

THE EARLY YEARS

"Let me beg all my readers to hear these wonderful boys, and they will arise and call me blessed." So wrote *Triad*, a New Zealand journalist, following the debut concert on ^{Jan 1908} ~~1909~~ in Auckland, of the Cherniavsky Trio: violinist Leo (18) pianist Jan (16) and 'cellist Mischel (15) Collectively and individually these three musicians had stunned this reviewer; who declared that Mischel (publicized as 12 years old) had displayed " a *tour de force* in harmonics which few living 'cellists could have compassed with such perfect clarity, intonation, and purity of tone. *Cet enfant est un ange*." Leo's violin playing, so *Triad* confessed, "swept me off my feet, and swirled me along the flood of his passion whithersoever he would." As for the pianist Jan, "if this boy learns as much in the next decennial as he has in the last, he will rank with the world's greatest pianists." As an ensemble, the Cherniavsky Trio was "likely to please not only the many, but also the select few" -by which the writer presumably meant their musically sophisticated peers - and critics.

Three months earlier the Cherniavsky Trio had so thrilled audiences in Australia that in April 1909 they returned. After giving eight concerts within a week in Sydney, they followed the regular concert making circuit that stretched right up to Kalgoorlie, the thriving gold mining in North Western Australia. Unlike other visiting artists of international repute (such as with some justification they considered themselves) they were prepared to perform at every town on that circuit. This policy made them extremely popular throughout the country, for

what artists of their stature would bother to perform in such agricultural communities as Tamworth or Armidale, where they were so memorably appreciated? (This policy, however, was somewhat erratic; according to Mischel's casual recollection many years later, on occasion he would, as soon as the train made any scheduled stop, rush off to find out the ticket sales for their advertised concert. If the sales were negligible, the Trio would simply 'skip town' and continue on its way.)

These three wunderkind were familiar enough with success. They had come from London to Australia via South Africa where they gave 86 concerts (14 in Johannesburg alone), a phenomenal total given that they were upon their arrival they were unknown in South Africa. Earlier reports of their concerts in Cape Town however, no doubt paved the way to the excitement their performances aroused in Johannesburg. According to a Cape Town newspaper of May 12 1908 the concert hall "was packed from end to end by a swaying, palpitating, applauding sea of human beings." Since their flight from Russia some four years earlier, the Chemiavsky brothers had come a long way.

They were not, however, destined to go much further. Even though as an entity the Trio existed for over 30 years (a documented fact that deserves a place in The Guinness Book of Records) it was only for the first ten years or so that the three brothers' success was indisputable, intense. - and profitable. In the wake of the many social and cultural changes following World War 1, not to mention changes in the brothers' personal lives, the trio projected an altogether different, fading, image, difficult as this image may have been for them to

recognize. Thus, a number of inter related factors together prevented the Trio from passing beyond the peculiar nature of its early success; nor, as individual artists would any one of the brothers ever enjoy an international reputation.

Born during the last decade of the 19th century in different towns of Southern Ukraine, the three boys were the sons of Avram and Rosa Cherniavsky. At the time of a family photo dated 1901, their two elder sisters, Sonia and Claritta, were young adults; their elder brother, Gregor, a sturdy adolescent. In a sense, therefore, the three boys were the first of a 'second' family for Avrum and Rosa Cherniavsky. The youngest in this family photo is Alex, barely more than a child. Yet to be born were Manya and Elza - the former was a fine 'cellist who at the age of 12 and with her brother Alex, a naturally gifted pianist, very actively contributed to the family welfare Throughout her life she derived great pleasure and satisfaction from music and for some years played the 'cello professionally. She also had a quality voice. Elza was a gifted violinist who, however, abandoned music at the earliest opportunity.

Each of these nine children was, virtually from birth, assigned a musical instrument; by their father. His only real success was with the Trio of engaging brothers, although Gregor, who was a prized violin student of the celebrated pedagogue Leopold Auer, was always remembered (for he died young) as the most talented of the entire family. In later years Alex occasionally joined the Trio as accompanist for Mischel and Leo, and subsequently became South Africa's leading concert agent. Each one of these children was genuinely gifted- but only Gregor was, presumably for financial reasons, able to pursue formal musical studies for more than a few months at a time.. Avrum himself, so family tradition held, could play any instrument of the orchestra; if so, his gifts must have been

extraordinary, to judge by the grossness of his hands in a later photograph. According to his obituary notice (in 1935) he had been conductor of the Moscow Opera Orchestra, a claim that has yet to be verified.

When Leo was born in 1890, Avrum Cherniavsky was a *badchen* - a violinist who, part musician, part jester, played (for a pittance) at Jewish weddings, bar mitzvahs, funerals. He had also organized and conducted a so called "children's orchestra," which played Sunday concerts in the local park of any town he happened to be living in. The grandfather of the internationally acclaimed violinist Mischa Elman, a boyhood playmate and life long friend of the Cherniavskys, was also a *badchem*.

In Russia, the cultural roots, musical traditions and social status of Mischa Elman and "The Boys" were virtually identical. The role that these influences played in Elman's early years has been thoroughly considered by the New York Times music critic Allan Kozinn in **Mischa Elman and the Romantic Style**., By contrast, very little is known concerning "The Boys" early years; which is why Elman's documented background is so relevant in any attempt to provide a context to The Boys' early years. Of course, the parallelism only runs until, at the age of 12, Mischa Elman made a sensational debut in Berlin, thereby launching a career very different from The Boys' since it led to an enduring international fame that culminated in a 50th anniversary concert in New York's Carnegie Hall.

In recounting Mischa Elman's early years Allan Kazinn thoroughly discusses the status and heritage of the *badchen*, a key figure in orthodox Jewish culture. He points out that in Russian Jewish society "the musician was appreciated as an artisan of sorts, yet he occupied a low place in the social order" - unless he was like Mischa Elman's great grandfather Josef,

who became a *badchen* - in his years of retirement. Previously, he had been a Talmud scholar and a tallis-maker - a weaver of prayer shawls- occupations that gave him status amongst other scholars and, from a musical point of view, direct contact with cantors. With such a background he could, as a *badchen*, afford in his retirement to remain active -- and respected - in his community. As a young man Josef's son (Mischa Elman's grandfather) followed in his father's footsteps only to discover that, much as his music making was appreciated, he was otherwise socially ignored - regarded as little more than an impoverished artisan. In an attempt to regain his family's social status, he insisted that his son Saul pursue religious studies and have a business, rather than follow the family tradition.. Saul therefore eked out a livelihood in Shpola, best described as either a large village or a small town , part of the Countess Urusovva's huge estate in Ukraine, selling hay by the bag and giving Hebrew lessons (He taught the Cherniavsky boys the rudiments of Judaism - no doubt gratis) He abandoned everything, however when, reassured that the musical gifts of his five year old son Mischa were unusual, he decided to devote himself to Mischa's musical future, thereby vicariously satisfying his own musical aspirations..

He did not reach that decision on his own. As it happened, in Shpola, Kozinn explains, there was a little *ad hoc* orchestra that gave concerts in the parks and performed at weddings, led by a conservatory trained conductor who was a local celebrity. It was obvious to Saul that this was the man to judge Mischa's talent, so one day he turned up at an orchestra rehearsal, Mischa and his miniature violin in tow, and approached the conductor. As Saul recalled that encounter in his Memoirs, the musician was uninterested in hearing the child, and he told Saul that the ability to play a couple of simple tunes didn't necessarily

signify a great talent. The true test of talent and musicality, he said, was an ability to play with accompaniment; whereupon Saul suggested that the orchestra might accompany his son in a short selection to complete the audition. Saul does not tell us what the orchestra and Mischa played but he reports the conductor was impressed with the child's ability to keep up with the ensemble, unflustered by the circumstances. "Gentlemen," he told the players "I must admit the child is a wonder. For the next months, he took the child under his wing, and taught him the rudiments of notation - harshly, it seems, for Elman later recalled that failure to recognize the notes resulted in a spanking.

