

# The Young Yehudi Menuhin

Schumann Violin Concerto  
Vieuxtemps Concerto No.4  
Brahms Hungarian Dances 1, 7

Enescu Sonata No.3  
with Hephzibah Menuhin



**PARNASSUS**

# The Young Yehudi Menuhin

## **Robert Schumann: *Violin Concerto in D Minor, Wo023***

- |   |   |       |
|---|---|-------|
| 1 | I. In kräftigem, nicht zu schnellem Tempo | 12:23 |
| 2 | II. Langsam                               | 5:49  |
| 3 | III. Lebhaft, doch nicht zu schnell       | 8:55  |

**Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York**

**John Barbirolli, *conductor***

## **Johannes Brahms**

- |   |   |      |
|---|---|------|
| 4 | <i>Hungarian Dance in G Minor, Wo01 No. 1</i> | 2:50 |
| 5 | <i>Hungarian Dance in A Major, Wo01 No. 7</i> | 2:04 |

**Marcel Gazelle, *piano***

## **George Enescu: *Violin Sonata No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 25***

- |   |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| 6 | I. Moderato malinconico                    | 7:55 |
| 7 | II. Andante sostenuto e misterioso         | 8:19 |
| 8 | III. Allegro con brio, ma non troppo mosso | 7:25 |

**Hephzibah Menuhin, *piano***

## **Henri Vieuxtemps: *Violin Concerto No. 4 in D minor***

- |   |                       |      |
|---|-----------------------|------|
| 9 | I. Andante – Moderato | 6:49 |
| A | II. Adagio religioso  | 6:23 |
| B | III. Scherzo – Trio   | 4:16 |
| C | IV. Finale. Allegro   | 5:50 |

**Philharmonia Orchestra**

**Walter Süsskind, *conductor***

**Yehudi Menuhin** was born at about one in the morning on 22 April 1916 in the Mount Lebanon Hospital in the Bronx district of New York and had been declared by the doctor to be ‘a perfect little boy’. However, for the next couple of decades his birthday was celebrated on 22 January, a ploy by his father to make the young prodigy seem even younger than he was by putting it out that he had been born on that date in 1917.

His parents – Moshe and Marutha – who both had Russian-Jewish backgrounds had first met when living next door to each other in the Palestinian city of Jaffa. By 1914, however, they had both moved to the USA and their friendship was renewed. As he was then living in New York and she was in Chicago, this had to be maintained by means of daily letters. Eventually, Marutha joined Moshe in New York and they were married on 7 August 1914 at a Marriage License Bureau in the Bronx, Moshe having added a year to his age in order to be entitled.

Soon, the young couple were looking for accommodation. When, at an apartment house in the University Heights area of New York, the manager proudly told them that they would love it there, not least, because no Jews were allowed, Marutha told him that they were indeed Jews and that they would therefore look elsewhere, announcing that if she ever had a son she would call him Yehudi - which in Hebrew means ‘the Jew - and ‘let him stand or fall by his name’.

In 1918, the Menuhin family went to live in California and it was there that the young Yehudi’s fascination with the violin began. His parents had started taking him to concerts at the Curran Theater in San Francisco and rather than showing any interest in the conductor, whose role in the proceedings he claimed not to understand in his autobiography ‘Unfinished Journey’, he would focus his eyes on the leader of the orchestra, Louis Persinger, and wait for the ‘sweet, lovely sound’ of his violin to float up to the gallery. Before long he was asking his parents to give him a violin for his fourth birthday and arrange for Persinger to teach him how to play it.

As it turned out, he was to receive his first lessons from Sigmund Anker, an Austrian-born violinist, who had for a time been a member of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. According to Menuhin, as a teacher he had ‘the tested techniques of a drill sergeant’ and ‘transformed boys and girls into virtuosos by the batch’. Nevertheless, during his time with Anker, the young Yehudi appeared in public, and was heard on the radio. Eventually, in July 1923, he did start having lessons with Persinger, by

which time Yehudi's two sisters, Hephzibah and Yalta, both of whom were to become pianists, had been born. On 30 March 1925, at the age of eight, he gave his first solo recital at the Scottish Rite Auditorium in San Francisco, accompanied at the piano by Louis Persinger, with one reviewer claiming that 'this is not talent; it is genius'. Later, in March 1926, he was back at the Curran Theater this time, however, to play three movements from Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* with Persinger conducting the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.

