



# Yehudi Menuhin and Bath: A mutual benefit?

*Tim Bullamore*

**Y**ehudi Menuhin was artistic director of the Bath Festival from 1959 to 1968 – ten festivals, during which time the world beyond Bath was undergoing a dramatic cultural revolution. At the outset of his tenure his was already a household name. By the time he left he was a distinguished elder statesman; and he was to remain so until his death thirty-one years later.

The purpose of this paper is to pose the question: who benefited the most from Yehudi Menuhin's association with the city, Menuhin or Bath? It has often been reported that Menuhin put the city on the cultural map. Indeed, some publications have erroneously reported that Menuhin founded the Bath Festival. Recently, one of the glossy magazines that come through our letterboxes spoke of the festival "started by Yehudi Menuhin". Humphrey Burton refers to Bath as 'his', ie, Menuhin's festival.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, even Menuhin, in June 1968, while preparing for his last festival, said: 'I feel I have brought *my* festival to Bath'<sup>2</sup> (author's italics). He certainly did not start the festival, nor did he bring his festival from anywhere else – there was no previous Menuhin festival other than the family gathering in Gstaad in Switzerland where he had made his home since 1957. The premise that he raised the cultural and artistic profile of the city does stand up to scrutiny, but did the city at the same time revive Menuhin's flagging career? Indeed, to undertake a bit of crystal ball gazing, would Menuhin have had much of a future career if he had not spent a decade as director of the Bath Festival? Did the city do him as much good as he did for the city?

The Bath Festival as we know it today came into being in April 1948. It was the brainchild of the impresario Ian Hunter (later Sir Ian Hunter) and was at first called the Bath Assembly. Its initial aim was to be a festival of the arts for young people. True to those intentions the opening concert of that first Assembly was also the first public performance by the National Youth Orchestra. Running the Bath Assembly was by no means a full-time job for an ambitious young impresario. Indeed, Hunter was considered to be such an upstart that he was removed after the first festival. The city tried to run the festival itself, but in 1955 had to return to Hunter on bended knee and ask him to come back.

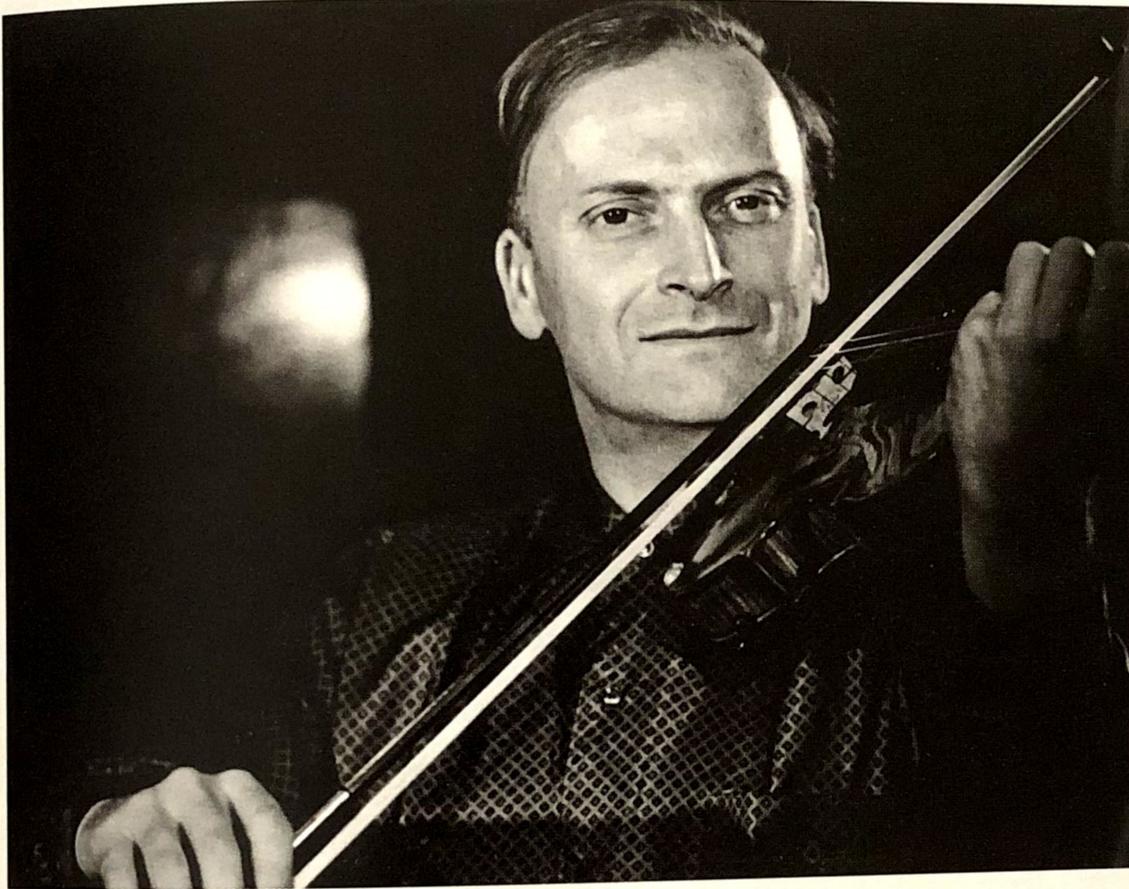
**Facing: fig 1: Yehudi Menuhin takes rehearsal in the Guildhall, 1962**  
Memorably photographed sitting in the lotus position, Yehudi Menuhin directs with the bow of his violin.  
*Photograph – Axel Poignant*