Although he is not identified by name in the foregoing account (a paraphrase of a memorandum, no longer extant, recording Mischa Elman's earliest recollections) the "conservatory trained conductor" was Avrum Cherniavsky. That Mischa Elman was indeed a member of "Father's orchestra" is a known fact, interestingly confirmed by two passing comments in this account. The first of these comments is that "the true test of talent and musicality was an ability to play with accompaniment" - this was exactly the test that Avrum, in forming the Cherniavsky Trio, would put into practice with his own sons. The second comment is that "Elman recalled that failure to recognize notes resulted in a spanking." That Avrum declared 'the child is a wonder' is probably a figment of Saul Elman's blind pride in his remarkably gifted son whom he *knew* (belief fell far short of his convictions) was, Messiah like, God's musical gift to mankind. Avrum was so cruelly scant in his praise of his own children that it is unlikely he would lavish praise on a potential rival.

Avrum Cherniavsky's approach to teaching was indeed primitive and brutal, effective but fatally flawed. While he trained (the term is appropriate) his

three enormously gifted sons, he did not attempt to teach them the fundamentals of a musical education, probably because, together with an impatience with such basics, he was determined to have them play their assigned instrument - in his "Children's Orchestra." (Much to his delight, Jan was initially assigned the drums; years later and under very different circumstances he joyfully returned to this instrument at a memorable Christmas party) Later on, when he had recognized their unusual musicality Avrum no doubt focused on facility of technique, so as to qualify them for 'the stage.' This impatience with fundamentals is well illustrated by the story that when asked by Eugene Ysaye, with Leopold Auer the leading violin teacher of the age (although of a different school) to play the common chord of C, Leo was stumped. However, since Leopold Auer remarked that Mischa Elman's bowing and fingering were weak, Leo was surely not the only prodigy whose initial studies were deficient in this way.)

Family recollections (quite apart from Elman's) give all too clear an idea of Avrum Cherniavsky's methods. In his absence his wife Rosa was charged with noting any extended silence during an assigned practice time. On his return Avrum would punish any reported silence with a slap on the face or a spanking. In moments of impatience during her music lesson, so his daughter Manya recalled, he would move toward a whip that stood in the corner. "He never touched it, but he would go toward it," Manya said - probably true enough, at least in her case. According to Alex - recollecting later years in London for he was only born in 1898 - "home was like a conservatory, with Papa jumping from child to child shouting 'wrong finger' here, 'wrong note' there." Jan said that he had to practice at 4 a.m. in order to accommodate the family schedule. And after the three brothers had started to perform in public, Avrum would deliberately deflate his son's egos, constantly dismissing the praise of audiences with "Don't

believe a word they tell you, because you're not that good." Even his grand daughter Louise Matelson recollects that in his old age, "he would strike me over the fingers with a ruler when I made a mistake during my violin lessons with him." Little wonder that in later years Leo publicly described him as "tyrannical."

While part of that tyranny may be attributed to his nature - he "was stern unforgiving and dominating - and never smiled" - much may be attributed to his struggle to provide for his family. Circumstances during these early years evidently required him to constantly move from town to town in search of work (this probably explains why each of the three boys was born in a different town of Southern Ukraine) - all too often taking in payment for his services a meal for his starving and, it must have seemed, ever increasing family..

Despite his poverty, Avrum had one great asset: - his wife. Rosa Magaziner was the eldest daughter of a Rabbi who was also some kind of a business man in Bedichev (the birth place of Jan) a small centre for grain and cattle, of some 75,000 residents, of which no less than 80% were Jews. According to *Baedeker 1914*, Bedichev had a railway station hotel (rooms from 3/4 -3 rubles) as well as a hotel in the town centre where rooms were let out for 40 copeks an hour. A Carmelite Convent had been established in Bedichev in 1627, but was suppressed in 1864. With her boundless sense of humour and good nature, so Manya remarked, Rosa was the mainstay of the family, Avrum its driving force. An old photo of a somewhat complacent Rosa, seated and surrounded by three equally complacent sisters, all young adults, projects a definite air of respectability. Connection to this respectability probably improved Avrum's otherwise lowly position as a poverty stricken *badchen*.

Little more is known of the Magaziner family, other than one of Rosa's sisters ended up in South Africa, where her husband ran some kind of a store catering to gold miners. Possibly a brother also moved to South Africa because,

in the recollection of Sasha Magaziner, now a resident of London and an acknowledged cousin of the Cherniavskys, during his childhood the Cherniavsky "boys" would gather at his parents' home in Johannesburg and happily pass the evening "making music", mostly traditional Jewish or "gypsy" folk, thereby acknowledging, at least en famille, the force of their cultural heritage.

"The Boys" very rarely spoke - and then only indirectly - of the family's status during the very early years in Russia., probably because memories of their poverty were too painful. Mischel once remarked that his uncanny ability to catch insects in mid air originated in his need, as a child, to catch lice in his hair. Their sister Manya was less reticent when during an interview with a journalist in 1953 she remarked, her earliest memories in mind, "My Mother was a wonderful cook, she kept us all in good health., but my childhood was thrown away. We were never allowed to have toys - our parents thought that toys detracted from our music. We sometimes practiced 8 - 10 hours day, so we never even saw the light of day."

Music, it seems, was the only thing that Avrum knew anything about or, perhaps more to the point, passionately cared about, as he focused on his 'children's orchestra' and the natural talents that he recognized in his own family. In later years memories of participating in "Father's Orchestra" seem to have been regarded by his family as an unforgettable experience possibly because of its leader's tyrannical demands. - Alex later claimed to "treasure some memories of Odessa. One of them, is a picture of the 'children's orchestra' started by my father largely to give concerts in the Alexander Park of that city. Most of the 'children' were clearly over 21, and at least a couple were family men but they claimed quite logically that they were also 'children' and therefore entitled to be in the orchestra." A faded photograph of the Orchestra - band would be a better term - shows that the members, dressed in lace collars and patent-leather

pumps, ranged from the very young to the adolescent and beyond

Avrum must have launched this project (he was born in the mid 1850's) in the early 1880's because Serge Koussevitsky (1874-1951) whose international career as an orchestral conductor was even more illustrious than Mischa Elman's, is known to have been a member - as a bass player. In 1888 Koussevitzsky attended the Moscow Philharmonic Music School, joined the bass section of the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra in 1894 and began giving solo recitals two years later. If indeed Avrum was both 'conservatory trained' and at one time conductor of the Moscow Opera Orchestra it would seem he recommended the young bassist to his Alma Mater. Koussevitsky, who took care to marry a tea merchant's daughter, spent most of his career as conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. His most celebrated protege was Leonard Bernstein.

In 1897, some five years before the Cherniavsky brothers performed in public as an ensemble Leo joined (after six months of "study,") his Father's Orchestra, stationed at that time in Dneiperetovek, a growing industrial city in Ukraine. He was seven years old. Three years later he and his eight year old brother Jan, by this time a pianist, made their first public appearance followed, so it was said, by a 'tour' of Ukraine - very probably to sites where, thanks to their father's industry the family name was known to the Jewish community. The duo very probably attracted attention for their technical abilities, musicality and, no doubt, their stage presence which became so marked a trait.

Before this tour took place, it seems probable enough that Leopold Auer, Professor of Violin at the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music, had heard Avrum's sons' music making. (For all we know, he may already have been long acquainted with Avrum Cherniavsky, whose oldest son Gregor was one of Auer's favourite students in pre World War 1 Russia.) In any case, when told that Mischel had started playing the violin at four years of age, Auer objected - "You

journalists of very notable gifts. As for the lower classes, Babel represents them as living freely and heartily. In their ghetto, the Moldavanka, they were far more conditioned by their economic circumstances than by their religious ties."

In the summer of 1897 Saul Elman had moved with his son Mischa to Odessa in order to enroll Mischa in the Imperial Academy of Music. The Elmans remained in Odessa until the end of 1902, when Mischa was accepted by the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Presumably, therefore (exact dating is impossible) the Cherniavsky family moved to Odessa at about the same time and circumstances permitting, with the same purpose in mind. The fact that during these years in Odessa Mischa would play leap frog with the Cherniavsky brothers suggests a certain intimacy existed between the boys - and for that matter the fathers, even if Saul Elman would never allow that any other violinist approached his son's gifts.

More is claimed of these years than is known for sure. Leo, for example, is said to have performed in Odessa at the age of 10 or so - referred to some years later as "an event still fresh in the memory of music lovers in Odessa." Jan had his first 'formal' lessons in Odessa from a certain Mme. Goldweisser. Mme. Goldweisser may have been part of a small music school which a Mrs. Puritz, a wealthy widow, had established for talented but poor children - amongst whom - before he was admitted to the Academy - was Mischa Elman. And, of course, there is the eye striking cartoon of the three brothers that appeared in an Odessa paper following their debut performance in that city. That performance may well have been part of an evening audition, during which Mischa Elman participated in a piano trio. Leopold Auer, who is known to have been in Odessa on a kind of talent search during the winter of 1901-2 was in the audience.

