

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH AND  
ITALIAN NATIONAL MUSICAL STYLES  
AND GENRES ON THE MUSIC OF J.S.  
BACH: A PERFORMANCE DISSERTATION  
PROJECT

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of Music

The music of Johann Sebastian Bach was heavily influenced by the French and Italian styles of composition. The three recitals that comprise this dissertation trace these connections through programming of French and Italian Baroque works alongside the compositions of J.S. Bach. The recitals include original viola repertoire as well as viola transcriptions of works for the cello, viola da gamba, and violin. In addition to showing the connection between Bach and his extra-national contemporaries, these recitals expand the capabilities and repertoire of the viola as a solo instrument and ensemble instrument in Baroque repertoire.

The first recital features Italian Baroque composition paired with selections from the third, fourth, and sixth cello suites of J.S. Bach. The works of Marco Uccellini and Carlo Marino show the contrapuntal and rhythmic Italian aesthetic that Bach would mimic when writing comparable suites. In addition, his use of ornamentation

directly reflects the works on the program. The second recital consists of works from seventeenth century France. The instrumental and orchestral suites of Marin Marais are paired with Bach's fifth cello suite to show his adoption of the pure dance forms and harmonies that arise from the period. The final recital consists solely of works by J.S. Bach. The connections drawn in the first two recitals are heard in the performances of the repertoire of the third and final recital.

While the viola often seems like a neglected instrument during the Baroque period, these recitals, performed during the 2011-2012 school year, show that the versatile and improvisatory nature of Baroque instruments and composition give the viola a unique place in modern period performance. The viola suits the range and tone quality of many Baroque instruments, allowing for natural transcriptions and arrangements of many works. The viola da gamba suite of Marin Marais and cello suites of J.S. Bach display the viola as a solo instrument fully capable of achieving the expressive qualities of the original intentions. The ensemble work featured in the first two recitals show the viola as not just a member of the continuo section, but also as an independent melodic voice.

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH AND ITALIAN NATIONAL MUSICAL STYLES  
AND GENRES ON THE MUSIC OF J. S. BACH: A PERFORMANCE  
DISSERTATION PROJECT

By

Daniel W. McCarthy II

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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Doctor of Musical Arts  
2012

Advisory Committee:  
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## Preface

The recitals for this dissertation project feature musical instruments that are known as historical instruments. This means that the construction and physical setup of the instruments are similar to the construction and physical setup of instruments from the time period in which the music was first heard. In addition, we employed historical performance practices, using technical and interpretive approaches appropriate to the time period of the music. However, it is important to understand the issues surrounding true historical authenticity in Baroque music.

Musical instruments, tastes, and the technical demands of playing were constantly changing during the Baroque period (1600-1750). In addition, during this period of time, there was a marked lack of uniformity and standardization. This included various and diverse issues: pitch levels varied widely in different cities, and even among the churches, palaces, and coffeehouses within one city; violins, violas, and cellos had varying body lengths during much of the seventeenth century; and widely different rhythmic measurements existed for French *inegal*, consecutive eighth notes that were “swung.” Taking these various deviations into account, this performance is thus at best only an educated approximation of how the music might have sounded when it was first performed and in the decades that followed.

For example, in the first recital we performed on instruments that were set up, for the most part, in an early to mid eighteenth-century fashion. We also used eighteenth-century bows that are longer than bows used in the seventeenth century. Each of the bowed string instruments we played, in addition to being partly strung with pure gut strings, was also strung with one or more gut strings covered by a metal winding.

However, these “closed-wound” gut strings were not available until after 1660. Technically, because of these and other significant factors, our instruments are historically inauthentic for the performance for much of the music of Biagio Marini (1597-1666) and Marco Uccellini (1603-1680). Despite such compromises, it is still my hope that taking this approach brought our interpretations closer to the original intent of the composers and musicians who wrote and played this music. Ultimately, my goal was to have played this music in such a way as to help realize its true potential to move the listener.

## Foreword

During the course of my education as a violist, I have studied, analyzed, and performed transcriptions of J. S. Bach's solo suites for cello. As I have worked with different teachers, I have encountered vastly different approaches and interpretations, and have also explored many recordings, which vary even more. Somehow, I was never completely musically satisfied with the various approaches I encountered, and needed to discover my own simple, yet logical approach.

It is this quest which has led me to the study of historically informed performance as well as the study of baroque viola. For me, this has made it possible to play Bach's music in a way that brings cohesion, variety, and meaningful expression to the music, and I find I have many more choices in the overall interpretation. Delving into both the music and the writings before and around the time of Bach has helped me to gain an understanding of how harmony, texture, notation, and movement titles affect the approach one would take with music of that time. Even more significantly, using an eighteenth century bow on a baroque viola strung with low-tension gut strings helps elucidate the idiomatic relationship between the music and the instruments of the early eighteenth century. The variety of articulation, bowings, and different timbres that are available to me increases greatly with this instrument as opposed to a modern viola. Overall, the approach of historically informed performance has greatly expanded my own creative possibilities of interpreting the music.

