

## 8. THE TOURTE BOW AND ITS EFFECTS ON INSTRUMENTAL TECHNIQUE

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**Abstract:** *The history of bow makers records various changes in the construction of the bows, in close connection with the expansion of the artistic repertoire and the development of the instrumental technique of the bow and strings instruments. The eighteenth century brought an important concern for these changes, but only in the late of the 1700s there will be a standardization in the length and shape of the bows. After a period of transition, full of multiple attempts, Francois Tourte is the one who creates the model we call today the modern bow.*

**Key words:** *bow, model, Technique, standardization, Francois Tourte*

### 1. Introduction

We aim to take a look at the development of the bow in the eighteenth century and to analyze how the bow technique changed and evolved from the Baroque period to the time of the discoveries of Francois Tourte<sup>27</sup>. For a violist, reproducing the creative effort of a performer belonging to a certain historical period of a creation is an ongoing challenge. One of the ways to evoke and respect the musical style is to use the instrumentation and technique of that period, or as close as possible to their original conditions. The study work also includes the creation of a sound ideal, aiming an authentic interpretation, although the path to this desideratum is not always direct or easy; perhaps that is why the term *historical interpretation* is more appropriate.

### 2. Discussions

As we know, there are countless theories that no one knows what music sounds like 200 years ago. Some theories challenge the technical level existing in that period, or support the originality and preponderance of the importance of the interpreter. However, in the middle of the last century, a whole generation of interpreters began to worry about these issues related to the historical truth of the interpretation, and their interest materialized in the study of previously forgotten or ignored information — treaties, books, and journal, as well as instruments and bows used during that period.

During the early nineteenth century, bows were not primitive accessories, but were quite elaborate, some of them being true works of art. However, we cannot imagine Amati, Stradivarius or Guarneri playing with bows that do not serve the existing instruments or created by them. There is information that the luthiers also built bows. Of course, being extremely fragile devices, very few survived approx. 300 years, like the instruments of the same period, being almost impossible to find original models. Another aspect is that there has always been a close connection

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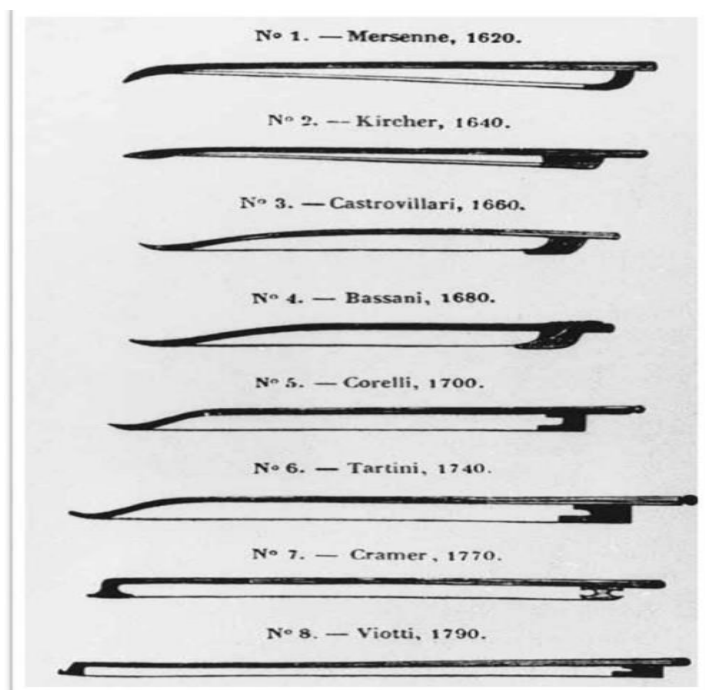
<sup>27</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran%C3%A7ois\\_Tourte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran%C3%A7ois_Tourte), 27 septembrie 2021

between performers and bow makers. Those from before Tourte were cataloged and appreciated by performers rather than by the violin makers who built them, so there are now Corelli, Tartini or Viotti models (later called Tourte).

We can imagine that the performers were looking for well-known and skilled luthiers, that an exchange of ideas was taking place, and that the performers were testing the bows, offering suggestions, or having certain preferences for the next bow ordered. Even today, things are not very different on a professional level. That is why we consider that the bows of that period are the key to understanding the practical interpretation. It can be remembered that the viola was also different from today and that the lower tension of the gut strings as well as the short neck made a big difference in terms of sound and therefore the technical approach.

