

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1141

The Great Violinists – Volume 6

Without doubt the two greatest violin teachers of the last hundred years have been Leopold Auer (1845-1930) and Carl Flesch (1873-1944). Auer produced a string of very great violinists of whom the centre piece was Heifetz. If it is the case that Flesch is somewhat less remembered today it is for two reasons. Unlike Auer, Flesch found great satisfaction in devoting himself to the advancement not only of brilliant but of equally worthy, but lesser talents. To this worthy reason must be added the sad fact that three of his most brilliant pupils died very young: Josef Wolfsthal (1899-1931), Joseph Hassid (1923-1947) and Ginette Neveu (1919-1949). Hassid without question was of the super-stellar Heifetz category. Of a fourth, Alma Moodie (1900-1943) Flesch himself thought very highly, but not even the slightest recorded souvenir is known.

Wolfsthal came of a Polish musical family of which Max Wolfsthal, also an infant prodigy, also died young. Josef came to Flesch in Berlin at the age of 10 and stayed with him until he was 16. He then played a few times in public and in a reference at this time Flesch, who did not fling praise around unduly, wrote "In my view (Wolfsthal) is generally the best violinist of the youngest generation." However Flesch considered that he should play in an orchestra to broaden his musical horizons. Thus he played in the first desks in Bremen and Stockholm and then moved to Berlin where, at the age of 26, he also became a teacher at the Hochschule für Musik. In the late 1920s he performed in many modern works often as soloist in premières. He presumably also was leader and played solo passages in Klemperer's Berlin recordings, some of which can be heard on Symposium 1042 *Die Kroll Jahre*. He played too, in a string trio with Hindemith and Feuermann. Reportedly he led a rather gypsy-like existence in a flat far from clean and also neglected his health. At the age of 31 he became ill with influenza and succumbed to it. He was already considered one of the finest violinists in Germany, his bowing particularly being, in Flesch's opinion, near absolute perfection. (When he became ill Flesch, as senior violin teacher at the Hochschule, obviously had to appoint a substitute and he selected Max Rostal. Sadly, a person seeking self-agrandisement promoted some malicious gossip around these events and this may have been also the source of the unsubstantiated story of a rift between Flesch and Wolfsthal.)

Sixty years later the writer asked Max Rostal (1905-1991) who, with his astonishingly vivid memory, was obviously the most qualified person living for an assessment of his near contemporary. In his last letter to the writer he replied: "The violinist Josef Wolfsthal was before my time also a student of Carl Flesch. I remember him as a really excellent violinist who worked as Concertmaster (leader) at the State Opera and also as Professor at the State Academy in Berlin. As a soloist he was not well known, although his abilities would easily have qualified him for a brilliant solo-career. He was most likeable as a colleague; but through detrimental influence this character-quality was in later years less evident. In spite of all this,

Wolfsthal was a really fine violinist and also a likeable human-being."

Wolfsthal's performances are many worlds away from those of the modern high-powered virtuoso passing from concert hall to concert hall by high-powered jet. There is restraint and dignity; emotion is there, but in the composer's music, not on the artist's sleeve.

Szymon Goldberg was also born in Poland and also came at the age of ten to Flesch in Berlin. He made his début in Warsaw in 1921 and in 1924 Flesch felt he was ready for Berlin Audiences. In 1925 Flesch, following his normal practice with those obviously marked out for distinguished solo-careers, advised him to play for a time in an orchestra and he became leader in Dresden. (One sometimes wonders how the seasoned lesser desks felt about this succession of Wunderkinder delaying or blighting their promotion prospects.) In 1929 he became leader of the Berlin Philharmonic under Wilhelm Furtwängler and in 1931 he replaced Wolfsthal in the trio with Hindemith and Feuermann.

Furtwängler, whatever the calumnies later spoken about him, fought hard to retain and protect Jewish musicians in his orchestra, but one by one they all realised that they had to leave. Goldberg left in 1934 and commenced a concert career including a distinguished partnership with Lily Kraus. He was interned by the Japanese in 1942 and after the war continued as a noted soloist and teacher. He lives now in the United States where he still teaches and plays.

Goldberg's performance of the Adagio appeared as a disc on its own whereas Wolfsthal was allowed three sides in his set and it must be extremely uncommon as presumably compulsory deletion followed within a few months.

The poise and line of Goldberg's playing and the musical balance with the orchestra are at once apparent. Again, the soloist is not out to impress the audience by a large sound with his own, rather than Mozart's, personality.

Symposium Records acknowledges the contributions to the production of: Carl F. Flesch, Dr. Paul Lewis and Adrian Tuddenham.

This compilation is copyright. It may not be broadcast, copied, hired out or publicly performed without permission.

Recording details:

Mozart Concerto: Odeon, probably 1928

2-20911 2-20916 2-20918 2-20919 2-20927 2-20928 2-20929 2-20930⁻²

Beethoven Concerto: Polydor, probably 1928

1534 1535½ 1536 1537 1538 1547½ 1548½ 1549 1550 1551 Bm I

Mozart Movement: Telefunken, June 1932

18493-1 18494