An unusual account, representing a prototype of Avrum Cherniavsky's occupation as a violin teacher in Odessa is in Isaac Babel's short story,

"Awakening." The relevant point of this story is that Babel was repelled by his parents' delusion that, given violin lessons by Mr. Zagursky at a special rate of a rouble a lesson, he would be a second Mischa Elman, an icon for all parents resident in the Moldavanka: (and, later on, for that entire generation) As Babel explains,

When a lad was four or five, his mother took the punny creature to Zagursky's. Mr. Zagursky ran a factory of infant prodigies, a factory of Jewish dwarfs in lace collars and patent leather pumps. He hunted them out of the slums of the Moldavanka, in the evil smelling courtyards of the old market. Mr. Zagursky charted the first course, then the children were shipped to professor Auer in St. Petersburg. A wonderful harmony dwelt in the souls of those wizened creatures with their swollen blue hands. They became famous virtuosi. My father decided that I should emulate them. Though I had, as a matter of fact, passed the age limit set for infant prodigies, being now in my fourteenth year, my shortness and lack of strength made it possible to pass me off as an eight year old. Herein lay father's hope.

In the following paragraph Babel provides a glimpse of "Zagursky" at work as an unnamed student, exhausted if not terrorized, emerges from his studio:

The door to the sanctum would open, and from Mr. Zagursky's study there would stagger big headed, freckled children with necks as thin as flower stalks and an epileptic flush on their cheeks. The door would bang to, swallowing up the next dwarf. Behind the wall, straining his throat, the teacher sang and waved his baton. He had ginger curls with and legs, and sported a big bow tie. Manager of a monstrous lottery, he populated the Moldavenka and the dark culs-de-sac of the Old market with the ghosts of pizzicato and cantilena. Afterwards Professo Auer lent these strains a diabolical brilliance.

The flip side of the project, which the rebellious Isaac soon enough abandoned, was that it allowed him to recognize his true vocation as a writer. Since Isaac Babel and his parents only moved to Odessa in 1905 the portrait of Zagursky is best taken as generic, or at least not directly based on Avrum.

For Mischa Elman an, the upshot of the move to Odessa was, in accordance with Babel's story, admission to the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

Clearly, this was far from unexpected, even though in Odessa Elman apparently studied at Odessa's Academy of Music rather than with Avrum:. In 1902 Pablo Sarasate, an eminent violinist of the day had, after auditioning Mischa, boldly declared "I am in a position to testify that he is the possessor of great talent. If he succeeds in taking up his studies in Paris, Berlin, or St. Petersburg he will, within a few years be the pride of Europe."

So far as is known no such recommendation was given the Cherniavsky brothers, either because it was not sought or, for that matter, deserved. Avrum was either forced to turn to his sons as an immediate source of income, or no reputable pedagogue was willing to recommend collectively three young musicians of certain but unequal talent, no matter how compelling they may have been as an ensemble. This may explain the enthusiastic but carefully non committal comments that Eugene Ysaye, with Leopold Auer the pre eminent violin teacher of the day, wrote of the Cherniavsky Brothers some five years later: "Having had the pleasure of hearing these boys as virtuosi and in musique de chambre, I am happy to affirm never in my life have I heard children so gifted in every respect . I am convinced they will go very far and will be artists of the first rank in the near future."

Thus, as Mischa prepared for the Conservatory, the Cherniavsky Brothers prepared to go on tour. In all probability the itinerary was similar to Mischa Elman's which, so Allan Kozinn states "began with a tryout in Nicholaev, a town less than 40 miles northeast of Odessa, and the only town they could reach on the three rubles in their budget. " That concert, arranged with the help of the local music school, reportedly netted Saul Elman 400 rubles.. Two weeks later, and prior to moving to St. Petersburg to study with Leopold Auer, Mischa followed a known itinerary that included the town of Berditchev - the birth place of Jan and, more relevently, the home town of the Magaziner family.

The "Cherniavsky brothers" are known to have also played in Beditchev because it was there, so a vague legend runs, that their performance caught the attention of Nathan Schwartz, a 'magician' allegedly a member of a visiting circus. This mysterious personage evidently offered to 'manage' them. This offer clearly suggests that their performance was primarily an entertainment. In a sense this is understandable, because during these years musical 'prodigies' were, relatively speaking, a dime a dozen, and, both on and off the stage, the Cherniavsky brothers were always entertaining.. The trick was, of course, to pass beyond this stage and evolve into mature concert artists such as Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifetz and other internationally acclaimed concert artists of the future. Failure to grow out of this status meant ultimate obscurity - or at best a music hall career, all too, often short lived. Determined to avoid such a fate for his inherently musical sons, both for their own sake as much as (in a financial sense) for his, Avrum Cherniavsky refused this offer just as, by force of circumstances, greed, or short sightedness, he would deny his sons the benefit of any meaningful period of formal studies. In the short run the strategem paid off handsomely. In the long run it proved costly.

In the meantime, however, the boys' first tour was successful, if only to judge by subsequent opportunities that came their way over the next two years or so. Their itinerary extended beyond the Ukraine into Lithuania, where they played in at least three major cities, Vilna and Vitebsk and, en route, Minsk. Vilna, an important commercial city of some 200,000 Jewish, Lithuanian and Polish residents had, unlike Odessa for example, a long history. Originally a great centre of Pagan worship, in 1323 it was designated capital of Lithuania and, following the introduction of Christianity, little more than 50 years later boasted a cathedral the first of many churches. When he invaded Russia Napoleon made Vilna the strategic centre of the French lines; and on his retreat from Russia he

again visited Vilna - only to be forced to leave in disguise.

The Boys' concert in Vilna probably took place in the Town Theatre, kitty corner to the Nyemetzkaya or 'German' Street,' according to *Baedeker* 'now exclusively occupied by Jews but containing the Lutheran church, built in 1555.' Amongst those in the audience was, so he told Mischel some 20 years later during his son's debut concert in Chicago, the father of Jascha Heifetz. In Vitebsk, so he remarked to Mischel half a century later, Marc Chagall remembered how his family wanted to go to the Cherniavsky concert but could not afford the price of admission. In Minsk, The Boys posed for an eye-catching (and extant) photograph

Although nothing is factually recorded regarding the financial return of this tour, a some passing remarks of Josef Lhevinne (1874- 1950?) , originally a concert pianist but for the last 40 or so years of his life a towering figure as a piano teacher in New York - provides a possible measure. Invited in 1913 (when he was 39 years old), to comment on "Opportunities for virtuoso students in Russia," he remarked that :

One singular custom obtains in Russia in reference to concerts.

The pianist coming from some other European country is paid more than the local pianist. For instance, although I am Russian by birth, I reside in Germany and receive a higher rate when I play in Russia than does the resident artist. In fact, the rate is often double. The young virtuoso in the early stages of his career receives about 100 roubles an appearance in Russia, while the mature artist receives 800 to 1000. The rouble, while having an exchange value of only 50 cents in United States currency, has a purchasing value of about one dollar in Russia.

(Like Avrum Cherniavsky, Lhevinne's father was a professional musician, playing all instruments except the piano.)

Quite apart from its financial benefits (presumably great enough to support the family for some time, and even cover the costs of leaving Russia) this

tour had encouraging results. Together with, in all probability, the active support of Leopold Auer, it led to the Cherniavsky brothers' visit to St. Petersburg. Since years later Manya vaguely recalled living there as a toddler, the entire family may have followed Avrum and his charges, possibly in the hope that the Boys would join their brother Gregor and their friend Mischa Elman as students at the Conservatory.

