

JASCHA SPIVAKOVSKY — A MUSICAL LIFE

Michael Spivakovsky

THE EARLY YEARS

Jascha Spivakovsky was born, the fifth of nine children, on 18 August 1896 at Smiela, a small town which still exists near Kiev in the Ukraine.

The name 'Spivak' means singer in many Slavic languages, and was given to the family at the time of Peter the Great to denote their occupation, since they were already established musicians at the time.

When Jascha was about three years old, he heard an organ-grinder playing in the street below the family's apartment. Going to his sister's piano, and to the astonishment of his father, he reproduced the melody, together with a singularly correct left-hand accompaniment. From that time he began piano lessons, and at five years of age he was invited to play for the noted Russian pianist Vassily Safonoff. Accompanied by his mother, Jascha arrived at Safonoff's apartment early one morning and was shown into the music room. Safonoff ordered Jascha to stand near the door, out of sight of the keyboard while he tested the boy's sense of pitch. He was most puzzled when Jascha was a semitone high on every occasion. Finally he realised that the boy had perfect pitch but was naming the notes after his own piano, which was a semitone flat. Jascha was then asked to play, and Safonoff was so impressed with his talent that he gave the boy a written endorsement to study as his pupil at the Moscow Conservatory. However, it was difficult to go to Moscow, and so the offer was not taken up. Instead the family moved to Odessa, on the Black sea, and Jascha had private lessons from time to time, with Safonoff.

One of the great artists to visit Odessa, the pianist Joseph Hofmann, heard him play and was as impressed as Safonoff had been, especially with the boy's use of the pedals, but again nothing substantial eventuated, though many years later they became good friends.

At the age of seven, Jascha gave his first public performance in a large hall in Odessa, in front of about 5,000 people. In his own words, 'When I went to the piano nobody saw me. The stage was so vast that a grown-up person looked small to the audience, so you can imagine it was an easy matter to overlook a little fellow like me. Two chairs stood before the piano, a large one and a small one. I tried the large one but could not reach the pedals with my feet, so I jumped down and took the smaller one, but found I could not comfortably reach the keys. It was while I was performing these acrobatic feats that the audience noticed me, and they laughed and applauded. I eventually played my pieces — from the large chair and without pedal. The Governor of Odessa and the Conservatorium between them presented me with a grand piano of which I was very proud'.

Three years later the political storm clouds gathered. The Russo-Japanese War which the Russians lost, was followed by a Revolution, and the Revolution by a *Pogrom*, in which the Jews were blamed for the ills besetting Russia. Odessa was in turmoil. An angry mob was moving down the street in which the family lived, wreaking havoc, looting and beating up anyone in their path. Jascha's family took refuge on the roof of their five-storey apartment block. Cossacks were sent to quell

the disturbance, but instead began shooting at the people on the roof, who fled down the stairs again. In her haste to escape, Jascha's eldest sister pushed him and he fell on the stairs. At that moment, a bullet hit the balustrade just above his head. If he had been standing it would have hit him. Another bullet struck the wall near the head of baby Issy, still in his mother's arms. The family fled to the apartment of their landlord, a Polish Catholic, who secreted them into his cellar where they hid, and looked after and fed them while they lay under straw for five days.

When the family eventually returned to their apartment they found that everything had been destroyed or stolen. Jascha's prize piano had been thrown from the fifth floor balcony and smashed on the street below. All his music, including his own compositions, had similarly disappeared.

After the *Pogroms*, Jascha's father sought a safer place for him to study, and took him to Berlin, to learn from Professor Mayer-Maher at the Klindworth-Schawenka Conservatorium. Although Jascha fulfilled the three requirements of Leschetitsky, the famous teacher and former student of Czerny, namely, to be a prodigy, of Jewish origin and Slavic descent, his father was unable to go to Vienna where Leschetitsky lived. Instead he sought out Mayer-Maher, whose credentials as a teacher almost equalled Leschetitsky's. Both had learned from great teachers and had established 'schools' of piano playing. Mayer-Maher had studied with Liszt, Clara Schumann, and unusually with Anton Rubinstein. Unusually because Liszt and Rubinstein, the great pianists of the nineteenth century, were also great rivals, and few students studied with both. Nevertheless, many characteristics of Rubinstein's playing, particularly his emotional warmth, depth of tone and methods of tone production became apparent in Jascha's playing. Amongst people and especially critics who had heard both pianists play, Jascha became known as 'the new Anton Rubinstein'. From the *Leipziger Zeitung*: 'With his verve he reminds one of [Anton] Rubinstein, and with his pithiness of representation, of Bulow'. Like Rubinstein he had been Russian-born and German-trained.

In 1910, at the age of fourteen years, Jascha won the coveted Bluethner Prize from an adult field. The prize itself was a magnificent Bluethner grand piano, fold inscribed. So that the jury would not be swayed by his youthful appearance (he was still wearing short pants), all contestants were required to play from behind a screen. His number was thirteen, a fact which prompted him in later years to claim it was his lucky number. The three judges of this illustrious competition, won later by Jascha's brother Albert, as well as by the Chilean pianist Claudio Arrau, were illustrious in their own right: Ossip Gabrilowitch, one of the finest pianists of his time, Leopold Godowsky, brilliant technician, and Ferruccio Busoni, master pianist and musician who was much respected by critics and fellow musicians alike.

