GUILHERMINA SUGGIA: CELLIST
For Jacqueline and Gabrielle
Guilhermina Suggia: Cellist

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Preface

During school holidays in the late 1940s, a young girl used to ride her bicycle in front of Guilhermina Suggia’s home in Porto, Portugal. Back and forth she pedaled on rua da Alegria, listening intently to the music of the cello wafting through the open windows. More than 60 years later that cyclist wrote to me, wanting to share the memory of her schoolgirl days and wondering if I could tell her of any existing recordings. “I always believed I would hear her again,” she said. Many people share the nostalgia and hope expressed by this woman. The nostalgia is for a great musical figure known as the “queen of the cello” in her lifetime; the hope is to see her restored to her rightful place in history.

Born in 1885 in Porto, Portugal, to a middle-class musical family, Suggia began playing cello at age five. She made quick progress as a child prodigy and at age 16 won a scholarship to study with Julius Klengel in Leipzig, Germany. Between 1907 and 1913, Suggia lived in Paris with fellow cellist Pablo Casals in an unconventional partnership: while they pretended to be married, in fact they never were. When their relationship ended Suggia moved to London, where she built a spectacularly successful solo career. The painter Augustus John produced a celebrated portrait of Suggia in 1923, which today hangs in London’s Tate Gallery. In 1927, Suggia married Dr José Casimiro Carteado Mena and settled down to a comfortable life divided between Porto and London. Throughout the 1930s, she remained one of the most respected musicians in Europe, appearing on stage with many noted instrumentalists and conductors and completing numerous BBC broadcasts. The war years kept her at home in Portugal, where she focused on teaching. Suggia made a few triumphant final appearances in England in the late 1940s. When she died in 1950, her will provided for the establishment of several scholarship funds for young cellists, including England’s prestigious Suggia Gift.

I first learned about Suggia while doing some reading on Jacqueline du Pré, who was a recipient of the Suggia Gift as a teenager, and I decided to make a project of finding out more about her. Suggia is famous for what people tend to call her “temperament” – her strong personality and flair for drama – and she has a reputation for a certain flamboyance. Many fantastic stories have been told about her over the decades, and as my research progressed, I began to see that the line between fact and fiction in Suggia lore is a slim one. In poring over Suggia’s letters and other writings, I have often been struck by the distance between the exotic diva of legend and the woman before me. The voice I heard was intelligent, warm, and generous; it portrayed an enormously dedicated, knowledgeable and self-disciplined artist. I was also struck by the deep respect and affection for Suggia expressed by nearly everyone who knew her. Initially merely curious about Suggia, I came to genuinely like and admire her.

Unfortunately, Suggia did not take steps to preserve many of her personal papers. There are no journals, no diaries, no mother lode of documents to be mined for
deep insight into her existence and its inner dynamics. Her decision to keep a lot of things private was firm and irrevocable, with the result that the trajectory of her life and work has to be pieced together from far-flung traces in archives in several countries and in memoirs published by her contemporaries. The most extensive body of information is stored in a municipal archive in Matosinhos, Portugal, which contains thousands of concert programs, press reviews, photographs, and a small collection of letters.

Very famous during her lifetime, Suggia faded into relative obscurity after her death in 1950. One reason for this is the fact that she did not make many recordings, and many of those that she did make in 78 rpm format have not been remastered and reissued. Fortunately, in late 2004 Dutton released a CD entitled *Suggia plays Haydn, Bruch and Lalo* with discerning liner notes by Lyndon Jenkins. H.L. Kirk included a brief discussion of Suggia in his 1974 biography of Casals, and Robert Baldock expanded on that discussion in his own book on Casals, published in 1992. A major advance occurred when Portuguese author Fátima Pombo published two books on Suggia, in 1993 and 1996, which made extensive use of documents stored in the Matosinhos archive. By organizing the large cachet of concert programs and press reviews, Pombo was able to assemble a far more detailed picture of Suggia’s performing career than had previously been available. My work builds upon the foundation laid by these authors. Readers may be interested in a weblog on Suggia at http://suggia.weblog.com.pt/, managed by Virgílio Marques, which is mostly in Portuguese but is also accessible to English speakers, with many interesting visuals.

Whenever possible, I quote extensively from Suggia’s letters and published writings in order to allow readers to develop an impression of her personality and mode of expression. Her published writings were produced for various British publications in the 1920s. The most significant of these are two articles on cello playing in the journal *Music and Letters*, both of which make many points of continuing relevance to musicians and music lovers. Appendices to the book feature these articles and Suggia’s other published writings, which include “Sitting for Augustus John” (her account of the creation of the famous portrait) and essays on the singer Fyodor Chaliapin and on Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. The obituary for Suggia published by Milly Stanfield in *The Strad* in 1950 is also included in an appendix.

It is not my purpose here to assess or defend the quality of Suggia’s cello playing. I am not even sure that a truly informed assessment is possible at this point, given how few recordings Suggia made (and I argue in Chapter 7 that this was a deliberate choice on her part). My task has been to compile a different kind of record, one aiming to be as faithful as possible to whatever real information exists about Suggia’s life and work. The concert reviews in the Matosinhos archive are an important part of this body of information. They give clues not only about where, what and with whom she was performing, but also about what her contemporaries heard in her music. Technical, interpretive, and performance standards have evolved since Suggia’s day; tastes have changed. The press clippings are best treated as a window into how Suggia’s playing was received by live audiences who listened to her music in a way that we today cannot. It is in this spirit that I include quotes from numerous reviews, sprinkled throughout the book.
She was known affectionately to friends and family as Guil. Casals called her Mina. By her mid-20s, she was known professionally as Madame Suggia – a dignified title in her era, but one that reads less elegantly in our own. For simplicity’s sake, I refer to her as Guilhermina until she reached the age of 18 and as Suggia thereafter.

