916, Menuhin spent his early years in San Francisco. He began his formal violin studies at the age of five with Sigmund Ankers who quickly uncovered the child's extraordinary musical gifts. One year later Menuhin was entrusted to the musical care of Louis Persinger (1887-1966), an accomplished soloist, orchestral leader and student of Eugène Ysaÿe. After one year of study with Persinger, Menuhin made his first public appearance in Oakland, California playing Bériot's salon confection _Scènes de ballet_. The California critics, overwhelmed, acclaimed him as a genius. Early in 1925, the nine-year-old Menuhin played Lalo's _Symphonie espagñole_ accompanied by the San Francisco Symphony. This was followed two months later by his first full-length recital. Again, west coast audiences and critics alike were stunned by the seemingly endless musical capabilities of the child. When Persinger moved to New York in the autumn of 1925, the Menuhin family followed to avoid any disruption in the boy's lessons. This migration resulted in the Manhattan Opera House recital on January 17, 1926. The young virtuoso played an ambitious programme, with Louis Persinger at the piano: Handel's _Sonata in E major_, Lalo's _Symphonie espagñole_, and Paganini's _Concerto in D major_. Unlike their west coast colleagues, the

New York critics reacted with disinterest. The newspapers in question did not bother to send their first-string critics to the performance and the reviews penned by their underlings were notable for their extreme brevity. The simple fact of the matter was that by 1926, New York had had its fill of child prodigies. Precocious children from Europe had landed on American shores in a steady stream since 1900 (and earlier), had emblazoned the skies with their technical fireworks and had, for the most part, melted into nothing. The New York critics were, by this time, careful not to be caught up in this "musical" sham. They were more than willing to wait and see. The audience however, always a lover of prodigious children despite the most caustic critical objection, reacted with unbounded enthusiasm.

Young Menuhin's New York debut was followed by studies in Europe with the great Rumanian violinist Georges Enescu (1881-1955). When the family returned to New York in the fall of 1927, Yehudi Menuhin could no longer be ignored. His first appearance in Carnegie Hall on November 25, 1927 marked the beginning of his world fame. He was eleven years old at the time, though his advertized age was ten. Menuhin's performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto was greeted with an ovation by an audience that included the sophisticated as well as the unsophisticated, the knowledgeable as well as the unknowledgeable - and the critics. Aside from the display of technical maturity, aside from the richness and the sonority of his tone, it was the intuitive responsiveness in the child's playing that moved Olin Downes to concede that Menuhin was not an infant prodigy, but rather "a great artist who began at an early age."[1] The Tribune's

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[1]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 524.

Lawrence Gilman took a somewhat more poetic approach:

> What you hear . . . takes away the breath and leaves you groping helplessly among the mysteries of the human spirit.[2]

A few weeks later, on December 12, 1927, Yehudi Menuhin gave his first Carnegie Hall recital before a packed house. Again with Persinger at the piano, he played a difficult (and according to the critics a poorly chosen) programme which included Mozart's Concerto No. 7, Bach's Chaconne, Tartini's Devil's Trill Sonata, Chausson's Poème and Wieniawski's Souvenirs de Moscou. Olin Downes' review, which took up the better part of an entire page of the New York Times, mirrored the frenzied enthusiasm with which musical New York greeted this violinistic sensation.[3] It was by now clear to him (as to the others) that young Yehudi Menuhin was indeed, musically, a child of the times:

> There is no question of the significance of this talent. His importance has nothing to do with technic - already enormous for a child. Other children have accomplished technical feats, in the manner of trained dogs and intelligent seals. Nor would the richness, beauty, sonority of the tone of a ten year old be sufficient to make the sum of last night's achievement. At the root of it all is a superb responsiveness to music, intuitively felt when it is not intellectually comprehended; and a big nature, an uncommon intelligence, already in a child. . . . Chausson's "Poème" . . . was technically the best performance of the evening. To explain its emotional splendor, its big curve and alternately languorous or white-hot emotion it is necessary to invoke the sadly overworked word of "genius." There is no other explanation of such a performance. . .[4]

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[2]Ibid., p. 524.

[3]According to the critics, this particular audience was, for the most part, made up of America's musical elite and included an extraordinary number of professional string players who had come to see for themselves if the rumours surrounding the child had any basis in truth.

[4]Times, December 13, 1927.

