

Eugénie-Victorine-Jeanne Alombert

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Abstract: The pianist and composer Eugénie-Victorine-Jeanne Alombert once held a notable position in Parisian cultural life; the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris has more than a dozen of her compositions, almost all of them digitized and available to the world through the Gallica website. Her dates of birth and death are unknown; she was probably born between 1860 and 1870, and can be documented until 1906. Her teachers included Mary Moll and Pompilio Sudessi; those performing her works included Célestin Bourdeau and (probably) Nicolas Gervasio.

Keywords: Paris, France, piano, composition, Eugénie-Victorine-Jeanne Alombert , Mary Moll, Célestin Bourdeau, Pompilio Sudessi, Louis Besson

The many women composers and musicians of later nineteenth-century Paris may have been forgotten for more than a hundred years, but the laudable drive and accomplishment of the French in digitizing their vast cultural production retained in French libraries means that at least some details can be recovered. Eugénie-Victorine-Jeanne Alombert once held a notable position in Parisian cultural life; the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris has more than a dozen of her compositions, almost all of them digitized and available to the world through the Gallica website. I have been unable to determine dates for her birth and death. The dates for her two marriages (1888 and 1900), and the dates of activity for her teacher, Mary Moll, suggest that she was most likely born sometime in the decade between 1860 and 1870, and all trace of her vanishes after 1906. Her published music seems to date from a very narrow span of years between 1891 and 1895. Unusually, we are told repeatedly by the piano editions that “all these pieces exist [also] for orchestra.”

Almost all the information that can be retrieved about Alombert has to be sifted from the details and dedications of her published works. Her “Bagatelle-Souvenir de Cabourg,” a valse-caprice, bears evidence to her presence in Cabourg, a noted summer retreat, with casino, on the Atlantic coast near Caen. The Casino had a theater with an internationally-noted opera season. Her “Brise embaumée [Embalmed Breeze],” another waltz, bears a dedication to Célestin Bourdeau, chef d’orchestre, maître de Chapelle à l’Église Russe de Paris. Bourdeau, as well as being a conductor and choir director, was also a prolific composer, with published works ranging to at least op. 45, mostly for piano solo, but also works for the Orthodox liturgy. A notice of his retirement published in *Le Figaro* (8 March 1914) notes that he had been directing the Russian choir for fifty years. Not only was Bourdeau active in Paris, but he was also the artistic director of the Casino of Cabourg, a fact revealed in his entry in the directory *Tout-Paris*, in its first edition in 1900.

A rather unusual news item from 1879, published in the *Revue du monde musical et dramatique*,¹ informed the reader that Bourdeau had put together an orchestra that could be hired by composers who wished to hear their works.

M. Adolphe² Bourdeau, choir director of the Russian Church, has just found, through an ingenious combination, the means of forming an orchestra composed of thirty musicians in order to perform the works of composers who are unable to be performed, either in classical concerts, or in seeking, which is very onerous, to put together, at their own expense, a symphonic orchestra. By paying the single sum of one hundred francs, one can have at one's disposition and in one of our leading concert halls an orchestra with conductor, or that one may direct oneself. Given the minimal sum required, M. Bourdeau's idea is certain to be successful; do we need to mention that the artists comprising this orchestra have been chosen among our best performers.

It is not beyond reason to imagine that Jeanne Alombert's works, in their orchestral garb, would have been performed under M. Bourdeau's baton.

Two of Alombert's compositions, the *Menuet champêtre* and the *Pavane-régence*, are dedicated to Mary Moll, in both cases identified as "Mademoiselle," and, in the latter case, as her teacher. Moll was among a number of pianists reviewed in *Le Ménestrel*, 13 April 1884. She made her début at the Salle Érard in 1881, in a concert of Weber, Chopin, and Liszt that was reviewed in *Le Monde Illustré* (16 April 1881). Moll was a student of Le Couppey at the Conservatory. She was also a composer, with *Welcome!* (a polka-mazurka), published by J. Heinz in 1874.