The greatest insight into Bach's music that was gained came by studying and playing the music of his predecessors in France and Italy. Playing music in the

traditions of Lully and Corelli has helped me to understand the models that Bach would later use, expand upon, and synthesize. This led me to the creation of this dissertation project, which consists of three recitals designed to showcase the French and Italian traditions and how they influenced Bach. The intentional use of both period and modern violas for different pieces illustrates the differences between modern and Baroque string instruments, and also shows that a historically informed approach is possible on both period and modern instruments.

## Acknowledgements

This project, which was completed in two semesters, rather than the normal three, was only possible with the help and support of many people. First, I want to express my gratitude to my friends Caitlin McSherry, Nick Hodges, Sally Bruce, Emily Cantrell, Gözde Yasar, and Dan Walshaw for donating their time to learning and performing this music on period instruments. Second, I want to thank my viola professor and committee chair, Katherine Murdock. I've come a long way under her guidance in the past three years, and I would not have been able to take on this project were it not for the skills she imparted to me. Although she is a modern player, her musicality and ability as an artist made her adaptive enough to help me with what was musically unsuccessful. She also kept me honest with myself about the quality of my playing on the Baroque viola, which was invaluable. I also want to thank my girlfriend of seven years, Anchie Chen, who has always supported me pursuing this difficult field of historical performance. She has helped me keep perspective and given me advice that I've always relied on heavily.

Lastly and most importantly, I want to thank Dr. Kenneth Slowik. Two and a half years ago I met Dr. Slowik when I attended his seminar on string literature of the Baroque era. Dr. Slowik introduced me to an entire world of music making and sound that was outside of my experience, and enriched my world beyond what any other teacher has done. He provided me with the means to further my study of historical performance by awarding me with a fellowship to attend the Baroque Performance Institute at Oberlin Conservatory. Even after that summer, he has always happily given what time he could in the form of complimentary tickets to his performances,

allowing me to sit in on his recording sessions, instructing me on playing viola da gamba, and writing recommendation letters for me. In the fall of 2012, I will be the first Baroque violist to ever attend the historical performance program at the Juilliard School of Music, and it is an honor that I would never know if it weren't for the teaching and influence of Dr. Slowik.

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# Daniel McCarthy, Viola, Baroque, Viola

Caitlin McSherry, Baroque Violin  
Nick Hodges, Baroque Violin  
Gözde Yasar, Viola da Gamba, Cello  
Daniel Walshaw, Theorbo  
Jennifer Huang, Harpsichord

Recital I: The Italian Style  
December 16, 2011, 8:00 p.m.  
Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall

Sinfonia Sesto Tuono, Op. XXII  
Sinfonia Terzo Tuono, Op. XXII  
Sinfonia Primo Tuono, Op. XXII

Biario Marini  
(1594-1663)

Sonata sopra la Monica, Op. VIII  
Sonata sopra la Prosperina, Op. IV  
Sonata II, "detta la Luciminia contenta", Op. IV

Biagio Marini  
Marco Uccellini  
(c. 1603-1680)

Sonata in D Major  
*Grave*  
*Allegro*  
*Largo*  
*Grave*  
*Allegro*

Carlo Antonio Marino  
(1671-1705?)

- Intermission -

Sonata No. 5 in E Minor, RV 40  
*Largo*  
*Allegro*  
*Largo*  
*Allegro*

Antonio Vivaldi  
(1678-1741)

Selections from Suites BWV 1009, 1010, and 1012  
*Prelude* from Suite No. 6 in G (orig. D) Major, BWV 1012  
*Allemande* from Suite No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1009  
*Courante* from Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major, BWV 1010  
*Allemande* from Suite No. 6 in G (orig. D) Major, BWV 1012  
*Gigue* from Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major, BWV 1010

J. S. Bach  
(1685-1750)



# Daniel McCarthy, Viola, Baroque Viola

Caitlin McSherry, Violin  
Sally Bruce, Violin  
Emily Cantrell, Viola  
Gözde Yasar, Cello, Viola da Gamba  
Dan Walshaw, Theorbo  
Jennifer Huang, Harpsichord

Recital II: The French Style  
February 24, 2012, 8:00 p.m.  
Leah M. Smith Lecture Hall

Suite No. 1 in D Minor from *Pièces de Viole*, Book IV

Marin Marais  
(1656-1728)

*Prelude*  
*Allemande*  
*La Mignone*  
*Caprice*  
*Menuet*  
*Gigue*  
*Rondeau*

