

# Arnold Dolmetsch †

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**ARNOLD DOLMETSCH †.**  
 ("Birmingham Post," 11.3.40.)

The death of Arnold Dolmetsch at Haslemere the other day, at the age of eighty-two, has removed one of the most characteristic figures of our musical life. One may well put it so, for although he was a native of France (Le Mans) and sprang from old Swiss stock (Zürich), it is hardly an exaggeration to say that he had become part of English musical culture as well as of the Surrey landscape. He always spoke English with a formidable accent that made it almost incomprehensible to his audiences when it came in a vehement spate from the concert platform at the Haslemere Festival; yet as an artist and a craftsman he made his way after the manner that has so often meant success for English men of genius. For he was, in the literal sense of the word, an amateur, but one who excelled many professionals in their own work by a kind of brilliant opportunism in picking up knowledge and skill by practical application rather than through academic training.

One could not walk about among the pines and the heather on the glorious heights of Hindhead without thinking of those painstaking and patient musical artisans in the valley below. The Dolmetsch workshop is the sight of Haslemere, apart from the natural attractions of that part of Surrey, into which it somehow fits most congenially, and one cannot long stay in the pretty market-town without realising that the Dolmetsch family and the Dolmetsch disciples are the talk of the place, the subject of mild gossip free from scandal and now and again the cause of some head-shaking over the eccentricity of a life devoted to the

resuscitation of dead music and the refashioning of obsolete instruments.

Like Bach, Dolmetsch brought up a musical family, or rather two musical families, for, again like that master, he was twice married. Hélène, the gifted daughter of the first household in France, was a cellist and viola da gamba player who made her reputation in more than one country before she died at the age of forty-four. The second Mrs. Dolmetsch, a sister of the late Sir Harry Johnston, who was the first Special Commissioner for Uganda, was one of her husband's pupils for the bass viol, which she continued to play admirably at the Haslemere Festivals while her four children, two sons and two daughters, grew up to join the "consort" of old instruments one by one. Even without any outside pupils the Festival could sport a "broken consort" of various combinations of viols, recorders, lute, harpsichord and clavichord, Arnold Dolmetsch himself being capable of playing any of these (except, I think, the bass string instruments) as well as the only "modern" intruder he would allow — the violin. Each of the children could forsake another instrument for a recorder. The sons, Rudolph and Carl, eventually surpassed their father in skill on one instrument or another, but never matched him in versatility.

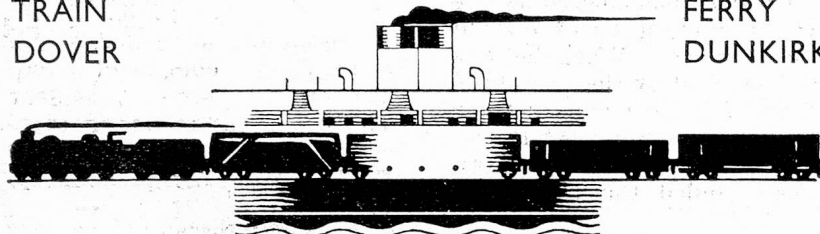
Dolmetsch himself never performed with absolute ease, which of course was not to be wondered at, seeing how many instruments he attempted and how much of his time and knowledge he devoted to construction and to research. For year after year he turned out a number of his own harpsichords, clavichords, recorders or other revivals, produced old works he had rediscovered in manuscript here and there, carefully and learnedly edited by himself, and he published a book on "The Interpretation of the Music of the

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Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" that is full of valuable information, particularly on the difficult subject of ornamentation.

If he had cultivated a brilliant virtuosity on five or six instruments as well, it would have been a miracle. But he had no use for miracles. What he wanted was to show at his Festivals how people played in their own homes under the Tudors and the Stuarts, and it was not to be supposed that they all performed like modern concert-givers when they produced their chests of viols for a pleasant evening of musical conviviality. Indeed, if their performances were as good as those usually heard during that happy week or fortnight of summer offered to music-lovers by the Dolmetsches year after year, they must have been exceptionally lucky. But if perfection was not to be had at Haslemere, nobody turned a hair, and it seemed all beautifully in the picture. I have seen Dolmetsch worrying over a lute, looking rather like Mime puzzling over the shattered pieces of Siegfried's sword, and declare frankly that the instrument was beyond him; and I shall never forget the consternation of one of his audiences at the end of a very long concert, when the party broke down in the finale of a Brandenburg Concerto, and Dolmetsch exclaimed: "Neveerr mind; we arrrre not ashamed; we starrrrt again; frrrrom the beginning" — and they recommenced, not from the beginning of the finale, but of the whole Concerto!