From the time she was a young child until the last days of her life, playing the cello was the single most important aspect of Suggia’s existence. What she referred to as her carrière – that is, the work of performing as a cellist – was more than a desire or an ambition, and certainly not merely a means of making a living; for Suggia, it was life itself. She was blessed with extraordinary talent, the best training, and the support of powerful patrons. One of the greatest struggles she faced, I believe, was the tension between maintaining a performing career and settling down in marriage. Suggia was a lively and affectionate woman who appreciated male companionship; but at least twice, she felt compelled to reject marriage proposals from loving men who could surround her with comfort and security. She chose to remain single and independent until she could be absolutely sure that marriage would not compromise her work. She died in bed with her Montagnana cello by her side. Cello was the true love of Suggia’s life.

As a charismatic performer, Suggia helped popularize the repertory for solo cello in the early twentieth century. She was one of the first women to make a career of playing the cello at a time when prejudice still existed against women playing this traditionally “masculine” instrument, proving that a woman could play the cello just as well as a man. A role model for so many other musicians, she was herself a fearless pioneer. I hope that this book will contribute in some small way to retrieving her from the shadows of the past.

Anita Mercier
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Research of the sort required for this book is a form of detective work, involving the pursuit of countless clues and leads. It has been my good fortune to meet so many generous and knowledgeable people in the process of completing the work.

The first person I contacted in connection with this project was Robert Ballock, whose biography of Casals is an inspiration. Robert took an immediate interest and I am indebted to him for a great deal of helpful information. Among other things, he put me in touch with Prof. Fátima Pombo in Portugal. Both Robert and Fátima participated in a conference on Suggia at the Juilliard School in 2002.

Without Fátima’s pioneering scholarship on Suggia, it would have been virtually impossible to make any progress at all. I thank Fátima for all the assistance and support she has so considerately provided, and also for her friendship, confidences, and loving attentions to my meninas.

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Suggia was fluent in several languages and conversant in a few others, so reading her letters and other documents has necessitated far-ranging linguistic adventures. When in doubt, I enlisted the expertise of Michael Maione, Harold Slamovitz, and Gonzalo Sanchez. All translations are my own and responsibility for any mistakes belongs to me.

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Thank you, finally, to René, my partner in this as in all endeavors.
Chapter 1

Teachers and Mentors

I. Porto

Porto, the ancient “capital of the north,” is the second largest city in Portugal after Lisbon. Famous for its port wine trade, it winds by the thunderous waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the misty Douro River. Guilhermina Augusta Xavier de Medim Suggia was born in Porto on June 27, 1885.1 Her father, Augusto Jorge de Medim Suggia, born in Lisbon on March 11, 1851, was of Spanish and Italian descent. A professional cellist, he played in the orchestra of the Teatro Real de São Carlos and served on the faculty of Lisbon Conservatory before taking a teaching job in Porto in the early 1880s. His wife Elisa, born on November 26, 1850, was also Lisbonese. The first daughter of Augusto and Elisa, Virginia, was born three years before Guilhermina. Both children inherited their father’s musical abilities. Virginia was a talented pianist and, like Guilhermina, began musical training at a young age. The daily rhythms of the Suggia household were shaped naturally by music.

Augusto began to teach Guilhermina to play the cello in 1890, when she was five years old, at which point the family had moved from Porto to the neighboring town of Matosinhos. Although it made sense for Augusto to want to pass on his expertise as a cellist to one of his children, at the time the cello was an unusual choice for a girl. Custom dictated that if a female were to play an instrument, she must look appealing and never compromise her feminine charm. Clarinets, oboes, and other instruments held in the mouth, which distorted the facial features, were considered unseemly. Brass instruments were too assertive. The piano was a popular choice, as it allowed a woman to sit upright, playing with minimal physical exertion, perhaps even with bare shoulders decorously displayed. Violin was beginning to catch on, even if, as one American writer said, “a violin seems an awkward instrument for a woman, whose well-formed chin was designed by nature for other purposes than to pinch down this instrument into position.”2

The cello and its cousin, the bass viol or viol da gamba, presented obvious problems. Before the 1860s, when the endpin came into use, both of these instruments were held between the knees or calves. “Decency, modesty, and the hoopskirt

1 Many sources erroneously give the year of Suggia’s birth as 1888. 1885 is the year noted on her birth certificate. Suggia consistently wrote 1885 on official documents, including her passport and her last will and testament. See various documents reproduced in Fátima Pombo, Guilhermina Suggia ou O violoncelo luxuriante (Porto: Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, 1993), 336 and passim.