Even to get permission to visit St. Petersburg - let alone to live there - was quite an achievement, as Allan Kozinn tells of the difficulties the Elmans encountered. Initially, Saul Elman had rejected the idea of the St. Petersburg Conservatory upon learning that Auer, a Jew, had converted to Russian Orthodoxy as the officially recommended means of avoiding the pernicious anti-Semitism of Vyacheslav Plehve, Minister of the Interior. Auer, however, gave Saul Elman a letter to Lopuchin, the city's Police Chief and one who did not sympathize with Plehve's anti-Semitism. The letter merely requested temporary permission for Mischa Elman, escorted by his father, to attend one term at the Conservatory. At the end of the term Mischa was, thanks to his growing reputation and discrete support from his musical admirers, allowed to continue his studies; Saul, however, had to leave the city and reapply from Odessa. At Auer's suggestion he registered as a student at the Conservatory, only to be denied (much to Auer's indignation) by Plehve. As a last resort the ever sympathetic Lopuchin arranged a musicale to which he invited Plehve and other members of the Czar's cabinet. Plehve openly marveled at Mischa's performance so that when the next morning he saw on his desk Saul Elman's application together with a note explaining he was Mischa's father, he gave in.

The difficulties the Cherniavskys faced were no doubt similar to the relatively detailed account of the Elmans' trials. In his too brief recollections tape recorded a few months before his death, Mischel spoke of Plehve - adding

that he was later on assassinated (as indeed he was in 1904). He also remarked that some unidentified person had given Avrum a letter asking that "something be done for these boys." He also pointed out that as Jews they had to get special permission to travel beyond the "Pale of Settlement" - and that getting this permission indicated the celebrity, if not indeed prestige, that their concerts had already generated. He did not elaborate on these comments, which is why the Elman's experience helps establish the kind of difficulties they encountered.

Dealing with Plehvel was only the tip of a far greater problem - the deep seated anti semitism that, during the latter years of the 19th century had grown increasingly violent. The following passage on "AntiSemitism in Russia" from the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, (1911 edition) speaks for itself"

The Jews were cooped up in one huge ghetto [The Pale of Settlement] in the Western Provinces [i.e. Ukraine] "marked out to all their fellow countrymen as aliens, and a pariah caste set apart for special and degrading treatment." (*Persecution of the Jews*, 1891, p.5) Following the emancipation of the Serfs (18--?) landowners were half ruined and peasants were free but penniless; the Jews stepped in as moneylenders and middle men and merchants, to fill an unavoidable void. There is no evidence this was abused, but it was seen as 'exploitation', giving birth to an Anti Jewish movement. Easter 1881 was when the first serious crisis broke out, with Jews accused of using Christian blood for manufacture of their Easter bread ("The Blood Accusation") Within a few weeks the whole of Western Russia from the Black Sea to the Baltic, was smoking with the ruins of Jewish homes. Very hard hit were Odessa and Kiev.

In 1898 the Russian Social Democratic Federation with their Arbeiter Bund became very active favoring trade unions. The Government enforced prosecution laws, so that by 1901 the 'Bund' of 30,000 defined itself as political and revolutionary. The revolution was denounced as a Jewish conspiracy by Plehvel, who organised the "League of True Russians, designed to spread anti semitism. In 1903 this culminated in the Kishinev pogrom and thence to wholesale butchery Odessa and Bielostock, October 1905.

The Elmans and, there is little reason to doubt, the Cherniavsky families were

personally familiar with the horror of the pogroms - those incidents of anti-Semitism that so deeply scar the social history of Russia and in particular of Ukraine. According to Saul Elman, as news of his orchestral trial with the ad hoc orchestra of Shpola had spread, Mischa had been invited, shortly after Easter, to play for the Countess of Urusova. The invitation was issued only days after, as Allan Kozinn explains,:

the Jews of Shpola had endured the ravages of a fierce, anti-Semitic pogrom. Interestingly, Saul Elman described this particular horror with cinematic but entirely impersonal detail. The town's wounds were not yet healed; the pillage homes still remained in their wrecked state; the ugly gaps in the wall, shattered windows and doors served as reminders of days of horror. Still fresh in our minds were the images of blood stained lifeless forms of our martyrs as they lay butchered in the streets. The atmosphere was stifling.

Supplementing this adult's account, are Mischa Elman's childhood memories of the same incident, recalled many years later:

I remember it was a wintry day, in the afternoon. My father used to go to pupils' houses {such as the Chemiavskys'?'} so he wasn't home. All of a sudden we heard screams and the sound of stones on windows and doors. And I remember Mother saying 'I hope Father will manage to come home.' My father did get home, and when he came in they locked the doors. They darkened the house with curtains, put out the kerosene lamps, and we went in the cellar. We stayed there for four nights. I suppose we had something to eat. Why did it happen? When the peasants got drunk, they said, 'Let's beat the Jews,' and the police did not control them. I'm not so sure anyone got killed. They damaged houses.

Some ten years later, while on board the *Aruba* en route to India, Leo had " a long and interesting conversation" with a fellow passenger - a future Prime Minister of England - on the status of the Jews in Russia. Even if Leo did not have the Shpola pogrom in mind during his discourse, he undoubtedly spoke with informed feeling if not personal experience.. Even more likely, Leo had in mind the Pogrom of Kishinev, a relatively peaceful town, that took place in the winter of 1903 (when the family was in all probability living in St. Petersburg.) and that,

so it was said somewhat controversially, the reactionary Viacheslav Plehve had directly sponsored. This accusation was so widely believed that privately printed articles supporting the charge were widely distributed. When the *London Times* ran a lengthy story on this particular pogrom, reporting that that 47 Jews were slaughtered, 424 wounded, 700 houses burned, and 600 shops looted, the matter became an international issue. While latter day apologists maintain that Plehvel had no prior knowledge of this outbreak and that he considered his prime responsibility was to maintain order, none claimed he was a friend of Jews. In 1902, the year of his appointment as Minister of the Interior, he had written "There is no revolutionary movement in Russia, there are only Jews, who are the enemies of the Government." Plehvel's assassination in 1904 did not stop pogroms. Between October-December 1906 (by this time all but Gregor had fled to Vienna) over 600 pogroms occurred in Russia - virtually all of them in the Pale of Settlement.

Mischel's recollections of the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music revolved around two particular incidents. The first was that the three brothers, together with their older sibling Gregor, played the "Mozart Quintette" there. (He did not identify the violist - perhaps they did without one.) The second, confirmed by Jan in an interview with the *Vancouver Province* in 1956, was that after little Mischel had played some solo works for the Conservatory audience, the Conservatory's celebrated Professor of cello, Wersbilowitch, picked him up. put him on his shoulders, and then walked around proclaiming the little boy's genius. While there is no reason to doubt this story, Wersbilowitch was known as a heavy drinker, so one must wonder whether it was Mischel's genius or a bottle of vodka -possibly a mixture of both - that promoted this incident.

Whatever the motive for moving to St. Petersburg little seems, at least directly, to have benefited the Cherniavsky Boys.. This was in stark contrast to

the attention Mischa Elman attracted . According to Saul Elman, Leopold Auer arranged for Mischa to perform at dinner parties of wealthy music loving patrons and when newspaper reports of one such evening appeared, Saul Elman claimed in his Memoirs that "Without a single exception, the St. Petersburg critics agreed that Mischa was the greatest child marvel the world had ever known." Of course, Auer had accepted Mischa as his own student - as he had, previously, he accepted Gregor Cherniavsky. However much he may have encouraged or recognized the Cherniavsky Boys, he certainly would not have championed Leo, the violinist of the group, if only because Mischel was so much more naturally gifted, and Jan so much more musically intelligent. Leo was a fine violinist, sharing many of the essential qualities of his brothers but as time went by his talents as manager and organiser of the ensemble adversely affected his violin playing.

Virtually nothing has, as yet, been uncovered as regards Gregor's years (believed to have been six) as Auer's student. As a photograph proves, he did indeed win a highly coveted Medal - in competition, let it be noted, with fellow students such as Effrem Zimbalist and Toaster Seidel, both of whom had distinguished (if not as great as Elman's) careers as concert violinists. According to his brother in law, Gregor was very handsome, spoke Russian "as it is spoken in St. Petersburg," and, most important of all as a musician, "had the tone of an angel." It also seems that at this time at least, Avrum Cherniavsky made little attempt to 'organise' Gregor's future. When the family finally moved to Vienna in 1904/5, Gregor evidently stayed behind to continue his studies with Auer. If or when the relevant archives become available, perhaps further details regarding Gregor's years with Auer may emerge.

