

## *SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1300*

### The Great Violinists – Volume 14

ALEXANDRE MOGUILLEWSKY was born in Russia in 1885 and became a pupil of the Moscow Conservatoire. There he studied under Johann Hramily. Hramily, a Czech, was appointed in 1869 as an assistant, and in 1874 as a professor, and remained there, a highly regarded teacher, until he died in 1915. Moscow with Hramily may have been less prestigious than St. Petersburg with Auer, but nevertheless produced a stream of ranking players. Other pupils of Hramily included Stanislav Barsovich, Léa Luboschütz, Michael Press and Alexander Petschnikoff.

In 1908 Moguilewsky was a founder-member of the Moscow Society for the Propagation of Chamber Music. In 1912 he formed the Moguilewsky String Quartet, the other members being Pakelman, Balaleinikov and Sisserman. This group and the Duke of Mecklenburg's Quartet between them raised Russian standards to new levels.

The Stradivarius Quartet was formed in 1918. Later Moguilewsky joined it and raised its standards. In addition to the entire Beethoven cycle, the quartet played works by Casella, Debussy, Hindemith, Ravel and modern Russian composers.

Moguilewsky left this quartet in 1921. Subsequently he emigrated to Japan where he continued his career until his death in 1953.

His records were made probably all in Japan in the early 1930s.

NATHAN MILSTEIN was born in 1904 in Odessa, the fourth of seven children. His parents appreciated music, but were not themselves musicians. His first acquaintance with the violin may have been to divert his aggressive nature from fighting with his siblings. His first lessons were with a teacher locally. These, however, were terminated as the teacher's answer to wrong notes was violence towards him. At seven years of age the boy went to Stolyarsky at the local conservatoire. Many students, including Oistrakh, regarded Stolyarsky highly; Milstein, however, claimed that he learnt little from him.

In about 1915 Milstein moved to St. Petersburg to study with Leopold Auer, though the amount and length of contact may not have been great; in any case Auer emigrated in 1917. Nevertheless the relationship must have been fruitful, for in later years Milstein expressed appreciation of Auer's teaching; there might have been greater musicians than Auer, he recounted, but Auer allowed students to develop their own personalities.

After the revolution Milstein played at government educational concerts in the Odessa province. Material necessities were in short supply, but the thoroughly cosmopolitan region, with orchestras, theatres and opera, was excellent for a developing young artist. Then, in 1923, he met Horowitz, and they appeared together, very unlike as they were, to wild acclaim.

At the end of 1925 they left Russia with official blessing, as ambassadors to show the world what Communism could produce. Whatever their intentions were at that moment, the fact is that they stayed away. They were well received in Europe, particularly in Spain. After a couple of years they crossed the Atlantic and made the United States their home. Milstein's orchestral début in America was in 1929 in Philadelphia under Leopold Stokowski, always on the lookout for good soloists.

In 1932, he was warmly greeted in the London, though *The Times* did ask if there was more of Milstein heard than of Brahms. In 1936 the *Musical Times* spoke of him playing Vivaldi "with a fire and precision... the Vivaldi whom Bach admired; not the pedagogue.." But here, too, there were doubts, this time on the extent to which Milstein had penetrated Beethoven. Perhaps Milstein took time to mature. Certainly the comments eventually ceased, but, of course, the work of any real artist, bears his imprint. In sum: He began, and remained, a dazzling virtuoso; the nobility of his interpretations grew.

MIRON BORISOVICH POLYAKIN was born in 1895 in Cherkassk. After initial tuition from his father he entered, at the age of seven, the music school of Kiev where he was a pupil of Vonsovskaya. In 1908 he entered the St. Petersburg Conservatoire as a pupil of Leopold Auer. Although he had already played the Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky concertos, he had, nevertheless, to undergo the preliminary "conditioning" course with Auer's assistant, Nalbandyan, which he resented. For his playing, temperament and musicianship, his assessments were always of the highest. The highest possible mark was 5 but on one occasion Glazounov insisted on marking him 5++ and in 1910 Auer's report on Polyakin consisted of three exclamation marks. But his pride and arrogance were also noted. He remained a student until 1918, but never graduated. Also, Auer, contrary to his normal habit, allowed him to give concerts in the provinces. Perhaps these arrangements were to keep him from military service. After the war he embarked at once on a concert tour which included Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden. Polyakin moved to the United States of America in 1922. Probably only Kreisler had been totally unscathed by the arrival there of Heifetz in 1917. (Apparently Elman and Godowsky chanced to sit together at Heifetz's début. Elman: "Isn't it awfully hot in this hall?" – Godowsky: "Not for pianists.") Polyakin won first prize in the World Violinists Competition which took place in 1925 in New York with his playing of the Tchaikovsky concerto. Nevertheless, in 1927 he returned to his homeland; perhaps out of a sense of duty or homesickness, perhaps from pique or hurt pride that his success was not greater.

Relations with the state seem to have been undamaged by his residence abroad, for he embarked at once on a heavy concert schedule throughout the country and, in addition, he began to teach. In 1928 he was appointed professor at the institute at which he had formerly been a student, now the Leningrad Conservatory, and in 1936, as Moscow, the new capital, artistically as well as politically, rose in prominence, he moved to a similar position there.

In the United States he had had to compete for his place, principally with Auer pupils who had already established themselves, Elman, Zimbalist and above all, Heifetz. Now he experienced rivalry from the rapidly advancing Oistrakh, thirteen years his junior. Each was regarded as a god, whose supremacy was hotly defended by his followers. The rivalry did not extend, on paper at any rate, to the two men themselves. Each attended concerts at which the other played and beyond doubt each learnt from the other. (In Odessa, within a period of a few days, Glazounov conducted his concerto for each of them.) Oistrakh regarded his colleague's performances of the Bach Chaconne and the Sonata in D of Brahms as summits of interpretation, and Polyakin spoke of Oistrakh as on a level with him.

In 1940 the state conferred upon him the title of Artist of Merit. Alas, he did not enjoy it long as the following year, returning to Moscow from appearances in the Crimea, he died in the train of a heart attack.

In taste and style Polyakin's playing was held to be the closest to Auer of any of his pupils, but affliction from nerves made him an uneven player.

As a teacher he tended to proceed by example rather than explanation, indeed at times his playing in class was felt to exceed anything he achieved in concert.

The brevity of his life, and the conditions prevailing in Russia in the '30s, have left us with a recorded legacy of this artist which is both very small and very hard to come by.

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