fashion effectively prohibit the fair sex from playing the viol,” observed the Abbé Carbasus in 1739. Even fewer women took up the cello than the viol da gamba, apparently because of the necessity of frequent shifting and greater string resistance. The tonal qualities of the cello reinforced its masculine associations. As the historian W.J. Wasielewski put it, the cello lends itself far less to virtuoso exaggerations and confusions than does the easily portable violon [sic], so favorably disposed for every variety of unworthy trifling. The masculine character of the cello, better adapted for subjects of serious nature, precludes this … If the violon, with melting soprano and tenor-like voice, speaks to us now with maidenly tenderness, now in clear jubilant tones, the violoncello, grandly moving for the most part in the tenor and bass positions, stirs the soul by its fascinating sonority and its imposing power of intonation. Nonetheless, female viol da gamba and cello players were not unheard of. Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music, was frequently depicted as a gambist. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Venice, the orchestras of the ospedali conservatories – institutions that trained orphaned and abandoned girls for musical vocations – featured young ladies playing all of the instruments, including the lower strings. There were female gambists in the court of Louis XIV of France. One of the daughters of Louis XV, Henriette, also played the viol da gamba; a portrait of the princess playing her instrument was painted by Jean-Marc Nattier in 1754. Another daughter of Louis XV, Adélaïde, played the cello.

The first woman known to play the cello professionally was a Parisian named Elise Cristiani (or Christiani), who was born on December 24, 1827 and had a short but notable career. She studied with a teacher named Benazet and made a sensational public debut in 1845 at age 17,embarking soon after on a tour of several cities in Germany and Austria. Concertgoers surprised by the novelty of seeing a lady cellist were won over by the beauty of her playing and by her personal charm. (The Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung remarked that “the expectation of witnessing an ungainly performance was quite disappointed.”) Felix Mendelssohn accompanied Cristiani in a concert in Leipzig and dedicated his Song without Words for cello and piano to her. She held an appointment in the royal court of Denmark before succumbing to cholera during a tour in Siberia in late 1853. She owned a Stradivarius cello of 1700 which bears her name.

Cristiani may have contributed to one of the most important developments in cello history: the widespread adoption of the endpin. The endpin was in use as early as the 1600s, but not universally endorsed until the late nineteenth century. Without an endpin, the player was forced to hunch awkwardly over the instrument, whereas the endpin permitted a more relaxed, upright posture and eased the access of the bow.

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to the A and C strings. The tone of the cello also sounded less constricted with the endpin. According to a 1900 article on cello technique, “it has been stated that the tail-pin first came into use on the advent of the first lady 'cellist’ [i.e., Cristiani]. This cannot be completely accurate; Cristiani certainly was not the first cellist to use an endpin, nor are we absolutely sure that she actually used one. On the other hand, some nineteenth-century instructional sources discouraged the use of the endpin on account of its “womanish” associations, which suggests that it was women who led the way with what was to become a standard practice. The endpin transformed cello playing and contributed to the instrument’s evolution as a solo concert instrument.

Even with the endpin, however, many women were taught to hold the cello in ways designed to avoid placing the instrument between their legs. A “side-saddle” position was popular, with both legs turned to the left and the right leg either dropped on a concealed cushion or stool or crossed over the left leg. A frontal position with the right knee bent and behind the cello, rather than gripping its side, was also used. Feminine alternatives like these were still in use in the twentieth century. As late as 1905, the Italian author of an instructional manual remarked that “nelle donne piu che mai occorre curare la corretta posizione” [“few women play in the correct position”].

Lisa Cristiani was a novelty at the mid-mark of the nineteenth century. By 1914, Edmund van der Straeten was able to identify over 20 female cellists in Europe and North America, among whom Suggia, May Mukle, and Beatrice Harrison are the most well-known today. Most of the women he listed were born in the 1870s and 1880s (Harrison was born in 1892). The growing popularity of the endpin had much to do with the surge in the number of female cellists in the late nineteenth century, but other key changes were also at work. Social conventions that discouraged women from performing in public were relaxing, while at conservatories, women were graduating in record numbers. Barred from employment in all-male symphony orchestras, enterprising women founded their own ensembles, such as the Vienna Women’s Orchestra, proving that they could play all of the instruments just as well as men. Finally, as many of the late Romantic composers discovered the emotional possibilities of the instrument, the repertory for solo cello began to expand significantly. As the turn of the century approached, the appeal of the cello as an instrument of choice was rising for all musicians, including women.

Augusto played the cello with an endpin, so it was natural that the three-quarter size cello ordered from Paris for Guilhermina also had one. He taught her to play in the straddle position: a picture of the cellist at age seven shows her sitting comfortably with the miniature cello between her knees. Her older sister Virgínia studied piano

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9 This cello was procured by the Viscount Villar d’Allen, a Porto potentate and music-lover, and is still in the possession of his family.
with a teacher named Thereze Amaral. The musical progress of the young Suggias was so rapid that before long they began to give public performances at clubs and meeting halls where the local aristocracy gathered for social and cultural events. The first appearance of the prodigiosas was at the Assembly of Matosinhos in 1892. Seven-year-old Guilhermina was described in Porto’s Jornal de Notícias as dressed in blue, seated in a tiny chair, hugging her cello, reminding us of an enchanting little doll. Her small hands strained to grasp the strings … She smiled and played the bow as if she were playing in her bedroom with a toy. The movement of the bow was strong and secure, very admirable for an age at which the fingers lack the strength and agility that only study and practice will bring with time. Her playing was so astonishing that the ladies and gentlemen got up to cheer her, covering her with kisses which she smilingly acknowledged.10