While both the purpose and the duration of the family move to St. Petersburg remain unclear, the next - and last - recorded move for The Boys

before they left Russia for Vienna was to Lividia, the site of two imperial palaces only a short distance from the fashionable resort of Yalta. It was there, according to later publicity at least, that they performed for the Czar. This is possible, because according to his diary of 1900 and 1902, the Czar appreciated musical evenings. On March 18, 1900, for example, he noted that "A wonderful cellist played for us. It was a French boy, Bazelek by name." [Bazelek has yet to be identified] . In February 1902, "Chaliapin came and gave us moments of delight," while in December of the same year his diary records "We listened to the young Czech violinist, Kubleik, who played incredibly complicated music and showed him self a real virtuoso." The Czar's diary for 1903/4 is not as yet accessible.

More probably, however, the 'command' performance was for members of the Court - such as the Czar's uncles, Grand Dukes Constantine and Nicholai. According to Jan, who in his old age ~~re~~ recalled seeing the Czar's children playing in the park, the performance took place, appropriately enough, on St. Cecilia's Day (November ---). However, this may be incorrect because the silver napkin ring each received for the performance is engraved "1904 27 January." The real significance, however, of the engagement was that they were Jewish - and few if any Jews had previously performed for the essentially anti-Semitic Court. Even to travel to Yalta for this performance special passes were required.

After this concert the Boys joined the family for a supper of "bread and cheese," so Alex recalled. But, apart from the prestige, the evening paid off. Grand Duke Constantine, the Czar's Uncle and at the time Commander in Chief of the Russian Army and a generous and active patron of the arts, allegedly presented Leo with a fine violin. This is quite possible - after all, some wealthy patron in St. Petersburg had presented Mischa Elman with a violin made by Amati, one of the great Italian violin makers of the 17th century. In any event,

patronage of this sort, together with the support on the Jewish musical community, could do no harm to The Boys' future. The Revolution was more than a decade ahead.

Chapter Two

In October 1904 The Boys traveled to Berlin to make their concert debut outside Russia. Berlin, a minor walled city until 1871 when it was designated the capital of the newly proclaimed German Empire, had within three or four decades become "the greatest purely modern city in Europe." in large part thanks to a remarkably efficient municipal administration. It was also one of the most culturally dynamic - again according to Baedeker 1911 - there were no less than 25 theatres (including one devoted to 'pieces in Jewish dialect') and 8 concert halls. These figures are astonishing, given that barely 20 years earlier, the city had three concert halls and three theatres - for an estimated population of two million which by 1911 had grown to three million.

For The Boys Berlin presented their first real test as aspiring musicians. The city's predominant musical figure was the violinist and pedagogue Joseph Joachim, in 1888 appointed founding head of the Hochschule fur Musik, a position he held until his death in 1907. Joachim's musical pedigree was awesome. Born in 1831, at the age of nine he made his debut in a double violin concerto with none other than Felix Mendelssohn. Concertmaster of Franz Listz' ensemble in Weimar, he was an intimate of Robert and Clara Schumann, and of Johannes Brahms - until his divorce, when Brahms sided with Joachim's wife. In his later years he enjoyed enormous prestige throughout Europe, both as a pedagogue and as leader of his celebrated Quartette. His most prominent student was Leopold Auer, enormously influential Director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory from 1868-1917. At least two of his colleagues, including Professor Altmann, whom the young Artur Rubinstein so revered as his private tutor, reviewed concerts for Berlin's daily newspapers. Little wonder, therefore, that string players, and specifically violinists, regarded a Berlin debut as a critical litmus test for their future careers as concert artists.

One means of placing the Boys' critical reception in Berlin in some sort of perspective is to compare it with that of their friend Mischa Elman, who made his Berlin debut only days earlier. Of course in more than one sense such a comparison is spurious: Elman was a soloist, The Boys were an ensemble. Throughout his performance, all ears were tuned in to Elman's sound and musicianship, whereas The Boys performed both as an ensemble and, briefly, soloists, so that attention was inevitably more dispersed, the reception less concentrated. Besides, Mischa Elman, no doubt already convinced of his Messianic mission, was far more confident than any of The Boys and, no doubt, far better prepared. On the other hand Elman, pudgy and serious looking and prone to moving about in response to his music making, notably lacked The Boys' stage presence - their harmonious vitality, their long hair and (by the standards of the day) sexy attire - traits that as inherent attributes of their music making they would so skilfully flaunt in later years to promote their popular appeal. Notwithstanding these obvious differences, The Boys and Mischa Elman shared, apart from their common heritage, at least two specific attitudes.

Toward the end of his 60 year career Elman, speaking *ex cathedra* as the Grand Old Man of the Romantic Style, discussed his attitudes towards a musical world that had so radically changed from the days of his greatest success. Expressing his disdain for "an overemphasis on the sheer mechanics of performance," Elman explained that the difference between contemporaneous performers and 'the great performers' such as Eugene Ysaye, Enrico Caruso and Ignace Paderewski was that these icons of his youth "gave pleasure to their **audiences. They moved people with their message. To attend one of their recitals was an experience never to be forgotten. Most young musicians perform exceedingly well, but lack imagination and individuality.**" Later he went on to argue that:

The essence of string or vocal surety is the ability to produce good, true, fluent sound. Yet we have all heard performers who could do that without moving us in the least. Musically, they may be good musicians, but they project no message.

The common cause, in such cases, is that such performers lack personality. This mysterious quality, personality, is thought to be the source from which springs meaningful expression - the human power to move human hearts.

If nothing else (because of course The Boys as well as their audiences were of a class very different from that of these 'great performers') these theses illustrate two underlying 'secrets' of The Boys appeal. Wide as that appeal may have been, the musical pleasure they gave to their audiences was nonetheless intense - and amazingly enduring. It was also an essential component of their career as an ensemble. While any artist of the Romantic style placed great weight on audience response ("Platform work makes the artist" Leopold Auer told Mischa Elman's father, "The artist's soul responds fully to the fast beating pulse of a sympathetic audience") as The Boys career evolved so did their dependence on audience response become, together with the pressure to make money, a guiding principle. This inevitably affected their development as serious concert artists. Quite apart from 'the good, true, fluent tones' for which Mischel in particular was so widely admired, much of that dependence on their relationship with their public was related to the glow of their individual personalities, their apparent joy in making music, their 'presence' as an ensemble. Yet the sad truth was that while many serious musicians appreciated The Boys' abundant gifts they also recognized that without the opportunity - together with the disposition - to pursue long term study, those gifts could not mature. Overlooked but even more to the point, individual study leading to maturation would surely have resulted in the break up of the happy band of brothers.

Discussion of Berlin critiques.

Following their Berlin debut The Boys returned to Vienna where under the supervision of their eldest sister Sonia, they had earlier settled. (Passing references suggest that they played in Holland and France after their Berlin debut. Presumably, had these concerts been critically approved, the references would have been less casual.)

Within a short time of their return, the rest of the family arrived from Odessa. A glimpse of what the reunion meant is provided by the comment of Alex (some 50 years

later) that "When my father and mother arrived in Vienna from Russia to get the children to study music seriously it was no easy matter finding a place big enough or cheap enough for a family of over ten, all of them active children. It became worse when after they found an apartment the neighbours complained that a quiet neighbourhood had been turned into a 'day and night' conservatorium."

Known throughout much of the 19th century as 'the ballroom of Europe,' by 1904 Vienna, with its risqué dancers and other venturesome entertainment, was widely regarded as in a state of cultural decadence. For musicians however, - and especially for pianists - it remained a Mecca. This was not only because of its illustrious associations with generations of great composers but also because from 18-- until his death in 1915, Theodore Leschetizky, internationally known as a piano pedagogue, had a studio in Vienna. Although he personally taught only the most promising students, as sorted out by a number of devoted assistants, for years he held a weekly Masterclass, attended by as many as 80 or more. Amongst those who fell under his spell was Jan Cherniavsky.

Grove's *Dictionary* describes Leschetizky as " a vigorous, strong willed man and musician with a formidable memory and an infallible ear. He was a hard task master and for the exacting demands he made was both feared and worshipped. His approach was practical rather than scientific; he taught chiefly by demonstrating, handling technical difficulties and musical problems according to the need of each student. He did not demand exercises, technical practice, but stressed complete concentration on the music and a thorough knowledge of it in every detail." Leschetizky"s influence on Jan was life-long and profound. When in his old age he accepted a handful of students Jan, a somewhat unorthodox teacher in so many ways, barely deviated from Leschetizky's attitudes and demands, even to the extent it might be fairly suggested, that he was "both feared and worshipped."