The *Souvenir d'Italie* bears a dedication to "Monsieur Gervasio, chef d'orchestre au Casino Municipal de Nice." This referred to Nicolas Gervasio, who had dozens of compositions for piano or orchestra published between 1876 and 1930. One may also surmise that Gervasio was a professional colleague of Bourdeau, who was at a similar establishment in Cabourg.

Violetta!, from 1893, is dedicated to another teacher, "Monsieur P. Sudessi." This is Pompilio Sudessi, 1853–1923, born in Treviso, Italy, who produced a vast number of works for piano, and also a respectable number of operas. The remaining dedicatees are "M. and C. Drappier" and "Alice Boucher," about whom I have been able to find nothing in connection with Alombert.

Alombert appears at least twice in published sources from 1895, where she is identified as "professeur de piano." In *Le Ménestrel* (p. 22), we are informed that she has been named a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. The official bulletin of the National Ministry of Education usefully provides her complete name.³ This allows us to be reasonably certain that this is the same musical Mlle. Alombert who is the bride in two separate nuptials dating from 1888 and 1900, respectively.

I believe her first wedding was to a very well-known figure in Paris, the music critic, Louis Besson, also known as Panserose in the press.

¹ Volume 2, 4 October 1879, p. 222.

² Evidently an error.

³ Bulletin officiel du Ministère de l'éducation nationale (1895), p. 46. "Mlle Alombert (Eugénie-Victorine-Jeanne), professeur de piano, à Paris."

L'art musical reports:

On Monday the 11th was celebrated, in the church of Saint-François in Lyon, the marriage of Monsieur Louis Besson, our confrère sympathique from *L'Événement* to Mlle Alombert. Messieurs Lassalle, Cossira, Aimé Gros, director du Conservatoire, Luigini, director of the orchestra of the Grand-Théâtre, Lapret, solo violinist of the same theater, were heard during the ceremony, one of the most musically sumptuous that had been organized in Lyon for a long time.⁴

Besson (1845–91) was the editor of *L'Événement*, as well as being a composer and librettist. He must have been astoundingly fat, for one source on the theater of the period said that his girth could barely be accommodated in an arm-chair.⁵ This was likely the source of his nickname, “Panserose” [panse in French = paunch]. He wrote the *Soirée Parisienne* and *Courrier des Théâtres* columns. His obituary was printed in *The Musical Times*, Vol. 32, p. 420 (1 July 1891), but there is no mention of his bereaved widow.

Alombert would make a good match in 1900, when she married into the French nobility; Mlle Eugénie-Victorine-Jeanne Alombert celebrated her nuptials in Paris with “M. René-Louis-Joseph-Henri de Sévelinges, architect, son of the late Omer-Oscar and Henriette Pauline Emilie Taveau,” as reported in the *Annuaire de la noblesse de France*, Vol. 56 (1900), p. 358. *Tout-Paris* (1900) reports that they resided at 3 Place Victor-Hugo, and received visitors on Mondays. Alombert lived until at least 1906, when she is still listed at the same address with Mr. Sévelinges in *Tout-Paris*.

WORKS:

Après le thé, mazurka, J. Alombert.

Paris, P. Schott.

Dépot: 1894.

Cotage: PS et Cie S5983

List of 15 compositions on verso of title page; also on final page.

Note: Tous ces morceaux existent pour orchestre.

Digitized BNF: ark:/12148/btv1b9069579v

Bagatelle. Souvenir de Cabourg. Valse caprice pour orchestre par J. Alombert.

Paris, Loret fils et H. Freytag.

BNF

Included in list of fifteen works for piano published by Schott.

⁴ *L'art musical* (31 October 1888), p. 160.

⁵ Edmond Benjamin, Henry Buguet, *Coulisses de bourse et de théâtre*, p. 128 : “Louis Besson (*Panserose*), dont l’embonpoint semble mal s’accommoder d’un fauteuil, prend place dans la loge de *L'Événement*.”

Brise embaumée: valse pour piano. Paris, P. Schott.

Dépot: 1894.

