

The Dolmetsch Story

by Dr. Brian Blood

The Dolmetsch Workshop is the most tangible aspect of a craft and music-making tradition stretching back to the 1880s when Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940), French-born but of Swiss origin, moved to London to begin a lifetime's study of early music and of the instruments for which it was written.

Arnold Dolmetsch



Possessing a remarkable range of skills, those of performer, maker, scholar and promoter, he was uniquely placed to understand the problems inherent in studying and re-presenting a tradition that, by the end of the nineteenth century, had completely disappeared, and where what little evidence there was, lay unrecognised in musical scores, treatises, tutor-books and in the qualified opinions of contemporary musicians, commentators and diarists, written in a bewildering array of styles and languages.

Today, in the age of recordings, TV and films, radio, photocopiers, fax-machines and microfilm, we can barely comprehend the enormity of his task, but the world-wide interest and involvement of so many, both amateurs and professionals, in this rich and glorious field, owes much to his seminal work.

Dolmetsch received a thorough training as a craftsman at Maison Dolmetsch-Guillouard, 9 rue de la Préfecture, Le Mans, France, his parent's piano, organ and harmonium manufactory. Dolmetsch escaped his responsibilities to the Dolmetsch-Guillouard business by marrying Marie Morel, a widow ten years his senior, before undergoing formal training in piano, violin and composition at The Brussels Conservatoire and where he first came into contact with musicians playing early musical instruments from the collection belonging to the Conservatoire. In 1883, he moved with his family to London, to enrol at the newly opened Royal College of Music, where he could further his interest in 'early music'.

It would be a mistake to think that an interest in early music was particularly remarkable in England at this time. J.A. Fuller Maitland described the situation at Cambridge, where he was a student in the 1870s, as follows: 'The professorial lectures which often admitted the existence of madrigals, virginal music, and such things, nearly always took it for granted that there was no beauty such as could appeal to modern ears, so that the respect with which we were encouraged to approach them was purely due to their antiquity.'

In 1885, at the huge International Inventions Exhibition in The Albert Hall galleries, in South Kensington, London, A.J. Hipkins organised a display of and a series of concerts including instruments, some brought by Victor-Charles Mahillon from The Brussels Conservatoire. The Musical Times commented, 'some of the effects were beautiful as well as curious, while others were only curious.'

Appointed violin master at Dulwich College, but living in the London of the 1880s, he began to collect and later make viols, lutes and a range of early keyboard instruments, for his friends and for the many who flocked to concerts where they could hear him, his family and colleagues play newly discovered repertoire on treasured originals and on Dolmetsch's recent reconstructions.

Harry Haskell writes:

'Owning a Dolmetsch instrument became a status symbol in smart society. Mrs Patrick Campbell ordered a set of psalteries to use in a performance of *Das Rheingold*, and Yeats purchased one for his friend Florence Farr to play while reciting his poetry.'

In 1897 Hans Richter engaged Dolmetsch to play recitatives on his harpsichord in *Don Giovanni* at Covent Garden. His 'Beethoven' pianos, in particular, were among the many beautiful instruments made during his sojourn in London in the late 1890s. Among a wide circle of influential friends including the central figures in the Arts and Crafts Movement (led by William Morris and including Selwyn Image, Helen Coombe, Herbert Horne and Roger Fry whose designs featured on a number of Dolmetsch instruments) and an army of admirers (including Gabriele d'Annunzio (poet), whom Dolmetsch first met in Rome in 1897 and who was to be a frequent companion in long walks around the family home in Fontenay-sous-Bois when Dolmetsch was working for Gaveau, George Bernard Shaw who has left us vivid and appreciative reviews of Dolmetsch's London concerts, Ezra Pound who immortalised him in Canto LXXXI, George Moore (sometimes called the Irish Balzac) who based an entire novel, *Evelyn Innes*, on Dolmetsch's work, house and instruments, James Joyce, announcing that he planned to 'coast the South of England from Falmouth to Margate singing old English songs' to his Dolmetsch lute, used his futile attempt to purchase such an instrument from Dolmetsch as the inspiration for a similar transaction contemplated in *Ulysses*, Percy Grainger for whom Dolmetsch was a fertile source of the early English music that so inspired him, and F.T. Arnold, the musical scholar, who turned frequently to Arnold Dolmetsch for advice when writing *The Art of Accompaniment from a Through-Bass as practised in the 17th and 18th centuries*, long recognised as the standard authority), he enjoyed great success as a promoter of English music of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Margaret Campbell, his biographer, noted that standing barely five feet tall, and dressed in a velvet suit, complete with knee britches, lace ruffles and shiny shoe-buckles, his appearance made him look more pre-Raphaelite than the pre-Raphaelites themselves'.

His fame spread abroad as well as throughout England, leading him to be invited to the Chickering Factory in Boston, U.S.A. where he directed the making of early stringed and keyboard instruments, and later in the Gaveau Workshops in Paris, France. During these periods in America and France some of his very finest instruments, now treasured heirlooms, were produced. (examples of the Chickering-Dolmetsch clavichord may be found at The American Piano Museum, The Bate Collection, Oxford and the Russell Collection, Edinburgh).

