



PIANO
CLASSICS

J.S. BACH

KEYBOARD WORKS

VOLUME 3

BACH
French Suites

Yuan Sheng *piano*

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH 1685-1750

French Suite No.1 in D minor BWV812

1	I.	Allemande	4'05
2	II.	Courante	2'12
3	III.	Sarabande	3'26
4	IV.	Menuet I & II	3'21
5	V.	Gigue	2'50

French Suite No.2 in C minor BWV813

6	I.	Allemande	2'57
7	II.	Courante	2'12
8	III.	Sarabande	3'24
9	IV.	Air	1'34
10	V.	Menuet I & II	3'21
11	VI.	Gigue	2'23

French Suite No.3 in B minor BWV814

12	I.	Allemande	3'22
13	II.	Courante	2'20
14	III.	Sarabande	3'21
15	IV.	Angloise	1'49
16	V.	Menuet and Trio	3'34
17	VI.	Gigue	1'55

French Suite No.4 in E flat BWV815

18	I.	Allemande	3'17
19	II.	Courante	1'49
20	III.	Sarabande	3'01
21	IV.	Gavotte	1'33
22	V.	Menuet	0'53
23	VI.	Air	1'40
24	VII.	Gigue	2'17

French Suite No.5 in G BWV816

25	I.	Allemande	3'07
26	II.	Courante	1'41
27	III.	Sarabande	5'06
28	IV.	Gavotte	1'17
29	V.	Bourée	1'24
30	VI.	Loure	1'44
31	VII.	Gigue	3'27

French Suite No.6 in E BWV817

32	I.	Allemande	3'10
33	II.	Courante	1'44
34	III.	Sarabande	3'46
35	IV.	Gavotte	1'13
36	V.	Polonaise	1'27
37	VI.	Menuet	1'16
38	VII.	Bourée	1'36
39	VIII.	Gigue	2'29

Suite in A minor BWV818

40	I.	Allemande	3'39
41	II.	Courante	1'24
42	III.	Sarabande simple	3'23
43	IV.	Sarabande double	2'34
44	V.	Gigue	2'31

Suite in E flat BWV819

45	I.	Allemande	3'09
46	II.	Courante	2'06
47	III.	Sarabande	4'45
48	IV.	Bourrée	1'46
49	V.	Menuet I & II	3'05

INTRODUCTION

From 1717-23 Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) enjoyed the highest title he ever achieved, Court Music Director to Leopold, Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen. Although the prince was a Calvinist, Bach the committed Lutheran nonetheless later wrote of being happier working for Prince Leopold (“who both loved and knew music”) than in any other position.

Because the court was Calvinist (or “Reformed”), there was no elaborate music in the palace chapel, so Bach focused his compositional energies on secular, mainly instrumental music, producing the Brandenburg Concertos, the unaccompanied violin music, and much keyboard music, including the *Clavierbüchlein* for Wilhelm Friedemann (his eldest son), the 2- and 3-part Inventions, the English Suites, Book I of the Well-Tempered Clavier, and other works.

Despite Bach’s later fond recollections, the situation in Cöthen over time became increasingly less to his liking, leading him to apply for the position of Cantor of St. Thomas’s School in Leipzig. Although Bach applied late and had to deal with a political divide on the Town Council over the duties of the Cantor, he ultimately was appointed in 1723. And when he moved with his family to Leipzig in May, 1723, the “four wagons loaded with household goods” cited in a newspaper account of Bach’s arrival must have included the *Clavierbüchlein* or music notebook of Anna Magdalena Bach. Begun in 1722, it contained early versions of the French Suites 1-5, although whether Suite 6 was included is not certain.

Anna Magdalena was Bach’s second wife, a notable singer who had been the second highest paid musician in Cöthen, after Bach himself. They had married less than a year before, and the *Clavierbüchlein* (and thus the

suites in it) was likely a present from husband to wife. The French Suites in this source are the only autograph copies of the music that exist. However, judging from the style and appearance of the notation, Suites 1 and probably 4 are fair copies based on a now lost original and Suites 2, 3, and a few bars of 5 (completed probably in early 1724) appear to be drafts of new works. Possibly, French Suite 6 and two other suites that are found in later sources mixed in with the French Suites – BWV 818 in A minor and, less likely, BWV 819 in E-flat major – were also written into the 1722 *Clavierbüchlein*. However, this cannot be proven, since two-thirds of the volume have not survived. In Leipzig, Bach would continue to revise these works, finish the Suite 5 and, if not already composed, add Suite 6.

None of the pre-Leipzig keyboard works mentioned above were composed for publication (as were the later keyboard Partitas). Rather, their purpose was pedagogical, for Bach was building his own repertory of teaching pieces, music that would provide his pupils good examples of all genres and styles of keyboard music. The need for this was real, since Bach had developed an outstanding reputation as a teacher already with his first professional position in Arnstadt (1703-7); indeed, students were known to follow him from one location to another. Although Bach’s early pedagogical work is not well documented, it is clear that when he settled in Leipzig his teaching activity exploded. Moreover, he followed a curriculum for this instruction that was later described by the son of Heinrich Nicolaus Gerber, a Bach student for two years beginning in 1724:

At the first lesson he [Bach] set the Inventions before him [H. N. Gerber] When he had studied these through to Bach’s satisfaction, there followed a series of suites, then The Well-Tempered Clavier.

Given the known chronology of these works, the “suites” must have been primarily what we now call the English Suites (completed by about 1715) and the French Suites, and perhaps also BWV 818 and 819.

