

GSTAAD MENUHIN FESTIVAL

& ACADEMY

Yehudi Menuhin and the Gstaad Menuhin Festival

A Living Affinity with the Saanenland

Yehudi Menuhin, the founder of the Gstaad classical music festival bearing his name, is still remembered as a world famous violin child prodigy, conductor and humanist. His remarkable humanity, his multi-faceted artistic gifts and his perpetual curiosity were the hallmarks of his creative endeavours. It was in 1957 that this honorary resident of Saanen founded the legendary festival in the Saanenland. The promotion of young talent was just as important to him as playing music amongst friends.

A Russian cosmopolitan

Born in 1916 in New York into a family of Russian Jewish immigrants, Yehudi Menuhin grew up in San Francisco. Watched over by his strict parents as he practised and learned, he was quickly seen to be a musical prodigy. All his life, Yehudi Menuhin was a nomad and a cosmopolitan and travelled the world as a humanist, organiser and musician.

“When Can I Start Playing Vibrato?”

As early as in 1922, the ambitious, tirelessly practicing boy Yehudi was allowed to appear for the first time in student concerts. In 1923, he enforced to continue the longed-for lessons with Louis Persinger, the first concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. On February 29, 1924, the blond chubby boy impressed in a concert of the Symphony Orchestra, and therefore got the chance to appear as a soloist in the Scottish Rite Auditorium in San Francisco one year later – and another year later, in January 1926, Yehudi was shining in New York's Manhattan Opera House, right before his debut with the San Francisco Orchestra under Louis Persinger in March, where he played the Violin Concertos by Lalo and Tchaikovsky. However, Yehudi didn't come up to study with the famous Belgian “Master of the Sublime Style” Eugène Ysaye in Brussels. Instead, the 10-year-old Yehudi fought his way to lessons with the Romanian master George Enescu after his magnificent Parisian debut. Since his early childhood, he wanted to become his student – years later, Enescu was meant to become an almost fatherly mentor to the young violinist and invited the Menuhin family to the house of the Romanian princely family Cantacuzène in Sinaia, where Yehudi first experienced folklore and the joyful world of the gypsy violinists.

First Large-Scale Performances in the Year of Destiny 1927

In November, the first performance at New York's Carnegie Hall, playing the Beethoven Violin Concerto with the New York Symphony Orchestra under Fritz Busch, was a huge success, and was therefore followed by further concerts and the first recording for Victor. After touring through the USA in 1928, the courted child prodigy received the famous “Fürst Khenvenhüller”-Stradivari as a gift from patron Henry Goldman, who accompanied Yehudi on his second European tour to Paris and other important centres of music.

Legendary Berlin Concert on April 12, 1929

The ingenious interpretation of the three great Violin Concertos by Bach, Beethoven and Brahms with the Berlin Philharmonic under Bruno Walter, as well as the encounter with the physicist and musician Albert Einstein, an encounter that has been described several times, have become part of music history. Since this evening at the latest, the fame of the brilliant child prodigy has been going around the world. Menuhin's teacher Enescu convinced the family to choose Adolf Busch as the “teacher of the German violin school”.

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Studies with Adolf Busch in Basel

In the book “The Menuhin Saga”, father Moshe chose the title “Basel, Busch and a lot of traveling (1929–1931)” for the 18th chapter and described the Swiss stay in the pretty house at Gartenstrasse 12 and many valuable encounters that happened right there. The winter season was devoted to concerts such as those in November 1929 in Queen's Hall (London) with the London Symphony Orchestra under Fritz Busch and first recordings for “His Masters Voice” (HMV): Menuhin became the most sought-after violinist of the time.

The Menuhin Caravan Rolled On: Countless Performances

The year 1931 was filled with intense concert activities, while the family was living in Ville d'Avray near Paris. Recordings of Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 with the London Symphony Orchestra under Landon Ronald and, in 1932, the Violin Concerto by Edward Elgar (while the composer himself took over the baton) – still a musical document – and, in Paris, a recording with Menuhin's teacher George Enescu and the famous Orchestre Lamoureux (Bach's Double Concerto) attracted much attention. Yehudi Menuhin was considered the best paid artist of that time! The cosmopolitan and family breadwinner for the “Menuhin caravan” refused to continue performing in Germany after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. Highlights during the following months included duo recordings with his beloved sister Hephzibah playing piano, a brilliant interpretation of Beethoven's Violin Concerto under Arturo Toscanini with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1934 and much acclaimed radio broadcasts in the USA. Menuhin's popularity reached unique peaks, but the young star remained under the influence of his parents and suffered more and more from personal confinement.