In the meantime, by way of historical note, we should be aware that Menuhin had taken part in the 1952 Festival – programmed by a council officer.<sup>3</sup> He was at this stage thirty-six years old and had just returned from a series of ten concerts in February and March in India, where he had been invited by Prime Minister Nehru,<sup>4</sup> and would later visit Israel, where there were still some highly charged feelings over his musical collaboration with the German conductor Furtwängler immediately after the Second World War. In that 1952 concert in Bath, which took place on May 28th, Menuhin gave a recital at the Forum accompanied by his brother-in-law, Louis Kentner. A publication called *The Bath Critic* wrote: 'If this concert had consisted simply of the movement from the Kreutzer Sonata which was given as a third encore, the audience would have had their money's worth.'<sup>5</sup> But even after this, the fifth festival, the city fathers were already squabbling about money. The city had offered a guarantee against loss of £1,000. The loss was in fact almost £1,300.

Alas, bureaucrats are not great impresarios. As already mentioned, in 1955, in desperation at the monotony of its festival, the city swallowed its pride and asked Hunter to return to run the festival. That year Menuhin gave three concerts in the festival. One was a duo recital at the Guildhall with the violinist Gioconda de Vita, which included some wonderfully obscure classics such as a pair of duets by Viotti and Spohr's Duo for Two Violins. Another was Viotti's Violin Concerto No. 22 with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. It must have been a small orchestra, as the concert took place within the confines of the Guildhall. The third was an unaccompanied recital in Bath Abbey of music by Bach. Based on the reviews for this and previous concerts, my discussions with Menuhin, and talking to people associated with the festival at that time, I believe that this concert, four years before he even became artistic director, was arguably the high point of Menuhin's violin playing career in Bath. Morley Pooley, *The Bath Chronicle's* music critic, wrote:

'A solitary figure, clutching a violin, stood in front of the choir stalls in Bath Abbey on Tuesday evening, and paused while the huge crowd of people who had flocked to see him settled quietly in their seats. Behind him the newly-restored East Window stood out in bold relief like a beacon of faith, before him a sea of upturned faces waited expectantly. And as he drew his bow across the strings of his fiddle, magic seemed to fill the air. For

ninety minutes he played almost continuously, and throughout that time there was scarce a rustle to break the spell he wove. The player was Yehudi Menuhin, probably the greatest violinist alive today; the instrument he held – almost as old as parts of the beautifully proportioned Abbey Church which formed such a wonderful background to the music of the greatest of all writers of church music, Johann Sebastian Bach – was a priceless Strad.<sup>6</sup>



**fig 2: Yehudi Menuhin, 1961.**  
Pictured during the Bath  
Festival of 1961  
*Bath in Time – Bath Central  
Library Collection*

It is perhaps worth pausing at that moment in 1955 to consider the point that Menuhin's career had reached. Yehudi Menuhin was born in New York on April 22nd 1916 to Ukrainian-Jewish immigrants<sup>7</sup>, Moshe and Marutha. He was named Yehudi – which literally means Jew – to make a statement to his parents' anti-Semitic landlady. The family moved to San Francisco where, at the age of seven, Yehudi gave his first public recital. Soon he gave a performance of the Mendelssohn concerto. The one thing all those who heard him agreed about was the purity of his tone and the seeming effortlessness of his technique. All the biographies, including Magidoff, Burton, and the controversial Palmer tale, speak of a somewhat unreal childhood. Tony Palmer in particular was granted an extensive interview with Menuhin's sister, Yaltah. In it she said: "We never knew, until it was much too late, how utterly isolated we were, that we were not living the life of children at all."<sup>8</sup> [fig.2]