This music was propagated in the 18th century exclusively in hand-written copies, the earliest ones being made by students and members of his family, and likely by Bach himself. The surviving manuscripts containing the French Suites, in particular, document a process of continuing revision that makes clear that Bach did not consider them to be pieces having a final form. Thus, various versions of the pieces show many variations: two eighth-notes on the same pitch are turned into a quarter-note (or vice versa); melodic thirds are filled in with passing notes; ornaments, mainly trills and appoggiaturas not found in Anna Magdalena Bach’s 1722 *Clavierbüchlein*, are added; and bass lines are modified. Sometimes entire passages are scratched out and rewritten, examples being the endings of the Courante of French Suite 2 (transmitted in five different versions!), the Menuet of French Suite 3, and the Sarabande of French Suite 5. Finally, entire movements--especially menuets or even complete suites--are added or subtracted in different sources or placed in different order.

The existence of all these types of variants among the oldest sources preserving the French Suites presents a formidable challenge to both editors and performers, who must then make decisions about which readings of a particular suite to publish or to perform. But there is no single, definitive solution.

THE “ENGLISH” VERSUS THE “FRENCH” SUITES

Although a fuller discussion of the English Suites must be reserved for the recording of those works (the next release in this series), some comparisons between them and the French Suites are useful here, not least because there are connections between their manuscript traditions and pedagogical function.

The obvious first question concerns the familiar designations “English” and “French,” since there is nothing English about the English Suites and the French Suites are less French than the English Suites, having many Italian features (discussed below). Regarding the national titles, Johann Nicholas Forkel (1749-1818), who was in close touch with Bach’s sons and published the first book-length biography of Bach in 1802, speaks of the

Six large suites, consisting of preludes, allemandes, courantes, sarabands, gigue, etc. They are known by the name of the English Suites because the composer made them for an Englishman of rank but then of

six little suites, consisting of allemandes, courantes, etc. They are generally called French Suites because they are written in the French taste. By design the composer is here less learned than in his other suites, and has mostly used a pleasing, more predominant melody. In particular the fifth suite deserves to be noticed on this account, in which all the pieces are of the smoothest melody; just as in the last gigue none are used but consonant intervals, especially sixths and thirds.

There is no evidence Bach himself used the terms “English” and “French,” which do not appear in *any* of the early manuscript sources, although there is evidence that these titles were used in the Bach circle. The oldest documented

use of these terms appears in the preface to a collection of keyboard pieces collected and published (Berlin, 1762) by Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, who, although not a student of Bach, was close to the Bach circle; he speaks of “the six French Suites by the late Capellmeister Bach.” In 1783, in a catalog of the music collection of the Prussian princess Anna Amalia, interestingly under the heading “The Theater” (with which dance was associated), there is listed “Six English and Six French Suites for Clavier” by Bach. Nonetheless, the designation of the English Suites as “large suites” and the French Suites as “small suites,” first propagated by Forkel’s biography, is commonly found without the national terms. Although today “English” and “French” are the usual identifying titles, they seem to have been normalized only in the 19th century, especially through the publication of Czerny’s edition of the suites (1840).

The most obvious musical difference between the English and French Suites is that the former all have extended preludes, whereas the French Suites lack them. An exceptional situation is French Suite 6, which in the copy made by Heinrich Nicholas Gerber (1725) carries the title “Suite 6ta avec Prelude,” the prelude being in fact the E major Prelude from Book I of the Well-Tempered Clavier (1722). (Similarly, a version of Suite 6 of uncertain origin, BWV 815a, has a prelude.) This reminds us that a modern performer should feel free to precede a performance of any of the French suites with an improvised or composed prelude, which would correspond to a well-established baroque performance practice.

Another difference between the French and English Suites is in internal organization. The English Suites (like the six Suites for Cello, BWV 1007-12) uniformly consist of six movement-types (prelude, allemande, courante, sarabande, two additional dance movements of the same genre, and gigue),

not counting the presence of a variant or second example of a given type. The French Suites continue to adhere to the framework of the four core dances--allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue--but the alternative dances placed between sarabande and gigue are more varied. To be sure, the bourrée, gavotte, and menuet are found in both sets, with only the Passepieds of English Suite 5 not finding an echo in the French Suites. However, Bach introduces new types of alternatives into the latter: air (Suites 2 and 4), anglaise (Suite 3), loure (Suite 5), and polonaise (Suite 6).

EARLY MANUSCRIPT SOURCES FOR THE FRENCH SUITES

As stated above, the extant sources of the French Suites from Bach’s time make clear that these works were in a constant state of evolution. However, since all the original sources have not survived, the precise relationship of one extant source to another cannot be established; rather, one must postulate the existence of sources before the oldest surviving source (the 1722 *Clavierbüchlein* for Anna Magdalena Bach), as well as many lost intermediate copies that were the models for other extant manuscripts. Moreover, early versions of the French Suites were apparently copied late in Bach’s life. Bach’s attitude towards the French Suites seems to have been very different from that towards the Partitas, which took essentially definitive, published form in the years 1726-31 (minor post-publication corrections notwithstanding).

It is worth briefly considering the principal sources available to editors and performers of the French Suites, since this would help performers in their evaluation of editions and open up the possibilities of choice in matters of the musical text they wish to perform.