Although he continued to take lessons from Mayer-Maher until he was sixteen, Jascha's concert career began in earnest with the winning of the Bluethner Prize. Music critics were quick to recognise that here was a major talent, in an era which boasted some legendary names in the history of piano playing — d'Albert, Carreno, Sophie Menter, Josef Hofmann, Busoni, Godowsky, Gabrilowitch, Egon Petri, the eccentric de Pachman and many others.

Jascha's performances were noticed for their mature interpretation and powerful emotion, coupled with a remarkable rhythmic and tonal command, characteristics which remained with him throughout his career. His name appeared in several books under the title of *wunderkind*, or prodigy. He was regarded as the foremost student of the Mayer-Maher school, and gave recitals before the crowned heads of Europe — German, Danish, Roumanian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Montenegrin

royal audiences. At fourteen years of age he gave an entire Schumann recital in Leipzig, one of the most critical musical centres of Europe. A famous German critic took him to task for attempting such an audacious concert: 'We think it is a mistake that Spivakovsky's master should allow him to perform such a programme at such an age, but we are bound to admit that we should have made the same mistake ourselves, for Spivakovsky is the heir to [Anton] Rubinstein as an interpreter of Schumann'.

From having barely escaped with his life in the Russian *Pogroms*, Jascha had risen to being acclaimed as one of the foremost young talents in the pianistic world, which at the time was particularly blessed with great artists. Jascha's future looked rosy and assured.

Then came the First World War. Being enemy aliens in Germany during wartime was decidedly unpleasant. The older members of the family, Jascha (at seventeen) among them, were sent to an internment camp at Ruhleben. Food was scarce, and a musical career non-existent.

Towards the end of the war, with the Allied blockade in force, there was insufficient food for the Germans, let alone for aliens. The family nearly starved. On one occasion, a member discovered a swan which had frozen to death on a nearby lake. They cooked and ate it. A loaf of bread had to last them a week. Somehow they survived.

After the war Jascha set about re-establishing his career. Several of the older masters had gone and in their place a new generation of pianists was coming to the fore. These included especially the students of the Leschetitsky and Mayer-Maher schools. Pianists such as Schnabel, Cortot, Barere, Brailowsky, Moiseiwitch, Arrau, Artur Rubinstein, Rachmaninoff and others became well known. Jascha Spivakovsky was considered one of the leading pianists in the august group. In fact he probably reached as high a degree of popularity and critical acclaim in this period as at any time in his career. Though this may seem to some an extravagant claim in the latter years of the twentieth century, it is borne out by the critics of the time. Here are some excerpts from 1921:

The strongest piano talent I have met with in the course of the last decade [*The Hamburger Correspondent*].

Brailowsky, Gabrilowitch, Fanny Davies, Moiseiwitch and Spivakovsky all gave recitals last week. Spivakovsky's recital I enjoyed more than any. Since Carreno I have heard no one play with such overwhelming passion [*The Lady*].

It is a long time since we have heard such playing, technically faultless, and with such overwhelming passion [*London Daily Chronicle*].

He is in the front rank of pianists. He is tremendously alive, and his playing has rare character [*London Morning Post*].

We have seldom heard a more brilliant performance. Again and again the audience brought him back to respond to the insistent demand for encores [*London Daily Telegraph*].

At twenty-five Spivakovsky has gone far. He is assuredly a genius [*London Westminster Gazette*].

It was at this time that Jascha gave a series of historical concerts in Berlin which traced the development of the concerto from Bach to Brahms. In this he was following the lead established by Anton Rubinstein, whose gargantuan historic solo recitals of Beethoven and Schumann went on for hours, and Ossip Gabrilowitch, who also played historical recitals early in his career. In 1914, Gabrilowitch had also given a concerto series of nineteen concertos at four concerts. However, Jascha combined the concept of historical progression with the concerto series, the first time that it had been attempted on such a scale. The series consisted of fifteen concertos.

The critics remarked on his seriousness of purpose, and noted that he appeared equally at home with all the different styles. If this stylistic breadth seems extraordinary today, it must be remembered that the leading artists of that period were more concerned with being fine musicians than with being fine pianists. It was this attribute which enabled them to effectively interpret many different styles, and which must have made Jascha's series of historical concerts a significant contribution to the understanding of the concerto's development, as seen through the eyes of an individual performer.

The series of concerto concerts proved to be a considerable success. Jascha was engaged to play forty concerts in Germany and received offers to go to the United States of America. Instead, after talking to his friend Benno Moiseiwitch, he decided to visit Australia, a decision which was to have far-reaching consequences for his personal and professional future.

In December 1921, Jascha made his Australian debut. The tour itself proved to be most successful, but very strenuous. He gave seventy five concerts in seven months (fifteen in Melbourne alone), and he lost thirty pounds in weight!

