

A Young Genius of the Violin

A Chat with Oskar Shumsky.

QUITE a furore has been created in musical circles in South Africa by the playing of a Jewish lad of thirteen. When it was announced that a boy so young would arrive here to give interpretations of some of the most difficult violin compositions, there were many who nodded their heads in doubt. Such incredulity was immediately shattered when the first notes of Oskar Shumsky's violin were heard in the large auditorium of the City Hall in Johannesburg. It was realised at once by the audience that they were listening to a player who was undoubtedly a genius. As the programme proceeded and the young artist gave extraordinary easy interpretations of the most difficult works, the marvel of the performance began to create its influence upon an audience, which realised that it was confronted with a unique phenomenon—a youth whose playing could be equalled with some of the greatest violinists in the world.

In view of the interest which the visit of young Shumsky has aroused, a representative of the *Zionist Record* called upon the lad with the purpose of having an informal chat. He found him quite unspoiled by the adulation being showered upon him. Shumsky retains the boyishness of his young years and his first reference in the conversation was to his *Barmitzvah*, which occurred in May of this year.

"I read my *parsha* at the Kenneseth Israel Synagogue in Philadelphia. This is the leading congregation in the city and is ministered by the famous Rabbi Krauss.

"I am proud of the fact," added Shumsky, "that Zimbalist, the great violinist, was present at the synagogue at my confirmation. I was also pleased to receive congratulations from all the famous leading violinists.

Oskar Shumsky was born on May 27th, 1918, in Philadelphia. At an early age he showed signs of talent and a great interest in the violin. Albert Meiff, the great violinist took him under his influence. He was heard by Mischa Elman, who invited him to perform and later the boy was heard by Leopold Auer—the great violin pedagogue—who was so deeply impressed that he took him under his wing, as his youngest pupil. Shumsky made his first appearance with an orchestra at the early age of seven, playing with the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Leopold Stokowski. Immediately after, he played with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and later with most of the leading symphony orchestras in America.

"My present tour in South Africa," said Shumsky, "is the first concert tour outside of the United States. After my visit here, I shall be going to Australia, New Zealand, India, Japan, South America, and later I hope, to give performances in Europe."

The Jewish members of Shumsky's audiences in Johannesburg have been particularly pleased at the introduction into his programmes of specifically Jewish compositions. In his first programme he played a delightful composition by Ernest Bloch entitled "Nigun."

This is a charming improvisation, of a number of old Chassidic tunes, and Shumsky rendered this with great feeling.

"I have the pleasure of knowing Bloch," declared Oskar with enthusiasm. "He is a wonderful fellow and is still writing some excellent compositions and I shall always be proud to play them."

Asked if he had met Joseph Achron—another outstanding composer who is devoting himself to the creation of specifically Jewish music—Oskar replied, "Yes. I know him very well and I am delighted to play any of his compositions. I love his 'Hebrew Melody' and played that in my third programme in Johannesburg and I hope to play it from time to time during my South African tour."

Oskar also gave the interesting information that Zimbalist, the well-known violinist, is composing music of a Jewish character.

"I include in my programme his 'Hebrew Melodies' and some 'Hebrew Dances.' They are very charming and I am sure that Jewish audiences will like them very much indeed."



Zimbalist and Shumsky.

Living in New York—which is to-day the musical centre of the world—Oskar has been able to meet some of the great world musicians, amongst whom are Fritz Kreisler, Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifetz, Rachmaninoff, Joseph Hoffman and others—all of whom appear to recognise in Shumsky a young genius of the violin.

One of the outstanding aspects of Shumsky's playing apart from his remarkable technical mastery of the instrument, is the pure tonal quality of his violin itself. Asked about the instrument, Oskar said, "I am very proud of my violin and may tell you that it was chosen by Kreisler and purchased and

presented to me by Ernest Schelling—the famous American pianist and composer."

As he spoke Oskar handled the violin in a loving manner.

"Is Kreisler interested in you?" he was asked.

"I am proud to say that he is," replied Oskar, "and once every year I have the privilege of playing before the great master."

In conversation with Shumsky, our representative secured the interesting information that Fritz Kreisler is definitely a Jew.

"I can assure your readers on this point," said Shumsky, "as Fritz Kreisler has never denied his Jewishness."

The point was also endorsed by an elder brother of Oskar's who has come to South Africa with him and is taking care of him on the tour.

"I wish you would tell your readers also," said the young lad, "how proud I am that I am a young Jew. I come from a good Jewish home and my father is an enthusiastic Zionist and very active in Jewish circles in Philadelphia. I am proud of the fact that when Dr. Weizmann last visited America, I appeared on a programme with Maurice Schwartz—the great Yiddish art-actor—and at this concert the Zionist leader was present."

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The Passing of Leopold J. Greenberg.

Editor of London "Jewish Chronicle."