The earliest surviving manuscript, as noted above, is the 1722 *Clavierbüchlein* of Anna Magdalena Bach, which preserves early versions of French Suites 1-5. Unfortunately, only about a third of the notebook survives, and missing are the allemande, the opening 12 bars of the courante, and the end of the gigue of Suite 1; the allemande, the first part of the courante, and most of the gigue of Suite 2; and the courante, sarabande and opening of the gavotte (in later sources called anglaise) of Suite 3, for which Bach later in the manuscript penned a menuet and a menuet-trio. Only Suites 4 and 5 are preserved complete (Suite 6 being lost or not yet composed). Moreover, the writing suggests that only Suite 1 (and possibly the beginning of Suite 4) is a fair copy, i.e., based on an earlier compositional draft, whereas most of the other suites seem to be still in their compositional stage. The suites were probably copied in stages into the *Clavierbüchlein* over the period 1722-24.

A very important but complicated source with French Suites 1-4 and BWV 818 and 819 (plus an alternative allemande for the latter, BWV 819a/1) was begun about the same time as the *Clavierbüchlein* of 1722. The unspecified copyist, originally designated "Anonymous 5," has been identified by Andrew Talle as Bernhard Christian Kayser (1705-58). Kayser studied with Bach in both Cöthen and Leipzig between ca. 1717 and 1725, apparently becoming one of the composer's closest associates; indeed, his handwriting was originally thought to be Bach's.

According to Marianne Helms, the manuscript was created in four stages:

1. Early versions (some perhaps even antedating the 1722 *Clavierbüchlein*) of Suites 1, 2, and 3 (the last without Menuet and Trio), plus BWV 818, were entered. (BWV 818 has another version, BWV 818a, that has a primitive

but extended prelude but is transmitted completely apart from sources containing the French Suites.)

2. By 1723, revised endings of the allemande and courante of Suite 2 were pasted over the original.

3. After 1725, the Suite BWV 819, Suite 4 (without menuet), and the menuets of Suite 3 were added.

4. Ca. 1731, the allemande BWV 819a/1 was inserted between the allemande and courante of BWV 819 and the menuet of Suite 4 added.

Although, as indicated, revisions already occurred in course of copying the manuscript, there then ensued a further, substantial process of revision, so that scholars recognize two layers of musical text in this manuscript, original (including early modifications cited) and revised, and treat them as if they represent two separate sources.

Another source associated with Anna Magdalena Bach is her *Clavierbüchlein* of 1725, which contains later, i.e., revised, versions of Suites 1 and 2 (the latter incomplete after m. 18 of the sarabande) in her hand. Given that Suite 1 does not appear until p. 86 (Suite 2 breaks off at p. 100, with no space to complete it), it is possible that the copying was done a few years after the beginning of the notebook; the musical texts represent revisions of the 1722 originals, but not the last revisions of the works.

There remain three other sources of particular significance. The first, a set of copies of individual suites, was made in 1725 by Bach's student Heinrich Nicholas Gerber (1702-75), who was in Leipzig from 1724 to 1727. Gerber's collection is the only source described thus far that contains all six French

Suites, plus BWV 818 and 819. However, indicative of the complexity of dealing with the sources, the suites do not follow the now-usual ordering and two suites are numbered “6”:

Gerber’s Numbering:	Suite:
1.	BWV 812 [French Suite 1]
2.	BWV 818
3.	BWV 819
4.	BWV 814 [French Suite 3]
5.	BWV 813 [French Suite 2]
6.	BWV 815 French Suite 4]
8.	BWV 816 [French Suite 5]
6. [sic]	BWV 817 [French Suite 6 with the prelude BWV 854/1]

Another Bach pupil, Johann Caspar Vogler (1696-1763), working perhaps as early as 1724-5 but no later than 1729, copied the French Suites (except Suite 3) plus BWV 819. Vogler, who began studying with Bach in Arnstadt, continued with him from 1710 to 1715 in Weimar before coming to Leipzig.

Finally, there is the copy made by Bach’s student and son-in-law Johann Christoph Altnickol (1719-59). This is the only extant manuscript of the period containing all six French Suites (but no other suites) in the now customary order. It is presumed that the copying was done sometime after Altnickol arrived in Leipzig to enroll in the University in 1744--the early 1750s has been proposed--which would make this the latest of all the sources surveyed here. Nonetheless, it preserves many early readings, and so the lost model from which it was copied likely antedated Bach’s autographs found in the 1722 *Clavierbüchlein*.

THE PUBLICATION HISTORY OF THE FRENCH SUITES

Early Editions

The French Suites certainly circulated in the 18th century, especially in central and northern Germany. In addition to manuscript copies of the entire set, single suites, and isolated movements, individual pieces were published in instructional books by Christoph Nichelmann (Danzig, 1755), Johann Phlipp Kirnberger (Berlin, 1783), and Muzio Clementi (London, 1801) and in anthologies (Amsterdam, before 1767). However, the suites were not published as a set until 1802-3, and then without the rubric “French Suite,” when they appeared serially in a “Complete Works of Bach” edition presided over by Bach’s first biographer, Johann Nicolaus Forkel. This was issued first in Leipzig by Hoffmeister & Kühnel, and subsequently reprinted there, unaltered, by A. Kühnel (1805-13) and C.F. Peters (1814-51). The musical text of this edition was not based on any of the sources described above but rather on a (now lost) manuscript in Forkel’s possession. An error propagated throughout is the omission of m. 8 of the bourrée of Suite 5.

