

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1938)

Heft: 849

Artikel: Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch's 80th birthday

Autor: B.G.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686884>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 03.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

**MR. ARNOLD DOLMETSCHE'S
80th BIRTHDAY.**

I had the rare and extreme pleasure last week of meeting, in his own home, a patriarch — Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch — known to music-lovers throughout the entire world, now about to celebrate his eightieth birthday with a London concert of his music.

The concert will take place at the Art Workers' Guild on Saturday week, February 26th.

Mr. Dolmetsch lives in a large house at Haslemere. Its hall is a museum of old instruments, harpsichords, clavichords, spinets, and violins. (Children and grand-children, make, and play on, these instruments. There will be seven Dolmetschs taking part in the concert.) On the walls of the hall are sixteenth and seventeenth-century musical prints, among them a French "Ste. Cecilia chantant les Louanges de Dieu," accompanying herself on an instrument as large as a modern double-bass.

The patriarch himself, with his wife, receives in his study — which again has tools and carpenter's benches and musical instruments in it. He half reclines, propped up in a chair (he has had a chill recently); his forked beard is now grey; on his head is a turban-like cap — more than ever he is like something out of the Old Testament, painted by Rembrandt. The dark eyes are capable of flashing patriarchal fire. It is curious to note that he, with the keenest of musical ears, has been resident in England for sixty years, and still speaks with a strong French accent.

I asked what first turned him to his life-work of discovering "old" music, and recreating the instruments for which it was written. "I first came to England as a composer, and to study composition — but I almost left off composing fifty years ago.

"What changed me was coming face to face with the old English music — this mountain of marvellous music — this deep well of lovely music. It took me altogether! It got hold of me. That — and seeing what an extraordinary effect it could have when played rightly."

"Would you say there has been no improvement in instrument making since, say, the sixteenth or seventeenth century?"

"There has been no improvement," says Mr. Dolmetsch, with lively animation, "in any art, at any time, anywhere! There have been little changes — like in fashions — but you usually find that where you've gained something you've at the same time lost something else that makes up for it."

"What about the modern piano?"

"The modern piano," says the Sage, "is the impurest, the beastliest, instrument that the world has ever seen! There are some nice ones — my own Broadwood, fifty-seven years old, has a beautiful tone."

"How do I account for the degeneration? I account for it by the *virtuosi*, who were *not* also composers, coming into the concert room. Mozart was a composer as well as a virtuoso. Beethoven was a composer as well as a virtuoso. They understood the instrument; and Beethoven's sonatas, played on a piano of his time, a Broadwood of 1810 or thereabouts, can be unbelievably beautiful."

"But the virtuoso who was not also a composer wanted to make a lot of noise, and to punch the piano to pieces. A piano of that time, when a virtuoso had finished a recital on it, would be like a battle-ship that had been in a fight. It would be out of action for six months!"

"So you got stronger pianos — and coarser pianos. The modern piano is horribly coarse; especially in the bass. I asked a musician the other day to turn his back on a modern piano while I struck two chords on it in the bass — the C-major chord and the C-minor. He admitted that he couldn't tell which was which."

A Last Request.

The talk passes to early days, and the circle that first welcomed and grew enthusiastic about Mr. Dolmetsch and his music — William Morris, Swinburne, Selwyn Image, Sturge More, Laurence Binyon, Arthur Symons, Herbert Horne, Robert Hichens, and Bernard Shaw.

"William Morris told me that he had never liked music before he heard my way of playing it. When he was dying, he sent for me to come and play to him. So we put a virginal on top of a four-wheeler (the usual means of transport in those days) and went across to him. I think he liked it; he kept me playing to him a long, long time. ... And not a bad way to die, either — listening to lovely music."

There is a magnificent caricature of George Moore in the house, drawn by Will Rothenstein in blue pencil and sealing-wax. Underneath it someone (not Moore) has irreverently written, "C'est moi, Moooooorrre!" in reference to the author's fairly well-known egotism. The drawing is a miraculous likeness and should be kept for the National Portrait Gallery.

The King's Interest.

I asked Mr. Dolmetsch what he thought the main achievement of his life. A pause before the answer. "I have discovered a quantity of English music of the greatest beauty and value. No one has rendered such a service to English music as I have. And sometimes under struggles."

What of official recognition? "Lately — yes! But when you English do a good thing you make a secret of it. Last year the King (to whom I had the honour of playing when he was still Duke of York) granted me a civil pension in recognition of my services to English music. This aroused only mild comment in the English Press. But when it became known last summer that the French Government had made me 'Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur' for my services to French music, the English papers made a great song of it and trumpeted it in all directions."

The insignia of the Croix de la Légion d'Honneur will be presented to Mr. Dolmetsch by the French Ambassador at his concert on Saturday week.

H.G.
(Sunday Observer.)

