

Pau Casals i Defilló, known during his professional career as Pablo Casals, was born in Catalonia, Spain, December 29, 1876. He is generally regarded as the pre-eminent cellist of the first half of the 20th century, and one of the greatest cellists of all time.

Casals was also an internationally renowned political figure, a voice for human rights, and an activist against oppressive governments. He dedicated his life and used the power of his career to oppose the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. Following the brutal Spanish Civil War and Franco's consolidation of power, Casals refused to perform in countries that officially recognized the Franco government, a decision that included a refusal to play in the United States. Until his death in 1973, he made only one exception: in 1961 he performed at the White House for U.S. President John F. Kennedy (1917–1963), a man he greatly admired. In 1971, at the age of ninety-five, he performed his "Hymn of the United Nations" before the United Nations General Assembly. Casals sought to inspire harmony among people, using both the voice of his cello and the power of his self-imposed silence.



artist & teacher

PABLO CASALS: ARTIST AND HUMANITARIAN

by [LLUIS CLARET](#) (*Barcelona Trio; "Victoria dels Angels" Music School at Sant Cugat and Toulouse Conservatory*) with Paul Katz

Pablo Casals was born on December 29, 1876, in Vendrell, in the Catalan region of Spain. He was the second of eleven children of Carlos Casals and Pilar Defillo de Casals. Casals's father, Carlos, was a carpenter and the local church organist, and would play the piano while baby Pablo rested his head against the instrument and sang along. By the age of four, Casals was playing the piano, and at five he joined the church choir. By six, he was composing songs with his father, and by the age of nine, he could play both violin and organ. At ten years old, Casals began his life-long practice of starting each day with a walk, taking inspiration from nature. Upon returning home, he would play two Johann Sebastian Bach works on the piano.

Discovers the Cello

Casals became interested in the cello after hearing the instrument in a recital he attended at age eleven - he must have had a passionate reaction to the instrument, for soon after, his father built him one. His parents argued about his future – his father wanted him to study carpentry, but his mother would not hear of it and enrolled him in the Municipal School of Music in Barcelona. Casals clashed with old-fashioned, strict instructors, and insisted on playing cello in his own, more expressive manner. This "new" way of playing revolutionized cello performance, and thus Casals single-handedly made the cello a more popular solo instrument.

Among the many impressed by Casals was the Spanish composer Isaac Albéniz (1860–1909). After hearing Casals play, Albéniz wrote a letter of introduction to Count Guillermo de Morphy, secretary to the Queen Regent of Spain, Maria Cristine. In 1894 Casals traveled to Madrid, Spain, and gave concerts for the queen and her court. Over the next few years his reputation spread, and with the huge success of his formal 1899 solo debut in Paris, Casals's career was assured.

Discovering the Bach Cello Suites

In 1890, while Casals and his father were browsing a Barcelona bookstore, Casals stumbled upon a volume of Bach's Six Suites for Solo Cello. Previously considered merely musical exercises, Casals immediately felt their profound musical depth, and practiced them every day for a dozen years before first performing them publicly. He then continued to play at least one suite per day for the rest of his life.

Casals' performances of the suites shocked listeners by correcting the previously held belief that Bach's unaccompanied music for strings had no warmth or artistic value. Casals's love of Bach's music carried over into the rest of his life.

Casals Silences His Cello In Protest

"I am everyday more convinced that the main-spring of any human enterprise must be moral strength and generosity." Casals came to understand the suffering of the poor as he walked the streets of Barcelona and he vowed to use his music to help his

fellow people. Casals wrote letters and organized concerts on behalf of the oppressed, and he refused to perform in countries such as the Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy, where, in his view, governments mistreated their citizens. After the brutal Spanish Civil War (1936–39), when General Francisco Franco took dictatorial control of Spain, Casals went into self-imposed exile and announced he would never return to Spain while Franco was in power. He settled in Prades, France, and gave occasional concerts until 1946, when, to take a stand against tyrants such as Franco, Casals vowed never to perform again.

Persuaded by friends, however, Casals resumed playing in 1950, participating in the Prades Festival, organized in Prades, France, to honor Bach. At the end of the festival and in every concert he was to give after that, Casals played the Catalan folk-song, "Song of the Birds", to call attention to continued oppression in Spain. In 1956, he settled in Puerto Rico, where he started the legendary Casals Festival, which attracted the great artists of the world, led to the creation of the Symphony Orchestra of Puerto Rico, and a music conservatory on the island. Just short of his 97th birthday, Casals died October 22, 1973, having never returned to Spain.



