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A Grand Master: Théo Charlier

BY ROSARIO MACALUSO

ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY JEFFREY AGRELL



Théophile Noël Charlier (1868-1944) is the most representative musician of the Liège School of trumpet. Thanks to his “36 Transcendental Etudes” (published by A. Leduc, Paris), his name is still known worldwide. Théo¹ Charlier was born July 17, 1868, in Seraing, a town near Liège where his father worked as a cobbler.

At the age of 12, on December 1, 1880, he was admitted into the cornet class of Dieudonné Gérardy (see *Brass Bulletin* 89, page 74) and to the solfège class of Sylvain Dupuis at the Liège Royal Conservatory (LRC). He rapidly made a name for himself as he successively received the First Certificate of Merit on cornet (1882; required piece: Fantasy by J. Forestier), a 2nd Prize in cornet (1883; Fantasy by C. Otterer), a First Prize in cornet (1885) and a First Prize with Honors in trumpet along with the Vermilion Medal (1886, Concerto in F minor for cornet by Ed. Wolff, Fantasy for trumpet by B.C. Fauconnier; the exam program stipulated that “besides the required piece for cornet, the candidate must perform a piece for the trumpet). As with his predecessors Everaerts, Meuron and Gérardy, he participated when he was very young in concerts given in Liège and surrounding area. Upon the death of Dieudonné Meuron, he became a teacher’s assistant in the class of high brasses at the LRC from 1884 to 1886, and then in 1888.²

Orchestra soloist at age 18

In 1886, Théo Charlier was engaged as principal trumpet with the “Concerts of the Palace, Arts and Commerce of Anvers” Society, a post he occupied until 1895 along with a position at the Royal French Opera (an orchestra which he even conducted for a time). In 1895 he was engaged as principal trumpet at the Théâtre royal de la Monnaie, the Ysaye Concerts and the Concerts populaire in Brussels. He enriched his musical experiences by appearing more and more as a choir conductor and piano

accompanist at the Théâtre royal de la Monnaie for several seasons. In 1904 he left his Brussels posts to assume direction of the famous Mariemont Bascoup Colliery Band and of the School of Music (Schola musicæ). But most of all he was in demand everywhere for his exceptional talent on the trumpet.

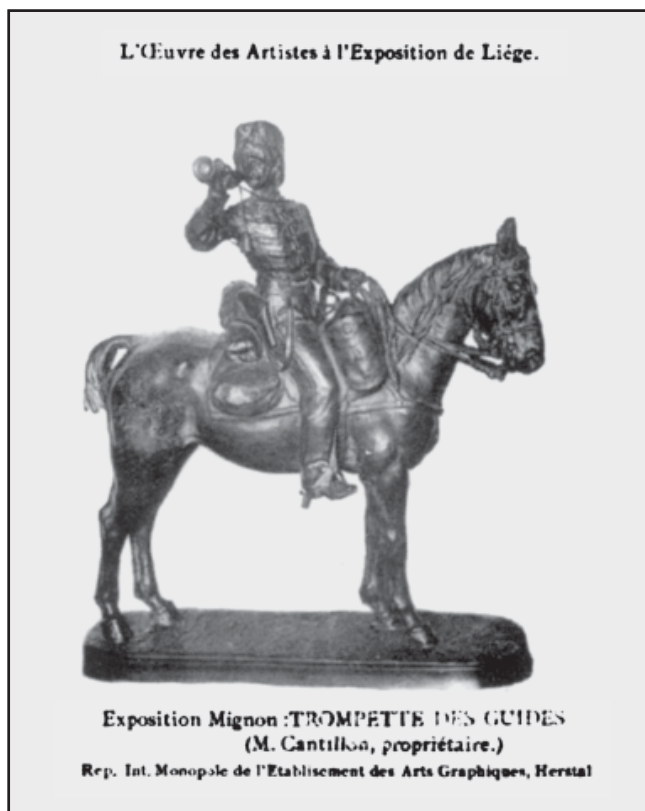
Trumpet versus cornet

Contrary to most of his colleagues, Théo Charlier did not seem to be under the influence of the military music that was in vogue at the time. On the other hand, the evolution of tastes grew to favor the fire and brilliance of the valve trumpet over the sweet and soft sounds of the cornet and fluegelhorn. Alert to the cultural movements of his time, Théo Charlier had from the beginning had the ability to sense the importance of this change. The position he took was decisive in placing Belgium ahead of France in this modernist trend. Charlier was 21 when Jean-Baptiste Arban, the undisputed master and unconditional defender of cornet (1825-1889) passed away in Paris.³ Little by little, the golden age of the cornet faded away everywhere.⁴ Unconditional partisan of the “crystalline sound” (as he loved to say) of the trumpet, Théo

