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The influence of Baroque dance in the performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's "Six Suites a Violoncello Senza Basso"

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THE INFLUENCE OF BAROQUE DANCE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH'S SIX SUITES A VIOLONCELLO SENZA BASSO

by

RIFAT J. QURESHI

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ABSTRACT

The Influence of Baroque Dance
in the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's
Six Suites a Violoncello Senza Basso

by

Rifat J. Qureshi

A major part of Johann Sebastian Bach's works was influenced by dance. Only recently, musician-scholars have begun to analyze carefully the effect of dance on instrumental suites from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. In the Six Suites a Violoncello Senza Basso, I discuss the evolution of the dances found in this collection (allemande, courante, sarabande, minuet, bourrée, gavotte and gigue) and present their basic step patterns. Bach composed in a contrapuntally complex texture and on the surface obscured dance elements; yet, the dance pulse must be recognized and understood. In this study, the original violoncello part is reduced to its basic melodic structure and rhythmic pulses to reveal dance step patterns. The performer is given instruction on how to imitate these dance inflections with the instrument. Even though these instrumental suites were not intended to be danced to, the performer cannot ignore the importance of dance in this work. As a result, this knowledge will help the performer create spirited and intelligent performances.
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THE INFLUENCE OF BAROQUE DANCE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH'S SIX SUITES A VIOLONCELLO SENZA BASSO

Introduction

In the last forty years, a substantial amount of scholarship has surfaced that addresses major issues of performance practice spanning the early medieval to late romantic eras. This detailed concern for historically informed performance is progressively affecting and changing the vision and agenda of many music and arts organizations, institutions, and schools. Sophisticated and careful approaches to presenting music in a historical context have caught the imagination of a new generation of musicians and scholars. Interestingly, among these musician-scholars there has developed an obsessive dedication to define the intricacies of style in musical compositions from the past.

For interested performers, there is a wealth of primary sources from the Baroque era in particular. Critics, commentators and composers of that day explained many matters of performance practice. Although substantial instructions exist for the execution of technique of various instruments, there remain certain ambiguities and gaps in the historical record. To reproduce the sounds and musical gestures characteristic of the Baroque era, present day musician-scholars must include these instructions in their

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1 This title reflects a curious combination of both French and Italian wording. This may be an indication by J. S. Bach that he wanted to portray both national styles in this work (see later for further discussion).
performance vocabulary. This adaptation often leads to a wide range of interpretation.

There are invaluable aids and approaches that can help the performer recreate the general style. For example, performing on period instruments\(^2\) allows the performer to grasp the unique sound and technical demands of those instruments. Also, many instruction manuals by performers of that day, such as Türk, Tartini, Geminiani, Leopold Mozart, Quantz and C.P.E. Bach\(^3\) can guide the musician-scholar to recreate authentic performances of Baroque compositions. In addition, a keen intuition and a broad imagination can serve the sensitive musician, and ultimately help release the spirit of the music.

Only recently, scholars have begun to research and document an important area of performance practice: the history of dance from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. In this thesis, I investigate how the evolution of dance music from its choreographic roots has influenced some types of instrumental music of the late Baroque era. Basing my commentary on the collection, *Six Suites a Violoncello Senza Basso* (Cöthen, 1720), I shall discuss how Bach approached the composition of the Baroque suite and how these suites compared and contrasted to earlier models of dance music.

Dance influenced a major part of Johann Sebastian Bach's works. By Bach's time, the evolution of dance had already reached its peak and started its decline. Bach, who was not a revolutionary composer,

\(^2\) These earlier models have a distinct sound and construction that are different from modern instruments. See Boyden's *History of Violin Playing*... for an account of the evolution of stringed instruments.

\(^3\) For a list of these manuals by these musicians, see bibliography.
reached back into history, developing and elevating dance music in new directions. Although a few books and articles have seriously addressed the impact of dance in instrumental writing, this thesis represents the first attempt to analyze the complete Six Suites in relation to Baroque dance. I hope that this study will inspire the interest of performers in this relatively new aspect of performance practice and that it will serve as a starting point to further their search for historically informed performances.

Origin of the Suite

The origin of dance and dance music cannot be ascertained accurately since there is a "dance tradition extending back indefinitely into unwritten history and carrying forward to form one of many evolutionary threads of Renaissance and Baroque suite."\(^4\) Initially, dance music began primarily as simple compositions described as basso-danse\(^5\) tenors, over which the musicians improvised variations. These tenors were included in dance manuals that the dance masters used in their teachings.

The earliest known dance manuals originated in Italy and France in the fifteenth century with the composers Domenico da Piacenza (1416) and Michel Toulouze (c.1480) respectively. In these manuals, the dances were paired into walking steps (bassadanza in Italy and basse danse majeure in France) and leaping steps (saltarello in Italy.

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\(^5\) These early dances were defined as "low" (basse), meaning that they incorporated gliding, rather than lifted steps.
and basse danse mineure in France). The dance tradition gradually spread to other countries. In Germany they referred to this pairing as Tanz and Nachtanz, and in England, as pavan and galliard. This combination of gliding and leaping dances eventually evolved into the standard structure of instrumental suites in the Baroque era.

The first group of dances to appear together as a formal suite was found in the work by Estienne duTertre, Septième livre de danseries (Paris, 1557). With these works, the performer began to gain more control over the music, its order, and its improvisation. This contributed to the evolution of dance music from simple background support to sophisticated compositions. The musicians at a dance assembled the branles into suites, drawing on their memory or on tablatures and ordered them according to the demands of the dancers or current fashion.6

In the early seventeenth century, a defining of national styles and a creative burst of instrumental music allowed “a lively exchange of musicians among all countries [France, Italy, Germany and England]...and all this mobility left its mark on the suite.”7 Each country had its own contribution: the Italians were fond of the guitar and Spanish influence and the French developed the lute and keyboard repertoire. Instrumental versions of dance were also developed by the Germans who “made a special place for Polish dances”8 in their anthologies; and by the English who enlarged and

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6 Fuller, “Suite,” 337. Branle (“to sway”) was an early French rustic dance.
7 Ibid., 337.
8 Ibid., 337.
developed their *pavan-galliard* model. As a result, a cross-breeding of national idioms developed. The music of French lutenists, English musicians and vocalists (consorts) and German keyboardists all influenced the early standardization of the order of the suite: the *allemande, courante* and *sarabande*.

This order, A-C-S, was being adopted by most composers in these countries except in Italy were they “kept the old Renaissance classification of dances by genre until well after the mid-century.”

The addition of the *gigue*, establishing a new dance in the suite, occurred towards the middle of the seventeenth century. Once again, the French lutenists and clavecinists asserted their influence by initially adopting the *jig* from English musicians. Lute composers, such as Denis Gaultier in his *Rhétorique des dieux* (c.1655), incorporated the *gigue* into their works. Eventually, the model, A-C-S-G, found its way to Germany where it became a standard form of the suite until it died out by the middle of the eighteenth century.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the popularity of the lute had waned. Greater interest in the viol and harpsichord eventually filled the void. The works of Marin Marais for viol, and D'Anglebert, Lebègue and later François Couperin for harpsichord, monopolized the instrumental dance music of the late seventeenth century. In these compositions, a “closing group” of dances was formed. “The order of pieces for the closing group may well have been determined by the page layout of the engraving [a list of specific dances was shown on the

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9 Ibid., 340.
10 Although there are various types of *giques* (see page 51), this spelling will include all types.
front page of the collections), but in performance it was quite possibly
gigue, gavotte, minuet and one of the remaining [bourrée, canary or a
chaccone]."\(^{11}\)

**Dance in Seventeenth-Century France**

The influence of Louis XIV in France was far-reaching. During
his reign (1661-1715), his grand vision was to build France into a
powerful country in every respect: in culture, religion, commerce, and
social mores. His desired to centralize his power in the monarchy.
His absolutism would control all aspects of society, especially the arts.
This obsession led him "to control the arts and supervise them with
the same care he devoted to other state matters, because the arts
performed a vital function of creating an image of power and glory for
both foreign and domestic consumption."\(^{12}\) With the help of his
finance minister who supported an art-based society, Louis XIV
created a generation of workers that produced high-quality textiles,
lead, brass and glass products in order to overtake the art business of
other European countries. On a larger scale, architects were
commissioned to create magnificent edifices such as the Louvre,
Versailles and various triumphal gates to strengthen his artistic vision.

