

SPECIAL FEATURE on ADOLF SCHIFFER

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Birth: 1873 (Hungary)

Death: 1950 (U.S.A.)

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Adolf Schiffer was a Hungarian-born Czech cellist who for many years served as professor in cello at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest. He is best remembered as being the all-important link between two great cello performers and teachers – being a student of David Popper and the teacher of János Starker. He was also recognized as a teacher of Jewish heritage.

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Adolf Schiffer was born in Apatin, Kingdom of Hungary in 1873; today it can be found within the Serbian borders. He is said to have worked as a book-keeper while teaching himself to play the cello. He obviously had energy and desire because he reached a sufficiently good standard to gain a place at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest. There he studied under the great cellist, teacher and composer, David Popper, and was indeed his "final protégé". János Starker later described him as "*a great teacher... [whose] forte was in assisting his students to develop their natural abilities. He was a superb cellist and musician, but because of a rather late start as an instrumentalist, he limited his performances to string quartet playing.*" Schiffer was also greatly influenced by the composer and Franz Liszt Academy faculty member Leo Weiner.

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Schiffer then served as an assistant to Popper himself, and after Popper retired, Schiffer was appointed as Professor in cello studies, a role he was to hold until his own retirement in 1939. His most celebrated student was János Starker - one of his last students, and who continued lessons with him even after Mr. Schiffer had retired. Some of Schiffer's other well-known pupils included Paul Abraham, Tibor de Machula, Gábor Rejtő, Mátyás Seiber and Laszlo Varga, all 'big' names in the twentieth-century cello world.

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His most famous student has to be:

JANOS STARKER was born in Budapest to a father of Polish descent and a mother who had emigrated from the Ukraine, both Jewish. A child prodigy, Starker made his first public performances at ages six and seven. He entered the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest to study with Adolf Schiffer and made his debut there at age 11. And what a student Schiffer had, and what good work he did with his young cellist! Because ...Janos made his professional debut at age 14 playing the Dvorák cello concerto at only three hours' notice when the originally scheduled soloist was unable to play, and the following year (so just 15) he performed the Solo Sonata by Kodaly which obviously caught the attention of the music world with his brilliance. Starker once told an audience that "Popper is his 'cello grandfather' since as a youth he studied at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest with Popper's student, Adolph Schiffer. That makes Schiffer his "cello father." Schiffer used a Tubbs bow, which passed to János Starker, and fittingly has Schiffer's name engraved on the silver of the frog.

In describing his teaching, Starker notes that:

"He used no method. He assigned material, corrected musical errors, played fragments to clarify his suggestions, and ridiculed unnatural motions that were contrary to the music. Theatricality was discouraged and dismissed as fitting only for clowns to employ in lieu of talent."

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Another well-known student worthy to mention of Schiffer:

Gabor Rejto was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1916, and immigrated to the United States in 1939. His first cello teacher was Frederick Teller. At sixteen, Rejto entered the Liszt Academy of Music, where he studied with ADOLF SCHIFFER. In 1936, at the age of 20 and already a touring artist, he embarked on advanced studies with Pablo Casals, first in Barcelona and then in Prades. He was the cellist in the Paganini and Hungarian string quartets, and was a founding member of the Alma Trio. His chamber music experience attracted many students to his Cello Workshops held throughout the United States. Rejto was a resident of the US from 1939 until his death in 1987.

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And a third great student of Schiffer:

Tibor de Machula (1912-1982) was born in Hungary and had his first cello lessons with ADOLF SCHIFFER. Progress was swift - obviously Schiffer was a fantastic professor! - resulting in a debut for Tibor with the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra performing Haydn's Cello Concerto in D major in 1925 at the tender age of 13! In fact, in 1936 he was invited by Wilhelm Furtwängler to become the principal cellist of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, holding the post for 11 years before becoming the principal cellist of the Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1947. He remained in this post for thirty years until his retirement in 1977.

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Schiffer gives us an insight to his teaching philosophies by writing a 'Violoncellschule' in 2 volumes, which he worked on during the first years of the 20th century when he was still relatively young, and which was first published in 1910. It is only in Hungarian / German.

There are two volumes to this opus: Vol.1 treats the Initial Lessons, and 1st and 2nd levels, whilst Vol.2 is for the Advanced levels. Apparently this is not in public domain in Europe - however, if you are Canadian (and probably from the U.S.A. too) there appears no problem in downloading (as often, discrepancies for rather stupid copyright laws varying country to country although, as mentioned, the first publication available dates from 1910 so should be free for all...).

So...if you are interested to have it, I think from first glance looks to be very good, click here:

[https://imslp.org/wiki/Theoretical_and_Practical_Cello_School_\(Schiffer%2C_Adolf\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Theoretical_and_Practical_Cello_School_(Schiffer%2C_Adolf))

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