

American Federation of Violin & Bowmakers
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Thank you, and I wish to thank the American Federation of Violin and Bowmakers and Tom Wilder for inviting me back, only two years after being with you in Seattle.

At that time (Spring 2008), I was deep into the throes of organizing the Tourte Exhibition in London that I will try to share with you this morning. From even before the Seattle meeting continuing until the last bow was returned to its owner, I was involved in a project completely different than any I'd previously undertaken. It seemed like a full-time job – somehow I lived through it, and I think we had a good result.

I think it best, especially for this group on hand, to outline what the “Tourte Celebration Day” consisted of, and then talk about the exhibited Tourte bows while showing them on the screen at the same time.

To begin with, the Royal Academy of Music is a very venerable and proper institution and I tried to do things in a proper and English way – something already difficult and somewhat out of character for me. I believe that we had the best and most knowledgeable speakers on the subject of Tourte possible. Everyone that I approached agreed enthusiastically to participate.

Timothy Jones, the RAM Director of Programmes, welcomed the audience and introduced Peter Sheppard Skærved, a Research Fellow and concert violinist, who made a further

introduction and demonstrated the qualities of an early Tourte bow on his 1699 Stradivari violin. I then spoke a little bit on the life of Tourte and his family and then showed the bows on exhibition on a big screen, and discussed them.

Charles Beare then offered a very interesting discourse on the early work of Tourte with a preliminary emphasis on early designs, including pre-Cramer, fixed/open frogs, outward camber, and how Tourte saw beyond what we would now clearly call almost primitive concepts.

Jean-François Raffin was next, speaking about Tourte's prodigious influence on makers of later generations. His lecture included slides of bows made by archetiers from the mid-19th century up through the early part of the 20th century, each example showing great inspiration from Tourte.

The final talk of the morning was presented by Isaac Salchow, who dealt mainly with details of Tourte's workmanship not readily recognized by a casual look. His graphics were revealing and showed a profound understanding of this great maker's unique working style, focusing principally on his jointing style, both in his wood and metal work.

A lunch break followed and many of the guests had a look at the 35 Tourte bows and the 15 contemporary copies. By the way, those copies are here for your viewing, if you have interest. We had great viewing cabinets, trucked in from Germany, although the lighting was not the best. After the opening day we bought a number of little flashlights which helped a lot.

After this break, we continued with Peter Sheppard Skærved again and he was joined by our friend and remarkable virtuoso, Elmar Oliveira. Peter can be quite cerebral and bit abstract and spoke a while before being joined by Elmar. Elmar told me later he had no idea what was going to happen when he got up there. But of course it was excellent. They both demonstrated the subtleties of sound and handling qualities of two Tourte bows and the audience was quite taken.

James Warren's talk was next and addressed the influence that the performers of Tourte's time had on his progression. Two great violinists in particular – Giovanni Battista Viotti and Rodolphe Kreutzer – seem to have advised him on various players' preferences: Viotti on such elements as the camber and the height of the head and frog, and Kreutzer on strengthening the frog's metal ferrule. Tourte recognized good advice and no doubt implemented the suggestions proffered by these virtuosos.

Peter Oxley then offered his thoughts on making a copy of a Tourte bow. He displayed detailed measurements and drawings that illustrated some of Tourte's tool-handling techniques, which certainly give a bowmaker of Mr. Oxley's stature insight into a working style. He even showed, with photos on the screen, a certain twist seen in the beak of the head, when viewed straight on, that I think surprised us all.

The last speaker, appropriately, was Bernard Millant, and he showed photographs of the areas of Paris in which Tourte lived and worked, which included many end-of-day fishing trips

on the banks of the Seine. His intimate association with Tourte bows for many decades was palpable.

Following Bernard's presentation, we had the bowmakers of the copies come onstage and field questions from the floor. This was interesting, but from my point of view could have been a more substantial discussion.

A little break followed and then we heard a fine recital by Elmar and his pianist Robert Koenig. They played a Schubert Sonata, the Bloch First Sonata and then a few short pieces. The concert was very well received.

Then we had a good Italian dinner, some good Italian wine and it's interesting to note that all the bowmakers had too much to drink!

