

SR/ RECORDINGS SECTION

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JOSEF HOFMANN: *Hail and Farewell*

By ABRAM CHASINS

IT WAS an abnormally hot afternoon in the spring of 1926 when I found myself at the door of Josef Hofmann's suite at the Great Northern Hotel in Manhattan. I waited for quite a few minutes before knocking, hoping that my heart would stop pounding. Hofmann had been my pianistic idol for many of my twenty-two years, but I had never come closer to him than the distance between the top balcony and the stage of Carnegie Hall.

And here I was, paying him a visit. It had all come about two weeks before when I had met Mrs. Hofmann and had been astonished to hear her say, "Josef's been told about your Chinese pieces. He'd like to hear them and anything else you'd like to play for him. Will you come?"

Would I?

My first jolt that afternoon came when Hofmann himself answered my knock and I, all five-foot-six of me, had to lower my gaze several inches to meet his squarely. The contrast was startling between the mild-mannered little man who greeted me and the mental image I had held of him. It was hard to reconcile the soft voice,

delicate features, small hands, and meticulously debonair dress with the relentless Titan of the keyboard. The only physical sign of his power was in his massive back and shoulders. He looked like a chunky quarterback who moved with the litheness of a dancer.

At that time Hofmann had just turned fifty, but looked ageless. He could have just as well been forty or sixty. While we talked I observed the impeccable neatness of the man and the orderliness of his simple hotel parlor. An immaculately dusted Steinway grand stood in the corner, its keys gleaming, but with not a single piece of music on it—just a lone and shining metronome. Hofmann asked me about my compositional work and theoretical training. His questions were pointed and precise. He never wasted a syllable. He spoke flawless English with a slight accent, origin untraceable. Later I learned that he was equally at home in German, French and, naturally, his native Polish.

In the first few minutes of conversation he revealed a rigidly disciplined mind, an intense concentration, and a fierce passion for separating opinion from fact. He also had a quick



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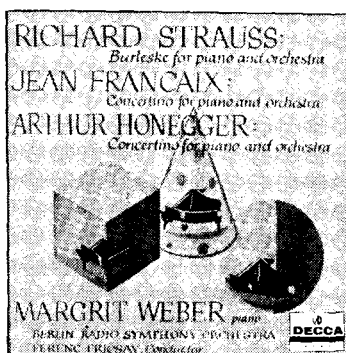


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