Selections from *Alcione*

Marin Marais

*Overture*  
*Air des faunes et des dryads*  
*Bourrée pour les bergers et bergères*  
*Sarabande*  
*Gigue*  
*Chaconne*

- Intermission -

Suite No. 5 in C Minor, BWV 1011

J. S. Bach  
(1685-1750)

*Prelude*  
*Allemande*  
*Courante*  
*Sarabande*  
*Gavotte I & II*  
*Gigue*

# Daniel McCarthy, Baroque Viola

Tanya Ruth, Alto  
Jim Krabbendam, Bass  
Gözde Yasar, Cello  
Jennifer Huang, Harpsichord

Recital III: A Synthesis of Styles  
April 11, 2012, 8:00 p.m.  
Leah M. Smith Lecture Hall

Two Aria Selections from Cantatas No. 6 and No. 178  
Aria from "*Bleib' bei uns, denn es will Abend werden*," BWV 6  
Aria from "*Gleichwie die wilden Meereswellen*," BWV 178  
J. S. Bach  
(1685-1750)

Sonata No. 3 in G Minor, BWV 1029  
*Vivace*  
*Adagio*  
*Allegro*  
J. S. Bach

- Intermission -

Partita No. 2 in G Minor, BWV 1004  
*Allemanda*  
*Corrente*  
*Sarabanda*  
*Giga*  
*Ciaconna*  
J. S. Bach

## Chapter 1: The Italian Baroque

Today's classical musicians owe much to their predecessors in the Italian Baroque. It was these composers and musicians who revolutionized music with the invention of the basso continuo, ending centuries dominated by polyphony. Later, musicologists quite correctly defined the Baroque era of music as "the age of continuo." Many of the instrumental genres in use, even up to the present, come from this time and place; Italians gave us opera, the instrumental sonata, and the symphonia and symphony. Indeed we are indebted to the Italians for the liberation of music from a purely practical function. It is in the Italian Baroque that we see the rise of music that is sound for sound's sake. Much of this music has no function other than to move the passions of the listener.

Italian music of this period exudes vitality, passion, and tenderness. Baroque Italian musicians had a reputation for fiery and passionate playing as well as a liberal use of ornamentation. It was a very distinct style of playing and contrasted greatly with the performance style of musicians from other regions in Europe. In 1702 a French priest and scholar, Francois Ragueneau, wrote a treatise that was soon translated into English in which he compared his native French style with the Italian style, saying:

"It is not to be wonder'd that the Italians think our musick dull and stupefying, that, according to their taste, it appears flat and insipid, if we consider the nature of the French airs compar'd to those of the Italian. The French in their airs aim at the soft, the easie, the flowing, and coherent' the whole air is of the same tone, or if sometimes

they venture to vary it, they do it with so many preparations, they so qualify it, that still the air seems to be as natural and consistent as if they had attempted no change at all; there is nothing bold and adventurous in it; it's all equal and of a piece. But the Italians pass boldly, and in an instant from sharps to flats and from flats to sharps; they venture the boldest cadences, and the most irregular dissonances; and their airs are so out of the way that they resemble the compositions of no other nation in the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Hubert Le Blanc, a French viol player, gives an even more revealing comment in 1740 about the fundamentally different French and Italian approaches to music. He describes an Italian listener's pleased reaction to a musical performance as:

“Ah! How touching the music is.”

And the French listener's as:

“Ah! How witty the musician is.”<sup>2</sup>

The genre that best represents the trends in instrumental Italian music during the Baroque era is the sonata. The origin and evolution of the sonata also showcases the degree of development and change that occurred in the instruments and the music of the time. The sonata has its origins in the late Renaissance, a time when instrumental music began to be taken more seriously as a high art form, beginning to compete with

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<sup>1</sup> Tarling, Judy, *Baroque String Playing for ingenious learners* (St. Albans, Hertfordshire, UK: Corda Music Publications), 2001, 159

<sup>2</sup> Tarling, 159

vocal music such as madrigals and motets. During this time the direct ancestor of the sonata, the instrumental canzona, was born. Very similar in style and form to madrigals and motets, the canzona was a one-movement work with alternating tempi and meter, and was a through-composed form for the same number and types of parts. What differentiated the instrumental canzona from madrigals, motets, and its vocal precursor (the term itself is derived from the verb *cantare*, “to sing”) was that the canzona was purely an instrumental genre performed by a consort, generally an ensemble of four to six instruments of the same instrument family. For example, one might have heard a canzona performed by a group of sackbuts, viols, or recorders.

In the late Renaissance, the sonata (from the verb *sonare*, “to sound” or “to play”) was at first indistinguishable from the canzona. However, by the early seventeenth century, the sonata, unlike the canzona, began to feature more technical virtuosity and one or two solo instruments accompanied by the newly created continuo line. The early sonata also became inextricably linked to the violin, serving as a vehicle for that instrument’s liberation from the viewpoint that it was only suitable for peasants, taverns, and dance accompaniment.

