The Road Towards the First Complete Edition: Dissemination of J. S. Bach's Solo Cello Suites in the Nineteenth century

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1850 was a year of some importance in the nineteenth-century recognition of Johann Sebastian Bach's music. His name and art would have been almost completely forgotten after his death (1750), had it not been for the determination of a few devoted students and, above all, his sons, Carl Philipp Emmanuel and Wilhelm Friedemann, whose efforts are well documented in their correspondence with Johann Nikolaus Forkel, Bach's first biographer.[1] A selection of their father's organ and other keyboard pieces and choral compositions received the occasional performance and sometimes even ended up being published.[2] Mozart, Beethoven and some of their contemporaries also held the Cantor of Leipzig in high esteem. None of that meant fame by any means but the flame was kept alive for quite a few decades.

The Bach renaissance did not start until the famous, often quoted performance (the first since the composer's death) of the St. Matthew Passion in Berlin in 1829 under the direction of none other than the barely 20 year old Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Mendelssohn and another young German composer, Robert Schumann, worked tirelessly, and indeed selflessly, on disseminating forgotten masterpieces, making a broader repertoire accessible for the general public. A typical example for this effort: Mendelssohn established "historical concerts" in Leipzig, where he premiered among other works Franz Schubert's Ninth Symphony, the score of which was discovered and sent to him by Schumann.

In 1834 Schumann founded and for several years edited the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, a twice-weekly publication, offering essays and news about the classical music scene in Germany and abroad, reviews of new publications, concerts and opera. Later, in 1850, exactly one hundred years after Bach's death, he became one

[1] Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst, und Kunstwerk. English: Johann Sebastian Bach : his life, art, and work / translated from the German of Johann Nikolaus Forkel ; with notes and appendices by Charles Sanford Terry* (New York, Vienna House, 1974).
[2] Hofmeister, Hofmeister XIX [electronic resource] : Monatsberichte, ([London, England]. Royal Holloway College, University of London, 2007).

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of the founders of the *Bach Gesellschaft*, a society whose express purpose was to publish every known work of Johann Sebastian Bach in a critical edition.

The editors of the *Bach Gesellschaft* took to the task of preparing the first *Bach Gesamtausgabe* with Teutonic thoroughness and precision, not wanting to repeat the mistakes of two recent and very incomplete "Complete Editions" of Georg Friedrich Händel (1787-1797 Samuel Arnold and 1843-1858 English Handel Society). It took almost fifty years to publish 46 mighty volumes, of which the 27th (which appeared in December 1879, Leipzig) encompassed the string solos: the Violin Sonatas and Partitas and the Cello Suites, under the supervision of writer, pianist and expert music librarian, Alfred Dörffel (1821-1905).

His ground-breaking publication of the Suites became so highly respected that it is still available in reprints today. Many musicians of our time consider it to be the first edition of acceptable scholarly quality. What made it different from any previous edition was the fact that Dörffel found a manuscript in Berlin to which no one before him had paid any attention. It was in the hand of Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena, prepared sometime between 1727 and 1731. Later it went through several hands, before first becoming part of Forkel's, then Georg Poelchau's library. From Poelchau's estate, the manuscript was passed onto the Berlin Royal Library (*Königliche Bibliothek*) in 1841 and stayed there undiscovered until Dörffel recognised its significance and rescued it from obscurity. No previous editors could make use of Anna Magdalena's copy before, simply because it was not known and therefore available to them.

In the rather long and astonishingly intricate history of the Bach Cello Suites editions, a path taking frequent, unexpected turns, Dörffel's publication marks the beginning of a new major phase. For the first time, Anna Magdalena's manuscript was announced as a source of key importance; all later editors were obliged to pay attention to it, often taking extremely divergent views regarding its reliability and authenticity. Dörffel even referred to her script as the *Originalvorlag*, confusing several editors well into the twentieth century who assumed, wrongly, that the word *Original* would promise an autograph. This was most certainly not Dörffel's fault: in the next sentence of the preface he clearly states that the manuscript in question was written by Anna Magdalena.[3] And yet, as recently as 1977, Kazimierz Wilkomirski stated in the foreword of his edition of the Suites that

[3] Johann Sebastian Bach, "J. S. Bachs Kammermusik. Sechster Band. Solowerke für Violine. Solowerke für Violoncello, Bd XXVII/1," in *Alte Bach Gesamtausgabe* ed. Alfred Dörffel (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1879). PXXX

"…recent research has shown that [Anna Magdalena's] manuscript of the Suites is no copy, but the original. I share this view; the extracts from manuscripts by Bach and his wife which are reproduced in the edition by the Soviet cellist Alexandr Stogorsky remove for me all doubts as to the authorship of the manuscript of the Suites."[4]

Dörffel's authoritative edition with its newly discovered source represented a turning point in the editions of the Bach Suites. The question must be asked: could these masterpieces have been propagated in any credible way since their inception until their publication in the scholarly *Gesamtausgabe* some 160 years later in 1879?

