



Mischa Elman with his wife and children.

Special "Zionist Record" photo.

MISCHA ELMAN COMES TO SOUTH AFRICA

Special "Zionist Record" Interview on Board the S.S. Duilio

IT was the accident of my being a passenger on the Italian liner (on my return journey from Palestine) which enabled me to be the first South African journalist to interview Mischa Elman, the brilliant violinist of world fame who is about to begin his first concert tour of South Africa.

The artist has paid a compliment to the reputation for beauty of South Africa by bringing with him his wife and two children (besides his accompanist).

"In my profession, I so rarely see my family," he said to me as we were sitting on the deck of the ss. Duilio, "that I decided to give them a holiday and let them see South Africa with me."

It will be remembered that as a boy prodigy at the age of 12, Mischa Elman electrified musical audiences by his exquisite playing of the violin.

"I have been playing for 33 years now," he said, "yet every recital I give is still my debut. I do not take my success for granted, and concentrate well beforehand before I appear, realising the grave responsibility resting upon me as an interpreter of the classics."

Mr. Elman was born in Russia, but left there when a young boy. Since 1914 he has made his home in America. Some years ago, he married there the charming Jewish lady who now accompanies him here.

"I have a great affection for America," he told me. "There has

been a remarkable advance in musical appreciation during the last 20 years.

"In previous years, Europe set its seal upon an interpretive artist, and America followed suit. To-day that country sets the tone, and it is the American stamp of approval which is acknowledged throughout the world.

"Success in America does not depend on any cliques, as it often does in Europe. It must be a real public success, shorn of all influence except that of great merit."

Mr. Elman added there was great musical talent in America, which the world would ultimately recognise.

"In the realm of musical composition, there is Ernst Bloch. His works were mostly orchestral, but his smaller pieces were fine, too, and were played at recitals by some of the greatest artists."

When in the course of conversation, Mischa Elman learnt that I represented a Zionist paper, his eyes lit up with interest and he spoke of his visit to Palestine two and a half years ago.

"The audiences there are delightful and most understanding," he said. "Besides appearing at recitals in the towns, I also played in the colonies. I did not intend to do so originally, but one was pleased to make concessions, when the sacrifices made by the colonists and Chalutzim were considered. It was a privilege to me to bring music to these people.

"An impression I carried away from Palestine was that there the

Jew felt at home on his native soil. It was a calmer Jew, more self-controlled. He behaves and lives there as if there had been no interruption whatsoever in Jewish habitation of the country in the last two thousand years. As a matter of fact, he behaves as if he has never left the country throughout all this period.

"I liked his Hebrew speaking—slow, deliberate and thoughtful—with no movement of the hands—a new Jew thoroughly at home. It is a memory which will always rest with me."

Asked what he thought of the establishment of the Palestine Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Elman said this development deeply interested the musical world.

"I do hope," he said to me, "the orchestra will develop its own musical standards and characteristics, regardless of what part of the world the Jews in Palestine may have come from. A general cultural unity is needed among the Jews there. Only such development can lead to creative art, and the production of music illustrative of the new life become created.

"I do not believe that Jews are an imitative people and they do not really assimilate themselves well culturally. Creating their own peculiar art, once given the opportunity, is their final destiny."

Telling me of the various audiences he faces on his tours round the world, and the impressions he gathers of his brethren in many countries, Mr. Elman declared he felt there was to-day a great under-current of Jewish unity and understanding. For instance, the old hatred between the German Jew and the Russian Jew was non-existent. Suffering had brought all classes of Jews to-day into a great spiritual unity, in the centre of which lies the hope in Palestine. One could only hope this unity will be productive of noble creative development in the years to come.

My conversation taught me that Elman has not merely been a player in life, concentrating on his masterly violin interpretations, but he was also a keen observer and a simple lover of his people. His arrival and stay in South Africa will not only bring distinction to music, but it will add to the prestige of Jewry, of which he is so notable a son.

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