PABLO CASALS

by **ROBERT BATTEY** (active Washington DC area cellist, teacher and writer)

Today the legendary name Pablo Casals evokes homage among musicians old and young, the world over. What is interesting about the great Catalan's career is that had it not been for Alexander Schneider, second violinist of the Budapest Quartet, he would have become little more than an historical footnote. An important footnote, to be sure, but nothing close to the near-deity status he still enjoys among cellists, particularly in this country. Casals played his last professional concert in the U.S. in the 1920's. He was active in the 30's, but did not visit these shores. After WWII, he went into self-imposed exile to protest the political situation in Spain.

Thus, in America, by 1950, very few non-cellists had heard Casals' name and only a handful of people had ever seen him play. His time in the spotlight appeared to be over. But that year, the bicentennial of Bach's death, Schneider moved heaven and earth to 1) persuade Casals to take part in a Bach festival to be held in his little French village and 2) persuade Columbia Records to sponsor and record concerts there. The resulting publicity (Columbia wanted the records to sell, after all) and the renewed contact great musicians had with Casals sparked a tremendous second career even though he was by then far past his prime. But between chamber music, conducting, and masterclasses, he stayed continuously before the public, his legend growing yearly, until his death in 1973 at age 96.

core principles

“The man who works and is never bored is never old. Work and interest in worthwhile things are the best remedy for age.”

“On my last birthday I was ninety-three years old. That is not young, of course. In fact, it is older than ninety. But age is a relative matter. If you continue to work and to absorb the beauty in the world about you, you find that age does not necessarily mean getting old. At least, not in the ordinary sense. I feel many things more intensely than ever before, and for me life grows more fascinating.”

“In spite of their age, those musicians have not lost their zest for life. How does one explain this? I do not think the answer lies simply in their physical constitutions or in something unique about the climate in which they live. It has to do with their attitude toward life; and I believe that their ability to work is due in no small measure to the fact that they do work. Work helps prevent one from getting old. I, for one, cannot dream of retiring. Not now or ever. Retire? The word is alien and the idea inconceivable to me. I don't believe in retirement for anyone in my type of work, not while the spirit remains. My work is my life. I cannot think of one without the other. To “retire” means to me to begin to die. The man who works and is never bored is never old. Work and interest in worthwhile things are the best remedy for age. Each day I am reborn. Each day I must begin again. For the past eighty years I have started each day in the same manner.”



"It is not a mechanical routine but something essential to my daily life. I go to the piano, and I play two preludes and fugues of Bach. I cannot think of doing otherwise. It is a sort of benediction on the house. But that is not its only meaning for me. It is a rediscovery of the world of which I have the joy of being a part. It fills me with awareness of the wonder of life, with a feeling of the incredible marvel of being a human being. The music is never the same for me, never. Each day is something new, fantastic, unbelievable. That is Bach, like nature, a miracle!"

"I do not think a day passes in my life in which I fail to look with fresh amazement at the miracle of nature. It is there on every side. It can be simply a shadow on a mountainside, or a spider's web gleaming with dew, or sunlight on the leaves of a tree. I have always especially loved the sea. Whenever possible, I have lived by the sea... It has long been a custom of mine to walk along the beach each morning before I start to work. True, my walks are shorter than they used to be, but that does not lessen the wonder of the sea. How mysterious and beautiful is the sea! how infinitely variable! It is never the same, never, not from one moment to the next, always in the process of change, always becoming something different and new."

"I see no particular merit in the fact that I was an artist at the age of eleven. I was born with an ability, with music in me, that is all. No special credit was due me. The only credit we can claim is for the use we make of the talent we are given. That is why I urge young musicians: "Don't be vain because you happen to have talent. You are not responsible for that; it was not of your doing. What you do with your talent is what matters. You must cherish this gift. Do not demean or waste what you have been given. Work — work constantly and nourish it. Of course the gift to be cherished most of all is that of life itself. One's work should be a salute to life."



PABLO CASALS 1876-1973

by [**BONNIE HAMPTON**](#) (*Francesco Trio; The Juilliard School*)

Much has been written about Casals, but it is from his records and films that his alive and joyful music-making may be experienced. In his own words, he was a simple man, but it was a simplicity and quiet dignity of a man who spent his life searching for clarity of thought and all that was natural and in tune with his own integrity. He felt that all he had done was to take those gifts which were given to him and develop them as fully as he could. This was perhaps one of the most valuable lessons one learns from him as a student – that there were no secret formulas to developing as a cellist and musician, but that one's primary concern was to find those qualities which are uniquely one's own and allow them to grow. To spend time with him or to share in his music-making was to experience the renewal of love and of life which was the source of his inspiration.

- Written for a concert in Tribute to Casals in November, Bonnie Hampton - 1973

What was the source of Casals' genius? On some levels it is very difficult to have a definitive answer because everything he did as an artist and cellist was so "natural". And the important word here is "natural". This was a word which he used so many times in lessons for both musical and cellistic reasons. He would point to "Nature" as the elemental source of guidance for our imagination musically. Always changing, always alive – elemental. And indeed, his own musical responses could be so many things – great beauty, intensity, volcanic energy (as in the c minor Suite), humor, charm, enormous sensitivity, elegance, always the essence of the musical experience of the music. But again, it is difficult to write about Casals because the answer is illusive. He had a balance of intellect and emotional responsiveness, that balance of character, talent and culture.