A fascinating view of the late Victorian London concerts organised by Dolmetsch comes from Jessica Douglas-Home's biography of her great-aunt, *Violet*, the exotic harpsichordist and clavichordist Violet Gordon Woodhouse.

One concert in particular, caught the imagination of the American harpsichordist Maggie Cole who with a group of friends, including the harpsichordists Malcolm Proud and Alistair Ross, gave a concert at the Wigmore Hall, London on the evening of 14th December 1999 in celebration of the instrument's renaissance during the hundred years following a performance of Bach's Triple Harpsichord Concerto in C at 6 Upper Brook Street, London W1, on 14th December 1899.

Upper Brook Street lies just across Oxford Street from the Wigmore Hall but the building that stands at the address is newer. To the north, over the road, lies the facade of the American Embassy.

The original program was given under the direction of Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch.

PROGRAMME - 14th December 1899

PART I

1. Suite No. 1 in D minor for Four Viols by *Matthew Locke*, 1670.
i. Fantasia ii. Courante iii. Ayre iv. Sarabande
2. Chacone for the Harpsichord, *G. F. Handel*, 1721.
3. A Song from the Opera of "Sosarmes", accompanied by Violins and Harpsichord. *G. F. Handel*
"Sento il Cor"
4. Sonata for the Viola da Gamba and Harpsichord obbligati, accompanied by a Second Harpsichord. *Georg Telemann*, c. 1730

INTERVAL

PART II

5. Sonata for the Harpsichord, being No. 9 in D major: *W. A. Mozart*
6. Song, accompanied by the Harpsichord. *W. A. Mozart*
"Abendempfindung."
7. Sonata No. 3, for the Harpsichord and Viola da Gamba. *J. S. Bach*
8. Concerto in C major for Three Harpsichords, Two Violins, Viola, Violoncello and Violone. *J. S. Bach*

The Names of the Performers

The Consort Viols :

Trebles - Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch, Mr. H.M. Matheson,

Alto - Mr. W. A. Boxall,

Tenor - Miss Mabel Johnston,

Basses - Miss Beatrice Horne, Miss Hélène Dolmetsch,

The Viola da Gamba : Miss Hélène Dolmetsch,

The Harpsichords :

Mrs Gordon Violet Woodhouse.

Mrs Elodie Dolmetsch.

Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch.

The Violins: Mr. W. A. Boxall, Mr. H. M. Matheson.

The Viola : Miss Lille Durham.

The Violoncello : Miss Hélène Dolmetsch.

The Violone : Miss Mabel Johnston.

The Singer : Mr. Douglas Powell.

Tickets, 10s 6d. to be had from Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch,

7, Bayley Street, Bedford Square, London W.C.

Jessica Douglas-Home writes:

'Although this was to be a public concert, Violet prepared as if for a private occasion. A small library, planned as [her husband] Gordon's smoking-room, led off her drawing-room. By letting down a thick green velvet curtain in front of the archway, Violet turned the library into a retiring chamber, from which the Dolmetsch family emerged in Elizabethan costume onto a raised dais where the harpsichords stood.

There being no electricity in the house, the drawing-room was lit by two statues holding oil lamps in the niches on either side of the double doors, and by violet-coloured wax candles set on the green-striped walls in flat brass sconces. Since no paintings could compete with the beautiful ceiling, Violet had hung the room with silhouettes on glass and engravings in low tones of brown, grey and black. The dark, polished boards of the uncarpeted floor gleamed in the candlelight, and high piles of cushions haphazardly filled the window seats.

During the day Gordon had arranged the flowers - ferns, roses and lilies - brought up from the hothouses at Wootton. The guests were invited for half-past seven, an hour before the concert, and were offered cheese croutons, sandwiches, ice creams and white wine, the idea, not altogether successful, being to

avoid an unseemly rush for the buffet. Violet's room could seat fifty and the audience was allowed to overflow on the landing and the staircase.'

Maggie Cole observes, 'questions of presentation like venue and acoustic, costume and image, remain current concerns: what's the best way to restore a musical 'old master' to enhance present experience? The 'historically informed' approach brings no absolutes with it, and throws everything in our conventional concert and opera life up for discussion too.' This description of the Brook Street concert echoes that written by Mabel Dolmetsch of a house concert given by the Dolmetsches in their family home, 'Dowland', a few years earlier.

'The concert room, tinted a soft diaphanous green, was entirely illuminated by wax candles, set round the walls in hand-beaten brass sconces, and interspersed with rare lutes and viols, suspended from hooks.... There was a pleasantly informal atmosphere at these concerts; and the interludes, during which excellent coffee and *petit fours* were handed round, enabled one to appreciate the unusual nature of the audience.'

The approach of the German army towards Paris during the First World War forced the family back to London but under threat from the bombing by Zeppelin, the Dolmetsch family decamped to the verdant beauty of Haslemere in Surrey from whence countless millions of early instruments have flowed since. Haslemere has a special place in recorder history - it was there, in 1919, that Arnold Dolmetsch completed one of the first, and certainly the most influential of, twentieth-century recorders, based on one of his originals (an alto by Bressan, now part of the Dolmetsch Collection housed at the Horniman Museum, Forest Hill, London). The antique instrument had, by that time, been mislaid on Waterloo rail station, left behind in the rush to catch a train back to Haslemere after a concert by the family at the Art Worker's Hall.