Between 1892 and 1895, Guilhermina and Virginia gave several joint recitals and became celebrities of sorts in the local salon circuit. Praise was invariably extended to Augusto, the “father and distinguished artist,” who took to the stage for his share of applause at the end of concerts. The success of his daughters fed Augusto’s filial pride and probably enhanced his cachet as a music teacher. A comparison with the hands-on father of another famous child prodigy, Clara Wieck (later Schumann), is called to mind. But unlike Friedrich Wieck, who was tyrannical, possessive and rancorous, Augusto was a genial and affectionate man who put Guilhermina’s interests first. At least until 1904, when she began to tour regularly in Europe and probably became self-supporting, Augusto managed everything necessary for the launching of her career, from bookings and publicity to accompanying her to Leipzig for a 16-month period of study with Julius Klengel. In today’s world, such support might seem unremarkable, the normal performance of a basic parental duty. But in the nineteenth century, it was by no means inevitable that a daughter’s potential would be encouraged by her father, in music or any other field. Violist-composer Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979) and composer Germain Tailleferre (1892–1983) had to struggle with unsupportive fathers, as did the somewhat older composers Ethel Smyth (1858–1944) and Cécile Chaminade (1857–1944). In conservative Catholic Portugal, Augusto Suggia had the vision to imagine futures for both of his daughters outside the boundaries of home and hearth. The foundation for Guilhermina’s ultimate success was laid by her father, who not only recognized her abilities but also supported her ambitions with unstinting devotion.11

It is obvious that Guilhermina’s immediate family was somewhat unconventional. All the same (or perhaps because of it), she had a happy, well-adjusted childhood in a comfortable middle-class home. The only discernible turbulence in her family life

10 O Jornal de Noticias, October 13, 1892, Câmara Municipal de Matosinhos, Biblioteca Florbela Espanca, and Arquivo Histórico Municipal, Matosinhos, Guilhermina Suggia Collection (hereafter CMM).

11 Margaret Campbell erroneously states that Suggia was “the daughter of an eminent physician whose family considered social graces to be far more important than the study of music.” Margaret Campbell, “Masters of the Twentieth Century,” in Robin Stowell (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to the Cello (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 83.
relates to tensions between her parents, which became quite pronounced in later life and may have been in the air even when Guilhermina and Virginia were young girls. Of the two parents, Guilhermina was probably more closely identified with and influenced by her father. While Elisa was deeply loved, she appears to have been the less dominant parent; in fact, she was dependent and somewhat helpless, and as the years went by, the necessity of taking care of her fell rather heavily on her younger daughter’s shoulders. It is possible that this early closeness to an encouraging masculine figure accounts for many of the traits that served Guilhermina well in her career, including unapologetic self-confidence and a fierce work ethic. Her teachers and early musical partners were overwhelmingly male (with the exception of Virginia). In a sense, she grew up in a man’s world and made her way through it with apparent ease. Augusto’s instruction and support, along with the generally happy and stable circumstances of her childhood, undoubtedly had a great deal to do with this.

Abundant opportunities for formative musical experiences in and around Porto also fed the young cellist’s ascent. In the last decades of the century, the city was home to an energetic and innovative community of classical musicians. The leader of this community was the violinist and conductor Bernardo Valentim Moreira de Sá (1853–1924). In the 1870s and 1880s, Moreira de Sá helped found several organizations for the purpose of introducing Porto audiences to music that was familiar in other parts of Europe but scarcely heard in Porto, or in Portugal for that matter. Through performances led by Moreira de Sá, chamber works of composers such as Haydn, Boccherini, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Weber, Schubert, and others were introduced to the Porto musical scene. The capstone of Moreira de Sá’s efforts was the creation of the Orpheon Portuense in 1882. Functioning as both a concert society and a performance venue, the Orpheon Portuense gave musicians and audiences access to a wide range of choral, chamber and symphonic music, with innovative programming featuring both established classics and new works. Ravel’s music was heard for the first time in Portugal when he came to Porto in 1928 at the invitation of the Orpheon Portuense. A 1913 brochure celebrating the history of the Orpheon Portuense lists appearances by a number of the most popular musicians of the day, including Harold Bauer, Ferruccio Busoni, Alfred Cortot, Wanda Landowska, Artur Schnabel, Georges Enesco, Fritz Kreisler, Jacques Thibaud, Eugène Ysayé, and Felix Salmond. The Orpheon Portuense functioned as a de facto music school, with youngsters forming chamber groups and putting on concerts of their own. After her father, Bernardo Moreira de Sá was the most important influence in the first stage of Guilhermina’s musical life. Guilhermina was mentored and encouraged at the Orpheon Portuense, and members of the Moreira de Sá and Suggia families were close friends. Bernardo Moreira de Sá’s granddaughter Madalena studied cello with both Augusto and Guilhermina.

In the 1890s, then, when Guilhermina’s musical gift was beginning to ripen, Porto would have been buzzing with concerts, recitals, and news of exciting performers. As a local Wunderkind, she would have been introduced to visiting artists in a position to dispense advice and encouragement. One such opportunity arose in 1898, when Pablo Casals appeared on the scene.
Casals was making a name for himself, but he was not yet the international eminence he would become. Having spent several years studying and working in Brussels and Paris, Casals moved to Barcelona in 1896, where he taught and played principal cello at the Gran Teatro de Liceo. In 1897, he formed a trio with the Belgian violinist Mathieu Crickboom and the Spanish composer-pianist Enrique Granados. In the summer of 1898, Casals took a job playing nights in a casino in Espinho, a resort town about 16 kilometers south of Porto. He also gave solo recitals once a week that generated a great deal of excitement in music-hungry Porto. At the time, Guilhermina was 13 years old and Casals was 22. Recognizing her potential when Augusto brought her to play for him, he agreed to give her lessons during his stay. She traveled by train from Porto to Espinho for weekly instruction until Casals returned to Barcelona at the end of the summer. Casals also befriended Moreira de Sá and agreed to undertake a six-week tour of Brazil with him the following summer.