Before we see the bows let's take a look at François Tourte. I believe this enlargement from the engraving by Kamermann is all we have which is a good rendering of today's hero. We are not sure when Kamermann produced this and, at least for me, it's interesting to try to gauge how old Tourte would have been at this time. To have this grand Latin statement attached, which in English translates to "through a new form he gave glory to the bow" would mean he was established at the top, and the modern bow, as we still refer to it today, would have been created by Tourte at least some little bit of time before this engraving was executed. That would mean not before about 1790 and could of course be a good many years later.

I think we can say we're looking at a man in his middle years – in 1790 he would have been 42. The very sober, almost austere expression – this would not be surprising for anyone posing for a portrait at that period of time. It seems obvious that this is a man in robust health, whether he was in his early 40s or quite a bit older. My idea is that this engraving was made in the very early 1800s. If I'm not reading too much into this, I would say he appears modest but full of confidence. He is resolute and perhaps physically imposing, but I think there is also an element of sensitivity there. Those who know his work would certainly understand that.

In London that day, we were there to celebrate Tourte, his life and his work and of course he was a celebrity in his own time, at least for stringed instrument players of that time. Although we know very little of Tourte's life, it seems he lived a simple existence, not able to read or write, but from his creations that we enjoy and respect to this day, it is obvious he led a very fulfilled life. He had a passion for fishing, according to the writings of the Abbé Sibire, who lived in the time of Tourte, and at the finish of his day's work, Tourte would walk across the street and fish in the Seine, the great river which runs through Paris. To mention just a bit about Tourte's family: his father was a carpenter who became a luthier, probably making some instruments as well as bows – we are not sure how prolific he was. François' brother, Léonard, who was only a year or two older than François took up his father's profession of bowmaking early on and certainly was important to François' early training clock making. François and his wife, Marie Jeanne Françoise Emery, had a son and daughter and the daughter, Jeanne Félicity, never married and seems to have assisted in her father's shop in some capacity. François' son, Louis François, was a 'cellist in the opera and had studied with Levasseur, one of the most important 'cellists of the time. He also married his teacher's daughter, Marie Rosalie Levasseur. A son of Louis François Tourte, Louis François II, known as Francis, was a poet, although he had other

professions. He was not a famous poet but communications to him from some important poets of the time exist and speak kindly to him. So the artistic nature of Tourte continued with his descendants.

This Kamermann engraving which you see enlarged, we had an original one in London, generously loaned for the occasion by Yves Cordelle, a direct descendent of François Tourte whom I had met the summer before. Though he was seven generations removed, to see Mr. Cordelle and the Tourte rendered by Kamermann, the resemblance was uncanny. One could easily imagine he was Tourte's son. Mr. Cordelle and his son Martin attended the Tourte exhibiton and we felt very honored to have them there. The elder Cordelle, now retired, is a very cultured man, and had been a nuclear engineer by profession. Though he was very aware who François Tourte was, he had never seen a Tourte bow until I showed him one, upon our meeting that summer.

So now, the bows, in a chronological procession.

The first bow, and the second, are Cramer bows, the name Cramer coming from the German violinist Wilhelm Cramer, from whose popularity and his use of this type of bow gave a brief vogue to them which was, more or less, the decade of the 1770s. Interestingly, I have heard from some of today's highly regarded period instrument players that these Cramers are very difficult to use. At the same time, the principal 'cellist of the Chicago Symphony uses such a bow, made by François' brother Léonard, as his everyday bow. These first two bows were made by François while working for, or with, Léonard. Whether they were originally sold as the

acknowledged work of François or not, we do not know. Nevertheless, the difference in the quality of the work of these two men is very much in evidence, François' execution being of a completely higher category.

The next two, surely from the same period of time, are of a completely different concept. The heads are radically different from the Cramers, the sticks are more robust and have more camber. The ornate frog of number three in a way mimics the form of the heads of the Cramers. Here we see the head of number two with the frog of number three. Cramer bows often had this type of frog. Note the tall, elegant heads. Tourte's affinity for what seems now to be exceedingly tall heads continued, sporadically at least, over the many years of his career. The produced sound, handling and sculptural qualities were all certainly considered as regards the making of these bows.

