

A Eulogy for Yehudi Menuhin and Our Lost Culture



Portrait of the Artist Playing the Violin, Dick Ket, 1926

The classical music of the West is an abomination that must be

extirpated from the repertoires of all concert halls, opera houses, recording studios, orchestras, ensembles and individual performers, and abandoned by the conservatoires, because it is the work of white composers, and their whiteness is the cause of the suffering of non-white peoples.

Thus speak the woke, the cultural dictators of our time.⁽¹⁾

The same applies to all the arts. Our culture is being destroyed, and voices are not raised in protest in the mass media, government bureaucracies, academies, museums, national galleries, public libraries, or international agencies. It means our culture is condemned to death. In fact, that is a list of the institutions endorsing the death sentence.

Let us dare at least to raise verbal monuments to the great of our dying culture. Physical monuments would be torn down and smashed. And, it is true, our pages of praise might be burned. But still let us do it while we can. In the field of music, let's speak and write eulogies to our great composers and performers.

One of the greatest performers was Yehudi Menuhin, with whom I spent a few hours in 1989, in a "green room" and studio of Channel 4, the British TV network.

Of the assorted discussants assembled for a late-night program I forget most of the names, but not what the scheduled discussion was about: *terrorism*. Two or three of us had been invited to participate because we were reputedly "experts" on the subject. When we were all on the set, it became clear that few others had anything to do with terrorism except their opinions of it. But there was one actual convicted terrorist among us. A reckless utopian, he had been jailed for committing, or attempting to commit, an act of terrorism, and was later, after his release, re-arrested and detained in confinement for the duration of a national celebration when the Queen was driven through central London. He was much

aggrieved about this, we were to hear, feeling himself to have been the victim of an injustice. But it seemed to me a wise precaution on the part of the authorities to put him where he could do no harm on such an occasion. After all, heads of state have been known to be the object of assassination attempts—some successful—by violent rebels when they were paraded in public in their own capitals. I thought it wrong to invite such a man to explain his opinion of terrorism to a television audience. An opinion is a thing of reason, and a terrorist is not reasonable. He has neither a personal, original, considered opinion, nor even a grubby, millionth-hand, stolen one; what he has is chronic resentment and a lust to harm and kill.

And there was Yehudi Menuhin. When he entered, he chose, of the many empty chairs in the room, the one beside me. I introduced myself, and assured him that I knew who he was.

He was striking to look at: tall and slender; a face of strong masculine beauty, the features—high forehead, narrow slightly aquiline nose, eyes bright but serene—harmonious. There was a calm gracefulness and elegance in his form, his movements, his manners; a fineness of everything about him. His smile and voice were gentle, his speech thoughtful, candid, friendly.

Why was he included in a gathering of intellectual ruffians arguing over the morality of torturing and murdering for utopian ends? What was his opinion of terrorism? I don't remember what he said in front of the cameras. As he was famously a humanitarian idealist, he may have said that he believed—as I did not then and do not now—that nations could be at peace with one another; that the human race could be brought to dwell forever on green pastures in everlasting happiness. But it did not matter to me what he said for the TV audience. What mattered was what he said to me and I to him.

I had brought a copy of a book I'd written about the young, well-off, well-educated, bourgeois German terrorists who had

killed as many of their compatriots as they could *because they had a lust to harm and kill* and a self-flattering conceit that they were doing it for the good of the human race. I asked him if I might give him the book. He said he'd very much like to read it, and I inscribed it to him, "To Sir Yehudi". I don't remember what else I wrote, but I said that I wanted to give it to him as a token of my gratitude for all the joy his playing had given me in concerts and with recordings throughout my life since I first started listening to music. I most likely wrote something of the sort. He asked me how I came to write the book and how it had been received. He listened to my answers—I kept them fairly short, fearful of boring him—and he asked more questions arising from them. He was genuinely attentive to what I said. A few days later I received a letter from him, care of my publisher, thanking me for the gift. (His signature, in the last century, was worth hundreds of times the cost of the book.)

"Just a note," he wrote, "to tell you of the pleasure I had from our meeting, particularly the delightful conversation before the programme. I was very touched that you should give me your book with its affectionate inscription. May I say that I feel the same affection for you? Devotedly, Yehudi Menuhin."

I must hide it from the woke.

Among the documents I've kept safe through the eons of my life, there's an account of Yehudi Menuhin's first performance on a concert platform in London on November 10, 1929, when he was thirteen years old. His London debut was not, as many records assert, at the Queen's Hall—which performers and audiences favored for its excellent acoustics—but at the vast Albert Hall—where many parts of the auditorium baffled even the noise of a full orchestra.

The author of the account was a twenty-five-year-old pianist named Stephanie Stewart. She was a Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music, so she listened to the performance and

judged it as one who was knowledgeable as well as passionate about music. She had sat in the gallery where the sound was quite good, with two friends, Joy and Ivy, both violinists.