Manuscript Sources

When exactly Bach's Solo Cello Suites were written, is not known, for there is no extant manuscript left for us in the composer's hand. They would have become lost forever and soon forgotten, like many of Bach's other compositions, had they not been copied by several scribes over the course of the eighteenth century. The Suites have been transmitted to future generations in the hands of four different copyists, two of them in Bach's lifetime, and two much later, in the second half of the century. All editions since have been based in some way on one or more of these copies.

The copyist closest to the composer was without any doubt his second wife, Anna Magdalena (1701-1760). Watermarks and other graphological studies prove that her copy (in scholarly writings referred to as copy A) was made between 1727 and 1731. However, she was not the first person to copy the Suites. Johann Peter Kellner (1705-1772), probably a personal acquaintance and certainly an admirer of Bach and himself an accomplished organist, copied a relatively large number of his works, including the Violin Partitas and Sonatas and the Cello Suites (known as copy B). He wrote down all the string solo pieces around the same time and since the first page of his copy of the Violin Sonatas and Partitas bears the following inscription: "*Scrips./Johann Peter Kellner/Anno 1726./Frankenhayn*"[5]- we know when and where his work was done.

[4] Johann Sebastian Bach, "Six suites for violoncello solo," ed. Kazimierz Wilkomirski ([Krakow]: PWM Edition, 1977). 4

[5] Quoted in Russell Stinson, "J.P. Kellner's Copy of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo," *Early Music* 13, no. 2 (1985).

The other two copies were made after the composer's death from a manuscript, now lost, that also probably served as the basis of the first printed edition in 1824. Both of these copies were prepared by scribes whose names are not known to us. The first of these survived as a part of a larger collection in the property of Johann Christian Westphal, after whose name this copy is often referred to as the *Westphal Copy* or copy C. Interestingly, this manuscript was written not by one copyist but two. In the *Bourrée I* of the *Third Suite* the handwriting changes visibly in bar 12, marking the place where the second copyist took over. The other of the anonymous scripts was offered for sale as part of a larger packet by an Austrian art dealer by the name of Johann Traeg in 1799, hence the reference to it as the *Traeg Copy* or copy D.

To have four copies of the same masterwork could be thought of as a very fortunate situation. Surely the composer's intentions would reveal themselves through examination of these sources. Unfortunately, the four handwritten copies are all significantly different from each other and there is no clear indication as to any one of them being substantially superior. The four manuscripts are admittedly very similar (though by no means identical) in terms of notes and rhythms. However, they are significantly and consistently different in their articulations. For string players slurs are the most common and fundamental means of indicating articulation, therefore the placement of slurs is of particular importance, considerably more so than it would be in, for example, keyboard music. The existence and length of the slurs determines the bowing technique; there is a substantial difference between certain up- and down-bow strokes, their length and delivery.

However, marking this part of the interpretational process into the score is a relatively new development in the history of music. In the baroque era, slurs could be, but were not necessarily, part of the final product. In the first part of the eighteenth century, composers would regularly perform their own pieces, in which event there was no need for detailed performing instructions such as slurs. Even if that were not the case, they would consider the performer a creative colleague of almost equal rank and would leave all kinds of articulations (including slurs) and ornamentations to his judgement – a most important point too often disregarded in today's performances.

Be that as it may, Bach's articulation markings in his beautifully written out copy of the Violin Solos (composed around the same time as the Cello Suites in 1720 or before) are considerably more detailed than, for example, in the string parts of his cantatas or orchestral suites. Even more important is the fact that his bowing instructions in the Violin Sonatas and Partitas demonstrate his expertise on a string instrument and work well, mostly adhering to the widely accepted *Abstrichregel* or down-bow rule, according to which

"...one endeavours to take the first note of each bar with a down stroke, and this even if two down strokes should follow each other."[6]

This is the point where the lack of the autograph creates immense difficulties in understanding and following the composer's intentions. Albeit with regards to the principal parameters (pitch and length of the notes) the four manuscript sources and indeed the first printed edition mostly agree, in terms of the bowing instructions, there is a constant variance between them. It wouldn't be flippant to say that the only thing they consistently agree on regarding articulations is that they seldom agree.