Amongst Leschetizky's students was Artur Schnabel (1882- 195??) later on revered, like the 'cellist Pablo Casals, as indisputably one of the most powerful musical minds of

his times. Shortly before his death, Schnabel spent as many as 20 mornings answering a wide range of questions from a group of piano teachers. What he has to say about Vienna - let alone about Leschetizky - is relevant to The Boys' sojourn there. Many of the individuals Schnabel mentions played a role, sometimes obscure for lack of documentation, in The Boys' well being.

Schnabel points out that until its decline had set in at the turn of the 19th century, Vienna enjoyed a reputation as the Mecca of music. In Schnabel's view that reputation was undeserved, if only because "Until 1899 Schubert was never heard, this most musical of cities knew nothing of Mozart's piano concertos, Beethoven's Diabelli or Bach's Goldberg Variations, Beethoven's piano concertos rarely played, the Emperor was unknown." Dated as it may seem, Schnabel's point was that Vienna "was the most attractive market for musicians Aristocracy was not yet disturbed or changed in its traditional functions. They had security (in contrast to money makers) and therefore no difficulty in observing the obligations of noblesse. These included, as you know, the support of art - though not necessarily the understanding of it." At the turn of the century genuine music lovers, in large part from the Jewish community, had quietly filled the void left by the decline of the old Order. A pivot of that support, according to Schnabel, was "Albert Guttman, concert agent and manager, owner of the city's leading music store. All the great musicians of the epoch kept in personal touch with him. His regular Sunday soirees were internationally known." (Oddly enough, Schnabel refers to the anti Semitism of Dr. Karl Lueger, the City's dynamic Mayor for some 15 years until his death in 1910 - as "very mild but at the same time wild;" Schnabel mentions that he was as a young boy he was once attacked, but he was uncertain whether his attackers were anti Semitic or merely drunk. By contrast Allan Kershaw, author of the authoritative biography of Adolf Hitler, terms Vienna in 1907 as "one of the most anti Semitic cities in Europe.

After the mandatory period of study with Mme. Esipov Schnabel became one of Leschetizky's students (as did Jan, all too briefly, some time later). One day the Maestro

said to him "You will never be a pianist, you are a musician." This was an enormously significant compliment especially since Schnabel says that some years later Leschetizky paid a back handed compliment to Mark Hambourg (a contemporary of Jan) "You will never be a musician, you are a pianist." (Mark Hambourg and his brothers Boris a cellist and Jan, violinist, for a short time widely but not all that successfully toured as a Trio; subsequently all three were associated with their father's invaluable music conservatory in Toronto. Whether he knew of these remarks, in his later years Jan very clearly strove to be a musician rather than just a pianist..

Schnabel's further comments on Leschetizky are of immediate relevance to Jan's musical 'philosophy.' They are comments of a generation holding 'romantic' views of piano playing or teaching very different from today's, and are therefore dated, just as were Jan's attitudes in his old age. But nothing more clearly demonstrates the enormous influence on Jan of the months spent studying under Leschetizky's spell, especially when, recommended by Mme. Esipov, no longer Leschetizky's wife, but still on staff as an assistant, he had lessons from the Maestro himself. Leschetizky's love of the Czerny studies, his attitude towards the musician and the audience, his basic indifference, at least as a musician, towards critics and indeed towards money, his vitality and commitment to develop a student's musical nature - and, perhaps most telling of all, the absence of 'method' in his teaching, are but the more salient points of Jan's mature stance as a 'romantic' artist. In Schnabel's considered view Leschetizky

He belonged to the virtuoso world of the second half of the 19th century, although he studied with Czerny, who himself had been a pupil of Beethoven - but this virtuosity was a genuine and creative virtuosity, and not yet a mechanized one. In all my contact with Leschetizky, which lasted until he died, I never heard him talk about money or success or the Press or the critics or society. Not a word. He was absolutely independent. The great quality of Leschetizky was his vitality but I think he conceived of music not as an exclusive sphere of personal experience, but as something that has to be presented, shown to others. He saw music, so to say, as a public function. For him it was not music itself which gave to the musician, who took. For him the musician, as a person was the giver, and he who listened took. Nowadays, if you believe managers, and promoters, the customers give and the artist takes. The term 'to give' seems now almost inseparable from money (if it only be in terms of applause).

He did not always like me. He was very strict with me, and sometimes even hard, but yet he absolutely respected what he believed to be my musical disposition. Every Wednesday night, and in later years every alternate Wednesday, Leschitzky gathered all his pupils together and some of them had to perform. Very often he interrupted a performance and corrected the student. He had no 'method.' His teaching was a current which sought to release all latent vitality in the student. It was addressed to imagination, taste, and personal responsibility, not a blue print or short cut to success. He gave them a task but no prescription. He was always an artist - un grand seigneur, an inspiring personality. He wanted his pupils to materialize that which is spontaneous and beautiful. He succeeded in his teaching the way mountain guides do in climbing. One does not know how they always find where to go, yet they take you to the goal.

This closing image is especially appropriate to Jan's hindsight - albeit irrational - view that he was 'shortchanged' when torn away from his studies with Leschetizky, his musical guide. It is fairly clear that in his old age at least he grew to resent that he neither 'dropped out' nor was dismissed from Leschitzky's circle, but that he was ordered to withdraw. In his resentment he forgot that to disobey his domineering father, let alone to break up the musical and brotherly harmony on which he had grown emotionally to depend and that had given the public such pleasure would have been at the time totally beyond his comprehension. Yet it *is* true that had his studies been uninterrupted, he might have at least been given the chance to reach the summit.

In his later years as a pedagogue Jan sought like his Master "to release all latent vitality in the student." Likewise, his teaching was "addressed to imagination, taste, and personal responsibility, not a blue print or short cut to success." As the record will demonstrate, if either as a musician or as a pedagogue he failed to reach his goal, it was not for want of trying.

In contrast to Jan's experience, very little is known of Mischel's months of study with Vienna's cello teacher of the day Joseph Sulzer, a former student of David Popper, Composer and Professor of Cello in Budapest, with whom Mischel later publicity claimed he had also studied. This is improbable as it would have meant he, barely a teen -ager, would have had to live in Budapest. Far more likely, during a visit to Vienna Popper may have auditioned and commended him, thereby allowing Mischel to associate himself with

a leading 'cellist of the day. Mischel himself became very wary of claims to have studied with the most eminent of musicians, suggesting that more often than not the claim was based on one audition. This may have been the truth with regard to his association with David Popper.

It really seems that Mischel's problem was his failure - or was it inability? - to understand that to realize his potential, he had to discipline his natural talents. However, because his talent allowed him to find an easy solution to any technical or musical problem, he was either *unwilling* to recognize this necessity or he was *unable* to recognize it, in part at least because he was by disposition lazy. There is, however no doubt that he was Sulzer's student.

What Leo was up to during these months is unclear. He claimed to have studied with Eugene Ysaye, Leopold Auer's distinguished contemporary. But Ysaye lived in Brussels so that it is more probable that Ysaye merely auditioned Leo in Vienna. Besides, there is a story that when Ysaye asked him to play the common chord of C Leo was stumped, which rather suggests that Ysaye dismissed rather than taught him. It is very difficult to evaluate Leo the violinist at this stage of his career because as a member of the trio he was apparently in harmony with his brothers. When, following dissolution of the Trio and he was forced to stand alone his weaknesses of taste and his dated style became all too obvious even though his musical ardour and his dynamism remained undimmed. Unlike Jan and Mischel and in spite of critiques that wavered between the polite and the dismissive, he 'retired' very reluctantly.

Supported by The Boys particular attraction and armed no doubt with introductions to Vienna's Jewish community, the Cherniavskly family soon enough gained entree to Vienna's musical circles. One of the most important welcomes was from Albert Guttmann and his wife, whose weekly soirees brought together musicians and wealthy amateurs of music. The proof that The Boys attracted serious attention is that at some point M^cme. Guttmann gave Leo a violin. Avrum, of course, might have promoted or suggested such a

gift. She also introduced The Boys to the Rothschild family in Vienna and, later on, in London.

Another more personally meaningful introduction was to the Bettleheim family, one of the most professionally distinguished in Vienna's Jewish community. This contact was particularly meaningful to Jan who forged a lifelong friendship with Karl Bettleheim who, thanks entirely to Jan's devotion would some 30 years later escape the horrors of the Holocaust. Except for passing references to the Beittleheims' loving hospitality during Jan's visits to Vienna in 1938 and Karl's lifelong friendship with the entire Cherniavsky family, little else is known about the relationship in 1905 other than that Jan had enduring memories of Karl's companionship at this time.