Before long Menuhin's parents were advancing his career. He was in

Paris at the age of ten, where he met Georges Enesco, the Romanian composer, whom Menuhin persuaded to be his teacher.<sup>9</sup> At this time the kings of the violin would have been Fritz Kreisler and Jascha Heifetz.<sup>10</sup> Moshe Menuhin, Yehudi's father, was enthusiastic. He wrote a letter dated August 29<sup>th</sup> 1928 to Ibbs & Tillett in London, who at the time managed Rachmaninov, Hofmann, Cortot, Casals and Moiseiwitsch. In it he said: 'We shall take Yehudi to London... There is no reason why Yehudi should not carry London as he carried Paris, and thus sell out the Albert Hall.'<sup>11</sup> Yehudi had not so much as played a note in England at that time. But even then some felt that a little caution was needed in promoting this child prodigy. Ibbs & Tillett – remarkably, with hindsight – turned down the opportunity; instead the agency recommended him to the personal attention of Lionel Powell, a partner in the rival firm of Harold Holt, which Ian Hunter would later join.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this rare rejection, Menuhin's pre-war career in Britain was substantial and is well documented. His British debut was on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1929 in a performance of the Brahms concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Fritz Busch, followed by a recital at the Royal Albert Hall.<sup>13</sup> It was after his Berlin debut that year that Albert Einstein famously remarked: 'Now I know there is a God in heaven.'<sup>14</sup> Later that same year came the first truly emotional demand on Menuhin the man. Four years before the Nazis came to power he was asked by concert organisers in Munich to withdraw music by the Jewish composer Ernest Bloch from his programme. He refused.<sup>15</sup> Hitherto, he had rarely had to deal with difficult issues. As his sister Hephzibah once wrote: 'We were mentally cognisant of every problem, but only as a theoretical dilemma.'<sup>16</sup> His other sister, Yaltah, added: 'Like everything else in our family, we never realised until it was too late that the world was not as we had been led to believe. And so we have to constantly resurrect ourselves like corpses, but now with half our brains gone and our hearts pickled.'<sup>17</sup> Then there came the legendary recording, in 1932, at the age of sixteen, of the Elgar concerto with the seventy-five-year-old composer conducting. It was dreamt up by Fred Gaisberg at His Master's Voice to celebrate the composer's seventy-fifth birthday<sup>18</sup> – but poor old Elgar's contribution has been somewhat overshadowed ever since. Most biographers relate the, slightly exaggerated, tale of how Menuhin arrived from France three days before the recording session to work with the composer. After hearing the first few bars Elgar, supposedly, stopped him and said: 'I can add nothing. It

cannot be done better. Let's go to the races.' Menuhin was only sixteen. His mother still dressed him. Apart from his spat with the authorities in Munich, he was very unworldly. The Nazi atrocities, of which he would later witness the aftermath, had yet to occur. Menuhin genuinely believed that music could solve every problem.

Alas, three years later, by the age of nineteen, Menuhin was, in modern parlance, burnt out.<sup>19</sup> In 1935 he gave 110 concerts in sixty-three cities in thirteen countries on four continents – and all of this before the days of air travel. The strain was showing. One of his New York fans, Lydia Perera, noted in her diary: '22 March 1936: Concert in Town Hall. Toscanini in mother's box. Yehudi looks tired and weak. 29 March 1936: Yehudi looks tired, indifferent and sad. I had to grit my teeth as I left the hall to keep from crying.'<sup>20</sup> The child prodigy was gone. Now he needed to become a man. As he later said: 'My technique left me. Suddenly I felt I knew nothing.'<sup>21</sup> Menuhin cancelled all his concerts and withdrew to the family home at Los Gatos in California. According to his obituaries, he spent several years rebuilding his talents. He had to. His early training had, in fact, been severely deficient. He had played by instinct. When he had first auditioned for Ysaÿe in Brussels at the age of seven, he played flawlessly for the old composer. But Ysaÿe said: 'You have made me very happy, little boy, very happy. And now, play an arpeggio, just an ordinary arpeggio in three octaves.' Menuhin struggled with the simple exercise. 'I thought so,' muttered Ysaÿe. 'You will do well Yehudi to work on your scales and arpeggios.'

As they left Menuhin turned to his mother and begged: 'Take me to Enesco [the Romanian teacher], please.'<sup>22</sup> Ysaÿe was right. Menuhin had not mastered the underlying techniques of violin playing. He played by instinct. And when he reached adulthood and lost that childhood innocence, he had no solid foundation or training on which to fall back upon. But there were other factors.

As long ago as 1955, Robert Magidoff suggested that his problems were psychological and could be traced to the over-protectiveness of his parents, and in particular his mother who lived until 1998, dying at the age of 100 only 16 months before her son's death.<sup>23</sup> With his mother forever lurking in the background, Menuhin married Nola Nicholas, a lively Australian heiress whose unsheltered background could not have been more different to Menuhin's. The biographies go into great detail of how, almost from day one, she felt stifled, how Menuhin's parents instructed her in how to behave and look after Yehudi, and how, as the marriage deteriorated, Menuhin immersed himself in his music

rather than deal with his responsibilities.