Australian audiences, unlike those in some European or Latin countries, are often enthusiastic but not noted for unbridled exuberance. Therefore it is interesting to read the report of Jascha's first concert in Sydney, as described by Mr. Lawrence Godfrey-Smith, Chief Study Teacher of Pianoforte at the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music.

I have never witnessed such a scene in Australia. The whole audience rushed en masse to the platform. Then they stood for half an hour cheering the pianist at every appearance, and shouting clamorously for various favourites. In this way he played six or seven encores, and still hundreds of people crowded round the piano shouting for more. The attendant had eventually to shut the piano and take away the piano stool. Then they rushed the artist's room and the lights had to be turned out and the people ordered away. Then they rushed to the steps and surrounded the motor car in which Mr. Spivakovsky, with difficulty, at last got away. It was a most exciting scene, and I have never known such enthusiasm.

The music critics were equally enthusiastic. The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that 'He is possessed of amazing technique, and the exhilaration of his playing was followed by a whirlwind of applause'. Stage rushing, which had been quite popular at the time of Liszt and Paderewski, was something new to Australia, and created a sensation.

His first concert in Melbourne received a similar reception as had his Sydney debut. The Melbourne *Argus* noted that he was 'a pianist of great individuality and perfect technique. He took the audience by storm'. After this concert, Jascha received a letter from Nellie Melba, in which she said (in part): 'It was a great treat hearing you last night. I consider you one of the greatest pianists in the world'.

Thereby began a lifelong friendship between the two artists. Nellie invited him to her home at Coombe Cottage on many occasions, and offered to help boost his career in London, but this offer was not taken up.

After his Melbourne success, Jascha received a similar welcome in Brisbane. The Press waxed lyrical. From the Brisbane *Sun* came the following poetic gem:

Go to it Jascha
 Tho' poets can't design
 A rhyme to tell the world thy wondrous name,
 Garçon and masher,
 Damsel and Dame,
 The laurels bind for thine enduring fame
 Since Melba took the pen in hand to dash ya
 One brief, approving line.

Although Australia, in 1921, was remote from the musical centres of Europe, a few world-renowned artists had made extensive tours, Benno Moiseiwitch and Mischa Levitsky being the most recent. Music critics were not slow in making comparisons. Melbourne's *Table Talk* commented:

Jascha Spivakovsky, young as he is, ranks above any of the pianists we have heard in recent years, and is probably the most satisfying, all-round performer this generation has heard. His interpretations have "soul", that greatest asset, and a glorious mellow beauty of song-like tone which is enthralling.

Such was his success that the season had to be extended. Concerts were sold out and the public clamoured for more. At this time he gave a recital by Marconi wireless telephone from Her Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne, for the soldier patients at the Anzac Hostel in North Road, Brighton. This was a new experience for him, since 'wireless' was in its infancy, and he was most amused at the sight of the little upright piano, wired for sound, on which he had to play. The concert was heard plainly by the soldiers and nurses at the hospital, and unintentionally also by ships at sea within a range of about five hundred miles! All reported a clear reception.

As part of the Australasian tour for J. & N. Tait, Jascha crossed the Tasman Sea for a tour of New Zealand. His fame had preceded him to the extent that his concerts were booked out by people wishing to see the Russian phenomenon who had caused such extraordinary scenes of enthusiasm in Australia. It was not long before critics noted that 'his popularity grows from concert to concert'. Again his ability to 'reach' his audience was particularly apparent. The *Dunedin Daily Times* stated, 'It is many years since a pianist roused a Dunedin audience to such a pitch of enthusiasm', and ranked him in stature with Sir Charles Halle, Paderewski and Carreno.

The *Sun* noted in block letters that:

IT WAS TRULY A VERITABLE TRIUMPH, AND ONE THAT HAS HITHERTO NEVER BEEN ACHIEVED AT THE FIRST CONCERT OF ANY VISITING ARTIST. CONCERTS HAVE GONE AND CONCERTS WILL COME, BUT THAT OF SATURDAY NIGHT WILL BE A LIFELONG MEMORY FOR THOSE WHO WERE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE PRESENT.

After such a successful tour, both artistically and financially (with profits approaching £10,000), Jascha felt, with some justification, that he had at last 'made it', and that there would be no returning to the grim poverty of his early youth, and so it might have been except for an unfortunate set of circumstances. Being based in Berlin and with most of his family there, Jascha naturally converted almost all his tour takings into German currency, against the advice of his manager, Claude Kingston. No sooner had he done this and returned to Berlin, than runaway inflation set in. Within a very short space of time, the tour profits were eaten up, together with all his other money, and for the second time in his life he was left with just a few personal possessions and his musical gifts on which to build a future.