I think we're at about 1770 for these first four bows. With bow number five we see a resolute departure by François, in terms of style, from his brother Léonard. The frog, however, is of the same form as the previous. I find the pernambuco frog quite beautiful, although they were not to find favor for long, probably because ebony was more durable. The model of the head is what we call the "swan head" and is almost always, when made by Tourte, extremely elegant, as is the case here. Tourte was probably the creator of this model, although I know one made by his contemporary, Lefevre, that must emanate from about the same time as this bow. Strangely, Tourte seems to have made very few of these swan head bows. On the other hand they influenced following makers such as Dominique Peccatte and Henry greatly, as we see many swanhead 'cello bows from them.

Bow number six shows us a frog becoming more contemporary, though it is still an open, or “open-trenched” frog. With this head we are approaching the type that defines what I suppose we could call Tourte’s second period, which would be the “modern bows”. This particular bow is a viola bow and differs from Tourte viola bows which followed which we could call “standardized,” because they have more or less similar lengths and weights. This one is short in length while extraordinarily bold in both its physical and playing qualities.

With bow number seven we have definitely arrived at the modern bow. In terms of sculpture or form, it is perfect. The technical execution as well is as perfect as one could wish for. This must be one of the first bows made with the silver ferrule, one of the defining elements of the modern bow. At the same time the button, or adjuster, is also of silver, mounted on ivory in this case. Although Tourte would move away from this rather bell-shaped head, it would be revisited by other French makers almost a hundred years later. With the frog we are almost certainly seeing the early fruit of the collaboration of Tourte and the great violinists Viotti and Kneutzer. This is the first bow we see with a ferrule and I suggest that this bow was made about 1785.

Number eight is the finest example I know from this period of Tourte’s work. It makes a stunning beginning for the illustrated bows of François Tourte in Etienne Vatelot’s seminal *Les Archets Francois*. Our friend and colleague the late Robert Bein always used to say if there’s not a bit of magic about it, it’s not a Tourte. This very tall head, an exquisite improvisation, expresses perfectly the magic that Robert spoke of. That Tourte would return, from time to time,

to surprisingly tall heads like this, even if of a different model, certainly has to do with a desired playing result. It is to our benefit that they are glorious to see, as well. Of course we are seeing only in two dimensions so we miss a lot. I actually investigated shooting the bows in 3-D but it didn't work. However, I think the poetry of Tourte's work is obvious even like this. This is the first bow we see today with the divided button, or, the button in three-piece form. From this point on almost all Tourte buttons were made in this silver-ebony-silver form. This must have been aesthetically pleasing to Tourte, the only other reason to change from the previous capped button that I can think of would be to economize by using less silver. I would say this was a stylistic gesture by Tourte and maybe he was the first to make divided buttons – it certainly wouldn't be surprising. This bow I would date about 1790.

Bow number nine continues in the same manner, if not as dramatic. It furthers this elegant and important period of Tourte's work, as does number ten, a viola bow of standard length and weight. All of the first ten bows have round sticks.

With this bow we now have eyes in the frog. Sometimes we find a bow from this period where the frog has very large eyes. Earlier and contemporary bows by Léonard Tourte sometimes had mother-of-pearl in the flanks of the frogs, but these mother-of-pearl inlays were more decorative, having either large ovals, diamond shapes, shields or a design that followed the shape of the frog's profile. So François was doing away with what he probably considered excessive, or at least unnecessary.

