

Dr. Joachim's Jubilee (1894)

“Dr. Joachim's Jubilee,” *The Graphic* (London), February 17, 1894, 175–76.



Dr. Joachim's Jubilee



TOWARDS the end of February, 1844, there arrived in England from Leipsic, then, thanks mainly to Mendelssohn, one of the chief musical centres of Germany, a young violinist of twelve, a veritable juvenile prodigy, who was destined very soon to make a considerable mark in the world. That boy was Joseph Joachim, who now, therefore, celebrates the jubilee of his English *début*. His visit here was due partly to the advice of the distinguished vocalist Madame Viardot, at whose concert in the previous August he had played the Rondo of De Bériot; partly to the fact that his generous patron Mendelssohn was that year to direct the Philharmonic Society's concerts. The fame of the composer of St. Paul, indeed, attracted to this country a good deal of youthful talent in 1844, among the newcomers of the year being Piatti, Sainton, Kuhe, and others now forgotten. Joachim was born of a Jewish family at Kittsee, near Pressburg, in June, 1831, and as a boy of five he had been placed under Szervacsinsky, leader of the Opera House at Pesth, where he made his *début* as a child of seven. It was not, however, until 1843, after he had studied for two years under Boehm at Vienna, that he went to Leipsic, and at the concert of Madame Viardot aforesaid was introduced to Mendelssohn. While waiting in London for an appearance at the Philharmonic Joachim made his *début* at Bunn's benefit at Drury Lane on March 28, and a little later he appeared at the Societa Armonica, while on May 27 he played Beethoven's Violin Concerto at the fifth Philharmonic concert under Mendelssohn's conductorship. He played it from memory, introducing in the first movement a cadenza, a modified form of which he still uses. Despite the fact that Ernst and Sivori were among his rivals, the critics of the day, to do them full justice, were loud in their praises of the youth, and from that time his fortune was made. Joachim, however, under the sound advice of Mendelssohn, and of the great violinist David, resolved that his career should advance by steps the more secure because they were slow. For some years, indeed, he played at the first violin desk with David in the orchestra of the Gewandhaus Concerts, he afterwards, in 1849, led the Grand Ducal Band at Weimar, where Liszt was then residing, and, in 1854, he started a career of twelve years as conductor to the King of Hanover. Meanwhile he had more than once visited England, and about the early fifties he began to devote himself to the career of a virtuoso. Every one knows that in 1853 Schumann wrote for him his Violin Fantasia, Op. 151 (which Dr. Joachim revived at the Popular Concert last Saturday), and that in the same year, "In anticipation of the arrival at Düsseldorf of our beloved and honoured friend, Joseph Joachim," a Sonata for Violin and Pianoforte was concocted by three composers, Schumann undertaking the second and last movements, Dietrich the opening movement, and the then youthful Brahms, who modestly disguised his identity under the name of "Johannes Kreisler, jun.," the third section, an allegro. It was Joachim who in that year first presented Brahms to Schumann, and it is also mainly owing to the great violinist that Brahms owes the introduction of much of his chamber music to this country. To Joachim, as well as to his life-long friend the late J. W. Davison, is also in great part due the high standard of the works performed at the Monday Popular Concerts. Even in 1859, when he was playing at the Pops, the programmes of these entertainments were of a very miscellaneous character, but Joachim, satisfied by Davison that the British public would appreciate something better, started at Willis's Rooms a series of Beethoven Quartet Concerts on his own account, playing also here the so-

called “Posthumous” Quartets, which were then considered far above the comprehension of an average audience. The experiment was not lost on the director, and the “Posthumous” Quartets were almost immediately added to the Popular Concert repertory. It was also owing to Joachim that in this year Madame Schumann, who had visited us in 1856 and 1857, returned, and a performance at the Old Hanover Square Rooms in May, 1859, of the “Kreutzer” sonata by Madame Schumann and Dr. Joachim, is still amongst the most cherished recollections of certain middle-aged music lovers. Joachim’s duties in Germany kept him from England for a year or two, and accordingly, in 1865, Mr. Chappell made an arrangement with him by which he was to spend a certain portion of the spring in this country annually. The present, therefore, besides being his artistic jubilee, is his thirtieth consecutive season in England. It was chiefly in order to give him sufficient employment and to warrant Mr. Chappell’s outlay that the Saturday Popular Concerts were, in 1865, somewhat timorously started, although they have now become even more popular than the Monday Popular Concerts themselves. In 1868 Dr. Joachim started the Hochschule at Berlin, and then practically founded school of German violin playing, which, if perhaps not the most brilliant, is generally recognised as the soundest and noblest extant. Many will recollect the scene in March, 1877, in the Senate House at Cambridge, when Joachim received the honorary degree of Doctor of Music. The great violinist was in his most serious mood as the Latin oration was being preached at him, but the throwing of a halfpenny from the undergraduates’ gallery upon the stone floor of the hall immediately in front of the spot where the new Doctor stood in his robes, was irresistible, and Joachim laughed heartily. Another of the undergraduate pranks was the grave presentation to him of a toy violin, with cotton and absolutely unplayable strings; but in the evening, when at the special concert he played a solo, and when also, by the way, Brahms’ First Symphony was produced for the first time in England, the undergraduates ceased joking and applauded as only undergraduates can applaud. Another joke which Dr. Joachim tells against himself occurred at the Leeds railway station two or three years ago. He had been playing at Leeds, and was walking about the platform waiting for the train, when a half-drunken fellow of about fifty continually passed him, every time muttering, “Yes; but Paganini was the man.” Considering that Paganini’s farewell at the Victoria Theatre took place as far back as 1832 and that the tippler could not possibly have recollected him, Dr. Joachim accepted the remark as a compliment. A few years ago, on the fiftieth anniversary of his German *début*, Dr. Joachim was presented by his English admirers with a valuable Stradivarius violin, and the suggestion has also been made, and will probably be carried out, to celebrate his English jubilee by a reception, or in some other fitting manner.

Regent & Nott

MUSICOLOGY