

# Jews in the Field of Creative Music

## *Thoughts Aroused by the Visit of Jascha Heifetz*

By

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IN this decade the Jews engaged in musical occupations are both numerous and ubiquitous. All over the world, indeed, they play an important part in the musical life of the community. Not only that, but there are many Jewish artists who have attained to Olympian heights in their professions. One of these is Jascha Heifetz. His rise to fame is too well known to need repetition. The point is that, at the age of 31 he is the occupant of a position—which few can dispute—at the head of the violin world.

I have an interesting link with Heifetz's Petrograd days in the shape of a photograph which is reproduced herewith. In it we see Heifetz as a youth, together with two fellow-students of much the same age, Max Rosen and Toscha Seidel. The former is now living in America, where, perhaps, there is no exponent to equal his skill on the violin. As for Toscha Seidel, his name is a familiar one. He too, ranks with the best of his contemporary violinists. So that the group limned on the photograph is a very interesting one. Leopold Auer, together with three of his most brilliant pupils, and these Jewish, by the way.

The development of many a Jewish violinist has been committed to the care of Leopold Auer. To enumerate but a few of these who have won a great deal of fame of late: Heifetz, Seidel, Rosen, Borisoff, Melnikoff, and Shumsky.



In this remarkable souvenir of Professor Auer's Petrograd days we see Toscha Seidel receiving a lesson from the master. Jascha Heifetz is at the piano and Max Rosen is ready to turn pages. The photograph was taken by J. Siskowsky, another pupil.

The two mentioned last were among the last pupils to study with the celebrated pedagogue. All the violinists enumerated are Jewish, and to this list may be added the names of Elman, Zimbalist and Menuhin who, although still a boy, can make strong claims to be considered one of the greatest of present-day violinists.

**J**EWISH pianists of note are equally numerous. There is to begin with, Horowitz, who is at present conquering Europe with the magic of his art; and then too, Ignaz Friedmann, whose reputation is already firmly established. Shura Cherkassky, taking into account his youth, is an equally important pianist, while mention must also be made here of Harriet Cohen and Myra Hess—two of England's finest woman pianists. The former as a Bach exponent, can have few equals in the world to-day, while the latter is a distinguished chamber-music player as well as a brilliant soloist. And there are

many other Jewish artists who are playing an equally prominent part in executive music to-day.

But it is in the field of creative music that we Jews appear to have contributed only a small amount to the musical literature of the world. We appear to have produced no Beethovens, Bachs or Mozarts. But I think it would be inequitable to criticise us severely on that account for we have, for centuries, been scattered all over the globe. We have not

had a fixed, settled home like the Germans, for instance. And because of this it has been difficult to develop a thoroughly Jewish art with an adequate and universal appeal. On the other hand, the paucity of good Jewish music may be attributed to the fact that when in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, important musical developments were taking place in Europe, the Jews were prevented from gaining admittance to any of the big conservatoires, where an adequate technical training could be obtained. The great new movement—I cannot adequately stress its importance—beginning with Palestrina, the great contrapuntalist, therefore failed to benefit the music of the Jews in any way whatever. This explanation, I think, is quite a plausible one.

Offenbach, true enough, was a Jew. But he was not a patriot. Early on in his life he alienated himself from the faith he was born into, and, in his music, one can locate few traces of Semitic influence.

## Jews and Spiritualism

### Dr. Gaster's Address to Jewish Society for Psychic Research.

London, May 29th.

"MYSTICISM is undoubtedly the core of life. It is the driving force of human life. It is not one, however, that can be explained by reason or logic. Where reason and logic come into play faith finishes."

The Haham Dr. Moses Gaster said the above lecturing here to-day on "The Spiritual Aspect of Life According to Jewish Teaching" to the members of the Jewish Society for Psychic Research, which claims to spread "The Truth of Survival."

"Materialism is not the solution of the problem of matter," Dr. Gaster went on. "Even the wonder of the splitting of the atom only opens up a new gate to the Unknown."

"What have we to say of these spiritual problems from the Jewish point of view? The physicists speak of disintegration and reintegration of the Universe. Does it not mean death and resurrection? Does it in any way destroy the fundamental principle of unity in the world? And if there is unity in the physical world, how much more so is there unity in the spiritual world. Absolute unity then: change and transformation."

"What is to-day life, is to-morrow death," Dr. Gaster added, "and what is death to-day is to-morrow life."

"I have come here to say, be neither like Saul among the Prophets, nor Paul among the Apostles. That is, I have come here not to dogmatise, but to view this matter strictly from the traditional Jewish point of view, and from that point of view the driving force is the Divine Spirit. I stress the word 'divine.' No other interpretation has ever satisfied the world."

### Divine Spark Cannot Perish.

"I stand on the basis of the Bible and of tradition, and although the Bible does not speak directly of metaphysical problems—it was a book for the masses—yet there are words and allusions which show the trend of the conception of spiritual domain of our ancestors, the beginning of the idea that the divine spark cannot perish."

Dr. Gaster went on to quote from Isaiah . . . "The dead will live; those who sleep in the dust will rise up and praise God." From the Pentateuch: "He will be gathered at his death to his fathers," (by which, Dr. Gaster said, is meant "His spirit will be gathered up unto his fathers"); from the Jewish sages, who often refer to those who "slumber" in the dust; from the Eighteen Benedictions: "He will revive the dead"; Ezekiel and the dry bones, and the calling of the spirit from the four corners of the earth; from Jeremiah and Hagadah, and the Cabbala.

"I mention all these," Dr. Gaster said, "to show that it is only prejudice which says that trying to solve the problem of how to grow stronger in the faith of immortality is not part and parcel of Judaism."

"What the Hereafter is, what form the Spirit will take is beyond our ken. We do not know whether it is individualistic. Those of us who wish to go a little further must remember that we cannot dispel even a little of the darkness except with the strongest faith in the Creator and the soul's immortality, and then only with keen investigation and proper preparation."

"Slowly we must rise, step by step, to remove some of the obscurities, but we cannot draw general conclusions from partial results. We must learn slowly to understand, and so on to illumine. To-day in the physical world there are things that people never dreamt of. For those who wish to know the wonders of the spiritual the door is open."

### JEWES IN CREATIVE MUSIC.

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Much the same may be said of Mendelssohn. Nevertheless, there is, at the moment a group of Jewish composers who are attempting to put the Jewish race permanently on the musical map of the world, by giving it a new music. The leader of this group is Ernst Bloch of America. His experiments in translating Jewish sentiment into terms of beautiful sound are very interesting ones. His music is modern, original and appealing. Whether the attempts

of this Jewish group will meet with as much success as the "Big Six" in France remains to be seen.

AT any rate there are many who entertain the belief—it appears quite a feasible one—that the fostering of music in Palestine will enable a new Jewish art to be moulded there. Heifetz is one of these, and he has more than once given tangible proof of his sympathy with the music being produced at the moment in the Holy Land.

Sibelius, in his symphonies, commits to paper with remarkable

fidelity the gloomy shadows of the forests of his native land — Finland. Why, then, should it not be possible in the next decade or two for Jewish Palestinian composers, well-equipped technically, to communicate in sound the spirit of their native land, or of the Jewish race as a whole? But before a thoroughly national kind of music can be developed, a national home must be established. Zionism aims at doing this, and it therefore stands out prominently as a movement likely to yield many benefits, in the artistic as well as in other spheres.

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