Further on into the seventeenth century, the contrasting fast and slow sections of the early sonata began to increase in length, often beginning with a substantial slow section marked “Grave,” as seen in Uccellini’s *Sonata sopra la Prosperina*. The different individual sections of the early sonata are expanded, and eventually would become self-contained movements. This is the form that was known as the multi-movement *sonata da chiesa*, which consisted of alternating fast and slow movements, originally played during different parts of the Catholic mass. The *sonata da chiesa*,

and its secular counterpart the *sonata da camera*, reached their pinnacle of development with Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), who published four dozen trio sonatas, twelve violin sonatas, and *concerto grossi*, all of which share many elements of earlier sonatas. Corelli passed this model on to his students, such as Carlo Antonio Marino (1671-1705?).

In later sonatas, such as those of Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741), we see the same alternation of fast and slow movements, but the individual movements are often in rounded binary form and frequently contain elements of Italian dances such as a *siciliana* or a *giga*.

The selections from J. S. Bach's cello suites in the first recital were chosen to showcase some of Bach's Italian-influenced dance movements. The flowing repeated rhythms are the most notably "Italian" feature of these movements. This is especially apparent in the constant flowing triplet-eighths of both the Prelude from the Suite No. 6 in D major (written for a five-string instrument, which I play on my modern four-string viola in G major) and the gigue from Suite No. 4 in E-flat major. Another common Italian feature is the use of both duple and triple rhythms in the same movement as seen in the Courante from the fourth suite. The florid ornamentation that Bach writes out in the Allemande from the sixth suite is an excellent example of Italian ornamentation at its most tender.

Another important issue for musicians, when studying the Bach Cello suites, is Bach's seemingly deliberate mislabeling of some of the dances. For some unknown reason, Bach wrote movements entitled "Courante" in Suites 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 when in fact they are *correntes*, the quicker Italian counterpart of the French *courante*. In

addition, the Gigue from Suite No. 4 in E-flat major is actually an Italian *giga*. This mislabeling is very curious considering the fact that Bach correctly labels Italian dance movements in other pieces, such as his second partita for solo violin.

This confusion in the language used for various dance titles makes it paramount that the performer be familiar with the different dances that he plays when interpreting the Bach suites (or any dance suite, for that matter). As with the sonatas, the dance suites of the time take on an international flavor. Bach was an innovator in all the genres in which he composed, often writing pieces that deviated greatly from their more conventional counterparts. It is these innovations that further demand that a performer of Bach's suites have an understanding of the original dances.

Furthermore, it is important for the performer to understand how to differentiate between the Italian and French styles upon which Bach drew. Part of Bach's genius is that he fully absorbed both styles, and gained fluency in different French and Italian idioms that transcended mere emulation. Thus a performer should know how and when to play a mislabeled *courante* as a *corrente*, or if he ought to use French *inegal* in an eighth note passage.

## Chapter 2: Music of the French Baroque

Music in the time of the Renaissance and Baroque eras was grouped in the field of mathematics, along with other disciplines such as astronomy and architecture. Music had been viewed this way since the time of Pythagoras and Plato, who both believed that the mathematical proportions in music could stir human emotion. The ancient Greeks even considered music and astronomy to be linked. Astronomy was the study of the movement of heavenly bodies in mankind's outer world, and they considered music to be the study or process in which the objects of mankind's inner world, his passions and thoughts, were moved.

Musicians and composers in the late Renaissance held these views and traditions in great regard, and their pursuit of this aesthetic can be partially credited with heralding in the beginning of the Baroque era of music. This transition in music from the Renaissance to the Baroque is clearly manifested in the birth of opera, where there was a return to homophonic word-based music in order to revive the dramas of Ancient Greece, which were a combination of music and poetry.

In addition to these values of Classical Antiquity, the French held music's beauty to be two-fold in its ability to appeal to one's mind as well as heart. They emphasized balancing the passions of art and music with the firm control of reason. The French love for reason and order can be seen in the many institutions built by Louis XIII and his son Louis XIV, such as the royal academies: Literature in 1635, Painting and Sculpture in 1648, Dance in 1661, Music in 1669, and Architecture in 1671. The



French, who placed great importance on correct instruction, even wrote the very first method-books for various instruments.

French composers and musicians further expanded upon the quantifications of music's effects upon mankind, made by their classical forebears, with the idea of "musical affects." Although the French did not create the system of musical affects (a codification of different musical devices and their effects on the passions of humanity), their love of reason and order compelled them to use this system to control the release of the passion in their music. This conservative approach greatly contrasted with their Italian contemporaries, whose music can still shock audiences today with its bold chromatic shifts and sudden changes in character. By the late seventeenth century, the French were even controlling the way players ornamented music. When looking at a score of music by Marais (1656-1728) or Couperin (1668-1733), a modern player will be quickly overwhelmed by the number of crosses, horizontal and vertical squiggly lines, and other esoteric symbols used to notate musical ornaments. The Italians differed significantly from the French in this respect by notating very little in the way of ornaments, which they generally left to the discretion of the performer.