Despite this unfortunate financial loss, prospects for the future looked good. Jascha's artistic standing in the field of music in England and Europe was at an all-time high, and to this was now added his extraordinarily successful Australasian tour. He quickly set about re-establishing his concert tours and ventured further afield to Scandinavia. He was now in considerable demand as a soloist with leading orchestras under many of the world's finest conductors largely because of his historic concerto series with Berlin Philharmonic. As an expatriate Russian, he was inevitably asked to play Russian music, and each tour had to include a considerable serving of the Tschaikovsky *Concerto No. 1 in B^b Minor*. He once estimated that he had played it some four hundred times throughout his career. Nevertheless, he

brought to it a unique blend of fire and poetry seldom heard even in that Romantic period, which roused the audiences to fever pitch and continued the stage rushing of the Australasian tour. The famous German critic Dr. Gunther Schab commented:

The solo part of the concerto was played by the Russian, Jascha Spivakovsky, with a technical and musical finish such as I have never met before in this concerto. Our German pianists play such things too tamely, in a Western fashion. But this Russian has a courage for the most extreme. He has the most fiery tempi, the most vigorous accents, tender and burning colours, the wildest of unlimited crescendi, yet always remaining — and that is the wonderful part of it — artistically restrained and fine.

During his Australian tour, Jascha visited the home of Mr. and Mrs. H. Krantz in Adelaide, who were in the habit of entertaining visiting celebrities. There he signed his name on their concert grand Steinway piano. He was also persuaded to give their only daughter, twelve year old Leonore, some piano lessons. Several years later, when Leonore was seventeen, the Krantz family visited Jascha in Germany. On the pretext of going for a picnic, Jascha and Leonore eloped to Czechoslovakia and were married.

After Leonore's parents had left Germany and moved on to other parts of Europe, Jascha and Leonore decided on a honeymoon. However, they were doomed to disappointment for it never really eventuated. No sooner had they arrived at their destination on the Riviera and settled down to enjoy married life than a telegram arrived for Jascha from Vienna, informing him that he was to be soloist with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. The programme was to include the *Burlesque for Piano and Orchestra in D Minor* by Richard Strauss and the conductor was to be Strauss himself. This was quite an honour and despite the fact that Jascha had never performed the work before, it was not to be missed.

Since the concert was less than three weeks away, the couple had to curtail their honeymoon whilst Jascha went into solitary confinement in order to learn the work. He slaved over it night and day, and having got it into what he considered to be good shape, went to the first rehearsal with Strauss, feeling quite pleased with himself. He soon received a shock when Strauss leaned down from the podium and exclaimed 'Nein, Nein Herr Spivakovsky — too Russian, too Russian. It must be lighter, like a Viennese burlesque'. Poor Jascha went home and re-worked the piece all night. Strauss could hardly believe the difference at the next rehearsal and after all the early difficulties the concert itself proved to be a great success. The *Neues Wiener Journal* noted

In this concert, Jascha Spivakovsky played the piano part in the *Burlesque* full of life and beautifully. Until now the piano part has been played rather robustly, in a fortissimo frenzy. Spivakovsky however let the elegance, transparent beauty, and the clever wit of the solo part emerge. With economy of fortissimo, fineness in the run-playing, and working out of the figure-work, the architectural beauty of this piece was discovered for the first time.

At this time Jascha was joined by his youngest brother Tossy, a violin prodigy, who was eleven years his junior. Having studied initially under Willy Hess, Tossy went on to develop his own unique bowing technique that was based on the use of gravity, coupled with a special bowing grip which enabled him to produce a remarkably rich, full tone.

Thus began the Spivakovsky Duo comprising Jascha and Tossy, which became very popular in Europe at the time, and continued whenever the brothers came together in later years until the 1960s. In fact, at the time of his death in 1970, Jascha had been preparing to record all the Beethoven Piano and Violin sonatas with Tossy, nearly half a century after the duo came into being. In the 1920s they gave

many concerts in Europe and made a few recordings, all of which appear to have been lost.

One incident, which had an unusual and somewhat embarrassing sequel, occurred when the recording company had produced a considerable number of test records of Tossy, accompanied by Jascha and Albert. Tossy, always the perfectionist, decided that the recordings did not do him justice, and condemned the lot. However, the company management balked at the prospect of seeing all their investment wasted, and decided that the recordings could be put to good use after all. All they needed was an outlet in a remote part of the world: a place where it would be extremely unlikely that Tossy would ever visit — preferably where even the language was different. They chose Australia! Imagine Tossy's horror when, many years later, he arrived in Australia as part of the Spivakovsky-Kurtz Trio to find that his 'condemned' recordings had been distributed throughout the length and breadth of the country, and with Hitler in power back in Germany it was too late to do anything about it.

During the 1920s, Germany was the centre of many artistic and intellectual movements. In addition to developments in music, there was the *Bauhaus* in architecture, German Expressionism in painting, advances in mathematics and science — in fact a veritable twentieth century *Renaissance*. Because of this intellectual and artistic activity, a great many leading figures in various fields were drawn to the area.

The great mathematician and scientist Albert Einstein was also a very keen amateur violinist and took considerable interest in the Spivakovsky Duo, especially Tossy. With his wife, Einstein was often in attendance at their concerts. On one occasion he was seated next to Leonore, who was wearing the latest fashion in hats which covered most of her very blonde hair. During a break in the performance, Einstein's wife, who was a trifle short-sighted, leaned across and patted Leonore on the arm. 'What talented sons you have', she exclaimed admiringly to a stunned, twenty-one year old Leonore. Then, noticing her shocked expression, enquired, 'you are Mrs. Spivakovsky, aren't you?' Poor Leonore could only nod in reply.