Cotage: PS et Cie S5976

“à Monsieur Célestin Bourdeau chef d’orchestre, maître de Chapelle à l’Eglise Russe de Paris.”

Digitized BNF: [ark:/12148/btv1b9069580h](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:bnf:12148/btv1b9069580h)

List of 15 compositions on final page.

Note: Tous ces morceaux existent pour orchestre.

Galop serpent: pour piano. Paris, P. Schott.

Dépot: 1894.

Cotage: PSetCie 5979

List of 15 compositions on verso of t.p.; also on final page.

Digitized BNF: [ark:/12148/btv1b90695919](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:bnf:12148/btv1b90695919)

Gavotte Marguerite, J. Alombert. Paris, P. Schott.

Dépot: 1894.

Digitized BNF: [ark:/12148/btv1b9069592q](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:bnf:12148/btv1b9069592q)

List of 15 compositions on final page.

Note: Tous ces morceaux existent pour orchestre.

Impromptu, J. Alombert. Paris, P. Schott.

Dépot: 1895.

No plate number.

Digitized BNF: [ark:/12148/btv1b9069623t](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:bnf:12148/btv1b9069623t)

List of 15 compositions on verso of t.p.; also on final page.

Note: Tous ces morceaux existent pour orchestre.

Marche Religieuse.

Listed at end of list of compositions for piano. No surviving copy?

Menuet champêtre: pour piano. Paris, P. Schott.

Cotage: PS et Cie 5982

Dépot: 1894.

“à Mademoiselle Mary Moll hommage respectueux.”

Digitized BNF: [ark:/12148/btv1b9069639p](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:bnf:12148/btv1b9069639p)

Pavane-régence pour piano. Paris, P. Schott.
Cotage: PS et Cie 5891.
Dépot: 1893.
Digitized BNF: [ark:/12148/btv1b90695363](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:fr:bnf-12148-btv1b90695363)
“à mon Professeur, Mademoiselle Mary Moll.”
List of six compositions on t.p.

Pierrette! Polka marche pour piano par J. Alombert. Paris, P. Schott.
Cotage: PS et Cie 5893.
Dépot: 1893.
Digitized BNF: [ark:/12148/btv1b90695578](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:fr:bnf-12148-btv1b90695578)
“à Mademoiselle Alice Boucher.”
List of six compositions on t.p.

Polka villageoise, J. Alombert. Paris, P. Schott.
Dépot: 1894.
Cotage: PS et Cie 5978.
Digitized BNF: [ark:/12148/btv1b9069650q](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:fr:bnf-12148-btv1b9069650q)
List of 15 compositions on verso of t.p.; also on final page.
Note: Tous ces morceaux existent pour orchestre.

Souvenir d'Italie, barcarolle pour piano. Paris, P. Schott.
Cotage: PS et Cie 5981.
Dépot: 1894.
Digitized BNF: [ark:/12148/btv1b90696492](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:fr:bnf-12148-btv1b90696492)
“à Monsieur Gervasio chef d'orchestre au Casino Municipal de Nice.”
List of 15 compositions on final page.

Speranza, caprice espagnol pour piano. Paris, P. Schott.
Cotage: PS et Cie 5871.
Dépot: 1891.
Digitized BNF:
“à Mesdemoiselles M. et C. Drappier.”

Trianon-gavotte, J. Alombert. Paris, P. Schott.
Dépot: 1894.
Parties séparées pour orchestre.

Violetta! Mazurka pour piano J. Alombert. Paris, P. Schott.

Cotage: PS et Cie 5892.

Dépot: 1893.

“à mon professeur Monsieur P. Sudessi.”

Arrangements:

Pierrette. Polka-marche de J. Alombert, pour harmonie ou fanfare par J. Vidal. Paris, Erette et Schaeffer.

About the Author

Tom Moore is head of the sound and image department at the Green Library, FIU, Miami, Florida. He holds degrees from Harvard and Stanford, and studied flute with Sandra Miller. From 2004 to 2007, he was visiting professor at the University of Rio de Janeiro. Moore writes on music for numerous publications in the United States, Australia, Spain, Italy, Germany and France.