This loss was the spur for one of the most remarkable acts in the recorder's revival. Arnold Dolmetsch, now over sixty years old, worked for many months to uncover the recorder's secrets before producing a working model. Over the following six years he completed the main consort of recorders (descant, treble, tenor and bass) all at low pitch and based on historical originals.

This consort featured in the 1926 Haslemere Festival of Early Music. Peter Harlen, visiting an early Festival, purchased a set of recorders from Dolmetsch and, despite being confused by their being at low pitch, commissioned derivatives from German manufacturers and so started the mass recorder movement in Germany

.....and what of the lost recorder?

It was purchased at a junk shop and returned to its rightful owner.

Outside his immediate family circle, Dolmetsch had many pupils (makers, performers and scholars). Among many others these included Gunter Hellwig (viol maker), John Challis (harpsichord maker), Betty Brown (later Betty Goble, wife of [Robert Goble](#), craftsman (1924-1937) in the Dolmetsch workshops), Miles Tomalin (music teacher, writer and composer), Diana Poulton (lutenist), Dorothy Swainson (harpsichordist), Robert Donington (musicologist) who wrote that he and others have not so much improved on Dolmetsch's basic work as extended it in a way that Dolmetsch would have done, had he lived.

Dolmetsch's third wife, Mabel, was a scholar in her own right publishing seminal books on early dance. She too had remarkable pupils including Polish-born Miriam Rambert who later became one of the principal architects of English ballet as Dame Marie Rambert.

The Interpretation of the Music of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries by Arnold Dolmetsch (1915) (reprint including Appendix of Musical Examples available from The Dolmetsch Workshops) was the result of his research and experience. Dolmetsch's formidable powers as a scholar continued to the very end of his life, although as a player ill-health and age took their inevitable toll.

Those who have heard the clavichord recordings he made of Bach's 48 preludes and fugues, will appreciate that one listens more to the message than to the messenger. His tricky personality gave him a reputation for being a hard, even a difficult task master. What might start out in hope could end in tears.

Suzanne Bloch wrote to Arnold Dolmetsch, who had begun playing the lute in the late 1880s, on 25th May 1934.

Dear master,

.... Of course I shall play in your concerts. I shall do everything, dance, sing, play the harp, the lute! And I shall smile....

The world is in chaos: uncivilized at the present time. People need music and instruments like yours which bring peace and courtesy...

I will come to you as a humble disciple to work hard and try to become a real lute player, not a drawing-room amateur...

Your example is a very great inspiration to me and I hope to become worthy of you.

*Your devoted,
Suzanne*

Contrast this with her article "**Saga of a Twentieth-Century Lute Pioneer**", published in the Journal of the Lute Society of America, Vol. II (1969), pp. 37-43.

At this time my salvation came, in the person of Diana Poulton. I had heard about this "other lute player" who had studied with Dolmetsch for about three years but so far had not played at the festivals as a soloist. I was curious and a bit apprehensive, for in those early days we each felt that we were the "only one" truly to revive the lute. But when we met, we had an immediate rapport. At once she righted me about lessons with Dolmetsch, saying that for three years he had kept her on "All of Green Willow" and at times had made her weep. She and her husband Tom had done their own research in London, and Diana had inherited a sheaf of lute tablatures copied by Peter Warlock. They lived in Heyshott in a wonderful little thatched-roof cottage with a garden full of herbs and flowers and a tame magpie named Jack. Diana kept goats that she milked and she made her own cheese. This extraordinary down-to-earth way of living made a great impression on me. It was like a dream, away from the materialistic way of life that threatened to get worse and worse. After a meal, Diana would play her lute, reading fluently from all sorts of tablatures, or accompany Tom who sang in an extremely musical way. At last I heard the lute as it should sound.

As I advanced in my playing, Diana told me of the wonderful duets in "Jane Pickering's lute book." She had some of them copied, and one good day for the first time in probably three centuries, they came to life in the little cottage in Heyshott.

We then began to work seriously on some of the duets and played a set of them in an informal performance at the Haslemere Festival, to the delight of everyone and the high praise of Rudolph Dolmetsch, the oldest and most gifted musician of the Dolmetsch family. Our performance had not been known of by Arnold Dolmetsch, who would have vetoed our playing. Rudolph then insisted that we play at the following Haslemere Festival in 1935.

That winter I had many chances to play the lute. My real debut was, of all places, in Carnegie hall to illustrate the instrument in Ernest Schelling's children's concerts. I was skeptical of an audience being able to hear a lute in so large an auditorium, so Schelling plunked me on the stage, told me to play, and ran to all the different parts of the hall, even upstairs, while I played my "safest" pieces. Every so often I would yell, "Vous m'entendez, Monsieur Schelling?" to which he would shout, "Mais bien sur."

