



BAROQUE PRACTICE

March des Turcs: Performing a Piece in French Baroque Style

by Ginna Watson

String teachers who want to help their students play in baroque style are often stymied by the lack of good editions. Modern editions generally don't provide baroque bowings or

specify how trills and other ornaments are to be played. This is especially frustrating with French baroque music, which can be really fun to play with good markings but

downright boring without them!

With this problem in mind, local viola da gamba player Julie Elhard set out to make an edition of a 17th-century French baroque piece for string teachers to use with their students. (Julie wrote about teaching the viola da gamba to children in the last issue of *String Notes*.) The piece, *March pour le Ceremonie des Turcs* (*March for the Ceremony of the Turks*), is by the French composer Lully, whose *Gavotte* appears in the Suzuki books.

Lully wrote the March as a dance piece for the play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. With its dark G minor key and snappy dotted rhythms, the music reflects the 17th-century European craze for the exotic sound of Turkish music. Lully wrote the dance with two viola parts, as was common in French baroque music, but both parts can also be played by violins.

Lully was famous—or rather, infamous—for enforcing a uniform sound with his royal string band for the court of the Sun King, Louis XIV. Players had to begin almost every measure with a down-bow, and Lully kept a strict beat by thumping a large wooden staff against the floor (which led to his death after he stabbed himself in the toe and developed gangrene!).

Julie's edition reflects the “down-bow rule” by using either down-bow retakes (as in measure 16 for the violin II, viola I and cello parts) or “up-up” bowings at the ends of measures (as in measure 12 for the violin II, viola I and cello parts) to make measures begin with down-bows where possible.

French baroque music was frequently played “inegale”—that is, with uneven or “swung” eighth notes, as Julie notes in her edition. Playing “long-short, long-short” pairs of eighth notes is pretty easy for students these days to do, as many of them play blues-type pieces in their school orchestras. Dotted notes were usually played “overdotted” or “double-dotted,” so in measure 2 of the March, the eighth note is delayed and played as a snap rhythm that connects to the following quarter: “ta-DAH.”

Ornaments, indicated by symbols above

Marche pour la Ceremonie des Turcs (excerpts)

from *Ballet du Bourgeois Gentilhomme*

Jean Baptiste Lully, 17th Century

To be played “inegale” = unequal eighth notes

the notes in Julie's edition, are an essential part of French baroque music. They help create the characteristic elegant, refined sound of the period. Measure 2 in the first violin part contains the symbols for both a trill and a mordent, indicating they can be used interchangeably. But baroque trills and mordents differ from those found in later periods of music: they are short, usually only one or two "squiggles" above the note, and they always start on the note *above* the note shown. Moreover, the starting "upper" note comes *on* the beat and is essentially the main note of the squiggle:



The second viola gets the last word in this edition with a mordent on its final whole note, a common French baroque practice; student violists can relish their time in the spotlight by lingering on the initial upper note of the trill, and adding an extra squiggle or two. They also get to create a major harmony with their "picardy third," a practice that originated with French music.

The tierce de coul  , or "slide of a third," is one of the most graceful French baroque

ornaments. It connects a trilled note with the note that follows by an eighth note between the beats, as in the violin I part in measure 11. Julie has inserted a slur between the coul   and the following note to "slide" down into it. When ornaments happen in close succession like this, the effect is very French—fashionable and fit for a king!

Ginna Watson specializes in period-instrument performance. She plays baroque violin and viola, medieval vielle and rebec, and medieval harp with the Lyra Baroque Orchestra, the Bach Society, and The Rose Ensemble for Early Music. Ginna teaches violin at Hamline University in St. Paul and violin and viola privately. She also gives masterclasses on medieval and baroque performance practice in the Twin Cities and throughout the country. †