Brass Playing in Belgium

The Liège School of Trumpet

- Philippe Van Hoesen (1838-1839)
- Denis Loxhay (1840-1844)
- Pierre-François Everaerts (1844-1878)
- Dieudonné Meuron (1878-1884)
- Dieudonné Gérardy (1878-1900)
- Théo Charlier (1901-1933)
- Michel Nicolay (1934-1952)
- Pierre Cox (1953-1994)



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Théo Charlier (in the 20s)



Théo Charlier (in the 30s)



Théo Charlier (in the 40s)

Charlier dedicated himself from this point on to the technical and artistic evolution of this instrument. His influence was a determining factor in the rapidity with which the trumpet became established at the end of the century in Belgium, especially at the Liège Conservatory, where, in 1901, he was first named professor of cornet and of trumpet, and then, some months later already, exclusively professor of trumpet (the cornet remained in the program until 1908).

Premiere of the Bach 2nd Brandenburg Concerto

With the “resurrection” of the trumpet, it was logical that the best instrumentalists everywhere, whether they knew each other or not, simultaneously attempted to

meet the challenge of these difficult parts written by the baroque masters that no one could or tried to play any more (especially the cornetists).⁵ Intelligent, capable and reflective, Théo Charlier wisely waited until he reached his full physical and musical maturity at around thirty years of age



1905 - Permanent Orchestra of the Liège Exposition: François Schoffeniels (1st cornet), Théo Charlier (1st trumpet), Charles Gaucet (2nd trumpet), Joseph Dumoulin (2nd cornet)

THÉÂTRE DES NATIONS (Salle Prad)
492^e CONCERT — VINGTIÈME ANNÉE — SAISON 1905-1906

ASSOCIATION ARTISTIQUE DE MARSEILLE

Concerts Classiques

PRÉSIDENT : M. ARTHUR MICHAUD O
Subventionnés par l'État, le Département et la Ville
Prix Beaujour décerné par l'Académie des Sciences, Lettres
et Arts de Marseille (1902)

Chef d'Orchestre : M. GABRIEL-MARIE

HISTOIRE du POÈME SYMPHONIQUE

César FRANCK (1822-1890)

8^{me} CONCERT

Le Dimanche 10 Décembre, à 5 h. du soir
AVEC LE CONCOURS DE

M. THÉO CHARLIER

TROMPETTE SOLO
du Théâtre de la Monnaie et des Concerts Ysaye de Bruxelles,
Professeur aux Conservatoires de Liège et d'Anvers.

PREMIÈRE PARTIE

1. *Symphonie n° 2 en mi mineur*..... H. RAHAUD.
(redemandée)
a) Allegro moderato. b) Andante.
c) Allegro vivace. Andante. Allegro moderato.
Allegro vivace
d) Allegro. Andante. Largo maestoso.
2. *Concerto en fa majeur p. trompette aigüe, flûte, hautbois et violon obligés et orchestre*..... J.-S. BACH.
Solistes : MM. THÉO CHARLIER, VERRANDY,
JEAN et FRANCESCO VTTI.
a) Allegro. b) Andante c) Finale.

DEUXIÈME PARTIE

3. *LES EOLIDES, poème symphonique*... CÉSAR FRANCK.
4. *Divertissement p. trompette et orchest.* CH. BORDES.
(1^{re} audition).
Trompette : M. THÉO CHARLIER.
5. *Concerto n° 1 en sol mineur pour orgue et orchestre*..... G.-F. HENDEL.
a) Larghetto. Allegro. b) Adagio. Andante.
Orgue : M. PAUL REYNAUD.