I want to try to write about some of the Cellistic Basics which I received from him in lessons. These were intensive lessons in the late 50s and then through the 60s, when I would have the chance to play for him while participating in the Casals Festival in Puerto Rico or at Marlboro.

As a teacher he was very focused, kind, patient, but insistent and willing to stay with a point until one got it and it was understood. Intonation was conceived in terms of tonality and the attraction of intervals harmonically. Half steps and sharps and flats were affected by the notes around them - expressive intonation when playing melodically, but within the key structure. Chords, however, needed to be more tempered. Intonation was a crucial element in his work.

The vibrato was an expressive function of the music. Therefore, one needed the ability to have the control of every color, width, speed of vibrato, always coming from the center of the note – not on top of the note, but "in" the note. One's vibrato needed to come from the true center of the pitch.

This brings us to basic sound and tone quality. His Bow Arm was a perfection of balance and form, with every joint free and supple, but also with the source of energy coming from the back. He worked with the natural overtones of the instrument.

Therefore, we have the three elements working together for the sound – the true pitch, the centered vibrato, but most important, the flexible, free bow arm which is releasing the open sound of the cello. His sound was unique, that "Golden Sound", which

expressed his own musical voice on the cello. Indeed, that is the quest for all of us. To find our individual voice with the instrument.

Casals' left hand was enormously alive with a spring in the articulation of the fingers, but also with a free thrown strength. Again, a resilient strength, as with the Bow. The clarity of his articulation was remarkable, but also, I feel that there was an element of clarity in the fingers of his bow hand as well, which gave him that remarkable clarity and ring in the sound. He could play with great calm and serenity but also with volcanic strength and temperament, but always this was without physical tension of any kind.

One lesson, he asked me to play a C# minor scale - he was a great believer in scales and arpeggios. When I got back to the tonic, he started giving me intervals to be played all over the cello, i.e. two octaves and a tenth, then the next one, etc., notes in every register and string on the instrument. In other words, know every note on the cello and be able to put your finger right on it. He not only used left hand extensions in the lower register, but in the higher positions as well, avoiding unnecessary shifts. Some of his fingerings were unusual, but they always served the phrasing and often worked extremely well for clarity.

Over the years, I studied all the concertos, the Bach Suites and many sonatas. He felt that the early Italian sonatas were excellent for developing the technique needed for the Classical and Rococo style. Also, the small concert pieces for which one needed to bring an artistry and imagination to make them special. He talked about the use of the Bow in the Beethoven sonatas – that they demanded a special technique of their own to meet the natural articulation of the piano with its immediacy of sound.

Always he would stress the Character of the music one was playing – find its own essence and “say it” – never just notes – but always saying something. Develop a true critical listening sense – hearing oneself as it is and keep working toward that perfection.

And indeed, he was a perfectionist. Nothing was halfway or “about”. Every note is important within its context, but at the same time with the overview and concept of the whole work as crucial. He would often say “non retard – in tempo” with the larger structure and pacing as fundamental, but there was also flexibility.

While I am writing in generalities, all of these things came within the context of studying the music. He would show the ways of finding the goals, and most important, how to work them out.

There were wonderful moments when one heard his special artistry, and also the amazing facility and ebullient joy of his playing. Sometimes in performances, there was an incredible spontaneity, as if one were hearing the music for the first time, but that came because he had lived and thought every note.

His was a remarkable life in music. While in the context of the history of the cello, there had been many fine cellists before him, but Casals opened a whole new Era; a complete Musician and Artist; cellist, composer, conductor, pianist, teacher, showed us new levels and possibilities in our musical and cellistic journey. He was a humanitarian. He gave such a gift of insight and experience into the striving for the highest truth in this world of music.

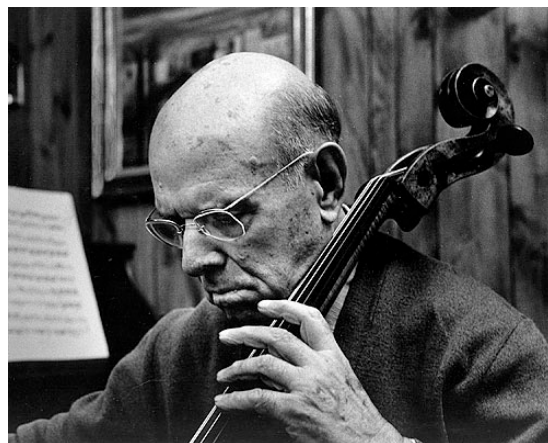
Bonnie Hampton, April 2013

tributes

by [LLUIS CLARET](#) with Paul Katz

At the end of the Spanish Civil War, Pablo Casals, together with my parents and thousands of other Catalans and Spanish citizens, exiled themselves to France. Upon the liberation of France at the close of World War II, Casals devoted all of his energy to playing concerts to raise funds for orphan children in need.