She sent her report to my mother, who had been her fellow student and friend at the Royal Academy. She wrote it in longhand over five pages. As photocopying machines had not yet been invented, she sent the sheets she had written on. They contain a request that they be passed on to others, and presumably they were. Some decades later someone photocopied them. A copy lay for decades in a box of preserved papers in a mahogany mausoleum in my parents' library. It survived the executive tornadoes that scatter the flimsier possessions of the dead, and was re-interred in my own overcrowded box. I read it when I saved it from oblivion in 1984, then forgot it, and have now rediscovered it.

Here it is, with its spelling and punctuation mistakes, redolent of the enthusiasm with which it was written ninety-two years ago:

Essay on Yehudi

(To be passed on to anyone who's interested.)

He's the funniest looking little boy with knock-knees and golden hair. He wore a darkblue knickerbocker suit, with wide white shirt-collar open at the throat—and he has thin legs with huge feet, in shiny patent leather shoes. He sways to & fro while he plays, and waddles on to the platform with his feet turned out, and his long arms dangling beside him, and he bows to the audience in the most business-like and bored way as much as to say "I suppose this part of the business must be got through with.

I should think he will grow into a big man. He looked rather small on the platform, and his violin enormous.

The Albert Hall was more than half empty—I was so

surprised—but Maurice Chevalier was appearing there that night, so perhaps they preferred to fill it for him—altho' it was Yehudi's "only appearance". As a matter of fact, he is now advertized as appearing again next Sunday, and I needn't say I'm overjoyed! I think I'll try & book a stall, and be closer this time, tho' its really better for sound in the balcony where we were. I don't think, however, that Yehudi ever will be the fiddler to draw the celebrity concert type of audience, like Kreisler and Ellman. He is already too big an artist for them (the Albert Hall type of [illegible]).

He started with the Bach Suite—that first movement is a devil, Joy says—he scratched a bit and his intonation ~~in the~~ wasn't too sound—but Ivy says she's heard Kreisler and Szigeti make a real mess of it.

After that came the slow movement—and from then onwards everything was perfect—rhythm, intonation, tone etc. I can only describe his playing as "touchingly beautiful" —for really it is.

I'll never forget his opening bars of the Mendelssohn concerto. I've always hated the last movement—thought it spoiled the rest, and was vulgar—when I think of the way Elman plays it! But Yehudi made it light, bright and airy—beautiful in fact. The smaller pieces he played each to suit its type—the Debussy "La fille au cheveux de lin" was emotional in the exquisite way that Debussy should be. He gave us five encores, all technically brilliant things, ~~then~~ except the last, it was the negro spiritual air from the New World Symphony, he played it with enormous deep tone—very slow—now you know only the greatest artists can play slow things really slow, because they need to be so much more powerful and sustained, and only have true significance & depth, and stir one "profoundly". Then he came on grinning, in a big overcoat, to show us he couldn't give any more.

They say he is brilliant at mathematics & science, and

never does more than a few hours practising per day.

Someone told Ivy they heard him play the Cèsar Franck Sonata, & will never forget his opening bars as long as they live. Now that I've heard him, I can just imagine it!

His program for Sunday is awful—real Albert Hall—I was praying he'd play Beethoven or Mozart, for I know he'd be wholly satisfying in either.

You don't think of him as a prodigy—just a miraculous conception, and a cheering revelation. You know the feeling it gives one to hear the first birds in Spring, or see lovely sunlight, or hear and see gorgeous clear morning water—well that's what there is in his playing. Then there is an enormously big spiritual element—which will (unless wonders cease to cease) seal his fate, I shall imagine, as an Albert Hall filler.

That is why his Bach will always be lovely—and then anything else that he plays, because of that wonderful quality I tried to describe above (it may be youth—he may lose it later on), he will beautify, no matter what it is—like the last movement of the Mendelssohn.

His tone is enormous—and he has a lovely violin. He sustained six long bars with one bow—easily and perfectly as anything—so you see his power is fully mature, as are his interpretations.

For another seventy years Yehudi Menuhin gave pleasure to audiences with his interpretations of the works of the great composers, playing exquisitely on violins made by famous Italian luthiers—Antonio Stradivari and members of the Guarneri family—in the 17th and 18th centuries. (What now will become of musical instruments invented and made by white oppressors?)

His last appearance at the Albert Hall was on December 22, 1998. He conducted Beethoven's 9th Symphony. The vast hall in which he had first played as a boy was this time packed full (for wonders had not ceased). Beethoven's music, Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, Menuhin's orchestra and soloists and choir proclaimed most beautifully that lasting joy is possible.

Oh, fortunate old world, to have had such people in it!

Could a performing musician conclude his career with a more triumphant work? A magnificent career, as Menuhin's was, more fittingly? He died soon afterwards, the following March.

But of all the white composers, Beethoven is the most unforgivably white, say our cultural dictators.⁽²⁾ And of all Beethoven's works, the 9th Symphony is, they say, the most oppressive, the most intolerable, because it has very often been proclaimed the crowning glory of European classical music.⁽³⁾

Early in the new century, on September 11, 2001, as everyone knows, terrorists sent from Afghanistan hijacked and crashed airplanes in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania, killing 2,977 people. The Western powers, led by America, responded by going to war in Afghanistan for twenty years. As I write this, the war is coming to an end. The terrorists have won—not because they are militarily stronger than the West, but because the West has weakened itself, hollowed itself out, by killing its culture.