A brief excerpt from the *Praeludium* of the G major Suite will demonstrate excellently this rather chaotic state of affairs. The legato marks are not only different in all of the four manuscripts but differ also in the first four new editions.

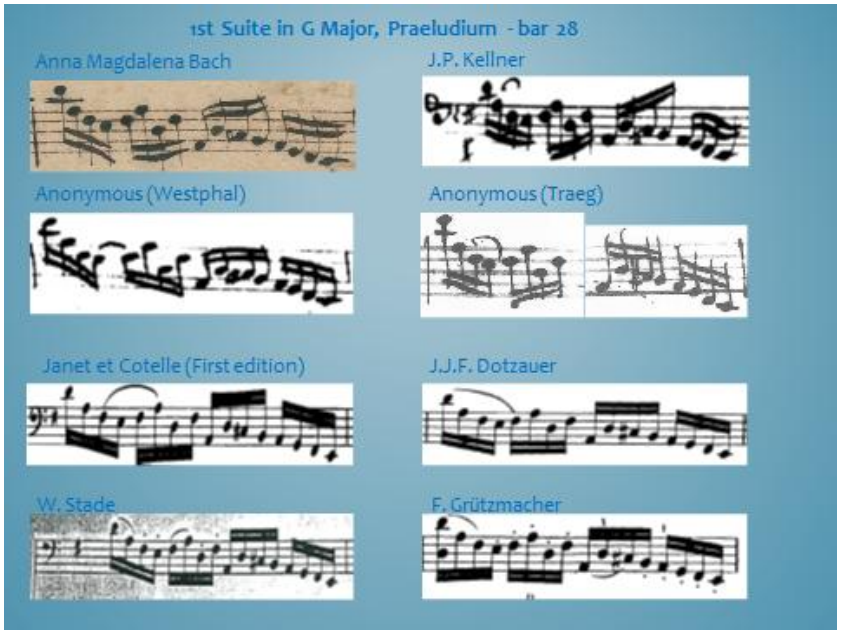


Figure 1: Prelude G major Suite, bar 28

The reason for the differences – at least as far as the manuscripts are concerned - can be given in three different ways. The easiest and most straightforward

[6] Leopold Mozart, *A treatise on the fundamental principles of violin playing*, vol. 6. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). 74

explanation would be slipshod work. The human factor is very rarely recognised here. Take Anna Magdalena as a case in point: she was a young woman of barely twenty when she married Johann Sebastian in 1721. Although an accomplished professional herself, a trained singer of some quality, she had to look after the Bach household and that included the duties of being a stepmother to Bach's four young children from his first marriage. She also gave birth to ten children between 1723 and 1733. That means – and this fact is seldom mentioned or appreciated in the biographies – that for the overwhelming majority of those years she was pregnant. For the few months when she was not, she had to look after newborn babies. To make this extremely difficult period of her life even harder, seven of her children died during those eleven years.

These were the exact same years when she copied several of her husband's compositions, including the Cello Suites. Would negligence be the right word to describe the cause of her share of mistakes or would perhaps permanent exhaustion be more appropriate?

Another possible explanation, assuming that all four manuscripts were copied from several but original autographs – an assumption by no means proven – could be that their sources might represent different stages of the compositional process (drafts, fine copies etc.) and thus be marked in different ways. Bach rarely copied one of his own works without continuing the editing and composing process.

Finally, the last explanation could assume, indeed accept, that the manuscripts represent to some extant an already "edited" version of the original and thus would include interpretational suggestions by the copyists (based on performance practice or advice from contemporary cellists?) as well. This assumption would seem particularly credible for manuscripts B, C and D.

The first edition by Janet et Cotelle

There is one further primary source that under normal circumstances could help to decide questions of authenticity: that is the first printed edition. Curiously, this was published not in Germany but in France about a hundred years after the Suites were written. This happened barely eleven years after one of the bloodiest combats ever between French and German troops at the Battle of the Nations, a truly unlikely time for cordial Franco-German relationships. And yet, Napoleon may have lost on the battle fields at Leipzig, but a small Parisian firm, Janet et Cotelle, won a major coup in 1824 by printing the Cello Suites for the first time. The editor, the Frenchman Louis-Pierre Norblin (1781-1854), based his work mostly on the two late eighteenth-century copies but deviated from them often enough to make it unique and rather unreliable. He changed the title from *Suites* to *Sonates ou Etudes* without any explanation. He also changed the names of several movements. Not only the originally French *Courantes* became Italian *Correntes* in his version but also, for

no obvious reason, he renamed the *Bourrées* of the Third and Fourth Suites as *Loures*. He added his own tempo markings to all the movements. Other extensive changes such as his bowings and other articulation markings are not particularly helpful or logical from a cellist's point of view.

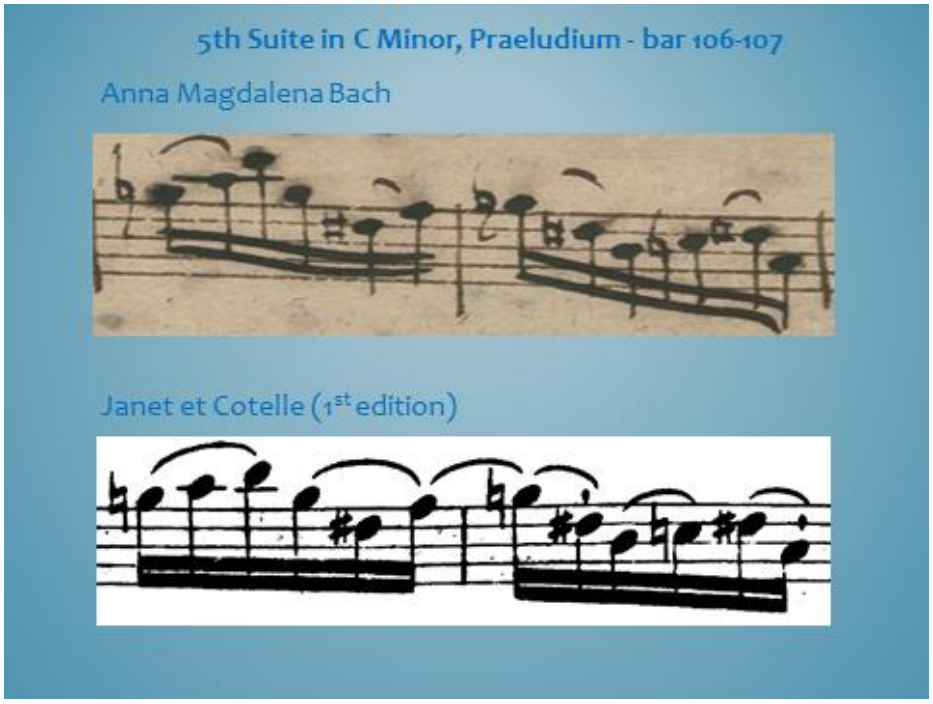
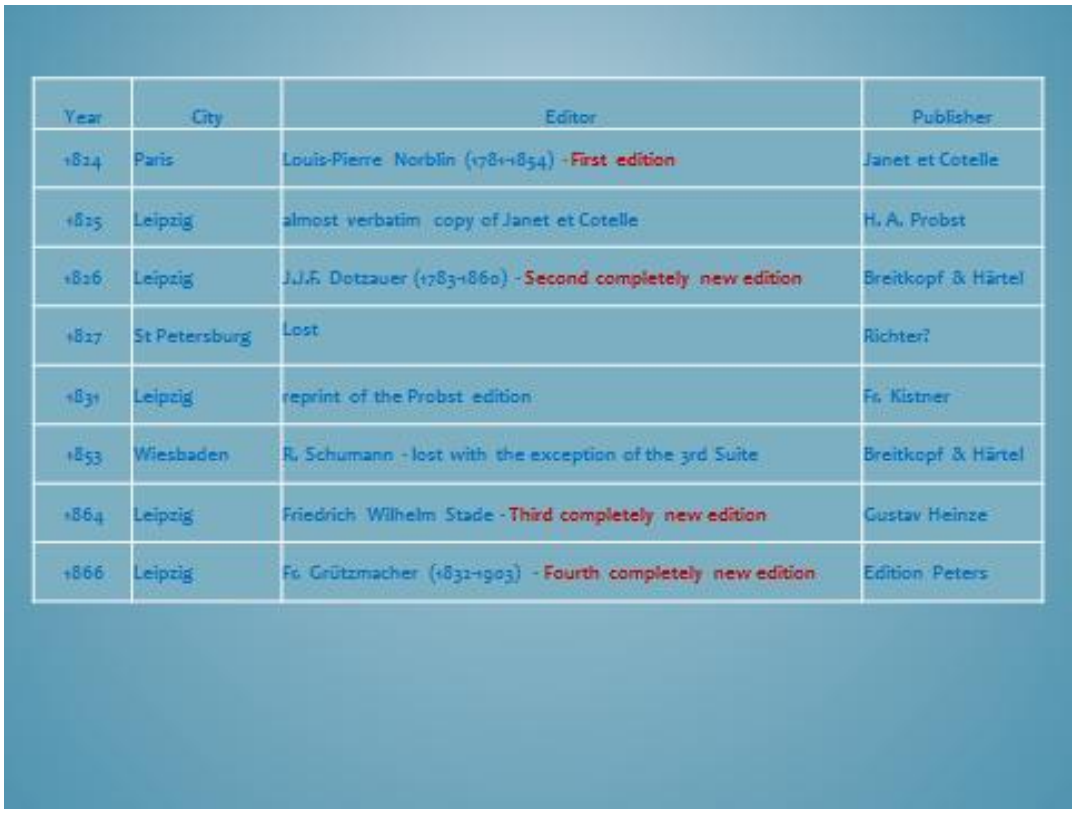


Figure 2: Prelude from c minor Suite, bars 106-107

To "facilitate" playing in the Sixth Suite, he reduced Bach's writing of chords dramatically by randomly cutting out notes, but what's even more important (though an obvious mistake): he left out five bars of that Suite's Prélude altogether.

The early editions: Dotzauer, Grützmacher and Stade

Curiously, after the *Janet et Cotelle* edition, another three editions appeared in quick succession within the next three years.



Year	City	Editor	Publisher
1814	Paris	Louis-Pierre Norblin (1781-1854) - First edition	Janet et Cotelle
1825	Leipzig	almost verbatim copy of Janet et Cotelle	H. A. Probst
1826	Leipzig	J.J.F. Dotzauer (1783-1860) - Second completely new edition	Breitkopf & Härtel
1827	St Petersburg	Lost	Richter?
1831	Leipzig	reprint of the Probst edition	Fr. Kistner
1853	Wiesbaden	R. Schumann - lost with the exception of the 3rd Suite	Breitkopf & Härtel
1864	Leipzig	Friedrich Wilhelm Stade - Third completely new edition	Gustav Heinze
1866	Leipzig	Fr. Grützmacher (1832-1903) - Fourth completely new edition	Edition Peters

Figure 3: Early Editions

Excluding reprints, only one of them would qualify as a new edition, the 1826 print by Justus Johann Friedrich Dotzauer (1783-1860), published by Breitkopf & Härtel. Dotzauer was a well-known cello teacher and an active performer. His edition is conservative but helpful, instructive without being innovative. He started off following the principles of the first edition but, when at a crossroads, sought help from Kellner's manuscript. He also made numerous corrections following his own musical common sense. In essence, Dotzauer's reading is perfectly adequate, if not exactly awe-inspiring. His edition is available in reprints even today.

It took nearly forty years, an unusually long pause in the history of the Bach Cello Suites editions, until the next new edition surfaced, not by a cellist but an organist and composer, by the name of Friedrich Wilhelm Stade (1817-1902). The year was 1864, the city Leipzig and this was the first published edition with piano accompaniment. Stade edited the cello part and composed the accompanying piano part. Like Norblin in the first edition, he changed the names of *Suites* to *Sonatas*, he also copied Norblin's tempo markings and movement titles loyally and that included the mystifying renaming of the *Bourrées* in the Third and Fourth Suites to *Loures*. He altered Norblin's bowings frequently and added staccatos and accents liberally. New features of this edition are Stade's somewhat intriguing fingering and bowing instructions. Their confident frequency suggests some assistance from an unnamed

cellist collaborator, yet from a practical point of view, they do not make much sense. His intention with the additional piano part was most probably to popularise the Suites.

Did the Suites need popularising? According to common belief of the day, they did.

"During the nineteenth-century… it was believed that the public needed an aid to facilitate their understanding of the music and saw the solution in providing accompaniment to the Solos. The result of this was the publication of innumerable transcriptions as well as newly composed piano accompaniments from the 1840s until the turn of the century."[7]

Undisputed masterpieces as they are, Bach's violin and cello Solos were considered little more than technical aides, studies (hence the frequent title: *etudes*), possibly bravura pieces. Individual movements from them to be played alone as a warm-up at the beginning of a concert or at the end of it as an encore, rather than complete works demanding complete performances.

Friedrich Grützmacher (1832-1903) was one of the rare artists who often played the Suites in his concerts. (It is an urban myth that Pablo Casals was the first cellist to perform a complete Bach Suite in a concert.[8]) He was a regular touring artist, apart from his job as Principal Cellist in the Dresden Hofkapelle. He worked tirelessly to disseminate the works of Bach and Boccherini as well as those of his contemporaries like Mendelssohn and Schumann. His artistry was considerable, his belief in his own judgement perhaps even greater. In a letter to his publisher, Edition Peters, he famously stated:

"Some great masters like Schumann and Mendelssohn have never taken the time to notate all the indications and nuances necessary, down to the smallest detail . . . .

[7] D. Fabian, "Towards a Performance History of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin: Preliminary Investigations'," *Essays in Honor of László Somfai: Studies in the Sources and the Interpretation of Music* (2005). 4

[8] Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung: Grützmacher, "Berichte. Dresden, Ende April [Fünf letzte Abonnementconcerte: Mozart, Haffnerserenade, Wagner, Vorspiel zu Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg; Herr Reinecke (Pianist). Kammermusik-Soiréen der Herren Lauterbach, Hüllweck, Göring und Grützmacher. Triosoiréen der Herren Rollfuss, Seelmann und Bürchel. Zweiter Productionsabend des Tonkünstlervereins: Herr Blassmann. Dritter Productionsabend: Herr Concertmeister F. David. Vierter Productionsabend: L. Hoffmann, neues Streichquartett, S. **Bach, Suite für Violoncello solo; Herr Grützmacher**, Herr A. Reichel (Pianist; Schluss folgt)]," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* II, no. 22 (1867). 178

My main purpose has been to reflect and to determine what these masters might have been thinking, and to set down all they, themselves, could have indicated . . . I feel I have more right than all the others to do this work."[9]

In fact, due to Herr Grützmacher's artistic liberties, sometimes it is rather difficult to recognise the original work once he had finished editing it. In the case of the Bach Suites, the changes he proposed are as profound as they are rhapsodic: notes, rhythms, harmonies are altered as a matter of course. Brahmsian hemiolas appear where Bach's music could not possibly imply any. The dynamic contrasts are worthy of a Tchaikovsky symphony; sudden off-beat accents remind the listener of a late-Romantic composer at his eccentric best rather than the Cantor of the Thomaskirche.

Here is a short example, taken from first Dotzauer's and then Grützmacher's edition, demonstrating the latter's propensity for passionate contrasts and altered notes. (2nd Suite in D minor, Gigue)

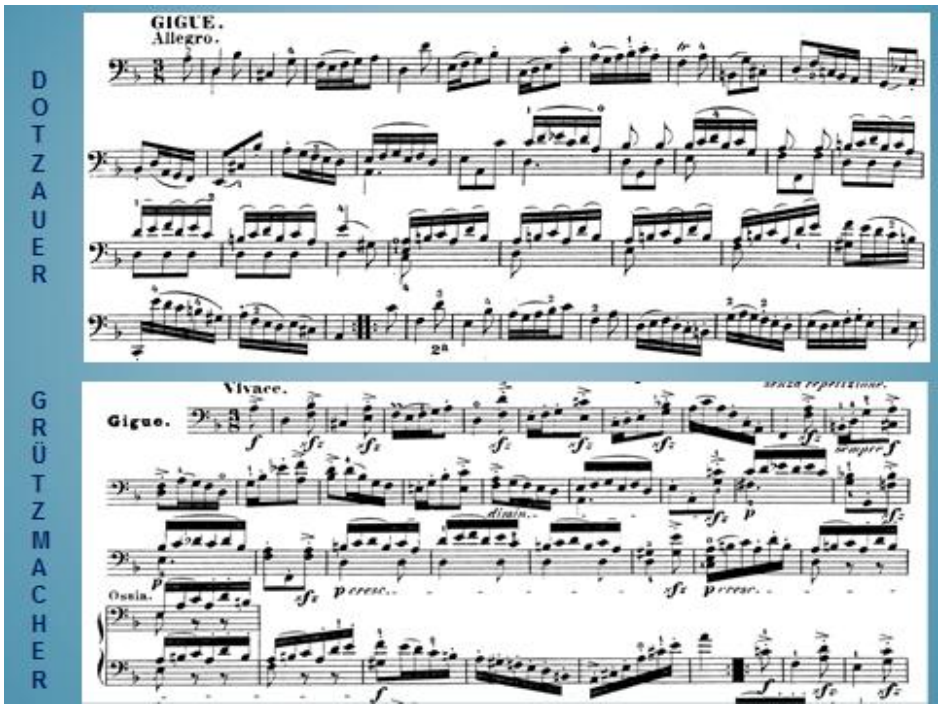


Figure 4: Dotzauer, Grützmacher

[9] Dimitry Markevitch, *Cello story* (Princeton, N.J: Summy-Birchard Music, 1984). 62, no formal attribution

Grützmacher's wildest innovation was perhaps the reduction of several movements of the Fifth and the Sixth Suites (for example, the Prelude of the C Minor Suite became an anorexic 190 bars long instead of the original 223, once he completed his cavalier editorial work.)

The question is obvious: why did he do it? Or to put it less politely: how did he dare? Depending on one's level of benevolence and magnanimity, there could be two possible answers. We could agree that he did the very best he could in order to make Bach's name and compositions better known; he published and played the Suites in a version that he thought would appeal to the largest part of his audience on account of its extreme passion, dynamic changes and technical difficulties which made these compositions genuine "bravura pieces". Of course, if in a less generous disposition, we could be outraged at his arrogance, at his blindness to the serene beauty of Bach's music. After all, in the same letter, quoted before, he also wrote:

"I have reaped much success in presenting this edition in concert, something that would have been impossible with the bare original in its primitive state."[10]

In 1866 when Grützmacher's *Konzert Fassung* was published, the *Bach-Gesellschaft Ausgabe*, the original complete edition, was still thirteen years away, yet, the four main styles of future possibilities were clearly signposted – if not ideally executed. All future editions followed one of these alternatives. We have Norblin's work, trying to be "scholarly", following the available sources loyally but without a critical eye or much practicality. We also have Dotzauer's carefully calibrated "practical" view on the Suites; intelligent and playable it is - exciting it is not. If excitement is needed, there is plenty of that in Stade's edition, representing the "alternative" with its additional piano part, rather erratic bowings and somewhat forced character of "chamber music"; or we can go to the extremes of the "performer" in Grützmacher's edition with its touchingly extravagant instructions for all kinds of excessive articulations.

Approaches by the scholarly, the practical, the alternative, the performer... - what more could Dörffel have added to this impressive catalogue?

[10] Ibid.

Dörffel's Edition

In the introduction to the volume of the Violin and Cello Solos, Dörffel lists two manuscripts (Anna Magdalena and Kellner) and three early editions (the 1825 Probst edition which is a reprint of Janet et Cotelle, Dotzauer and Stade) as his sources. As far as the primary parameters are concerned, the notes and rhythms in his publication are a dependably sensible combination of the mentioned sources. Things get considerably more complicated when the articulation marks are being checked. The slurs in Dörffel's edition demonstrate a skilful if somewhat haphazard amalgamation of bowing suggestions based mostly on Anna Magdalena, Kellner and Dotzauer – and "spiced up" with his own additions for good measure.

There are extended passages (sometimes almost complete movements[11]) following Anna Magdalena's often unclear articulations as closely as possible, yet on many occasions Dörffel gives preference to the markings of Kellner or Dotzauer and occasionally to Janet et Cotelle[12]. A typical example to demonstrate his own contribution is in the *Bourrée II* of the Fourth Suite, the slurs of which had never appeared before in that, otherwise perfectly logical, order.

The reasons behind his choices are nowhere explained and some of them are rather quirky. Why, for instance he copied Kellner's – and only Kellner's – choice of notes (bar 79) and double trills (bar 86) in the *Prélude* of the Third Suite against all other sources is puzzling to say the least. The double trill has since found its way into many other editions – at least the obviously wrong "c" of the chord in bar 79 did not.

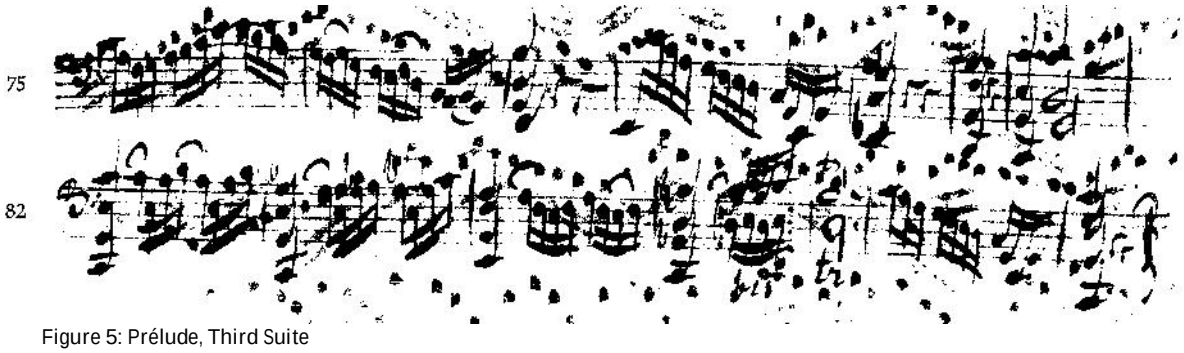


Figure 5: Prélude, Third Suite

[11] E.g. Allemande of the Third Suite

[12] Dotzauer himself was influenced heavily by both Kellner and Janet et Cotelle which complicates matters even further. However, there are numerous examples of original Dotzauer legatos finding their way into Dörffel's edition.

Dörffel did not make any effort to differentiate between the authors of various articulation marks; therefore it is no easy task to find out what slur originated with which particular source. This problem does not get any simpler in places where the introduced bowings are ostensibly his own – but coincidentally identical with an external, unnamed source.[13]

By modern standards, an edition like this would never qualify for the exclusive adjective "critical". In fact, Dörffel's often arbitrary method of choosing from the available sources is conspicuously similar to Dotzauer's approach more than fifty years earlier. However, we are discussing a publication from a time when musicology was a very young discipline and the accepted canons of performance practice were significantly different from those today. Dörffel did not decide by himself that the various articulation markings or their origins were of little importance. In his Preface, he freely admitted that establishing the correct notes and rhythms was his main aim, the inconsistencies of the bowings within and between the sources being impossible to resolve. According to his explanation,

"It is a good thing that for Bach the bowings and other markings referring to the Art of Performance are only of secondary importance. Bach, unlike the performers, was never pedantic: he respected the performer's artistic sense and intelligence and thus provided him with as few instructions as possible."[14]

Little did he realise that with this somewhat careless sentence, he opened the floodgates for a second major epoch of the Bach editions. Since it was thus announced - and by a highly respectable source! - that „Bach wasn't pedantic" about the articulations or other markings, anything and its opposite became possible. For the next seventy years or so, about twenty-five new editions attempted – mostly without scholarly restrictions - to create the ideal edition of the Bach Suites. Their unique ways of interpreting Bach's ideas were not necessarily aiming to understand the original sources better than anyone else before. Nor does the lack of an autograph or the incessant contradictions between the four eighteenth-century manuscripts explain the incredible variety of technical and artistic solutions. In the next decades following Dörffel's edition the available manuscript sources received

[13] Third Suite Prélude, bars 37-60 exactly following Westphal's (C) articulation.
[14] "Es ist gut mit diesen Stricharten und sonstigen Bezeichnungen, welche die Kunst der Ausführung betreffen, nur ein nebensächlichen Punkt bei Bach berührt wird. Denn Bach war dem ausführenden Künstler gegenüber nie peinlich: er liess ihm, seiner Einsicht und seinem Kunstsinn, die vollste Freiheit und gab ihm deshalb so wenig als möglich Vorschriften." ABGA, XXVII/1, PXIV.

only occasional interest. It was not until the dawn of the early music movement which coincided with August Wenzinger's ground-breaking edition in 1950 that what we might describe as the third phase of the Suites editions began. This epoch – while still producing some remarkably whimsical "performers' editions" – was and is increasingly defined by a scholarly approach, the commitment to comprehend Johann Sebastian Bach's intentions as closely as possible. The flow of new editions is yet to ebb and that can mean only one thing: the Holy Grail of the perfect Bach Cello Suites edition has not been found.

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