Grandes Orgues de la Maison Michel MERKLIN et C^e, de Lyon

Dimanche 17 Décembre : M^{lle} Clotilde KLEEBERG, pianiste

before he played the perilous trumpet part of the Bach 2nd Brandenburg Concerto in concert (under the direction of C. Lenaerts). That was on April 17, 1898 in Anvers. The review appeared on April 24 in "The Musical Guide" No. 17 and confirmed: [...] First of all, it must be noted that the performance of the Concerto for violin, flute, oboe and trumpet by J.S. Bach, is a marvelous piece that one rarely has the chance to hear. The trumpet part is especially demanding, and it requires an artist as sure and in control of himself and his instrument as M. Charlier, the excellent principal trumpet of Concerts Ysaye and of the theater Anvers, to dare to attack this difficult work. M. Charlier played his part with such courage that he was called back three times [...]. This account invalidates the assertion of Edward Tarr in his excellent book "The Trumpet".⁶ Charlier often played this concerto. The second time was in Liège on November 17, 1901 at the LRC (dir. O. Dossin) with a G trumpet custom-made for him by Mahillon. Next he played it in Paris (French premiere!) at the Schola Cantorum on March 26, 1902, at the request of Vincent d'Indy. For this occasion the program announced that this concerto has always been considered unplayable and has remained as such over the years because of the difficulty of the trumpet part. M. Théo Charlier is the only person to date to perform the entire original work. It is a

veritable tour de force and one can't say enough about this artist. The Andante of this concerto where the trumpet takes a short rest is one of the most beautiful passages Bach ever wrote. Charlier played also first trumpet in the J.S. Bach Cantata "Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis" in the second part of the concert. The Musical Guide No. 15 of April 13, 1902 (p. 347) commented: [...] The program began with the Concerto in F major for trumpet, flute, oboe and violin with quartet accompaniment. Soloists were MM Bastin, Brun, Borrel and above all M. Charlier of the Concerts Ysaye, who came especially from Brussels. He performed the difficult high trumpet part with assurance and the most remarkable rhythmic aplomb. He played it again in Marseille (1902, with soloists Dusausoy, flute, Mondain, oboe and Claveau, violin) and in Paris (March 13, 1903: excerpt from the program: [...] the famous trumpeter Charlier of Brussels, who will come especially to play the very difficult trumpet part. His presence makes obligatory a second hearing of the concerto in F that won him such a resounding success last year [...]). 1905 saw more performances, first in Liège and then again in Marseille on December 10 in the company of Verrandy (fl), Jean (ob) and the famous violinist Francescatti (father of Zino). In this same concert (conducted by Gabriel-Marie) he played the world premiere of "Divertissement" for trumpet and orchestra by Charles Bordes (1863-1909). It was an uncommon feat that demonstrated his technical mastery. The unique prowess of Charlier comes to light in every program. For instance, in Marseille in 1905 they wrote: [...] The concerto in F major by Bach has always been considered unplayable and as such has lain neglected for many years. Even at the Brussels Conservatory, they say that M. Gevaert organized performances using two players, one for the high register of the instrument and the other for the low parts. In Germany they play a simplified arrangement by Mr. Mottl, which completely distorts the work. M. Théo Charlier is the first and only one to dare to perform this dangerous part, and he was not afraid to have a special instrument made by MM. Mahillon, the skilled instrument makers of Brussels. He is the only one to date who has performed the concerto in its entirety without any changes. This is a tour de force and one can't say enough about the artist. We don't doubt that he will have the same success in Marseille that he had in 1902, and those he had Liège, Anvers, Brussels and Paris where he performed the same work. The name of Théo Charlier and his performance of the Brandenburg concerto appear again in Brussels in 1906. Here we will stop with the impressive list that shows so well the abilities of Théo Charlier. It seems likely that he was really the first to have performed this part in its complete version without the least change. Théo Charlier enjoyed an international reputation, and was in frequent demand as a soloist or to take on the most difficult and delicate parts of the cantatas and oratorios of Bach (and the Suites!) and Haendel. He traveled around Europe with Vincent d'Indy, Charles Bordes and many others for many concert tours. At the respectable age of 63, he played once again the first trumpet part of the B Minor Mass on a D trumpet.⁷ He also appeared as a soloist in various programs (the "Septet" of Saint-Saëns), plus even "lighter" pieces: the "Fantasy" of Theodor Hoch, his own "Solo de concours", the Fantasy for cornet by D.D. Gérardy, etc.