By the time she met Casals, Guilhermina was already experienced at performing in more polished venues than social clubs and salons. She debuted at the Gil Vicente Theater at Porto’s Crystal Palace in May of 1896, playing one piece with Virginia and a Haydn piece with a string quartet. After this, she participated regularly in concerts presented by the Orpheon Portuense as a soloist, in chamber groups, and as first cellist in the Orpheon Orchestra directed by Moreira de Sá.12 By 1901, she was a member of the Moreira de Sá Quartet, joining the founder and Henrique Carneira on violin and Benjamin Gouveia on viola. In March of that year, the quartet played at the Lisbon Conservatory, and a few days later Guilhermina and Virginia were invited to give a recital at the salon of Michel’Angelo Lambertini, a Porto native and friend of Augusto.

Already by age 16, Guilhermina was near to the top of her profession in her native country. Portugal had furnished a hospitable environment for the earliest stage of her career, but it was still a backwater of the major cultural centers of Europe. It was obvious that she would need to move on to further studies with a famous teacher in France or Germany if she was to reach her full potential. Influential intermediaries, including Lambertini and António Lamas, an ardent music-lover and collector of antique instruments, set about securing the government funding necessary for a period of study abroad.

Soon an extraordinary opportunity arose: Guilhermina and Virginia were invited to play at the Palácio das Necessidades in Lisbon. King Carlos and Queen Amélie, along with other members of the royal family, attended the recital. A few weeks later, the queen sent the sisters two gold bracelets hung with heart-shaped charms of rubies and diamonds, along with a note expressing her appreciation. Augusto wrote Lambertini a few months later with the happy news that Guilhermina had been awarded a government scholarship. On November 15, 1901, the journal *Arte Musical* announced the departure of the violoncellist Guilhermina Suggia and her father for Leipzig, “where the talented youngster will be placed under the artistic guidance

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12 Several sources claim that Suggia was principal cellist in something called the Porto Symphony Orchestra at age 12. Porto did not have a symphony orchestra at that time (although today it is home to the Porto National Orchestra); Suggia played in Moreira de Sá’s Orpheon Orchestra.
Teachers and Mentors

of Julius Klengel.”

A farewell concert took place earlier in the month, at which Guilhermina played for the 50th and final time with the Moreira de Sá Quartet.

Guilhermina was setting sail for the wider world, and she would go on to achieve fame in many cities. But she never forgot the heady musical experiences of her youth in Porto, in which Bernardo Moreira de Sá played such an important role. Many years later, cello in hand, she paid a final visit to her old friend as he lay dying in bed.

It was the last time she would play for him.

II. Leipzig

The 16 months spent by Guilhermina and Augusto in Leipzig in 1901–1903 were stressful for the whole family. Elisa and Virgínia remained at home while Augusto and Guilhermina were in Leipzig. The scholarship covered only her expenses; Augusto was not subsidized, and while in Leipzig he had little means of earning an income.

It fell to Virginia not only to support herself and Elisa, but also to send supplemental funds to Leipzig. All of the family’s resources were dedicated to Guilhermina. It was a total investment in her future.

Although Julius Klengel was a member of the faculty at Leipzig Conservatory, Guilhermina worked with him as a private student and did not enroll in the school. Already a seasoned performer, apparently she was considered too advanced for the program of studies offered at the conservatory. This would have included classes in subjects such as harmony, counterpoint, ear training, and pedagogy in addition to instrumental lessons and chamber coaching. The fact that Guilhermina studied privately makes it difficult to determine how broadly beyond the cello her musical education at Leipzig ranged. The collection of books she possessed at the end of her life, which was bequeathed to the Porto Conservatory, included Salomon Jadassohn’s treatise on harmony – a relic, perhaps, of her student days in Leipzig.

Most European conservatories, including Leipzig, began admitting women in the last half of the nineteenth century. By the 1880s, the numbers of women in the conservatories had reached such a level that some observers feared they would crowd out the men. However, women were admitted with a set of expectations denoting a certain less-than-equal status. Women were not permitted to become scholars or professors at the conservatory level; few became composers or conductors. For many women, conservatory training was a kind of finishing school on the path to marriage. Once they left the conservatories they were excluded from professional orchestras, conducting posts, positions in universities, and the professional musical life of the Church. If a musical profession was anticipated, it would likely be a short-lived career as a solo performer, which would normally be abandoned upon marriage, or teaching at the elementary or secondary level. Teaching young children was the most common vocation of female conservatory graduates. The fact that Guilhermina was placed on a separate track of private study would seem to indicate confidence in her

13 Arte Musical, November 15, 1901, CMM.
14 Bernardo Moreira de Sá died on April 2, 1924.
unusual abilities. Indeed, Klengel’s assessment of his new student was unequivocal: “She is a cellist with the highest artistic merit, who has no reason to fear comparison with cellists of the masculine sex.”\footnote{Fátima Pombo, Guilhermina Suggia: A Sonata de Sempre (Matosinhos, Portugal: Edições Afrontamento/Câmara de Matosinhos, 1996), 60.}

In the late nineteenth century, there were two dominant schools of cello playing: the French and the German. The more austere German tradition was favored in Portugal. Bernardo Moreira de Sá studied in Germany, as did other influential Portuguese musicians such as the conductor Raimundo de Macedo (1889–1931), the pianist Alexandre Rey Colaço (1854–1928), and the pianist and composer José Vianna da Motta (1868–1948). Augusto played with the German technique, which he passed on to Guilhermina. He taught her to play “in the strings,” bowing closer to the bridge and with a slower bow speed, in contrast to the faster bowing closer to the fingerboard emphasized by the French school.

