

Nathan Milstein (1904 -1992) was a Ukrainian-born American virtuoso violinist. Widely considered one of the finest violinists of the 20th century, Milstein was known for his interpretations of Bach's solo violin works and for works from the Romantic period. He was also known for his long career: he performed at a high level into his mid-80s, retiring only after suffering a broken hand.

Milstein was born in Odessa, then part of the Russian Empire, the fourth child of seven, to a middle-class Jewish family with virtually no musical background. It was a concert by the 11-year-old Jascha Heifetz that inspired his parents to make a violinist out of Milstein. He started violin studies with the eminent pedagogue Pyotr Stolyarsky, also the teacher of David Oistrakh. When Milstein was 11, Leopold Auer invited him to become one of his students at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Milstein may in fact have been the last of the great Russian violinists to have had personal contact with Auer. He also studied with Eugène Ysaÿe in Belgium.

Milstein met Vladimir Horowitz in 1921 when he played a recital in Kiev. Milstein and Horowitz performed together throughout the Soviet Union and struck up a lifelong friendship. In 1925, they went on a concert tour of Western Europe together. Milstein made his American debut in 1929 with Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. He eventually settled in New York and became an American citizen. He toured repeatedly throughout Europe, maintaining residences in London and Paris.

A transcriber and composer, Milstein arranged many works for violin and wrote his own cadenzas for many concertos. He was obsessed with articulating each note perfectly and would often spend long periods of time working out fingerings which would make passages sound more articulated.

A recital he gave in Stockholm in July 1986 proved to be his final performance. It was recorded in its entirety, and shows the remarkable condition of his technique at age 82. A fall shortly afterwards in which he severely broke his left hand ended his career. He died of a heart attack in London on December 21, 1992, 23 days before his 89th birthday.
(Notes adapted from Wikipedia)

Producer's Note

This volume is the first of three which will reissue all of Nathan Milstein's published 78 rpm solo recordings for American Columbia. Although his concerto recordings from this period have appeared often on LP and CD, none of these solo discs, made between 1935 and 1945, have ever seen an "official" re-release by Columbia or its successor, Sony, and neither have they been presented before in their entirety elsewhere.

Milstein had made a few test recordings for HMV in 1932, which remained unissued on 78s when he was not signed to the label. Three years later, he began an association with American Columbia which lasted until 1947, although his last sides remained unissued when he began recording for RCA Victor in 1949. He would later record for Capitol, Angel/EMI and Deutsche Grammophon, with his final sessions being held in 1975.

This inaugural release focuses mainly on works from the Baroque period (Nardini being more of a transitional figure between the Baroque and Classical eras) which, except for the Bach items, are presented in piano-accompanied arrangements made in the 19th and 20th centuries. Bach and the works of Italian Baroque composers were cornerstones of Milstein's repertoire, and he re-recorded them often during his long career. The Bach Partita included here was his earliest published recording, and it is fitting that his final recital 51 years later concluded with its Chaconne.

Mark Obert-Thorn



milstein

the american columbia solo recordings - volume 1



1. J. S. BACH Adagio

from Sonata No. 1 in G minor, BWV 1001 (4:27)
Recorded 21 February 1936 · Matrix: XCO 18475-4
First issued on Columbia 68477-D in album X-61

J. S. BACH Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004

2. 1st mvt. - Allemande (2:07)
 3. 2nd mvt. - Courante (1:49)
 4. 3rd mvt. - Sarabande (2:19)
 5. 4th mvt. - Gigue (1:41)
 6. 5th mvt. - Chaconne (13:46)
- Recorded 27 & 30 December 1935 · Matrices: XCO 18452-3, 18453-1, 18460-2, 18461-2 & 18462-3 · First issued on Columbia 68814/16-D in Set 276

7. VITALI (arr. Charlier) Chaconne (10:49)

Recorded 31 December 1935 · Matrices: XCO 18464-1, 18465-1 & 18466-3
First issued on Columbia 68476/7 in album X-61

VIVALDI (arr. David) Sonata in A major, Op. 2, No. 2, RV31

8. 1st Mvt. - Preludio: Presto (0:29)
 9. 2nd Mvt. - Capriccio: Presto (0:27)
 10. 3rd Mvt. - Corrente: Allegro (1:33)
 11. 4th Mvt. - Adagio (1:05)
 12. 5th Mvt. - Giga: Allegro vivace (2:00)
- Recorded 20 April 1936 · Matrices: CO 19064/5 · First issued on Columbia 17070-D

Nathan Milstein, violin

Leopold Mittmann, piano (Tracks 7 - 24)

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn
Special thanks to Nathan Brown, Charles Niss and the Yale Collection of Historical Sound Recordings (Mark Bailey, director) for providing source material.
All recordings made in the Columbia Studios, New York City

Total Timing: 73:51

VIVALDI (arr. Respighi) Sonata in D major, Op. 2, No. 11, RV9

13. 1st Mvt. - Moderato (1:55)
 14. 2nd Mvt. - Allegro moderato (2:27)
 15. 3rd Mvt. - Largo (1:51)
 16. 4th Mvt. - Vivace (2:07)
- Recorded 21 February 1936 · Matrices: XCO 18704-1 & 18705-3
First issued on Columbia 68478-D

TARTINI (arr. Kreisler) Sonata in G minor, "The Devil's Trill"

17. 1st Mvt. - Larghetto (2:43)
 18. 2nd Mvt. - Allegro energico (3:00)
 19. 3rd Mvt. - Grave - Allegro assai (5:44)
 20. Cadenza - Adagio (2:38)
- Recorded 31 January, 1 February and 25 April 1938 · Matrices: XCO 22347-2, 22348-2, 22349-1 & 22350-5 · First issued on Columbia 69196/7-D in album X-98

21. NARDINI (arr. David) Larghetto

from Sonata No. 2 in D major (4:15)
Recorded 31 January 1938 · Matrix: XCO 22346-1 · First issued on Columbia 69179-D

PERGOLESI (arr. Longo) Sonata No. 12 in E major

22. 1st Mvt. - Allegro (1:43)
 23. 2nd Mvt. - Adagio (1:36)
 24. 3rd Mvt. - Presto (1:21)
- Recorded 29 March 1937 · Matrix: XCO 20895-1 · First issued on Columbia 69179-D