



# Great Violinists • Milstein

ADD

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## BRAHMS

### Double Concerto for Violin and Cello

with Gregor Piatigorsky, Cello

### Violin Sonata No. 3

with Vladimir Horowitz, Piano

## BEETHOVEN

### Violin Sonata No. 5

‘Spring’

with Artur Balsam, Piano

## Nathan Milstein

Robin Hood Dell Orchestra  
of Philadelphia • Fritz Reiner

Recorded 1950-1951

# Great Violinists: Nathan Milstein (1904-1992)

## Brahms • Beethoven

The twentieth century saw wonderful trio ensembles, perhaps the finest being the combinations of Alfred Cortot, Jacques Thibaud and Pablo Casals, and later Emil Gilels, Leonid Kogan and Mstislav Rostropovich. Those groups have great reputations because they happen to have left superb recordings, but was there another one, potentially just as exciting yet unrecorded? Vladimir Horowitz, Nathan Milstein and Gregor Piatigorsky made up a potent trio, from all accounts, but no one thought of getting them together in the studio. Granted, Piatigorsky made records with Jascha Heifetz and Artur Rubinstein, the so-called 'million-dollar trio', but those performances have not worn well, for all their occasional moments of flair. This CD brings us as close as we can now come to hearing Horowitz, Milstein and Piatigorsky in consort. It also gives us Milstein's only recording with Horowitz – they had started out as a regular duo – and his sole one with Piatigorsky. For good measure it enables us to hear Milstein with his long-time piano partner, Polish-born Artur Balsam, in one of their favourite works. All three recordings come from the brief period when Milstein was recording for RCA Victor – previously he had been a mainstay of Columbia and he would soon move on to Capitol.

Born in Odessa on New Year's Eve 1904, into a middle-class commercial family, Nathan Mironovich Milstein was encouraged by his mother to take up the violin before going at seven to Pyotr Stolyarsky's school, from which he graduated just as the next star pupil, David Oistrakh, was giving a first performance. In contrast to Oistrakh, Milstein did not develop a rapport with Stolyarsky: at an early age he developed an ironic, independent viewpoint, and a scepticism towards those in authority which would not have served him well in post-Revolution Russia. Part of this healthy dissent showed itself in a refusal to be dominated mentally by his teachers: he was dismissive of the 'cult

of personality' and had run-ins with several 'star' conductors. The highlight of his time at Stolyarsky's was the brilliant performance of Glazunov's *Concerto* he gave in 1915 with the composer on the podium. From 1916 to 1917 he was at the St Petersburg Conservatory with Leopold Auer, for whom, true to form, he had more respect than love, and this sojourn gave the final polish to his lofty style, although he learnt as much from listening to fellow students such as Heifetz, Toscha Seidel, Eddy Brown, Miron Polyakin and Cecilia Hansen as from the great pedagogue. 'I truly came to love the violin in Petersburg,' he wrote. 'I liked going to the Conservatory, and I liked the atmosphere of competition in Auer's class – talented children playing the violin, one better than the next, inspiring me to try harder.' Milstein's capacity for hard work impressed Auer, who presented him with a bow. 'I later learned that the bow was very cheap, but for the notoriously miserly Auer it was an amazing gesture.' All the same, Milstein was forsaken when Auer emigrated to the United States in 1917, and from the age of thirteen he was essentially an auto-didact, transforming himself into the cultured figure familiar in later years.

Milstein knew considerable poverty in the years after the 1917 Revolution, but gradually built up his career and in Kiev in 1921 met Horowitz; their duo soon grew into the trio with Piatigorsky. In 1923 Milstein played Glazunov's *Concerto* in the newly-named Petrograd with the conductorless orchestra 'Persimfans'; and Glazunov, drunk as usual, insisted on trying to perform an encore with him. More successful were concerts at which he and Horowitz shared the platform with the Stradivarius Quartet, or singers such as Antonina Nezhdanova and Leonid Sobinov. Sometimes he played the violin for the ageing ballerina Ekaterina Geltzer as she performed *The Dying Swan*. At one concert in Moscow in 1923, he gave the local

premières of the (first) concertos by Szymanowski and Prokofiev, with Horowitz playing the orchestral parts on the piano. 'The culmination of my touring with Horowitz through Russia was our appearances in [Petrograd] in 1923,' he wrote. 'They were enormously successful. [...] We were greeted and treated as rock stars are today.' The grand finale was an orchestral concert at which Milstein again played the Glazunov *Concerto* with the composer conducting.

On Christmas Day 1925, Milstein left Russia for good to tour Europe with Horowitz. An appearance in Spain led to his crossing the Atlantic, to give recitals in Buenos Aires and Montevideo with the harpsichordist Wanda Landowska, and at a concert in Vienna his small but select audience included Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, Karl Amadeus Hartmann and Julius Korngold. The summer of 1926 was spent in Ysaÿe's orbit, although the Belgian told him: 'Go, there is nothing I can teach you.' He emigrated to the United States in 1928, making his début with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Stokowski the following year (in the Glazunov *Concerto*) and with the New York Philharmonic in 1930. Thereafter he divided his career between the old world and the new. Although he became an American citizen in 1942, he was based alternately in Paris and London after World War II. He was still playing to a high standard in his early eighties – his last recital, which was filmed, was given in Stockholm in 1986. In his later years he taught, both privately and at the Juilliard School and the Zurich Conservatoire. 'What I feel I can offer these young musicians,' he said, 'is simply what I have learned myself through experience. I try not to impose my way on them, not to teach them to play, even, but to help teach them to think.' He died in London on 21st December 1992.