Julius Klengel was recommended to Augusto by his friend Oscar da Silva, a pianist and composer from Porto. Klengel was born in 1859 to a musical family. His grandfather played violin with the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig for 50 years without missing a single concert, a feat the grandson repeated as principal cellist of the same orchestra from 1881 to 1924. Klengel’s father and siblings were musicians as well; together, the family could muster a piano quintet. After studying with Emil Hegar at the Leipzig Conservatory, Klengel toured Europe as a soloist and with chamber groups. He studied composition with Jadassohn and produced a great deal of cello music, including etudes, concertos, capriccios, a hymn for 12 cellos, and chamber works. Klengel taught many cellists who went on to have renowned careers, including (aside from Suggia) Emanuel Feuermann, Edmund Kurtz, Alfred Wallenstein, Joseph Schuster, Jascha Bernstein, Mischa Schneider, Benar Heifetz, Henri Honegger, Stefan Auber, Paul Grummer, Gregor Piatigorsky, William Pleeth, and Maurice Eisenberg.

Klengel’s chief pedagogical rival in Germany was Hugo Becker at the Hoch Conservatorium in Frankfurt. The two famous teachers had completely different approaches. Becker delved deep into physiology and anatomy in an effort to make a science of cello playing. He was considered by many, including Piatigorsky and Raya Garbousova, to be rigid and dictatorial. Klengel, on the other hand, was a relaxed and genial man who respected the individuality of his students. He intervened as little as possible, always allowed a student to play a piece to the end while he puffed on an ever-present cigar, and guided through quiet encouragement. While not overbearing, he took a personal interest in his students, dispensing paternalistic advice and assistance as needed.

In addition to her father and Klengel, Pablo Casals had a major impact on Suggia’s development as a cellist. In the literature on Casals, Suggia is usually cited as one of Casals’ most illustrious students. Curiously, at a certain period in life Suggia herself took pains to insist that she was \textit{not} Casals’s student. A magazine profile in the 1920s by the writer Lyle Watson makes this assertion, most likely at Suggia’s prompting:
Probably the association of the two artists in concert work gave rise to the impression, still prevalent in musical circles and stated as a fact in at least one work of reference, that she was a pupil of Senor Casals. As we have seen, however, this was not the case; and I take this opportunity of authoritatively correcting the mis-statement.¹⁷

Strictly speaking, this was not true: Suggia did in fact have some lessons with Casals at Espinho in the summer of 1898; and of course, she must have absorbed a lot from Casals while living with him in Paris before World War I. The tumultuous relationship between the two cellists, discussed in the next chapter, made this a sensitive topic for Suggia. What she was probably attempting to convey was that she was not merely a student of Casals, in the sense that the term might suggest; not his subordinate or disciple, and certainly not his creation. Interestingly, Milly Stanfield, Casals’s English secretary, also seems to make a point of not defining Suggia as Casals’s student in the obituary of Suggia she published in the magazine *The Strad*:

Possessed of exceptional talent for the instrument, she studied as a girl with Julius Klengel in Leipzig, who was then at the height of his fame. Whilst there, she came under the influence of Casals, with whom she subsequently worked in Paris over a period of several years. She imbibed from him a sense of style which, at that epoch, was associated solely with his name. To this she added a temperament that was entirely personal.¹⁸

The influence of Casals is undeniable: Suggia acknowledged it openly, and it can be heard in her playing. But Suggia related to Casals more as a colleague, with profound admiration and respect, than as a student. She did not claim to be his equal: indeed, she described Casals as the greatest cellist of their day. But as Stanfield indicates, whatever Suggia took from Casals, she made her own.

In 1920, Suggia was asked to write an article for the British journal *Music and Letters* on cello playing. In the article she discusses the cello’s history as a solo instrument and its repertory, and makes some general points about technique, before turning to the subject of distinguished cellists in history.

I shall avoid talking here of living cellists as much as I can, or mentioning names for the sake of comparison, but I am bound to bring a name forward which is, in the opinion of the whole world, the one which stands pre-eminent among those of living cellists. This name is Pablo Casals. It is not his biography I am going to trace, but I must say a few words about his work and its immense value to the coming generation of cellists.¹⁹

She goes on to discuss what she deems to be the most important aspects of his approach to cello playing.

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¹⁷ Watson’s article is in the Matosinhos archive, but the periodical and date of publication are unclear; probably it was published in the late 1920s.