In due course The Boys made their Vienna debut having previously played, as was the custom, at numerous musical soirees. This debut took place on April 9 1905 in the Small Hall of the Vienna Concert Society. "While the older two didn't surpass the average norm of child prodigies" reported the *Illustrierte Wiener Extrablatt*, "the young 'cellist seems a phenomenon. The full tone, the rather certain technique and the easy lead of the bow are visual advantages, accompanied by an innate feeling for rhythm and an amazing temperament. The public never tired of encores which the young rascal granted with obvious pleasure. Ten months later Mischel, together with Gregor "Dzerny Tscherniavsky" participated in a concert "held in support of the recent massacre in Russia" - an obvious reference to one of the many programs of those times in Russia. The other participants in this concert included a singer from Stockholm, a Royal Romanian chamber singer, a Russian Opera singer and four "Hofburg" actors. None of these artists, although named, are easily identifiable.

Later in 1905 Avrum took The Boys to London. Little evokes better the flavour of this city in 1905 than the Baedeker guide of that year even though one can be sure that its practical information was of no interest to Avrum. According to this guide hotels ranged

from 8/- a day and up (fireplaces extra) with smoking permitted *only* in the Billiard and Smoking rooms. As for restaurant food Baedeker, ever the diplomat, remarks that "English cookery, which is as ordinally praised by some epicures and bons vivants as it is abused by others, has at least the merit of simplicity so that the quality of the food one is eating is not apt to be disguised, as it is on the Continent." Baedeker's statistics are overwhelming: He reports that London's population in 1901 as over six and a half million and that there were 500 hotels and inns, 1500 churches, 7500 public houses, over 30 theatres and no less than 102,000 'paupers.' The total cost of governing London was L14,700,000: its reported debt in 1903 was L58,500,00

Mischel had a vivid memory of arriving at Liverpool Street Station, in those days a hurly burly of activity with its 18 platforms, 20 lines and nearly 1000 trains a day. His memory was particularly vivid because Avrum ordered The Boys "not to move" while he took a local train to Whitechapel, described by Baedeker as "a district chiefly occupied by artisans, with its Jewish tailoring shops. . . . Nearby stands St. Jude's church, with a fine mosaic (Time, Death and Judgement") by G. F. Watts. Adjoining the Church is Toynbee Hall, residence for some 20 Oxford and Cambridge graduates desirous of sharing the life and experiences of the East End poor."

Downtrodden as the area may have been, his destination was not. He was on his way to call on Chaim ^{Wertzman} ~~Weissman~~, already a leader of the Jewish community and later the driving force in the establishment of the State of Israel, of which he was the first President. (Weissman told Mischel of this visit in ^{Johannesburg} ~~Cape Town~~'s Carlton Hotel where the two met in the mid 1930's.) Avrum and The Boys were subsequently presented to liberal minded and warm hearted Dr. Chaim Tchernowitz, a celebrated scholar of the Talmud and at one time Chief Rabbi of Odessa. If these two could not help Avrum introduce and promote The Boys to potential patrons, no one could.

The result was fairly immediate. Within a week or two they were performing in the homes of the Rothschild, Sassoon and other highly placed families. It

may well be that when ^{Arum} ~~he~~ and the entire family (upon arriving from Russia) finally moved to 29 Sinclair Road, Hammersmith, he received further financial help - unless, of course The Boys' earnings were substantial enough to cover costs. Nothing is known of these earnings, possibly because at the time The Boys were not told of them. Later on the family moved to Edson Road, Olympia, and then, before the parents left England in 1916 or so, ~~at~~ ^{to} Dewhurst Road. All these addresses were in a shabbier part of London. (For some strange reason Manya had an *idée fixe* that initially the family residence was "near St. James' Palace.")

A little - enough to give it some colour - is known about 29 Sinclair Road, a three storey house big enough to accommodate the large and music making family. Some ten years ago a gentleman, having read in the Edmonton Journal an item about the writing of The Vision of Salome phoned to ask if the author (absent) was related to the Cherniavsky family. He subsequently explained that as a young boy he lived next door on Sinclair Road and remembered how the entire Cherniavskly family would be ^m 'arched out and assembled' _n in the back garden. He even remembered Manya by name. Unfortunately he was lost track of before any meeting could be arranged. Today, 31 Sinclair Road, kitty corner or adjacent to the former Cherniavsky home, is occupied by the offices of the Harold Holt Concert Agency . In his time Harold Holt was one of London's most active impresarios counting amongst his artists the likes of Mischa Elman, Joseph Szgeiti.)

Also at 29 Sinclair Road that, according to Manya whose family recollections were so astonishingly sharp, the great Italian opera singer, Tetrzzini, had afternoon tea with Rosa.

This visit, only relevant as an indication of the curiosity The Boys had aroused in musical circles, probably took place in 1907 - in the Fall the celebrated Luis Tetrzzini was Gilda in Rigoletto at Covent Garden with the sensation of the day, the Irish tenor John McCormack. McCormack, who rose to international fame and enjoyed a career that only officially ended in 1938 made his London debut in November 1904 at a concert at Queen's Hall sponsored by the Gaelic League, yet to re-appear. The debut draw no attention. After some 20 ill paying

engagements (such as at the Queen's Hotel, Leicester Square) his luck changed when, appearing with Edna May, a popular comic artist of great beauty and charm, the *London Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* music critics heard him. Soon enough he was engaged by organisations such as the ever popular Sunday Concert Society, which offered programs in which up and coming artists participated together.

On January 27, 1907, for example, a concert took place at the Guildhall, Cambridge in which, amongst others, John McCormack and the "Cherniavsky Brothers" appeared. On March 29 of the same year - on Good Friday - these same artists, under the management of Bernhardt Concerts, performed at the "Kennington and Camden Theatres." Both these concerts are documented on the Internet, as is one on March 1 in which McCormack, Mischa Elman and Ada Crossley^{a/s} participated. Ada Crossley, an Australian born singer who later enjoyed considerable popularity, included Gregor Cherniavsky in her Company when in 1911 she toured South Africa and allegedly introduced Alex (with little or no effect) to London audiences.. Quite possibly her initial contact with the Cherniavskys was made through Mischa Elman.

The Boys no doubt had several other similar engagements in London - one of which was fondly remembered in 1985 - almost *eighty* years later - by Sophie Lesk, a resident of Medicine Hat, Alberta, where Felix had just arrived to teach at Medicine Hat College. Shortly after his arrival the departmental Secretary somewhat tentatively asked the usual question; a few days later he met Sophie who enthusiastically recalled how, as a prettily dressed six or seven year old, she had handed out programmes at a Sunday Concert in which The Boys appeared. She also said, but was unable to identify by name, that a cousin of her mother had played some part in arranging for The Boys to come to England.

Until its date was documented it had always been believed that the concert at the Cambridge Guildhall, for which "they received one guinea each and a free breakfast," marked The Boys public debut in England. This is absolutely incorrect.

On October 22 1906 the *Morning Post*, a rigidly conservative newspaper, printed the following review:

Three small Russian boys made their first appearance before a British audience at the Aelian Hall on Saturday afternoon. The eldest, who is about 14, [sic: each was presented as two years younger than they really were] is a violinist with unusual powers of execution which enable him to conquer the difficulties of the Tchaikovsky 'Violin Concerto' without hesitation. There is immense spirit in his playing, and it is, in fact, occasionally extremely impetuous; but its effect, in conjunction with his command of expression, is remarkable. The next member of the family in point of years is Jan, who is 12, and a pianist with a most sympathetic style, which enables him to express the idealism of Chopin, and to accompany admirably. The third is Mischel who plays upon a diminutive cello in a fashion little short of masterly. The ease with which he played the Golttermann Variations was extraordinary, but the expressiveness in which the childish face took its share, was noteworthy.

Each member of the Trio displays tremendous vitality, which lends a special distinction to their playing, because it removes every suggestion that it is in any way forced, or that it is not a voluntary effort. The program opened with the 'No. 2' Trio of Beethoven, and the children played it in the manner of mature artists who have conquered the musicians' difficult task of cultivating the power of interpreting Beethoven with meaning. The reception of the Trio was most enthusiastic.