Menuhin was very good at spotting publicity opportunities, especially if they could be dressed up as humanitarian work. But on one occasion he bit off more than he could cope with. As soon as the war was over he returned to Germany – a country that he had refused to visit since Hitler came to power in 1933 – to perform for survivors in the death camps, which were now known as displaced persons camps. This precipitated the most serious of his crises. The scenes that he and Benjamin Britten, his accompanist, witnessed in Belsen, where they played twice in a single afternoon, shook Menuhin to his core. The surviving inmates, liberated only a week earlier, had been transferred to the SS barracks because the prison huts had been burnt down. Many were dressed in clothing fashioned from army blankets. Britten was so scarred by what he saw that he only spoke once of the experience. He told Peter Pears how what he and Menuhin had seen had left such a wound that no piece of music that he (Britten) had subsequently written was untouched by the memory.<sup>24</sup> Given that Britten's childhood had been relatively normal, imagine how much greater the shock for Menuhin, seeing the atrocities inflicted on people of his own race. This was the child-like Menuhin, the Peter Pan of music, who was not permitted to cross a road unaccompanied until the age of eighteen and for whom shopping was a preposterous activity to be avoided for ever.<sup>25</sup> Britten, the outcast homosexual who had just written *Peter Grimes*, and Menuhin, the Jewish fiddler; their visit to Belsen was so soon after liberation that no pictures of the atrocity had yet reached a domestic audience. They were totally unprepared for what they encountered. Even forty-five years later Menuhin struggled for words, crying at the memory of the horror of what he had encountered.<sup>26</sup> In his own memoir Menuhin says: 'I shall not forget that afternoon as long as I live.'<sup>27</sup> Menuhin's sister Yaltah once said: 'After Belsen, Yehudi was never the same again. What man would have been? The effect of Nola leaving him, added to what he saw in Belsen, almost destroyed him.'<sup>28</sup> What Menuhin realised was that he had not just witnessed a horror, as in a film or a nightmare, he had witnessed the truth. This was how man was capable of behaving to man. As Tony Palmer wrote: 'If the horror transformed the man, it also knocked the violinist right off balance. And this was a man whose life, indeed the only life he knew, was as a violinist. He was running. He was afraid. And he was not yet thirty years old.'<sup>29</sup> Burton, however, disputes that Menuhin ever saw the true horrors of Belsen, but claims instead that he saw the camp when it had been tidied up.<sup>30</sup>

When Menuhin returned to conventional concert halls in the late 1940s critics – and the public – noticed that his playing had lost some of its beauty.<sup>31</sup> Once again, he was having a crisis of technique, this time precipitated by the Belsen experience and the collapse of his marriage. Even the sympathetic Magidoff writes:

‘Menuhin grappled with his problems in a wretched kind of isolation. He saw little of his wife, as they became strangers to each other... Shedding habits, especially those automatically acquired and practised for many years, and bringing new habits under conscious control, is as grim an undertaking as any adult could assume.’<sup>32</sup>

This was to become a regular theme: while his playing was filled with emotion, it was often technically flawed. Even Desmond Shawe-Taylor, a mild-mannered critic if ever there was, wrote while reviewing a series of CDs issued in 1991 to mark Menuhin’s seventy-fifth birthday: ‘Perhaps no violinist of the first order has been so continuously busy as conductor and organiser, or had quite so technically a chequered career.’<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the late 1940s and early 1950s saw a busy schedule restored and the dissolution of his first marriage. There was a new, powerful and controlling woman in his life. Menuhin married secondly Diana Gould, a ballerina, on October 19<sup>th</sup> 1947 at Chelsea Registry Office. Later the same day he gave a concert with the London Symphony Orchestra under George Weldon. Diana, according to Palmer, was determined to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.<sup>34</sup>

There were still difficult times ahead. There were illnesses such as measles and chickenpox, relatively inconsequential in childhood but more serious in adulthood; because of his upbringing Menuhin had been sheltered from them as an infant. There were also the deaths, in aircraft crashes, of the violinists Jacques Thibaut and Ginette Neveu and the pianist William Kapell. These misfortunes led Menuhin to refuse to travel by air for many years to come.<sup>35</sup> The indefatigable Diana – the self-styled ‘fiddler’s moll’ – proved to be defatigable and checked herself into a Swiss clinic for two months suffering from stress.<sup>36</sup> There was also the Magidoff biography in 1956 which, while seeming adulatory today, caused enormous ructions in the Menuhin family.<sup>37</sup> Moshe Menuhin wrote a twelve-page memorandum to his three children denouncing the

'defamation' with which they had cooperated. And then there were the postwar emotions, hard perhaps to envisage today, stirred up by Yehudi's concerts in Germany with the Berlin Philharmonic under Celibidache and later, after his de-Nazification, under Wilhelm Furtwängler. These generated considerable rancour in Israel and the US, so much so that Menuhin was provided with an armed guard in the Jewish state. Although Furtwängler had remained in Germany during the war Menuhin believed that the old conductor had been working against, not for, the regime. A tribunal later agreed. Coming from a man who was not a politician in the conventional sense, this message was extremely powerful. It also endeared Menuhin to Furtwängler more so than perhaps to any other conductor and this bond is arguably heard no better than in their recording in 1947 of the Beethoven Violin Concerto. Still, that pre-war innocence and effortlessness had vanished for ever; the child prodigy was gone. Menuhin now had to work to produce his music. It was no longer a care-free pastime. He found the late 1940s and early 1950s very difficult.

