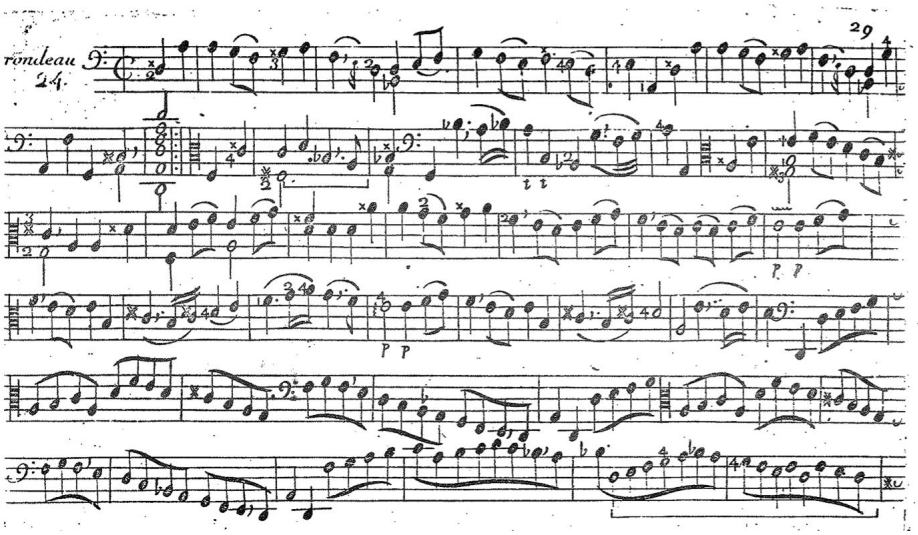
Baroque Practice

The Misattribution of "Lully's Gavotte"

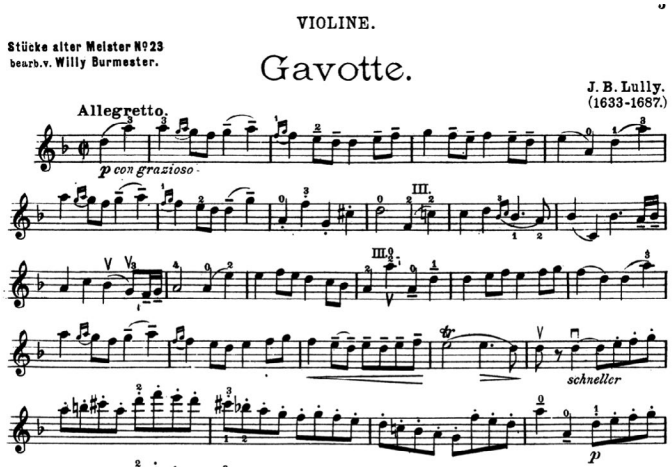
by Charles Asch



Rondeau by Marin Marais (published 1689, Paris: L'auteur, Jean Hurel)

The Gavotte attributed to J.B. Lully in the *Suzuki Method for Cello, Book 3*, has both an incorrect title and an incorrect composer. The original work is by Marin Marais from his *Pièces de viole, Livre 1*, titled "rondeau." The work was dedicated to "Monsieur de Lully" by Marais, and first published in Paris in 1686. A new arrangement of this piece was published in 1904 for violin and piano by Willy Burmester (1869–1933), a student of Joseph Joachim, as part of collection of short works titled *Stücke alter Meister*, which means "Pieces of Old Masters." Piece No. 23 is titled "Gavotte," and with the source incorrectly attributed to J.B. Lully (1633–1687). All works contain a piano part as well.

The work is clearly labeled "bearbeitet [edited] von Willy Burmester," making no pretense of being an edition recreating the exact work of the composer. Burmester created a collection of works to enhance the violin repertoire spanning from the baroque to the classical era, from Pergolesi, to Couperin and Handel. For his own era, which we now might call the "late romantic era," Burmester created a violin collection titled *Stücke neuer [new] Meister*, including his arrangements of short pieces by his contemporaries such as Paul Juon, Jean Sibelius, August Wilhelmj and Robert Schumann. Burmester was the violinist to whom the *Violin Concerto* by Sibelius was dedicated, although he did not end up performing the work. Burmester altered notes, bowings, and fingerings to suit a performance style a student of his time could readily adapt, completing Volumes 1–5 of *Stücke alter Meister*. Volumes 6–12 would be completed by arrangers and violinists such as Michael Press, Gustav Hollaender and Fabian Rehfeld (imslp.org).



"Gavotte" misattributed to J.B. Lully, Burmester (published 1904, Berlin: Schlesinger)

Later, Burmester's "Gavotte by Lully" would be adapted for cello/piano by cellist Jacques van Lier, who played in the Heerman-Van Lier quartet and the Dutch Trio. The Dutch Trio was praised for their "unanimity of expression and fidelity of expression" (Musical courier. v.44 1902 Jan–Jun, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015025409775&view=1up&seq=43&skin=2021.) The end of the 19th century and early 20th century were characterized by a

freewheeling spirit in reviving and adapting works by composers from the baroque and classical eras. Even compositions by romantic composers were frequently adapted and altered in front of the composer himself, such as in the interactions of Wilhelm Fitzenhagen with Tchaikovsky in altering the order and orchestration of *The Rococo Variations*. Fritz Kreisler would compose works, then falsely attribute them to Francoeur, Vivaldi and Boccherini.