An interpretation - arguably not all that impartial - of these remarks would suggest that this critic, as if reluctant to hurt The Boys' feelings yet willing enough to recognize their unusual abilities, chose to thinly disguise his reservations about their posture (implied particularly by featuring a Beethoven Trio) as serious concert artists. For Leo to conquer the Tchaikovsky Concerto 'without hesitation,' with playing that is 'occasionally extremely impetuous' leading to an 'effect' that might well be termed 'remarkable' is all very well, but is it pleasing let alone mature? Jan's 'sympathetic style' together with his success to "accompany admirably" is surely more commendable. The praise heaped on Mischel is qualified by his facial 'expressiveness' - a distracting habit that even as an adult he made little effort to inhibit. And what is one to make of the comment deliberately asserting that the 'immense vitality' dispels any suggestion that The Boys' playing "is in any way forced, or that it is not a voluntary effort"? Is this a subtle way of deploring the practice of exploiting prodigies? Certainly not, in Avrum's view; after all, the reception was 'most enthusiastic' and in his opinion that, under the family's straitened circumstances, was all that really mattered.

But their success mattered little to others - in that, with one exception, no other documented record of their concert engagements during these first years in England has remained. At one point they interested Alfred Butt, an impresario at the very start of his later remarkable career.

Alfred Butt, whom Mischel casually recalled more than 70 years later "we used to call 'Putz' -he started out selling post cards in the East End." Later on, as Manager/owner of the Palace Theatre, Butt became London's leading impresario. He introduced Maurice Chevalier, Fred Astaire, Paul Robeson - and Maud Allan - to London audiences. He became a personal friend of King Edward VII. During World War I he entered politics and was made first Minister of Food and then Chancellor of the Exchequer (Minister of Finance). His tenure in this all powerful post, however, was brief; he was forced to resign because it was said that during a game of golf he advised his companions to "tee Up" a day or two before his Budget was to ~~impose~~^{lift} a tax on tea! He later sat as a member of Parliament. In his Will he directed that all his business papers be burnt, a directive that subsequently his son, who knew nothing of his father's background, resented.

Butt was interested in the Boys, because, unlike Avrum or for that matter The Boys themselves, he saw them as Music Hall attractions. Apparently he sent them on at least one tour of 'the Provinces' before, probably by mutual agreement, the association ceased. Later on they would tour the provinces under different or their own management.

On November 26 1906 Jimmy Davison, music critic for the *Times* reported that

The three clever Cherniavsky brothers, Leo, Jan and Mischel, gave a further display of their promising talents at Bechstein Hall on Saturday afternoon, before a large audience. There was only one concerted work Mendelssohn's First Trio - which was perhaps just as well as ensemble playing showed their inexperience to a greater extent than some of the solos chosen, and the performance was not marked by any striking climax or even balance of tone. Leo, the violinist, aged 14, is at once the most technically advanced of the three, and he played a Paganini Concerto with a considerable amount of verve and character. Jan, the pianist, played a Beethoven Sonata, and the 'cellist's principle contribution was a concerto by Saint Saens. It is hoped that the three will not be allowed to forget that, although their playing was very well considering their ages, they have a great deal to learn and that in consequence the next few years will be spent in

retirement and study.

These blunt remarks need no glossing; the advice was ignored although, so far as is known The Boys did not perform in a London concert hall for at least five years. Instead, they continued to participate in London's more popular Sunday Concerts circuit as well as touring the 'Provinces' circuit - a standard practice. It may also have been during these months that Mischel started his long association with Herbert Walenn, founder of what surely was London's only Cello school. Walenn, a lifelong bachelor who lived with his spinster sister on Welbeck Street, close by the Royal Academy of Music, owed a great deal to Mischel, for the reputation that Mischel, the first of his really outstanding students such as John Barbiroli, Zara Nelsova, brought to his fledgling School. Mischel of course owed an even greater debt to Walenn who, he wrote, at Walenn's death in 1955 was "like a father to me." A very indulgent father, for Walenn regarded Mischel's gifts as "heaven sent. He knew instinctively the phrasing, how music should go. His was a natural talent - and never spent much time practicing." Mischel's gifts were, it would again seem, too much of a good thing, so abundant as to defy discipline leading one to wonder just how focused were his studies. Meanwhile Leo, according to a program note for a concert in Australia some 35 years later, "fell under the influence of the great Wilhelmi" - another eminent violin teacher familiar to musicians of the day. Since nothing is known of this claimed association, it is no doubt best to pass it over without speculative comment. No matter whether or with whom Jan was studying, one can be at least certain that unlike Mischel he was diligently practising.

Since there is no evidence of any hardship greater than the family was used to, one can assume that The Boys had a healthy number of engagements. And yet, if Avrum believed that the family breadwinners were on the threshold of a concert career (as was Mischa Elman, whose occasional recitals and orchestral engagements attracted serious praise) he was to be sorely disappointed; if he did not follow Jimmy Davison's advice it was probably because his dependence on his sons, together with a blinkered confidence in their gifts, blinded him to the obvious. The fact that he enjoyed the patronage of some powerful families in the Jewish

community may also have promoted a somewhat astigmatic view of the future.

It is only fair to suggest, however, that perhaps The Boys themselves, relishing the applause as much as the joy of playing together and enjoying their status as the family breadwinners, saw no reason to consider - if indeed they were aware of it for English still was a foreign language to them -- Jimmy Davison's explicit hope that "although their playing was very well considering their ages, they have a great deal to learn and that in consequence the next few years will be spent in retirement and study." They were, after all, only teenagers, plunged like the rest of the family into the maelstrom of a totally foreign society. Only Jan, had he been asked, might have wanted to heed the critic's advice - assuming that he was even aware of it. But one can be sure that whatever the case neither he nor his brothers were ever asked; the only opinion that counted was Avrum's. "Study and retirement" was the last thing on his mind.

While nothing is known of the negotiations that led to the decision to send The Boys in the Spring of 1908 on a tour of South Africa and (presumably contingent upon success there) of Australia, the contours of the rationale behind the scheme may be deduced. Johannesburg's and Cape Town's remarkably vibrant Jewish communities, starved for a musical style resonant of their cultural heritage, could be counted on to welcome The Boys, as could smaller centres even more starved for music. The few performers of any genre who ventured to the 'dark' Continent no doubt could count on attracting attention if only for lack of competition - but, and this is a crucial point, they were either worn out or, having failed to attract much attention in England, unknown. Certainly none of them was as young, as attractive or as unusual as The Boys. Besides, if the tour were a flop, who in England or in Europe would be interested or come to know about it?

And who, for that matter, would know about any unapproved escapades in South Africa of one or more of these three teenagers? (Leo the eldest was 18, and to judge by his subsequent reputation, randy enough) Perhaps, for the ever controlling Avrum, that was the biggest gamble and for The Boys the most exciting challenge. Not that they were going out unescorted; they were to be managed and accompanied by Edward Branscombe who had

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previously managed at least one troupe - the Westminster Glee Club Singers - on a tour of South Africa and Australia. "He was like a father to us" Mischel once remarked.

Welcome as it must have been, this opportunity nevertheless had both a defining significance, an unforeseen irony. A few months after The Boys had left for South Africa Mischa Elman, at the invitation of the mythlike impresario Oscar Hammerstein, left for the United States where on December 10 1908 accompanied by the New York Philharmonic he performed the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto . That performance, coupled with a Carnegie Hall recital led to instant and enduring acclaim in the New World. (50 years later he gave a sold out anniversary recital in Carnegie Hall, and at his death the New York *Times* devoted half a page to his obituary) Elman did not visit South Africa until 1934, when his tour was managed by none other than Alex Cherniavsky, the youngest of Avrum's sons. The Boys made their New York debut in 1917 - on the same night as a gala Performance at the Metropolitan Opera featuring Ignace Paderewski and Fritz Kreisler, accompanied by the Boston Symphony. With 'competition' like that, they might have been tempted to reason, little wonder their debut attracted little praise or attention. Nevertheless, they took the hint and as a Trio subsequently made no serious effort to conquer New York or its likes, Who, after all, would want to be caught as a small fish in the ^{Jaws} ~~nets~~ of the world's cultural ^{sharks} ~~centers~~ when the opportunity to be a big fish in the ~~firm~~ ^{firm} of the world's cultural backwaters beckoned?