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Musician Is Just Another Tourist, Says Isaac Stern



Isaac Stern and his wife ready to take off on their way to another concert.

By W. G. ROGERS
Associated Press Arts Editor

Calcutta, Bombay, New Delhi, Israel, Milan, Rome, Zurich, London and New York again.

Tens of thousands saw him in concert halls and heard him play. But he heard and saw things, too, and used his cameras.

He and his violin appeared at 59 concerts.

A signed photo of India's Nehru, and a stamped U. S. Army medal



saying, in effect, well done for playing for the wounded, are among his mementos.

He told me about it just as he resumed his concertizing.

Was a violinist abroad about the same as a violinist in this country?

"No," he answered, and told of a train ride from Tokyo to Osaka: "I had played a concert in Tokyo. On the train there happened to be a member of the board of governors that sponsored the concert. Our discussion led him to suggest that I meet some government officials riding on the same train.

"So back he took me to the observation car where I was introduced to a group of Japanese leaders in striped pants and high hats. Among them were such top-ranking men as the speaker of the Diet and the minister of defense. We talked. I went back to my seat.

"As the train stopped at Osaka, we noticed a huge crowd waving flags and holding up banners. I said to my wife, 'They're here to greet the government officials, let's wait a few minutes till things quiet down.'

"So we waited. Then trying to escape attention, we left our car quietly, and then discovered that the signs carried by the crowd read: 'Welcome Isaac Stern.'

"In other words," Stern continued, "a violinist traveling as I was regarded, in the countries he visits, as sort of cultural ambassador. He must keep this in mind, too, he must be conscious that in his way he represents his country. Of course it's not official; it may look official abroad but it definitely is not at home. Other people give him a status his own people don't grant him."

"You mean the State Department doesn't consider you an ambassador?"

"It probably doesn't even know about me. It certainly doesn't regard me as any ambassador. Abroad it leaves me, like other musicians, very much alone."

Stern declined to speak for himself, but of musicians in general said:

"Foreigners are constantly being told how much money we are spending for them and how many A-bombs we have. But there are influential foreigners who would be much quicker to like us and understand us if they could hear one of our great symphonies or see American ballet. Without underwriting or financing our theater or our artists abroad, at least our government could recognize American talent, shake its hand in distant capitals, so to speak, invite it in for tea."

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