



Recorded 1937, 1950 and 1951

## BEETHOVEN

Sonata No. 9 in  
A major 'Kreutzer'

## BRAHMS

Sonata No. 3 in  
D minor

## FRANCK

Sonata in A major

Jascha Heifetz, Violin  
Benno Moiseiwitsch, Piano  
William Kapell, Piano  
Artur Schnabel, Piano

## Great Violinists • Jascha Heifetz

**BEETHOVEN: Violin Sonata No. 9 in A major, Op. 47 ('Kreutzer')**

**BRAHMS: Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108 • FRANCK: Violin Sonata in A major**

Jascha Heifetz was not the first 'modern' violinist. His fellow Auer pupil Mischa Elman preceded him, and so did Fritz Kreisler, who did so much to change the sound of violin playing, principally through the use of constant vibrato. Heifetz, however, was the man who stabilised and consolidated the way this most difficult of instruments was handled. He set the tone, and throughout his adult career, critics, fellow musicians and the public used him as their benchmark of good violinism. On a purely technical level, he has not been equalled, let alone surpassed. Yet even this quintessentially twentieth-century man sometimes harked back in style to an earlier age. He used certain tricks from the nineteenth century, especially little nudges of rubato and slithers of portamento, and when it came to giving a recital, he took his cue from his predecessors. A programme such as this one, consisting of three sonatas, would rarely be heard from Heifetz. He would generally schedule just one masterpiece of this stature, among a miscellany of other pieces including some of his own transcriptions, and he usually appeared with an accompanist, rather than a pianist of his own stature. So these three performances are doubly rare, in that he is partnered by three artists of the first rank.

Heifetz was born in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 2nd February 1900. His father Rubin, a competent fiddler, started him on the violin when he was three before passing him on to Ilya Malkin, a pupil of Leopold Auer. At six Jascha made his debut and a year later he played the Mendelssohn *Concerto* in Kovno. To enable him to stay with his family when he entered Auer's class at the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1910, his father was enrolled too. Heifetz became Auer's favourite and made his St Petersburg debut the following year; and in

1912 he performed the Tchaikovsky *Concerto* in Berlin under Arthur Nikisch, who promptly invited him to Leipzig. In Vienna he played under Vasily Safonov and he developed steadily through the early years of the Great War. He missed the chaos of 1917 but caused his own October Revolution that year, making his historic New York debut at Carnegie Hall. In 1920 he made his London bow with two Queen's Hall concerts which were so successful that he returned the same year. In 1925 he took U.S. citizenship and in 1928 he married the film star Florence Vidor (that and a second union ended in divorce). During World War II he gave many concerts for the American forces. In 1947 he reintroduced himself to London with the Beethoven and Tchaikovsky *Concertos* at the Royal Albert Hall, before the Queen and an audience of more than six thousand. In 1949 he offered Londoners the Elgar *Concerto*. When he played the sonata by Richard Strauss in Israel in 1953, riot police had to be called, and Heifetz was attacked by a fanatic with an iron bar. In 1959 he performed for the United Nations General Assembly but in the 1960s he began to confine himself mainly to the West Coast of America; chamber music also loomed larger in his life, through the Heifetz-Piatigorsky Concerts. Having given his last concert in 1972, he grew increasingly reclusive, and he died in Los Angeles on 10th December 1987. Heifetz did some teaching but his influence was mainly disseminated through his playing and his many recordings. Although he had a 1731 Stradivarius, his favourite instrument was the 1742 'David' Guarnerius del Gesù.