My father, Andreu Claret, was a very enterprising man and one of Casals' closest friends, and he became the Maestro's Secretary in order to help organize all these charity activities. On the occasion of my birth, this great friendship between Casals and my father resulted in Casals becoming my godfather, and thus I believe that, by mere chance, my cellist future began to be forged within me. There is a very interesting book by Anna Mora and Anna Dalmau (Editorial Mediterranea, Barcelona) that contains much of the correspondence between Casals and my father from this time.



Some years later in Barcelona, I became a student of Enric Casals, brother of the Maestro. And these long, wonderful years that I spent by his side introduced me to the fascinating world of the science of interpretation of Pablo Casals. Enric Casals, a violinist, orchestra director, and composer, constantly spoke to me of his brother's musical ideals, and his constant striving to more forcefully convey the composer's musical text. Casals did so his entire life; I remember when Casals was nearly ninety years old, Enric Casals one day told me, "I received a letter from Pablo telling me that he is very happy because he has just discovered a new fingering and better articulation in one of the Bach Suites"... Works that he had played every day of his life and performed hundreds of times!

Conscience drove his life: The same unshakeable moral convictions of respect for his fellow human beings, and of his inability to accept injustices and violations of human rights, also drove his cello ideals and musical interpretation. "Playing in tune is a matter of conscience," he said, and he believed constant study, searching, was needed in order to attain a level of technical mastery and interpretive depth that would be felt as natural and inevitable to the listener. The difficulties and complications of playing a stringed instrument were no excuse, they didn't matter – his musical goals, thoughts, were completely focused on achieving "transparency of the instrument", where one could forget the instrument and allow the music itself to have the leading role.

Steven De'ak, a cello student and biographer of the great David Popper, tells in his book (Paganiniana Publications) of listening to Casals in Budapest for the first time, together with his teacher Popper. Despite profound admiration for his own maestro, he realized that he was witnessing a profound change, a new era in the playing of the cello and a higher purpose for musical interpretation, one focused on the ideas and indications of the composer. Pablo Casals is acknowledged as the catalyst, the creator of what we call the modern school of the cello. Recognized as such by most of the cellists of the twentieth century as well as by many other great musicians of his time, letters and testimonials can be read in the splendid Pau Casals Museum in El Vendrell (Tarragona) - the town where the Maestro was born. (At the same time, Casals was a fervent admirer of Popper as both a cellist and composer, and Casals' concerts and recordings included many Popper compositions. Casals knew that without such previous great cellists as role models and inspiration, he could not have developed his own talent in the same remarkable way.)

For all that he gave humankind, perhaps most important are the six solo Suites of Bach which, without Casals, would surely not be the musical Bible of every cellist in the world today. Imagine young Casals as a teenager stumbling upon this discarded music in a bookstore, and the profound musical sensitivity and intuition that led him to understand the greatness of this music. We are eternally grateful to him for his re-discovery of the suites and for being the very first to dare to play an entire suite in public. Think of what this music has meant to thousands and thousands of cellists and to generations of music lovers. It is because of Pablo Casals that we have these 6 masterpieces – we celebrate them as the ultimate technical and musical challenge and they inspire and guide us for our entire lives as musicians and cellists.

And yet, it is not just musicians, but all of humanity that is indebted to this great man – "I am a man first and an artist second. My first obligation is to my fellow man." And so Pablo Casals also lives on as eternal inspiration, not only as an artist, but as a moral force, one who used his art in the cause of justice and to fight oppression.



REVISITING PABLO CASALS: A PERSONAL LOOK AT THE RECORDED LEGACY

by [SELMA GOKCEN](#) (London Cello Society)

"Those who have never heard Pablo Casals have no idea how a string instrument can sound. This is a unique synthesis of material and spiritual beauty."

–Wilhelm Furtwängler

To revisit the recordings of Pablo Casals is an unalloyed pleasure, one that still yields fresh insights after many years of studying and playing the many of the same works that were his favorites. I cannot remember when I have spent a more enjoyable few weeks listening to the skillfully re-mastered recordings, some from nearly a century ago, and marveling at their freshness and immediacy. Casals was an incomparable artist, and we are fortunate that the invention of recorded sound coincided with his emergence on the world stage. The choices that follow are entirely personal but will, I hope, invite the reader to explore this legacy and to make his or her own discoveries.