All this was not to deny the fact that the boy did display some childish irregularities. However, his inner qualities were such as to point towards the development of an artist of extraordinary musical and emotional capabilities:

> The lack of maturity was sometimes more evident in detail than in mass, as for example in the articulation of certain phrases, the lack of what could be called adequate punctuation, the need of the perspective of the fully developed artist, who sees the last measure when he is playing the first, and looks from a point that is oriented upon his handiwork and the conception of the composer.
>
> But in most cases, instinctively this child violinist felt profoundly, had his vision and communicated it to the audience. Everything potentially was there and he was happy playing with entire sincerity and enormous enthusiasm. This was not a child repeating a lesson, but a child with every emotional and intellectual quality intense within him and communicating his reactions to an audience. . . .
>
> This concert, unless all signs fail, betokened the existence of one of the greatest violin talents of this period. The years will show the full extent of an extraordinary gift which is being wisely protected from undue exploitation. Apparently no quality needed by an artist of the first rank is lacking.[5]

Although the earliest recordings of Yehudi Menuhin (Masters of the Bow, MB 1013) bring to light many of the immaturities of a young boy, they nonetheless offer the listener a glimpse at the genius of the mature artist. La Romanesca, an anonymous sixteenth-century air transcribed by Joseph Achron, is listed as Menuhin's first recording. It was made on March 15, 1928, just four months after his triumphant Carnegie Hall debut. His vibrato here is slow and thus his sound frequently lacks intensity. Nevertheless it is round and full, particularly on the G-and D-strings. His slides are often exaggerated, especially in the solo passages, and his intonation is not perfect. However the sensitive, reflective quality which marks the

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[5] Times, December 13, 1927.

performance of this plaintive melody is well beyond the scope of the average twelve-year-old. Jesus de Monasterio's Sierra Morena and Franz Ries' La Capricciosa were also recorded in March of 1928. In the Sierra Morena the young violinist captures the Spanish flavour with an air of freedom and natural spontaneity that cannot be taught. There is also evidence of greater intensity and solidity of tone in this performance. The technical knots - double stops, pizzicato, harmonics - are all handled with childlike aplomb but far from childlike dexterity. The intonation, though again not perfect, is more secure than in the previously-discussed recording. La Capricciosa is particularly secure technically (the pizzicato and spiccato figures are especially impressive) and the intonation is excellent. The extended détaché passages are clean and neat and project a strong in-the-string sound. Most impressive of all, however, is the high-spirited enthusiasm with which the youngster approaches this work. His recording of the Allegro from Fiocco's Suite No.1 in G major was also made in 1928. This is a work that many a twelve-year-old has played, but seldom with the dash and dexterity of this young performer. The tempo is extraordinarily fast and the intonation secure. However, the sound produced is not a bright one and the instrument rarely sings. This is particularly noticeable on the vibrated notes at phrase endings. Nonetheless, the playing is graced with a spirit of freedom and unbounded enthusiasm. Seven of the works on this disc were recorded on February 12, 1929, just over a month before Menuhin's thirteenth birthday. Ernest Bloch's Nigun from Baal Shem (Three Pictures of Chassidic Life) is marked by a warmth of sound and security in most technical matters. More astonishing, however, the performance

is filled with the plaintive sobs of the sorrowful Jewish heart. One would have thought that such emotional comprehension would be beyond the sensitivity of a twelve or thirteen year old and the fact that young Menuhin could successfully communicate this emotion through his playing at such a young age is the sign of a highly developed musical personality. On the other hand, his performance of Jean Marie Leclair's Sarabande and Tambourin from his Sonata No. 3 in D major shows the more childish side of the young virtuoso. The tone of the Sarabande is quite thin and the musical conception is more romantic in colour than baroque. The Tambourin is so rushed that once or twice the piece "runs away" from him and the intonation is often questionable. In his performance of the Adagio movement from Mozart's Concerto No. 3 in G major however, young Menuhin achieves a quality of sound that marks him, even at this early age, as one of the great players of the twentieth century. Its childlike sweetness is inexplicably combined with the clarity and refined simplicity of a mature artist's Mozartean interpretation. The rich tonal sensuousness that has come to be associated with the mature Menuhin is formally introduced by the young Menuhin in his performance of Gustav Samarzeuilh's Chant d'Espagne and Emilio Serrano's Canción del Olivido. These early recordings introduce Yehudi Menuhin as a young artist of mature musical and communicative abilities. Though far from fully formed technically, his musical personality is already, at the age of twelve, well defined and in its sensitivity and expressivity, it is a personality of the new generation.

As predicted, Menuhin's success and popularity was no mere "flash in the pan." Despite a few highly publicized and highly analyzed "low" points in his career (largely resulting from his "prodigy" years), Menuhin

has, to this day, remained one of the mostly highly accomplished, highly respected and best-loved performers of our present era.