In Bath the festivals of 1956 and 1957 had been cancelled. The 1956 because of an overspend the previous year – the year of the infamous re-enactment of the Battle of Trafalgar on the Recreation Ground that had to be abandoned because of blizzards in May. And the 1957, in which Menuhin had been due to appear with his sister Hephzibah, ostensibly because of petrol rationing.<sup>38</sup> Ian Hunter's 1958 festival was carefully managed from a financial perspective. The absence of a festival since 1955 probably ensured a more favourable reception for the 1958 festivities. After concerts featuring, among others, Yehudi and Hephzibah, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Rosalyn Tureck, John Gielgud and Shura Cherkassky, the *Chronicle's* headline was 'Festival: all pleased'.<sup>39</sup>

On March 5th 1959, Ian Hunter announced that Yehudi Menuhin, now aged forty-two, was to be the artistic director of the Bath Festival for that and subsequent years.<sup>40</sup> By that time both the festival and the violinist had suffered a number of crises. The festival funding was never secure, nor was its political backing. Menuhin was no longer a child prodigy, but he was by no means an elder statesman. In the music industry there is no artist harder to sell than a middle-aged one. Behind his back he was increasingly being mocked for his devotion to the three Ys – yoga, yoghurt and Yehudi.<sup>41</sup> [fig.1] His passion for green issues and the child-like innocence of his approach to many difficult questions made him, perhaps, the Prince Charles of his day. So while, with hindsight, we can hail Hunter's move as a masterpiece, it could be that he was

solving a problem for his own management company: what to do with Yehudi, his Jewish mama, and Yehudi's new – high-maintenance – wife, Diana. Speaking to the author in 1998 Hunter said: "I was his agent and the great thing with Yehudi was that it kept him interested with new ideas."<sup>42</sup> What a relief for the agent, to have your star artist off your back and interested with new ideas.

There is little doubt that most of the ideas for the festival were Hunter's. Menuhin was the titular head, but he was in no sense running the organisation. He had some say as to who performed at the Bath Festival and what they played, but – coincidentally – many happened to come from Hunter's own roster. In effect, Hunter was being paid to look after the day to day running of the festival *and* receiving ten per cent of the artists' fees. It was a successful business model that Hunter rolled out in several other cities including Edinburgh, Windsor, Brighton and Hong Kong.

For Menuhin the Bath Festival meant that he and his family could stay in one place for more than a couple of nights. [fig.3] At the family home in Gstaad, in the Swiss Alps, the Menuhins would rarely spend more than a week together before Yehudi would be off travelling. Even when he was there the family saw little of him. Ten days in the same city were unheard of for the Menuhin circus. In his autobiography Menuhin says: "To be in charge of a festival is as good as



fig 3: Bath Festival Poster, May 1960. Publicity of the festival arranged with Yehudi Menuhin. Bath in Time – Bath Central Library Collection

a holiday.<sup>43</sup> Zamira, the daughter from his first marriage who went to live with her father and stepmother when she was twelve, recalled:

'Daily life in Gstaad always began with yoga. Which I loathe. My father, in his underwear, standing on his head, and all of us expected to do the same. Then there would be breakfast, and then he'd disappear to practise or dictate letters, or telephone, or chair meetings. Later there would be lunch, and then he'd disappear again. We didn't see that much of him, even in Gstaad.'<sup>44</sup>

A stay of ten consecutive nights at the Lansdown Grove Hotel in Bath was sheer luxury for the Menuhins. Although Yehudi would have four different roles - speaker in a discussion, violinist, viola player and conductor of his own hand-picked chamber orchestra - crucially he did not appear in every event, nor even every day. Compared with his normal schedule, it was relaxing. For the first seven years of the Menuhin era the Festival was billed as 'a festival arranged with Yehudi Menuhin'; from 1966 he was billed as 'artistic director'.<sup>45</sup> In August 1998 he talked about the wide variety of guests who appeared. He said: 'That is what the festival meant to me. Communication and contact with a whole lot of people whom I could invite, who came from every aspect of music making and of human interest.'<sup>46</sup> [fig. 4] Indeed, Menuhin's first few years at the Bath Festival saw a stunning array of personalities. On one occasion



**fig 4: Yehudi Menuhin rehearses in the Guildhall, 1966.** With familiar portraits looking on, the School's Orchestra rehearse under the chandeliers of the Guildhall.  
*Bath in Time – Bath Central Library Collection*

he wrote to Sir Thomas Beecham: 'I have been entrusted with the Festival at Bath, and with the opportunity of indulging a few of my ambitions.'<sup>47</sup> And the format was pretty much established from 1959: Menuhin's ad hoc orchestra was dubbed the Bath Festival Orchestra, [fig. 5] there were chamber concerts in the Guildhall, flashier events in the Forum, sacred music in the Abbey and token amounts of jazz and music from the Indian subcontinent. In today's era of mass travel and world music concerts, we must not lose sight of just how extraordinary these last events were. A sarod recital by Indian musicians in the Guildhall on June 8th 1959 was unprecedented. And Ravi Shankar's joint



**fig 5: Yehudi Menuhin in rehearsal with the Bath Festival Orchestra, 1964.** Pictured in the Assembly Rooms.  
*Photograph – David Farrell*



**fig 6: Performers at La Serenissima on a specially constructed pontoon on the river, June 1962.** This event was visited by Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon. The Bath Festival was responsible for many grand and exciting productions.  
*Bath in Time – Bath Central Library Collection*

concert with Menuhin in 1966 predated the sitar master's collaboration with the Beatles by some months.

