



Left: First tour of America, aged thirteen, in 1888. Right: World celebrity, turn of the century.

By ZINO FRANCESCATTI

BEVERLY HILLS, CALIF.

**K**REISLER struck me like a thunderbolt the first time I heard him. It was in 1913. I had already been playing the violin for many years, though I was only eight. He came on the stage, and already the man was different from the great artists we were accustomed to hear—Ysaye, Thibaud, Paderewski, etc. They were personages with very long hair, dressed with a flavor of nineteenth-century romanticism, tremendous redingotes, jabots of lace, elaborate ties.

Kreisler, with his crew-cut hair, sober jacquette, and calm and formidable strength, made me gaze with awe. What came out from his violin was the thing I was waiting for: the revelation, the ideal of my dream not yet revealed to me, the beautiful tone, the clarity and simplicity of the phrases (in the Beethoven concerto), and particularly the

rebound inside your chest of the rhythm of his bow. I felt Kreisler pointed to the future for me. He was the artist who speaks to you not only of the wonders of the past, but also of the great things to accomplish your destiny. That night I decided to give all my life to the violin.

The second great influence was when I had, in 1920, to record for "His Master's Voice" most of the Kreisler repertory. I worked, naturally, with the Kreisler records, trying to reproduce, to imitate, the wonderful rubati, the gorgeous portamenti, and the unmistakable rhythms. While I was practicing one of his most famous pieces attributed to Pugnani (at that time we took it for granted that the Praeludium and Allegro was Pugnani's), my father, passing by, said in a burst of ire: "You can play as Kreisler does, but I can assure you that you are both wrong. Pugnani would never have played that passage with the accents you give. It is binary, not ternary." Unfortunately my father was dead when Kreisler admitted it was his own composition.

I learned more of the philosophical approach of Kreisler to his art during the many summers we passed in the Berkshires. He came often to see us in our place, "Fiddletop." From these numerous conversations, I can summarize thus:

"To be a violinist you must practice your instrument; but to be a great artist you must be curious of everything, and learn in every subject as much as you can . . ."

He loved to remember his youth, his studies at the Paris Conservatoire; his teacher Massart; Léo Delibes, the director, who told him to rewrite the Paganini Concerto (he did, later, but only the first movement); to tell stories of his friend Jacques Thibaud, Ysaye, with whom he played chamber music and also poker—to talk about Brahms, Joachim, with the great human traditions.

We also had musical discussions often with the late Albert Spalding, who was also a neighbor. At the end of the evening, Kreisler would take a seat at the piano and play with Spalding and me some Bach, Vivaldi, or Handel.

One of his favorite anecdotes was about a letter he received not very long ago from an old artist, in California, whom he didn't remember too clearly. It said, "Dear Mr. Kreisler, you were good enough to lend me a hundred dollars when I was broke thirty years ago. Knowing you are



Left: Trio in New York, with Jean Gerardy, cellist (middle), and Josef Hofmann, piano (1902). Above: Joint appearance in Beethoven's Triple Concerto with Harold Bauer, piano, and Pablo Casals, under direction of Walter Damrosch (seated). New York, 1917.

retired and need money, I send you back these hundred dollars which helped me very much. . . ."

Of course Kreisler did not need money, but some newspaper had been nicely inventive and concerned about his retirement. I never heard Kreisler be unjust, or have pleasure in criticizing someone. Intellect, love, modesty, tremendous knowledge, and an immense heart—that was Kreisler for me.

By YEHUDI MENUHIN

BOMBAY, INDIA.

**I**T WAS through his recording of "Liebesleid," which cast a spell upon my childhood, that Kreisler first came into my life. His particular qualities of tenderness, rhythmic lilt, the human speaking sound matched by its lively accented incisions, spoke a universal language that was as understandable to a small boy of five (in 1921) as to the whole of mankind. This was his unique genius.

I longed to be able to express myself like him or to penetrate his secret world. However, when by the time I was eight my parents took me to hear him at the Civic Auditorium in San Francisco (1924) I was no nearer my goal. For although we were all three entranced by his lovely playing of Mendelssohn's concerto, my parents, who never pushed me and found no intermediary to effect the introduction after the concert, took me home.

I did not meet him until five years later in Berlin. In his typically generous way he came backstage to see me at my debut there with Bruno Walter. It was there I heard him play the Beethoven concerto and now, encouraged by his friendliness toward us, we went backstage to thank him for his beautiful performance.

I was better prepared than I had been five years before in San Francisco to fathom those inner depths which colored even his most carefree notes.

Unlike so many of a child's images, which shatter in the presence of reality, his presence only etched mine all the more sharply and clearly.

He led in a creative way. He knew, as did so many of his background both older and younger than himself, like Paderewski, Jacques Thibaud, and today Artur Rubinstein, how to "savourer le moment."



With wife Harriet, in New York, in the Thirties.

As the years went by I learned to understand the origin of these very human values, his typically Austrian zest for everything that life has to offer, as well as the profound musicality and training coming from the same source.

How often did he warn me above all not to practice too much, not to destroy by slogging that most precious gift of all: to ignite one's self and one's audience in an act of spontaneous combustion.

His wide interests apart from his music, in which he was equally gifted as composer and pianist, served as the raw material, the fuel which fed the fires of his art.

Years after he stopped playing he remained interested in all that had gone to make up his life, from the most absorbed and romantic to the most mundane. "What are the prices of London concert tickets today?" he would ask me.

Or, as upon that riotous occasion when, joined by our wives Diana and Harriet, he and Jacques Thibaud outvied each other with reminiscences of their early and frivolous escapades all over the world, and as the evening advanced sailed nearer and nearer the wind until finally Harriet called a halt.

I was quite accidentally involved in the revelation of what was probably his greatest prank. Olin Downes asked me to give one concert in the series to which he acted as compere in the Brooklyn Academy of Music. This was in the early 1930s; in deliberating about the program he suggested that I begin by the much-played Praeludium and Allegro of Pugnani arranged by Kreisler. As it was Olin Downes's duty to speak about the particular works of the program, explaining their background to the public, he went to a great deal of trouble to discover the original Pugnani manuscript. Having combed the libraries of New York and the Library of Congress in Washington with no success, he finally cabled Fritz Kreisler in desperation to help him find the Urtext. It was this that evoked the famous wired answer in which Kreisler admitted that there was no use looking any further in the files of Pugnani for this manuscript, as it was none other than his own composition.

No reminiscences of Kreisler would be complete without reference to his inseparable life companion, Harriet. Between them there existed a devotion which was without doubt the strongest single thread in his life. I remember his saying, when once our paths crossed on tour, "Life is empty and desolate without Harriet. I cannot bear being separated from her."

By NATHAN MILSTEIN

STILLWATER, OKLA.

**A**S A BOY in Russia there were two musical names which meant more to me than any others—Chaliapin and Kreisler. From records, of course, for while we had a fine opera in Odessa where I lived, I did not hear Chaliapin until I was taken to St. Petersburg to study with Auer. I did not hear Kreisler until much later in Paris, but always his was the name of a violinist who was above and beyond all others, as the Pope in the Catholic world.

More than anything else I would describe his art as hypnotic. To see him stand there quietly and bring sounds from the instrument unlike anything anybody else produced was to feel what is to me the unique power of the interpreter—to appeal directly, as an individual, to the individual listener. I heard him first in Paris in 1926, but I did not meet him until 1931. I was invited to visit him during the interval. He had just played Bruch, with piano—hypnotically. When I left the room, someone said to me, "You kissed his hand." "No," I said. "That is impossible. I wouldn't do