
Gavotte and Musette

Title	Gavotte and Musette (in the Old Style) for String Orchestra
Time of Origin	1897
Premiere	7 May 1897, Veranstaltungssaal des Wiener Thiergartens in Prater
Duration	3 min.

Compositional engagement with historical styles was widespread in 19th century music. The revival of Johann Sebastian Bach's works brought with it an increased interest in traditional forms and their potential for further development. Schönberg's baroque-like string movements "Gavotte and Musette (in the Old Style)" of 1897 were likely inspired by this trend, perhaps in the context of the counterpoint lessons he received from his friend Alexander Zemlinsky. The Gavotte follows the traditional patterns of the baroque dance in terms of tempo, time signature and the characteristic half-measure upbeat. The melody, with its leaps of fourths and fifths, is simple in its makeup. In the middle section, contrapuntal procedures in the manner of a "spiritual exercise" (Schönberg) are employed, culminating in a fourfold stretto that commences in measures 16-17. Schönberg's gaze, however, is not only turned backwards. In the aforementioned stretto, he creates an experimental texture that does not exist in actual baroque gavottes. The piece follows a ternary A-B-A' form, since the concluding measures are based on the first section. In the Musette, contrapuntal technique recedes into the background. Here, Schönberg deals for the first time with formative methods that later, in a much more developed form, would be defined as "tone-color composition" (something similar also occurs in the String Quartet in D Major, written in the same year). A musette is harmonically static, like a drone. In this compositional study, Schönberg strives for a variety of sound in the divided string section. The first sixteen measures simply dwell on an E major chord, with the use of pizzicato, mutes, and arco creating differentiated sonorities. After a brief interruption of this static phase, the conclusion of the piece once again utilizes repeated E major chords interwoven with melodic lines. Much later in his career, Schönberg would revisit Baroque forms in the twelve-tone Suite for Piano, op. 25 and the tonal Suite in the Old Style (Suite im alten Stile), although under very different circumstances.