

Bronisław Huberman



Bronisław Huberman, one of the world's best violinists, was born in Częstochowa on 13th December 1882 to parents Jakób and Aleksandra. His father was a lawyer, whose livelihood, from this profession, was very meagre, and his parents' goal was to ensure better living conditions for their son than their own. It is interesting to mention that, even before his wonderful musical talents were discovered, they had always dreamed of a great musical career for him.

In his autobiography, Huberman himself tells of an event which occurred with another child prodigy and the Shah of Persia, which brought about his own study of music and rise to fame. But it is beyond doubt that, even without this occurrence, Huberman would not have remained in obscurity, and that his extraordinary talents would have opened the way for him to the fame and glory which he attained during his life.

Huberman wrote about this and his talents in his booklet *"From the Workshop of the Virtuoso"¹*, which was published back in 1912, and from which we derive our information about him, but we leave the reader to reach his own conclusions regarding this matter.

Huberman's first teachers were the famous Mieczysław Michałowicz and Izidor Lotto of the Warsaw Conservatory. (The former was born in 1851 and died in 1938 and, from 1906 to his death, was a teacher at the Warsaw Conservatory. He was also the teacher of Joseph Achron², among others. The latter was born in 1840 and died in 1937. He was a famous Polish violinist and composer, who was likened to Paganini. He studied in Paris, but most of his professional work was conducted in Warsaw).

At the age of seven, Huberman appeared at a charity function and, after being properly prepared by his teacher Michałowicz, scored a complete victory there, playing [Pierre] Rode's *Seventh Violin Concerto*. We must mention that this little boy learnt that concerto to perfection, which is currently studied as part of the curriculum of the seventh grade in primary [music] schools, after only six months of study!

A very influential event in Huberman's life occurred in 1892. During a visit to Berlin with his parents, he was introduced to Joseph Joachim who, after hearing the young boy's performance, immediately took him on as a pupil in his department.

Although he attended Joachim's school for only about six months, his study with the musical genius had a huge influence on the course of his studies and his musical development in the future.

¹ [TN: "Aus der Werkstatt des Virtuosen" (Heller, Leipzig 1912).]

² [TN: A Jewish composer and violinist.]

Huberman himself mentioned this many times and attested that his path in music had originated in the inspiration he had received from Joachim during his time with him.

Joachim assisted him greatly and made his first appearances abroad possible.

As early as 1893, he already performed in public concerts at the famous spa towns of Marienbad [Mariánské Lázně], Karlsbad [Karlovy Vary] and [Bad] Isch. A short time afterwards, he appeared in Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, Brussels and London.

In 1894, in London, he was acquainted with the famed singer Adelina Patti. A year later, he performed together with her in Vienna, which constituted a great victory for the acclaimed young violinist.

He had several encouraging successes in that period. The aging Brahms, when he heard the twelve-year-old Huberman play his *Violin Concerto in D Major*, expressed his opinion that this incredible boy was destined for great success in the future. The Queen of Romania bestowed upon him the title of Royal Violinist.

Count [Władysław] Zamoyski bought a Stradivarius for him. He was presented with another of this Italian master's violins by the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph.

After a short while, he travelled for the first time to the U.S. Thus Huberman gained worldwide recognition as one of the greatest violinists of his generation. He performed many concerts and aroused admiration with his unparalleled physical and spiritual strength.

In 1902, in Munich, he performed eighteen violin concertos in sixteen evenings.

When he was in Berlin in 1906, he met with Joachim for the last time. The death of this musical genius - his former teacher - in 1907, made him depressed. For some time, he stopped appearing in concerts and dedicated himself entirely to the theory of his profession. As a result of his focus on his studies, a compilation of his lectures was published in 1912, named "*From the Workshop of the Virtuoso*". This book not only includes practical conclusions, but also the essence of the virtuoso's thoughts, which were delivered with an admirable literary talent, and are of value for future generations.

1912 may be marked as the end of his training period. Although training never ends, especially for a virtuoso like Huberman, we may state that it was then that he achieved complete independence as regards the style and content of his musical performances.