In 1929 Menuhin briefly shared the spotlight with another young violinist from Persinger's studio - Ruggiero Ricci. Ricci, born in San Francisco in 1918, has always considered himself a "victim" of the child prodigy craze that swept through his native city following the sensational success of Yehudi Menuhin. His father, whom he has described as "some kind of musical maniac," had all of his seven children playing an instrument and although Ruggiero preferred the piano, he was forced to play the violin. Nevertheless, Ricci showed great technical facility on the instrument and in 1928, at the age of ten (though he was publicized as being eight), he made his debut in San Francisco with his teacher, Louis Persinger, at the piano. The programme included the Mendelssohn Concerto and virtuoso works by Vieuxtemps, Saint-Saëns and Wieniawski. His performance was greeted with so much enthusiasm that his New York debut was arranged for the following year. Ricci appeared in New York for the first time on October 20, 1929 with the Manhattan Symphony Orchestra. His programme included a Mozart concerto, the Mendelssohn Concerto and Vieuxtemps' Fantasia appassionata. His sparkling performance, which would have been a remarkable demonstration for a virtuoso of mature years, earned a tumultuous ovation from audience and critics alike. The critic from the New York Telegraph described him as "the greatest genius of our time in the world of interpretative music"[6] - this only two years after Menuhin had taken New York by storm.

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[6]Boris Schwarz, Great Masters of the Violin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 534.

Ricci was heard again on November 29 in recital at Carnegie Hall, but on this occasion, the child's age seemed to be more of an issue than had been the case with Menuhin. For example, Olin Downes stated that the programme (Vieuxtemps' Fantasia appassionata, Mozart's Concerto in A major, Paganini's Concerto in D major, an Intrada by Desplanes, Andalusian Serenade by Monasterio and Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen was chosen wisely "for a young intelligence." However he went on in his article to praise the boy's seemingly limitless technique. Lawrence Gilman on the other hand, true to the ideals of his predecessor on the staff of the Tribune, sought much more than technique. His search, unfortunately, appeared to be fruitless:

> Let it be said at once that this youngster, although indubitably endowed technically to an extent far beyond that to be expected of a child, has none of that musical maturity essential to warrant undue enthusiasm at this time. What the years may bring in this respect, no one can predict, but in its present state his playing of such pieces as Vieuxtemps' "Fantasia appassionata" and Mozart's A major Concerto only could be interesting because of the tender age of the performer. Of deeper musical portent, there was little indication.[7]

One full year later, critical reaction was much the same:

> The child's extraordinary talent for the violin and his genuinely musical nature were exhibited, the former more than the latter. It was violin playing of an astonishing kind for such a juvenile virtuoso. But it was undeveloped playing nevertheless. For those who wished to watch an infant prodigy doing something quite out of the ordinary, the exhibition was well worthwhile. For those who desired to hear an interpretation of Beethoven's music - but did anyone go there for that?[8]

Obviously, Ricci was not ready for an international career in 1930. Studies

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[7] Tribune, November 30, 1929.

[8] Sun, December 1, 1930.

followed in Germany with Georg Kulenkampff (1898-1948) and then again in America where he eventually returned to his first teacher, Louis Persinger.

The Masters of the Bow recording MB 1016 offers eight early recordings of Ruggiero Ricci. In these recordings, the listener comes face to face with a "blazing" violin talent. The technique displayed here is irreproachable; the tone is large, penetrating and vibrant; the vibrato, intense and muscular, lends to his playing a sense of urgency - all features of twentieth-century performance style. However, as the critics of the time were well aware, his playing lacks the imaginative expressivity and inner spirituality possessed by the great early twentieth-century players, including even the very young Yehudi Menuhin. This deficit has unfortunately become one of the hallmarks of modern violin playing.

The recording opens with a meticulous but austere performance of Bach's Sonata No. 2 in A minor for solo violin. Here, technical perfection reigns supreme - intonation is impeccable, each note is carefully measured and carefully placed, double stops are beautifully balanced and trills are crisp and precise. However, with the exception of the final Allegro movement, there is little spirit in Ricci's playing and even less musical direction. Little attention is given to dynamic colour and while most notes are technically irreproachable, they do not seem to be "going anywhere." The tone is strong and steady and of good quality but rarely, if ever, sings. Ricci's performance of Hindemith's Sonata No. 2 Op. 31 for unaccompanied violin is again marked by stunning technical perfection in all areas and a frustrating musical detachment. Nevertheless, in its strength and solidity, it is the playing of a "mature" violinistic personality. His performance