I already sensed, however, that this instrument had qualities that were not for a huge hall such as Carnegie. By then the lute had begun to represent something of great spirituality to me. At first I was not aware of it; I just wanted to play. Now, however, I can see that the young generation of today feels what I felt so many years ago--that same reaching out for a subtlety, a purity, a simplicity, a delicacy, and a rhythmic vitality. I felt so rich when I could play a short piece perfectly. To own a treasure is to be able to do justice to a piece of lute music. I discovered something else when I joined Carl Dolmetsch on a short American tour. I had to learn the virginals in three days and also play the recorder, but the real thing was to test myself as a lute soloist. Then I discovered the miracle of playing a simple piece well on the lute, of feeling the magic created by the sound of the instrument--this wondrous hush, a spell on the audience. It was as if suddenly the breath of the past were upon us all, making us forget the noises, the tensions of our times.

The next summer when Diana and I began to rehearse the lute duets we were to play at the Festival, we decided to work especially hard and show what the lute really could do. Arnold Dolmetsch had capitulated by then to Rudolph's and Carl's demands that we play the duets. Not to be outdone, he decided to do the four-lute pieces of Nicolas Vallet, and he would play the most difficult part, the treble, on a little lute that he had constructed for the occasion.

Oh, those rehearsals for the four lutes! Dolmetsch had great difficulty with the runs in the Vallet; after all, the man was eighty-two years old, and it was remarkable that he could play as well as he did.

He insisted on the use of gut strings, so we would go over yards of surgical gut, flicking a length the way Mersenne advises to make sure the string would not be false. At rehearsals on those hot July days, Dolmetsch would have us all tune separately, listening to us and directing us--much to my disgust, as I knew we could all tune perfectly well. By the time all four had tuned (4 x 19 strings!!), somebody's treble would "pop," and we would have to start all over again. One day, exasperated with the breaking of the strings, I went to London and bought several trebles at the shop of a stringmaker who made silk lute strings. At the next rehearsal, Dolmetsch began to express surprise that my treble stood so well. He had been violently against the use of silk strings, but he was not to be outdone. That night he stayed up, constructing a winding machine for making silk strings, insisting his strings would be better than those I had bought. The next day he came with a string and gave it to Diana, who was obliged to use it, and since it was not as strong as the others it also went "pop"--and so it went.

The day of the concert when we were to play the duets, Diana and I were very nervous for we had chosen some difficult duets and had worked hard to bring out subtleties of rhythmic expression and some lovely coloring in the "Spanish Pavan." We walked onto the stage, set our music on the stands, checked our tuning, and were ready to start when a voice came from the front row, "Lower your music stands so we can see you."

This was Dolmetsch, timing his comment perfectly. Diana and I lowered our stands, looked at each other sending a mutual message, "He won't shake us; no, he won't." The duets went off as well as we had hoped. The next day when Gerald Hayes wrote in his review, "At last the lute was given due justice at the Haslemere Festival," we felt

that we had accomplished our goal. From then on, Dolmetsch gave in and allowed others to play lute at the festival. I felt a bit sorry for him that day--he looked beaten--but Diana said, "I am not a bit sorry; after all, he made me cry for three years."

This is not a success story--just the beginning of the long, wondrous, hard road that can never end for any lutenist. Some have gone way beyond what Diana and I have done. But in those early years there was a great magic in pioneering that sometimes I feel has been lost with the recent commercialized interest in the lute, for which playing fast and loud seems to be the one criterion. Yet, there are still so many young people who seem to be searching as I did so many years ago for this subtle beauty that is beyond all things to enrich our spirits. A minute of beauty can be a complete universe.

Many years later, Diana Poulton remembered her own first meeting with Dolmetsch.

While I was a student at the Slade School of Art my Mother took me to one of Arnold Dolmetsch's concerts at the Hall of the Art Worker's Guild in London. This changed the whole course of my life. I decided I wanted to learn to play the lute and, after I was married, I was able to ask Arnold Dolmetsch to make one for me. I used this beautiful instrument for the whole of my performing life.

Dolmetsch's collection, those instruments that he owned at the time of his death, was acquired from the Dolmetsch family by The Horniman Museum, based in south London. Those interested in seeing the Dolmetsch Collection of Early Music Instruments should contact the Museum itself.

Invariably, Dolmetsch's first instinct was to copy original models but after a lifetime in the field it was no wonder that sometimes he sought to 'improve' on the original masters, applying the lessons they had learned, or maybe perfecting ideas they had tried unsuccessfully to introduce, making use of new materials or creating new designs to meet present day needs.

He argued that instrument making had always been, and should continue to be, an ongoing process of development where each design reflected the particular skills and tastes of the maker rather than just a reaction to the more restricted requirements of composers or performers from the past or present. The 'craft' of instrument-making should be more than just 'reproduction', in the same way that ornamentation in music should be more than playing only what early masters had committed to print. Dolmetsch believed that all the 'lost' instruments of antiquity had a rightful place in modern life if only latter-day craftsmen would learn again to make them and performers learn again to play them sympathetically.