He was a tyrant, of course, but unlike Mime, whom he resembled in a great profusion of unruly grey hair and beard, he did not lust wickedly and futilely after domination; he was loved for his tyranny because it was the expression of a passionate quest for noble things.

\* \* \*

("Catholic Herald," 8.3.40.)

A Requiem Mass was offered last Saturday at the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Haslemere, for Mr. Eugene Arnold Dolmetsch, who died on February 28th, in his eighty-third year. The interment followed in the Catholic cemetery at Shottermill.

Arnold Dolmetsch will be long remembered as one of the greatest authorities in modern times on old musical instruments and their music. When he was seventy years of age he was honoured by the launching of the Dolmetsch Foundation, for the encouragement of the revival of early instrumental music. At Haslemere, where he had lived for more than twenty years, and had his workshops, he founded the Haslemere Festival.

Born in France, of Swiss parentage, Dolmetsch became later, by naturalisation, a British subject. For a time he settled in the United States, but the main part of his research work was done in this country. That work recovered the beauty of many ancient instruments which had become, for most of the public, names only.

This ardent lover of the past in instrumentation restored many an ancient piece of work with his own hands, and at Haslemere the festival was always an occasion of delighting the ears of those attending with something fresh, in the way of a discovery, about which the discoverer was enthusiastic. For his services to music Dolmetsch was granted, a few years ago, a Civil List pension. His native country created him a Chevalier of the Légion of Honour.

LE MINISTRE DE SUISSE AU CITY SWISS CLUB.

Au cours de sa longue existence de plus de seize lustres, le City Swiss Club a eu maintes occasions de recevoir et honorer à ses réunions mensuelles ou extraordinaires des compatriotes distingués, de passage ou nouvellement arrivés à Londres ou bien aussi sur le point de rentrer au pays après une activité utile et féconde au sein de notre colonie. Cette excellente tradition, il l'a observée mardi 5 mars, ainsi qu'il convient, pour accueillir Monsieur Walther Thurnheer, Envoyé Extraordinaire et Ministre Plénipotentiaire de la Confédération Helvétique près la Cour de St. James.

Ainsi, après le mémorable dîner d'adieu offert par la colonie tout entière à Monsieur et Madame Paravicini, au Monico en décembre dernier, à trois jours près de la grandiose et merveilleuse réception faite par l'ensemble de cette même colonie à leurs distingués et très sympathiques successeurs, Monsieur et Madame Thurnheer, au Dorchester samedi 2 Mars, le City Swiss Club, comme tel, a eu le privilège et l'honneur de souhaiter une cordiale et chaleureuse bienvenue au nouveau Chef de mission suisse en Grande-Bretagne.

L'empressement des membres à prendre part à cette assemblée de grande occasion pour témoigner leur profond attachement à notre Mère-Patrie, à ses institutions et à son représentant officiel, s'est révélé d'une manière éloquente par la présence de plus de cent compatriotes et amis. Il serait trop long d'en faire ici tous les noms, mais pour les annales signalons parmi eux les collaborateurs du ministre: M. Preiswerk, chef de la division spéciale, M. Girardet, attaché commercial, M. de Rham; les chefs des principales maisons suisses établies ici: M. Lorsignol et M. de Wolff, directeur de la Swiss Bank Corporation, M. Gassmann, sous-directeur de l'agence des Chemins de fer fédéraux, M. Wuthrich, directeur de la fabrique de machines d'Oerlikon, M. Steiner, directeur de Volkart Bros., M. Walsler, le vénéré chef de la maison homonyme de tressage, chapeaux, etc., M. Gattiker, directeur des Tissages mécaniques de soiries d'Amriswil, M. Baume, chef de la maison homonyme représentant les montres Longines; d'autres personnalités: le colonel Bon, président du Fonds de Secours, M. Suter, président de la Nouvelle Société Helvétique, le docteur Pettavel, M. Léon Rueff, et tant

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