of Ysaÿe's Rêve d'enfant Op. 14 is marked by violin playing of the highest quality. Yet here too, it is disappointingly straightforward. There is little subtlety in his approach and the dynamic and tonal levels are one-dimensional. Again, Ricci's performance of Rachmaninov's Vocalise (the last from his collection of songs Op. 34) demonstrates the young player's remarkable control over his instrument and his sensitivity to the idiosyncrasies of the violin. In technical precision and tonal quality it is violin playing at its best, but as far as the music itself is concerned, there is little depth of emotion or interpretation. Ricci proves over and over again that the musical sensitivity he possesses with regard to his violin does not often reach as far as the music itself. It is in pieces such as Sarasate's Zigeunerweisen Op. 20 however, that we see Ricci at his best, for aside from the stunning technical perfection of this performance, it is playing infused with Ricci's own spirit and life. The sound is marked by warmth and richness in the lower registers and a crystalline purity in the upper registers. In the slower passages he projects a surprising sense of "gypsy" pathos and spontaneity and his fast passages are played with a measure of zest and enthusiasm that can only be described as thrilling. In all aspects, this is a memorable performance of Sarasate's virtuosic show piece.

Realizing his enormous strengths in technical areas and his relative deficiencies in purely musical areas, Ricci wisely, in the 1940's, decided to build his career on the performance and recording of works of extreme virtuosity. His decision seems to have been a fruitful one, for it is as a "violinistic gymnast" that Ricci has achieved his most spectacular

successes on the concert stage, and although he has perhaps not enjoyed the following that Menuhin has enjoyed, he has nonetheless maintained a highly successful career. In fact, Ruggiero Ricci marks the beginning of a long line of modern-day technical wizards who demonstrate not only absolute control over their instruments but great sensitivity to the tonal qualities of the violin as well. Consequently, they all produce beautiful sounds, achieve great intensity in their playing by means of their well-developed vibratos and play perfectly in tune even in the face of terrifying technical problems. However, in many instances, these virtuosos of the violin, like Ricci, are limited in what they have to say musically. Although there are today many great players, the "personalities" of the violin are few and far between. In their horrendous struggles to match the technical perfection of Heifetz, many have, for the time being, lost sight of the musical individuality of the great artists of the early twentieth century.

CHAPTER XV

THE CRITICS

Recorded evidence, as well as academic hindsight, has shown that the aforementioned guardians of New York's hectic musical life were knowledgeable in their statements and astute in their judgments. With regard to the great players that passed through their city, they were seldom at variance. Though there were frequent disagreements on small matters, their overall, final assessments were unified, and the course of history has shown the validity of their ultimate conclusions. Of course, there are always exceptions to every rule and the case of Toscha Seidel must be considered an important one. The critics unanimously praised the talents and achievements of this young Russian and predicted that his successes would rival those of his compatriots. Seidel's career unaccountably fell far short of the critical mark. All of the critics studied were musically demanding and were not to be taken in by the superficial veneer of master technicians as were, they suggested time and time again, their European colleagues. Their outspoken defence of musical ideals guaranteed high standards of performance within the city and by 1910, artists on both sides of the Atlantic were convinced that if they could score a success in New York, their professional careers would be assured.

The reviews themselves indicate that Henry Krehbiel, the oldest of the five, was the most outspoken and forthright in his opinions. The only

violinist in the group, he was quick to take issue with matters of a technical nature. Intonation was obviously a "sore point" with him, and, allowing no quarter for the common inconveniences of string playing, he showed no clemency to offenders. His initial reaction to new players was almost always one of suspicion, and even after they had proven themselves to all and sundry, he could still ferret out areas of weakness. Nevertheless, once charmed, he was equally outspoken in his support, and even Kubelík, with all of his "musical deficiencies," received credit for his astounding technical achievements. Keenly observant, Krehbiel was often the first to pinpoint problems and inconsistencies when they arose, as was the case when Eugène Ysaÿe began his technical decline. Nothing escaped his critical ear. He demanded not only technical perfection and musical inspiration but, on the more mundane level, a certain integrity in programming as well. Kreisler and Heifetz, the musical giants of the age, both received lashes from his critical whip for placing too many small, "inconsequential" works on their programmes. In his own musical tastes, Krehbiel was a lover of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. His reverence for them was that of a purist and he showed no mercy towards any performer caught tampering with their works. This of course brought him into many a fiery conflict with some of the most famous virtuosos of his day. Krehbiel was in many ways the most vocal and aggressive guardian of public taste. In his reviews and articles, he frequently lashed out at New York audiences for their lack of musical discernment. The arrival of a child prodigy in the city never failed to bring forth from his pen a barrage of critical displeasure, aimed more often than not at the audiences than at the offending

instrumentalist. Jan Kubelík's early years in New York were, as we have seen, particularly trying times for the beleaguered critic, as audiences flocked to hear him for other than musical reasons. Krehbiel's writing style was as straightforward as his opinions. His judgments were never embroidered with colour or decoration. He said what he had to say as directly and efficiently as possible.