Bow number eleven, a 'cello bow, brings us to a signal departure from the previous. I don't like to talk too much about "periods" of Tourte's work, because his stylistic development is not constant; sometimes he revisits the past a little bit, and as in this case, he jumps forward a lot. Here we can say we've entered a new period of Tourte's work. This 'cello bow, like some others that would follow, has a rounded ferrule, and this is perhaps both a stylistic gesture and a considered modification for the handling of the bow when a 'cellist plays in close proximity to the frog. This bow certainly has one of the first hatchet, or square, heads that Tourte made. Although the hatchet type head would come to dominate the violin and viola bows made by Tourte, it was less dominant with 'cello bows. It's interesting that he came to the hatchet head first via the 'cello bow – remember that his son was a 'cellist, though in his early teens when this bow was made – and although they were less predominant than with the violin and viola bows, it was this specific head that Tourte followed when making future hatchet head 'cello bows. Keep in mind though, that no two are ever identical. Here we see the head of number eleven along with that of number seventeen, made about fifteen years later, in order to see the consistency with this model. Also, this bow, which I date about 1805, has the Tourte • L brand that we are accustomed to seeing with the bows of Léonard Tourte. This indicates a shared workshop, and also a financial and likely sometime working collaboration of the Tourte brothers. It is certainly one of the last bows made which bear this brand, which was soon after altered to simply TOURTE, its L and small diamond shaped mark (proceeding the L) having been filed off.

Bow number twelve also marks a signal departure from previous violin bows. With its more aggressive, less rounded head, as with the number eleven 'cello bow, Tourte had entered a new phase of sculpture. The frog, also remarkable for its change of form, can be seen as the

prototype that the great Dominique Peccatte would adapt as his model of frog in the late 1830s – in other words about 35 years later - and by his brother François a few years later. This bow and the next three are all bows which rather approach the hatchet head without completely getting there. I think these bows range from about 1805 for number twelve and 1810-1815 for thirteen through fifteen. Twelve and thirteen are pictured in L'Archet, by Millant and Raffin. Numbers thirteen, fourteen and fifteen all have frogs with modest throats, or degorgements, especially fourteen and fifteen and that perhaps was a particular window of time in Tourte's oeuvre – that he made this type of almost simple frog. Especially notice the button of number fifteen, whose center section is comprised of eight triangular pieces of tortoiseshell, an excellent example of Tourte's improvisation. I know of no other Tourte with this feature.

Bow number sixteen is the Demidoff Tourte, replete with tortoiseshell, gold and diamonds. I'll quote here from the Strad Magazine of March 1959 about this bow. "In 1807, by order of the French government, a violin bow was made and presented to Prince Demidoff, the Russian Ambassador to France. It was to be a masterpiece of perfection attainable only by the genius of François Tourte. The master brought to bear, for this great honour, his choicest materials and talent, and produced this magnificent sample of his labours.

The presentation was made on the occasion of the signing of the Franco-Russia Alliance, in the presence of many dignitaries and notable of the music world. No gift could have been more appropriate for the Prince, who also had an enviable reputation as a violinist, and was known as host of elaborate musicales among the Paris elite.

In describing this rare specimen, Messrs. Wm. E. Hill & Sons state ‘the stick is octagonal, of Pernambuco wood of the choicest description; the colour, a magnificent reddish-brown; the head, hatchet-shaped, of the master’s finest cutting, the octagonal sections as sharp and clean as when it left the maker’s hands: the nut, mounted in gold, is of tortoiseshell with four small diamonds inset on either side; the pearl eyes encircled by gold rings, the screw with pearl facets between the gold rings inset with a diamond at the end, the tip is also of gold.’”

The bow, known as the ‘Prince Demidoff’ remained in the Prince’s possession until his decease, when it was learned that the Czar desired its acquisition for the illustrious performer, Henri Vieuxtemps.

About 1850 it was obtained by J.B. Vuillaume to supplement his famous collection of instruments. He then allowed his son-in-law, Delphin Alard, to use the bow, but remaining in his possession until the Duc de Camposelice insisted on it being sold to accompany the famous ‘Betts’ Stradivari of his collection. For many years thereafter the ‘Betts’ and the ‘Demidoff’ remained inseparable.

Messrs. Wm. E. Hill & Sons acquired the Duc’s collection at his decease and subsequently the bow became a part of the celebrated R.B. Waddell collection remaining with the ‘Betts’ Stradivari, then again falling into the hands of Hill & Sons, the bow was obtained, through the efforts of J.C. Freeman of the Wurlitzer Company, for the distinguished collector and connoisseur, Mr. S.L. Crocker of Los Angeles, California, in whose possession it has remained since 1928. Together with three other rare specimens of Tourte, the ‘Prince Demidoff’ is now part of the famous ‘Crocker Quartet’ of Stradivaris.”