A further illustration of the stylistic and aesthetic differences between the French and Italians was borne out by the physical differences between the instruments of the two countries. Italian instruments were a great deal louder than French instruments; violins in Northern Italy were strung with thicker strings, tuned with higher tension (thus greater projection) to as high as A=462, and the bows they used were longer than those used by string players in France. The viola da gamba enjoyed popularity

far longer in France than in Italy, where the Italians more quickly replaced the gamba with the violin family of instruments, which were louder and projected sound more clearly. In 1702 Francois Ragueneau also described the difference when hearing separate Italian and French ensembles:

"The Italians have... the same advantage over us in respect of the instruments and the performers as they have in regard of the singers and their voices. Their violins are mounted with strings much larger than ours; their bows are longer, and they can make their instruments sound as loud again as we do ours. The first time I heard our band in the Opera after my return out of Italy, my ears had been so used to the loudness of the Italian violins that I thought ours had all been bridled."<sup>3</sup>

Dancing was of vital importance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France. The art of dancing permeated everyday life of the French nobility to a large degree. Courtiers practiced dancing to promote their health and to refine their overall physical grace. Many of the movements in French dance can be found in the way one bowed or curtsied in greeting, or how a man would doff his hat when entering a hall. French dance masters were in great demand throughout Europe to teach the newest dances and dance etiquette to students, who were eager to become more sophisticated and refined: after all, dance technique and comportment signified status.

French dancing reached the height of its cultural standing in the courts of Louis XIII and his son Louis XIV. Louis XIV, also known as the "Sun King," had a

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<sup>3</sup> Tarling, 159

profound love for dance and was an adept performer of ballet. During the course of his life Louis XIV danced over 80 roles in over 40 ballets. He was also a patron of the arts and employed many great artists, including the composer and Jean-Baptiste Lully, who would become the most influential French composer in the seventeenth century.

Lully is credited with developing a style of music that worked well with the French language and dance traditions, which he combined in his unique brand of opera. Lully's approach to composing opera differed considerably from that of the older Italian style. He replaced the *secco* recitative, which he felt was unsuited to French declamation, with a new kind of recitative notated with frequently-changing meters, and which more closely mirrored French speech patterns. (Many observers of the time who were used to the clear delineation of *secco* recitative and aria were unable to distinguish between the Lullian recitative and the *airs*, which might have similarly-scored accompaniments, that followed.) These vocal segments were contrasted with dance pieces, in which the French love of ballet could be given rein. Lully is also credited with the creation of the French *ouverture*, a binary form in which the A section is comprised of slow dotted rhythms followed by a quick B section in a fugal texture in the dominant key. The Lullian operatic tradition continued well into the eighteenth century in the work of Lullian imitators, such as his pupil Marin Marais. Its influence is readily apparent even in the "revolutionary" operas of Jean-Philippe Rameau.

In addition to his achievements as a composer, Lully was influential as a conductor, bringing strict discipline and precision to the orchestra. He kept time for

his orchestra and dances by banging a great staff on the floor. (Foreign visitors to the Paris *opéra* vociferously complained about the audible distraction this caused.) Sadly, Lully died of gangrene from an accidentally self-inflicted wound from banging said staff on his foot. This strict adherence to the even flow of tempo is a hallmark of French music showing the importance of dancing. After all, dancing is made more difficult when rubato and other temporal liberties are taken with the tempo of the music.

The “rule of the down-bow” is another facet of the French Baroque tradition attributed to Lully. French Baroque bows were much shorter than their Italian counterparts, the longer *arcata*. These short bows were ideal for the sharp dance rhythms of French music, but not for the long singing lines of the Italian sonata. Lully and his contemporaries used these shorter bows to emphasize the strong and weak beats in a dance piece. The “rule of the down-bow” is so named for its rules regarding what beats are played on a down-bow and which are played on an up-bow. Generally, the down-bow is played on stronger beats and the up-bow on weaker beats. This rule was at first an unwritten convention commonly understood by French musicians. However, the traveling composer Georg Muffat (1653-1704), who studied with Lully from 1663 to 1669, published a written work in 1698 that codified this practice of bowing.

