



THE ARTIST AND HIS WIFE

Photograph taken on their arrival at Capetown

(Cay's Photo Service Agency)

A Talk with a Great Violinist



Joseph Szigeti
on his
Recitals
in Palestine

Johannesburg has in its midst at present one of the greatest violinists—Joseph Szigeti. His recital at the Colosseum on Sunday night was an unforgettable experience for those who had the privilege to hear him.

Szigeti the man also makes a deep impression upon one, as evidenced in the course of an interview with him shortly after his arrival in Johannesburg. A manner of quiet gentleness, a charm as subtle as it is persuasive—these are noticeable about him even on a first encounter.

There was never any question as to the career I would pursue," Szigeti said, "it was an understood matter that I should devote myself to music. Music had been in the blood of my family for generations."

In Hungary, of Jewish parentage, Szigeti as a child lived in an atmosphere of music. His parents and grandparents had been musicians of the popular type, and the profession they had made to Jewry. Musical life was that of music. "People here don't understand," Szigeti reflected, "how communal music is part of the life of the European, how it is inseparable from his very being."

In his brief boyhood in Hungary Szigeti entered the Academy of Music when he was nine or ten, and after a short while, he had moved to London, and although still a child, he had commenced to tour the great capitals.

Szigeti is at the height of his powers as a musician. Eagerly wherever he goes, honoring many nations, he might say that the world belongs to him. Famous musicians also be-

long to the world, and Szigeti, too, is no exception to this rule. For the past thirty years his life has been one of constant travelling, of crossing from this country to that, to delight with his great gift of music and audiences throughout the five continents.

A Concert at Ein Harod.

Vivid among his recollections of places seen stands out his memory of his concert-tour of Palestine, which he visited in 1935. He had always been interested in what he had heard of Palestine, of the great experiment which was being conducted there by the Jewish people, and he was delighted to avail himself of the opportunity of seeing the country.

In all, Szigeti gave eleven concerts in Palestine. But in particular he remembers a free performance which he gave at the settlement of Ein Harod.

"The experience of getting to this settlement was a most adventurous one," he said, amusement lighting up his face as he told the story. "Our car stuck en route in a deep ditch. It was already night—a beautiful night with big clusters of stars in the sky—and as a result of this mishap, I was late for my concert. In the end we were rescued from our plight by some Arabs who towed us out with a sort of truck. But before they would consent to help us they insisted upon striking a hard bargain with us as to the amount of compensation they would receive for their trouble."

At Ein Harod Szigeti had spent the night, and despite the absence of the amenities of civilisation, "there was no electric light, so we managed with lamps, and we had to wash in a little outhouse," he had

thoroughly enjoyed the hearty, happy, communal life—the rough, but abundant food, the good companionship he had found there.

"What impressed me so extraordinarily," he continued, "was the human material which is building up Palestine. At Ein Harod, for instance, I sat down to dinner with men who toiled on the land by day, and yet were intellectuals at heart. I was also amazed to hear the number of languages spoken there—three or four, and all spoken equally well."

Asked about the development of musical life in Palestine Szigeti replied that his tour had been too hurried for him to arrive at any conclusions. But he had got in touch with some of the teachers of the Conservatoire at Jerusalem, and had listened to the playing of some very talented students there. One of these students had since left Palestine to study under Carl Flesch. Another was doing brilliant things in Paris. At the Conservatoire he had also met an ex-pupil of his who was now one of the best teachers there. "Her pupils," he commented, "are known as the 'grandchildren of Szigeti.'"

Of the ovation he had received from Palestinian audiences, Szigeti could not speak highly enough. "It was an inspiration to play to such audiences," he said, "there was so much spontaneous enthusiasm, and such an appreciation of music." Tickets for his concerts had been sold out long before his arrival. In Jerusalem, Sir Arthur Waichope, the then High Commissioner, had brought a large party to hear him, and Mrs. Felix Warburg, who was also in Palestine at that time, had also been in the audience.

The Art of the Habimah.

During his stay in Palestine, Szigeti had seen a performance by the Habimah players. This had charmed and delighted him. Astonished him, too, because of the extraordinary way in which the Hebrew language lent itself to the interpretation of the Russian spirit, and the Russian technique of the theatre. "For anyone who knows and understands the Russian soul and temperament, the similarity between the technique of the Habimah players and the Moscow Theatre is quite remarkable. The point is that while we know that the art of the Habimah derives from the Moscow Theatre, the Hebrew language seems so particularly fitted to convey its atmosphere and spirit."

Another evening in Palestine which had delighted him as a musician was the occasion of a soiree given in his honour by the Association of Palestinian Artists, when he had heard some ancient Yemenite folk-songs, and old Sephardic melodies. "These were quite enchanting," he declared.

Despite the arduous of his life of travel, Szigeti finds in it an inexhaustible source of pleasure and interest. "Indeed," he said, "it is almost too absorbingly interesting. I always try to get the 'feel' of every country I visit. And then I want to get the most out of all the rich variety of human contacts one makes when travelling, and that can be very exhausting work."

Impressions of South Africa.

"And have you succeeded yet in getting the 'feel' of South Africa?" I asked.

"Not yet," he replied. "But I have seen enough to be overwhelmed by the bountifulness of Nature in this country." He praised the extravagant beauty of the Cape scenery, which he infinitely preferred to the "picture post-card type of pretty scenery one finds in Switzerland, for instance." Johannesburg, he thought, was a lively town in which the pioneering spirit was still much in evidence. "The tempo of life here," he remarked, "reminds me a little of the tempo of life in Tel-Aviv. The liveliness, the rush, the newness—all that is very reminiscent of Tel-Aviv."

Szigeti is an enthusiast about books and pictures. In literature his taste is for belles lettres, and his love of pictures has led him to an intimate acquaintance with most of the world's picture-galleries.

At this stage we were joined by Mrs. Szigeti, who is accompanying her husband on his tour of South Africa. She is Russian by birth, has a sympathetic personality, and shares his love of books and pictures. When she and her husband are not on tour, they live in Paris, where their daughter Irene is at school. Irene is a fine pianist, "but her taste," said Szigeti, "is too exquisite for her to want to be a professional artist. Her own performances would not satisfy her exacting standards. As a matter of fact," he added with a smile, "she is almost my severest critic."