

My correspondence with John Gault

In June 2004 I finished teaching at an apprentice school; I taught there 6 subjects, both apprentices and adult students and it was very exhausting. In addition, I stayed at a forestry house with a small farm, so I had to commute daily. Two months later, when my mother died, my father invited me to stay with him in Prague. This way, I could spend 4 quiet years in my life, until my father died in July 2008, at age of 96 years¹.

These years I could devote myself (besides daily duties) to the viola d'amore. I wrote 4 etudes for viola d'amore solo; I was trying to demonstrate the specific features of the instrument². I stitched these scores together and illustrated them with quotations by famous musicians³ concerning the viola damore. I announced it in the Newsletter and the only one who responded to my offer was Australian cardiologist John Gault. We became penfriends for about 11 years. In his last letter, dated December 2015, Dr. Gault writes about problems associated with his retirement; at his age of 82 he had to leave his outpatient's departments and work at home...

John Gault was born in India. His parents were missionaries, but he became atheist. His second wife, however, regularly visited the church. Once I asked him whether Australians believe in God; he wrote that most people would answer this question positively.

I don't know much about John Gault's professional life – he evidently belonged to top specialists in his branch. As far as I know, there is a competition of students of medicine in Melbourne that bears his name; there exist even an asteroid called Gault.

John Gault was amateur musician. He played viola in an orchestra, and in his 80ties he still took lessons on playing viola. He also played some rare instruments (like *ukulele*) and had a collection of stringed instruments. In addition, he sponsored some humanitarian projects in India. Every year he used to set out on a journey „around the world“ with his wife. At their last journey, his wife was saddled with a wheelchair.

As for me, John paid my dues to the Society and helped me to edit my *Handfull of Memories* in English; he said: „if they are interesting, I will do it“.

Finally, we exchanged some emails, but then the link disappeared; I had no courage to write him again...

Davle-Sloup, October 11, 2021

Jan Matys

1 I was working as a gate keeper at the National Theatre

2 I was inspired by the appeal for sending new compositions for the instrument

3 They were copperplate handwritten by Frantiska Jaeger