



BACH

Double Concerto

with Carl Flesch

Violin Concertos

BWV 1052 and BWV 1056

TARTINI

Violin Concerto in D minor

Joseph Szigeti

Orchestras conducted by

Walter Goehr

Fritz Stiedry

George Szell

(Recorded 1937-1954)

Great Violinists • Joseph Szigeti Bach • Tartini

This disc contains much of the baroque music that we have on record from the great Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti. Added interest is lent to the programme by the presence on the Bach *Double Concerto* of the Hungarian violinist and teacher Carl Flesch (1873-1944). This project came about because Flesch was living in London at the time: it is his one large-scale recording – otherwise, apart from short pieces, we have only sonatas by Handel and Mozart and some concertos taken down off the air. Tartini's *Concerto in D minor* was the only concerto by the Italian violinist/composer that had any currency in the 'good old days'. Szigeti, who wrote his own cadenzas, recorded it twice (this version being the better) and Peter Rybar made a famous early LP. Wolfgang Schneiderhan's version had limited circulation. While Bach's *Double Concerto* has been a staple of the catalogues since the pioneering acoustic discs by Kreisler and Zimbalist (with string quartet), the solo *Concerto in D minor* was an unusual choice for a 78rpm recording. Scholars had long suspected that some Bach keyboard concertos were arrangements of works for more 'singing' instruments, and in the early days of the baroque revival various versions were made. Adolf Busch and his father-in-law Hugo Grütters prepared a transcription of the *D minor Concerto* which Busch played all over Europe. His friend Szigeti attended at least one performance of this arrangement, in Switzerland, so perhaps it was the spur for the Hungarian to take up the Reitz edition. Although Szigeti recorded the concerto again with Casals conducting, this 1940 version is to be preferred. Szigeti also recorded a transcription of the slow movement of the *F minor Concerto* and later set down the whole work; and between them, these recordings help to make

up for the lack of Szigeti versions of the orthodox Bach solo Concertos.

Szigeti was the most distinguished of a line of superb violinists taught by Jenő Hubay. Born József Szigeti in Budapest on 5th September 1892, he was brought up in the Carpathian area of Hungary at Máramaros-Sziget, from which his family, originally called Singer, took their name. His father led a café band; one uncle, Deszö Szigeti (1880-1963), had studied with Hubay and was a leading orchestral player in Paris and New York, even making a few solo records, another uncle was a bassist, and Uncle Bernat gave Jóska, as he was known to family, friends and his early audiences, his first lessons. From the age of eleven to thirteen Szigeti was under Hubay's tutelage and he left the Ferenc Liszt Academy in 1905 to make his Berlin and Budapest débuts. As 'Szulagi' he played in a Frankfurt circus, then auditioned for Joachim, instinctively deciding not to study with the old man, although he always had the low bow arm of that school – Joachim had been Hubay's first major teacher.

Szigeti made his London début at the Bechstein (now Wigmore) Hall as a thirteen-year-old (the public was told he was twelve). From 1907 he was based in England and his concerto début was made with Bach's *Concerto in E major* and Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto* with the New Symphony Orchestra under Beecham. While in Britain, until 1913, he toured with Nellie Melba and John McCormack, met Myra Hess and Ferruccio Busoni, gave the first performance of Hamilton Harty's *D minor Concerto* and made his first records. He used very little vibrato in those days and this was one technique he worked on, during the decade from 1913 when he was off the international stage – he

spent much of World War I in Swiss sanatoria with tuberculosis. Hubay equipped his students with a wide vibrato and Szigeti was influenced by this tradition in developing his own sound; he always vibrated rather slowly and this trait could make his legato sound slightly concave. On the other hand, he knew how to intensify the vibrato so as to point up a climax in the music. He was a master of 'creative tension'. Although a gentle person off stage, he had a reputation for breaking strings when he got carried away.

From 1917 to 1924 Szigeti taught in Geneva. In 1922 he played with the Berlin Philharmonic under Fritz Reiner and from 1924 he was a regular visitor to the Soviet Union and England, but it was his Philadelphia début in 1925, with Beethoven's *Concerto* conducted by Leopold Stokowski, that sealed his fame. Now known as Joseph to English-speaking audiences, he was a far more cultured artist than the Jóska who had left Hubay's class with a tiny repertoire of virtuoso works. Based in Paris with his Russian wife Wanda and their daughter Irène, he was one of the busiest violinists of the interwar years, playing concertos, especially those of Beethoven and Brahms, or appearing in recital with his most frequent piano partner Nikita Magaloff, who married Irène in 1939.

In the mid-1920s Szigeti became friendly with Béla Bartók and appeared with him in concert, introducing the *Second Sonata* to New York in December 1927. Szigeti also transcribed seven pieces from Bartók's *For Children*, which they played in recital and recorded as *Hungarian Folk Tunes*. In 1931 the violinist toured the Far East, causing a sensation in Japan, and in 1933 he appeared on the same bill as Benny Goodman and Fletcher Henderson in America. In 1940 Szigeti emigrated with Wanda to the United States, where he and Bartók gave a recital at the Library of Congress and with Benny Goodman performed and recorded Bartók's

trio *Contrasts*, which the violinist and clarinetist had already introduced in 1939 with Endre Petri. In 1944, with Claudio Arrau, Szigeti presented the cycle of Beethoven *Sonatas* at the Library of Congress. He was the only great violinist of his generation to revive his career after World War II and he appeared a number of times with Artur Schnabel, but after 1950 his playing declined. He last appeared in London as a violinist in 1954, breaking a G string at his final concert. He settled in Switzerland in 1960 and died in Lucerne on 20th February 1973, having devoted his last years to competition jury work, writing and teaching.