The first practical edition---with fingerings, other performance indications, and even metronome settings---was that by Carl Czerny in a new series of Bach’s “Complete [keyboard] Works” (Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 1837-65). The French Suites appeared in Vol. 7 (1840), with the overall title “VI. kleine Suiten, gewöhnlich die französische genannt” (6 Suites, customarily called the French [Suites]); the individual suites were also published separately. It is clear that the musical text itself was primarily based on the previously published editions, since the same measure cited above is missing.

This edition, in turn, became the source for two others published in Paris (Launer: 1840-49 and Richault: 1840-62) and one in London (c. 1844). Moreover, Czerny’s edition continued to be reissued through the 19th century and even into the 20th.

In 1866-7 C. F. Peter's released yet another new edition of its "complete works" of Bach, edited by Carl Czerny and others. In addition to the canonical six suites, it included the first publication of the suites BWV 818, 818a, 819, and the substitute allemande BWV 819a/1. The prelude BWV 815a/1 was first published in a supplement to the edition in 1880.

In 1850, inspired by an idea going back to Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47), the Bach Gesellschaft (Bach Society) was founded by Robert Schumann (1810-56), a small group of scholars and musicians, and the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel. The stated goal: to produce the first true critical and complete edition of Bach's works. Although Mendelssohn died before the Society was founded and Schumann's involvement was shortened by illness and death, the Bach Gesellschaft did in fact produce between 1851 and 1900---in clean editions (i.e., without editorial markings) and reflecting the then-current state of Bach scholarship---sixty-six volumes that contained essentially all the works thought to be by Bach.

Not surprisingly, however, given the incomplete and complicated source situation, the edition of the French Suites proved problematic. The editor Franz Espagne apparently underestimated the difficulties and neglected important sources, which resulted in his edition, volume 13.2 (1865) of the Bach Gesellschaft series, being the only one without a scholarly introduction. A completely new edition of the French (and English) Suites was then seen to be in order, which finally appeared as Vol. 45.1 of the Bach Gesellschaft series (1895), this time edited by Ernst Naumann. The works are headed with the title *Sechs große Suiten, genannt Englische Suiten; Sechs kleine Suiten, genannt Französische Suiten*. This version of the suites remained for decades the standard one and remains readily available in reprints and on the internet today.

Modern Editions

The intensive researches undertaken for the Bach Gesellschaft edition resulted in a greatly widened view of Bach's music and the sources that preserve them. But it soon became clear that there was more work to be done. In the mid-twentieth century, German scholars, notably Alfred Dürr and Georg von Dadelsen, undertook a more modern, scientific evaluation of the sources, considering things like handwriting and watermarks, which led to a radically revised chronology of Bach's works, as well as the addition and deletion of works to the Bach canon. The need for a new edition was apparent, and so the Neue-Bach-Ausgabe (New Bach Edition) was undertaken under the joint sponsorship of the Johann Sebastian Bach Institute in Göttingen and the Bach Archive in Leipzig. The result was the publication by Bärenreiter of 104 volumes of music between 1954 and 2007, plus nearly as many volumes of Kritische Bericht (Critical Report) providing minutely detailed information about the sources, dating, copyists, previously published editions, and editorial procedures. The volumes of the Neue Bach Ausgabe are organized into "Series" denoting musical categories (e.g., Series I: cantatas; Series V: keyboard music). The French Suites, edited by Alfred Dürr, appeared in 1980 as Vol. 8 within Series V. Because of Bach's constant revision of the French Suites, Dürr chose to publish them in two versions, an "Early Version" and a "Later Version." However, since the most authoritative early source, Anna Magdalena's *Clavierbüchlein* of 1722, is incomplete, he relies primarily on the later manuscript copied by Altnickol that, as pointed out above, contains readings that may be even earlier than those in the 1722 *Clavierbüchlein*. Dürr's "Later Version" is an amalgam of several revised versions, reflecting their more extensive ornamentation.

Because of the lack of consistency among the sources, keyboardists wishing to play these works can also choose from later modern scholarly editions, none of which agree completely with each other, yet all of which can claim legitimacy.

One such edition, with detailed notes, is by Richard Jones (ABRSM: London, 1985). Jones relies primarily on the incomplete autograph of the French Suites in the *Clavierbüchlein* of Anna Magdalena Bach of 1722 but “adopts, in all cases of revision, the later or latest reading.”

The most recent edition consulted for this essay is by Ullrich Scheideler ([Munich]: Henle, 2017), who, while utilizing almost twenty sources (including some from the early 19th century), bases his edition primarily on Vogler’s copy and Anna Magdalena Bach’s *Clavierbüchlein* of 1725. Since neither of these sources contain Suite 3, Scheideler bases his musical text of that work primarily on Kayser’s copy and two other later sources. Both Jones and Scheideler provide alternate readings for sections of movements that underwent substantial revision, giving the modern performer further options.

For this recording, the Vienna Urtext Edition by Hans-Christian Müller (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1983) has been employed. The editor, seeking a “final version” of the suites, relies primarily on Anna Magdalena Bach’s 1725 *Clavierbüchlein*, the later layer of the Kayser/Anonymous 5 revisions, and the Vogler and Gerber manuscripts, as well as other, later sources.

THE MUSIC OF THE FRENCH SUITES

One of the differences between the English Suites and the French Suites is that the latter are more stylistically varied within the genres they include. For that reason, it seems useful to treat the music of the French Suites not

suite-by-suite, but rather by movement-genres, beginning with the four core movement types---allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue---and concluding with the optional genres that are placed between sarabande and gigue.