¹⁹ Guilhermina Suggia, “The Violoncello,” *Music and Letters*, 1/2 (April 1920): 107. The October 1920 issue of *Music and Letters* featured notes from one of Casals’s master classes in Paris the previous summer. According to the editor, these notes were “supplied by Madame Suggia,” but it is unclear if she actually attended the master class and took the notes herself, or if she procured them from someone else and passed them on to *Music and Letters*.
He revolutionized all the cello schools and created one which gives scope to all possibilities of the cello as the instrument capable of the finest musical expression, and this school is based on nothing but logical principles. He laid the greatest stress on the common scale, and was convinced that if a cellist could play a scale perfectly he could play anything. He discovered that to sit down and hold a cello, to place the bow on the strings, and to use the thumb position, one need not distort oneself. He realized the work of art in such a way that his body took naturally the corresponding shapes and movements, and thus was able to harmonise what the French call l’esthetique with his technique and musical sentiment.

If the 17th century had Domenico Gabrieli followed by Domenico Galli, if the 18th century had Luigi Boccherini and later on Romberg, Dotzauer and Duport – the last perhaps the most famous of all – the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century has in Pablo Casals the greatest of all, the one that carried to a much higher degree the cello technique; and it will be due to him that the cello will take rank, not only by the side of the violin, but as the first bow instrument there is.\(^\text{20}\)

Casals called his revolutionary new technique “Freedom with Order.” By contracting and extending the fingers of the left hand rather than moving the hand from one position to another on the fingerboard, a cleaner articulation was achieved. The noisy shifts and frequent use of glissando and portamento characteristic of nineteenth-century cello technique were avoided. Suggia too stressed the importance of clean playing: “the cellist should endeavor to rid himself of the susceptibility to make noises. It is quite extraordinary how few there are who can play without making noises. A noise is not music, neither can a simple musical phrase be beautiful which contains any sound other than a beautiful sound.”\(^\text{21}\) Suggia also gave Casals credit for reviving the classical repertory for solo cello, including Bach’s unaccompanied suites, Beethoven’s five sonatas for cello and piano, Haydn’s Cello Concerto No. 2 in D, and Schumann’s Cello Concerto, “all of which he plays in such a manner as to convince the world of their beauty.”\(^\text{22}\)

William Pleeth said that Klengel had a “fantastic, Paganini-like technique.”\(^\text{23}\) But it was of the old school, and Suggia’s technique was squarely of the new. It is likely that Suggia arrived at Leipzig playing with a technique influenced by Casals, and that Klengel encouraged her to stay on course without imposing his own methods upon her. Suggia did later say that before Leipzig she had developed an injury from over-practicing and that she was indebted to Klengel for helping her overcome bad habits leading to muscular strain.\(^\text{24}\) In any case, there would have been a great deal of continuity between the teachings of Klengel and Casals, musically if not technically. They knew and liked each other, and Klengel defended Casals from critics like Hugo Becker. Klengel liked to point out that it took a Spaniard to bring the glory of Bach’s cello suites to the attention of the composer’s fellow Germans.\(^\text{25}\) Casals dropped in

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 105.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 108.
\(^{24}\) Glasgow Evening Citizen, November 23, 1936, CMM.
on Klengel whenever he was in Leipzig and recommended students to him, including Maurice Eisenberg.

It was Oscar da Silva who contacted Klengel and arranged for him to take Guilhermina on as a student. Augusto had relied heavily on da Silva’s judgment, and his letters from Leipzig indicate that he and Guilhermina set forth from Porto with very little idea of what to expect. Fortunately, it was a good choice. Guilhermina’s time with the amicable Klengel was very fruitful, and later in life she would speak of her Leipzig teacher with great respect and affection.

Guilhermina was awarded a scholarship from the Portuguese government to study in Leipzig for three years. After a farewell concert in Porto, she and Augusto departed for Leipzig in mid-November 1901. They planned to stay in the house of Olga Katzenstein, the niece of the German consul in Porto. Within a few days of arriving, Guilhermina played for both Klengel and Arthur Nikisch, the conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, and on December 1 Augusto wrote to his friend Michel’Angelo Lambertini with news of how she was received.

Guilhermina has already begun her lessons with Julius Klengel. They are thrilled with each other. Guilhermina received a big distinction: when she was presented to Arthur Nikisch, he didn’t receive her at his home but at the Gewandhaus and he accompanied her himself. He said he would be better able to appreciate and evaluate her that way … Guilhermina was very happy and Nikisch gave her many bravos and glowing compliments. This attention from Nikisch is considered a huge honor for Guilhermina.26

Klengel too was deeply impressed by Guilhermina. Taken by the way she played one of his compositions at a lesson with little time for preparation, he dedicated his Caprice en forme de chaconne to her “with deep affection … in memory of your time of study in Leipzig.” At the end of the first term, the authorities in Lisbon required a progress report from Klengel. In his report, he praised her intelligence and the dedication she brought to her studies and said that she was moving ahead with surprising swiftness. Klengel predicted a stellar future for his pupil.27

Guilhermina’s progress at Leipzig was so rapid that she was there for less than half of the three years originally projected. Financial pressure may have been a spur.28 Already in January 1902, Augusto expressed anxiety in a letter to Lambertini: Virginia wanted to go to Lisbon to play in a concert, but she could not afford to take a break from the piano lessons that provided for her father’s upkeep. A year later he was in a state of near panic. It had been over six months since he had received any money from the government, and Virginia needed a new piano in order to continue teaching. He explained his predicament to Lambertini:

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26 Augusto Suggia to Michel’Angelo Lambertini, November 28, 1901, CMM.
27 Julius Klengel, June 19, 1902, in Pombo, Guilhermina Suggia: A Sonata de Sempre, 60.
28 In his novel Guilhermina (Porto: Imprensa Nacional/Casa de Moeda, 1986), which is of dubious value as a source of facts, Mário Cláudio writes that Suggia forfeited her royal scholarship as a penalty for accepting a fee to appear with the Gewandhaus Orchestra. This is not mentioned in the correspondence between Augusto Suggia and Michel’Angelo Lambertini and does not appear credible.
Since October I have written letter after letter to request the scholarship that was promised; but as of today, not even a cent. No help from anybody except the good and incomparable Virginia. Not even, at least, notice from Lisbon that they won’t continue to provide the scholarship! You can’t imagine my desperation; I’ve been waiting continuously for the money. Nobody deserves it more than Guilhermina, who has been a martyr to her studies since we arrived and has accomplished brilliantly the purpose for which she came here.