In that same period, Huberman also became interested in Chamber music.

In the 1920's, the Huberman, Friedman and Casals trio gained fame in the musical world and their joint performance in Vienna in 1927 was the peak of that year's musical season.

In 1929, Huberman visited the Land of Israel for the first time. In that period, he also began giving lessons in music and among his pupils - albeit for only a short time - was Irena Dubiska. He also tutored several violinists who are, to this day, connected in their work with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in Tel-Aviv - the fruit of Huberman's creation, and which is named for him.

Huberman was not only a world-class violinist, but was also a multi-faceted intellectual with extensive knowledge in various fields. He was interested in questions of medicine, biology and

musicology, as prove the many articles he wrote and, although these articles supposedly only deal with musical questions, from them may be seen the depth of his knowledge in all these subjects. This may also be seen from the collection of his writings in *"From the Workshop of the Virtuoso"*.

The political questions were one theme which occupied Huberman's mind in particular. In his bold conception, he envisioned something that seemed like a dream - the unification of Europe, such as that of the U.S.A. Huberman viewed this unification as the foundation of everlasting peace and true love of mankind, to which, as an international humanist, he aspired.

In 1932, Huberman published his book *"Vaterland Europa"* ["Fatherland Europe"], which was especially of great value then, when dark clouds covered its skies. This idea of his is further proof of how well he understood the political situation and sought to find a fitting solution to the impending Holocaust.

We should also mention some facts regarding the political situation prevailing in March 1933.

At that point in time, the Director of the Municipal Opera of Berlin [Carl] Ebert was dismissed - by Goebbels' orders - for not being a pure "Aryan".

The famous musicians who were living then in the U.S, among them Toscanini, Koussevitzky, Goldmark and Damrosch, appealed in a letter to Adolf Hitler, demanding he issue orders to stop the racial persecutions. Their petition, of course, was a voice crying in the wilderness and the persecutions continued. In May 1933, Arnold Schönberg was dismissed from his position at the Prussian Academy of Sciences. There was no end to the provocations, riots and criminal acts that were carried out in broad daylight and in front of the entire world's eyes, under the charming slogan "to introduce the spirit of music into the lives of the people".

The tragic events of the "musical deportations" in Poland were also described in this manner.

In this period, Huberman was nevertheless invited to come to Germany to hold his concerts. He, of course, refused and a few segments of his letter to [Dr Wilhelm] Furtwängler (who was one of the opponents of Hitler's methods regarding Jewish artists) from September 1933 should be published.

Huberman, first of all, expresses his admiration for the fearlessness with which he had conducted his campaign for rescuing the concert stage from threatening destruction by racial "purifiers" and mentions the prominent associates he had in this mission, such as Toscanini (who refused to appear in Bayreuth), [Ignacy Jan] Paderewski (who cancelled his concert in Paris) and the brothers Adolf and Fritz Busch (who left Germany following Hitler's rise to power). He also adds that, in light of the circumstances, he was proud of having the honour to be counted among the musicians who joined this stance*.

And Huberman continues:

Precisely these models of high sense of duty, however, must prevent all our colleagues from accepting any compromise that might endanger the final goal. Although the government's declarations, which owe their origin to you, may present the maximum of what may

* It seems that Furtwängler had succeeded in receiving a promise from the authorities of the "Reich" that, in the future, certain artists would be allowed to stay or perform in Nazi Germany, after a certain "selection", and to this Huberman was replying, as mentioned above.

presently be attained, yet, unfortunately, I cannot accept them as sufficient for my re-participation in German concert life.³

Huberman explains his rejection of this “solution” in detail, and expresses his confidence that Furtwängler, too, shared the same opinion, which was that of the greatest artists in Germany.