For help in defining proper art, James Joyce goes to Thomas Aquinas, who says that the aesthetic object renders three moments: integritas, "wholeness"; consonantia, "harmony" and claritas, "radiance". The experience of listening to Casals reveals the essence of note, phrase, movement, and entire work just as in a grand building each detail adds to the majesty of the whole without interrupting the flow of line and structure. His interpretations are not capricious; they observe fundamental laws of line and form, just as does every inspired work of art. Underneath there is rhyme and reason, but also an uncanny intuition at work. I shall aim to uncover what appears to my ears to be both clear and mysterious, the paradox of Nature and Art at work.

Unfortunately, Casals' prime as an interpretive artist did not parallel the apogee of recording technology as we know it today. Some of his best performances are the acoustic recordings made from 1916-1925 (collected in *Pablo Casals: The Complete Acoustic Recordings, Vols. 1-3*, Biddulph Recordings, LAB 141-3). Even in their remastered condition, considerable surface noise is present, but if one has patience, there are riches to discover. These three CD's are well worth owning.

At the age of 38, Casals did his first recordings for 'American' Columbia in New York in 1915. They reveal an artist with flawless intonation (this, in the days of no splicing or digital editing!), superb clarity of articulation in bow and left hand, expressive slides and a way, as they say, with a song. In Volume 1, composed mostly of pieces no longer than three or four minutes, we are reminded just how much depth of feeling is missing from modern playing. Casals knew the difference between sentimentality and sentiment, and he never indulges in personal distortion in these small gems. There is balance in the rubato, a controlled vibrato and a superb son filé. The slides are always for a particular expressive effect, judicious, never gratuitous. Listen to the Handel Largo from 'Xerxes' for its sustained line, dignified and unhurried. The Kol Nidrei is a work Casals recorded several times in his life: in 1915, 1923, and 1936. It is hard to put into words how he captures the idiom; he demonstrates here and elsewhere that dramatic recitative should be as much a part of the instrumentalist's art as the singer's.

For dazzling finger work, listen to the beguiling Popper Serenade. One of my favorites on this volume is the Popper Mazurka. In *Conversations with Casals*, he recalled his youth:

"In the summer I joined some bands which took part in the *festes majors* of Catalonia. It was very hard work. The heat, the travelling in old horse buses, the inns, the crowds, the dances which always lasted until dawn. The amount of waltzes, 'Americaines', mazurkas, 'chotis' (schottisches), rigodons and lancers I played during these tours! But I took this playing very seriously. I had a growing conviction that big occasions and big works were not the only important things in life."

In his hands, Popper's Mazurka is a fiery Polish dance played with great panache, extraordinary freedom and plasticity of rhythm, what, in jazz, is called 'bending the beat.' It is a piece that can sound repetitive in lesser hands.

The first recording of Bach that Casals made took place more than twenty years before he completed the Six Solo Suites for EMI. On this same volume appear the Prélude, Sarabande, Bourrée, and Gigue from the C major Solo Suite. What is striking is how he brings out the design of whatever movement he plays. The sequences are well-defined without being pedantic and dance figures have their place as accompaniment to the melody. In these first recordings one can uncover Casals' connection to the language of Bach. The breathing between phrases, the differentiation of primary and secondary voices, and the primacy of rhythm, not metronomic beats but a subtle give and take which never disturbs the flow, all contribute to the overall cohesion. The Gigue is particularly striking and gives one a clue to Casals' galvanising energy in live performances. There are lessons here to be absorbed by the young cellist.

I was particularly interested to hear Casals interpret Spanish repertoire, and so the Intermezzo from 'Goyescas' by Granados on Volume 2 of the series (1916-1920) came as a surprise. No indulgence in rubato, just crisp ornaments, a straightforward, brisk tempo, and an absence of sentimental mooning over the melody here. The same disc has a version of the Boccherini Allegro from the Sonata in A Major; lest anyone think that some modern players have surpassed Casals' technique, listen to the dazzling clarity of the repeated passagework. The same can be said for the Allegro Appassionato, Op. 43 by Saint-Saëns, a piece most cellists know well, until one hears this version. The speed is breathtaking, but not a note is lost. It is quintessential Saint-Saëns — quicksilver, fleet-fingered and poetic. I was intrigued by the imagination he displays in each of the upward running passages, a sign that a great artist can elevate a lesser piece to something of genuine interest.

Volume 3 in the series (1920-1925) has several folk songs which are played with touching sensitivity, never cloying, but for me the jewels of the disc are the Mendelssohn Serenade Op. 67 No. 6 with its inimitable inflected rhythm, the Rubinstein Romance with its upper register sounds of violin-like purity, and the idiomatic Russian soulfulness of the Tchaikovsky Mélodie. "Fantasy, as much as you like, but with order" was a favorite saying of Casals. How did he know what constituted order in the realm of fantasy? An unerring sense of rhythm might be one clue. The same disc has a version of the Popper Gavotte, which will delight your pupils and initiate them into Popper's fantastical world. There is also the Adagio from Haydn's Concerto in D Major, which he never recorded in full. Casals' classical style is as fresh today as it was then, with an overriding sense of proportion in the decorative filigree passagework.