1935: First Artistic Crisis

In 1935, the tiring world tour to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Europe ended in a crisis: Complaints during playing, cramps, growing tensions in the strict family environment slowed the 19-year-old down and brought, despite an 18-month vacation at the new family residence in Los Gatos, California, and despite some successful moments such as the premiere of Schumann's Violin Concerto in 1937, unrest and trouble. Would Yehudi, who was also admired by women, be able to detach himself from his surrounding?

Love to Nola Nicholas and the Escape

In 1938, the charming, wealthy Yehudi Menuhin fell in love with the young Nola Nicholas – a relationship, that would soon lead to difficulties. The beautiful and cheerful millionaires' daughter of the Australian “King of Aspirin” did not resist the stormy publicity of the world-famous wonder violinist for long. In order to attend a Toscanini concert in London on May 27th, Yehudi wished to marry her on May 26th to start the honeymoon with the joint admiration of the great conductor in London's Queen's Hall ... The delighted bridegroom was more than happy that only two months later, his beloved sister Hephzibah, in the young age of 18, married Nola's brother Lindsay in California. However, the hard reality was waiting for Yehudi to come back.

Yehudi Menuhin Becomes a Symbol 1939: The Outbreak of War in Europe – Menuhin Becomes a Father

During the outbreak of war, the young couple stayed in Australia, where their daughter Zamira was born on September 29, 1939. Nola fulfilled her motherly duties in the circle of her large family, while Yehudi gave many concerts and made new recordings in teamwork with sister Hephzibah, who had become the most famous pianist in Australia in the meantime. In 1940, Nola already gave birth to son Krov. When the USA entered the War in 1941, the idyll of living in Australia came to an end for the American Yehudi. Initially put on hold, he soon began an enormous concert series (about 500 performances) for soldiers of all Allied troops, dared to make a tour of Latin America in 1941 and visited England in an adventurous approach

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during the “War Concerts” in 1943, played for troops on the Aleutian Islands in March 1944 and in the following June for units of the Pacific troops in Hawaii.

Menuhin as a Symbol for Peace – Marital Difficulties with Nola

It was no surprise that the tireless violinist, humanist, peace herald and bearer of hope became alienated during his rare stays at home. Although he tried again and again to save his marriage with Nola and to be the best father he could be for his two children, the marriage slipped into ever deeper crises and finally had to break up.

Yehudi Menuhin and Diana Gould First Meeting in September 1944

What if Yehudi had not met the graceful, three years older Diana Gould, stepdaughter of the British Admiral Sir C. Harcourt, during his personal crisis in September 1944? Because of Diana, he found new strength: The “Angel on his Earthly Path” supported him during his career as a generous, wise partner – until his death. But the two did not yet belong together ... Within days of their liberation (Menuhin flew to Britain twice to play for British and French troops and factory workers), he gave concerts in Antwerp, Brussels and Paris (a historic concert as Menuhin was the first musician to play in the Paris Opera House following the city's liberation), and met Béla Bartók in New York in 1944, for him the outstanding composer of the 20th century – a musical relationship that became history and culminated in the dedication and premiere of Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin in New York.

1945: Menuhin's Performance at the San Francisco Conference of the United Nations

The cosmopolitan and philanthropist tried his hand as Paganini in the Paganini film “The Magic Bow” and also stood out in the soundtrack. In April 1945, Menuhin played for delegates to the first United Nations conference in San Francisco. In the following July, he played together with Benjamin Britten for the survivors of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. On Hamburg Radio, the Violin Concerto by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, newly discovered by Yehudi Menuhin, was heard (again) for the first time. The first trip to Moscow brought a friendship with David Oistrakh, new encounters, many performances, a recording with Antal Doráti of Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2 and new concerts in the USA. But all these activities were not conducive to the one-year attempt to save the marriage with Nola in 1946. The divorce of the first marriage became a fact of life, and after the historic Beethoven concert with Wilhelm Furtwängler in Berlin, Yehudi was finally able to marry his Diana in London in October 1947.

Happy Marriage with Diana Gould

The relationship to Diana Gould became the start of an impressive common work and family life of two very stubborn, but wonderfully complementary personalities. The two sons Gerard (born in 1948 at the Edinburgh Festival) and Jeremy (1951) became the hope of the new family, while later, the third-born son Alexis died in 1955 shortly after his birth. Musical highlights such as the world premiere of Walton's Violin Sonata alternated with complex humanistic activities: Menuhin criticized Apartheid in South Africa as early as 1950, tried to reconcile as a humanist and Jew despite bomb attempts on his first trip to Israel, experienced his first appearance in London's Royal Festival Hall in May 1951 with his sister Hephzibah, who in the meantime had remarried, and then travelled to Australia and New Zealand, where he first encountered a yoga script in the waiting room of a chiropractor. He gave a concert in Japan and also started a charity concert tour for the benefit of famine relief through India, where he met Pandit Nehru and the famous sitar player Ravi Shankar.

