

Cellists' Corner

Brief Career Details of Important Cellists

prepared by David Johnstone from public information

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SPECIAL FEATURE on ÉDOUARD JACOBS

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Birth: 9th February 1851 - Halle, Belgium

Death: 3rd March 1925 - Ixelles

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He was a pupil of Gustave Libotton and Joseph Servais (the son of famous cellist Adrien-François Servais) at the Brussels Conservatory. Whilst still a youngster he was active in the church orchestra, in the Halse Harmonie, in the Roland de Lattre choir and in the symphonic orchestra Cercle Servais. He later became a Professor in the same Brussels Conservatoire in 1885, succeeding his teacher as head of cello still whilst only in his early thirties.

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He played in the Weimar court orchestra for some years. He also played the viola da gamba in concerts of early music. Edouard Jacobs travelled around Europe advertised as a cello virtuoso. He gave countless concerts in France, Germany, England and the Netherlands and impressively went to Russia almost every year between 1892 and 1904. In his own country he frequently performed as a cellist, viol player and also as a singer!

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His influence on the Belgian Cello School cannot be underestimated, because his fame as a teacher spread quickly. Jacobs went on to teach cello for 44 consecutive years at the Brussels Conservatory. Indeed, cellists from all over the world came to study with him. Various pedagogical cello works are also dedicated to Jacobs, of which the most important are surely the Popper - High School of Cello Playing Vol.II (all the Etudes from number 21 to 30), Op.73 (completed by Popper in 1902).

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All fine to here...so why then is he the cellist that cellists 'love to hate'?! It refers to the fateful year 1895. A young a very talented young Pau {Pablo} Casals travelled to Brussels with a letter of recommendation for François Gavaërt, director of the Conservatory of Music. I understand that Gavaërt was impressed with Casals compositional skills, but it seems that professor Jacobs mocked Casal's arrival at the class (surely thinking the Spaniard possessed little level), asking him if he could play this or that work. However, after hearing Casals play the Servais - Souvenir de Spa in front of the cello class, he realized he was in front of a great artist. He later apologized, asking Casals to please enroll at the Conservatoire where he would be well looked after. But Pau Casals was hurt by his initial reception and refused to enter the conservatory and decided to go to Paris. After some difficult times in Paris, he returned to Barcelona - but as a result Queen María Cristina withdrew her personal scholarship or 'pension'.

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This one incident has blighted his career, which is a shame because he worked with some very fine cellists; for example Felix Salmond was trained by him. For his achievements, King Albert I conferred on Edouard Jacobs the title of Commander in the Order of the Crown; the German Emperor appointed him an officer of the Order of the Red Eagle; and the Russian Tsar awarded him the knighthood of St. Anne. Interesting, a few months ago (8th September 2020) his hometown Halle honoured him with a street name, or rather the "Edouard Jacobs Yard". This perhaps will help in rectifying his memory in a positive sense!

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'documenting the cello' - www.johnstone-music.com

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