Later that year, the Menuhins set off for Europe as Persinger had suggested that Yehudi should have a period of study with his own teacher, the now elderly Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. As it turned out, although after Menuhin had played him the first movement of the Lalo, Ysaÿe said 'you have made me happy, little boy' and offered to teach him, both Yehudi and his mother decided against the idea and went to seek out George Enescu who was in Paris at that time. Yehudi had been greatly impressed with this Romanian violinist and composer when he had heard him both play the Brahms concerto and conduct his own first symphony at the same concert back in San Francisco. Enescu was about to embark on a tour of Europe but said that if Yehudi came to his house the following morning at five-thirty he would listen to him play. 'I shall be very happy to make music with you, anytime, anywhere, whenever I am not on tour' Enescu told him and agreed to teach him as soon as this tour was over. Thus Menuhin gained a new teacher and a life-long friend.

It was in 1926, the same year in which Menuhin had played the Lalo with Persinger in San Francisco, that Enescu composed his *Violin Sonata No.3 in A minor* which he described as being 'in Romanian Folk-Style'. Ten years later, on 6 January 1936, Menuhin was to record this sonata with his sister, Hephzibah. (It was two weeks after that, on 21 January, when Menuhin recorded in Paris some of Joachim's arrangements of the *Hungarian Dances* by Johannes Brahms with the Belgian pianist Marcel Gazelle. Then after another ten years had elapsed - in May 1946 - according to Enescu's biographer, Pascal Bentoiu, Menuhin was to play this *A minor sonata* again but on this occasion with the composer as pianist.

Back in January 1938, Menuhin had given the first performance in the USA of Robert Schumann's *Violin Concerto* with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra with Enescu this time as conductor. Menuhin had been hoping to give the world premiere of this hitherto 'lost' work

the previous year but he had had to wait until Georg Kulenkampff had played it with the Berlin Philharmonic. Schumann had composed this concerto in 1853 shortly before he had been admitted to an asylum following a suicide attempt. Subsequently, Joseph Joachim, the Hungarian violinist for whom it had been written, decided, and with the agreement of Schumann's widow, that the concerto should be locked away and not performed until one hundred years after Schumann's death, that is 1956.

However, the score had come to light again in 1937 as a result of a search for it instigated by Joachim's great-niece, Jelly d'Aranyi, herself a violinist, who maintained that she had received, at a séance, messages from Schumann instructing her to find it and then perform it. When it was found, it was sent to Menuhin who, therefore, like d'Aranyi, wished to be the first to play it. The Nazi authorities had other ideas and demanded that it should have its premiere in Germany and, certainly not be played by a Jewish musician. Jelly d'Aranyi was able to give it its first British performance at Queen's Hall in London on 16 February 1938 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Adrian Boult just a week after Menuhin had recorded it in New York with that city's Philharmonic Orchestra and its then chief conductor, John Barbirolli.

When Robert Schumann first came across the young Belgian violinist, Henri Vieuxtemps, he claimed that his playing had 'the fragrance of a flower' and that it was 'perfect, masterly throughout'. The influential Austrian critic, Eduard Hanslick, said that listening to him play was 'one of the greatest, most unqualified pleasures music has to offer'. It was while Vieuxtemps was living in Russia, as both Tsar Nicholas I's court musician and soloist at the Imperial Theatre, that he composed the fourth of his seven violin concertos which unusually is in four, rather than three, movements and was reputedly the composer's favourite. Menuhin made his recording of this concerto in London in May 1955 with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Walter Susskind.

For a time, Menuhin played the so-called 'Vieuxtemps Guarneri del Gesù' violin which had been made in 1741 and had not only been owned by Vieuxtemps but, placed on a cushion, had followed his hearse on the way to his funeral. According to Menuhin, Vieuxtemps used to smoke a cigar and hold it near to his violin so that he could smell the smoke while playing Bach's *Chaconne* and think of a cathedral!

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Tracks 9-11 recorded during 1951 at Abbey Road Studio, London

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