The Allemandes

The allemandes of Suites 1, 2, 4, and 5 exhibit better than the others the adaption of the freely contrapuntal lute style to the keyboard, a style known as the *stile brisé* (broken style) because of the way melodic lines are broken into pieces, voices drop in and out, and chords are played as successive notes. Thus, these pieces are directly linked to the style of 17th-century French lutenists (and then harpsichordists) who created a new kind of allemande as an instrumental genre of moderate tempo and duple (usually 4/4) meter, albeit one with no apparent connection to an actual dance.

The use of a pedal point (a sounding or implied bass note, held out or repeated, usually against changing harmony) at the opening of sections is a feature of many allemandes by Bach. We find this technique, another style feature that goes back to the 17th-century lutenists, employed in the allemandes of Suites 1, 4, and 6, but it is also encountered, among other places, in the closing bars of both sections of the allemande of BWV 818.

The dimensions of these movements are modest and the sections of the binary form (“A” and “B”) tend to be balanced: the allemandes of Suites 1, 3, 4, and 5 have equal sections of 12, 12, 10, and 12 measures, respectively. When the sections are not of equal length, the B section is slightly longer: the allemande of Suite 2 is 8+10 mm. and that of Suite 6 is 12+16 mm. There is no reason that the sections must be in even numbers of measures, since

allemandes of this period have no relationship to dancing, and in fact many allemandes by French composers have an odd number of measures in their sections or entire length.

The allemandes of Suite 4 and 6 are in a somewhat different style from the others. The opening of the former begins in the style of a harmonic, broken-chord prelude such as opens Book I of the Well-Tempered Clavier. Here the single line of the right hand in 16th notes is accompanied by slower-moving bass and tenor voices until m. 6, when the *stile brisé* kicks in, with soprano and alto voices in constant alternation over a now single left-hand bass line for the rest of the piece (save for the opening of the B section). The allemande of Suite 6, on the other hand, looks like the score of an Italianate solo violin sonata with bass line. Indeed, it is in two voices throughout and has many figurations that suggest violin *bariolage* technique, with implied polyphony generated by constantly repeated pitches alternating with a moving line.

All of the allemandes have, in whole or part, a homophonic feeling to them because the top voice is the most consistently melodic. However, the allemande of Suite 3 is unique in that it begins in imitation between two voices and continues its contrapuntal conversation throughout. The texture and style are not unlike the 2-part inventions that would have been studied by pupils of Bach before they took up the English and French Suites.

The Courantes

One of the ironies associated with the French Suites is that they are less “French” than the English Suites: despite the use of the French title “Courante,” four of the six pieces so designated in the French Suites are in

fact Italianate correntes. Because the musical differences between the two genres are so great, one wonders why Bach chose to misname the correntes in the French Suites.

The French courante was considered from at least the last third of the 17th century to be the most noble, serious, and elevated of all the dances. A dance manual published in Leipzig in 1717 by Gottfried Taubert says that the courante remains the foundation of all good dancing and thus is still taught, even though it had lost popularity as a court and ballroom dance. The music of the courante generally moves in steady half-note beats in 3/2 meter or sometimes in dotted-half note beats in 6/4; the metrical feeling of a specific measure can be inferred from the notation rather than meter signature. Some courantes have the compound meter signature 3/2 6/4 to signify this ambiguity.

The courantes of Suites 1 and 3 are, in fact, in 3/2 and 6/4 meter, respectively. That of Suite 1 moves straightforwardly in 3/2 measures save for the last bar of both sections of the binary form, which are rhythmically (and traditionally) in 6/4. This metrical consistency is typical of Bach, but not French composers, who infuse much metrical contrast or ambiguity into their courantes, constantly switching between 3/2 and 6/4 feeling. There is some of this in the courante of Suite 3, which for the most part is clearly in 6/4, as the meter signature indicates. However, 3/2 feeling is found not only in the penultimate measure of both sections, but also in mm. 17 and 24. In some measures, such as m. 4, and 23, the right hand feels in 3/2, the bass in 6/4. In BWV 818, the meter is 3/2, but the music moves in 6/4 except for the 3/2 feeling (supported by the beaming) in mm. 10f. just before the close of the “A” section.

The corrente, as its Italian spelling implies, is quite something else. It seems to have developed into a type of virtuoso violin piece in 17th-century Italy, in the process losing any connection with dancing. Consequently, keyboard correntes generally preserve the 2-voice homophonic texture of a violin plus bass accompaniment; indeed, these pieces could be played by solo violin and continuo (cello alone or with a harpsichord realizing the implied figured bass that characterizes all baroque bass lines). The violinistic character also suggests that the lively tempo should not be so fast that violin-like articulation---essentially alternating stressed (“good”) and unstressed (“bad”) notes corresponding to down- and upbow---cannot be imitated on the keyboard.

It is interesting that, although a two-voice texture is primary in all four correntes of the French Suites, there are moments where a third voice appears, usually in the B section of the binary form. These brief instances of polyphonic writing could be accommodated by multiple-stopping on a violin, further evidence of the string-like character of the corrente. There are also instances where the texture is expanded vertically into chords (also negotiable on a violin): in Suite 2, m. 24 and 57; Suite 5, mm. 1, 17; Suite 6, mm. 10f., 16, and 32.