By being responsible for – but not taking part in – dozens of concerts Menuhin was in a new position. He could, without trying too hard, take credit for other people's work. He may not have programmed much of the festival, he may not have played in half of it, but it was still Menuhin's festival. As Palmer says, festivals provided him with a musical security that his concert career had of late begun to undermine.<sup>48</sup> And the Bath Festival proved to be a popular affair, both locally and nationally. [fig. 6]

The rise in the festival artistically, also brought a rise in popularity of its social side, with events such as a Venetian carnival called La Serenissima, a recreation of the Battle of Agincourt and the notorious Roman Orgy at the Roman Baths in 1961. [fig. 7] This latter continued to rankle with Menuhin nearly forty years later. In 1998 he told the author:

'I must say I was not particularly pleased about the Roman Orgy. I thought it was a music festival. If we'd gone deeply into the subject and found out what kind of music the Romans were listening to, and followed up the archaeology and the history, that would have interested me enormously. I love frivolity. I love gaiety, I love abandonment, I love improvisation. But to see a lot of rich people get together and find some excuse for getting drunk – that attitude was at odds with my own feeling about it.'<sup>49</sup>



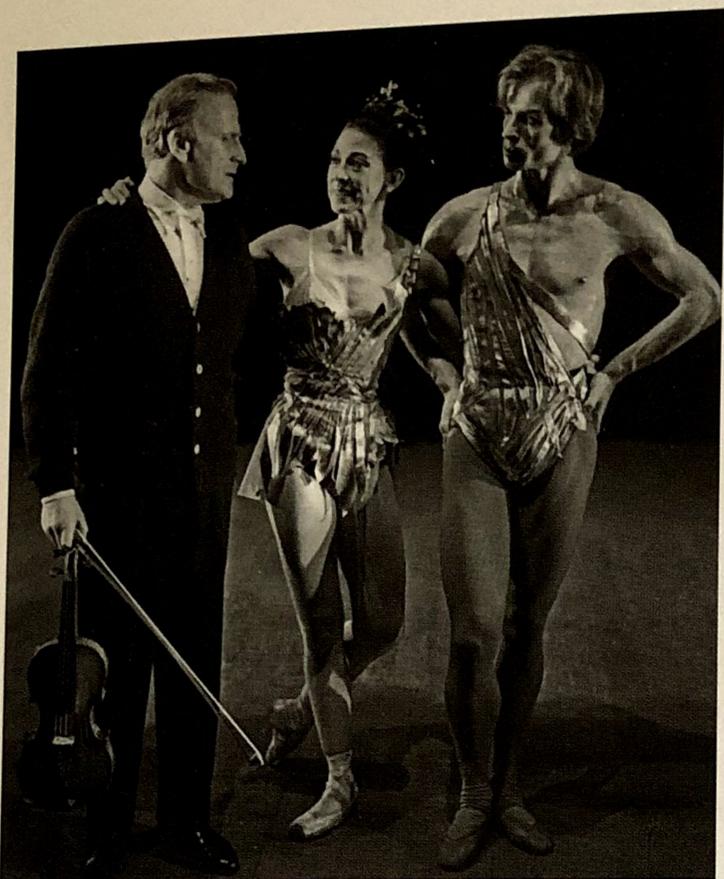
**fig 7: The Roman Rendezvous, Great Roman Bath, c.1965.** Extremely popular with the participants, less so with Menuhin who deplored the 'Roman Orgy' which became a popular feature of the Bath Festival.

*Bath in Time – Bath Central Library Collection*



**fig 8: Yehudi Menuhin and Nadia Boulanger in discussion at the Guildhall, 1962.** The Bath Festival extended out to Wells Cathedral that year where Boulanger conducted Stravinsky's Mass and Menuhin was the soloist in Mozart's Violin Concerto in D major.

*Photograph – Axel Poignant*



**fig 9: Menuhin, Fonteyn and Nureyev onstage at the Theatre Royal, 1964.** After a specially choreographed performance of Bartok's *Divertimento*, one of the highlights of the Bath Festival.

*Photograph – David Farrell*

Whether because of Hunter or Menuhin or – most likely – the pair of them combining their thoughts and ideas, the Bath festivals of the first half of the 1960s saw some important events including Pears and Britten (1959), Nadia Boulanger conducting (1960) [fig. 8], Jacqueline du Pré, aged just sixteen (1961), the London Symphony Orchestra with eighty-seven-year-old Pierre Monteux (1962), a joint concert with Menuhin and Johnny Dankworth (1963), Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev (1964) [fig. 9], the Smetana Quartet (1965) and Ravi Shankar in a joint concert with Menuhin (1966). But by 1966 times were changing. Menuhin was gradually getting more ambitious. He wanted the festival to change and to move forward – but in his way. Artists' fees and other costs were rising, but the city's grant that year had reached only £3,500. In the 1955 festival it had contributed £5,000. Unease was beginning to mount. The old canard of 'elitism' was being muttered; concerts where black tie was the norm looked increasingly out of place in the Swinging Sixties; the Menuhin entourage seemingly swanned in and swanned out; Menuhin himself was growing irritated with the dilution of the classical music programme. Burton believes the city to be at fault. On the subject of Menuhin being an absentee landlord Burton says that such a criticism 'cannot be sustained: the quality of the programme speaks for itself'.<sup>50</sup> In this Burton fundamentally misses the point: the programme is only part of what makes a festival a festival as opposed to merely a series of concerts or events. In an attempt to mollify Menuhin, the city awarded him the rare honour of the freedom of the city. Although the freedom