Great Moments in Cello Playing (Cello Classics) has, among many treasures, one track devoted to Casals, a recording from 1916 of the Haydn-Piatti Minuet and Variations, which offers an excellent introduction to the art of Casals. For the uninitiated, this is a port of call, so to speak. A fashionable piece of the late 19th century, it is Haydn with a liberal dose of virtuosity and style. Casals plays the theme with a directness and sense of proportion that is captivating. Each variation is characterized as the registers change, and the final restatement of the minuet is a model lesson in how a theme evolves through the passage of variations. Listen for the high F, which he plucks from Heaven towards the end of the piece with the grace of a bird in flight. How does he do that so effortlessly?

It is a fascinating exercise to compare the three versions of The Swan, made in 1915, 1920 and 1928, the latter being my favorite in terms of quality of recorded sound. This is a piece that defines the cello among taxi drivers and connoisseurs alike. I remember

the final meeting with a beloved teacher in which he played me a variety of string sounds, one after the other, and insisted that I define what made them exceptional. "Listen!" he said. "Listen to the beats in the sound." Many years later I understood what he meant in Casals' recording of *The Swan*. It is as if he has his fingers on the beating pulse of life, and to this day I cannot listen to his performance without tears welling.

In 1925 Casals left the Columbia label to record for the Victor Talking Machine Company. There is eloquent testament to his golden years of recording on Casals: *The Victor Recordings 1926-28* (Biddulph Recordings LAB 017). The pressings are a great improvement over the previous ones in terms of surface noise; one hears the immediacy and clarity of Casals' tone – the restrained vibrato and the well-centered sense of pitch. As with a good singer, there is never any wobble. Much of the repertoire he recorded previously is here: *Melody in F* by Rubinstein, *Kol Nidrei*, *Popper's Mazurka*, *The Swan* and *Chopin's Nocturne in E Flat*. There are notable exceptions, however, and some surprises, which are among my favorites.

The Bach *Musette* (arranged by Pollain) is remarkable for its bell-like trills and the exquisitely characterized, contrasting middle section, where Casals imitates the gentle sound of bagpipes with just the right inflection on the melodious double stops and not a trace of coarseness in the sound. This is one of those pieces where cellists can marvel at the range of tonal control Casals possessed in the bow. What sounds could he not produce? The Chopin 'Raindrop' Prelude contains one of the most radiantly spun cantilena lines of any instrumentalist I have ever heard, and even the growling double stops of this arrangement (which has not survived in the modern cellist's repertoire, perhaps for this reason) cannot spoil the limpid beauty of the theme as he plays it. Schubert's *Moment Musical No. 3* (arranged by Becker) has what Duke Ellington used to call "that swing", which one also hears in his later recordings of Schubert's orchestral works. The *Berceuse* by Godard was one of those favored salon pieces of the early 20th century, now out of fashion, which is a joy to rediscover in Casals' version because of the variety within his interpretation. His is the language of the heart; the inflected half tones, rising and falling thirds and fourths colored with delicate portamenti seem placed for maximum effect and yet never feel calculated. It must be said here that the Russian pianist Nikolai Mednikoff contributes accompaniments that are the crown to Casals' jewels. He possesses the gift of a sensitive touch at the piano and he listens to Casals as if he were his own right hand on the melody.

The only recording of Casals playing Debussy is on this disc: the *Minuet* from *La Petite Suite* (arranged by Choisnel). It is three minutes of flawless grace and charm, with an unerring instinct for the witty understatement of Debussy's style. What would we give to have a recording of the Debussy *Sonate* with Casals?

I shall not dwell on the Solo Suites of Bach, recorded in 1938-39 (EMI Classics), because they are so well-known and have done more to perpetuate the art of Casals than perhaps any other single recording. They were (and arguably still are) the gold standard of solo Bach recordings, and musicians of my generation grew up with them. It is hard to be objective when one is so close to a performance. For years I put them away, if only to find my own voice, but now it is a pleasure to play them for pupils, friends who may have never heard them, and for myself when the urge strikes. They may sound dated in places to modern ears, but for my taste he still plays wicked *Bourrées*, *Gavottes*, and *Gigues*, brimming with character. The keys to understanding Casals' interpretations of Bach are rhetoric and rhythm, curiously enough the same concerns which occupy the Baroque performance practitioners before the public today.