The Sarabandes

The sarabande, the third “core” dance of the “classic” baroque keyboard suite is characterized by binary form, 4-bar phrases (corresponding to the phraseology of the dance choreography), and frequently, but not always, a second beat given stress by elongation, thickening of texture, and/or change of harmony. Although the quarter-note beat of the sarabande was not quite as slow as the half-note beat of the French courante, it should move in a very deliberate tempo, although not so slow that the arc of the 4-bar phrases is lost.

The sarabande of Suite 1 is unusual for its rich, 4-voice, homophonic texture that at times seems to suggest a chorale setting; the repeated bass notes of the first two bars (as also mm. 17, 19, 21) produce a pedal point effect that, as noted above, is not rare in Bach’s dance-titled pieces. Moreover, whereas the A section and the last eight bars of the B section are essentially in an SATB texture, the first eight bars of the B section mainly have the bass carrying the melody and the right hand accompanying in 3-voice chords. Mild stresses on the second beat (note the half notes in the melody) occur in several measures.

In Suite 2, the sarabande features a highly stylized (i.e., not very dance-like) cantabile melody largely in 16th-notes with a two-voice, left-hand accompaniment moving steadily in eighths. Fewer second beats are emphasized than in the previous sarabande and in fact it is the third beat (usually approached by leap and tied over into the next bar) that is the locus of expressive intensity.

The sarabande of Suite 3 has something of the cantabile quality of the previous sarabande, but much more rhythmic variety. This variety is reflected in its characteristic 4-bar phrases---mm. 1-4 are slow moving, whereas mm. 5-8 move largely in 16th-notes; in the B section, mm. 9-12 are dominated by the right-hand melody (but note the hint of the opening theme in the left hand), whereas mm. 13-16 have an active left-hand moving in 16ths; in mm. 17-20 the 16th-note passage work is equally divided between treble and bass; and, finally, in mm. 21-24, the opening melody is in the bass, accompanied by the right hand with 16th-note figurations. In this movement, treble and bass are of more or less equal rhythmic complexity and importance; the middle voice, which never has 16th-note passages, serves to fill out the harmony and texture as needed. There are few second-beat stresses and the natural accents usually fall on the downbeat.

With the fourth French Suite, we finally have a sarabande that regularly stresses the second beat (18 out of 24 bars), although the stress is usually in one hand, not both. The texture is basically treble-bass (but with the opening melodic figures nonetheless frequently sounding in the left hand), yet the constantly changing number of voices sounding at a given moment remind us of the *stile brisé*.


The sarabandes of the fifth and sixth French Suites are the most French of the sarabandes in style. Replete with dotted-rhythms and French ornaments, with only a few hints of Italian-style embellishment, both works have the dignity and seriousness that are hallmarks of the French sarabande. Texturally, however, the sarabandes are quite different, with that of the fifth Suite being in three-voice polyphony, whereas that of the sixth Suite is a good example of the *stile brisé*, with chords of three to five voices connected by a single moving voice. Both movements also frequently and strongly stress the second beats of measures, especially in the sixth Suite. And whereas the sarabande of the fifth French Suite is transparent, regular, even predictable, that of the sixth is full of grandeur and regal nobility.

BWV 818 is unique here in having two sarabande movements: one "simple" and one a "double," i.e., variation. The former shows the strong influence of the *stile brisé* in both hands, but in alternating fashion (compare the openings of the "A" and "B" sections). The double, were it not otherwise labeled, could be taken for a *corrente*, with its treble-bass, violin-continuo texture. The sarabande of BWV 819, on the other hand, is characterized by Italianate trio texture (two treble voices plus bass), slow harmonic rhythm, and French ornamentation.

The Giges

In the keyboard Partitas of the later *Clavierübung*, Part I, Bach set the five giges in different meters. That is not the case here, one indication that Bach did not necessarily compose them with a view to producing a formally organized series of suites. Rather, the giges of Suites 2 and 3 have the same meter: 3/8; the giges of Suites 4 and 6 are in 6/8; and finally, the gigue of Suite 1 is in C , and that of Suite 5 is in 12/16.

The choice of meters, however, indicates Bach's awareness of the stylistic differences between the French gigue and the Italian giga, even if he uses the title "Gigue" for all. Thus, the triplet feeling in 6/8 and 12/16 points directly to the Italian style, whereas 3/8 is more typically French, as is the cut-time signature. However, in all of his giges in the French Suites, Bach adopts the French characteristic of an imitative opening. Moreover, with the exception of Suite 3, the "B" sections open similarly to the "A" sections, but with the subject inverted.

The most French of the giges here are those of Suites 1 and 2. In the latter, the sautillant rhythm  and the simple two-voice texture are features also shared with the *canarie*, a somewhat faster dance that also has a balanced phrase structure less evident here. Of much thicker texture, due both to the use of a third and even fourth voice as well as very characteristic French rhythms--dotted figures and scalar ornaments of (usually) three 32nd notes--is the gigue of Suite 1, which reminds one of the opening section (usually also in cut time) of a French overture movement.

The Menuets

Indicative of the unsettled nature of the French Suites is the variability of what occurs between sarabande and gigue. Jones refers to these movements as

“Intermezzi” and other scholars refer to them as “Galanteries.” Of such pieces, the type most frequently found in the French Suites is the menuet.

The menuet was the most popular of all baroque dances, one whose history extends even into the 19th century. It was associated with courtliness, virtue, and moderation. The basic menuet dance step requires six beats, equivalent to two measures of music in 3/4 (rarely 3/8) meter, so major metrical stresses normally occur on odd-numbered measures, not on every measure.