Using Berlin as a home base, Jascha set about extending his reputation throughout Europe. Some of the programmes he performed were formidable even by 1920s standards. The *Berliner Tageblatt* gives an example:

Among the soloists Jascha Spivakovsky stands out, who, at his second concert played the three Beethoven concertos. His excellent performance of these last three concertos places him in the ranks of our best pianists.

Although brought up pianistically in the Romantic tradition of Liszt and Anton Rubinstein, Jascha was already extending his musical vision both backwards and forwards beyond Romanticism, into Baroque on the one hand and contemporary music on the other. Bach and Scarlatti were often featured at the beginning of his recitals, as were the Impressionists Ravel and Debussy during the programme. Albeniz, Palmgren, and occasionally Scriabin, Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Bartok also appeared. In Italy, Jascha was befriended by the composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, who dedicated several compositions to him, as did the young Russian composer Nikolai Lopatnikoff. Naturally some of these compositions, which are not unlike those of Ravel, featured on Jascha's programmes. Strangely enough, he rarely played any Rachmaninoff, and explained this by virtue of the fact that Rachmaninoff himself was performing in Europe and could be regarded as the best interpreter of his own music.

Still, it was in the Classical and Romantic works that Jascha was able to 'reach' his audience best. Contemporary music was too new and strange for most audiences to

accept warmly, and this despite the fact that Jascha always strove to highlight the emotional content of the music in an effort to make it comprehensible to the audience. Some of the critics noticed this approach and commented on it. From the *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*:

... a pianist whose technique commands the Liszt school as well as the modern. A dreamer and stormer at the same time.

In 1927 Jascha visited Italy and made his first tour of Spain. The temperament of the Latin audiences combined ideally with Jascha's warm Russian expressionism to produce great enthusiasm. From *L'Araldo Musicale*, Milan:

Spivakovsky proved himself to be one of the most notable young, modern pianists. Tempestuous applause and demands for encores crowned the evening.

La Sera, Milan noted similarly:

... Spivakovsky's concert called forth the greatest admiration. He understands how to carry the public away with him in a real enthusiasm. We have had few opportunities to register a similar impulsive admiration. The public would not leave the hall and the many additional items were greeted with frenzied applause.

In a huge theatre in Salerno, Italy, Jascha was invited to play Beethoven's *Moon-light Sonata* at a ceremony in dedication of a new opera house. But when he walked on stage he found only a baby-grand piano; consequently he had to try and force the tone so that it could be heard at the back of the hall, and in the third movement he broke a string. This lay across several others and produced a terrible twang. Infuriated, he reached a run for right hand alone and standing up grabbed the offending string with his free hand and tore it out, finishing the sonata without a break! This feat of dexterity brought the house down, and the audience applauded, shouted and stampeded so much that Jascha was unable to continue for some considerable time.

At Brescia, the audience's reaction was almost overwhelming, with prolonged applause at the conclusion of the recital. In fact the audience refused to leave the hall, and finally followed the artist en masse to his hotel where they applauded outside his window.

Now that he had an Australian wife, and having already made a successful Australasian tour in 1921, Jascha was easily persuaded that the time was professionally right for another. The year was 1929.

For his second Australian tour, Jascha continued his adventurous programming. Not only did he open his concerts with Bach and Scarlatti but he included compositions from Frank Bridge, Scriabin, Stravinsky and Percy Grainger. A typical matinee programme played in Sydney began with Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*, followed by two Beethoven *Rondeaux*, a Chopin *Ballade and Nocturne*, then Stravinsky's *Petroushka*, Liszt's *Rigoletto Paraphrase*, and finally Percy Grainger's *Londonderry Air*. Although many of the new works given their first Australian performance were in the nature of encore pieces, some were substantial. Amongst these significant first performances, Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Max Reger's titanic *Variations and Double Fugue on a Theme by Bach* stand out. Understandably, critics were somewhat taken aback by the tonality and gigantic proportions of these works, particularly the Reger.

The Sydney *Sun*, surprised that Jascha chose this thirty-minute piece to open his first concert with, commented that

the work offers opportunity for a pianist with Spivakovsky's super technical equipment and power of expression. The more difficult portions, which certainly reach gigantic standards, were accomplished with ease.

The audience had no hesitation in accepting this new work and, as noted by another critic,

At the conclusion of the first number on the programme, the audience realised that a genius of the piano had come to them, and the demonstration of appreciation was remarkable in its intensity.

Some of the new pieces, however, were too modern for the critics' taste. The Sydney *Evening News* called Prokofiev's *Suggestion Diabolique* a 'weird composition', and described a Castelnuovo-Tedesco *Waltz* as having 'a peculiar beauty with a touch of the Satanic in it, and it was hardly a melody to dance to, unless under the influence of many cocktails'. Generally speaking, though, the new music was well received by audiences and most critics.