His France would be a symbol for all things noble, and a large
part of this cultural revolution was reflected in the presentation of
dance. Louis XIV’s reign marked an important development of a
sophisticated and refined type of dancing in contrast to simple

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\(^{11}\) Fuller, "Suite," 343.

\(^{12}\) Robert M. Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King* (Ithaca: Cornell University
Press, 1973), 150.
Renaissance models. Ballet and social dancing of the French aristocracy, which included ceremonial balls, military balls, marriages and birthdays, were greatly encouraged, especially since Louis was an accomplished dancer. The courtly dance became the main pastime of the aristocrats.

From his youth, Louis XIV had been involved in all aspects of dance instruction, choreography and the organization of ceremonies. He had a full-time dancing master and choreographer, Pierre Beauchamp, who "enabled dance steps and figures to be recorded, transmitted to contemporaries, and preserved for posterity."13 As a result, from 1660 to 1700 the bulk of secular music in France was almost exclusively written for dance.

After the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), there was a significant increase not only in trade and commerce among Germany, France and Italy, but also in the dissemination of culture. As Germany tried to rebuild itself after the war, its culture was shaped and influenced heavily by the latest fashions from France and Italy. The exportation of the French dances to Germany, as well as to other countries in Europe, was extensive.

With the rise of a prosperous middle class, this new generation could afford luxuries and entertainments. In particular, all German courts employed French dancing masters who regularly taught the German aristocrats. Dance manuals became available which allowed ordinary people to enjoy social dancing. And with the growing

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influence of Friedrich August I\textsuperscript{14} in the late seventeenth century, all manner of French dance was encouraged in his provinces.

The music for these dances was composed in a simple style for a variety of small ensembles. The music's texture was determined by the complexity of the choreography or the importance of the event in which the dance was presented. However, the overall texture in most dance music of this time was homophonic with simple melodies. Eventually, the music assumed its own identity, apart from its supportive role. Composers, as a result, began to write dance music intended to be heard in a formal concert setting.

The influence of Italian instrumental writing gradually increased by the late Baroque. Many concert dances employed elements of the Italian style that came to maturity in the string music of Corelli.\textsuperscript{15} This Italianate music was characterized by the virtuoso elements of string playing such as arpeggios, fast passages and aria-like sections. In contrast, the French composers preferred the art of adding ornamental graces to the simple pulses of the dance. "In the French style, ornamental signs were by far the more important. There was little improvisation of cadenzas, and little bravura writing."\textsuperscript{16} The Baroque era produced a vast amount of instrumental music that can be

\textsuperscript{14} Frederick Augustus (1670-1733) was King of Poland and Elector of Saxony (where he took the German equivalent, Friedrich August I). After the Thirty Years War, France was clearly the chief western power and Friedrich August I was shrewdly aware of the importance of rebuilding commercial and cultural relations between France and Germany.


largely attributed to the influences of French social dance music and Italian virtuoso string writing.

The Young Johann Sebastian Bach and the Social Dance

In the years 1717-1721, Johann Sebastian Bach was employed in the service of Prince Leopold at Cöthen. During this tenure Bach often visited the court at Celle which was a "miniature Versailles in its recreation of French culture."\(^{17}\) He came in contact with all types of composition from keyboard composers such as François Couperin and Nicholas de Grigny, and more importantly, the French court musicians chosen by Jean Baptiste Lully. Other trips to France and Dresden, "which had one of the most elaborate, splendid and expensively maintained courts in Europe outside of Paris,"\(^ {18}\) attracted Bach to the elegance and sophistication of dance music which was lacking in Cöthen. His numerous dance suites for the keyboard, solo violin, flute, viola da gamba, solo cello and chamber orchestra were composed with the constant encouragement of Prince Leopold who "Bach himself said loved and understood music"\(^ {19}\) and who was also gifted at the violin and harpsichord.

Bach was also attracted to Italian music, especially its virtuoso instrumental writing which was becoming popular in Germany. He was particularly influenced by works for violin by Vivaldi, Corelli and Tartini, as well as keyboard works by Domenico Scarlatti, and

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 12.
violincello pieces by Domenico Gabrielli. As a result, his instrumental dance music became more elaborate while keeping the dance aspects discernible.

These national styles were reflected in the titles of some of his works. "[In] the Clavierübung, Book II, he [wrote] 'Nach Französicher Art' (after the French manner), and 'Nach Italienischen gusto' after the *Concerto in F* which shows that he was not afraid to make a stylistic copy and sign it as such."²⁰

**The Genesis of the Six Suites a Violoncello Senza Basso**

By Bach's time, instrumental dance music had evolved over a period of 200 years. Its original function was simply to assist the dancers with the proper beats and add a pleasant melody. But in the early eighteenth century, the music began to take precedence over the dance. The suite still retained the same order of dances, but the composition itself became increasingly complex. Dancing ceased to be required and dance music became highly stylized. Bach masked the identity of a genre with writing that is texturally complex and technically demanding.²¹ It is quite evident that Bach had taken this existing musical form and refined it to a sophisticated level of composition.

This contrapuntal approach to the composition of the suite distorted the traditional stylistic dance features in his highly polyphonic works. However, an important question must be raised:

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²¹ Further descriptions can be found in Fuller, "Suite," 347.
did Bach maintain the character of the dances in these highly contrapuntal settings? Part of the answer may be found in the title of the work: *Six Suites for Unaccompanied Violoncello Without Bass.* The phrase, *without bass,* implies that Bach had abandoned the older idea of improvisation over a bass line and had created a medium in which dance pulses were integrated. Writing for the violoncello, he usually chose to work in a linear texture. However, in the analogous unaccompanied works for violin, *Sonatas and Partitas,* which also included the words *without bass,* he incorporated a greater degree of part-writing.

The idea of writing dance suites for unaccompanied instruments did not originate with Bach, but he was the first to write such works for the violoncello. Its emergence as a solo instrument was barely forty years old, originating in Italy in the mid-seventeenth century. Most likely Bach wrote these pieces at Prince Leopold’s request, possibly for a particular violoncellist, or perhaps he simply wanted to write dance suites to test his abilities at creative contrapuntal writing.

There is no autograph manuscript of the *Six Suites* in existence. However, there is some information about the inception of these masterpieces and their first copies and early editions. Four copies exist of the manuscript. According to the *Neue Bach Ausgabe*\(^{22}\), the first copy is attributed to Bach’s second wife, Anna Magdelena Bach, whom he married while at Cöthen. It is presumed to have been copied in the years 1727-31. Another copy is attributed to Peter

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\(^{22}\) In *Neue Bach Ausgabe* (Leipzig: Barenreiter, 1988) VI/2, two editions of the *Six Suites* are included: Text I is based on the Anna Magdelena and Kellner manuscripts; Text II is based on an anonymous copy.
Johann Kellner, copied in 1726. The remaining two copies have no attribution: these may have been copied by French students who based their copies on either the Anna Magdelena or Kellner copies.

Numerous criticisms of these copies point to the carelessness with which Magdelena undertook this task. Bach's intentions are shadowed by the inaccuracies in slurrings, missing beats, misplaced ornamentation and incorrect notes. Fortunately, a transcription exists in Bach's hand of the fifth suite for lute. This can verify Magedelena's mistakes and can allow the performer to analyze all the suites with a critical eye.

The Stylistic Traits of the Six Suites

The combining of national styles seems to have been a primary goal when Bach composed his Six Suites. Each dance movement has its own character which often leans clearly towards either the French or Italian style. However, he adds to both styles a complex counterpuntal exercise, a characteristic found in many of his works.