At his best, Heifetz played the concerto and sonata repertoire with a strong command of structure, coupled with minute attention to detail. He held the violin high and flat, pioneering a particularly high right elbow

which helped him to exert maximum bow pressure (he favoured German rather than French bows). To speak of him in purely gymnastic terms would be to overlook the sensuous beauty of his tone, yet he was the ultimate violinistic athlete, standing with feet perfectly balanced and hands in precise co-ordination. Off the concert platform, he was a good tennis player, oarsman and swimmer. With his mordant, often caustic wit, he could be highly entertaining (his parodies of bad violin-playing were published on an LP under the pseudonym 'Joseph Hague'), but he could behave like the epitome of a 'control freak' – and he was extremely litigious. He excelled in Brahms, Bruch, Glazunov, Prokofiev, Sibelius, Spohr, Vieuxtemps and Wieniawski but in the classics was frequently criticized for taking fast tempi, especially in later years, and he seemed to introduce an element of competition into all his music-making. Of his many commissions, the Walton *Concerto* was the most successful, its central movement a showcase for his ability to polish a phrase with a miniaturist's art. His repertoire reached well into the twentieth century but he did not play Prokofiev's *First Concerto*, the Berg or Bartók *Concertos*, or the Schoenberg, although it was written with him in mind. He was a fair pianist and an expert arranger who also composed popular songs.

César Franck's *Sonata* was the first of a number of recordings Heifetz made with the Polish-born virtuoso Artur Rubinstein (1886-1982). The impetus for this pairing came from HMV and it resulted in a fine performance, with bewitching playing from both artists. Yet their further joint studio appearances were all made in the trio repertoire, and when they next came together, with Emanuel Feuermann in Hollywood in 1941, Heifetz showed definite disapproval of Rubinstein's typically personal phrasing. The violist William Primrose, who was turning pages for the pianist and timing 'takes' at his colleagues' rehearsal of the '*Archduke*' *Trio*, told of how Rubinstein began the finale with 'more than a modicum of Polish

*espiéglerie*'. Heifetz stopped playing and said: 'Do you mind if we do that again?' Rubinstein then played the passage 'straight', as he did on the finished recording.

In Beethoven's virtuosic '*Kreutzer*' *Sonata*, HMV matched Heifetz with a player from the same Russian school, Benno Moiseiwitsch (1890-1963). This excellent pianist, best known as an interpreter of Rachmaninov's music, was long domiciled in Britain and came to be taken rather for granted, so that HMV generally issued his records on the cheaper Plum Label. The partnership with Heifetz was intended from the start as Moiseiwitsch's first Red Label outing for years. When the two men arrived at No.3 Studio, Abbey Road, on 13th June 1949, they had already rehearsed meticulously, but even after the usual balance tests, they played the first side five times, as Heifetz kept insisting that his violin was not prominent enough. The eight sides were still completed in one day, however, and the second take of each was selected for the artists to approve. Moiseiwitsch liked his test pressings but Heifetz did not: he still felt too much piano was in evidence. The two therefore returned to the studio on 14th May 1951 for a re-recording. This time the sessions took two full days and the result has never been classed with the '*Kreutzer*' recordings of Huberman/Friedman, Busch/Serkin and Szigeti/Bartók. As to whether it improves on the 1949 version, collectors can now make up their own minds, as the earlier performance has been published from the pianist's cherished test pressings. These two sets of sessions were to be the only ones featuring Moiseiwitsch as part of a duo.

In August 1950 Heifetz made his last records with Rubinstein. Works by Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn and Ravel were set down in Hollywood by the 'Million-Dollar Trio', the cellist being Gregor Piatigorsky. Later that year Heifetz suggested a collaboration with the young American pianist William Kapell (1922-53), who was being carefully nurtured by RCA Victor.

Although he was mainly seen as a soloist, as early as 1946 Kapell had recorded Brahms's *F minor Viola Sonata* with Primrose, and the following year he had recorded Rachmaninov's *Cello Sonata* with Edmund Kurtz. He proved a worthy foil for Heifetz in the third and most dramatic of Brahms's sonatas, even though like Moiseiwitsch he was kept unduly out of the sonic picture. The performance may not have the cut and thrust of the Busch/Serkin (live) and Szigeti/Petri (studio) recordings but it shows what an idiomatic

Brahmsian Heifetz could be. Unfortunately time was allowed to elapse before anything was done about further Heifetz/Kapell recordings, although both the other Brahms sonatas were planned and, after private chamber music sessions in the summer of 1952, Heifetz mooted a trio with Kapell and Piatigorsky. Alas, while returning from a tour of Australia, Kapell was killed in a plane crash on 29th October 1953.