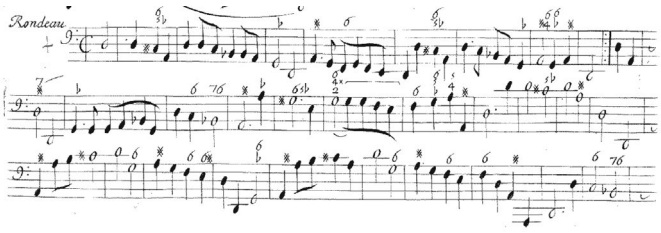
The collection of pieces by old masters by Burmester made no attempt to hide the idiomatically-driven adaptation of works by composers of the baroque and classical era to suit performers or students of his time. In fact, we can thank Burmester for the appearance of numerous pieces collected by Shinichi Suzuki during his studies in Germany during the 1920s, including No. 2 *Gavotte* by Martini (correctly attributed, found in *Suzuki Vol. 3 for Violin*), No. 12 *Menuett* by Beethoven (from a Beethoven set of *VI Menuetten für das Klavier*, found in *Suzuki Vol. 2 for Violin*), No. 19 *Bourée* by Handel (originally from an *Oboe Sonata in F major*) and more (Nos. 25 and 26 from the collection!). These titles can all be found on imslp.org.

Finally, we get to Burmester's No. 23 titled "Gavotte" by J.B. Lully, and with the perspiration and inspiration in drawing this collection of beautiful pieces for the violinist of his day, one can forgive Burmester's minor oversight. Perhaps Burmester simply saw this dedication "a monsieur Lully" while quickly leafing through numerous old manuscripts in a dimly lit Berlin library, or jotted down the wrong composer with a feather and ink after seeing the work elsewhere in another collection lost to time, misattributed there as well. It could be that Burmester learned the melody by ear from hearing the "Gavotte" performed by a mysterious violinist in a salón, who himself thought the melody came from the more famous Lully. Either way, adaptation was the way of the day, with the rise of the concert virtuoso and the adaptation of popular tunes for performances. It could have made a very good encore, enchanting audiences with the tale along the lines of "this is a very old Gavotte by the famed Lully, the godfather of French music, who died of gangrene, months after stabbing himself through his foot with his conducting staff in a rousing performing celebrating Louis XIV of France."

Nevertheless, we find ourselves in the modern era, where sources and methods can be easily checked and the shrouded mysteries of performance styles of the past have been more clearly elucidated than in the early 20th century. The unbroken development of a performance tradition on string instruments stretching from Corelli to Isaac Stern has been altered by a movement to investigate and restore performance traditions from the 17th–18th centuries, called "Historically informed Performance," or "H.I.P" for short. How is a contemporary teacher to respond when asked by a student "How should I play this Gavotte?"

- First of all, it would be a good idea to tell the student the true source of the piece, giving it the correct title of "Rondeau" and the correct composer "Marin Marais." There is no good reason why future editions of the collection of works in the Suzuki Method Books for violin, viola, cello or bass should contain misattributions. Changing the composer would be a step in the right direction, which would align with the pains Burmester took to correctly attribute nearly all the other composers in his collection.
- Second of all, it is interesting to expose the student to the different strains of performance and teaching traditions in the work. Once the student has learned the piece is by Marin Marais, the next bit of information relevant to the piece is that Marais was a famous viola da gamba player. "What is the viola da gamba?" a student might ask. In short, one could explain that the viola da gamba is like a cello with frets, but with a flatter back, six to seven strings tuned in 4ths and 3rds, and the bow held underhand. The viola da gamba was very popular in France and throughout Europe from the 1600s–1700s, and Marin Marais was one of the most well-known virtuosi on the viola da gamba in France of the early 1700s. One could explain that "da gamba" means "on the leg," which meant even the smaller treble and tenor viola da gambas, somewhat similar in range to the violin and viola (no relation!), were all played on the lap like little cellos, rather than held upright.
- Third of all, it is then interesting to expose the student to aspects of performance traditions of the viola da gamba of the late 1600s, alongside the performance traditions from Joachim through to Burmester in the early 1900s. The arrangement found in the *Suzuki Volume 2 for Violin*, and the *Volume 3 for Cello* derives essentially from the second tradition, that of the early 1900s. This does place a conundrum on teaching and performing this piece, a tension between the articulation markings and bowings added in the Suzuki edition, and the articulation markings and notes one would find in the original version of the melody by Marais. The markings found in the Suzuki edition are not the same as those found in the Burmester, though there are some similarities.

Most importantly, the melody is very different between the source from Marais and the arrangement by Burmester. The Suzuki edition maintains the same melody as the Burmester, while altering some articulations. The next article will explore these differences in articulation, ornamentation and pitches between the Marais, Burmester and Suzuki editions, and explore what this means for teaching this piece. One idea would be to just make a new edition based on the version written by Marais. The differences in melody and articulation between the original by Marais and the adapted versions by Burmester then Suzuki present problems for both interpretation and teaching. Oh, and Marais also composed a pretty sweet bass line that could be included and would inform a revived interpretation of this old, mysterious melody.



The Sweet Bass Line, or "Basso Continuo" part from the Rondeau

Dr. Charles Asch performs on both a baroque and modern cello. On the baroque cello he has performed with Lyra Baroque Orchestra, Bach Society of Minnesota and Bach Roots Festival, as well as participating in chamber music programs featuring music of the baroque and early classical throughout the Twin Cities. Dr. Asch completed his D.M.A. at University of Minnesota, his M.M. at Juilliard, and his B.M. at Northwestern University. He has studied with Tanya Remenikova, Hans Jorgen Jensen, Richard Aaron and Jaap ter Linden. His doctoral thesis at U.M.N. was focused on researching one of the first cellists in the latter part of the 19th century to exclusively perform with an endpin, Karl Davydov. 𝄽