The death occurred in London on Monday of Mr. Leopold J. Greenberg, Editor of *The Jewish Chronicle* and *The Jewish World*.

The late Mr. Greenberg was an outstanding character in Anglo-Jewish life and he took a prominent part in communal affairs. He was one of the early supporters of the Zionism of Dr. Herzl in Great Britain and wielded considerable influence in the development of the national movement throughout the English-speaking world. He was a member of the Actions Committee of the Zionist Organisation from 1905 to 1907, and represented that body in negotiations with the Egyptian Government in 1902-3 for acquiring a Jewish settlement in the Sinai Peninsula, and again with the British Government in reference to the famous offer of territory in British East Africa. At the Zionist Congress which was held at The Hague in 1907, Mr. Greenberg was Vice-President.

The deceased was a Birmingham man who later came to London when he established himself in business as an advertising agent. He was one of the foremost men in British advertising and was well known in the business community of the great Metropolis.

When he undertook the important post of Editor of *The Jewish Chronicle* some two decades ago, he made it a condition that the directors should not interfere in

the policy of the journal. He soon changed the whole tone of the leading Anglo-Jewish organ and the support of the journal for Jewish nationalism created a sensation at the time.

On assuming the editorial chair, Mr. Greenberg resigned from all public offices—Zionist and communal—and became an independent and powerful critic. During the last few years, the journal showed a definite tendency of opposition to the policy of Zionist leaders and its bitter attacks on Dr. Weizmann are well known.

There can be no doubt, however, of the fine contribution made by Mr. Greenberg towards the development of modern Zionism. His was a vigorous personality, which showed an enthusiastic prejudice for the things he held sacred.

Greenberg was a fighter until the very end. A few years ago he unhappily became paralysed, but this physical defect did not deter him from carrying on his fighting policy of opposition to certain aspects of Zionist development and also to certain phases in Anglo-Jewish life.

Whether one agreed or disagreed with the opinions of the late Leopold Greenberg, all must admit that in his passing a great loss has been sustained by British Jewry. He was the editor of the oldest Jewish newspaper printed in English and he had a high estimate of the importance of the post. Who knows if another will soon arise to equal him in steadfast sincerity and outstanding ability? D.

Young Jewish Aid Society (Cape Town).

The first bi-annual meeting of the above was attended by a regrettably small gathering. Mr. H. Winnett, the President, was in the chair, and an address on the place of charitable work in our lives was delivered by Mr. J. Weinreich.

Mrs. L. Gradner and Mr. F. Suritz were also present and complimented the Society on the work achieved to date. That the Society has been doing valuable work was revealed by the balance sheet which showed that £30 in cash had been donated to the six local charitable institutions during the six months of the Society's existence. It is a sum which could be considerably increased if there were more members, and, particularly, more workers in the Society. It seems difficult to make our young people alive to the importance of their presence in charitable work, but a start has now been made, and one can only hope that the example set will be followed by many.

The Zionist Conversazione in Cape Town.

A topic which has been discussed rather frequently within recent years in local Jewish circles was the subject of a paper read by Dr. H. W. Altschul at the Zionist Conversazione this week. It was the subject of the amalgamation of local Jewish institutions.

Dr. Altschul outlined the form which he contended such an amalgamation should take. Local Jewry, he said, should form a government unit and should have its own parliament with its departments of religious observance, kashruth, kadisha, Talmud Torah, gemillus, chasodim and geulath ha'areth.

A fair amount of discussion followed Dr. Altschul's address, and the conversazione was brought to a close at a late hour. During the evening the Jewish news was read as usual, and musical items were rendered by a trio of the Maccabean Guild consisting of Messrs. I. Lewis, Narunsky and Bauer, and Miss E. Richman, who sang. Mr. M. Horwitz, President of the Maccabean Guild, on the invitation of the Dorshei Zion, acted as host.

A YOUNG GENIUS.

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Amongst the treasured possessions of Oskar's is that of a printed programme of this concert autographed by Dr. Weizmann.

The present interesting programmes Shumsky is giving in South Africa was prepared by Zimbalist—who is taking a great interest in the young artist.

"I am extremely grateful for Zimbalist's interest in my career," said Shumsky.

Just before he left for New York, he played at a function in "Roslyn,"—a fashionable suburb of Philadelphia—at the home of Lessing Rosenwald, son of the famous Julius Rosenwald. The latter was also present and congratulated the young performer.

Just prior to sailing for this country, Shumsky's accompanist became ill and could not undertake the journey. His accompanist during his present tour will be Miss Bertha Feinholz, whom Shumsky considers is a remarkably fine pianist.

At the end of the conversation, Shumsky referred again to his tour which will cover a number of countries.

"But I wish," he added plaintively, "it were possible for me also to visit Palestine. I hope I shall be able to do so one day. I shall be proud to play to an audience of *Chalutzim*."

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