This also means that sections of a menuet’s binary form are always an even number of measures in length. And often these sections are in a low-number ratio to one another in length, such as 1:2 (Suite 1, Menuet 1; Suite 2, Menuet 2; Suite 3, Menuet 2 and Suite 6); this reflects Bach’s interest in proportionality, which is found throughout his works, especially those that he considered finished.

However, various types of syncopation and cross-accents are possible in both choreography and music, lending rhythmic variety to both. The menuets of the French Suites do not indulge much in rhythmic surprises, but see, for example, how in Suite 4 the normally weak second beat of mm. 10 and 12---which are weak measures in a menuet context---is unexpectedly stressed.

Of the non-core movements of the French Suites, the menuets present the most problems, since of the eight menuets that appear in various sources, only two, possibly three, appear to have been part of the original version of the suites. Moreover, Suite 5 appears never to have included a menuet.

Suite 1 presents the simplest case, since the two menuets were part of the work from the earliest preserved sources on. This six movement work therefore continues the form of the English Suites (except for the lack of

a prelude), which had two non-core dances of the same type between sarabande and gigue.

The original version of Suite 2 in the 1722 *Clavierbüchlein* was without menuets, although a *Menuet. del del Sigre J S Bach* was added by Anna Magdalena on pp. 46f. after Suite 5 and some other pieces; an autograph note on p. 10 between the air and the gigue of Suite 2 says “The menuet in C minor placed almost at the end [of the notebook] belongs here.” Later, a second menuet was added, but this is found only in Vogler’s copy, where the piece bears the title “Menuet 2”.

The menuet and trio of Suite 3 were not part of the early version of the work, but were written by Bach himself into the 1722 *Clavierbüchlein* immediately after the just-cited menuet intended for Suite 2, probably in 1723. However, there is no autograph evidence indicating that this pair of movements belongs to the suite and, if so, where it should be positioned. In Kayser’s copy they were added on a loose page at the beginning of the manuscript with no association indicated, and Gerber positions the two pieces at the end of Suite 3 in his copy. However, most modern editors follow Altnickol, who alone places them between gavotte and gigue.

The single menuet in Suite 4 was apparently not part of the original suite, but also was added later. Again, there is some question about where the piece belonged within the suite. Thus, Kayser places it after the gavotte, whereas Vogler locates it between air and gigue. (In the related version of uncertain origin, BWV 815a, a second gavotte replaces the menuet.) And, to complicate things further, Gerber and Altnickol omit the menuet altogether.

But most puzzling of all is the menuet of Suite 6. This piece is found in three of the six principal sources for the French Suites, all later, non-autograph copies. In these, the menuet is placed last among the suite’s eight

movements, a fact that disturbed later copyists and editors, who sometimes placed it sixth (as in the Bach Gesellschaft edition) or seventh in sequence. Gerber, on the other hand, refers to the polonaise of this suite as "Menuet. Poloinese." and the menuet as "Petit Menuet," suggesting that he considered the latter as the trio to the polonaise.

There is, therefore, no authoritative solution to the placement of the menuet, leaving the performer with several reasonable options. The ambiguity here, after all, is evidence of how freely a work like a suite might be treated by musicians of Bach's time. However, it was by no means unusual in the 18th century for a menuet to conclude a multi-movement work, whether it be a suite, concerto (such as the Brandenburg Concerto No. 1), or, later, even a symphony.

The Air

Although in the 17th century "air" ("ayre" in English usage) in both England and France denoted solo songs, usually of a light character, the term also was applied to simple song- and dance-like instrumental pieces. These were sometimes mixed in with dances in suites and existed also as stand-alone pieces of instrumental music within theatrical works.

Bach's first included airs in French Suites 2 and 4, and later in keyboard Partitas 4 and 6. The lively tempo of these pieces is indicated by their cut-time (or, in Partita 4, 2/4) meter!¹ Stylistically, the two airs in the French Suites are remarkably similar in their two-voice instrumental (rather than vocal) textures that incorporate occasional snatches of imitation. In sharp contrast is the famous "Air" from the third Orchestral Suite, BWV 1068, which harks back to the vocal origin of the genre. In none of these examples is there an obvious dance relationship.

Bach may have been inspired by the example of 17th-century French theatrical music and also François Couperin's keyboard works to employ airs in his suites, but, in fact, there was also a long history of such pieces in the suites of German composers that Bach could have known. Moreover, the titles "Air" and "Aria" are also found in the Möller Manuscript (c. 1704-7) and Andreas Bach Book (c.1705-13), sources containing music Bach came to know in his youth.

The Anglaise

The fourth movement of French Suite 3 is variously headed "Angloise" (Kayser), "Air angloise" (Gerber), and, representing the early version, "Gavotte" (Altnickol), the last a seeming misnomer, since gavottes begin on the half-bar. (The precise original title cannot be determined, since the opening page of this movement in Anna Magdalena's 1722 *Clavierbüchlein*, in her husband's hand, is among the lost material of that source.) The anglaise is in the tradition of the English country dance, which was taken up and transformed at the court of Louis XIV into the French *contredanse*. The rustic origin of this light-hearted dance is clearly alluded to in Bach's piece by the drone (bagpipe) effects in mm. 1-2 and 5-6. Thus, the work lends itself to a lively, not-too-refined manner of performance. One can also note that the form is a forward-looking rounded-binary form, with the opening music clearly returning, if varied, in m. 25.