Although he was writing dance pieces, Bach's compositional style incorporated many elements of linear and contrapuntal writing. By using passing tones, appoggiaturas, arpeggiation, florid ornamentation, and pedal points, Bach created a dense texture that, on the surface, obscured dance elements. By reducing the elements of counterpoint to their essentials, the performer will find that a basic dance pulse remains. These pulses are often related to step patterns of specific dances. How Bach closely follows or deviates from these
step patterns will provide the performer further insight in preparing spirited performances of the *Six Suites*.

**La Belle Danse Style and Its Basic Motions**

A brief explanation of dance motions will give the reader a basic understanding of how dance was approached. For further study, there are three important sources\(^{23}\) that give detailed diagrams and points of etiquette in executing the *belle danse*. Kellom Tomlinson was an English dance master of the early eighteenth century who composed dance music for the ballroom and illustrated many types of step patterns in his *Workbook*. A contemporary of Tomlinson in France was Raoul Auger Feuillet, Lully's private choreographer and dancing master. In his *Chorégraphie*, he wrote detailed choreographies of popular French court dances. Karl Heinz Taubert's *Höfische Tänze* is an study of dance motions, rules of etiquette and the history of court dances of this period.

The *belle danse* style was demanding both physically and mentally. Many individual steps were taken on the ball of the foot, with a stiff knee and an elegant, lifted carriage. A careful stylized 'bend and rise' called a *movement* began most steps.\(^{24}\) This combination of bend and rise, or *plié and élève*, is called a step-unit and is a preparatory movement to each dance. In relation to the music, this movement is the upbeat motion following through to the downbeat.

\(^{23}\) See bibliography for a complete citation of these sources.

\(^{24}\) Mather, *Dance Rhythms*..., 94.
The next movement involves the transference of weight from one foot to the other. The delicacy or abandon with which the dancer instigates this motion determines the character of the dance and the music. There are two ways to transfer the weight: steps or leaps. All dances consist of either stepping or leaping; and generally, dance suites are combined in pairs of stepping and leaping dances.

After the bending motion, plié, the dancer has the choice to step or leap. The complexities of dance techniques involve many types of steps. These steps have many variations and subtleties that were considered crucial to the art of dancing. Meredith Ellis Little gives the following examples of common step-patterns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stepping Patterns</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* pas marchés</td>
<td>plain walking steps on the balls of feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* pas glissé</td>
<td>motion of pas marché with a gliding motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* pas coupé</td>
<td>plié combined with a pas marché</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* tems de courante</td>
<td>bending both knees, straighten and rise on the supporting foot, and slide the other foot to position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaping Patterns</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* jeté</td>
<td>a leap from one foot to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* pas assemblé</td>
<td>a jump onto both feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* hop</td>
<td>leap from one foot onto same foot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many variations on these basic motions allow for a wide range of elegant gestures and motions. There are also specific choreographies for certain dances. Menuets, courantes, bourrées and gavottes have their own steps, while other dances such as allemandes, sarabandes and gigs are formed by a hybrid of steps.

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25 Little, Dance..., 22.
The Allemandes in the Six Suites

By the time Bach wrote these works, the allemande had already evolved into a highly stylized contrapuntal work. Of all the dances, it was the farthest removed from basic step-patterns. Even though it continued to be performed as a dance throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the instrumental versions became more idiomatic. In his allemandes, Bach "had a clear interest in the exploitation of motivic play and in a pseudo-polyphonic texture."\textsuperscript{26}

The allemande, which originated in the early 16th century in Germany, was a basse danse. In France, the earliest choreography exists in Arbeau's Orchésographie (Paris, 1589).\textsuperscript{27} It is a processional dance of walking steps and was the first dance to begin an evening of formal dancing in the court.

\[\text{The allemande...is a two part processional dance in which partners join hands and fall in line, one couple behind the other. The musicians then stop playing and the dancers engage in light conversation. The musicians again play part A and the dancers return to the end from which they started. To complete the dance, the musicians play Part B to a quicker, more lively duple time.}\textsuperscript{28}\]

The basic step unit consists of an upbeat motion, plié/élève, followed by "three walking steps (pas marchés) and then by a grève, a lifting of the free foot in the air (Fig. 1)."\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} This dance manual is an excellent source on sixteenth-century dances and social customs. A description of the alman is found in Thoinot Arbeau, Orchésography, translated by Mary Stewart Evans (New York: Dover Publications, 1967).
\textsuperscript{28} Mather, Dance Rhythms...208.
\textsuperscript{29} Little and Suzanne Cusick, "Allemande," 277.
Bach's treatment of the *allemande* is complex contrapuntally but still retains the implication of a step-pattern. In an *allemande*, this stepping character is usually achieved by a combination of quarter-note and eighth-note pulses. In order to create a contrapuntal setting, Bach often overlaid various types of figuration: passages with sixteenth-note figures, long flowing melodies, and arpeggiation.

In the *Six Suites*, Bach has used the above techniques to elaborate a basic allemande step pattern. In Fig. 2, the incipit of the *allemande* from Suite I shows the reduction of a homophonic texture into its melodic and rhythmic components.

"Every piece of dance music has its particular 'beat movement' [Taktbewegung] which is determined by the meter and by the note
values which are used within it."\textsuperscript{30} In this movement, Bach positions the beat movement where strong beats fall on the first and third beats of the bar.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Allegro of Suite I, bars 1-6.}
\end{figure}

The reduction is constructed to show the original violoncello part on the top line and the implied dance pulse on the bottom line. Stems on note heads represent different voicings implied by Bach. Throughout this document, I shall add step patterns to demonstrate how I imagine steps could be fitted to each dance. By reducing the original line to its basic rhythmic pulses, I found that these pulses are consistent with step patterns of basic dance forms. The step symbols\textsuperscript{31} shown below were created by Meredith Little as an effective tool to illustrate dance pulses in music. Below are the basic steps used in my analysis.

\textsuperscript{30} Newman, \textit{Bach and the Baroque}, 25.
\textsuperscript{31} For a more complete table of steps and step units, see Little, \textit{Dance...}, 22.
\( \text{plié (bend)} \)
\( \text{élève (rise)} \)
\( \text{grève (raising of free foot in air)} \)
\( \text{pas Marché (step without bend or rise)} \)
\( \text{glissé (slide)} \)
\( \text{demi-jetté (small leap)} \)

In the reduction, the main melody is found in the top voice. Even though there is no obvious part-writing, Bach allows the passages of the sixteenth notes to pass through various registers. Occasionally, a bass note is given prominence to form a harmonic progression (bars 4 and 6; G major and e minor respectively). The Affekt\(^{32}\) or basic character of this allemande is serene. Its melodic flow and smooth contour hide sharp articulations. Passing notes connect the main beats with scale passages.

In order to successfully articulate the pulses within this highly melodic contour, Bach has allowed some slurs to represent eighth-note pulses (bar 4). Using bow weight and speed, the performer can use the subtle Baroque technique of notes inégales\(^{33}\) to bring out these pulses without disturbing the flowing contour.

In Suite II (Fig. 3), the character of the allemande is lively in contrast to the passionate and rhapsodic character of its preceding

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\(^{32}\) The doctrine of affections presents the theory that music of the Baroque era should employ only one emotion or affect (such as anger, sorrow, sadness etc.) per movement.

\(^{33}\) In a pair of evenly written notes, the first note is given a longer stress than the second note. The degree of inequality is subjective: the gesture could be slightly lilting or very clipped.
prelude. The slurs in the melody imitate a gesture of walking eighth notes. The broken chords in bar 2 give profile to the bass motion. A two-voiced texture is implied by top-voice melodies (in bars 3-6) and bass notes (bar 2 and 3).