His friends in the Arts and Crafts movement had brought mediaeval design back into fashion not to have us live in the past but to have the past inspire the present. If a process akin to natural selection had consigned early music and early musical instruments to extinction, Dolmetsch was determined to reverse it. To apply an analogy, he was doing what modern-day scientists still only dream of - taking remnants of DNA from dinosaur fossils and bringing those long-departed creatures back to life to live, not in a recreation of their prehistoric past, but in the present.

How did Dolmetsch and his work appear to his contemporaries?

"I have seen the god Pan." "Nonsense." I have seen the God Pan and it was in this manner: I heard a bewildering and pervasive music moving from precision to precision within itself. Then I heard a different music, hollow and laughing. Then I looked up and saw two eyes like the eyes of a wood-creature peering at me over a brown tube of wood. Then someone said: Yes, once I was playing a fiddle in the forest and I walked into a wasp's nest

When a man is able, by a pattern of notes or by an arrangement of planes or colours, to throw us back into the age of truth, a certain few of us - no, I am wrong, everyone who has been cast back into the age of truth for one instant - gives honour to the spell which has worked, to the witch-work or the art-work, or whatever you like to call it. Therefore I say, and stick to it, I saw and heard the God Pan; shortly afterwards I saw and heard Mr. Dolmetsch.

extract from, Affirmations, part of Ezra Pound's "Literary Essays 1915".

A first-rate clavichord from the hands of an artist-craftsman who, always learning something, makes no two instruments exactly alike, and turns out each as an individual work of art, marked with his name and stamped with his style, can be made and sold for £40 or less, the price of a fourth-rate piano (no. 5768 from Messrs. So-and-so's factory) which you can hardly sell for £15 the day after you have brought it. Above all, you can play Bach's two famous sets of fugues and preludes, not to mention the rest of a great mass of beautiful old music, on your clavichord, which you cannot do without a great alteration of character and loss of charm on the piano.

These observations have been provoked by the startlingly successful result of an experiment made by the students of the Royal College of Music.

They, having their ears and minds opened by Mr. Dolmetsch's demonstration, to the beauty of our old instruments and our old music, took the very practical step of asking him to make them a clavichord. It was rather a strange request to a collector and connoisseur; but Mr. Dolmetsch, in the spirit of the Irishman who was invited to play the fiddle, had a try; and after some months work he actually turned out a little masterpiece, excellent as a musical instrument and pleasant to look at, which seems to me likely to begin such a revolution in domestic instruments as William Morris's work made in domestic furniture and decoration, or Philip Webb's in domestic architecture.

I therefore estimate the birth of this little clavichord as, on a modern computation, about forty thousand times as important as the Handel Festival.

George Bernard Shaw, writing in "World", 4th July 1894.

The work you are doing is so deeply beneficial to the cause of music - and, indeed, to the betterment of mankind - that it ought to be blazoned forth as widely as possible...

Your concerts are the most liberal musical education I have ever witnessed. Also they are the most enjoyable concerts I have ever heard....

I am, in music, a modernist... But I realize that true art has no oldness or newness, that all periods of human life produce great art, and that artistic culture depends upon a knowledge of the past, an understanding and love of the past...

The Fantasies for Viols, as you do them, are a far more subtle and exalted form of string music than any of the usual 'quartets' that are everlastingly heard....

It seems to me that some means should be taken to make a world public realize that the old music on the old instruments (made available and practical by you) is a necessary part of musical study (alongside the study of Beethoven, Bach, Wagner, etc.), and that it can be studied, as living music, from you!

Percy Grainger, extracts from letters written to Arnold Dolmetsch.

Rudolph Dolmetsch

Rudolph Dolmetsch was born on 8th November 1906 in Cambridge, Mass. U.S.A. He was the elder son of Arnold and Mabel Dolmetsch. In 1911 the family left America for France and in 1914 came to England, where they finally settled down in Haslemere in 1918.

He received his earliest training from his father and it was soon apparent that he was a naturally talented performer on keyboard instruments. He started his career at the age of five by playing the Spinet in a Parisian Theatre. When he was still a little boy Sir Henry Wood (the founder of the Promenade Concerts) was most surprised by the way, on being given a completely strange figured bass, Rudolph was able to fill in the chords for the accompaniment at sight. He was to eventually establish himself as one of the foremost harpsichord players of the day.



Rudolph (harpsichord), Carl (recorder), Nathalie (tenor viol) and Millicent, Rudolph's wife (viola da gamba). (photograph dated 1936)

Since the age of fourteen, Rudolph had formed an orchestra of various Haslemere residents and people who worked in his father's Workshop where they restored and made replicas of old instruments. In 1929 he married Millicent Wheaton (also born in 1906), his viola da gamba pupil. She was teaching at Bedales Junior School (Dunhurst) where she would teach for nineteen years. He toured and gave recitals for solo Harpsichord and also recitals for Viola da Gamba and Harpsichord with his wife.