After the recital series in Sydney which included eight concerts in fourteen days, the Sydney *Mail* commented:

No pianist who has ever appeared in Sydney before has played so many pieces without a single repetition. At the eight recitals he performed seventy-seven works, to which should be added Goddard's *Valse Chromatique*, Liadow's *Musical Box* and other encore pieces. Music lovers could not fail to be delighted that he introduced several important new works. He approaches every work with a seriousness of purpose and deeply felt appreciation which make for the highest in art. Viewed from every aspect, Spivakovsky is one of the greatest and most versatile pianists who have visited Australia.

Journeying from Sydney to Melbourne in 1929 necessitated a stop-over at Albury to change trains, because of the different rail gauges employed in Victoria and New South Wales; thus Jascha had to transfer all his cases from one train to another. The porter whose job it was to carry this luggage looked most distressed when he found six of the largest bags were particularly heavy. But his moans were soon stifled when Jascha said to him, 'that, my man, is music. How would you like to carry it all in your head, as I do?'

Actually, he had been lucky to make the train at all. The taxi in which he was hastening to catch it, ran into a Sydney tram and was severely damaged. Jascha, who was assisted from the wreck by bystanders, suffered a badly bruised back. He was stiff and sore for days, and often in later life complained of recurring bouts of 'lumbago'.

The 1929 tour of Australia was equally as successful as the previous tour seven years earlier. By introducing new and contemporary music into his programmes, Jascha was hailed as 'having done a great service to music in Australia'. In similar fashion to their European counterparts, Australian critics commented on the 'noticeable development in his interpretive powers, and technical advancement'. Also, having an Australian-born wife helped bridge the language difficulties, though the pronunciation of his name occasionally caused some amusement. Jascha managed to keep a sense of humour about it all — 'Whenever a man approaches me and begins to stutter', he said, 'I always say "Yes, that's me!"'

New Zealand critics and audiences were equally impressed with his performances. The *Dominion* from Wellington stated:

Recalling as faithfully as one may the memory of the great pianists who have passed this way, it does not seem that this young Russian has ever been surpassed, or even equalled.

With tributes like this still fresh in his mind, Jascha set sail with Leonore for Berlin, leaving behind a legacy of new music, some of which in recent years has become an integral part of the AMEB syllabus.

It was in 1930 that Jascha formed the Spivakovsky-Kurtz Trio. He had always considered chamber music to be one of the highest forms of musical art, requiring as it did great skill for the subtle blending of instruments and the subjugation of self for the greater artistic benefit of the ensemble. For the Trio he sought his youngest

brother and violinist, Tossy, and Edmund Kurtz, the 'cellist. All three were internationally known artists, having been musical prodigies and later successful soloists with some of the great orchestras in Europe. Tossy was, at eighteen years of age, engaged as concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, being the youngest violinist to fill this position. Edmund Kurtz had studied with Professor Klengel in Leipzig, and then with Pablo Casals in Paris. In 1930 he was Professor of 'cello at the Academy of Prague.

In any ensemble the individual style of each performer is crucial to the coherent expression of the group as a whole. In the Spivakovsky-Kurtz Trio, each artist was noted for his ability to bring the music to life; to capture the emotional content in a way which transcended technique, yet without any distortion of the rhythmic structure. None could have been termed a 'cold' artist. Consequently there was uniformity of approach in their realisation of musical objectives, and this singleness of purpose characterised their performances.

After practicing together for five months, Jascha felt they were ready to perform in public, and chose The Hague in Holland for their debut. The critics were enthralled. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* commented:

Debut extraordinary — of all the concerts that I have ever heard this was one of the most beautiful. Their solo as well as their ensemble playing is the most perfect that one can imagine.

This was followed by equally enthusiastic critiques from Rotterdam, Prague, Berlin, Copenhagen and Venice. Within twelve months of the ensemble being established, it was regarded as one of the finest in the world.

After achieving this great success with the Trio in Europe and Scandinavia, it seemed only natural that Jascha, married to an Australian and with two successful Australian tours behind him, should book the Trio for an Australian tour also. He felt sure that the others would find the country and its people as attractive as he had.

The tour of Australia began on 4 March 1933, and the Trio was booked for a series of fifty-two recitals. Billed as 'The most distinguished Trio that has ever visited Australia', it gave impetus in this country to the performance of chamber music, which had until then been considered too esoteric for the public. Australian critics, whilst echoing their European counterparts in admiring the performances of the Trio, seemed genuinely surprised that such music could give sustained enjoyment.

Three days after the Trio had left on the ship bound for Australia, Hitler came to power in Germany. Having seen at first hand the effects of *pogroms* in Russia, Jascha, who had previously predicted a similar situation developing in Germany, decided that the members of the Trio should remain in Australia at the conclusion of their current tour. This meant leaving everything behind in Germany and, in effect, losing all their belongings. Still, it was better than the alternative. Thus, for the third time in his short but eventful life, Jascha had lost nearly all his personal wealth, and material goods, and had to start over again.