We come to the one recording which many cellists and devotees of Casals would call his finest: the *Dvorak Cello Concerto in B Minor*, Op. 104 (Pearl GEMM CD). A little background information is in order here, if only to contrast with the beauty of the recording. In April 1937 Casals was on tour in Prague with George Szell and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. He was preoccupied with the continuing horrors of the Spanish Civil War; nevertheless, he was persuaded to record the work immediately after the concert. As Robert Baldock tells it in his book, *Pablo Casals*, Gaisberg, the artistic head of EMI, recalled that:

Casals flew from Barcelona, arriving more dead than alive...the dress rehearsal and concert before packed houses were a huge success. Casals' élan and stamina kept him going for the whole of the next day when over twelve unsurpassed (78 rpm) records were made, and then the little man collapsed, every ounce of his strength exhausted...

There is something far more than excellent cello playing on this disc. The exceptional conditions of time and place, the gravity of the situation in his beloved Spain, the heroism inherent in the work with which Casals surely identified, the participation of his Czech colleagues, all contributed to a performance so inspired and transcendent that it fairly leaps off the record and into one's imagination and heart. Many of my friends and I still talk about 'that moment' when we discovered this recording and its galvanizing effect on our understanding of the cello and of music-making. To revisit it more objectively is to appreciate just how Casals respects the score. If there is one work which has been pulled in all directions in the last thirty years, since Casals' death, it is this concerto. Tempo indications and relationships are ignored, phrasings indulged, dynamics altered, all in the name of individual expression. Casals' performance reminds us that the work has an inherent dignity and sense of proportion which the text bears out; his interpretation stands at the opposite corner of the ring, and because he illuminates the integrity of the score, his performance endures.

The Beethoven Sonatas with Mieczyslaw Horszowski is another body of recorded work which bears investigation. Of all five, I encourage you to listen to the final sonata, if only to witness the crossing of a threshold in the second movement, the *Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto*. There is in this movement such oneness with the composer's intentions that the listener becomes

unaware of an 'interpretation'. It is an example of the uncanny, inexplicable side of Casals' gift, the intuition that he relied upon to guide him to the core of a composer's work. I am not, however, particularly fond of the Brahms Sonata No 2 in F Major which Casals recorded with Horszowski. In places it seems sluggish and lacks the fire which is so much in evidence elsewhere. When one considers how much Casals recorded in 1938 and 1939, in addition to his usual touring and the strains of the war years, it is not surprising to find a performance here and there which is less successful. He was, after all, over sixty years old by the time he recorded the most significant portion of the cello repertoire.

There are the marvelous recordings from Prades made beginning in the 1950's, when the musical world first arrived on Casals' doorstep to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Bach's death; thereafter a regular summer festival became a feature of the Pyrenean landscape until 1956. Later recordings from the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont testify to the longevity of Casals' musical life.

In conclusion, I would like to mention two performances close to my heart: the Schubert Quintet, D 956, with Isaac Stern, Alexander Schneider, Milton Katims, and Paul Tortelier, recorded in Prades in 1952 (Sony Classical/Casals Edition) and the Schubert Trio in B flat Major, Op.99 with the Cortot-Thibaud-Casals Trio, made in 1926 (EMI Classics). Both recordings are the epitome of ensemble playing, inspired musical conversation among colleagues who were well-matched in every respect. These recordings will become old friends and will keep you company until the end of your life. They contain what Beethoven defined as music: "a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy." I keep them close to the CD player.

And so this glimpse into a lifetime of exceptional recorded work comes to a close. Casals graced the world's musical stages for over seventy years, and his recordings illuminate the magic of his art to a startling degree. He is ageless, and I wager when the next century comes round, we will still have an ear for him.

Compact disc recordings mentioned in this article:

Pablo Casals: The Complete Acoustic Recordings, Volume 1: 1915-16, Biddulph Recordings, LAB 141

Pablo Casals: The Complete Acoustic Recordings, Volume 2: 1916-20, Biddulph Recordings, LAB 142

Pablo Casals: The Complete Acoustic Recordings, Volume 3: 1920-25, Biddulph Recordings, LAB 141

Casals: The Victor Recordings (1926-28), Biddulph Recordings, LAB 017

Great Moments in Cello Playing, Cello Classics CC1006, Track 2

Pablo Casals, Music Memoria, Paris, MM 30428

J.S. Bach, The Six Cello Suites, EMI Classics, USA No. CDHB 61027

CASALS, 4 CD special set, Pearl, GEMM CDS 9935, consisting of:

Pablo Casals Plays Brahms, GEMM CD 9363

Pablo Casals Plays Works for 'Cello and Orchestra, GEMM CD 9349

Pablo Casals Plays Beethoven, GEMM CDS 9461 (Double CD)

