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# Cellists' Corner

## Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

*prepared by David Johnstone from public information*

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## SPECIAL FEATURE on ADRIEN-FRANÇOIS SERVAIS

1807 – 1866 Belgium

Principal cello Royal Chapel (Belgium), Professor Brussels Conservatoire. Many soloist contracts in Russia.

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Undoubtedly both Paganini and Liszt had a rather great influence on the Belgian artist. His contemporaries (Berlioz was one) used to call him "the Paganini of the cello" or "the Liszt of the cello." But his performing style as well as his cello works are closer to the style of his younger contemporary and compatriot, the famous violinist Henri Vieuxtemps (1820-1881).

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Though the value of Servais' cello works, like most of the violin compositions of Vieuxtemps, is today restricted basically to teaching, their historical significance is indisputable. They greatly facilitated the development of cello virtuosity, expanded its expressive and technical resources, and stimulated interest in the violoncello as a concert instrument and in the composition of concert music for it. His concert programs often were compiled exclusively of his own compositions, which were an unqualified success when he performed them himself! However Servais' programs usually consisted of a concerto and two or three of his own fantasias which he played with an orchestra or a quartet. A concert would open with an orchestral overture, and the cello works, which were the core of the program, alternated with performances by a singer or pianist. That he included in his programs works such as the Egmont Overtures and parts of Beethoven's symphonies speaks in favor of Servais' taste.

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To evaluate the scale of Servais' concert career, it is sufficient to say that over a period of forty years he gave more than ten thousand concerts in different countries of Europe -and that was a time when travel was extremely difficult.

In 1852, Anton Rubinstein dedicated to the Belgian artist his first violoncello sonata, which he probably played with Servais as well. In Belgium, Servais often played "Chant d'amour," a piece composed for him by Nikolay Yusupov. In the spring of 1866, Karl Davydov appeared in a Servais concert, with the two playing the main part in the work for eight violoncellos which the Belgian virtuoso had composed.

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But the 'fashion' of Servais passed, leaving him behind... the tragedy of the Servais type of virtuoso was that the progress of music and the tastes of the musicians and knowledgeable music lovers had become much more advanced, leaving them far behind. The time of romantic virtuoso aspirations had yielded to the spirit of the new age, to new esthetics, to the requirements of more significance and better expression of more profound content. The Russian critic Pavel Makarov left a graphic description of this idea in his review written during the last year of Servais' life:

*"Everybody worships Servais and finds so much charm in his playing that I really do not know what to do, whether to write about him or not? At his recitals Servais played his own compositions, i.e., early stale and antediluvian forms of fantasias on meaningless themes from Italian and French operas, the most unbearably banal of which was... his fantasia on the opera 'Lestocq'... His playing is based on superficiality that passes for feeling: he either nods charmingly, or gracefully waves his left hand when passing to an open string -quite 'chic playing', I must confess. But there is not the force or completeness which the playing of our Russian cellist Davydov truly abounds in. Servais' bowing -certainly does have more lilt than Davydov's, but this very lilt is so full of the unending sugary vibrato that one would, no doubt, like to cleanse one's ears with full and clear sounds, as one would like to have some plain water after eating candies. In his time, Servais might certainly have been the king of all cellists and surprised Europe with his playing -probably so, but his time has flown away irretrievably..."*

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Servais was the target of more criticism during his last appearances in St. Petersburg and Moscow in February-May 1866, several months before his death. On that occasion he toured with his son Joseph, a talented violoncellist and his own pupil.

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Although Servais finally no longer met the more profound esthetic demands of advanced musicians and listeners, he nevertheless did influence both performing cellists and composers who wrote for the cello in the last century.

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#### Dedications to Servais:

Anton Rubinstein – 1st Cello Sonata,

Nikolay Yusuove – Chant d’amour.

The Russian poets Mikhail Koltzov and Grigoriy Danilevsky dedicated him some of their poems.

Louis Stanlein - Fantaisie Caractéristique sur des motifs hongrois pour Violoncelle avec Accompt. d'Orchestre ou de Piano, Op.4 (c.1850)

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#### Music/Publications:

Many own original works, including the famous ‘Souvenir de Spa’.

Friendships: Franchomme, Berlioz

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## Students:

Servais was head of the cello class at the Brussels Conservatoire until his death, and tutored many pupils. Among them, Joseph Servais,<sup>9</sup> Jules DeSwert,<sup>10</sup> Charles Montigny, Charles Meerense, Ernest De Munck (the son of François De Munck), Adolph Fisher, Paul Becker and Joseph Hollmann of Holland, Valentin Müller of Germany, the Poles Adam Hermanowski and Jan Karłowicz, the professional Russian cellists Vikiy Meshkov and Arved Porten, and the amateur Alexander Storozhenko deserve to be mentioned. Their art is excellent proof of Servais' teaching talent. Here a few brief words on three of them:

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**Joseph Servais** - the Son of the famous Servais 1850 – 1885 Belgium  
Member Weimar Orchestra. Professor Brussels Conservatoire.

Dedications: Vieuxtemps – Cello Concerto No.2 in B minor, Op.50  
(1884)

Special friendship: Saint-Saëns

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**Adolf Fischer** 1847 – 1891 Belgium (later France)

\* Worked in Paris, making occasional concert tours.

Anecdote: a pupil of Servais in Brussels Conservatoire.

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**Auguste Van Biene** - the 'Magician of the cello' 1850 - 1913 Holland  
(later Britain)

Anecdotes: a pupil of Servais (at Brussels conservatoire).

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Daniel de Lange

1841 – 1918 Holland

Professor Rotterdam Music School. Composer. Cellist

Anecdote: a pupil of Simon Ganz and Servais.

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## Varied Anecdotes of Servais:

\*\* COUNT Mathieu Vielgorsky was dedicated pieces by Servais and Wieniawsky

\*\* Servais was a strong man! Lisa (Barbier) Cristiani (1827 – 1853) was a French cellist who died whilst trying to undertake a grueling tour of remote Russian and Siberia regions, as had done Servais successfully before her!

\*\* 1860 - concert 'debut' of David Popper, performing Servais - Souvenir de St. Petersburg, Op.15 / Orchestra of the Prague Conservatoire, conducted by Hans von Bülow (Ständisches Theater, Prague)

\*\* 1864 - the concerto debut of David Popper in Berlin - as soloist he choose to perform the Volkmann - Cello Concerto & Servais - Cello Concerto / the concert in Berlin was conducted by Hans von Bülow

\*\* 1871 - a recital of David Popper/cello and Anton Door/piano (probably first performance of Karl Eckert - Cello Concerto in version with piano reduction; the programme also featured a Servais concerto work) / (Vienna)



Please do see other original works for many different instruments and groupings, and also special transcriptions for cellists, and cellists with other instruments on the *Johnstone-Music* web page

Also both general musical and cello based articles, directories of famous historical cellists, and many other items of interest

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