**Tully Potter**

## **Producer's Note**

The Beethoven and Brahms *Sonatas* were transferred from U.S. RCA LP pressings, while the Franck *Sonata* came from a pre-war Victor "Gold" label set of the 78 rpm shellac discs.

**Mark Obert-Thorn**

## **Mark Obert-Thorn**

Mark Obert-Thorn is one of the world's most respected transfer artist/engineers. He has worked for a number of specialist labels, including Pearl, Biddulph, Romophone and Music & Arts. Three of his transfers have been nominated for Gramophone Awards. A pianist by training, his passions are music, history and working on projects. He has found a way to combine all three in the transfer of historical recordings.

Obert-Thorn describes himself as a 'moderate interventionist' rather than a 'purist' or 're-processor,' unlike those who apply significant additions and make major changes to the acoustical qualities of old recordings. His philosophy is that a good transfer should not call attention to itself, but rather allow the performances to be heard with the greatest clarity.

There is no over-reverberant 'cathedral sound' in an Obert-Thorn restoration, nor is there the tinny bass and piercing mid-range of many 'authorised' commercial issues. He works with the cleanest available 78s, and consistently achieves better results than restoration engineers working with the metal parts from the archives of the modern corporate owners of the original recordings. His transfers preserve the original tone of the old recordings, maximising the details in critical upper mid-range and lower frequencies to achieve a musical integrity that is absent from many other commercially released restorations.

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

Playing  
Time  
75:49

# BEETHOVEN • BRAHMS • FRANCK

## Violin Sonatas

### Jascha Heifetz (1901-1987)

8.110990

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#### Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827):

##### Violin Sonata No. 9 in A major, Op. 47 ('Kreutzer')

31:01

1 Adagio sostenuto - Presto 10:01

2 Andante con Variazioni I – IV 13:15

3 Finale: Presto 7:44

with Benno Moiseiwitsch, piano

Recorded 14th-15th May, 1951 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3, London

Matrices: 2EA 13982 through 13989 • First issued as RCA Victor LM-1193

#### Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897):

##### Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108

19:40

4 Allegro 7:17

5 Adagio 4:31

6 Un poco presto e con sentimento 2:42

7 Presto agitato 5:10

with William Kapell, piano

Recorded 29th-30th November, 1950 in the RCA Studios, Hollywood

Matrices: E0-RC-0467 through 0472, all Take 1 • First issued as RCA Victor LM-71

#### César FRANCK (1822-1890): Violin Sonata in A major

25:08

8 Allegretto ben moderato 5:33

9 Adagio 7:25

10 Recitativo—Fantasia: Ben moderato - Molto lento 6:26

11 Allegretto poco mosso 5:44

with Artur Rubinstein, piano

Recorded 3rd April, 1937 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3, London

Matrices: 2EA 4883 through 4888, all Take 1

First issued as HMV DB 3206 through 3208

On a purely technical level, Jascha Heifetz has not been equalled, let alone surpassed. He possessed a strong command of structure, allied with minute attention to detail and a sensuously beautiful tone. At times he harked back in style to an earlier age by using certain tricks from the nineteenth century, especially little nudges of rubato and slithers of portamento. A programme such as this one, consisting of three sonatas, would rarely be heard from Heifetz and he usually appeared with an accompanist, rather than a pianist of his own stature. These three performances, including a bewitching César Franck *Sonata*, are doubly rare, in that he is partnered by three artists of the first rank.

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Special thanks to Nathan Brown, Charles Niss and Maynard F. Bertolet

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Cover Image: Jascha Heifetz, 1947 (The Tully Potter Collection)