I haven’t complained and I’m still not going to for fear it might reflect badly on Guilhermina in Lisbon, and because I am so embarrassed. It shames me that Klengel, to whom I was forced to confess all, has not taken any money for his lessons for the past two months …

Virginia has already sent her sister 42,300 [réis]. That’s the price of a good piano. If you my dear friend can do us this favor [of buying a piano for Virginia], you will be helping one of the best creatures in the world, and Guilhermina will be happy to repay the loan in a little while. In any case, it is guaranteed by Virginia’s earnings.29

The family was split up, Virginia was making career compromises, Augusto was reduced to begging for money – all so that Guilhermina could pursue what her father called the trombetas da fama. At Leipzig, perhaps for the first time, Guilhermina knew what it was to really work under arduous and uncertain conditions. She thrived on the musical challenges and was always described by Augusto as “happy” and “excited.” But the pressure must have been terrific. She needed to make her debut, get bookings, and begin earning an income. And in order to do that, she needed to reach a level of technical and artistic expertise that would satisfy Klengel and Nikisch. With so much at stake, it is no wonder that she worked at an accelerated pace.

Guilhermina did not return to Porto for summer vacation at the end of the 1901–2 school year. Klengel believed that if she continued her lessons uninterrupted, she would be ready to be presented in public by the next winter. In October, she received a formal invitation from the Gewandhaus to make her debut in February. Klengel organized a celebratory musicale featuring Guilhermina playing with members of the Gewandhaus Orchestra, which gave her some useful practice in performing under intense scrutiny and also heightened anticipation for the debut. A Gewandhaus presentation entailed two separate concerts, one with the Gewandhaus Orchestra and another of chamber music.

On February 26, 1903, Guilhermina played Volkmann’s Cello Concerto with the Gewandhaus Orchestra conducted by Nikisch. After the concert, she played a solo encore, and the maestro permitted an unusual breach of protocol: at the insistence of the audience, she was recalled to the stage to repeat the entire piece. For the second concert, she played a duet with Klengel. He gave her the part of the first cello. Suggia later recalled that the other professors at the conservatory considered it unseemly for a student to be featured above a teacher in this way. But Klengel dismissed the criticism, saying, “I am old, I’m beginning to decline. She is young and full of talent; she knows all of the secrets of the cello and is on her way up. She will go so high that no one will be able to reach her.”30

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29 Augusto Suggia to Michel’Angelo Lambertini, January 26, 1903, CMM.
30 Pombo, Guilhermina Suggia: A Sonata de Sempre, 63. Interestingly, Klengel seems to have encouraged Suggia to learn a number of works that she subsequently dropped from her
It was a total triumph. Augusto could finally relax and exult in what had been so spectacularly accomplished. On March 16, he wrote to Lambertini:

[Guilhermina] is considered a celebrity in Leipzig and this winter the two most talked about artists, who caused the biggest sensations, were the violinist Jan Kubelik and our Guilhermina. And this is in Germany, where all the important people are. We’re arranging another concert, in Plauen on the 25th of this month, and then we’ll be leaving, because the concerts will all be finished. At this point it’s not clear if we’re going directly to Porto or to Lisbon, but we’ll be going by sea.31

Guilhermina Suggia was 18 years old. She had completed her studies with one of Europe’s premier teachers and was ready to make her way as a concert artist. Formally speaking, her student days were over. In a sense, however, like all true artists, she remained a student for her entire life. Patient, focused, and relentlessly honest, Suggia was not prone to glib vanity. She understood an existence dedicated to music to be an open-ended process of hard work and personal risk. As she explained to an interviewer near the end of her life,

As an artist I am always unsatisfied, looking at each moment to reach the supreme perfection. I study every day and I continue to learn all that remains for me to learn. When I play well in front of an audience, I like to get enthusiastic applause, but before the audience responds I have already applauded myself with the intimate satisfaction of a sincere spiritual pleasure. I am my own harshest critic. That’s exactly why when I feel I haven’t played well, I’m not impressed by the applause of listeners. In my conscience, these appreciations are not deserved. I am grateful for them – but I don’t accept them in the depth of my soul, as a woman and an artist.32

repertory. Concert programs from 1903 to 1906 feature a number of composers whose names rarely if ever appeared on her programs again, including Volkmann, Davidov, Rubinstein, Godard, Rossini, Sitt, Liszt, Goldmark, Chopin, R. Strauss, Wagner, Svendsen, Piatti, Volbach, Chabrier, Herbert, and Klengel himself.

31 Augusto Suggia to Michel’Angelo Lamberti, March 16, 1903, CMM.
32 Interview by Marques da Cunha, O Primeiro de Janeiro, January 12, 1943, CMM.
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