

MEDIA PEACE PRIZE 1979

SYDNEY TOWN HALL, MONDAY

22 OCTOBER 1979, 11 A.M.

INTRODUCTION OF MR. YEHUDI MENUHIN

The Hon. Mr. Justice M.D. Kirby  
Chairman of the Australian Law Reform Commission

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I have five minutes to introduce one of the great musicians of our age. Five minutes might be enough for you to thrill an audience with a full piece. For a lawyer, it is scarcely sufficient time to adjust the wig and clear the throat.

When it was discovered that you would be in Sydney during United Nations Week, those who organised the Media Peace Prize suggested that I should invite you to make the presentations. Without hesitation you agreed. And we are happy and honoured to have you amongst us.

For the autobiography of a supremely modest man, I commend to this audience your book "Unfinished Journey". In it you explain that your father was descended from Chasidic Rabbis in Russia. For reasons that I entirely understand, you express pleasure in the fact that the Chasids, whose movements had originated in the late 18th century, were rebels among the People of the Book. Instead of emphasising legal community, they glorified ecstatic communion, prizing mystics above scholarship and rejecting purely cerebral religion in favour of dancing and making music to the greater glory of God.

Your father left Russia in 1904, one year before the Antisemitic pogrom of 1905. He grew up in Palestine and later went to New York where you were born. In your home, as recounted in your book, you were brought up with full consciousness of your father's affection and love for the Arab playmates, with whom he had been forbidden to play. The lessons you learned at your parents' knee about the need for tolerance and understanding, have been with you all your life.

It is not necessary for me to recount your famous career. Your debut in 1927, at the age of 10, is well known. You first visited Australia soon after that and you have been a frequent and always welcome visitor since. You and your sister, Hephzibah, have family links with our country. Your son Krov was born in a Melbourne hospital shortly before a concert at the Town Hall in 1940. You record that you were not sure which would arrive sooner, the baby or the Brahms concerto.

During the war you performed hundreds of recitals for allied troops and for relief organisations. After the war you returned to Germany for the first time since the Weimar Republic fell to Hitler, not to the orchestral circuit of your youth but to play for displaced persons, survivors of the death camps. Having nowhere else to go, they were still living and the spirit of man's love for music was still alive in them.

Your life's story is full of efforts on behalf of peace and understanding, particularly through music. It was you who opened the door to the visits by Soviet musicians to the West, when you arranged for David Oistrakh to visit the United States, soon after Stalin's death. Though you have been a firm supporter of Israel, and though your mother chose your name so that you would proudly proclaim your race, you have not been one-sided in your efforts for peace. In 1974 you sought to engage the sympathy of Mrs. Golda Meir for the plight of Palestinian refugees. In your book you "grieve that chances of

magnanimity should be lost". "Anxious for the good name of my people, I would have Israel an example to others, extending Jewish ideals to those beyond the borders and minorities within. I would like to see Jerusalem as a capital city of a new sort, serving as spiritual focus for Muslims, Protestants, Greek Orthodox and Catholics as well as Jews".

For six years you were President of the International Music Council, an organisation of UNESCO and in this role you pleaded the morality of tolerance and the separation of culture from politics.

Shortly before you came to Australia you received in Frankfurt a Peace Prize of your own, presented by a group of German publishers to those who have contributed to society. The previous winners included Albert Schweitzer and you are the first musician to be awarded that Prize.

You say in your book with characteristic modesty :  
"My life has been spent in creating Utopias.  
If this has been an ambition bound to fail -  
for Utopia can exist only outside time ...  
- it has nonetheless been achieved here and  
there, briefly and partially".

Throughout your life you have sought to bring a certain harmony to the world through the universal appeal of music. Last week you told the Australian media that you looked on your vocation as a "privileged job". You said this :

"To establish contact with a whole lot of people I've come to realise that music is a very basic phenomenon. It puts us together with the vibrations of the universe".

I am sure that there is no-one better fitted than you to present the first Australian Media Peace Prizes. I now invite you to do so.