In the Baroque era, the dance suite was to the French what the instrumental sonata was to the Italians. The dance suite, like the sonata, would become one of the most popular musical genres in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dance

pieces in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were not all organized into specific sets as we know them, in which one particular dance follows another. Often in a published work there would be a number of pavannes followed by another number of galliards followed by sarabandes followed by courantes, etc. The performers would choose from these collections which dances to play. In the late half of the sixteenth century, pairings of specific dances in published works began to appear. This development continued its course with composers creating their own repeating sets of dances. The invention of the standard dance suite made up of an allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue is credited to Johann Jakob Froberger (1616-1667). Although Froberger did use these dances specifically, he did not specify this exact order for all his suites. Often he had these four dances arranged differently, such as courante, allemande, gigue, and sarabande. The order of dances that would become standard for dance suites was the result of Froberger's publisher insisting upon a standard layout and publishing them as such without consent.<sup>4</sup>

The dance suite genre greatly influenced the music of other composers; the rhythms and characteristics of specific dances were even absorbed into non-dance music. Just as the Italian sonata developed and evolved into other genres, so too did the French dance suite. By the end of the seventeenth century, the dance suite could also contain other dance pieces placed amongst the four core pieces. These "gallantries," which were often placed in between the sarabande and gigue, included menuets, gavottes, bourees, passepieds, and other dances. By the early eighteenth

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<sup>4</sup> Howard Schott. "Froberger, Johann Jacob." In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10298> (accessed May 18, 2012).

century, composers such as Marais, Couperin, and Rameau began to abandon elements of the traditional dance suite. They inserted a great number of additional dance pieces into the suite, even leaving out some or all of the four core dance pieces. Other suites by the same composers consisted of character pieces that represented a person, place, or thing, and contained no specifically-labeled dance music (although frequently the dance origins of the character pieces are quite clear.)

Outside of France, the dance suites of J. S. Bach, Telemann, and Händel were as important as their sonatas and concertos. These suites, for the most part, still abided by the traditional movement layout containing the core dances of Froberger's suites, with gallantries sometimes sprinkled liberally throughout. In orchestral suites, the allemande was usually preceded by an overture-prelude in the style of Lully's French overture. The prevalence of such suites outside of France made an understanding of the rhythms and gestures of dance music vital to composing and playing music. As late as 1760, Kirnberger, a student of J. S. Bach, had this to say about the importance of understanding dance music:

"To achieve the necessary qualities for good performance, the musician can do nothing better than to play industriously all kinds of characteristic dances. Each of these dance types has its own rhythm, its rhythmic subjects of equal length, and its accents in the same place in each phrase. The musician thereby recognizes these easily, and through frequent practice, becomes accustomed subtly to differentiate each rhythm, and to mark the phrases and accents, so that the varied and mixed

rhythms are readily perceived even in a long piece. He also gets into the habit of giving each piece its particular expression, since each kind of dance melody has its own characteristic beat and note values.”<sup>5</sup>

Kirnberger even considered it vital to have an understanding of dance pieces when writing and performing fugues:

“It is impossible to compose or to perform a fugue well if one does not know all the different dance rhythms; and therefore, because this study is neglected today, music has sunk from its former worth, and one can no longer endure fugues, because, through miserable performance that defines neither phrase nor accents, they have become a mere chaos of notes.”<sup>6</sup>

The second recital in this performance project ends with Bach’s fifth cello suite, which is the most French of all the cello suites in character and genre. The prelude, unlike the improvisatory preludes of the other five suites, is in the form of a French overture with its characteristic dotted rhythms and extended fugal section. The fifth suite is also the only suite in the set that contains a true French *courante*, which is in 3/2 and has a more moderate tempo. Each of the other suites has a movement titled

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<sup>5</sup> Mather, Betty Bang, *Dance Rhythms of the French Baroque: A Handbook for Performance* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 1987, xiv

<sup>6</sup> Mather, xiv

“Courante,” but these are in fact Italian correntes, which are in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, and are much quicker and livelier in character. The gigue is also unique from the other giges in this set of suites, being in  $\frac{3}{8}$  time and having the characteristic French gigue rhythm of a dotted eighth followed by a sixteenth and another eighth. French dotted rhythms are also featured prominently in the allemande of this suite.

Bach writes this suite in *scordatura* tuning with the top A string tuned down a step to G. This makes it possible for the cello to play more densely voiced chords than if the instrument were tuned in perfect fifths. In this tuning, the cello also takes on the character of the viola da gamba, which is tuned in perfect fourths with a major third in between the middle two strings. Since the viola da gamba was still a very popular instrument in France well in the eighteenth century, these characteristics speak specifically to Bach’s French intentions for the suite.