![Musical notation]

**Fig. 3 Allemande of Suite II, bars 1-6.**

Bach has effectively used the medium of the violoncello to bring out the resonant bass notes of the C string as well as highlight the baritone quality of the A and D strings. The clear harmonic progression in the bass contrasts with the walking eighth-note passages in the melody. The performer should stress these harmonic points to create a four-bar phrase while sustaining a lyrical melody.

The charm of the allemande in Suite III (Fig. 4) is reflected by Bach's graceful use of free ornamentation and written-out turns. These gestures produce a light and lilting quality. The reduction shows a pulse that falls on the quarter-note beat. Since simple walking quarter notes form the basic dance pulse, the interest of the
dance is not found in the pulse but rather in the gracefulness of the lilt.

The performer can best execute this gesture by observing fewer articulation points. For example, stresses can fall at the beginning of a bar (bar 1); or at the half-bar (bar 3); or on the quarter note (bar 4). In this dance, the performer should give rhythmic poise to the outlined pulse while allowing the ornamentation to be free within those bounds. By playing the turns as upbeat (grève) motions, the performer will heighten the buoyancy of the gesture.

![Musical notation]

**Fig. 4 Allemande** of Suite III, bars 1-4.

The main feature of the allemande in Suite IV (Fig. 5) is the contrast of flowing melodic lines with clear rhythmic gestures. In bars 1-2, the melodic line proceeds by step, pulses at the half note and quarter note. In the next four bars, arpeggios outline eighth-note pulses. This leaping arpeggiation brings out a bass line and presents a spirited dance.
To achieve these gestures, the performer should execute singing détaché strokes in the melodic, aria-like sections and incorporate lifted strokes for the leaping sections. In bars 3-5, the dance pulse can be best achieved by moving the bow quickly on the first sixteenth note of each group and letting the rest follow in an up-beat motion to the next pulse. In the eighth-note figures following, the poise of the dance can be best inflected by giving the lower eighth note more weight and the second eighth note, less.

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 5 Allemande of Suite IV, bars 1-6.**

In Suite V (Fig.6), Bach used the model of the French orchestral overture, found in the works of Lully. Pulses occurred on either quarter notes or half notes in each bar with ornamentation connecting the main chordal points.

In the first two bars, the pulse falls on the half note followed by two quarter notes. The notes in between, by tradition, were often
double-dotted\textsuperscript{34} which gives an impression of stateliness. Also, the theme is heard in different voices. This pseudo-polyphony occurs in the first two bars where the melody moves from the top voice to the bass.

To bring out the melody clearly, the performer should give weight to the main tone of the melody. The notes in the chord will be played before the beat and the main note (D-flat) will be played on the beat. The other notes that support the main tone should be released after sounding. This manner of performance will clearly separate the melody from the accompaniment.

Fig. 6 The Allemande of Suite V, bars 1-5.

The allemande of Suite VI (Fig. 7) does not contain dance pulses, but rather presents a chorale with florid ornamentation. The main chorale chords occur on the half-bar (bar 1) or at quarter notes (bar

\textsuperscript{34} Robert Donington quotes Quantz in \textit{Baroque Music: Style and Performance Handbook}, 49. “The dotted notes must be pushed on sharply by the performer, and executed with vigour. The dot is held long and succeeding notes made very short.”
2). To hear the structure of the chorale, the performer should first play the chorale chords without ornamentation as in the reduction. The reduction will also show that the melody notes in the ornamentation create a melodic flow. Once the melody, derived from both the chorale and ornamentation, is firmly established in the performer's mind, then the remaining ornamentation can be added to embellish that line.

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 7** *Allemande* of Suite VI, bars 1-3.

**Courantes and Correntes in the Six Suites**

In the Six Suites, Bach wrote six dances that he labeled *courantes.*\(^{35}\) However, five of these are composed in the Italian *corrente* style; only one is written in the French style, found in the fifth suite. Although these dances were labeled inaccurately in the Anna Magdelena manuscript, this study will distinguish between these

\(^{35}\) Since Bach's manuscript is lost, it is not sure how he labeled the *courantes* in the Six Suites. Throughout the document, I shall designate this dance in its French or Italian nomenclature, where applicable.
two types. Bach wrote in both the French and Italian styles equally: eighteen Italian correntes are found in his music for violin, cello, keyboard and flute with an almost equal number of French courantes.

The French courante is a slow dance in triple time (usually in 6/4 or 3/2 meters) and was described by contemporary commentators as solemn, noble, grand, and majestic.\textsuperscript{36} The courante was favored by Louis XIV; he danced it virtually every day for twenty years. He “wanted his reign, his kingdom, and his person to be identified with this dance.”\textsuperscript{37}

In contrast, the Italian corrente was used by Bach as a showpiece for idiomatic display. In the style of Italian virtuoso writing, the corrente exhibits fast sixteenth-note passages with wide leaps and broken chords. The corrente was originally “a courtship dance combining fixed and improvised step-patterns. A general air of gaiety prevailed, dancers seeming to run rather than walk, moving from side to side in a zigzag fashion.”\textsuperscript{38} Step-units of the corrente were often in compound meter (12/8 or 6/8) and in hop-step motion (Fig. 8). The hop springs off the eighth note and the steps land on the quarter note, the whole step executed in triple rhythm.

\textsuperscript{36} For a further account of contemporary descriptions of this dance, see Robert Donington’s ...\textit{Handbook}; and The Interpretation of Early Music.\textsuperscript{37} Little, Dance..., 115.\textsuperscript{38} Little, “Courante,” The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: MacMillan Press, 1980), 4:875
In the Six Suites, Bach clearly retained a lively character and springing motion in his correntes. Since these dances are in 3/4 meter, the effect of the hop-step pattern is often outlined by the bar: the hop on the third beat and the step on the first beat of the next bar. To add interest with metrical ambiguity, Bach often altered this dance pulse by introducing syncopations, hemiolas and off-beat accents. These compositional devices were essential for capturing the virtuoso character of these instrumental pieces.

In Suite I (Fig. 9), despite the fact that this movement is labeled courante in the manuscripts, the performer can clearly distinguish the Italian style. The reduction outlines a basic quarter-note pulse. The profile of the hop-step pattern falls on the third and first beats of the bar. As a result, the performer should exercise care that no undue stress be placed on the second beat. The performer will need to adjust his tempo accordingly in order to create a coherent four-bar phrase and to bring out the virtuoso elements.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 875.
Fig. 9 *Corrente* of Suite 1, bars 1-5.

In Suite II (Fig. 10), the reduction shows that there are many eighth-note subdivisions in this *corrente* that are given importance within the hop-step pulse. The steps on first beats (bars 3-5) are in eighth-note pulses as well as the hops on third beats (bars 4-5).

In order to bring out these subtle inflections, the performer should use bow weight and speed to highlight the melody. To successfully execute the sixteenth-note passages, the performer should note that these are passing notes that smoothly connect to the next pulse (bars 4 and 5). By playing the reduction incisively, and later adding the remaining notes, the performer will gain the skill of allowing the passing notes to move correctly from pulse to pulse.
The simple texture of broken chords in Suite III (Fig. 11) belies the intricacy of the pulses. In this *corrente*, Bach composed an implied polyphony which brings out pulses and melody tones in different voices. In the opening (Fig. 11a), he sometimes gave only one pulse to the bar on the first beat (bars 1, 3, 5). In bars 2 and 4, he gave the main pulses on the first and second beats. Motivic play is an important factor in this dance and the performer should highlight the differences. For example, in the opening bar, the performer should treat the arpeggiation as a cascading gesture, in contrast to the scalar melodic eighth note passages in bar 2, which should be considered melodic and played in a lyrical manner.
Similarly, in Fig. 11b (bar 10 and 14), the pulses are accentuated on the notes G# and E or A and D. He has purposefully obscured the hop-step pattern to allow for a more sophisticated interplay of pulses.

Fig. 11b Corrente of Suite III, bars 9-17.