The Bourrées

The bourrée, which appears in the French Suites 5 and 6, may have its origins in a French folk dance, but is well documented as a courtly genre from the time of Louis XIV. A lively dance, it incorporated leaps as well as steps

1. However, some sources, including Altnickol's copy, indicate C meter for the air of French Suite 2.

2. In Altnickol's copy, however, the bourrée is given the meter signature C. See also previous note.

and found a place not only at court balls, but in ballets and other musico-theatrical works.

Musically, the bourrée is in cut-time with a quarter-note upbeat² and a tempo range of moderate to fast (the beat being the half-note). Another characteristic is 4-bar phrases, but in fact the A section of the bourrée of French Suite 5, the B section of that of Suite 6, and the A section of that of BWV 819 have 10, 30, and 14 bars, respectively. A characteristic rhythm is the snappy  figure, with stress on the quarter, which is found in all these bourrées.

In the Scheideler's edition, there is a second bourrée in Suite 5 that is musically identical to the "Loure" found in some early-version sources; however, this so-titled "Bourrée II" is only transmitted in two sources from around 1800 that were copied by Bach's biographer Forkel and his circle. The movement will be treated below as a loure.



The Gavottes

The gavotte, although somewhat less energetic than the bourrée, shares its cut-time meter and 4-bar phrases. (Interesting, however, is that while the gavotte's musical phrases begin and end on the half-bar, the dance begins on the downbeat.) The gavottes of the French Suites 4, 5, and 6 follow these prescriptions, except that that of Suite 4 has a B section of 14 measures, an anomalous feature similar to that already encountered in the bourrées of French Suites 5 and 6.

As explained above (see The Anglaise), in Altnickol's copy the movement in cut-time after the sarabande of French Suite 3 is apparently mislabeled "Gavotte."

The Loure

The term "loure" in medieval France denoted a bagpipe and, by implication, a peasant instrument used to accompany rustic dances. This association apparently was still remembered in the *grand siècle*, given that a bagpipe tutor by J.M. Hotteterre includes a loure from Lully's *Alceste*.




Nonetheless, the 17th-century loure was considered to be a slow, majestic theatrical and ballroom dance (as implied by its 6/4 meter), although one having musical links with the French gigue: both dances utilize the *sautillant* rhythm--- in the loure,  in the gigue---and many writers characterize the loure as a slow gigue. Likewise, the French gigue (see that of French Suite 3), like the loure, characteristically begins with a short-long upbeat figure, employs dotted rhythms throughout, and has phrases of irregular length. Concerning the performance of loures, J. J. Quantz (1752), whose suggested tempo is ca. MM = 80 and who was the first writer to discuss overdotting, says that the dotted notes should be overdotted and the bow lifted after every quarter-note, whether dotted or not. Keyboardists can imitate the prescribed bowing by shortening the quarter-notes slightly. Since loure choreography involved two step-units per measure, there should be a feeling of two big beats per measure in musical performance.

Loures are rare in the music of Bach, the best-known being perhaps that in the third Violin Partita (BWV 1006). Moreover, it is not certain if Bach wanted to include one in the French Suites: although a loure was originally composed for French Suite 5 (appearing in Anna Magdalena's 1722 Clavierbüchlein and Altnickol's copy, and thus in Dürr's "Early Version" of the French Suites), it is absent from the other principal sources used by Dürr and Jones for their editions; Jones in fact includes it, but says it is optional. The music is found, however, in late manuscripts copied in part by Forkel, but here with the

puzzling title “Bourrée 2,” under which title Scheideler has chosen to include it in his edition.

The Polonaise

“Polonaise” is a French term that means “Polish”; during Bach’s professional career and beyond, the Electors of Saxony also ruled Poland, under the titles of King August II and then from 1733 August III, respectively. Poland was considered somewhat of a cultural backwater, yet the “barbaric beauty” of Polish folk music fascinated German musicians, notably G. P. Telemann, who spent many years there. Something of this country character comes through in the polonaise of French Suite 6, with the repeated notes in the implicit tenor voice producing a drone-like effect—bagpipes were an essential component of the Polish folk idiom.

The polonaise has its roots in the folk *polonez*, but developed into an aristocratic processional dance that gained popularity all over Europe—it was danced at the Dresden court by 1708, for example. Typical musical features, all found in Bach’s keyboard polonaise, include triple meter (3/4), downbeat beginning, cadences on second beats, and a set of common rhythmic patterns, such as , , and , that are employed to accent the beats corresponding to the longer notes. Bach’s later student Kirnberger, who had lived in Poland, described the polonaise tempo as slower than the menuet but faster than the sarabande. Words such as “martial,” “ceremonial,” “noble” are used to describe its character.

Regarding the unique designation “Menuet. Poloinese” in Gerber’s copy of Suite 6, see the section on The Menuets, above.³

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3. The author thanks Eva Farago, Joyce Lindorff, Dorothy Olsson, and Yuan Sheng for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

YUAN SHENG

Yuan Sheng has gained international recognition through his extensive performances in more than twenty countries. Mr. Sheng has performed in Carnegie Hall in New York, Cadogan Hall in London, Ford Performing Arts Center in Toronto, Seoul National Center for the Performing Arts as well as National Center for the Performing Arts, Forbidden City Concert Hall, Beijing Concert Hall in Beijing, and Shanghai Concert Hall in Shanghai, China. He has been heard and seen on WQXR in New York, WGBH in Boston, NPR in U.S.A., National Radio Station of Spain, National Radio Station of France, National Television of Poland, China Central TV, and Beijing Music Radio.

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