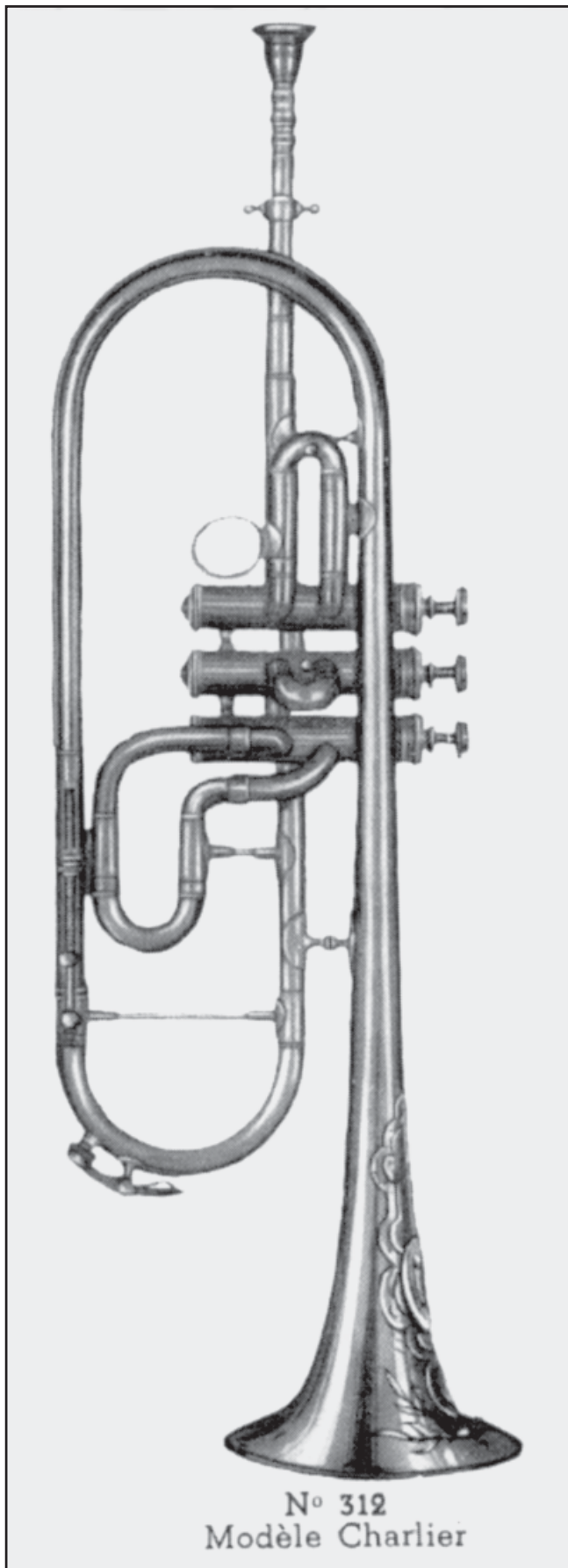
Faculty of the Scola Music of Brussels: Miry, Chaumont, Théo Charlier (Director-founder), Bosquet, Jongen

Mahillon B-flat Trumpet, Charlier model

Toward the end of the 19th century, after his amazing feats as a concert artist, Théo Charlier drew up plans for a B-flat trumpet which was successfully realized by the manufacturer Mahillon⁸ in Brussels. This model would be played by all his students. Why did Théo Charlier so firmly select the key of B-flat, when in neighboring France the choice was for the key of C? The Belgian master sought for himself and his students a sound that was full, round, and clear. To compensate for the thin and strident sound of the small bores of the era, he chose to base his



Théâtre de la Monnaie of Brussels. Built in 1817 by the architect Damesne, it was completely destroyed in a fire and reconstructed in its current form in 1855.



Charlier model B-flat trumpet made by Mahillon

new concept on a German model (as is shown by the illustration), using more gradual curves than those of French instruments. On the other hand, entirely for reasons of sound, Charlier preferred the French piston mechanism to the German rotary valves. From all evidence, Charlier also sought to spare his students the brutal transition from cornet to C trumpet. It was not until after the war in 1945 that C trumpets with larger bores appeared.