Another feature of this movement includes a string technique called *bariolage*: a bow stroke that alternates between two strings and gives the effect of a sustained pedal point on one string (Fig. 11c). This gives the movement a rustic drone effect in contrast to the virtuosic mood of the previous two suites.

Fig. 11c A *bariolage* stroke in the Corrente of Suite III, bars 20-26.
In Suite IV (Fig. 12), there are several motivic gestures which give this *corrente* a forward drive that almost overshadows the pulse. There are three main components: broken chords; sixteenth-note passages functioning as passing tones; and triplet passages. In bar 1, the broken chords clearly outline the quarter-note pulse and stress the hop-step pattern on the third and first beats.

The performer should be aware that the bow stroke should highlight the melody. The sixteenth-note passages also outline the hop-step pattern and give an added sparkle as the passages spring from the bottom register to connect to the upper voice. The performer should also be careful to consider these figures as passing tones to avoid any unwanted accents. The triplet figures in bars 5-7 give the illusion of slowing the motion that imitates a heavy-footed peasant quality.

![Musical notation](image)

*Fig. 12* Corrente of Suite IV, bars 1-8.
Bach inserted the French *courante* (Fig. 13a) into Suite V. The
*courante* has its own specific step patterns and is not a leaping dance.

The *tempo de courante*...

is a noble gesture consisting of a bend, rise and slide. (A *plié*, or
bending of the knees, comes on the final crotchet of a bar,
followed by an *élève* or rise on the downbeat and a curved slide of
the non-weight bearing foot on the second beat of the bar).

Another type of step...is the *pas de courante* made up of a *demi-
coupé*...and a *coupé*. 40

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**Fig. 13a** A typical step pattern of a French *courante*.

In this suite, the violoncello’s A string is tuned down to G
natural. This technique of altered tuning is called *scordatura*. The
overall effect produces a dark and introverted sound. Bach exploited
this tuning to bring out the grave and somber quality of the *courante*.

In this movement, Bach closely follows the step patterns of the
*courante*. The strongest stress (*élève*) is on the first beat. The second
pulse has a gentle inflection (non-weight-bearing foot). It can be also
treated as passing motion (*glissé*) to the third beat which acts as a lift
to the next bar.

Bach supports the placement of the steps with chords. These
chords are often three-note or four-note chords. The performer
should be aware of the delicacy of this dance so that the chords are

played with the proper weight. This is a highly ornamented movement and the performer must be aware that ornamentation should simply embellish the step patterns. Quantz suggested that "shortening the eighth note after a dotted quarter...is imperative to sharpening the rhythms...; the affect will quickly become abstract without such definition."\(^{41}\)

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 13b** *Courante* in Suite V, bars 1-5.

Suite VI (Fig. 14) is written for a five-stringed instrument, *violoncello piccolo*.\(^{42}\) The *corrente* in this suite exhibits quarter-note pulses with the hop-step pattern on the third and first beats of the bar (bars 9-14). However, many bars simply have an arpeggio outline with no definite dance pulses (bars 1,2). Bach has written some motives

\(^{41}\) Little, *Dance...*, 126.

\(^{42}\) The *violoncello piccolo* or *violoncello à cinque corde* was used by Bach to display virtuoso violoncello writing. It was slightly smaller than a violoncello and was tuned in the same manner, with the added top string tuned to e'. This instrument was used in the entire sixth suite.
which support the dance step pattern and others that are rapid sixteenth-note passages that function as bridge material (bars 15-19).

![Fig. 14 Corrente of Suite VI, bars 9-14.](image)

**Sarabandes in the Six Suites**

The original *sarabandes* can be traced back to 16th-century West Indies. Spanish explorers witnessed this dance and exported it back to Spain. There it was accompanied by castanets and guitars and was considered an exotic dance. Singing was added with percussion instruments. The Catholic Spanish courts were offended by its loose motions and ugly words and Phillip II later banned the "zarabanda...in Spain in 1583 for its extraordinary obscenity."43

Because of the court's censorship, the *sarabande* became an extremely popular form as a forbidden dance. It was often mentioned in the works of poets and writers such as Cervantes and Lope de Vegas. Its French adaptation was evidently tamed for the court as

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"choreographies reveal a dance that seemed calm and sometimes tender, but ordered, balanced and sustained."\textsuperscript{44}

There are no specific step patterns existing for this dance. It is a hybrid of steps such as \textit{temps de courante}, \textit{pas de bourrées} and \textit{pas coupés}. The basic character of these step patterns is a \textit{bend} on the first beat and a \textit{step} on the second beat. The performer can achieve this bend/step combination by pulling a fast bow on the bend-pulse and easing into the step-pulse with a slower bow.

\textit{Sarabandes} are composed in both \textit{3/4} and \textit{6/4} meters (Fig. 15).\textsuperscript{45} In France, the \textit{3/4} meter was preferred. It "implied a slower tempo with three substantial beats per bar, while [6/4 meter was] more common in Italy [which] implied a faster tempo and a compound meter with one accent per each triple group."\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{Fig. 15} \textit{Sarabande in stil francese} by G.M. Bononcini (Bologna, 1671)

\textsuperscript{44} Little, \textit{Dance...}, 93.
\textsuperscript{45} Hudson, "\textit{Sarabande}," 491.
\textsuperscript{46} ibid., 491.
The *sarabandes* in the *Six Suites* incorporate the French model. Bach enjoyed this dance, since "over a period of approximately thirty-three years [he] experimented with and refined a wide variety of sarabandes."\(^{47}\) However, all these dances exhibit one common feature: strict phrase structure of four or eight bars; irregular phrase lengths appear only rarely.

In Suite I (Fig. 16a), the *sarabande* rhythm is clearly stated by two chords. The first beat is the *plié* (bending of both knees) of the *tems du courante* (or a *pas de bourrée*); and the second beat is the *élève* (rise) to a *glissé* (slide) to another foot. The third beat can be either a step or a *glissé*. Often in this dance, the step pattern and melody are equally important. In bars 1-4, between the dance pulses, there are eighth-note and sixteenth-note passages that connect the pulses melodically. The performer should note that although these embellishments are modest, a melodic flow should be maintained.

![Fig. 16a Sarabande in Suite I, bars 1-4](image-url)

\(^{47}\) Little, *Dance...*, 97.
Bach also included hemiolas in bars 7-8 which are an important characteristic of this dance. The stresses for the hemiola fall every two beats over a two-bar phrase, creating a 2:1 augmentation of the preceding triple meter.

![Fig. 16b A hemiola in Sarabande in Suite I, bars 9-12](image)

The somber key of d minor of Suite II (Fig.17) suggests a quiet and distant mood. The range is kept mostly in the middle voice to emphasize the grave character. The writing is sparse with very few sixteenth-note passages or florid gestures. The bend and step pattern is present throughout the dance with characteristic hemiolas (not shown).

![Fig. 17 Sarabande in Suite II, bars 1-5.](image)
In contrast, the *sarabande* in Suite III (Fig. 18) has a lively character that is portrayed by the dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note figures in bars 1-2. The resonant four-note chords add a rustic character: a trait of the entire suite. The performer should not feel inhibited in playing this *sarabande* in a lively manner since Bach has given strong accents and articulations. The melody is clearly in the soprano voice; therefore, the performer should take care in executing the chords as support to the melody. This can be best produced by starting the chords slightly before the beat and arriving at the melody note precisely on the beat.

![Musical notation]

*Fig. 18 Sarabande in Suite III, bars 1-5.*

In Suite IV (Fig. 19), Bach has introduced a *sarabande* that is noble and majestic. In this movement, there are also many figures combining dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note figures as in Suite III, but their character is entirely different. Here they are "reminiscent of the *entredé grave* style [and] according to Quantz, the character of this style is best achieved by lengthening the dotted note [bars 2 and 4],
detaching the bow during the dot, and shortening the following quick notes or note." There is also contrast between the chordal passages and the dotted-figure passages: the performer should allow for both singing quality and rhythmic emphasis to separate them.