bought Menuhin's favours for a little longer, arguably it also cemented his role in the Establishment at a time when the world was increasingly disdainful of such rarefied honours. The rot had already set in and granting Menuhin the freedom, far from solving the problems, served simply to exacerbate them.

The 1967 festival got off to a bad start with a storm in a teacup between the Abbey and the festival over who should take part in the festival service. Then, Jacqueline du Pré pulled out of her concert at the last moment to go to Israel to support its troops. Even the ever-supportive Morley Pooley, the long-serving music critic of *The Bath Chronicle* turned ambivalent: 'Basically it is the same formula – the Menuhin family,' he wrote.<sup>51</sup> Something had to change. There would have to be life beyond Menuhin. There was a cosiness – particularly in the insular Menuhin caravan – that sat far too uneasily in the revolutionary fervour of the late 1960s. And Bath, for all its exciting events, never rivalled Salzburg or Edinburgh, nor, says Palmer, did it become an essential place of pilgrimage for the discerning music lover. It never was more than a comfortable bourgeois get-together for the local gentry and their children.<sup>52</sup> Menuhin's answer was to rejuvenate the festival with opera – to be funded by the ratepayers of Bath. The festival board would have been only too well aware of how the city council would react if they approached with a begging bowl. While students were growing long hair and rioting, Bath would like some opera. Burton is highly critical of the local burghers: 'For the philistines who were in the ascendancy in local affairs the festival was becoming too esoteric.'<sup>53</sup>

Menuhin was by now almost as famous for his non-musical work as for his musical work, in particular his humanitarian and mediation work. Within his family, he settled disputes; in his work for Unesco he strove to find solutions to conflict; his work in post-war Germany with the Berlin Philharmonic and Furtwängler helped to draw a line under the Nazi era from a musical perspective. Yet, when it came to the Bath Festival, he could not find a solution. He was adamant that the festival must have opera. And the festival was adamant that it could not afford opera. Menuhin went some of the way, by digging into his own pocket; as a result there were four performances in 1967 of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* produced by Phoenix Opera.<sup>54</sup> Again, accounts vary. Did Menuhin lower his fees, waive his fees or even – as he once claimed – write a cheque for £3,000? We don't know. But as a negotiating stance that perhaps weakened his position.

Who said what to whom, and how exactly Menuhin's tenure was brought

to an end, has long since been taken to the grave. There are conflicting accounts, some collected after time has allowed the more raw emotions to subside. Immediately after the 1967 Festival, Morley Pooley wrote in *The Bath Chronicle*: 'In recent years the festival has followed a rather anonymous pattern, with scarcely a distinctive ripple from one June to another to stir the musical waters...' He continued in similar vein, before unveiling a shocking suggestion: 'There is one major change the festival could make. It concerns the artistic director Menuhin himself. Now this, I am aware, may seem like heresy. To the musical world Menuhin is the Bath Festival... Somewhere there has to be found another personality.'<sup>55</sup> The article quickly reached Menuhin, who was in the US. He was suspicious that it had been planted by the festival authorities. There was a sharp exchange of correspondence and, somehow, it was agreed that 1968 would be his tenth and final festival.

To the author's mind Menuhin had simply overstayed his welcome. For the 1968 festival he had prepared and booked a cast for *The Magic Flute*. The festival balked at the cost and refused to entertain it. In *Unfinished Journey*, Menuhin writes: 'When the town council refused to underwrite a fourth opera, I felt it was my cue to go.'<sup>56</sup> Menuhin's ambitions had moved to a new level; the city had stayed roughly where it was. Menuhin and Bath had outgrown each other. At the time there was a good deal of acrimony and bitterness, some of which spilt over into both the local and the national press. Thirty years later, Menuhin was philosophical about his departure. He said: 'I don't think that directors should remain in their position much more than ten years, because there is always a little sediment.'<sup>57</sup>

The public end of this extraordinary and successful era in the history of the festival came in a peaceful and relaxed way on the last night of the 1968 festival, June 30th. In what was probably the least formal event of his decade-long tenure, Menuhin and the Bath Festival Orchestra gathered at the Assembly Rooms for an evening of Viennese waltzes and polkas. At midnight, no one wanted to leave. For one last time in Bath, Yehudi Menuhin placed his violin beneath his chin. The great virtuoso's final contribution to the Bath Festival was Strauss's *Blue Danube*.<sup>58 59</sup>

