

Marie Jaëll

by Catherine Guichard

Who is Marie Jaëll?

An artist, entirely devoted to art, a multiple artist, a great performer, an original composer, a revolutionary pedagogue, and much more: a creative spirit eager to discover the links between mankind and the mystery of art. She writes in her diary: "Why do philosophical ideas stick to me every time? They are reflected in everything I do. To be only an artist, I cannot indeed be that. Art itself seems to me but an eternal symbol of the infinity into which we gaze blindly."

Through the various stages of her life and successive interests, she engaged in exciting fields that her curious mind wanted to explore and unite with the art of music. Hence the richness of her accomplishments, as a result of a lifetime of work, reflection, and melting with great minds.

If we had to find a one-word that characterizes Marie Jaëll, it would be: Passion. Passion for her art above all: "It's not love, it's frenzy I have for my art... This passion overcomes all obstacles."

She is so passionate about art that she wants to understand it, and nothing will stop her fiery state of mind. What she feels instinctively, what she senses through mere intuition, she wants to bring to light. "I have to go beyond instinct toward knowledge" she says.

Her goal, her desire, is to try to free the consciousness of the interpreter, to perceive

the link between cause and effect, thought and touch sensitivity, the brain and the hand. "Anything that remains unconscious is not prone to improvement."

Following extensive research into these links between the pianist and the instrument, Marie Jaëll invented a method, the so-called *Method of Touch*, based on physiology and the development of tactile sensitivity.

Knowing how to express and rediscover the musical language of a piece of music means knowing how the various sounds within a group are related to each other, and therefore knowing how to feel and prepare one's hand to express this language of sounds.

But this awareness of the sensory links that unite the pianist to his instrument is accompanied by a deeper resonance in us: a total awareness of what we are and what we could be. Marie Jaëll deals with the complex problem of human nature and crosses the frontiers of human psychology. It is in us that our wealth, our possibilities, our limits are located. We must open our eyes to ourselves, know ourselves, not be afraid to reveal who we are.

"We never go down low enough to see what we are, we never go up high enough to see what we should be... if we want to live, we must be born to ourselves" she writes in her diary.

Like the phoenix that rises from its own ashes and flies to higher heights, we can soar, surpass ourselves, after recognizing our

imperfections and agreeing to reduce them to ashes, before being reborn.

"Exploring the unconscious in the underground of the mind with adapted methods will be the main task of the century ahead" said Bergson. And this is the task Marie Jaëll has followed: to free our resources, to free them from the shadows, to put them at the service of musical expression. Her passion to understand art is matched by another passion: science.

Science became the ally of Marie Jaëll, and the study of geometry, physics and physiology helped her to invent a thorough way of teaching, which reveals to the musician the secret laws of aesthetics.

Technique and art are intimately intertwined. But the understanding and knowledge of a work of art does not deliver its mystery, at most it can precisely define it and set the limit where it begins.

To understand a work of art is to isolate, to strip, to separate from all confusion the pure quality where the work's freedom and beauty stands... it is in the inner silence that one perceives its radiance and fascination, and the blessing of emotion.

"My mind overwhelms my bodily forces, which in their entirety become resonance... resonance of ideal beauty, appearing as the deliverance of our being, which not only aspires to beauty, but can attain it in its supreme fullness..."

This transformation of a human's relationship with art, of the performer with the expression of musical language, begins with the perception of our body, and even,

quite simply, of our hand. Releasing the consciousness of the hand means perceiving its movement or immobility, feeling the fingers that are part of it as independent elements, developing the tactile sensitivity that we often ignore. A sensitized hand, conscious, kept open and motionless in space, that vibrates in contact with space, becomes aware of its relationship with it.

The unexplored path on which Marie Jaëll launches herself with a vibrating passion, allow us to perceive a philosophy of life.

What is the aspiration of this little Alsatian girl, to whom an irresistible vocation from childhood leads to art, and who, after having known triumphs, withdraws from the world, leaving a solitary and almost obscure life, in order to devote herself entirely to the research that fascinates her?

A letter, addressed in 1913 to her pupil and friend Catherine Pozzi, reveals the secret.

"As a child, I read with great respect, as if I understood them: Shakespeare, Homer, Dante. A very special impression remained with me: when I saw the mystical rose that Dante held in his hand in an engraving, I said to myself: if I were him, I would hold the rose the other way round, in order to look at the root".

This image, which she expresses as a child, is the reflection of her vivid concern for musical research, and inspires all her work.

"Don't just admire the flower, but observe the root that made it grow and blossom."

Marie Jaëll continued to explore this field of research until her death in 1925.