As time went on he broke away from the family tradition of ancient music performed on traditional instruments. After studying conducting with Constant Lambert for two years at the Royal College of Music he started an orchestra of about forty players, with Olive Zorian as its leader. His father, Arnold Dolmetsch, had always been very much against conductors of any sort and never lost the chance of running them down in public. Arnold Dolmetsch's 'run-ins' with leading conductors during the 1920s and 30s led Adrian Boult, who felt he had been slighted during an attendance at one of the early Haslemere Festivals, to refuse to have anything whatsoever to do with the book nor with anything 'Dolmetsch'. This reaction apparently caused Sir Henry Wood, who was a supporter of Rudolph, enormous amusement. Dolmetsch did not have problems with all conductors as the fascinating correspondence between Ernest Ansermet and Arnold Dolmetsch clearly shows.

Rudolph's first concert was in November 1938, which was well received, obtaining excellent press notices. He included composers such as Kodaly, Delius, Sibelius and Grieg.

The Observer Nov 1938

"The second half of Mr. Dolmetsch's programme consisted of Sibelius' 'Rakastava' Suite, Delius' two pieces for small orchestra and Haydn's Symphony No. 73 in D (La Chaise). Both 'Rakastava' Suite and Delius' 'First Cuckoo' were given balanced performances, the Sibelius vividly delicate and the Delius rich and sensuous. We enjoyed the restraint and sanity of all that he did as a musician"

Western Morning News Nov 1938

"Mr. Dolmetsch, who is better known as a harpsichordist, secured some delightful playing of delightful music and will, one hopes, appear again in his new capacity."

The News Chronicle 1938

"... He was responsible, too, for producing in orchestral form Bach's 'Musical Offering', the gift he made to Frederick the Great. This is a set of scientific conundrums, but it is also splendid art, miraculous as artifice, magnificent as music."

Rudolph was able to give two more chamber orchestral concerts in London, the last being in February 1940. He was also arranging and composing and also published a handbook on Conducting. This too has good notices in the press and he received a letter from Bosworth & Co., the publishers, dated 30 December 1942 saying, "Dear Sir, We think it might interest you to know that Sir Henry J. Wood wrote for a copy of your book 'The Art of Orchestral Conducting'. Alas, Rudolph was never able to see this letter as it arrived after his ship had been torpedoed.

His first composition to be submitted to the B.B.C. (British Broadcasting Corporation) was called "Spring Tidings" and was broadcast in 1936, conducted by the composer. Another work, "Two Movements of a Symphony", was sent to the B.B.C. in London and was broadcast by the BBC Scottish Orchestra in 1952. The same work was performed in Moscow much later on, as it could be played separately or to follow Borodin's unfinished "Symphony No. 3 in A minor". It was also performed in Warsaw.

Several smaller works were performed by the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra in about 1946 and a Military Band Suite on Elizabethan tunes was broadcast by the B.B.C. Military Band in January 1941.

Directly the war started, he joined the Haslemere Home Guard and in 1940 was called up for Active Service in the Royal Artillery as a gunner. He was sent to anti-aircraft stations in different parts of the country. In Newquay in 1941 he started a series of music recitals and talks on 'Conducting' at a local hotel. Soon the recitals were held twice weekly and were a great success with attendance well over a hundred. He was finally posted overseas towards the end of 1942. It was not a troop ship, but a ship carrying specialists in various branches connected with war service, nurses, doctors, missionaries, etc. Rudolph was to take up a post as a Regimental Bandmaster.

In December 1942 he was posted as 'missing'. The ship, the 'Ceramic', was torpedoed in mid-Atlantic. After the end of the war Rudolph was presumed lost at sea while on Active Service.

Many of Rudolph's manuscripts and papers were acquired by the Library of The Royal College of Music as a bequest from Millicent Dolmetsch upon her death in July 1988. The catalogue and references are listed below:

Reference Description, year of composition

- 5953 Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, 1942
- 5954 Concerto for Clarinet, Harp and Orchestra, 1939
- 5955 Concerto for Clarinet, Harp (above) accompaniment for two pianos, 1940
- 5956 Ground and Caprice for Orchestra, 1934
- 5957 Innisfallen Suite for Military Band, n.d. Score and Parts
- 5958 Two Movements of a Symphony, 1942 Score and Parts (written between 1940-42 and essential completing Borodin's Third Symphony in A minor)
- 5959 Pastoral Rhapsody for Orchestra, 1937 Score and Parts
- 5960 Spring Tidings for Orchestra, 1934 Score and Parts
- 5961 Sinfonietta for Orchestra, Op. 2 1933 Score and Parts
- 5962 Chinese Caprice, A Fantasy on Chinese folk tunes for Orchestra, 1939
- 5963 Concertino for Viola da Gamba and Small Orchestra, 1941
- 5964 Caprice for Solo Viola da Gamba, 1929
- 5965 Songs of Flight for voice and piano, 1939
 - 1. The Airman (E Vine Hall)
 - 2. The Seaplane (Louise Stewart)
 - 3. The Airman demobbed (Cuthbert Hicks)
- 5966 Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op. 1, 1936 (given as 1932 by Jürgen Schaarwächter)
- 5967 Symphony No. 2 in B flat, 1936
- 5968 Miscellaneous arrangements of music compiled by Millicent and Rudolph Dolmetsch
- 5969 Miscellaneous letters, programmes, press cuttings, promotional material and other material on or about Millicent and Rudolph Dolmetsch

Millicent Dolmetsch became something of a recluse following the death of her husband. Initially she was resistant to the promotion of Rudolph's music feeling that it was now out of fashion and would not be appreciated in an age in which tastes had definitely 'moved on'. Towards the end of her life, however, she was instrumental in encouraging the performance of some of the music and, through the good offices of Layton Ring, the Concertino for Viola da Gamba and Small Orchestra received a performance in Newcastle with Jane Ryan playing the solo part and a student orchestra accompanying. Millicent had two sisters. One, ten years younger than Millicent, lived in Godalming and used to attend Dolmetsch family parties in the 1950s while the other married a Chinaman and moved to Spain. Rudolph and Millicent had no children.