Subsequently, Huberman dwells on the humanistic and ethical aspects of the issue, and asks,

Can you expect this process of sublimation, which pre-supposes complete abandonment of one's self to one's art, of the musician who feels his human dignity trodden upon and who is officially degraded to the rank of a pariah? Can you expect it of the musician, to whom the guardians of German culture deny because of his race, the ability to understand "pure German music"? At the same time, they deliberately keep silent, on the one hand, concerning the half-Jewish origin of Richard Wagner, which has now been proved beyond peradventure of doubt, and, on the other hand, concerning the historic role played by Mendelssohn, Anton Rubinstein, Hermann Levi, Joseph Joachim and so forth.

You try to convince me by writing, "Someone must make the beginning to break down the wall that keeps us apart." Yes, if it were only a wall in the concert hall! But the question of a more or less than authoritative interpretation of a violin concerto is but one of numerous aspects - and God knows, not the most important one - behind which the real problem is hidden. In reality it is not a question of violin concertos nor even merely of the Jews; the issue is the retention of those things that our fathers achieved by blood and sacrifice, of the elementary pre-conditions of our European culture, the freedom of personality and its unconditional self-responsibility unhampered by fetters of caste or race. Whether these achievements shall again be recognized depends not upon the readiness of the individual who is "the first to break through the wall that separates", but, as in the past, upon the urge of the conscience of artists collectively, which, once aroused, will crash through sources of resistance with the impulse of a force of nature, breaking them as it would a paper wall.

In closing his letter, Huberman sends his good wishes to his friends in Germany and expresses his emotional turmoil for being forced to renounce Germany.

Huberman did not suffice with just this - he was very active in his systematic war against Nazism.

In March 1936, he published his “Open Letter to the German Intellectuals” in the “Manchester Guardian”. Huberman’s protest as an artist and public figure was not limited to just writing articles. He made it his goal in life to express his resistance against the deceptions of the Nazis by creating the Palestine Symphony Orchestra⁴ in Tel-Aviv.

In August 1936, Huberman left Vienna and settled in the Swiss town of Corsier-sur-Vevey. From there, he travelled to the Land of Israel, in order to organise the orchestra there, and met with great success in his exploits.

The first concert of the Palestine Symphony Orchestra in Tel-Aviv, on 26th December 1936, was conducted by Arturo Toscanini. The orchestra consisted mainly of musicians who were victims of Hitler’s regime.

³ [TN: I've quoted this and the subsequent passages verbatim from the original letter, as published on BronislawHubermanForum under the title “Bronislaw Huberman, Brief an Wilhelm Furtwängler vom 10. Juli 1933”. In the Hebrew version in Sefer Częstochowa there are some small differences.]

⁴ [TN: It was renamed the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in 1948.]

The concert's programme comprised two overtures by Weber and Rossini, Brahms' 2nd Symphony, Schubert's 8th Symphony and the overture to Mendelsohn's "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

The "New York Times", in its issue dated 27th December 1936, wrote of this great event which was mainly due to Huberman's efforts:

*Mr Huberman conceived the idea of creating the orchestra on his visit to Palestine a year ago, and promised his aid to German exiles and Jewish musicians - many of whom are famous worldwide. He persisted in his relentless efforts, during almost a whole year, to achieve this goal and, yesterday, they achieved their great victory!*⁵

Huberman also gained great fame in many cities in Africa and Asia, with his numerous appearances.

On one of his journeys to Sumatra, he was injured in both hands in an aeroplane accident. Although his injuries were not dangerous, the virtuoso was unable to hold his violin for two years.

In 1940, he performed in Johannesburg, South Africa and, due to the onset of the Second World War, was unable to return to his home in Switzerland. He travelled to the U.S., where he remained to the War's end. Huberman was unable to adapt to the hectic, commercial life in America and did not feel well there. In 1945, he hurried back to his home in Switzerland.

In 1946, he was received with great enthusiasm by his audience in Brussels. Shortly afterwards, he broke his leg. The bone would not heal and had to be realigned twice. This seriously undermined Huberman's overall health and he was also extremely exhausted by the great deal of travelling and the concerts he performed during this period.

In May 1947, he was still making his plans for the future. However, on 16th June of that same year, he was no longer among the living! He died in his villa at Vevey (Switzerland).