With the Bath Festival Menuhin had enjoyed a platform for ten of the most tumultuous years of the past century. It was a platform that he carefully cultivated. He named his group of musical friends the Bath Festival Orchestra. And when he left he renamed them the Menuhin Orchestra. He recorded with

them, and put both his name and the festival's name in record shops the world over. There is no doubt that, artistically and economically, he did a lot of good for Bath; forty years later the city continues to reap the benefits of its association with Yehudi Menuhin. But his presence in the city also did a lot of good for Menuhin. He was no intellectual. He was a genius, an artist, a musician, a statesman and a humanitarian. He called himself, in all seriousness, a 'gypsy'.<sup>60</sup> Even Louis Kentner, his brother in law, wrote as the violinist vacillated between his first wife and his lover (Diana): 'Yehudi may not be a great intellectual luminary.'<sup>61</sup> For the rest of his life, he was the former artistic director of the Bath Festival; there were no more emotional or technical crises other than the infirmities of old age. He had entered the festival as a middle-aged man, and he came out of it as an international treasure, an elder statesman of the world.

Had it not been for the Bath Festival, would there have been a career in the decades after middle-age? It is impossible to know. Without the opportunity to pause each year in the beautiful city of Bath, would his hectic schedule have led to more crises? During all this time Menuhin had also been forging his humanitarian work and developing his school. He went on from Bath to Windsor, where he was director of the Windsor Festival for a mere three years. But there was to be no Windsor Festival Orchestra nor the freedom of the town of Windsor.

Menuhin and Bath, whose need was the greatest? Yes, Bath continues to benefit to this day from its relationship with Menuhin. However, based on the evidence above, it can be argued with some conviction that the career of Yehudi Menuhin, arguably the greatest violinist of the twentieth century, benefited more than has previously been documented from his relationship with the city. [fig.10]



**fig 10: Souvenir Programme for the Bath Festival, 1963**  
 The festival ran from June 6th to 16th in that year.  
*Bath in Time – Bath Central Library Collection*

## Notes

1. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin* (Faber & Faber, 2000), p.386
2. *The Bath Chronicle*, June 18th 1968
3. Tim Bullamore, *Fifty Festivals* (Mushroom, 1999), p.39
4. Robert Magidoff, *Yehudi Menuhin: the authentic biography* (Robert Hale Ltd, 1956) pp. 256-261
5. *The Bath Critic*, June 1952
6. *The Bath Chronicle*, May 14th 1955
7. Stanley Sadie (ed), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (MacMillan, 1980) Volume XII, p.167
8. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait* (Faber & Faber, 1991), p.25
9. *The Financial Times*, obituary, March 13th 1999
10. *The New York Times*, obituary, March 13th 1999
11. Christopher Fifield, *Ibbs and Tillett: the rise and fall of a musical empire* (Ashgate, 2005), pp.144-146
12. Christopher Fifield, *Ibbs and Tillett: the rise and fall of a musical empire*, p.153
13. Robert Magidoff, *Yehudi Menuhin: the authentic biography*, p.134
14. *The Guardian*, obituary, March 13th 1999
15. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, pp.104-105
16. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.66
17. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.66
18. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, pp.130-133
19. *The Daily Mail*, obituary, March 13th 1999
20. Robert Magidoff, *Yehudi Menuhin: the authentic biography*, p.171
21. *The New York Times*, obituary, March 13th 1999
22. Robert Magidoff, *Yehudi Menuhin: the authentic biography*, p.60
23. Marutha Menuhin, obituary, *The Times*, November 21st 1996
24. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.59
25. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.69
26. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.70
27. Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, (Methuen, 1976, 1996), p.186
28. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.71
29. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.72
30. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, p.251
31. *The New York Times*, obituary, March 13th 1999
32. Robert Magidoff, *Yehudi Menuhin: the authentic biography*, pp.225-226
33. *The Sunday Times*, April 21st 1991
34. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.76

35. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, p.342
36. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, p.341
37. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, pp.351-353
38. Tim Bullamore, *Fifty Festivals* (Mushroom, 1999), pp.49-51
39. *The Bath Chronicle*, June 7th 1958
40. *The Bath Chronicle*, March 5th 1959
41. *The Times*, obituary, March 13th 1999
42. Tim Bullamore, *Fifty Festivals*, pp.53-54
43. Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, p.358
44. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.134
45. Tim Bullamore, *Fifty Festivals*, p.75
46. *The Bath Chronicle*, August 19th 1998
47. Letter to Sir Thomas Beecham dated June 13th 1960; author's private collection
48. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, pp.123-124
49. Tim Bullamore, *Fifty Festivals*, p.62
50. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, p.389
51. *The Bath Chronicle*, June 20th 1967
52. Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, p.125
53. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, p.388
54. Tim Bullamore, *Fifty Festivals*, p.79
55. *The Bath Chronicle*, June 20th 1967
56. Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, p.362
57. Tim Bullamore, *Fifty Festivals*, p.87
58. Tim Bullamore, *Fifty Festivals*, p.89
59. Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, p.362
60. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, p.506
61. Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, p.268

Other reading:

Diana Menuhin, *Fiddler's Moll* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1984)  
 Moshe Menuhin, *The Menuhin Saga* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984)