Carl Dolmetsch



Carl Frederic (born Charles Frédéric) was the youngest of the four children of Arnold Dolmetsch and his third wife, Mabel. He was born at Fontenay-sous-Bois in France on 23 August 1911 at the time when his father was working for Gaveau in Paris, but the family returned to England in 1914 and finally settled in Haslemere in the winter of 1917 where his whole life, from early childhood until his death on 11th July 1997, was centred.

It was Arnold Dolmetsch's policy to ensure that his children grew up to become versatile on a wide range of early instruments in order to form a meaningful family consort but each excelled most especially on one instrument or another.

See above for details about the life of Carl's older brother, Rudolph and at the end of this biography for details about his elder sister, Cecile

Carl's younger sister, Nathalie excelled on the viola da gamba for which she edited much valuable music as well as writing a successful tutor. Nathalie inherited many of the talents and interests of both her parents and was active in early dance as well as in early music. Carl himself, while very proficient on the viol and the violin, centred his attention on the recorder and lifted its status from a rather obscure early wind instrument to one of considerable significance.

Carl's particular contribution to modern recorder making is as well known in musical circles as is George Washington's association with cherry tree and axe! Arnold wrote in his diary

"Concert Londres, Grand succès. Baba abandonne mon sac à main contenant le recorder et mes outils etc. à Waterloo en face de la plateforme No. 5. Désespoir! Belle journée."

The Art Workers' Guild Hall was the venue for the concert.

The family continued to give concerts in London after their move to the Surrey countryside, events that commenced and concluded with the journey between London Waterloo and Haslemere by rail. After one concert a moment's inattention on the part of a young Carl led to the bag containing tools and a precious antique treble recorder being left behind on the Waterloo platform. The loss was not discovered until the journey was well underway - it must have been accompanied with much consternation and recrimination. Despite the offer of a reward the instrument and tools appeared lost forever.

Arnold, never one to shirk any task, set about designing and building his first modern recorder - work completed to his satisfaction in 1918 when he was 60 years old.

Over the course of the next seven years descant, tenor and bass recorders were added and the first complete consort of Dolmetsch recorders was heard in performance at the 1926 Haslemere Festival. Arnold passed responsibility for the research and production of recorders to Carl in 1926.

Carl received all his early musical education under his father but he also studied with Carl Flesch and Antonio Brosa. He performed as a youthful soloist in the very first Haslemere Festival, founded by his father in 1925, and was able to boast that he had performed in every subsequent Festival right up to the 72nd in 1996 and he personally directed every Festival from 1940, the year his father died. Last year he handed over the directorship of the Festival to his daughter Jeanne.

In the meantime his career as a virtuoso recorder player took flight in the 1930s when he formed an historic partnership with Joseph Saxby as his accompanist after a chance encounter at the Oxford Playhouse in 1932. It was a partnership that was to endure for sixty years with several notable debuts in America and Europe before the Second World War.

In 1937 he became a founder-member with Edgar Hunt and others and first musical director of the Society of Recorder Players. In 1939 in company with Joseph Saxby he gave the first of 45 annual Wigmore Hall recitals, occasionally with the assistance of other artists. Unlike his father, Carl was not just an early music specialist but a musician of much wider vision. For these occasions he invariably commissioned a new work featuring the recorder from a wide range of contemporary composers and gradually a significant repertoire of new music for the instrument in various combinations was built up with notable contributions from such composers as Lennox Berkeley, York Bowen, Herbert Murrill, Arnold Cooke, Cyril Scott, Francis Chagrin, Hans Gál, Gordon Jacob, Nicholas Maw, Stephen Dodgson, Jean Françaix and a series of very durable works from Edmund Rubbra.

This repertoire added variety and spice to the world-wide concert tours upon which Carl and Joseph increasingly embarked, visiting Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada and the United States of America, where they undertook no less than twenty coast-to-coast tours over the years and from where they brought back yet more new music to add to the old. The importance of individual teachers and performers is paramount in the recorder world and influences are easily traced.

After hearing Carl Dolmetsch, the Dutch artist Kees Otten took up the recorder, to become Frans Bruggen's teacher, a line which continues today

During the Second World War the Dolmetsch workshops turned to making parts for aircraft but concerts continued throughout that dark period raising funds for the Free French and other war charities. In this way, the Haslemere Festival, unlike so many others, could boast a genuine continuity from 1925 to the present day.