AUSTRALIA AS HOME

Now that he was to make Australia his home, for the time being at least, Jascha became involved in things Australian. He was requested to give a memorial recital to that great Australian war-time leader, General Sir John Monash. For this sombre occasion, Jascha chose to play Chopin's powerful *Funeral March Sonata* in B^b Minor.

With such celebrated members of a distinguished Trio settling more or less permanently in Australia, several music educational institutions sought their services. After much discussion of the many offers received, they decided to settle in Melbourne and teach at the University Conservatorium under the leadership of Professor Bernard Heinze. It was here that Jascha brought about several important changes to teaching practice in Australia, including giving Master Classes for groups of students, to enable them to learn from each other's performances. Room 1 (his designated teaching room at the Conservatorium) became quite famous — or notorious — depending on whether the student had practised sufficiently or not. One day a poem appeared, nailed to his door and accompanied by a cartoon of a furry Russian bear with Jascha's face. It said:

All who pass this door beware
It is the den of Jascha bear
A cuddlesome chap you will agree
He eats fried pupils for lunch and tea.

A few days later a further verse appeared:

Jascha bear was cross today
I'm not sure why but people say
He ate a pupil raw, not fried
And has a nasty pain inside.

Despite his rather ferocious appearance, he was nevertheless generally kind — his most critical comment to a student being 'You wicked girl, you', said with a twinkle in the eye.

However, on other occasions, either examining or adjudicating, he could be quite cutting. At one *Eisteddfod*, he told a technically correct but very unmusical performer that she would be better off playing tennis; however, there is no truth in the story that he failed everybody at an AMEB examination. The truth is that they were afraid he might do so. This may have been the reason why he was never asked to adjudicate these examinations. His aim was to endeavour to raise Australian standards to European levels, and consequently he worked his students very hard and always demanded the highest standards of performance.

At this time, Jascha and Leonore had their first child, a daughter whom they named Rahel after Jascha's late mother, to be followed several years later by two sons, David and Michael.

Despite Australia's relatively small population, the Trio itself and the individual performers were in demand for both concerts and radio broadcasts. For more than two years, beginning in 1935, Jascha and Tossy gave recitals every Sunday night of virtually all the violin and piano repertoire. Of these, three performances could not go to air 'live' and were recorded on acetate. These have been preserved in the ABC archives in Canberra.

Despite the Trio's popularity in Australia, the artists felt cut off from the musical mainstream of Europe; thus it was that firstly Edmund Kurtz and then Tossy left these shores. Kurtz elected to settle in England and Tossy in the USA. Only Jascha, with his roots now firmly established in Australia, remained.

Whilst on a visit to Australia in 1937, the violinist Bronislaw Huberman asked Jascha to arrange a committee of friends of the newly-established Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Jascha set up this group, little realising that he would play as soloist with the orchestra in later years, or that through the fund-raising efforts of this group the orchestra would tour Australia several times from 1968 onwards.

In the late 1930s, with the political situation worsening in Germany, Jascha received desperate pleas from many people (including members of his own family)

to help them migrate to Australia. However, such a task was not easy. Prior to any immigration approval being given, each prospective migrant had to have a guaranteed job plus two hundred pounds in cash. These restrictions did not deter Jascha, who managed to bring out most of the remaining members of his family as well as a dozen others. However, he was unable to guarantee jobs for all the people who wrote to him. It always haunted him that some of these may have perished in the ensuing Holocaust.

Then came the Second World War. Jascha offered his services to help the war effort and gave a number of recitals to raise money for the Red Cross and the Allied troops. In addition he became an air raid warden. This may have come about because wardens had to march the streets decked out in protective clothing, including gas mask and helmet, and carrying a huge wooden rattle, to warn of impending gas attack. With his powerful forearms, Jascha was considered the only person capable, locally, of wielding this rattle successfully.

He continued to give regular broadcast recitals for the ABC during the War years, but was already suffering from being regarded as a 'local', and thus fewer performance opportunities were available. With the American fleet using Australia as a base for its Pacific campaign against the Japanese, Jascha found his student ranks swelled by American servicemen. One such student was so impressed with Jascha's teaching that, after the War, he uprooted his whole family and migrated to Australia so that he could continue his studies.

After the War, having been out of the international public eye for a number of years (in fact since 1933), Jascha decided to begin touring overseas again. This was much more difficult and expensive than using Berlin as home base, as he had done after the First World War. Nevertheless, Jascha planned an overseas tour which was to include America for the first time and to be preceded by an Australian tour in 1947. That the Australian tour was a great success is borne out by the reviews:

Last night's concert in the Town Hall would be belittled if it were described merely as a piano recital. It was an experience of mind and spirit with a sincere artist's submergence of self and technical awareness into the world of Beethoven. This was playing which made much that has been heard on the instrument in Sydney these several years seem as the tinkling of insignificant bells [*Neville Cardus*].

Jascha Spivakovsky's piano recital in the Town Hall last night was the greatest Beethoven playing Melbourne has heard for a decade [*John Sinclair*].

To have gained his true ranking, this Russian-born pianist should have left Australia long ago; in which case his would be one of the resounding names of today [*A. L. Kelly*].