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 19 Sarabande in Suite IV, bars 1-8.

The starkness of the sarabande in Suite V (Fig. 20) is echoed by its bare texture. The step-pattern is similar to the previous suites but is subtly hidden. The usual stress on the second beat is represented by a lower neighbor tone in the broken chord (bar 1, second beat). The performer should evoke the spirit of this sarabande by not over-dramatizing the second beat. Rather, emphasizing color of the minor-second interval of the neighbor tone will be sufficient.

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48 Ibid., 107.
Bach exploits the five-stringed violoncello piccolo in Suite VI (Fig. 21) by using resonant three- and four-note chords throughout this movement which clearly emphasize the important first and second beats of the step pattern. The meter is 3/2, implying a slow and stately character. The melody is in the top voice and is embellished with appoggiatura to add poignancy to the sound. The performer on the modern instrument can best imitate the resonance of a five-stringed instrument by allowing the chords to ring throughout the beat.
**Minuets, Bourrées and Gavottes**\(^{49}\) in the *Six Suites*

The structure of the classical suite of the 17th century was based on the following scheme: *prelude, allemande, courante, sarabande, gigue*. Composers often added different dances, such as *passpieds, loures, siciliennes* and others to add individuality and uniqueness to that suite. In the *Six Suites*, Bach inserted three additional dances in between *sarabandes* and *gigues*. These were *minuets, bourrées* or *gavottes*.

Because Bach was influenced by both Italian and French styles, he sought a careful balance between a lively, virtuosic and idiomatic Italian style and a calm, elegant and poised French style. He utilized those Italianate qualities in all the *allemandes, courantes, and gigues* except in Suite V where these three dances are clearly in the French style (most likely because the sound of *scordatura* tuning is less overt). On the other hand, the inclusion of *minuets, bourrées* and *gavottes* adds a unique French dimension to the suites. All three were sophisticated and highly elegant dances of the court of Louis XIV.

Bach recognized the simple charm of these dances and hardly deviated from their spirit and step patterns. He added no complex counterpoint or florid ornamentation, but retained the clear form of these aristocratic dances. Also, his care in using proper phrase lengths and dance step patterns often is supported by actual choreographies of contemporary dance masters. Bach appreciated both the excitement of Italian idiomatic display and the art of French

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\(^{49}\) In the *Six Suites*, these spellings are slightly different. However, current scholarship has generally agreed with the above versions.
court dance, and he skilfully combined them in each suite without calling attention to one or the other.

The Minuets

The word minuet was derived from the French word, menu, meaning small or fine. Early minuet dances originated in southwestern France in the Poitou region. Eventually, the minuet became one of the most popular dances of Louis XIV's court and was later adapted by instrumentalists as a stylized ensemble piece in the 18th century. The music for the court minuet originated in the mid-17th century in Lully's ballets and operas. In the early 18th century, it also became popular as a common social dance. In 1752, a Frenchman remarked, "I knew nothing in the whole Art of Dancing more noble, more expressive, nor more elegant, than the Minuet."\(^{50}\)

A wide range of styles and tempos evolved due to its popularity, not only in France but in virtually every other country in Europe. Commentary of that day suggested "a very lively dance...rather moderate than quick."\(^{51}\) In the Six Suites, Bach closely imitated the step patterns of the choreographies found in court dances. The minuet was a delicate couple dance that encompassed a small area, involving small gestures with the feet. The pulse of the dance was light and well defined:

\(^{50}\) Little, Dance..., 63.
\(^{51}\) Donington, ...Handbook..., 17.
musicians playing stylized minuets should realize that the basic unit of the dance is two bars long...and that while the dancer's movements always imply an accent on the first beat of a unit, strong secondary accents would not necessarily fall on the second beat.\footnote{52}

There were several dance step patterns that were incorporated into the overall flow of the dance. Below are two examples of common minuet steps (Fig. 22).\footnote{53}

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\( \vee \) = plié [bend knees]; \( R \) = right foot; \( L \) = left foot; 
\( j \) = demi-jeté [small leap on to ball of foot]; 
\( \Lambda \) = élève [rise to straightened knees] on ball of foot; 
\( \vee \Lambda \) = demi-coupe [bend and rise]; 
\( I \) = pas marché [step on ball of foot]

\textbf{Fig. 22} Two common minuet step-patterns.

Bach wrote twenty-eight instrumental works that were labeled minuets and many others that were not so titled. In the \textit{Six Suites}, they are presented in pairs as \textit{Minuet I} and \textit{Minuet II} in contrasting styles and are found only in the first two suites.

In Suite I (Fig. 23), the main pulses of \textit{Minuet I} occur on the first and third beats in a four-bar phrase structure. The broken chord

\footnote{53 Ibid., 354.}
of bars 1 and 5 gives weight to the bass notes and supports a walking eighth-note melody. The step patterns are dispersed over two bars. The performer should maintain the correct balance of pulses. For example, the first beat receives a stress at the beginning of every two bars and the third beat leads to the first of the next bar. This motion is paralleled by the *sliding* or *lifting* of the foot in dance step patterns. The performer should be aware that these two gestures can be imitated by the bow: a *legato* bowing for *sliding* and a *lifted* bowing for *lifting*.

![Fig. 23 Minuet I of Suite I, bars 1-8.](image)

In *Minuet II* (Fig. 24), Bach implied a three-voiced texture in which the middle part often acts as a connecting voice between the upper voice and bass. The main stress occurs at the beginning of every two bars. In bars 2 and 4, third beats act as small leaps (*jettes*) to the next bar, while in bars 1 and 3, the steps are rising (*élève*) which creates a forward motion. The plaintive mood of g minor key is reflected by these delicate stepping gestures.
The rustic nature of Minuet I in Suite II (Fig. 25), is illustrated by heavy three-part chords in a two-voiced texture. Stresses fall on the first beat of every bar. Bach emphasized this by using forceful chords on the downbeats and a quarter-note lift at the third beat (bars 1-2). A smooth counter-melody in descending step-wise eighth notes (bars 3-4) relieves the texture. The performer can bring out these contrasting qualities by highlighting those gestures that are rhythmic and lifted, as opposed to those that are smooth and melodic.
In Minuet II (Fig. 26), the parallel major key of D evokes a light and open quality in relief to d minor. In bar 1, the trill on the first beat acts as a gentle rhythmic impulse that leads to the second bar. In bar 2, the second and third beats react to the impulse of the first beat. These beats are not accented but continue the lilting motion. In bars 5-6, there are no strong pulses, but rather a freely flowing melodic line.
The Bourrée

The bourrée originated as a folk dance in the Auvergne region in France and was often accompanied by singing and playing the lute. Later, as a court dance, it was a simple courtship dance that had its own specific step-pattern, the pas de bourrée (Fig. 27). It consisted of a demi-coupé (a plié followed by an élève onto the foot making the next step), a plain step, and a small gentle leap.

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{dance steps:} & \quad \downarrow \uparrow \downarrow \uparrow \downarrow \uparrow \downarrow \uparrow \downarrow \uparrow \downarrow \uparrow \\
& \text{\textit{v} = plié [pend]} \\
& \text{\textit{\&} = élève [rise]} \\
& \text{\textit{I} = plain step} \\
& \text{\textit{J} = jeté [leap]} \\
& \text{\textit{g} = glissé [slide]} \\
\end{align*} \]

Fig. 27 Bourrée in L. Pécour’s Recueil de danses (Paris, 1700).

The bourrée was considered the most straightforward of all the dances. Johann Mattheson related that “its essential characteristic is contentment, pleasantness, unconcern, relaxed, easygoing, comfortable and yet pleasing.” Its basic pulse begins with an upbeat quarter note or two eighth notes. The phrases are regular and the pulses are weighted on the half-bar.

