



THE MUSICIAN IN QUESTION
YEHUDI MENUHIN 100
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Yehudi Menuhin recounted to *New Internationalist* magazine the narrative behind his name in a pre-birth incident in New York City: ‘...to find an apartment of their own, my parents searched the neighbourhood and chose one within walking distance of the park. Showing them out after they had viewed it, the landlady said: "And you'll be glad to know I don't take Jews." ... Back on the street my mother made a vow- her unborn baby would have a label proclaiming his race to the world; he would be called Yehudi, "The Jew"'. Beginning violin lessons at age 5, by 7 Yehudi first appeared as a solo violinist with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. At 12 he made his first solo recordings, at 13 he played the Bach Beethoven and Brahms concertos under Bruno Walter, and at 16 played Elgar's Violin Concerto with the composer conducting, before going on to make the first ever complete recording of Bach's partitas for solo violin. Bartok wrote his Sonata for Solo Violin for him. In 1945, after the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, Yehudi played for the surviving inmates accompanied on the piano by Benjamin Britten. In 1947 he returned to Germany to play with the Berlin Philharmonic under Wilhelm Furtwangler, the first Jewish musician to do so after the Holocaust. To be a child prodigy and world-renowned violinist would be quite enough for many people – but not for Yehudi Menuhin. Over the years he added conductor, festival curator, school founder, philanthropist, peer, social commentator and yogi to his never-ending repertoire of activities. In 1952 he met the renowned yogi BKS Iyengar, and arranged for him to teach in the West. When director of the Bath Music Festival 1959-68, he first met Ravi Shankar: they went on to record the award-winning ‘West meets East’ in 1967. Later in his life he was known as a critic of Jerusalem's occupation of the West Bank, following in his anti-Zionist father's footsteps. It was typical of the breadth of his imagination that some of his last recordings were with the jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli. An artist without peer, he believed the music he played to be, quite literally, a form of human healing, out of which we might make peace with ourselves.