Tall, courtly and courteous, Szigeti was 'the thinking man's virtuoso'. He was adept at flattening his intonation for a more pathetic effect in relaxed or soulful passages, then tightening it for up-tempo or marcato sections; he never tuned sharp to cut through the orchestra. He made a lovely sound but the musical line and rhythmic pulse came first with him; his tone was rarely noticeable for its own sake. His style of playing was old-fashioned, in that he used downward slides which often sat oddly on the contemporary music he played. Yet this portamento helped to give his playing a singing, breathing, easeful quality. He owned two Guarnerius violins, his main concert instrument being the Pietro Guarneri of Mantua formerly played by Henri Petri.

It has to be admitted that none of these recordings is up to the standard of Szigeti's best work, although his own playing is mostly marvellous. The *Double Concerto* is a particular disappointment, in view of its importance vis à vis Flesch. Walter Goehr conducts squarely and has not rehearsed his pick-up string group thoroughly: the '*Double*' was a repertoire piece in London, heard every year at the Proms, usually played by the sisters Jelly d'Arányi and Adila Fachiri, and perhaps Goehr thought he could get away with a run-

through. Flesch is past his prime and even the sound quality is poor (the present transfer is the best ever made). Goehr is little more of an inspiration in the Tartini, but his insensitivity pales into insignificance when compared with the brutality meted out to the *F minor Concerto* by George Szell. As the accompanying ensemble is made up of members of Szell's regular Cleveland Orchestra, appearing under a *nom de disque*, it is all the more regrettable that the result is so dogged and heavy. The support group in the Bach *D minor*

Concerto also needs some explanation. The New Friends of Music, organised by Ira Hirschmann, used to put on series of chamber concerts every season in New York. Most of their artists, and many of their subscribers, were immigrants or refugees from Europe. Sometimes an orchestra was brought together, and it is this rather motley band that is conducted here by Viennese-born Fritz Stiedry (1883-1968). Szigeti's vital, vibrant playing knits it all together.

Tully Potter

Producer's Note

The recordings on this disc were transferred from American Columbia pressings: "Full-Range" label editions for the Tartini and the Bach *Arioso* and *Double Concerto*, "Microphone" label pressings for the Bach *D minor Concerto*, and a first edition blue-label LP pressing for the *G minor Concerto*.

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.

- TARTINI (ed. Pente; arr. Szigeti): Violin Concerto in D minor** **13:04**
- 1 Allegro 5:17
 2 Grave 3:44
 3 Presto 4:04
- Joseph Szigeti • Orchestra • Walter Goehr**
 Recorded 6th December 1937 at the EMI Abbey Road Studios, London
 Matrices: CAX 8130-1, 8131-1 and 8132-2; First issued on Columbia LX 710 and 711
- 4 **BACH (arr. Szigeti): Arioso (Largo from Clavier Concerto in F minor, BWV 1056)** **3:41**
Joseph Szigeti • Orchestra • Walter Goehr
 Recorded 6th December 1937 at the EMI Abbey Road Studios, London
 Matrices: CAX 8133-2; First issued on Columbia LX 711
- BACH: Concerto for Two Violins and Orchestra, BWV 1043** **15:39**
- 5 Vivace 4:02
 6 Largo ma non tanto 6:57
 7 Allegro 4:41
- Joseph Szigeti and Carl Fleisch, Violins • Orchestra • Walter Goehr**
 Recorded 30th August 1937 at the EMI Abbey Road Studios, London
 Matrices: CAX 8060-1, 8061-1, 8062-1 and 8063-1; First issued on Columbia LX 659 and 660
- BACH: Violin Concerto in D minor**
(Restored by Reitz from Clavier Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052) **23:06**
- 8 Allegro 7:45
 9 Adagio 7:31
 10 Allegro 7:51
- Joseph Szigeti • New Friends of Music Orchestra • Fritz Stiedry**
 Recorded 24th April 1940 in New York City
 Matrices: XCO 27207-1, 27208-1, 27209-2, 27210-1, 27211-2 and 27212-1
 First issued on US Columbia 11379-D through 11381-D in album M-418
- BACH: Violin Concerto in G minor**
(Restored by G. Schreck from Clavier Concerto in F minor, BWV 1056; ed. Szigeti) **11:48**
- 11 Moderato 4:09
 12 Largo 3:48
 13 Presto 3:52
- Joseph Szigeti • Columbia Symphony Orchestra • George Szell**
 Recorded 13th January 1954 in Severance Hall, Cleveland
 Matrix: XLP 31209; First issued on US Columbia ML 4891 (LP)

**Playing
Time
67:19**

BACH • TARTINI

Joseph Szigeti (1892-1973)

8.110979

ADD

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The great Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti was the most distinguished of a line of superb violinists taught by Jenő Hubay. Tall, courtly and courteous, he was 'the thinking man's virtuoso', for whom musical line and rhythmic pulse came first and whose tone, though very beautiful, was rarely noticeable for its own sake. This disc contains much of his recorded legacy of baroque music albeit mainly in transcriptions, as was the custom in the early days of the baroque revival. Old-fashioned performances these may be, but Szigeti's vital, vibrant playing knits everything together.

Tracks 1-7: Orchestra • Walter Goehr
Tracks 8-10: New Friends of Music Orchestra • Fritz Stiedry
Tracks 11-13: Columbia Symphony Orchestra • George Szell



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MADE IN CANADA

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Cover Photograph: Joseph Szigeti (Tully Potter Collection)