Overall, Bach wrote twenty bourrées; and in the Six Suites, they are paired to imitate the minuet construction. The bourrées are

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55 Ibid.
56 Little, Dance....35.
unaffected and have little ornamentation (as opposed to bourrées for keyboard which are more Italianate). The sparse texture suggests that Bach left ornamentation to the performer or that Anna Magdelena "probably copied...Bach’s [manuscript] without embellishment."\textsuperscript{57} Nonetheless, all four of them reveal the steps of the pas de bourrée.

The jovial bounce in Bourrée I of Suite III (Fig. 28) is reflected by the open three-note chords (bars 2, 4). Here, two voices (bars 1-4) are contrasting in nature. The up-beat gesture to the first beat represents a melodic motive while the lower voice on the second and third beats has a rhythmic lilting gesture. The performer should emphasize this duality in order to bring out the separate voices as well as create a dialogue.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{bourree.png}
\caption{Bourrée I of Suite III, bars 1-4.}
\end{figure}

Bourrée II (Fig. 29) is written in the parallel key of c minor. Here the lilting gestures are less emphasized in order to bring out the melodic passages. The stresses fall in a two-bar sequence in which the pulse is on each half-note. The performer should underscore the

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 50.
quietness of this movement by not interrupting the long-melodic flow. Bach induces a quiet mood without unnecessary pulses to allow a moment of relief from the vigorous dances that surround it.

Fig. 29 Bourrée II of Suite III, bars -4.

The lively character of the Bourrée I of Suite IV (Fig. 30) is highlighted by the sixteenth-note run on the upbeat. The performer should treat this plié figure melodically and place the heavy pulses (bars 1 and 3) on the first and third beats..

Fig. 30 Bourrée I of Suite IV, bars 1-4.

In Bourrée II (Fig. 31) the mood reflects a feeling of repose and calm. The syncopation (bars 1,2) allows for a gentle lilt and interplay between the two voices. The performer should be careful to bring out
the lower voice but not to accent the upper voice. This interplay is achieved by sounding the lower voice during the double-stopping while keeping more bow weight on the melodic upper line.

![Musical notation]

**Fig. 31** Bourrée of Suite IV, bars 1-4

**The Gavottes**

The origin of the *gavotte* began in the Basse-Bretagne region of France in the late 16th century. Like the *bourrée*, it was a folk dance with a simple construction: a homophonic texture in binary form with balanced phrasing. It was a couple dance in which “each couple takes a few turns alone, and then the lead gentleman and lady kiss [most likely greet] all the dancers of the opposite sex.”

Gavottes came into vogue in the early 18th century because of a “pastoral craze....that idealized a simpler rural life.”

Descriptions of the court versions varied: “gavottes move graciously and a little slower than a [presumably processional] march, which moves solemnly.”

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58 Mather, *French Baroque*, 250.
59 Little, *Dance*..., 47.
60 Mather, *French Baroque*, 250.
Gavottes and bourrées are very similar in phrase structure and step-pattern. The main distinction is that there are different steps such as hops and jumps in the gavotte. Also, in the bourrée, the strong accent is on the first beat of the bar, whereas the gavotte begins in the middle of the bar (Fig. 32).\(^6^1\)

![Figure 32: A typical gavotte step-pattern applied to M. Balon's La gavotte de Seaux (Paris, 1714)]

Bach's gavottes reflect a calm and pastoral mood. Overall, he wrote eighteen gavottes; and in the Six Suites, they are paired in contrasting styles.

In Suite V (Fig. 33), Gavotte I, the main pulses on the half bar are connected by slurred eighth-note figures. The performer should consider these as melodic bridges between the main pulses. In this two voiced texture, Bach seamlessly allows both voices to be heard in the eighth-note figures. The performer needs to separate the melody.

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and chords to bring out the contrast. To highlight the melodic line, the chordal notes are played before the beat. As a result, there will be proper weighting of the voices.

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 33** *Gavotte* I of Suite V, bars 1-4.

In *Gavotte* II (Fig. 34), Bach introduces a triplet figure in which he conceals the melody. In the reduction, the gentle undulating figure reveals a melody in quarter notes. Since there is a two-voice texture, effective use of dynamics can contrast the upper and lower voices.

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 34** *Gavotte* II of Suite V, bars 1-4.

The peasant character of *Gavotte* I in Suite VI (Fig. 35) is strongly emphasized by strong three-note and four-note chords. Bach uses the natural sonority of the five-stringed instrument to bring out
this quality. Once again, the performer should execute these chords so that the main melody note falls on the beat.

Fig. 35  Gavotte I of Suite VI, bars 1-4.

In Gavotte II (Fig. 36), Bach thinned out the texture and composed a lighter, lilting melody. Later in this movement, he returned to a rustic quality by adding a pedal point to the melody.

The grandeur of the gavottes in Suite VI is found not only in the large, open chords but also in the interweaving melodies. The performer should exploit both these effects to bring out the resonance in the dance.

Fig. 36  Gavotte II of Suite VI, bars 1-4.
The Gigues in the Six Suites

The origin of the gigue can be dated back to the 15th century in the British Isles. The jig "was a prominent feature of the stage entertainment called JIGG, an important, farcical, burlesque comedy." Described as frolicking or leaping, the jig was considered a loose and ribald dance that often required fast and virtuosic footwork. These dances did not have any specific step patterns, but were danced in four-bar phrases in both simple and compound duple meter.

As this dance spread to the continent, each country varied the jig and slowly created new styles. In 17th-century France, gigues became more complex in rhythm and texture. Cross-rhythms, hemiolas, syncopations, irregular phrase lengths and imitative counterpoint were some of the features that were found in gigues in the lute repertoire. Also, Lully provided choreographies for many gigues, a dance he used extensively in his ballets (Fig. 37).

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62 Bach incorporated in the Six Suites both the French gigue and the Italian giga. Other spellings commonly found throughout his works are jig, jigg, gique in which Bach reflected those national styles.
64 Ibid., 369.
Italian gigas were found in the Italian string repertoire as early as mid-17th century. Unlike the French gigue, the giga was often used in instrumental works such as trio sonatas (Fig. 38).\textsuperscript{65} “Gigas appear to be more of a purely instrumental excursion than does any other Baroque dance except the allemande.”\textsuperscript{66}

\textbf{Fig. 38} This Italian giga is composed by Arcangelo Corelli, from his op.5 no. 9 Trio Sonata.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 370.
\textsuperscript{66} Little, Dance..., 157.
The Italian *giga* is less complex than the French *gigue*. It is homophonic in texture; phrases are often irregular; and a strong motivic play is an important feature. The spirit of the Italian *giga* can be related to English country dance. Its characteristic hopping and leaping gestures can be easily imitated in instrumental writing with fast passages, broken chords and wide leaps. Bach reflected this character in his *gigas* (he composed only one French *gigue* in the fifth suite), by using 6/8 and 3/8 meters in the *Six Suites*.

In Suite I (Fig. 39), the main pulses are reduced to two beats per bar. Each beat represents a typical hop and leap gesture: eighth-note/quarter-note figure or quarter-note/eighth-note figure. The performer can best execute the jovial, country-like character by giving a spirited upbeat (*plié*) and a strong downbeat (*hop*). In executing the opening upbeat motion, the dancer would have bended his knees on the half bar, instead of the eighth note because the lively tempo would have made the *plié* motion difficult.

![Fig. 39 Giga I of Suite I, bars 1-4.](image-url)
The character of the *giga* in Suite II (Fig. 40) is strongly influenced by the 3/8 meter. Stresses occur on each down beat suggesting a rustic quality (which is later emphasized with open-string pedal points). This also highlights an implied two-voice polyphony. The performer should try to create a continuous eight-bar phrase while keeping the stresses constant. As a result, the stresses will not interrupt the flow of the melody; and the melody will not lessen the impact of the stresses.

![Musical notation image](image)

Fig. 40  *Giga* of Suite II, bars 1-8.