Franz Schubert/ Casals Edition, Sony Classical, SMK 58 992

Great Recordings of the Century, Cortot-Thibaud-Casals Trio, Schubert Trio in B flat Major, Op 99 and Beethoven 'Archduke' Trio, Op 97, EMI Classics, 72435 66986 28. Angel Version, 7243 567001 23



THE RECORDINGS OF PABLO CASALS

by [ROBERT BATTEY](#)

Today the legendary name Pablo Casals evokes homage among musicians old and young, the world over. What is interesting about the great Catalan's career is that had it not been for Alexander Schneider, second violinist of the Budapest Quartet, he would have become little more than an historical footnote. An important footnote, to be sure, but nothing close to the near-deity status he still enjoys among cellists, particularly in this country. Casals played his last professional concert in the U.S. in the 1920's. He was active in the 30's, but did not visit these shores. After WWII, he went into self-imposed exile to protest the political situation in Spain.

Thus, in America, by 1950, very few non-cellists had heard Casals' name and only a handful of people had ever seen him play. His time in the spotlight appeared to be over. But that year, the bicentennial of Bach's death, Schneider moved heaven and earth to 1) persuade Casals to take part in a Bach festival to be held in his little French village and 2) persuade Columbia Records to sponsor and record concerts there. The resulting publicity (Columbia wanted the records to sell, after all) and the renewed contact great musicians had with Casals sparked a tremendous second career even though he was by then far past his prime. But between chamber music, conducting, and master classes, he stayed continuously before the public, his legend growing yearly, until his death in 1973 at age 96.

Casals' "Golden Period" as a recording artist was the decade of 1929-1939 for the HMV label. He had recorded quite a bit already, for both RCA and Columbia, but the repertoire consisted mainly of arrangements, popular songs, and snippets from larger works. When recording technology and public taste had progressed to where there was both the technical ability and market demand for serious, complete works, Casals was more than ready (he was 53 at the time). Under his new HMV (today EMI records) contract, he recorded much of the standard cello repertoire, with top collaborators, in good halls, and in high-quality sound. These recordings are variously available on EMI, Pearl, and Biddulph CD's today.

Principal among them, of course, a set that is on most cellist's "desert island" collections, were the complete Bach Suites. The shadow these incandescent interpretations cast over all who have followed is remarkable, and they have been analyzed too often to require further mention here. But Casals also recorded the complete Beethoven sonatas, the Brahms F major sonata, the Boccherini, Dvorak, and Brahms Double concerti, Kol Nidrei, and a dozen encore pieces, as well as piano trios of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Mendelssohn. Given the stress and difficulty of recording in those days (sessions had to be started and stopped for each 4-minute side of a 78; but within a side there was no splicing, so any audible flaw meant re-doing the entire side), the quality and quantity of this output is remarkable.

The HMV recordings represent the Casals that Fritz Kriesler called "the monarch of the bow," not the groaning, mannered musician that many of us grew up hearing. For many years the post-war Columbia recordings (from the Casals festivals and, in particular, a recital recorded live at the White House during the Kennedy administration) were the only available Casals recordings, outside of the Bach Suites which have remained in print continuously since they were first issued. But those documents of the artist in his dotage are happily superseded by the reissues of the earlier material.

So, to sum up, Biddulph has released a 3-volume set of all of Casals' early acoustical recordings for Columbia. While the playing is wonderful, and the sound quality is tolerable, much of the repertoire makes these discs more of an archival and historical acquisition than an artistic one. For a good, inexpensive portrait of Casals' art during this period I recommend RCA's "Casals Early Recordings," a single disc of charming cello lollipops, exquisitely played. Next came his glory days with HMV, all recordings from which a serious cellist should at least know, if not own. All are now available on EMI or Pearl CD's. The last HMV recording Casals made was the Elgar Concerto, just after the war. His musical vision and personal intensity still burned bright, but, at 69, his cellistic abilities were clearly in decline. His later recordings, available now mainly on Sony CD's, do not present him as he would wish to be remembered.

At his best, Casals played with a clarity of musical vision that swept all before it. It was often not "pretty" cello playing, and the style, while easy to parody, cannot be copied. It was a unique mixture of spontaneity and planning, delivered with an artistic conviction that has simply disappeared today. Listen, for example to his two EMI Boccherini recordings, the A major sonata and the standard Gruetzmacher-arranged Bb concerto. There you will hear a control of color and emotion that commands attention from the first note. His rubato is far freer than what is heard from today's artists, and yet so natural and inevitable-sounding that the music seems to have been composed that way. He plays his own extended cadenza in the finale of the concerto, and it is a tour de force, both as a composition and as a performance. In short, Casals presents true "music making," in every sense, and it is little wonder that such great artists as Bernard Greenhouse, Isaac Stern, and David Soyer, to the ends of their lives, cited him as a dominant influence.

Thanks to the efforts of the historical labels mentioned, all of this essential material is available to us today.