Deems Taylor, critic for the World from 1921 to 1925, frequently accused Krehbiel of having been "too forthright and too often disapproving in his reviews"[1] and Richard Aldrich, five years after Krehbiel's death, gave the following assessment of his colleague:

> If there was narrowness in some of Krehbiel's views as a critic, it was the outcome of his complete confidence in his own judgment and the validity of his own knowledge and opinions. He brooked, indeed, little opposition. He was apt to lay down the law; as his opponents, and opponents of criticism in general, like to say, to "pontificate." Pontification is not a good thing in any art, and perhaps it involves a misconception of the function and the limitation of criticism. The critic is not a law-giver; nor does his judicial function extend, like that of the Supreme Court, to the final and definitive interpretation of fixed and unchangeable law. But Krehbiel had something like a certainty that there were unchangeable laws, not man-made but inherent in the nature of things, in the art of music; that he knew what they were, and that it was his function to lay them down and expound them, as a final jurisdiction, from which he recognized no appeal.[2]

Krehbiel would no doubt have counteracted the above with his own statement on criticism, which first appeared in a November 21, 1920 article for the

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[1]Barbara Mueser, The Criticism of New Music in New York: 1919-1929 (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1975), p. 60.

[2]Richard Aldrich, Musical Discourse (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 291.

Tribune:

> No man has a right to an opinion in a question of art who is afraid to express it; and the foolishest [sic] course that a critic, lay or professional, can follow is to withhold his judgment for fear that at some future time it will be proven erroneous.[3]

The severity of Krehbiel's critical approach found its source in intellectual strength. The solidity and discrimination of his judgments were based on a profound knowledge of the history of music and an inside knowledge of its technical ramifications. By means of his vast store of musical experience, Krehbiel made invaluable contributions to the expansion of America's artistic horizons:

> Krehbiel had a place in America that corresponded to that of the great critics of the nineteenth century in Europe; a place of commanding influence and authority. He had put the profession of musical criticism upon a higher plane of knowledge and competence in all that makes for a true basis of judgment, than it had ever occupied in America before his day.[4]

William Henderson, like Krehbiel, was a harsh and exacting critic, though his writing, despite its crisp, sometimes abrupt overtones, was more imaginative in style. His role as overseer of New York's hectic market in soloists was not one he accepted graciously:

> Of this anyone who places the function of criticism upon a high plane would wish to say very little. The consideration of the performer is the least important office of real criticism; but unfortunately it is the one on which the public lays the largest attention. You may write many pages assailing the fame of Beethoven and no one will take issue with you; but expose the paltry pretenses of some third rate opera singer and the vials of wrath are opened.[5]

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[3] Tribune, November 21, 1920.

[4] Richard Aldrich, Musical Discourse (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 282.

[5] William J. Henderson, "The Function of Musical Criticism," Musical Quarterly, I/1 (1915), p. 75.

Nevertheless, he threw himself into this "unpleasant" task with vim and vigour, supported by a wealth of musical experience, both academic and practical. His expectations mirrored those of the new age:

> It [criticism] must seek for the existence of creative force, for that unconquerable personal power which raises a pianist or a violinist to the rank of preacher of the gospel of Beethoven or Chopin, the opera singer to that of ambassador of Verdi or Wagner. All that lies below his level is but a matter for the routine record of the day. It comes from the east; it sinks into the west; the rest is darkness. Where it was there is nothing, not even a memory.[6]

Though not a string player himself, Henderson's reviews indicate his unquestionable sensitivity towards the violin as an instrument, as well as his knowledge of its technical idiosyncrasies. Like Henry Krehbiel, he could delve into practical matters of execution easily and with confidence, and his demands were no less rigorous. Henderson was another who monitored audience capriciousness with a watchful eye and a ready pen and frequently directed his attacks on empty virtuosity towards the audiences that mindlessly supported it. Despite the critical severity evident in much of Henderson's writing, his reviews betray a definite literary flair. Nowhere in Krehbiel's articles will the reader find allusions to a spiccato "as clear as crystal" or a staccato "as crisp as the sparkle of a frosty morning." Even in the midst of Henderson's most vehement and sarcastic tirades, there lies a streak of good humour. One cannot help but smile at his description of the youthful Franz von Vecsey as "an amiable, hearty, sturdy young chap, set up on a platform to fiddle at people."