This cheerful and exuberant *giga* in Suite III (Fig. 41) is structured in eight-bar phrases, divided in sub-phrases of two bars each. Often Bach obscured strong *giga* pulses and wrote smooth melodic gestures as in bars 1-2. By contrast, the rising scale passage connects to rhythmic gestures (bars 3-4). In this *giga*, ascending and descending scalar figures should be treated as melody; and broken
chord figures utilize the *giga* pulse. The performer should bring out these lyrical qualities and contrast them with the rhythmic elements.

![Fig. 41 Giga of Suite III, bars 1-9.](image)

Bach wrote this *giga* of Suite IV (Fig. 42) in 12/8 meter in contrast to previous *gigas*. He created a lyrical effect by incorporating a melody within the triplet figures. Thus, the strong *giga* pulse is not appropriate for the character of this movement; however, the performer should still give the triplet figure a lilt. By giving a slight stress to each triplet figure, the performer will capture the appropriate lilting gesture and prevent the phrase from racing ahead.

![Fig. 42 Giga of Suite IV, bars 1-4.](image)
Bach composed a French *gigue* in Suite V (Fig. 43) to reflect the subdued sound created by *scordatura* tuning. This *gigue* in 3/8 meter, incorporates the *sautillant* figure: the dotted-sixteenth and eighth-note figure of each bar. A lilting motion is produced as the performer lifts the bow slightly after the eighth note on the third beat. The phrase consists of eight bars and the pulses remain strong at the beginning of each bar.

![Music notation](image)

**Fig. 43 Gigue of Suite V, bars 1-9.**

The fanfare quality of the *giga* in Suite VI (Fig. 44) begins in the upper register of the five-stringed instrument. By adding chords, Bach placed heavy stresses on certain beats (bars 1-3) to create a sturdy and rhythmically grounded *giga*. Once again, the performer can create contrast by bringing out melodic gestures in scale passages (bar 1 and 3) and *giga* pulses in broken chords (bar 2 and 4).
The Preludes in the Six Suites

Each of Bach's suites or set of dances often begins with a prelude which does not bear a dance title. While they are not specifically dances, several do contain implied dance rhythms; therefore, I have included an analysis of the preludes in this discussion.

The function of the prelude can be traced back to late 15th century and early 16th century practices.

Preludes evolved from the short improvisations made by lutenists checking the tuning of their instruments, keyboard players testing the touch and tone of theirs, or church organists establishing the pitch and mode of the music to be sung during the liturgy.  

The style of these short improvisations included techniques unique to those instruments. For example, lutenists used strumming, arpeggiations, pedal points and fantasia-like passages to prepare themselves, and also to alert the audience that a performance was

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67 Other names that were used were praeludium and praeambulum.
beginning. The prelude also served to create a mood that would dictate the general character of the work that followed.

By the late 17th century, preludes were composed as separate works (unattached preludes) or as introductions to either fugues or a set of dances. These preludes often included improvisatory passages that gave an impression of freedom. In the preludes of his dance suites, Bach often connected motivic relationships and harmonic progressions to the following dances in order to create a larger unified work. In the Six Suites, each prelude presents unique and far-reaching technical exercises that exploit the tonal capabilities of the violoncello.

In Suite I (Fig. 45), broken-chord arpeggiation (bars 1-7) imitates the lutenist’s strumming motion. The performer should allow the bottom G pedal point to ring. This parallels the lutenist’s desire to sound a bass tone that resonates in order to tune the chord that follows. Another imitation of lute technique found in this prelude is the use of bariolage: an undulating between two strings that creates a resonant effect.

The reduction reveals a simple pulse that gives weight on the first and third beats of every bar. On these beats, the performer should let the bass notes ring while playing the broken chord and then should give the eighth-note figures a lilt.
The passionate prelude of Suite II (Fig. 46) demonstrates a remarkable lyricism which is uncommon in Bach's works. The characteristic low-sounding notes are cleverly integrated into the texture. The performer can achieve this by moving the bow quickly on the first note of the sixteenth-note figure (bars 2-3) to allow the note to ring. Also, Bach added another feature: the basic pulse suggests a sarabande rhythm, in which the performer can imitate the gesture of the bend-step pulse.
The prelude of Suite III (Fig. 47) is reminiscent of the *praeludium* of the E major Partita for violin. Its *moto perpetuo* quality is suggested by a *presto* label in one of the French manuscripts. Freely flowing sixteenth-note passages and arpeggiations fill this prelude with exuberance and resonance. The reduction (bars 9-12) shows that Bach placed definite pulses within this fantasia-like texture. The performer should allow these pulses to contrast with the lyricism of the fantasia.

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 47** Prelude of Suite III, bars 9-15.

Simple arpeggiation dominates the prelude of Suite IV (Fig. 48). The lower note sounds the pedal point and the reduction of the cascading arpeggios shows a profile with an implied pulse. The performer should allow the harmonic progression to unfold. Bach gave color to this prelude by using diminished and minor chords throughout this movement. A remarkable addition occurs in the middle of this prelude: Bach introduced a long, winding fantasia
passage. He added this section to break up the texture and give relief to the constant arpeggiation. Such different moods and moments of repose are quite common in the preludes.

![Musical notation](image)

**Fig. 48** Prelude of Suite IV, bars 1-6

In keeping with the uniqueness of Suite V, Bach has written a noble and expansive prelude and fugue as its first movement. The beginning of the prelude (Fig. 49) incorporates a c minor pedal point with ornamentation connecting the main beats. The performer should allow the pedal point to ring throughout the ornamentation and keep the implied pulse in tempo. Emphasizing main structural beats will give support to the improvisatory nature of this prelude.
The attached fugue (Fig. 50) has an implied two-voiced polyphony and the performer should distinguish each voice by giving it an individual articulation. The top voice is played with a strong marcato stroke while the lower voice should be legato. In addition, Bach used a pseudo-giga pulse. The performer should allow this pulse to be heard without distorting the fugue theme.
The resonant aural effect in the prelude of Suite VI (Fig. 51) is achieved by Bach's combination of a bariolage and a giga-like gesture. The strong downbeat motion results in a full-sounding rustic quality which the performer can optimize by giving an accented stroke on each beat while allowing the open string to resonate simultaneously.

Fig. 51 The Prelude of Suite VI, bars 24-27.

CONCLUSION: The Dance Never Stops

Because dancing was a normal and everyday occurrence of Bach's generation, the understanding of dance forms and step patterns, as presented here, should be an integral part of the modern performer's skills. This document has established that the intricate instrumental music of Bach did not deviate far from its choreographic roots. In all the court dances, there are two basic motions, the step and the leap. A performer is quite capable of imitating these gestures on a stringed instrument with proper bow strokes. My instructions for the execution of these step-patterns should easily guide the performer to
capture the spirit of the dance which is often hidden in the complex linear and contrapuntal texture of the *Six Suites*.

Performing this other works of Bach can be a fulfilling endeavour for all musicians. Many instrumentalists have bravely transcribed the *Six Suites* for their medium and the work remains an important part of their repertoire. Violists in particular have welcomed and studied these works as closely as violoncellists. If the reader concludes that the study of dance is the last word in understanding the *Six Suites*, then I have failed in my study. The scope and breadth of Baroque instrumental music is vast. Constant reading, listening and performing can sensitize the performer to deep and profound meanings inherent in this great era of music. The performer may consult over fifty editions of the *Six Suites* by famous performers and editors who contributed their experiences and thoughts about this work.

Indeed, the performer is the only real link between generations, for music is a truly human endeavor which can be passed on by oral and aural traditions. For the musician-scholar, the study of previous editions unfolds much valuable information. At the same time, these editions can be a source of confusion. Each generation develops its own sense of musical expression and a sincere effort is made to pass on these thoughts and experiences. However, as scholarship is refined and musical expression changes from decade to decade and century to century, one can lose what was initially intended in these compositions. Fortunately, we have at our disposal much contemporary advice and instruction on performing Baroque music
well. It is my hope that the performer will explore the ideas presented here, as well as other facets of the Six Suites to recreate this splendid music.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


