

## JULES MASSENET

### Composer Biography



**Jules Massenet** (May 12, 1842–August 13, 1912) was a French composer of opera most commonly lauded for the lyricism, sensuality and sentimentality of his music. He was born in Montaud, France to an ironworker father and an amateur musician mother; his mother was the one who taught him piano. When he was 11 years old, he entered the Paris Conservatoire and studied composition under noted opera composer Ambroise Thomas. During his studies, he met Wagner who, along with Berlioz, was one of his musical heroes.

Massenet's music was published for the first time in 1861. He won the Prix de Rome in 1863, which secured him a three-year period of study, most of which he spent at the French Academy in Rome. He spent this time studying the works of great German masters and his contemporaries. He returned to Paris in 1866 and made a living by teaching the piano and publishing music in the popular style of the day. Having won the Prix de Rome, he was invited by the Opéra-Comique in Paris to compose a one-act opéra comique, *La grand'tante*, which premiered in April 1867. His first large-scale work premiered in 1872. It was an opéra comique in four acts, *Don César de Bazan*. Unfortunately, it was a failure, but in 1873 he succeeded with his incidental music to Leconte de Lisle's tragedy *Les Érinnyes* and with the dramatic oratorio *Marie-Magdeleine*, both of which were performed at the Théâtre de l'Odéon. That being said, most of his income came from teaching music lessons. He considered himself a bourgeois artist, and disliked the limelight.

His first prodigious success came with *Manon* in 1884. It became one of the cornerstones of the French operatic repertoire. After this brief period of success, however, Massenet entered a period of mixed fortune, with some of his operas being lauded as successes and some condemned as failures. He refused the position of director of the Conservatoire in 1896. Massenet died in Paris in August 1912 of abdominal cancer.

*For more in-depth biographical information on Massenet, please see these websites:*

- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jules-Massenet>
- <http://www.opera-rara.com/massenet-jules.html>