His teaching

When Dieudonné Gérardy, his teacher, died on August 30, 1900, Théo Charlier took over in the interim until March 1, 1901, the date that he was officially named professor at the LRC, a position which he held for 32 years!⁹ Though his methods carried on the traditions of his teacher and predecessor (musicality inspired by the great violinists), Charlier of course imparted his own personality and the great experience he acquired as a soloist, as an orchestra musician and playing in the opera pit. He was thus able to transmit to his students a message of great richness, which enabled them to win many positions in the symphony orchestras of Belgium and France. In constant contact with Vincent d'Indy, Alexandre Guilmant and Charles Bordes, directors of the Schola Cantorum (founded in Paris in 1894), Théo Charlier¹⁰ followed their example by opening, on October 3, 1905, the Scola musicæ in Brussels, an "institute of advanced musical studies" of which he would be the "director-founder" and where he taught...voice.

His "36 Transcendental Etudes"

It was around the same time that he wrote "36 Transcendental Etudes for the chromatic trumpet in B-flat"¹¹ which rescued his name from obscurity. First published Buffet-Crampon, they were reprinted in 1946 by Editions A. Leduc in Paris, which has assured the book even today of worldwide distribution. His talent, his sure sense of taste, and his experience as an orchestral and opera musician all achieve expression here in an exceptionally successful form. The etudes have introduced countless musicians to lyric and romantic expression of high standard. But Théo Charlier also left behind other works which deserve to be rediscovered: didactic and theoretical works for trumpet, a "History of the trumpet from the distant past until our time", melodies and virtuoso pieces for voice, "Djamileh" (opera-ballet in 2 acts; premiered at the Anvers Royal Theater in 1897), "Mad'lein", Wallonian opera (1899), several divertissements-ballets, school pieces for children's choirs, competition pieces and concertos for various instruments, competition Solo for B-flat trumpet and piano (Ed. Schott, Brussels). His last work, composed in 1943, one year before his death, is the "2nd competition Solo for B-flat trumpet" with orchestral accompaniment (which he also arranged with piano reduction; Ed. Schott, Brussels). This work was required at the LRC in 1944. Charlier, thanks to his longevity at the Royal Conservatory in Liège imparted an exceptional dimension to his trumpet class.¹² After retiring on September 1, 1933, he still sat regularly (until 1942) on the jury for the annual brass competition at the Conservatory. He was a privileged witness of the evolution of the teaching and manufacture of his instrument. His contribution to the broadening of the repertoire and to the progress of the style of

Etude de genre (MS No. 18)

THÉO CHARLIER (1868-1944)

The musical score is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It consists of 14 staves of music. The piece features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Dynamic markings include *f* (forte), *p* (piano), and *mf* (mezzo-forte). Articulation includes trills (*tr*) and accents (^). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-3 and 6. The score concludes with a double bar line.



Rue du Pairay in Seraing (1994), where Théo Charlier was born on July 17, 1868. Standing on the right side, Rosario Macaluso, on the track of the great master.

trumpet playing is considerable. His artistic and pedagogical activities won him many official distinctions.¹³ Théo Charlier passed away on October 9, 1944, in Brussels.

Notes

- 1 It was in 1903 that Theophile became Théo on all documents and in concert programs.
- 2 It was in this same year on April 26 in Seraing, his native village, that he married Mélanie Belleflamme (born Dec. 2, 1867), who presented him with a daughter, Alida Alexandrine, born June 25 in Anvers... also in the year of our Lord, 1888.
- 3 Jean-Pierre Mathez, Joseph, Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban, 1825-1889, portrait of a French musician of the 19th century (1977, Editions Bim, Vuarmarens, Switzerland - www.editions-bim.ch).
- 4 An amazing evolution took place during a quarter of a century (1895-1920): in France, Merri Franquin followed the movement later, as did Louis Armstrong in the United States, who at the end of the 20s renounced the cornet of the traditional jazz of New Orleans (King Oliver, etc.). Théo Charlier seems to have been one of the pioneers of the movement. Let us note nevertheless that the B-flat piston-valve trumpet was required earlier in Germany, where it seems to have been built from the second half of the 19th century on.
- 5 A bit like the great inventions (automobile, flight, radio, electric light, etc.) which arose almost simultaneously everywhere because the time was right for the ideas, and they converged toward the same point.
- 6 Edward Tarr, *The Trumpet* (1977, Hallwag Berne, Payot Lausanne; 1984 Schott, Mainz; Batsford, GB), page 135: The first trumpeter of our time who successfully performed the 2nd Brandenburg Concerto was A. Goeyens of Brussels. He first played it on February 23, 1902 [...].
- 7 Concert given March 28, 1931, at the Liège Royal Conservatory of Music under the direction of François Rasse. Théo Charlier played the B Minor Mass throughout his career, in particular in Liège on March 30, 1900 and March 15, 1913, always on a D trumpet.
- 8 The Belgian Mahillon family of manufacturers was renowned in Brussels and London between 1836 and 1935. The best known, Victor Charles (1841-1924), was distinguished by his knowledge of acoustics (he wrote many important books and articles which provided inspira-