## Chapter 3: Bach's Synthesis of Different Styles

Before delving into J. S. Bach's early musical background and education it is essential to first understand the family from which he came and the environment in which he was raised. Johann Sebastian Bach was born on March 31, 1685 to his parents Johann Ambrosias Bach and Maria Elisabeth Bach in the town of Eisenach, located in the central German region of the Holy Roman Empire known as Thuringia. To be born a Bach in this time and place was to be born to a way of life that was already laid out for you, and in seventeenth-century Thuringia, the name "Bach" was synonymous with the word "musician." J. S. Bach could trace a direct line of professional musicians back three generations to his great-grandfather Johannes Hans Bach (d. 1626). The vast majority of Johannes' male progeny continued the family trade through the generations, playing various instruments in and even directing various town music companies and churches in Thuringia. The Bach family would also go on to make a series of advantageous marriages, allying themselves with affluent merchant families. This helped to garner influence with various town councils in the region, guaranteeing the family's musical dominance and its employment in Thuringia for generations to come. This dominance can be seen when Johann Christoph Bach, J. S. Bach's uncle, passed away in 1693. Christoph's employer, Count Anton Günther of Schwarzburg-Arnstadt, asked Christoph's widow "whether there was not another Bach available who would like to apply for Johann Christoph's post, for he should and must have a Bach again."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Wolff, Christoph, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 2000, 14-15

J. S. Bach's early childhood was spent in Eisenach, where his father directed the town music company. Sebastian would have grown up in his father's household seeing his father, older brothers, his father's various apprentices and journeymen, and a myriad of other relatives playing and repairing musical instruments. Little Sebastian would have taken part in these activities and grown up learning from the example that these different men set for him. In addition to being instructed by his father and other teachers on various instruments, Sebastian would have also been proficient at playing the violin, various keyboard instruments, and singing. Outside of the household of Johann Ambrosius, Sebastian was greatly influenced by other musicians in the family such as his father's first cousin, Johann Christoph Bach. Sebastian grew up seeing his father's cousin playing the organ in his church, and would relate anecdotes to his children about this "profound composer," who "never played in fewer than five parts" and even dared to use the augmented sixth chord.<sup>8</sup> This kind of organ playing would have amazed a child and, not surprisingly, exerted a strong influence on Sebastian, who would go on to be one of history's greatest organists and composers of polyphony.

By the age of nine, Bach had sadly lost both parents and with his older brother Jakob, went to live with their oldest brother Christoph in Ohrdruff, some thirty miles away. During these formative years, Sebastian studied various keyboard instruments and genres under guidance of Christoph. Christoph composed very little so it is quite likely that he instructed Sebastian with literature similar to what he himself studied with his primary teacher, Johann Pachelbel. This would have included much of that

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<sup>8</sup> Wolff, 28-29

composer's preludes, fugues, fantasias, capriccios, and dance suites.<sup>9</sup> Pachelbel also supplemented Christoph's musical education with the works of other composers such as Froberger, Kerl, and others. As Christoph is the only teacher acknowledged in Bach's obituary this relationship between the two brothers may be presumed to have been quite close. It is during Sebastian's stay with his brother that the famous story of the "moonlight manuscript" took place. Bach's son Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach would relate this story in his Father's obituary:

"The love of our little Johann Sebastian for music was uncommonly great even at this tender age. In a short time he had fully mastered all the pieces his brother had voluntarily given him to learn. But his brother possessed a book of clavier pieces by the most famous masters of the day-Froberger, Kerl, Pachelbel-and this, despite all his pleading and for who knows what reason, was denied him. His zeal to improve himself thereupon gave him the idea of practicing the following innocent deceit. This book was kept in a cabinet whose doors consisted only of grillwork. Now, with his little hands he could reach through the grillwork and roll the book up (for it had only a paper cover); accordingly, he would fetch the book out a night, when everyone had gone to bed and, since he was not even possessed of a light, copy it by moonlight. In six months' time he had these spoils in his own hands. Secretly and with extraordinary eagerness he was trying to put it to use, when his brother, to his great dismay, found out about it, and without mercy took away from him the copy he had made with such pains. We may gain a good idea of our little Johann Sebastian's

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<sup>9</sup> Wolff, 44-45

sorrow over this loss by imagining a miser whose ship, sailing for Peru, has foundered with its cargo of a hundred thousand thaler.”<sup>10</sup>

In actuality, it is more likely that Christoph was upset by the fact that Sebastian copied, without permission, what he himself had to buy from his teacher Pachelbel. This “moonlight manuscript” probably also contained the music of other contemporary composers such as Buxtehude and Reinken from the northern German tradition, as well as music from the quintessentially French composers Lully and Marais.

When he was only fifteen years old, Bach was sent to enroll in St. Michael’s school in Lüneburg, some 230 miles north of Ohrdruf and far away from his ancestral territory of Thuringia. The decision to leave Ohrdruf was prompted by financial difficulties on Sebastian’s part, but the decision to go to far away Lüneburg is another matter. Sebastian deliberately chose to continue his schooling and may have considered attending university. Out of all his immediate male relatives, Sebastian was the only one to finish Latin school. He even finished at an exceptionally young age, starting the most advanced class, the *prima*, at the age of fourteen. His brothers, by comparison, never progressed beyond the *tertia* (the third highest class), which they attended at the age of fourteen. Usually the male members of the Bach family would seek an apprenticeship at this age, but Sebastian bypassed the stage of apprenticeship completely. Lüneburg offered new territory for Sebastian, with its

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<sup>10</sup> Wolff, 45

resources near Hamburg. Not only was St. Michael's an attractive opportunity, but so was the chance to become familiar with northern German organs and organ playing.