The deceased received great honours, both as an artist - being among the best violinists in the world - and as a public activist.

During his "Vienna" period, Huberman was chosen as Honorary Member of the Society of Friends of Music in Vienna [*Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien*] and was awarded the Orders of King Leopold, and the [French] Legion of Honour [*Légion d'Honneur*]. The Jewish Institute of Religion in New York conferred an honorary doctorate upon him⁶.

The illustrious deceased one was indeed worthy of all this honour, for he had dedicated his entire life, not just to his fruitful artistic career, but also to public necessities in all political and social fields, as a brave warrior for justice and rectitude.

All his manuscripts, comments and annotations on sheet music, which include fingering, bowing, punctuation, dynamics etc., the awards he received from countries, presidents and kings, and the collection of his private correspondence, which includes letters from the greatest men of Huberman's generation - he bequeathed to the Central Library of Music in Israel, which is at "Heichal Ha'Tarbut" ["Culture Palace"] in Tel-Aviv, and all this is under the special care of his trusted secretary Mrs Ida Ibbeken, who has settled in Israel.

⁵ [TN: All attempts at quoting the article in the original English have been to no avail. I am therefore translating it from Hebrew, and it may be stylistically different to the original article.]

⁶ [TN: See: <https://culture.pl/en/artist/bronslaw-huberman>.]

His name was always mentioned with awe and respect in his hometown of Częstochowa and it is with the same sentiments of admiration and affection that we immortalise his great name in our *Sefer Częstochowa!*

E. Ben-Moshe

My Meeting with B. Huberman

In 1945 (two years before his untimely demise), the world-famous virtuoso Huberman was still travelling around the whole world, delighting music-lovers with his God-given talent. I was in Italy then, as a Jewish soldier serving in the British army, to which I had volunteered in response to the call of the "Jewish Agency" - our "government on the run".

I suddenly discovered that our "townsman" Huberman was coming to Milan, where he would give a concert.

Naturally, I was determined (and for a Jewish soldier this entailed superhuman efforts) to would attend the concert – to me it was a life-and-death question! This was not only for my love of music, but mainly due to my "local patriotism" - no insignificant matter - "our townsman", who had brought such honour and glory to our Częstochowa throughout the entire world, "our Huberman" - who had created the Tel-Aviv Philharmonic - was coming to Milan and I would not see him and hear him?

So I remembered the words of our Reb Menachem Mendel Ussishkin z"l, who used to say, "*Nothing stands in the way of willpower*". Torah scholars say that Ussishkin appropriated this saying from the Sages of the Talmud but, be that as it may, I was able to acquire a ticket to the concert!

Over twenty years have passed since that extraordinary evening but, when I remember it, I can still hear the heavenly sounds of - we may certainly say – a superhuman talent. Bewitched, I pushed my way to the great virtuoso and murmured quietly, "I am a *Częstochower* and, as a fellow townsman, I would like to shake your hand!" He extended his hand to me, saying, "Although I left Częstochowa as a child when my parents moved to Łódź, they never lost contact with the city", and he went on to mention by name a few Częstochowa families that he remembered, after which he remarked, "I don't know why, but I have a certain sentiment for my birth-town. And often", he added, "when I call to mind that Częstochowa is the city where I began studying music and in which I took, as a child, the first steps in my musical career, a sympathy is awakened in me, not just for the city itself, but for its residents as well".

When I told him I was living in the Land of Israel and that I was serving in the British army in response to the call of the "Jewish Agency", he said to me, "The Land of Israel is very dear to me. Indeed, I created the philharmonic orchestra there, and it gladdens me that it is developing so well. I have the hope that someday it will be in one of the first places of the musical world."

Sadly, he never did see how his hopes were fulfilled, for just two years later, in 1947, the brilliant life of one of the greatest musicians of his generation came to its end.

I am proud to have had the privilege to speak with him and to hear of his sympathy for Częstochowa and his warm love for the Land of Israel and its symphonic orchestra, which he created with such efforts and devotedness!