With such accolades, Jascha embarked on his first post-war overseas tour — this time by air. On 24 January 1948, he made his debut at Carnegie Hall in New York. Because he had not made commercial recordings since before World War I, he was quite unknown to American music critics and they analysed him with interest:

If fireworks are called for Mr. Spivakovsky very obviously can provide them. What is more, in doing so he is able not only to play the notes but to play the music as well. This distinction is not a common one and leads us to believe that an important artist has at last chosen to come and play for us. Mr. Spivakovsky has a command of piano tone which borders on the remarkable [*John Ball Jr., New York Times*].

And from the celebrated music critic Noel Straus:

Power and delicacy were equally at Mr. Spivakovsky's command. The application of colour was masterly and imaginative. This was a brilliant and impressive performance.

Straus, however, was uncomfortable with some of Jascha's expressive Romanticism. This was probably due to the fact that the emerging American school of piano playing was itself more intellectual than expressive and did not take kindly to Romantic music. In addition, the great influx of international artists to tour the USA

in post-war years had hardly begun. Jascha's playing must have seemed very unusual indeed. Significantly, Straus' own ideas on interpretation and expression changed dramatically over the next few years. In 1952, apparently having forgotten the previous meeting, he commented in the *San Francisco News*:

... But the exciting discovery of the evening was the pianist Jascha Spivakovsky. His technical approach to the piano was orthodox but the sounds he produced indicated mastery of classic models plus individual dynamic freedom — a blending of the best from the old school of piano playing and the new. Beauty of tone and variety of colour and dynamics, together with Spivakovsky's fine cultural sense and appreciation of climactic values resulted in a beautiful projection of the piano score.

The concert season in both hemispheres of the world at that time centred around the winter months, and Jascha spent fourteen winters in a row, from 1947 onwards, travelling the climatically bleak world circuit. Artistically, however, the tours were rewarding. Because of the geographical position of Australia, his tours now included New Zealand, Hawaii and India, and he also toured Israel, Africa and Iceland in addition to Britain, Scandinavia, the USA and Canada. Fortunately, he was at the peak of his physical and intellectual powers because these tours were most exhausting.

In 1952, Jascha was requested to play as soloist at a concert to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. For this occasion, he chose to play the *Concerto in D* by the British composer Benjamin Britten. It was the first Australian performance of this work, and its success encouraged Jascha to introduce several significant modern works to the Australian public. Solo pieces by the Russian composer Kabalievsky, the Norwegian composer Saeverud and others appeared on his programmes. Possibly his most resounding success with music of this genre was the first Australian performance (and one of the first in the world) of the Swiss composer Ernst Bloch's monumental *Concerto Symphonique*. Bloch had sent him the original manuscript to work from, together with some instructions for performance. Despite the percussive nature of the work and its atonality, audiences and critics received it enthusiastically.

In presenting modern works of this kind, Jascha was unique amongst his contemporaries in that his repertoire extended from Baroque through to the most modern. Moreover, he was able successfully to make the transition to the percussive style without losing the expressive qualities of the music. Also he was equally at home with all the different styles, unlike his romantic contemporaries, who tended to specialise in a single composer or a single period.

During one of the tours of Great Britain, Jascha was approached by two commercial recording companies. Since he had just taped a flawless (even by his standards) performance of Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto for the BBC and because he was scheduled to play in Chicago the following evening, he suggested that the taped performance be released commercially. The recording companies were willing but BBC regulations at that time forbade it, and the tape had to be destroyed. The loss is posterity's as he never again recorded commercially.

In 1960, a serious illness necessitating major surgery cut short his international tours, and thereafter confined him to touring Australia. He died on 23 March 1970, at the comparatively young age of 73 years.

EPILOGUE

Throughout his years of semi-retirement after 1960, many international artists visited Jascha in his home. Some of them were: Artur Rubinstein, Shura Cher-

kassky, Claudio Arrau, Julius Katchen, Daniel Barenboim, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Gary Graffman (pianists); Ruggiero Ricci, Henryk Szeryng, Igor Oistrakh (violinists); the contralto Maureen Forrester, the comedian Victor Borge, and both the Budapest and Borodin string quartets.

In 1968, the Borodin Quartet offered to tour Russia with him but he felt uneasy about touring again (it was eight years since he last toured). Being Russian-born, he was uncertain as to whether the Soviet Government would allow him to return to Australia.

Professor George Kehler, in his recent book *The Piano in Concert*, describes Jascha's pianistic style as:

... characterised by the attributes of the Russian school — a remarkably rich and full tone quality (which cannot be adequately described) together with a very strong, consistent rhythmic impulse and an almost incredible legato. The legato enabled him to highlight the melodic line without pedalling, giving great unity to the overall concept without losing the fine detail. This sparing use of sustaining pedal gave great clarity of texture, which critics referred to as "crystal piano playing", an effective blending of the best of the old and new schools. Other critics who witnessed Spivakovsky performances thought him to be an extraordinary artist, a musician of the masterly order, of great physical and intellectual power, an unsurpassable performer.