During his time as a student at St. Michael's, Bach became familiar with the organist George Böhm, who lived and worked in Lüneburg. Sebastian may have regarded Böhm as a role model. Böhm had followed a path that was more attractive to Bach, having graduated from Latin school and even attended university. It is through Böhm that Bach gained familiarity with the prelude and fugue models of the northern German composers. Böhm may have also facilitated Bach's acquaintance with the famous organist and composer Johann Adam Reinken, who lived in nearby Hamburg. At the time of their first meeting, Reinken, an octogenarian, must have presented a figure of awe and respect to Bach. Reinken was not only a great composer of north German organ music, but also played on one of the largest and most impressive instruments that the young Bach had ever seen.

It is also through Böhm that Bach gained a familiarity with stylized dance music. When Sebastian returned to Ohrdruf to visit his brother Christoph after spending five years in Lüneburg, he gave Christoph a great deal of literature that he had procured in Lüneburg, which included many French suites. These suites contained various ornament tables and other instructions pertaining to their execution. This would imply that Böhm was influential in introducing Bach to the performance practice of French music. In addition to learning the particulars of playing French music, Bach probably gained significant exposure to French dancing from Thomas de la Selle. Selle was the dance master at the *Ritterakademie*, which was a school near St. Michael's in Lüneburg for the children of noblemen. A student as extraordinarily skilled as Bach

would have caught the attention of the dance master, who would have allowed Bach access to many resources. Selle was also in the employ of the Duke of Celle, who maintained a secondary residence at a castle in Lüneburg where he employed a troupe of French musicians. Bach would have further absorbed the French aesthetic of performance by attending concerts given by these musicians.

These different traditions and influences that Bach absorbed as a youth were often synthesized in his music. Some of Bach's works in French genres may lack the characteristic lightness due to Bach's superimposition of imitation and polyphony. The direction and flow of French dance music can be heard and felt in religious works by Bach, such as the beginning and closing movements of the *St. Matthew Passion* or in innumerable examples from his cantatas. Bach's absorption and mastery of these different traditions transcended mere emulation and displayed a truly unique and individual style.

The pieces programmed in the third recital were chosen to demonstrate this synthesis of different styles that is a hallmark of Bach. Bach's third sonata for viola da gamba and harpsichord, a good example of the *Sonata auf concertante Art* ("Sonata in the concerted style"), begins with a *Vivace* in which the ritornello structure of the Vivaldian concerto is clear. The third and final movement is a *giga* in the style of a fugue, which is a common feature in the trio sonatas and the Op. 5 violin sonatas of Corelli. In the second movement marked *Adagio*, the gamba and the harpsichord simultaneously play in completely different styles. The *Adagio* is in rounded binary form, and begins with the gamba playing a melody in the Italian style and the harpsichord playing in the style of a French sarabande. The harpsichord has

agogic accents on the second beat and has a less florid melody than the gamba. In the B section both instruments switch styles; the gamba now plays in the style of a French sarabande and the harpsichord plays in the style of an Italian slow movement.

The second partita for solo violin is another excellent example of Bach's experimentation with styles. In this partita, Bach gives us a very normal layout for a dance suite of allemande, courante, sarabande, gigue, and a chaconne as the finale. However, Bach writes extremely Italianate versions of these dances and titles them Allemanda, Corrente, Sarabanda, Giga, and Ciaconna. These movements have many Italian characteristics, which include smooth flowing regular rhythms, the mixture of duple and triple rhythms in the same movements. The Corrente and Giga are actually Italian dances, quite distinct from their French counterparts.

The Ciaconna that ends this suite stands out for its length and massive emotional scope. Although we may be unfamiliar with a Chaconne ending a dance suite, it was not uncommon. Both Marais and Purcell were known to end some of their suites with a Chaconne, and it was common for French operas to conclude with a Chaconne. The "Ciaconna" Bach writes in this suite has both Italian and French features. The beginning chords with their sarabande-like emphasis of the second beat evoke the French aesthetic of the Chaconne as a dance. The virtuosic passages that follow in much of the piece hearken back to the Italian divisional style of playing from the early half of the seventeenth century. It is in these passages that we see the same material being varied again and again in different rhythmic diminutions and Italianate figuration over the repeating bass line. Considering that this monumental piece

combines the styles of France, Italy, and Germany, it felt to me to be a fitting end to this project.



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