

HUBERMAN WITH THE NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

BRAHMS: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D, Op. 77. MOZART: Concerto No. 4 in D for Violin and Orchestra, K. 218. Bronislaw Huberman, Violin; New York Philharmonic conducted by Artur Rodzinski (in Brahms) and Bruno Walter (in Mozart). BRUNO WALTER SOCIETY BWS-551. (Produced by Discocorp).

In 1895 a fourteen-year-old boy gave a performance of the Brahms Violin Concerto that moved the then 62-year-old composer to tears. That boy was Bronislaw Huberman, and he went on, of course, to become one of the distinguished violinists of the twentieth century, but one who, in many respects, was not a typical virtuoso. For one thing, Huberman (like Joseph Szigeti) remained unconcerned with technical display and tonal refinement. Indeed, his tone could be quite acerbic on occasion. It certainly is in this performance of the Brahms, recorded from a New York Philharmonic broadcast of 1944.

In part this tonal edginess may have been exacerbated by the AM transmission and the limitations of off-the-air disc recording. What is more, at this time Huberman had returned to his career after an interruption caused by a plane accident that so severely incapacitated his left hand, he had to relearn how to use it. What is clear, however, is the remarkable musician Huberman remained. This is passionate, powerful Brahms, purged of the prettified elegance some virtuosos of the period imposed upon it. Often the reading has a commitment that explodes into white heat. Little surprise, then, that the Carnegie Hall audience broke into applause after each movement. There are, to be sure, some traits that stamp Huberman's style as coming from a past era: His rhythm, for example, is often quite free, though never to the point of destroying a basic pulse. He also delights in portamento, so much so in fact, one is reminded of Bruno Walter's admonition to the New York Philharmonic: "Gentlemen, I want to hear your departure and your arrival, but not the entire trip." Doubtless some may find Huberman's scooping just before the first-movement recapitulation excessive. But the sheer raw force of his playing triumphs over period mannerisms. Artur Rodzinski's accompaniment matches the violinist stride for stride.

The Mozart concerto comes from a Philharmonic broadcast of 1945 and has been issued previously by Discocorp. Again, the violinist sounds coarse tonally (far more so than in his pre-accident studio recording of the Mozart concerto K. 216). But he plays with considerable verve and wit, making the most of what is (for Mozart, at least) relatively uninspired material. Even Huberman's unusual staccato accents in the finale seem musically pointed and cogent. His cadenza, however, is most unstylish. In the Brahms, incidentally, Huberman plays a cadenza unfamiliar to me, one that may well be his own. In both works the sound is poor: distorted, shrill, and

marred by some very slight (but noticeable) shifts in pitch between side-joins. Frankly, though, I will take such shortcomings when the execution is so exciting, musical, and intelligent. A Brahms Violin Concerto of this character is simply not to be heard today.

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