

Friedman and many of his colleagues were addicted to card games and gambling, but aside from these, Friedman had little time to spare, living like a doctor on call. The conductor Georg Schneevoigt wrote:

Excerpted  
from “Ignaz  
Friedman” by  
Allan Evans

Friedman, today [1940] one of the great pianists of the world, at the beginning of his career came to Riga to give concerts. At that time I was the conductor of the Riga Symphony Orchestra, which orchestra provided the greatest opportunities for celebrated artists to appear in Russia. At the time of this story, M[oriz] Rosenthal had been engaged to give three concerti with the Riga Symphony Orchestra. Rosenthal was then considered to be the most attractive celebrity pianist. Two days before the concert, Rosenthal cancelled his visit.

A young pianist, by the name of Ignaz Friedman, was billed to give concerts in Riga. I talked to the manager of the orchestra, and eventually we decided to see what could be done with this comparatively unknown pianist. Friedman had only arrived in Riga by the 8 AM train, and when he reached his hotel about an hour later he was sound asleep—so sound asleep, in fact, that I had to shake him to wake him. He told me to go away, as he wanted to sleep, and, yawning, he rolled over and turned his back to me. I told him that I wanted him to take Rosenthal’s place and appear with the orchestra the following day. This woke him up; To take Rosenthal’s place and appear with the Riga Orchestra was an opportunity that no young artist would yawn at.

When we came to discuss salary, I mentioned a figure much lower than that arranged for Rosenthal. After all Rosenthal was a famous artist, whereas it was Friedman’s first appearance in Riga and he had no reputation as a pianist. Friedman, however, had his own definite ideas, and flatly refused to appear at the fee I mentioned. I proceeded to point out that he was unknown in Riga and so forth; whereupon Friedman pulled the bedclothes around his ears and proceeded to go to sleep again. In vain did I endeavor to point out the advantages of this opportunity of appearing with the orchestra—Friedman remained firm in his demand for the same fee as Rosenthal. By this time I was almost desperate. “All right, I will pay you the same fee as Rosenthal,” I said, “but on one condition: You must play the same concerti as Rosenthal.” I thought to myself this boy will never be able to do these works, so on this point I will defeat him and he will accept my terms. Rosenthal was programmed to play a concerto by Beethoven, one by Rubinstein, which is very seldom played, and a concerto by Henselt, which I have never seen before or since on any program.

Friedman listened attentively when I gave him the program, looked very thoughtful for a few minutes, and then said: “You can send me the scores of the Henselt and the Rubinstein.” Within twenty-four hours he came to rehearse with the orchestra, and not only had he mastered these two most difficult works which he had never seen before, but he played them from memory. To this day I have nothing but the greatest admiration for Friedman. We have been the best of friends ever since this first concert together, and we have been associated in concerts all over Europe.<sup>50</sup>