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Menuhin Becomes a Citizen of the World

Yoga and the Indian Culture

In 1952, Yehudi Menuhin met – on the recommendation of Pandit Nehru – the yoga teacher B.K.S. Iyengar, born in 1914, who was also invited to the occasion of the first summer stay in Gstaad in 1954, which strengthened the connection with the culture of India and the enthusiasm for practicing yoga. After the master had already decided to forgo air travel in 1953, Menuhin experienced the satisfaction of being a teacher in 1954, when he gave his first violin lessons at Nadia Boulanger's Conservatoire Américain in Fontainebleau.

Moving to Europe in 1955 – Gstaad Becomes the Menuhin's Favored Place to Be

After the disagreement with their parents over the controversial biography of Robert Magidoff in 1955, the Menuhins decided to move from California to Europe, living alternately in London and in the Saanenland, and after 1958 for almost two years with friends near Florence. Finally, from 1960 onwards and next to their home in London, they owned the chalet “Chankly Bore” in Gstaad, where they enjoyed the winter months. In the unique Mauritius Church, Menuhin found the perfect concert venue, also at the suggestion of his friends such as Antal Doráti. In 1957, the Mauritius Church became the source of Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy at the suggestion of “Kurdirektor” Paul Valentin.

Menuhin as an Educator and Festival Director

Being a Musician-Educator

Infected by the virus of didactic work with young people and inspired by the idea of passing on his life experiences, Menuhin's work became increasingly filled with writing, training and designing his festivals in addition to his intensive concert activities. He has been in Gstaad since 1957 and was Artistic Director in Bath, England from 1959 to 1968. In 1963, he founded the Yehudi Menuhin School in London, then in larger premises in Stoke d'Abernon, which today is an elite school for young string players and musicians and is being supported by the state. Tirelessly, he let his festival grow in the Saanenland, played and conducted with enthusiasm more and more orchestral works after 1959, in 1966 the first Mozart opera, but was also enthusiastic about improvising with Ravi Shankar and ventured many musical openings such as appearances with the jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli. After receiving honorary citizenship in Grenchen in 1968, where he also became a Swiss citizen, he received the honorary citizenship certificate of the municipality of Saanen on April 25, 1970. He also received countless international honours and from 1969 to 1975, he chaired the International Music Council of UNESCO. His political initiatives are impressive: In 1971, he stood up for Russian dissidents in Moscow, gave speeches and wrote several books. In 1974, he performed for the first time with Edmond de Stoutz and the Zurich Chamber Orchestra the “Polyptique”, written for him by Frank Martin. In the same year, Menuhin initiated the “Bermuda-Festival” and impressed in Washington at the 200th anniversary celebration of the United States in front of President Gerald Ford and Queen Elizabeth II.

A Passion for Difference

His interest in other cultures and musical movements saw him arrange encounters between various styles at the Gstaad Festival, revealing the binding power of music, for example with Indian sitar-player Ravi Shankar (in 1971 and 1975) or with jazz virtuoso Grappelli. Menuhin endlessly pursued the «healing power in musical harmony». Meditation and yoga exercises were important to him, and music was indispensable.

1977: Coronation with “Live Music Now» in London and the IMMA in Gstaad

The year 1976 saw the publication of Menuhin's much acclaimed autobiography “Unvollendete Reise” (“Unfinished Journey”), while at the same time the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was designing the

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television series “The Music of Man”. To his 60th birthday, Menuhin received honours from all sides. The International Menuhin Music Academy came to Gstaad in 1977 with the Camerata Lysy and, under his student Alberto Lysy, became a jewel of the cultural scene of the three valleys of Pays-d'Enhaut, Saanenland-Obersimmental and the musical life of Gstaad. The master was constantly on the road, ventured new competitions for young musicians, travelled to China in 1979, where he became Honorary Professor at the Beijing Conservatory and brought students for the IMMA. Despite financial difficulties, the reputation of his festivals and schools grew. In 1982, he became President for lifetime of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Menuhin's Death – An End at the Zenith of Recognition

1985: British Citizen and Honoured as Sir Yehudi

In the 1980s and 1990s, Menuhin's work shifted more and more to London, Diana's home town: Sir Yehudi received the “Order of Merit” from the British Queen in 1987 and was appointed Baron in 1993 as the Right Honourable the Lord Menuhin of Stoke d'Abernon, with a seat in the House of Lords. The great humanist and musician remained tirelessly active, conducting all over the world, and in 1992 he founded the International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation in Brussels to serve the humanistic vision. The main project is the artistic education programme “MUS-E®”, which today is active in 12 countries for around 70,000 children. The foundation of this programme was laid at an international conference during the 1993 Menuhin Festival in Gstaad.