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[6]*Ibid.*, p. 76.

Despite the lofty tone evident in much of his writing, William Henderson possessed a good deal of humility and this humility spilled over into his opinion of American music criticism as a whole, regardless of his own successes in the field:

> As known and understood in this country, musical criticism is a department in the complicated service of the daily newspaper. The critic, harnessed to the chariot of the press, is no brother of Pegasus, but rather of the more humble steed that draws the early milk wagon to the consumer's door. What he brings, you take with your coffee.[7]

Henderson's aim was not to provide infallible statements on music or musical performances. Rather, he hoped to present an educated and experienced point of view from which the intelligent reader would then form his own opinion:

> The true desideratum after all, is not the infallibility of criticism. The acquisition of a ready-made opinion is sought only by the intellectually incapable or indolent. A real man prefers to think for himself; and the best criticism is that which compels him to do so. Therefore what we should value most in critical commentary is its point of view, its endeavor to attain an altitude from which the whole breadth of the subject may be surveyed.[8]

Henderson was popular with his colleagues and his death on June 5, 1937 brought forth tributes from all parts of America and Europe as well. That of Olin Downes provides an excellent insight into the critical personality of this influential writer:

> He wrote with uncommon brilliance and force to the very last, and with a conciseness and wit for which men many years his junior could envy him. . . . He had a knowledge and frankness which made him a terror to bunglers, and an invincible champion, indomitable in his fight for musical righteousness. . . . He

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[7]*Ibid*., p. 70.

[8]*Ibid*., p. 82.

> could say in a sentence more than most in a paragraph, and when the subject justified it, he showed a poet's feeling and intuition for beauty. He was a student to the end of his life. And all he did was informed by his honor, his gallantry of spirit, the profound self respect and principal which characterized him as a man and scholar.[9]

James Gibbons Huneker was unquestionably the most colourful of the New York critics at this time. His knowledge and experience in all artistic areas (music, drama, painting, dance and literature) was prolific and he wrote professionally on all such topics with an enthusiasm and flamboyance that remains unmatched to this day in the field of criticism. Though just as fervent in his musical demands as were his colleagues, Huneker's literary virtuosity tended to envelop his reviews, even negative reviews, with a blanket of humour. Hence, his articles were seldom aggressive and never abrupt. Unlike the vast majority of reviews examined, those by Huneker can stand independently on their literary merit as well as on their musical merit. They provide interesting and entertaining reading for the musical as well as the unmusical. His critical approach was imaginative. While his colleagues, for example, spent much time and energy bluntly lamenting the vacuous virtuosity of Jan Kubelík, Huneker, as we have seen, preferred to entertain his readers with humorous descriptions of the virtuoso's appearance and manner - an unusual, if impolite, way of suggesting the same. His December 1, 1918 review of Jascha Heifetz (quoted on pages 131 and 132 of this paper) provides an excellent example of the originality and almost whimsical poetry of his style.

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[9]New York Times, June 6, 1937.

Despite Huneker's facility in his field, his philosophical attitudes regarding criticism remained remarkably simple and down-to-earth. Although quick to defend criticism as a form of art, his writings on the subject frequently reflect an astonishing degree of humility:

> Everyone criticises. Never forget that fact. The only difference between your criticism and mine is that I am paid for mine. That doesn't necessarily make it better. . . . It is always one man's criticism. And no man thinks or feels as another.[10]

He often tried to reassure the public that critics "are not in the game to find fault as simple souls imagine, but to register values, vocal and personal."[11] James Huneker had a deep-rooted belief that criticising other men's music, plays, novels, poems and paintings was in fact a poor substitute for creating them oneself. His artistic fire and aggressive enthusiasm served as a camouflage for the inner disappointment and disillusionment he felt with regard to his life as a creative observer of the arts:

> It behooves us to be humble, as pride goeth before a fall. Like the industrious crow, the critic . . . should hop after the sowers of beauty, content to pick up in the furrowed field the grains dropped by genius. At best, the critic sits down to a Barmecide's feast, to see, to smell, but not to taste the celestial manna vouchsafed by the gods. We are only contemporaries of genius, all of us. . . . But who dares confess this shocking truth?[12]

Richard Aldrich was by far the most gracious member of the group. Although he was frank in expressing his dissatisfaction and disappointment, he was, nevertheless, eminently fair, and when reviewing a performance, he

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[10]James G. Huneker, The Pathos of Distance (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 333.