tion for 20th century makers such as the late Renold Schilke in Chicago), organology and as a impassioned collector. All this made him one of the most inventive makers of his time. But it was above all Joseph (1848-1923), his nephew (youngest son of his brother Charles) and his grandson Fernand-Charles (1866-1922) with whom Charlier collaborated. In 1909 Charlier took out a patent (No. 214621) on a screw rim for brass instrument mouthpieces. A Mahillon-Charlier trumpet (No. 2871) is preserved at the Staatliche Musikhochschule in Berlin.

- 9 Commuting by train between Brussels and Liège (ca. 80 km.), Théo Charlier also played principal trumpet in the Permanent Orchestra [sic] of Liège, in particular at the festivities of the universal and international Exposition in Liège in 1905. His Liège section colleagues were Charles Gaucet on trumpet and François Schoffeniels and Joseph Dumoulin on cornets. Every day for 6 months, many concerts were given and more than 60,000 performers were heard.
- 10 With his friends Joseph Jongen (1892-1953, composer, organist), Emile Bosquet (1878-?, piano) Emile Chaumont (1878-1942, violinist), Louis Miry (cello), Arthur de Hervé (trumpet, solfège), Mme Hertzberg-Leitert (piano).
- 11 Pierre Cox, professor at the LRC until 1994 still had a manuscript of these etudes in his class.
- 12 Names of some of the winners of the LRC (in parentheses are the date of winning the 1st prize; * = unanimous, ** = with honors, *** Vermilion Medal): 1902: Joseph Istaz***, Joseph Dumoulin, 1903: Alfred Hottermans, 1904: Arthur Douard*, 1905: Joseph Martin, 1906: Léon Moyse, 1907: Abel Lakaye, 1908: Henri Watrin, 1909: Félicien Degée***, 1910: Henri Ancion (assistant and then professor at the Luxembourg Conservatory from 1910 to 1949), 1911: Pierre Truillet , 1913: François Servais***, 1914: Armand Renkin***, Emile Laloux***, Gilles Fraikin, 1915: Michel Nicolay***, Henri Mossiat, 1916: Alphonse Cox, 1917: Maurice Clabeck***, Louis Melders, 1918: Albert Gerday*, 1919: Julien Brochard* and Albert Cox*, 1920: Lambert Henrion, 1922: Théodore Grunday***, Maurice Defays*, Ren Lafleur*, 1923: Léonard Massart*, Pascal Hincourt*, Prosper Debruyne*, 1924: Raymond Moor*, Léon Cochart, 1927: Henri Erlich*, Eugène Antoine*, Louis Sohet*, Henri Purnelle*, 1928: Jean Marchal**, Léon Mouzon, 1929: Henri Erlich***, Andr Daigneux***, 1930: Lon Dhainaut***, 1932: Andr Daigneux***, Norbert Crehay***, Joseph Dupont*, 1933: Ernest Pottier***, André Raskin, Jules Rombauts.
- 13 Civic decorations: civic medal 1st Class (1927), centennial commemorative medal (1931). National decorations: Knight of the Order of Leopold (1920), Officer of the Order of the Crown (1926), Officer of the Order of Leopold (1933). Foreign decorations: Officer of the French Academy (1904), Officer of Public Instruction of France (1928).



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