This most rare violin bow was later sold by Jacques Français to its present owner.

It's surprising to think this bow could have been made as early as 1807, but I'm not going to challenge the Hill document. It's the first violin bow we see that has a full-fledged hatchet head.

Number seventeen, is the Delamare Tourte 'cello bow, also a bow replete with diamonds. Though not very well remembered now, Delamare was one of the finest 'cellists in France by the end of the 18th century. In 1801 he traveled to Berlin and later to St. Petersburg and Moscow where his playing was well received and he hob-knobbed with royalty. He returned to Paris in 1809 and organized a concert that was not very well received and from then on played in salons and private circles. It seems he had virtually no money when he married an independently wealthy woman in 1815 and we can only imagine that this Tourte bow was probably a wedding gift to him, along with the Stradivari 'cello he is rumored to have owned. This bow was later owned by Franklin Singer, of Singer Sewing Machine fame, who also owned the Bass of Spain Stradivari 'cello. This bow has been well looked after and is in a fine state of preservation.

Beginning with the Prince Demidoff violin bow, we have arrived at Tourte's mature period and for the very most part, Tourte's following violin and viola bows have hatchet heads, of course varying a bit from one to another. So we will move through these bows more quickly.

The tortoiseshell, gold and diamonds signify a definite esteem for Tourte, the maker, but also suggest a certain extravagance, perhaps even decadence, of the elite of the time. The next 5 bows are also of tortoiseshell and gold.

Bow number eighteen is a violin bow fairly unique within Tourte's oeuvre. It may be the only known Tourte which has a round stick and has a tortoiseshell and gold frog. Its model of head is bold and its stick is robust.

Bow number nineteen was formerly owned by the concert violinist Adolph Busch, also a well-known teacher of the violin. It features an unusually firm octagonal stick, has tortoiseshell and gold mounts, and is in a very fine state of preservation. It's pictured in Joseph Roda's Bows for Musical Instruments.

Bow number twenty is truly great and this bow has inspired a good many copies. In fact there is even a Dominique Peccatte we believe is a copy of this specific Tourte. The Engleman I, it's a well-known and most beautiful violin bow. Formerly in the famous Hottinger collection, it was next owned by the Rembert Wurlitzer firm and then by William Möennig & Son, Ltd., of Philadelphia. Its sale was declined to professional players in order to preserve its very pure condition.

Number twenty-one is a violin bow with a more aggressive type hatchet head. This violin bow is believed to be one of two purchased from Tourte by Louis Maurer on 6 March 1820 and the original receipt from Tourte is preserved to this day. Accompanying documents,

written in English and German, show Maurer bought the bows for Wilhelm Speyer (1790-1878), a well-known violinist. Edward Speyer (1839-1934), Wilhelm's son, was a collector of musical memorabilia of sorts and was probably the recipient of the Tourte bows upon his father's death. It seems likely that Alfred Hill acquired the bows from Edward Speyer before 1890, when Arthur Hill's diary began. This remarkable bow was copied by Samuel Allen and the model of its head is seen frequently on bows from the Hill workshop.

Number twenty-two is an exception to my previous generality about the hatchet head 'cello bows, this one being fuller and broader as seen in profile here, than the typical ones. In the sale of Abel Bonjour's collection at the Drouot in Paris in 1887 there was a tortoiseshell and gold mounted François Tourte 'cello bow, Lot 11, which was purchased by Hippolyte Chretien Silvestre for 1,100 francs. (At the same sale the silver and ebony Delsart Tourte 'cello bow fetched 380 francs.) As Silvestre was often Alfred Hill's agent in Paris it is likely that he purchased it for him. The bow had previously been presented at an exhibition in London in 1885, largely arranged by Arthur Hill. The great bow seen here, which was the property of the eminent 'cellist Martin Lovett, of the Amadeus Quartet, before its acquisition by its present owner, is almost certainly the one with this history.

