

Auguste Franchomme (1808-1884) was the most renowned French cellist of his time. Born in Lille, where he studied cello and composition, he came to Paris at the age of 16 and won the Paris Conservatoire's Premier Prix in a matter of months. Within five years, he was performing his own compositions throughout Europe to great acclaim. Franchomme composed charming, virtuosic cello music, influenced by his contemporary Conservatoire violinists, by the operas he played, and by Chopin. Remarkably, most of his compositions are out of print and have never been recorded.

While establishing himself as a soloist and composer, Franchomme also laid the foundations of a career as an orchestral cellist, chamber musician, and teacher that lasted the rest of his life. He performed in the opera orchestras of Paris for over a decade, was principal cellist of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, and in 1832 became solo cellist of King Louis-Philippe's new Musique du Roi. He was also a beloved cello teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, where he taught for nearly 40 years, until days before his death.

Arguably the key moment of Franchomme's artistic life occurred in 1832, when he met Frédéric Chopin, who became a close friend and frequent collaborator. It was Franz Liszt who introduced the two men, still in their early 20s, at a dinner party, which ended with Franchomme going to Chopin's apartment and listening to him play (at Franchomme's request) late into the night. Their circle included Mendelssohn, Berlioz, George Sand, Jane Stirling, the Rothschilds, and many other luminaries of 19th century Paris, but it was Franchomme's friendship that became a steadfast mooring in Chopin's increasingly tempestuous life. Franchomme was the dedicatee of several of Chopin's compositions including his final work, the Sonata for Piano and Cello Op. 65, and he was the recipient of the last letter Chopin ever wrote.

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