The 18th-century bow, circa 1725, was a shorter bow, held with the thumb placed under the hair band, and was generally used to make short, striking sounds in rhythmic dance music. The bow of the Italian sonata was longer (about 61-71 cm), with a slightly convex rod. The tip is described as a pike head and the wand was fixed with a screw, a mechanism that would indicate the changes that would follow. Compared to the Tourte bow, the Corelli-Tartini bow is shorter and lighter, especially at the tip, the balance point is lower on the wand, the hair band is softer and narrower (about 6 mm.) The baroque bow feature was the same. The bow feature was *non-legato*, producing what Leopold Mozart called *small softness* at the beginning and end of each trait, resulting in a clear and bright sound, and bad sounds made without the hair band losing contact with the string.

An example of an important bow is described by David Boyden in *The History of Violin Playing in Front of Its Origins to 1761*, p. 207, which is part of the Ansley Salz collection of the Berkeley University from California. Violinist Pamela Goldsmith, who had the privilege of playing with this bow, describes it as *not only beautiful (the wand is made of pernambuco and ivory pandurina bead, featuring a small stringed lute), but it is also of exceptional quality for playing.*



Towards the middle of the century is the so-called transition period, when the separation of the hair from the stick becomes more obvious, especially at the heel, due to the fact that the bow lengthens and becomes straighter, approaching the concave shape. These changes probably took place depending on each other, resulting in a wider sound and a more obvious accuracy of the attack. The hair band is lighter than the Corelli model, the mechanism is standardized with the pernambuco wood rod. The great luthiers of this period were Nicolas Duchaine, Joseph Rene La fleur, Turte - the father and Eduard Dodd. There were no standard models, each with a different weight, length and balance. In fact, all the bows of the eighteenth century are experiments, because artists and violinists sought to find and develop features that would serve the musical repertoire.

The most widespread model of the transition period was the Cramer model, developed in Germany and there is evidence that it was used in the Mannheim Orchestra and was popularized by the violinist Wilhelm Cramer, who took the bow to Paris around 1770. Just as the Baroque sonata bow is associated with Corelli and Tartini and the transition bow with Wilhelm Cramer, so the modern Tourte bow is associated with Viotti's name.

He made his debut in Paris in 1782, where he distinguished himself as the most important violinist in Europe. The newspapers of the time praised his performances with *a strong sound, an indescribable fluency, purity, precision, shadow and light, the ease with which he sings the most difficult passages, refined brilliance*, etc. Certainly the performers of the time did not have a low instrumental level at all. Viotti was also a great teacher, his lessons being real forms of inspiration for his students. The most famous of his school were Pierre Baillot (1771-1842), Jacques Rode (1771-1830) and Rudolphe Kreutzer (1776-1831). In the past, string orchestra instrumentalists each had their own way of shooting the bow, which resulted in a different method of attack and therefore insufficient finishing and refinement. Professors Rode, Baillot and Kreutzer have refined their student technique, with outstanding results in orchestral sonority.

### **3. Results**

Tourte's youngest son, his father, Francois Tourte (1747-1835), was born in Paris, and his father's desire was for him to become a watchmaker. After spending 8 years as an apprentice in this field, she abandoned him to become an archer. Among the artists of the time in Paris, there was a tendency for instrumentalists to imitate vocal singing. The need for a bow to match that expression was obvious. Tourte's first innovations in the field took place between 1775-1780. It seems plausible that Viotti, who visited Paris in 1782, influenced Tourte, both because of his fame as a violinist, but also because of his style of interpretation, which called for a better bow. The luthier standardized the length of the wand to 74-75 cm (the violin), loading the heel region and the metal screw to balance the weight, fixed the length of the hair band to 65 cm and the center of gravity to about 19 cm from the heel.

Notable in this context is the contribution of John Dodd, in England, who brings transformations to the bow, whose technical requirements began to increase

by raising the tempo, long phrases or expanding the space and the number of concerts. It is impossible to determine when the new bow came into general use, because, surprisingly, we do not have contemporary reactions to this innovation, but this probably happened during Beethoven's time, around 1790. With the new model, challenges arise also on the technical aspects (right shoulder level, finger placement or wand inclination towards the keyboard).

Only in the 19th century did Baillot, Rode and Kreutzer rule the violin school, which today is equivalent to the Belgian, Russian or French schools. The basic feature of the transition period was the *non-legato*, because due to the position of the hair, the bow could not produce sound immediately on the move, but needed the pressure of the fingers. The result is a soft sound at the ends and "swollen" in the middle, where more pressure is exerted, resulting in sound spaces between the directions of the feature. This ornament, also called the *messa di voce*, became very popular in the 18th century. Regarding the articulated attack, the staccato, the authors tell us that it was played *stinging, short and solid sound* (Lohlein, 1774).

