

DOUBLY UNIQUE

YEHUDI MENUHIN AND HIS SISTER

By Ruth C. Brotman



YEHUDI MENUHIN'S name has been blazoned upon the page of every newspaper, magazine, in the radio, and in records throughout the world, until it is a household word. His violin playing for the past 10 years (he was but 10 years old at the time of his debut) has used up all the superlatives of music critics and left the layman spellbound! This, you would think would suffice as one generation's contribution to the musical world, but no! the Menuhins bring forth a pianist, a daughter Hepzibah, four years Yehudi's junior, and repeat their sensational gift to grateful humanity. Hepzibah Menuhin, whose Hebrew name translated into everyday English would read "my desired one," is the embodiment of a rare orchid, with poetic eyes, blonde hair, chiselled features and the transparent charm of another planet, plus the gift of music, simple mannerisms, cooking and tap dancing.

When I was granted the privilege of interviewing these stars, little did I realise I would be led into the sanctuary of the Menuhin family group. But there I was! talking to Moshe Menuhin, Mother Menuhin, who had her arm in a sling due to a burn, Yaltah, the youngest, blonde and daredevil of them all (and I'm willing to wager we'll hear from her yet) and of course Yehudi and Hepzibah. All questions were answered directly and without evasion, no matter which one of the family I addressed.

Yaltah, the youngest and 14 years of age, insisted on telling the interviewer she looked Italian, and this led immediately into the questions closest to the heart, i.e., Hebrew, the Palestine orchestra and matters pertaining to the Dickstein Immigration Bill, which will affect foreign artists if it comes into effect.

The elder Menuhins and Yehudi know Hebrew, and they all speak Italian, French, German, Spanish, Russian and English. Yehudi was born in New York City and later the family moved to San Francisco,

where Hepzibah and Yaltah were born.

The Palestinian orchestra, which Toscanini directed recently, was then discussed. Mother Menuhin, with Yehudi nodding assent, ventured that they were interested in the orchestra in a national way, and in this way would be glad to contribute towards it. They made this statement in a broad sense.

We were interrupted by a cameraman who wanted pictures of Yehudi and Hepzibah, and then by the piano tuner. There was some hilarity as the cameraman gave orders for poses and the elder Menuhin laughingly remarked that "for once they obey orders instead of giving them," but added quickly: "But we never ask them to obey in the true sense of the word." Mother Menuhin chimed in: "Children are like flowers, if you constantly pull at the stem of a flower you spoil it."

After the pictures were taken, I asked Yehudi about his remarkable stage poise, which I first observed in Carnegie Hall when he made his debut there 10 years ago. He was at a loss to explain it in definite terms, except that music was so all important to him that he forgot people were there. He added: "I only want to make them happy and to sing to them."

I then asked him why he liked the violin and he said: "For two reasons. First, because it is interesting and produces music; and second, because it is emotional rather than logical."

We then spoke of his teacher, Enesco, whom we heard recently in Detroit with our symphony orchestra as violin soloist and conductor. Yehudi has studied with Enesco since the age of eight, and apart from two years when he tried to study with other teachers, has been with him constantly. He spoke in glowing terms of Enesco, saying he was his greatest inspiration, and we, who heard him recently, know what he means.

Yehudi Menuhin, who for the past two years has been in retirement on the family ranch in California, had been rumoured as studying for conductorship. When questioned about it, he was quite indignant, stating: "One does not study to be a conductor!"

We steered into different channels then. I had heard Yehudi was interested in the reclamation of the Sahara Desert. Yehudi was much interested in having the Sahara Desert made livable, it would mean so much to Palestine and France.

It was drawing near lunch time and Mrs. Menuhin was telling me what a marvellous appetite Yehudi had, although none of the Menuhin children have ever eaten in a public dining room. Pretty Hepzibah can bake bread and cook the entire dinner in their California ranch home on the cook's night out. Yehudi and his sisters, Hepzibah and Yaltah, are ardent devotees of tap dancing and the older two Menuhin children are an adept mixed doubles tennis team. They spend a good portion of every day on the courts when they are at home on their ranch in California's Santa Cruz mountains. Yehudi and Hepzibah spend three hours a day practising their music together, four and five days a week.

To the Menuhin family, contentment is more important than fame and wealth. Said Mrs. Menuhin: "If Yehudi should decide to give up his music and become a shoemaker, we would be satisfied, that is, if that's what he wanted—and if he were an idealistic shoemaker."

Hepzibah is 16, and has been acclaimed a piano virtuoso in Paris, London and New York. She does not plan "a great career" for herself, but wants to play the piano for her own enjoyment. Unlike her brother, Hepzibah has not returned regularly to the concert platform since she gave her first public recital in her native

San Francisco when she was eight years old, from the Schrine Auditorium stage that saw Yehudi in his debut four years previous.

All three of the Menuhin children, including 14-year-old Yaltah, who is also an accomplished pianist, have never attended a regular school—but have had the best instruction from private tutors. Hepzibah has been schooled by some of the world's greatest teachers of piano, including Marcell Ciampi, one of France's leading keyboard pedagogues. In addition to her solo studies, she has always played chamber music at home with her brother as well as with her brother's Quartet and Quintet ensembles.

One of the directors of the Gramophone Company of England happened to be present at one of these informal musical evenings and requested Papa Moshe Menuhin to allow his talented daughter to make some records with her brother and other members of their home chamber music circle. Thus began Miss Hepzibah's remarkable "career." And before she had ever appeared with her brother in Paris, London and New York, her records made with her brother in sonatas of Franck, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart and Enesco had achieved wide circulation.

Papa Menuhin was besieged with offers from concert managers and concert going organisations for joint recitals by the two virtuosi, but for several years the answer was "no." Finally, when he was sure Hepzibah was sufficiently mature, he consented to one annual joint recital in Paris, London and New York, and this routine was followed for three consecutive seasons. The radio debut of the two in a joint recital occurred only a month ago.

The family is unique in that it travels everywhere together, and at present is remaining in California for six months.

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