He worked as Musical Director in Gstaad until 1996 and was showered with many honours as one of the most famous world citizens and respected humanists. He was proud of the first meeting of the “Assemblées des Cultures”, his “Cultural Parliament” as an initiative for peace within the framework of UNESCO. He died quite unexpectedly – only one year after his mother Marutha, who died in 1998 at the age of 100 – on March 12, 1999 in Berlin on a concert tour with his Sinfonia Varsovia. A good, restless heart stopped beating a few weeks before his 83rd birthday.

Yehudi Menuhin: A Life in Moments

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| 1916 | Born on 22 nd April in New York, into a family of Russian Jewish immigrants. |
| 1921 | Violin lessons in San Francisco (Motivation: “When can I play vibrato?”). |
| 1924 | On 29 th February, first appearance, as a student of Louis Persinger, first violin solo of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. |
| 1927 | Meeting with Georges Enescu. First concert in Paris with the “Orchestre Lamoureux”. |
| 1929 | On 12 th April Yehudi Menuhin plays his legendary Berlin concert under Bruno Walter. With three solo concertos by Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, he establishes world fame as a child prodigy. |
| 1935 | 110 concerts during a world tour leads to an artistic crisis. |
| 1938-1945 | During the Second World War he plays over 500 concerts for Allied troops. Yehudi Menuhin becomes a symbol of peace. |
| 1957 | First musical performance in the Saanenland, the “Menuhin Festival” is born. Also becomes artistic director of the Bath Festival. |

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- 1959 Growing enthusiasm for conducting.
- 1963 Foundation of a children's music school in Stoke d'Abernon, England.
- 1969 Elected President of UNESCO's International Music Council.
- 1970 Made an honorary burgher of the commune of Saanen.
- 1977 Foundation of the International Menuhin Music Academy (IMMA) – Camerata Lysy moves from Holland to Gstaad.
- 1979 Yehudi Menuhin wins the German editors' peace prize.
- 1993 The British Queen appoints him "Baronet of Stoke d'Abernon": Sir Yehudi Menuhin becomes Lord Menuhin.
- 1999 Menuhin, artist and humanist, dies on 12th March of heart failure in Berlin.

Quotations from Yehudi Menuhin

"I feel at home in Gstaad. I started a small music festival there in the wonderful little church in Saanen ..."

"A way of life which excludes the riches of the unknown and the mysterious is out of variance with life itself."

"Every living moment is a new departure, an end and a beginning, a coming together and a separation."

"The right of people for silence, clean air and pure water, for meadows, forests and non-polluted food belongs into the constitution of all states."

Pausing for Reflection on the Philosopher's Path

A Philosopher's Path with 12 information panels, running from Gstaad to Saanen, serves as a reminder of Yehudi Menuhin, free citizen of the Saanen region (he received this honor in 1970). His reflections on human behavior, nature, and culture are preserved in all their wisdom along the lifeline of Saanenland, the river Saanen.

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Menuhin Center Saanen

The Menuhin Center Saanen Association has as its goal the preservation of the memory of the artistic and spiritual heritage of Yehudi Menuhin in Saanenland. Yehudi Menuhin's life, cultural surroundings as well as his musical and pedagogical influences are documented and displayed in the historical Salzhüsi Chalet in the center of Saanen. As a research center and memorial archive material (photographs, texts, a small library and mediathek) is gathered, registered and presented for public access and use. And since Yehudi Menuhin guided and shaped the festival for over 40 years, the rich history of the Gstaad Menuhin Festival is also documented here.

Contact / Information: Menuhin Center Saanen, Dorfstrasse 61, 3792 Saanen, Switzerland
Tel. +41 (0)33 744 19 40.

Literature and DVD

The 304-page book "Gstaad und die Menuhins" ISBN 3-71651446-2), published by Benteli Verlag • DVD "Yehudi Menuhin – Lord of the Strings"; the 50th anniversary of the Gstaad Menuhin Festival

Available in the Festival Office (Tel. +41 (0) 33 748 83 38) as well as in specialty shops.

"Anzeiger von Saanen", Special edition, 120th Year, Sunday 7 March 2000, No. 19 (Author: Dr. Rolf P. Steiger)

Press contact:

Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy AG
Christine von Siebenthal
Head of Marketing & Communication

Dorfstrasse 60, P.O. Box
3792 Saanen

Tel +41 33 748 83 38
Direct +41 33 748 83 34
cvs@gstaadmenuhinfestival.ch

Publisher:

Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy AG
gstaadmenuhinfestival.ch