About the spiccato feature, Labedens said in 1774: There are two kinds of detachment: the simple detachment by separating the string bow and the one called *enlevee*, because in the latter case it is necessary to separate the string bow by a slight lift. *Portato* - the sounds articulated in legato, was a feature used by performers of the eighteenth century in a way that had to highlight the notes below the legato, and between them, the pressure on the chorus was subtly reduced. In general, due to the characteristics of the Tourte bow, the basic feature produced a sustained sound, with increased contrast between the dynamic levels (*forte* and *piano*), and the attack was better defined.

In the years to come, many types of bow features will appear that will involve some subtleties in execution, making the use of the bow more varied and more complex. The great masters imprinted on the violin various characteristics: simple and *te's* bow fully reveals its possibilities, bringing to light indications of *thmelodious* in the hand of Corelli, harmonious and full of grace with the bow of Tartini, noble and grandiose in Pugnani, or full of courage and fire in the hands of Viotti. The variety and detail of the descriptions of that period in terms of the use of the bow is impressive and *Toure* features of the bow used in the early nineteenth century.

In *The Art of Violin*<sup>28</sup>, written in 1830, Baillot talks about all the technical details of the bow technique, the division of the bow, how and in what part a certain feature is executed, all of which are supported by extremely useful drawings and examples for young violinists. It can be said that it is about a stylistic change, towards more grandeur, greatness, hence the search for new technical means that correspond to this need. Baillot emphasizes the importance of using the portions of the bow in close connection with the needs of the musical text: *The heel is the power, it marks the beat, attacks the strings and energetically produces the nuances that require a certain force of sound .. The middle possesses balance, tempering strength with sweetness ..., center of expression, breathing. The tip does not lose its*

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<sup>28</sup> [http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/0/04/IMSLP188855-PMLP145529-Baillot\\_art\\_de\\_violon.pdf](http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/0/04/IMSLP188855-PMLP145529-Baillot_art_de_violon.pdf), a 25, 26 septembre 2021

*strength, the lack of elasticity makes it useful for small shades, for the expression of the hammer and through the natural weakness given by the distance, it becomes in the passage the place where the expression disappears. Baillot also describes the sustained sound: The sustained sound must be equally loud from one end of the bow to the other. To maintain this requirement it is necessary to increase the power (pressing) as we approach the tip, which is weaker, pressing the wand with all fingers, especially with the thumb. To support the sound, press the bow vigorously, from one end to the other, at a higher or slower speed, depending on the movement. You should not hear the change of bow or any harshness in the sound, from heel to toe. To do this, press the wand with your thumb as the heel approaches the gag to prevent the bow from pressing on the string.*

#### **4. Conclusions**

These indications may seem superfluous today, but at the time we are referring to them they were of decisive importance for the production of quality sound, especially since the idea of *legato* without delimitation, of which the author speaks, did not apply to eighteenth-century music. In the same work, Baillot classifies the types of features and how they should be made: *Grand detache* and *martelle* will be made in the upper third of the bow. It becomes obvious that modern features, such as the *martelle*, will be best achieved with the modern bow. For *spiccato*, a fair division of the areas of the bow stick is suggested, according to which 3 types of feature can be made: easy *detache*, made by fixing the bow on the string and taking advantage of the elasticity of the bow, an imperceptible impulse is given to a short feature. In modern terminology, this feature is also called "brushed".

Next is the pearl detachment, made with a higher speed and an even smaller amount of bow and the *sautille*, with the bow at the start "hanging" on the spot, after which the impulse is given and the rope is left. The best way to find out how music should be played in a certain period of time is to experiment with these features, if possible, with the different types of bows that were used at the time. Once a sound concept is established, the way the interpretation of a certain work is approached will change.

This is not always possible or easy, as violist Pamela Goldsmith reports: *I had a recital in which I performed Passacaglia de Biber, composed in 1686. I used a baroque bow and viola Gasparo da Salo, with mat strings, given in La = 415. Then I sang the solo sonata by Fr. Hindemith, with viola and modern bow. It was a torturous mental effort, it was very difficult to make these changes. On the other hand, we dedicate our lives to music and there is nothing more important than the authentic interpretation of everything that was written before 1989. Each interpretation is a compromise, there is no way to reproduce a song completely faithfully, say from the century XVIII. We probably won't reach that ideal, but I won't stop trying.*

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