

Why Handel Wagged his Wig - and lots more stories about the lives of  
Great Composers by Steven Isserlis.  
Faber and Faber, 2006.

I have always admired Isserlis the cellist, but until I read *Why Handel Wagged his Wig* had failed to realise that his prowess with the bow is matched by that with a pen!

*Why Handel Wagged his Wig* is a second volume about the lives of the great composers, the first being *Why Beethoven Threw the Stew*. In this book, Isserlis describes, in addition to Handel, Haydn, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Dvorák and Fauré. Each has a chapter packed with anecdote, biographical and musical detail, and particular vignettes in their life and career.

Isserlis writes entertainingly at all times, and achieves that rare feat, in a book about classical music, of making the reader laugh out loud. This is a great book for children, either to be read to, or to read themselves, and could well arouse a longer term interest in classical music in their little hearts; but it is also a perfect introduction for adults who may be daunted by the field, or ashamed of their ignorance, and want a way in that doesn't patronise them.

I eagerly await volume three.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh