

What a painting can tell us, or the quest for a lost baroque lute composition, by Bernhard Fischer and collaborators

In 2024, I visited the Timken Museum of Art in San Diego, USA. During my short visit I spotted a fine oil painting *Portrait of Marguerite de Sève* by the French painter Nicolas de Largillière, dated 1729.



Nicolas de Largillière, *Portrait of Marguerite de Sève, Wife of Barthélémy-Jean-Claude Pupil* (1729)
Timken Museum of Art, San Diego, USA.

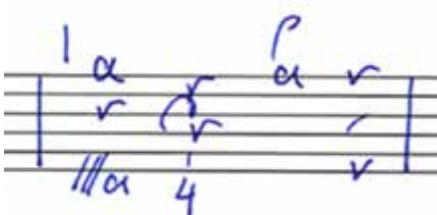
The painter of this portrait of Marguerite de Sève, Nicolas de Largillière, enjoyed a long and successful career as a portraitist, and was sought out early in the 18th century by important new clients from the provinces of France. Marguerite de Sève, the subject of the portrait, wears an elegant costume with an embossed and jewelled bodice.

When I spotted the painting, automatically my look focussed on the music book Marguerite de Sève holds in her left hand. Instantly I realised that the sheet of music is a quite realistic image of a baroque lute manuscript.

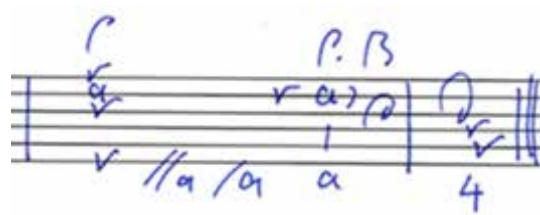


We can see that the lute manuscript book has five tablature lines. Some of the tablature bars were easy to read.

The bar directly below the thumb of the left hand.



The final two bars of the piece



The piece, in 3/4 time, is in C Major. Various friends have been contacted within the lute community, and initially we agreed that the piece could be a chaconne or similar dance. Unfortunately, no such piece was identified from any known lute database.

Who was Mme. Marguerite de Sève, and why does she show us a music book? Mme. de Sève was born on 18 September 1699, probably in Lyon as the daughter of Pierre de Sève, the first President of the Court of Currencies of Lyon, which was established in 1705. She was therefore from a family of high social standing, and her family had been among the nobility for several generations: owners of the castle of Fléchères since 1606, with two ancestors who were provosts of the merchants of Lyon at the beginning of the 17th century. She married Barthélemy-Jean-Claude Pupil on 15 February 1722, and the marriage undoubtedly responded to the ambitions of her husband, advisor to the Court of Currencies, who bought the office of President just after his marriage, and who

in March 1726 inherited the office of President from his father-in-law. M. Pupil was also noble, but only going back a generation, his father having started his career in trade. In 1733, the Pupils acquired the castle and lordship of Mions, and became the Pupil de Mions. Marguerite was to live to 1754, her husband to 1779. The couple had 7 children. The son, Leonard, was a royalist, and so left France during the Revolution.

It is well documented in the archives of Lyon that Marguerite de Sèvre was good to the city's poor and the family were highly appreciated by the population, for their charity.

In 1713, notables from Lyon decided to meet once a week solely for the sole pleasure of making music. The concerts of the Academy of Fine Arts continued until 1773, and were to become an essential component of musical life in Lyon. Perhaps the music Marguerite de Sèvre touches with her left hand serves as a symbol for her love of music and contribution to music in Lyon at the time.

High magnification of the page of music reveals some words: Marguerite de Sèvre seems to want to convey a message: 'Buvons beaucoup mes cher amis' ('Let us drink a lot my dear friends'). Accordingly, it has been suggested by the Curator of the Timken Museum exhibition that the music refers to a drinking song. However, it is not clear whether this inscription is the title of the lute piece depicted, or just a message from Marguerite de Sèvre that we should enjoy the life at its best.

At all events, drinking songs were always very popular in France. A 19th century publication with the title *Recueil De Noëls Anciens* (Besançon, 1842) includes a composition by François Gauthier of 1705 to the air of 'Buvons, buvons, mes chere amis' to be sung during the general procession. The text further explains the use of this song, namely to celebrate Jesus: 'A la naissance de Jesus, des Bergers s'éveillent a la voix des Anges qui viennent leur annoncer la venue du sauver, et les invitent a aller l'adorer et lui rendre leurs hommages' ('At the birth of Jesus, shepherds awake to the voice of the angels who come to announce to them the coming of Jesus, and invite them to go and worship him and pay their respects to him.')

Troisième Noël,

RECUEIL

DE

NOËLS ANCIENS,

AU PATOIS DE BESANÇON ;

NOUVELLE ÉDITION,

Corrigée, suivie du Sermon de la Crèche et augmentée de Notes explicatives et historiques,

Par Th. Belamy.



BESANÇON.

IMPRIMERIE ET LIBRAIRIE DE BINTOT,

PLACE SAINT-PIERRE.

1842.

COMPOSÉ EN 1705, SUR LA PROCESSION GÉNÉRALE DE BESANÇON 1.

AIR : Buvons, buvons, mes chers amis, etc.

A la naissance de Jésus, des Bergers s'éveillent à la voix des Anges qui viennent leur annoncer la venue du Sauveur, et les invitent à aller l'adorer et lui rendre leurs hommages.

Levans-nous vite, aicoutans bin,
Voi qui qu'on crie di gran maitin,
On entend bin di tintaimare ;
Las Anges chantant hautement,
Qu'en pa seret toute lai tare,
Que nous n'airans pu de tourment.

Lou feu ot-tu en quéque luë ?
Cai, courans vite, héla, mon Duë !
L'ai pris sans doute dans l'Aitaule ;
C'ère in pouëre meichant taudi,

1 Ici commencent les Noëls composés par FRANÇOIS GAUTHIER.
— Les sommaires et explications qui précèdent quelques-unes de ces pièces ont été conservés tels qu'ils existent dans l'édition originale, ainsi que l'indication des airs sur lesquels on doit les chanter.

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With the suggestion of a drinking song in mind, again the lute databases were searched, identifying a drinking song 'Aux Armes Camerades—Air a boire' in the lute manuscript A-GÖ Nr. 2 (Göttingen, Benediktinerstift, Musikarchiv).



'Aux Armes Camerades—Air a boire', A-GÖ2, 15^r

However, the title is not a perfect match, and in any case this piece does not really fit with what we see in the painting. Thus, we followed the idea that the presented lute composition may represents a popular song from the French opera, perhaps composed by Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–87). Indeed, more than a hundred of Lully's compositions and arias have survived intabulated in baroque lute manuscripts. And then we have the French playwright, actor, and poet Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, alias Molière (1622–73). A review of Molière's comedy play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* resulted in the identification of two drinking songs, namely the *première chanson a boire* which starts with 'Un petit doigt, Philis pour commencer le tour' ('Drink a little, Phyllis, to start the glass round'), and the *seconde chanson a boire*, 'Buvons, chers amis, buvons' ('Let us drink, dear friends, let us drink'), in act IV scene 1. The title of the second drinking song is very close to the text on the painting.

The first drinking song is in C major and starts with in 4/4 but ends in 3/4 measure, while the second drinking song is in G major, in 4/4. For these drinking songs no versions for the lute are currently known, and intabulating them did not produce any similarities with the fragment visible in the painting.

Although the history of the Sèvre-Pupil family is well represented in various historical records of the city of Lyon and detailed information has been collected by the Cercle de Généalogie de Mions (Association of Genealogy of Mions), no specific household item list, or inventory records have been preserved. Similar, the Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon which collects and keeps the records and antiquities of the Academy of Fine Arts of Lyon, could not trace any music book or lute manuscript among its treasures. Thus, the hunt for the missing lute book and a specific drinking song continues, and lute enthusiasts are warmly invited to join us in the quest identify this lute piece—and perhaps even the lute manuscript, if by a miracle it survives somewhere!

I would like thanking following important contributors and collaborators in this interesting story: Derrick R. Cartwright, Ph.D., Director of Curatorial Affairs, Timken Museum of Art, San Diego, USA; Peter P. M. Steur, Moncalieri, Italy; Pascale Boquet and Mauricio Buraglia, Société Française de Luth; Cornelia Primosch, ORF, Austrian Broadcasting Service, France; Antoine Ropion, University of Lyon, France; Florance Suppot, Mions Genealogy Club, France; Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, France, and Richard Labschütz, Austria.

Music for Henry Noel, and intabulations of *chansons à boire* for baroque lute,

Further to David van Edwards' cover story essay on Henry Noel, who died in 1597 after a game of 'baloune' at Court—thwarting Dowland's hopes of a position at the English court, which Noel would have supported—here is a little of the music associated with him. Noel is thought to be the 'bonny boots' referred to in a number of madrigals; an excellent singer as well as dancer, sportsman, Member of Parliament and generally a 'live wire', and his death seems to have provoked genuine sadness at court, to judge from the number of pieces written in his memory. Besides Dowland's psalm settings, the *Lamentatio Henrici Noel*, there were at least five vocal pieces:

John Holmes, 'Thus Bonny-boots the birthday celebrate', *Triumphs of Oriana*, 1601

Robert Johnson, 'Come blessed bird' (1601)

William Holborne, 'Since bonny boots was dead' (1597)

Thomas Weelkes, 'Noel adieu, thou court's delight' (1600)

Thomas Morley, 'Hark alleluia', 'a reverend memorial of the vertuous and learned sir Henry Noell'

Weelkes's tribute especially is an extraordinary piece—do listen to the recordings on YouTube if you have a moment.

Here is John Robinson's edition of Mignarda / Henry Noel's Galliard, (reprinted from *Lute News* 126); William Holborne's canzonet, 'Since bonny boots was dead', one of six vocal pieces at the end of the Anthony Holborne's *The Cittarn School* (1596), Dowland's 'Shall I strive with words to move' from the *Pilgrims Solace* (1612), and Ron Andrico's lute song intabulation of one Dowland's psalm settings for Noel's funeral, for the Lute Society edition.

Finally, following on from Bernhard Fischer's article in the last *Lutezine* on the so-far unsuccessful attempts to find the original music of a drinking song arranged for lute, depicted in an 18th century painting, here are two baroque lute arrangements by Richard Labschütz of drinking songs from Lully's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Enjoy!

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme - Scene 1 / Act IV - Premiere chanson a boire

Composer: Jean-Baptiste Lully

Arrangement for lute: Richard Labschütz

Handwritten lute tablature for 'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme - Scene 1 / Act IV - Premiere chanson a boire' arranged for lute by Richard Labschütz.

The tablature uses a 5-line staff with a 12th fret indicated. The notes are indicated by vertical strokes (up or down) and horizontal strokes (left or right). The first measure shows a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are written below the staff, corresponding to the notes. The arrangement includes several measures of vocal parts (labeled 'r' for recitation) and instrumental parts (labeled 'l. B' for lute bass). The vocal parts are written in a stylized, rhythmic notation. The instrumental parts show a mix of single and double strokes, with some measures featuring a combination of vertical and horizontal strokes. The lyrics are in French, with some words written in a cursive script. The arrangement concludes with a final section of vocal parts.

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme - Scene 1 / Act IV - Seconde chanson a boire
Composer: Jean-Baptiste Lully Arrangement for lute: Richard Labschütz

Handwritten lute tablature for 'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme' in 4/4 time. The tablature uses a 5-line staff with a 6th string implied by the tab. The notation includes various strokes (up, down, cross, vertical) and letter-like characters (e.g., 'r', 'a', 'd', 'p', 'l') representing specific lute techniques. The piece consists of four systems of music, separated by double bar lines with repeat signs. The first system starts with a 'P' and ends with a 'd'. The second system begins with 'l. P' and ends with 'r'. The third system begins with 'l. P' and ends with 'a'. The fourth system begins with 'l. P' and ends with 'a'. The music concludes with a final section starting with 'l. P' and ending with '2. 0'.