



Yehudi Menuhin

[A recent photograph with signature.]

Yehudi Menuhin Conquers Again

An Impression of His Albert Hall Recital

By

Joseph Sack (London)

IN London on Sunday, December 10th the weather was intensely cold. But that did not prevent 10,000 music-lovers from going to hear Yehudi Menuhin, the Jewish boy-violinist give his recital in the Royal Albert Hall.

From all parts of London, and, in fact, from points many miles further away, they came, anticipating an afternoon of wonderful music. And they were not disappointed! Yehudi was at the top of his form. And that is to say his playing was sheer magic!

Long before the concert started every seat in the vast auditorium was occupied. Rows of faces eddied around the platform, and on the choir seats above it. I was sitting in the balcony. From here the sleek, black grand piano seemed strangely tiny.

The hour of three approached. Promptly at that time a fair-haired boy of sixteen stepped lithely on to the platform. There was a tumult of applause. He bowed this way and that in acknowledgement; tuned his violin; lifted his bow. And then we heard the opening notes of Beethoven's C Minor Sonata. With bold strokes he etched the opening theme; filled the hall with notes of liquid gold. Menuhin's tone is remarkable. It is warm, it is polished. It can be quietly lyrical. But where the music blazes into fury, it can have an amazing strength and eloquence. And every note he plays has meaning. Every phrase has its part in the story. And whatever latent beauty there might be in the music, he uncovers. This of course indicates the penetrating quality of his mind. At sixteen, he can see as far musically and understand as much as any master before the public to-day.

That is why his reading of the Fugue of the third Bach sonata for violin unaccompanied, succeeded so well. This is perhaps the most difficult music ever written for the violin. There is no accompaniment to begin with. And then to complicate matters, theme and counter-theme are intertwined like the tendrils of vines. Menuhin, however, was untroubled by any of these things. With the self-confidence of a master he came on to give a flawless performance. Standing alone on the platform he seemed to be swallowed up in the gloomy spaces of the vast hall. But the moment he began to play he and his violin dominated everything and everybody. He played the last chord. The audience applauded. The sunset haze of his music vanished . . . We were in the Albert Hall after all. Yes, here were the familiar lights, the drab decorations!

He gave us some idea of his technical capacity a little later on, when he played the Paganini D Minor Concerto. The first movement with its thirds and complicated passage work, sparkled under his deft treatment; the most intricate effects—such as double harmonics—in the remaining movements did not baffle his fingers, or even for a moment impede the smooth flow of beautiful sound. It was all done with such effortless ease, too!

At the end there were memorable scenes. The audience broke into prolonged applause. Menuhin returned again and again to the platform; played encores. But still the applause continued with unabated enthusiasm. The lights in the hall were lowered, and even this traditional way of indicating the end, did not stop thousands from asking for more. And they got it. Yehudi returned and played the last item of a strenuous programme.

Then, after his triumph, he retired; rested for a while; and began preparations for his visit to Rome. He left early next morning. After playing in Rome he is booked for another tour of America.

Off the platform he is a very unassuming boy. He is fond of reading, and when he has the time he enjoys hiking. Every year his father—who lived in Palestine before coming to San Francisco where Yehudi was born—insists on a six-weeks holiday for Yehudi. This year he spent it in the Swiss Alps, in company with Horowitz, the young virtuoso pianist, and Piatigorsky, the 'cellist. A few days after his holiday was due to commence he was offered £700 to play at an "at home" in London. The offer was declined.

Already he is very widely travelled. He is booked to tour the Colonies. From Harold Holt his concert agent I learnt that Menuhin was definitely due to tour South Africa in September and October, 1935. Because of his engagements in the United States, England and Europe, he will not be able to visit the Union before this date. But the tour has been definitely arranged.

There is one country, by the way, which he will *not* visit while the present regime lasts. And that is Germany. The curious fact is that when he first played in Germany several years ago, his reception was even more cordial than in other places. And that is saying a lot!

So much has been written about Menuhin, that readers of this article may wonder whether there has been any exaggeration in speaking of his genius. I am able to assure them that all the claims made for Menuhin are in no way exaggerated. They will see that for themselves in 1935!