

Prone to Violins

About violinists, violins, and the violence that occurs between the two.

Tuesday, January 18, 2011

Bronislaw Huberman



Bronislaw Huberman was a Polish violinist, teacher, and writer born on December 19, 1882 (Brahms was 49 years old.) He is best known for founding the Israel Philharmonic and for his individualistic style of playing. He is also the only concert violinist who had the same violin stolen from him twice – the 1713 Gibson Stradivarius – in 1919 and again in 1936. As Jacques Thibaud before him, he had to spend a year rebuilding his technique after a plane crash (in 1937.) (Thibaud's hand injuries were suffered while he served in the armed forces in the First World War. His later plane crash in 1953 was fatal.) He also married an actress, just as Pinchas Zukerman did much later – not the same actress, of course. He also advocated a United Europe, but mostly in his writings and lectures (though he did confer with some high-ranking political leaders.). Later, he had a public disagreement with a German conductor over his refusal to play in Germany after 1932. Violin pedagogue Carl Flesch had an intense dislike for him, though I don't know why. It may have been because he simply didn't like his style of playing. Huberman was known in his time for being nervous, intense, and having strong convictions about everything. Those qualities were probably reflected in his playing as well. Huberman first studied with Mieczyslaw Michalowicz and Maurycy Rosen from the Warsaw Conservatory and with Isidor Lotto in Paris (the study with Lotto may have been in Warsaw as well.) He played a Spohr concerto in public at age 7. From age ten, 1892 until about 1896, he studied with Joseph Joachim in Berlin, although his lessons with Joachim were sporadic – Joachim was absent from Berlin quite often. Huberman later said that another teacher – Charles Gregorovitch (student of Wieniawski) - had taught him everything he (Huberman) knew. However, he also studied with Joachim's assistant (Karl Markees), Hugo Heermann in Frankfurt, and Martin Marsick in Paris. By the time he was 12, he had already toured Holland and Belgium. When he played in London a little later on, he was not as successful as he had been elsewhere. Back in Germany, despite his growing reputation, there were few concerts to play and money became very scarce. He had become the sole provider for his family and things began to take a desperate turn. It has been stated that during this time (1894), in Paris, Count Andrzej Zamoyski presented the Gibson Stradivarius violin to him. (This particular Count Zamoyski was the son of Count Stanislaw Kostka Andrzej Zamoyski – there are several Counts from this family named Andrzej. Other sources have him receiving the violin from either Count Jan Florian Zamoyski, Count Maurycy Klemens Zamoyski, or the Austrian Emperor in that same year - 1894. However, a respected violin site - Cozio - has him acquiring the violin in 1911, not 1894. According to the Huberman Archives in Tel Aviv, Huberman himself bought the violin in 1911. Obviously, these discrepancies need to be reconciled and I am therefore pursuing a solution to this seemingly simple riddle.) In that year also, Adelina Patti, a singer who was well-known back then, invited Huberman to play with her on her farewell tour coming up in 1895. Though he only played at her last concert (January 22, 1895), things went well for Huberman and his family after that - the concert was a huge and

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critical success for them. He was still only 12 years old. The following January (1896) turned out to be a memorable one, too. Everyone agreed that he was brilliant and unencumbered in his interpretations. At one of his concerts in Vienna (January 29, 1896), he played the Brahms concerto. Brahms was present (among other great musicians), sitting in the balcony, and was incredibly impressed. The critics called him a genius. After 1896, he had no need for further lessons. In November of that year, he toured the U.S., making his debut at Carnegie Hall (New York) with the Mendelssohn concerto on November 21. He was 13 years old. It would be 25 years before he would return (1921). His playing was often described as very original, authoritative, and impetuous, but his tone was said to be somewhat un-beautiful, lacking finesse, sweetness, and warmth. In Europe, he had performed for royalty – including the Austrian Emperor - in the U.S., he played for wealthy patrons. In 1897 and 1898 he toured Russia. After that tour, he took three years off to rest and practice some more – perhaps also to help care for his sick father (who died in 1902.) Though he disliked recording, he did some of that in 1900. He later recorded (among other things, for Columbia Records) the Tchaikovsky concerto (1928-1929), becoming, according to some sources, the first violinist to do so. He toured Italy in 1903 and even played a recital on Paganini's Cannone Guarnerius – a replica of which luthier Daniel Houck has constructed for me. Up to that time, only Camillo Sivori (Paganini's pupil) had played the famous violin – Ruggiero Ricci, Eugene Fodor, Salvatore Accardo, Regina Carter, Dmitri Berlinsky, and Leonid Kogan have also played the Cannone since then. He continued to tour extensively and very successfully – including South America - for the rest of his life. After 1932 he did not play in Germany. In 1937, he left Vienna for Switzerland. A year after the airplane accident (1937), he returned to the stage with a concert in Egypt. In 1939, he moved to New York but returned to Switzerland after the end of the Second World War. YouTube has many sound recordings of his on its site. Huberman died on June 16, 1947 at age 64. It has been suggested that he died in his sleep. Joshua Bell now plays the twice-stolen Gibson Strad.

Posted by [violinhunter](#) at 8:02 PM

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Ivry Gitlis is among the young violinists Huberman helped as they were getting started.

January 19, 2011 6:38 AM



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