The war work brought the Dolmetsch firm into contact with many 'new' materials' including 'plastics' and from this experience began one of the most commercially fruitful periods for the Dolmetsch firm.

Carl personally invented and developed the inexpensive plastic recorder which did much to promote the instrument for use in schools and his work in music education has had wide ranging consequences and led to his being appointed C.B.E. (Commander of the British Empire) in 1954.

In 1960 the degree of honorary D. Litt. was conferred upon him by Exeter University.

He was also elected an honorary Fellow of Trinity College of Music and of The London College of Music.

At all times he remained faithful to his father's aesthetics and maintained the Haslemere Festival his father had founded in exactly the way he would have wished, zealously guarding the essential teaching his father had set in motion for future generations and it is largely due to this zeal that the promotion of early music on authentic instruments and in period style has flourished in the positive way it has today, being accepted in a manner his father could barely have dreamed about when he undertook his pioneering work a century ago.

He also maintained his father's workshops for the manufacture of early music instruments and most especially for the recorder which still flourishes under changing conditions to this day under the direction of his twin daughters Jeanne and Marguerite. Arnold Dolmetsch had been a member of the Art Workers Guild, a 'medieval inspired' association established by William Morris and his colleagues and including the finest craftsmen and women. Dr. Carl was himself a member (or 'brother' to use the correct term) and was elected Master in 1989.

In 1937 Carl married Mary Ferguson, who had come down from Scotland to study music in Haslemere. Her organising ability did much to set Carl up upon his international career and to establish the Haslemere Festival and other Dolmetsch enterprises on a firm financial footing.

François, the eldest, did not take up music professionally but, after taking his degree at Cambridge, became a successful photographer based in Colombia. In recent years he has returned to music, establishing and playing in a chamber music group in Cali and being appointed general manager of the Orquesta Sinfonica del Valle, based in Cali, which gives over 250 concerts every year in Colombia and abroad.



Jeanne and Marguerite have remained in Haslemere where they have meticulously upheld the Dolmetsch musical traditions both as performers and as craftswomen.

Richard, the youngest, showed enormous musical talent and won the Gold Medal of La Royaume de Musique in Paris in 1961, but his life became dogged by illness and he died very tragically in 1966 at the age of 21, a loss from which his father could never fully recover.

By then Carl's marriage had been dissolved. Mary Dolmetsch died at her home, Easter Greyfield, Peebles, Scotland on 15 October 1996 after a long illness.

The family consort in 1952;
from left to right :Carl, Richard, Jeanne, Marguerite and François.

Joseph Saxby

Joseph Saxby was born 3rd January 1910, the son of Russian violinist Michael Zacharewitsch and American Joan Saxby. At the age of 15, and already showing a precious talent, he toured America as his father's accompanist. A pupil of Adela Hamaton, he went on to study under Hubert Fryer at The Royal College of Music, London. Joseph used his mother's surname to avoid confusion with his father. He went on to accompany John McCormack, the famous Irish tenor, on his farewell tour of America. In 1932, when Joseph was 22, he met Carl Dolmetsch, who was playing the recorder for a production of William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night at The Oxford Playhouse. Joseph was playing the virginals. Turning then to the harpsichord he studied with Arnold Dolmetsch and joining Carl Dolmetsch launched their celebrated musical partnership which was to see 40 annual Wigmore Hall recitals, 20 coast-to-coast American tours, as well as tours of Australia, New Zealand, Japan, North and South America, Alaska, Canada and Europe. Joseph will always be remembered as an ebullient, convivial, extrovert punster, a wonderful foil to Dr. Carl with whom he enjoyed 60 rich years of music. To many Haslemere residents his role as accompanist in countless pantomimes and his devoted work as organist at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Haslemere, will be of particular note. Latterly, Joseph retired in Haslemere but continued to make music until a few weeks of his death. Dr. Carl Dolmetsch died a few weeks after Joseph.

Cecile Dolmetsch

Barely three weeks after Dr. Carl's death, his sister, Cécile Dolmetsch, the last surviving child of Arnold Dolmetsch, died in Guildford after a short illness. Cécile was born in 1904 in Dorking, England. She made a speciality of playing the much neglected pardessus de viole and, after her sister Nathalie's death, she became President of the British Viola da Gamba Society.

The Workshops Today

In the 1930s Carl Dolmetsch completed the upper end of the family with the sopranino as well as producing recorders at modern pitch - until then all production had been at low pitch. Production at low and modern pitch continues side by side to the present day. The company continued making many kinds of hand-made early musical instruments (viols, lutes, harps, rebecs, harpsichords, spinets, clavichords, recorders, pipes and tabors, tambourin, psalteries, and so on).

The first Dolmetsch plastic recorders were manufactured in 1947, establishing the name in the area of educational musical instrument manufacture. More recently the Company has formed manufacturing and design associations with other manufacturers (including Coolsma in Holland - owned by Aafab b.v.) to broaden the range of instruments bearing the Dolmetsch name. However, the family (Jeanne Dolmetsch, Marguerite Dolmetsch and Brian Blood) continues to this day to play a central role designing, promoting and making, setting the standard of craftsmanship and reliability for which the company is justifiably famous.

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