[11]James G. Huneker, Bedouins (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), p. 16.

[12]*Ibid.*, p. 124.

strove to bring out favourable points, scarce though they might be. Hence his reviews of Jan Kubelík and Franz von Vecsey contained more positive sentiments than those of his colleagues. Unfortunately, there is some evidence, as we have seen in the case of von Vecsey, that Aldrich could be diverted from his views by the aggressive statements of his fellow critics. Nevertheless, he possessed a keen ear and a quick mind, and though not one to belabour inadequacies, musical or otherwise, their significance was never lost on him. Though not a scintillating writer to be enjoyed for his literary style (as was Huneker), Aldrich had things to say and he said them clearly and well. There was always thought in his reviews and he had the ability to find the precise words to communicate that thought. Fairness and honesty were among the cardinal virtues of Richard Aldrich as a critic and these characteristics combined to form a species of criticism as simple and unaffected as it was dependable:

> His reviews meet the test of rereading years after the events with which they dealt - better, perhaps, than those of some of his seemingly more brilliant confreres. The fact seeker finds what he wants; the opinions ring true; there are no fuss and feathers to obscure the picture of what was performed and the manner of its performance. There was something sturdy, dependable, and level headed about Aldrich's reviewing; in season and out, over more than two decades of honorable service he was a critic remarkably consistent in his views; and his opinions were read from day to day for the solid oak they contained, though doubtless many a reader would have preferred a brisker style and a livelier writing personality.[13]

It would appear, even from the small number of his reviews studied in this paper, that Olin Downes followed in the footsteps of Richard Aldrich,

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[13]Oscar Thompson, "An American School of Criticism," Musical Quarterly, XXIII/4 (October 1937), p. 436.

his good-humoured predecessor on the Times. Dubbed by Virgil Thomson as "the last of the music reviewers to enjoy music,"[14] Downes retained, throughout his career, a zest for musical performances and seemingly never grew tired of concert going. Like Aldrich, his reviews mirrored a positive approach to criticism. Unlike Aldrich, however, he exhibited a good deal of freedom in his writing style and his assessments (as we have seen in the cases of Kreisler and Heifetz) were coloured with a measure of poetic insight. However, this is not to say that his writings were deficient in musical expertise. As a violist, he had an "insider's" knowledge of string playing and he did not hesitate to delve into its intricacies during the course of a review. Like his colleagues, his musical demands went far beyond matters of perfect intonation and effortless technique. In addition to his keen and never-failing enthusiasm for musical performance, Olin Downes proved to be thorough in his research of musical subjects. It was during the preparation of a series of lectures for the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences that Downes came upon the now famous "hoax" of Fritz Kreisler. When thorough investigation failed to produce the model for Kreisler's "transcription" of Pugnani's Praeludium and Allegro, Downes approached the Carl Fischer Publishing House which, by coincidence, had recently received Kreisler's request to reveal his authorship of twelve such "transcriptions" in their 1935 catalogue. Downes' New York colleagues, along with respected critics world-wide, shared the embarrassment of having been duped for thirty years.

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[14] Tribune, January 27, 1957.

New York's musical life, was, throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, guarded by a group of men who were as capable as they were conscientious. They brought to their much-maligned field not only a wealth of journalistic expertise but sound musical backgrounds and a genuine, unabashed love for music as well. Despite the never-ending barrage of orchestras, singers and instrumental soloists of all kinds that clamoured for attention in this booming artistic metropolis, these men managed to keep their ears open and their minds alert to new trends and developments in the field of performance. Though usually cautious in their approval of new sounds and styles, they were, as a group, thorough in their assessments, and their reviews of violin performances throughout these years provide an accurate log of developing trends in this field. Though one cannot reasonably place upon them the sole responsibility of directing the course of instrumental performance, their opinions, observations and concerns helped to cultivate and enrich the soil of artistic consciousness in which the roots of twentieth-century musical ideals found nourishment. History has shown these critics to be among the most astute, observant and capable that twentieth-century America has yet produced.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the development of violin playing throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, as seen primarily through the eyes of five of New York City's most respected critics. These critics witnessed and recorded the emergence among violinists of a new consciousness with respect to their instruments in particular, and their styles of performance in general. The nineteenth century, as mentioned earlier, saw the rise of instrumental virtuosity, exemplified in its latter years by the dazzling, if sterile, perfection of Pablo Sarasate. The academic interpretations of Joseph Joachim offered something of a challenge to the popular trend at this time but, while they stimulated the musical intellect of audiences, they often fell short in areas of emotional projection and technical precision. Eugène Ysaÿe was the first important violinist to combine technical proficiency with musical expressivity and hence, more than any other, symbolized the violinistic bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition, the wide range of his emotional inspiration placed greater demands on the violin itself than ever before in terms of tonal projection and beauty of sound. Hence Ysaÿe's technical approach to the violin (his bowing, vibrato, portamento) was inspired by his insatiable desire to express himself emotionally on his instrument. Fritz Kreisler was another from these early years who used the violin as an instrument of personal and emotional expression. The throbbing intensity of his tone not only captured the hearts and imaginations of his audiences but set new standards for future generations of string players.