Reading Milstein's outspoken memoirs, *From Russia to the West* (1990), one realises we are fortunate to have these excellent Brahms performances. Milstein did not care for Brahms's music, although he was regarded as one of the best exponents of the *Violin Concerto*. He ranked it after the Beethoven and

Mendelssohn, with the sardonic comment 'alas'. He felt all Brahms's concertos were 'written down unsatisfactorily', said he was 'not crazy' about the *Double Concerto* and confessed he recorded it only as a tribute to his friendship with Piatigorsky. He refused Pierre Fournier's request to make a second recording and suggested the violin part 'should be given away to the other instruments, leaving the cello as a solo'. This 1951 performance, excellently supported by the Hungarian maestro Fritz Reiner, with the Philadelphia Orchestra under its summer festival name for contractual reasons, shows no sign of the violinist's unease. He was equally grudging about Brahms's *Sonatas*, while admitting they were 'exceptional', and made just this one recording. It is a superb interpretation and we must regret that Horowitz played so little chamber music on record – Milstein mooted Beethoven's *C minor* and 'Kreutzer' *Sonatas*, as well as the Franck, while Horowitz suggested Grieg, Saint-Saëns and Medtner. They never agreed on repertoire and so this performance of Brahms's greatest sonata remained their sole studio collaboration. Milstein was almost as rude about Beethoven's writing for the violin as about Brahms's: he liked only four of the sonatas and recorded only three, doing two of them twice. Most Milstein aficionados will know his beautiful stereo version of the '*Spring*' *Sonata* with the great Czech pianist Rudolf Firkušný, but many will be unaware of this 1950 recording with Artur Balsam, which appeared only in America, on 45rpm discs and an early LP. It is similar in outline to the performance with Firkušný but perhaps more spontaneous in places. It is good to have it back again. Balsam (1906-94) was a fine advertisement for the Polish school of pianism and excelled in chamber music; other violinists with whom he can be heard on record are Busch, Francescatti, Goldberg, Shumsky and Szigeti, but his most fruitful partnership was that with Milstein, which lasted more than two decades.

Tully Potter

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# GREAT VIOLINISTS · NATHAN MILSTEIN

## Historical Recordings · 1950 and 1951

- |   |   |              |
|---|---|--------------|
|   | <b>BEETHOVEN: Violin Sonata No. 5 in F major, Op. 24 ("Spring")</b> | <b>21:52</b> |
| ① | Allegro   | 9:08         |
| ② | Adagio molto espressivo   | 5:39         |
| ③ | Scherzo: Allegro molto  | 1:11         |
| ④ | Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo  | 5:53         |

**Artur Balsam, Piano**

Recorded 6th June, 1950 in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York City

Matrices: E0-RC-1073/6 and 1082/3; First issued on RCA Victor LM-134

- |   |  |              |
|---|--|--------------|
|   | <b>BRAHMS: Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108</b> | <b>21:23</b> |
| ⑤ | Allegro  | 7:58         |
| ⑥ | Adagio   | 5:00         |
| ⑦ | Un poco presto e con sentimento                        | 2:57         |
| ⑧ | Presto agitato   | 5:31         |

**Vladimir Horowitz, Piano**

Recorded 22nd and 29th June, 1950 in RCA Victor Studio No. 2, New York City

Matrices: E0-RC-1200/5; First issued on RCA Victor LM-106

- |   |  |              |
|---|--|--------------|
|   | <b>BRAHMS: Concerto for Violin and Cello in A minor, Op. 102</b> | <b>30:04</b> |
| ⑨ | Allegro  | 15:17        |
| ⑩ | Andante  | 6:46         |
| ⑪ | Vivace non troppo  | 8:02         |

**Gregor Piatigorsky, Cello**

**The Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia • Fritz Reiner**

Recorded 29th June, 1951 in the Academy of Music, Philadelphia

First issued on RCA Victor LM-1191

**Reissue Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn**  
**Special thanks to Fred Heft and Gary Stucka for providing source material**

## Producer's Note

The Beethoven sonata was transferred from a 45rpm set (WDM-1594), which was released at the same time as the LP version, while the remaining two works come from American RCA LP pressings. The odd, choppy sound in the *Scherzo* of the *'Spring' Sonata* is present on all releases, and is not a by-product of noise reduction in this transfer.

**Mark Obert-Thorn**

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## BEETHOVEN • BRAHMS

Nathan Milstein

(1904-1992)

 Playing  
Time  
73:22

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MILSTEIN: BEETHOVEN • BRAHMS

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| Nathan Milstein, violin • Artur Balsam, piano<br>Recorded 6th June, 1950 in New York City   |                                 |              |
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| Nathan Milstein, violin • Gregor Piatigorsky, cello<br>The Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia • Fritz Reiner<br>Recorded 29th June, 1951 in Philadelphia |                                 |              |

Although, from all accounts Nathan Milstein, Vladimir Horowitz and Gregor Piatigorsky made up a potent trio, no one thought of bringing them together in the recording studio. This Naxos re-issue gives us Milstein's only studio collaboration with Horowitz, a superb interpretation of Brahms' greatest violin sonata, and his only recording of the work. Milstein's sole recording with Piatigorsky, of Brahms' *Double Concerto*, is a powerful performance, excellently supported by the Hungarian maestro Freitz Reiner. The rare 1950 recording of Beethoven's *Spring Sonata*, which appeared only in America on 45rpm and an early LP, is even more spontaneous than the acclaimed stereo version.

MADE IN  
E.C.

Producer and Audio Restoration Producer: Mark Obert-Thorn  
Special thanks to Fred Heft and Gary Stucka  
for providing source material

[www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com)

Cover Image: Nathan Milstein (Tully Potter Collection)



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MILSTEIN: BEETHOVEN • BRAHMS

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