Bow number twenty-three is a violin bow in a remarkably pure state. It retains its original silver head-plate, which were not common among Tourte violin bows from all but his oeuvre of the late 1700s. Shortly after the end of the second World War, an American gentleman entered and won an international chess tournament in England. Because of restraints at the time on the British currency, he was unable to depart with the prize money. By chance, a director

from the Hill & Sons firm also participated in the competition and upon discovering that the winner's son played the violin, proposed making an exchange of merchandise for the awarded sum. An extremely fine Tourte violin bow, seen above, was selected from the Hill collection and the deal was struck. However, because of the monetary value of the bow, the chess champion elected to not give his son the bow but instead placed it in a safety deposit box where it reposed for many years. Until very recently the bow has remained almost unplayed.

This bow, number twenty-four, could hardly have a more important provenance. It was formerly the property of the great Eugène Ysaÿe and later of the late, great concert violinist Isaac Stern, who used it along with a few other bows in his collection. The boldness of the head suggests it may be one of the last bows Tourte made with tortoiseshell and gold mounts.

Number twenty-five is our other swan head 'cello bow of this exhibition, for me one of the most beautiful bows in the world. It's a great mystery why he didn't make more of these, and interestingly, the following generation, especially Dominique Peccatte and Joseph Henry, made a lot of them, although almost none of them arrive at the magic on view here. Also interesting, I am yet to see a swan head violin bow made by Tourte, yet a good four or five Mirecourt makers of the early 1900s made swan head violin bows, invariably branded Tourte. But not many 'cello bows. I have no explanation for this at all, but it seems obvious that Tourte's swan head 'cello bows were much admired by the future bowmakers.

The violin and viola bows now continue our little tour today in hatchet models. I will just mention that this one, number twenty-six, is the only later Tourte I'm aware of which bears his brand, seen here in the detail photo.

Number twenty-seven is a great viola bow in virtually mint condition. It was owned by Peter Shidlov, of the Amadeus Quartet. The head is a classic example of Tourte's hatchet head model of the late period. It was made around 1820-1825.

Bow number twenty-eight exhibits Tourte in his element in terms of structural beauty. A violin bow certainly made when Tourte was approaching his late years, it is remarkable for its poise and for the technical prowess of its making.

Bow number twenty-nine resided for many years in important bow collections in France. It is quite a late violin bow with, again, an extremely tall head whose aggressive structure contrasts to the surprisingly smooth, continuous lines of the frog.

Bow number thirty is a violin bow with a round stick – Tourte's late work had predominantly octagonal shafts. It has the illustrious history of having belonged to the eminent violinist and collector Zlatko Balakovic and then later was the favorite bow of the concert violinist Aaron Rosand.

Number thirty-one is one of the fairly rare 'cello bows with what we call a violin bow head, in this case of the hatchet model. Although they make a strong statement stylistically, they

are almost unique to Tourte. This is the best one I've seen. It shows the freedom and imagination that make Tourte's work so individual.

Bow number thirty-two is a viola bow in a remarkable state of preservation. This bow was for many years in the collection of the eminent violinist Louis Krasner and was next owned by the well-known violist Bruno Giuranna. It exhibits a forcefulness typical of Tourte's late work. Bow number thirty-three is a violin bow also in a fine state of conservation, retaining even its original head-plate and tinsel (silk) wrapping. Both beautiful and rugged, it was the subject of the Tourte copy bows at the exhibition.

Bow number thirty-four is the Comte Doria violin bow, its name derived from this wealthy family of Spanish origin. Though of a superior pernambuco, the head exhibits Tourte's mannerisms to exaggeration. These are readily seen in the head's profile and could be considered as a diminution of his facility.

So finally we arrive at number thirty-five, our last bow, a 'cello bow that is not at all the typical hatchet model, but is almost a violent hatchet. I wonder, with these last two bows if Tourte didn't know his work was approaching the end. It is surprising to find a late Tourte with an open-trenched frog, but, with Tourte, a surprise is never far away.

So we've seen Tourte's bows spanning a time period of almost 60 years, from around 1775 to about 1832. Not too many people work 60 years anymore. As we look once more at this great artist, in all his seriousness, can we not imagine him on a day when he was especially

pleased with a bow just finished, or perhaps after he caught an exceptional fish, looking a bit like this...