By 1910, those who had not adjusted to the demands for a high level of technical proficiency, interpretative integrity, emotional projection and beauty of sound were lost in the rising tide of young virtuosos who appeared to possess all of these characteristics in abundance. Henri Marteau, for example, enjoyed great popularity at the turn of the century. Critics praised his "breadth of tone," the "warmth and elegance" of his style and his "virtuosic capabilities." Judged by the standards of a fading era, Marteau was a violinist of importance. By 1910, however, the criteria had changed and so too had critical reaction to the French violinist. His tone, now considered dry and lifeless, could not in any way match the brilliance and intensity of Kreisler's. His academic, somewhat prosaic approach to violin playing was swept aside by the emotional extravagance of Ysaÿe. Vibrato, an important hallmark of the new age, was evidently of little concern to Marteau and the notion of "singing" on the violin was seemingly beyond his musical comprehension. Jan Kubelík was another virtuoso whose playing harkened back to an earlier time. Though his technical accomplishments rivalled those of Sarasate himself, his lack of musical sensitivity and his inability to express himself personally and emotionally on his instrument kept him well outside the select circle of early twentieth-century giants. Franz von Vecsey was yet another violinist who falls into this category. As a young child, the brilliance of his technique took America by storm, but as his maturity failed to bring forth the individuality and imagination demanded by the new age, he slowly faded into musical oblivion. As Richard Aldrich frequently explained, a highly developed technique was, by 1920, neither uncommon nor cause for excessive wonder. The more elusive qualities

of musical expression such as tonal intensity, eloquence of style and imagination, were the new goals. Vecsey, though not totally deficient in these areas, was limited compared with players such as Ysaÿe, Kreisler and even Jacques Thibaud who, though not a serious competitor with the leaders of the modern era, possessed enough warmth, temperament and technique to be counted among those of the "new generation." There were, of course, players during these years who, though perhaps not totally at one with the requirements of the modern age, showed signs of having developed well beyond the confines of the nineteenth century. The recordings of Váša Příhoda, for example, demonstrate not only near-perfect technique but a tone of good quality and a vibrato which, though lacking the intensity of some of his more successful colleagues, is nonetheless well developed. However, generally speaking, his playing lacks the vibrant charm and imagination that the new age demanded. Along with Ysaÿe and Kreisler, Mischa Elman stands out as an important personality of this new age. Despite almost constant critical complaint regarding musical and emotional extravagance, the beauty of his tone and the volcanic energy inherent in his performances captivated audiences the world over. The year 1917 wintessed the arrival in America of the violinist who in many respects represents the culmination of all that went before in terms of violinistic development. The technical and intellectual brilliance of Jascha Heifetz set standards for the violin that have yet to be equalled, let alone surpassed.

Brief analyses of recordings made by the violinists discussed have been included in this paper. In several instances it has been noted that the actual recorded sound does not support the written opinions of the critics.

This, however, does not necessarily disprove or discredit the reviewers' statements. In the case of the majority of violinists discussed, the number of recordings available for consideration was extremely limited, particularly when compared with the number of concerts the critics themselves reviewed. It should also be remembered that the process of recording places different pressures on the artist than does a live performance and hence significant differences, ranging from the technical to the interpretative, can be the result. In the early days of recording, when artists were only beginning to familiarize themselves with the process, it is reasonable to assume that the pressures associated with the recording studio were extreme - in all likelihood to the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others. Nevertheless, regardless of whether or not the listener is able to obtain an entirely accurate musical reading from these voices of the past, it is an often exciting, frequently moving and always interesting experience to listen to these extraordinary personalities of the violin. These recordings, together with the written assessments of those fortunate enough to hear these virtuosos time and time again, form invaluable links connecting modern scholars with one of the most exciting periods in the history of violin performance.

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