La Société de Secours Mutuals des Suisses à Londres (fondée en 1703) a le profond regret d'informier ses membres, amis et connaissances du décès à l'âge de 33 ans de

Monsieur GEORGE FAVRE-BULLE
survenu le 14 février à Saint Loup, Canton de Vaud.

Les funérailles ont eu lieu à La Sarraz. Le Comité.

WHERE TO LISTEN IN NEXT WEEK.

Monday, February 21st, 8.30 p.m. (Greenwich Time) Beromünster — Sottens — Monte Ceneri — Broadcast from Swiss Children in London.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLÉE MENSUELLE

aura lieu Mardi 1 Mars au Restaurant PAGANI, 42, Great Portland Street, W.1. et sera précédée d'un souper à 7h. 15 précises (prix 5/-).

ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.	Démissions.
Admissions.	Divers.

Pour faciliter les arrangements, les participants sont priés de bien vouloir s'inscrire au plus tôt auprès de Monsieur P. F. Boehringer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2. (Téléphone: Clerkenwell 9595).

Le Comité.

MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS

HOUSEKEEPER wanted for Swiss Family in Scotland, experience in cooking and supervision of two children, aged three and seven years. Write Box No. 33, c/o Swiss Observer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Saturday, February 19th at 2 and 4 o'clock — Nouvelle Société Helvétique — *A Travers La Suisse* — Film Show at King George's Hall, Caroline Street, Tottenham Court Road. Admission free.

Tuesday, March 1st — City Swiss Club — Monthly Meeting (preceded by dinner at 7.15 p.m. sharp) at Pagani's Restaurant, Great Portland Street, W.

Wednesday, March 2nd at 7.30 p.m. — Société de Secours Mutuals — Monthly Meeting, at 74, Charlotte Street, W.1.

Saturday, March 12th — City Swiss Club — Dinner and Dance — at the Mayfair Hotel, Berkeley Square, W.1.

SWISS BANK CORPORATION,

(A Company limited by Shares incorporated in Switzerland)

99, GRESHAM STREET, E.C.2.

and 11c, REGENT STREET, S.W.1.

Capital Paid up £6,400,000

Reserves - - £1,560,000

Deposits - - £39,000,000

All Descriptions of Banking and Foreign Exchange Business Transacted

Correspondents in all parts of the World.

Telephone Numbers :
MUSEUM 4302 (*Vitellus*)
MUSEUM 7055 (*Office*)
Telegrams : SOUFFLE
WESDO, LONDON
Established 50 Years.

"Ben faranno i Paganini
Purgatorio C. xix. Dante
"Venir se ne dee giu
tra' miei Meschini."
Dante. Inferno. C. xxvii.

**PAGANI'S
RESTAURANT**

GREAT PORTLAND STREET, LONDON, W.1.

LINDA MESCHINI | ARTHUR MESCHINI Sole Proprietors.

MAGGI'S SOUPS
TASTE GOOD - AND DO YOU GOOD!
14 DELICIOUS VARIETIES 2d PER TABLET.
If not Stocked by your Grocer, apply to
MARBER & Co. Sole Agents of THE MAGGI COMPANY,
1 STANHOPE STREET, LONDON, N.W.1

Divine Services.

EGLISE SUISSE (1762).

(Langue française).

79, ENDELL STREET, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, W.C.2.

(Near New Oxford Street).

Dimanche, 20 Février :

11h — Culte — M. Emery.

6h.30 — Culte — M. Emery.

11h. — Ecole du Dimanche.

SERVICE FUNEBRE.

Un service en mémoire de Charles, Alfred Barbezat, des Bayards (Neuchâtel) né le 15 avril, 1875 à Le Locle, décédé le 6 février 1938 à Le Locle a été célébré à l'Eglise Suisse, le 12 février 1938.

Le Pasteur Emery reçoit le Mercredi de 11 heures à midi 30, à l'église, 79, Endell Street, W.C.2. S'adresser à lui pour tous les actes pastoraux. (Téléphone : Muséum 3100, domicile : Foyer Suisse, 12, Upper Bedford Place, W.C.1.)

SCHWEIZERKIRCHE

(Deutschsprachige Gemeinde).

St. Anne's Church, 9, Gresham Street, E.C.2.
(near General Post Office.)

Sonntag, den 20. Februar 1938.

11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst und Sonntagsschule.

7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst.

8 Uhr, Chorprobe.

Anfragen wegen Religions-bezw. Confirmandenstunden und Amtshandlungen sind erbeten an den Pfarrer der Gemeinde : C. Th. Hahn, 43, Priory Road, Bedford Park, W. 4 (Telephon : Chiswick 4156). Sprechstunden : Dienstag 12-2 Uhr in der Kirche.

Printed for the Proprietors, by THE FREDERICK PRINTING CO., LTD., at 23, Leonard Street, London, E.C.2.