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# MENUHIN FESTIVAL GSTAAD

## PRESS RELEASE

*Lord Menuhin and the Menuhin Festival Gstaad*

## A Living Affinity with the Saanenland

Lord Menuhin, the founder of the Gstaad classical music festival bearing his name, is still remembered as a world famous violin child prodigy, conductor and humanist. His remarkable humanity, his multi-faceted artistic gifts and his perpetual curiosity were the hallmarks of his creative endeavours. It was in 1957 that this honorary resident of Saanen founded the legendary festival in the Saanenland. The promotion of young talent was just as important to him as playing music amongst friends.

### **A Russian Cosmopolitan**

Born in 1916 in New York into a family of Russian Jewish immigrants, Yehudi Menuhin grew up in San Francisco. Watched over by his strict parents as he practised and learned, he was quickly seen to be a musical prodigy. All his life, Yehudi Menuhin was a nomad and a cosmopolitan and travelled the world as a humanist, organiser and musician.

### **A Passion for Difference**

His interest in other cultures and musical movements saw him arrange encounters between various styles at the Gstaad Festival, revealing the binding power of music, for example with Indian sitar-player Ravi Shankar (in 1971 and 1975) or with jazz virtuoso Grappelli. Menuhin endlessly pursued the “healing power in musical harmony”. Meditation and yoga exercises were important to him, and music was indispensable.

### **Love of Gstaad**

In 1957 Yehudi Menuhin and his family moved to Gstaad and founded the Menuhin Festival Gstaad. The elemental power of the natural environment and the mountains fascinated and inspired him. He was impressed not only by the Saanenland’s magnificent alpine arena, but also by the meeting of Western Switzerland, German-speaking culture, and the nearby South with its Italian lifestyle. Since Gstaad and its surrounding area also offered an ideal environment for an international education for his children (among others, the “Le Rosey” Institute and the International Kennedy School are based in the Saanenland), Menuhin settled with his family in the area. Walking in the mountains with his children, the city-dweller discovered the natural world of the native population, who were also to inspire Menuhin with their folklore and music.

### **Discovery and Promotion of Countless Talented Young Musicians**

Infected by the virus of pedagogical work with young musicians and motivated by the idea of sharing his life experience, Menuhin’s busy concert schedule increasingly was accompanied by writing, teaching and the direction of his festivals (since 1957 in Gstaad and from 1959 to 1968 also the artistic director of the festival in Bath). In 1963 he founded his Yehudi Menuhin School in London, later in more expansive premises in Stoke d’Abernon, a school for outstanding young musicians that now receives state funding. In 1977 the International Menuhin Music Academy moved with the Camerata Lysis from Holland to Gstaad and under the direction of his student Alberto Lysy it becomes a jewel in the cultural life of Gstaad and the three valleys: Pays-d’Enhout, Saanenland and Obersimmental.

### **Untiring Dedication until the End**

During the 1980's and 90's Menuhin's shifted his activities more and more to London: Yehudi Menuhin received the "Order of Merit" from the British Queen in 1987, and in 1993 he named a baron with the title "The Right Honorable Lord Menuhin of Stoke d'Abernon". The great humanist and artist remained untiring in his activities, conducting around the world and founding in Brussels in 1994 "MUS-E"; he continued as musical director in Gstaad until 1996. Menuhin earned the distinction as one of the world's most famous citizens and was awarded countless distinctions as a respected humanist. While on concert tour with his Sinfonia Varsovia he died suddenly in Berlin on 12 March 1999. His upright, spirited heart stopped beating just a few weeks before his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

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### **Yehudi Menuhin: A Life in Moments**

- 1916 Born on 22<sup>nd</sup> April in New York, into a family of Russian Jewish immigrants.
  - 1921 Violin lessons in San Francisco (Motivation: "When can I play vibrato?").
  - 1924 On 29<sup>th</sup> February, first appearance, as a student of Louis Persinger, first violin solo of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.
  - 1927 Meeting with Georges Enescu.  
First concert in Paris with the "Orchestre Lamoureux".
  - 1929 On 12<sup>th</sup> April Yehudi Menuhin plays his legendary Berlin concert under Bruno Walter. With three solo concertos by Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, he establishes world fame as a child prodigy.
  - 1935 110 concerts during a world tour leads to an artistic crisis.
  - 1938-1945 During the Second World War he plays over 500 concerts for Allied troops.  
Yehudi Menuhin becomes a symbol of peace.
  - 1957 First musical performance in the Saanenland, the "Menuhin Festival" is born.  
Also becomes artistic director of the Bath Festival.
  - 1959 Growing enthusiasm for conducting.
  - 1963 Foundation of a children's music school in Stoke d'Abernon, England.
  - 1969 Elected President of UNESCO's International Music Council.
  - 1970 Made an honorary burgher of the commune of Saanen.
  - 1977 Foundation of the International Menuhin Music Academy (IMMA) – Camerata Lysy moves from Holland to Gstaad.
  - 1979 Yehudi Menuhin wins the German editors' peace prize.
  - 1993 The British Queen appoints him "Baronet of Stoke d'Abernon":  
Sir Yehudi Menuhin becomes Lord Menuhin.
  - 1999 Menuhin, artist and humanist, dies on 12<sup>th</sup> March of heart failure in Berlin.
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## Pausing for Reflection on the Philosopher's Path

A Philosopher's Path with 12 information panels, running from Gstaad to Saanen, serves as a reminder of Yehudi Menuhin, free citizen of the Saanen region (he received this honour in 1970). His reflections on human behaviour, nature, and culture are preserved in all their wisdom along the lifeline of Saanenland, the river Saane.

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## Menuhin Center Saanen

The Menuhin Center Saanen Association has as its goal the preservation of the memory of the artistic and spiritual heritage of Yehudi Menuhin in Saanenland. Lord Menuhin's life, cultural surroundings as well as his musical and pedagogical influences are documented and displayed in the historical Salzhüsi Chalet in the center of Saanen. As a research center and memorial archive material (photographs, texts, a small library and mediathek) is gathered, registered and presented for public access and use. And since Yehudi Menuhin guided and shaped the festival for over 40 years, the rich history of the Menuhin Festival Gstaad is also documented here.

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## Quotations from Yehudi Menuhin

"I feel at home in Gstaad. I started a small music festival there in the wonderful little church in Saanen ..."

"A way of life which excludes the riches of the unknown and the mysterious, is out of variance with life itself".

"Every living moment is a new departure, an end and a beginning, a coming together and a separation".

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## Literature and DVD

- The 304-page book "Gstaad und die Menuhins" ISBN 3-71651446-2), published by Benteli Verlag
- DVD "Yehudi Menuhin – Lord of the Strings"; the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Menuhin Festival Gstaad  
*Available in the Festival Office (Tel. +41 (0) 33 748 83 38) as well as in specialty shops.*

"Anzeiger von Saanen", Special edition, 120<sup>th</sup> Year, Sunday 7 March 2000, No. 19 (Author: Dr. Rolf P. Steiger)