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J. S. BACH'S PARTITA IN E MINOR, BWV 830:
MOTIVIC ANALYSIS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON INTERPRETATION

by

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J. S. Bach's Partita In E Minor, BWV 830: Motivic Analysis And Its Influence On Interpretation

by

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ABSTRACT

The E minor Partita of J. S. Bach involves one of the most controversial issues among musicologists and performers, the rhythmic interpretation of the last two movements: Tempo di Gavotta and Gigue. There are two views: one supporting duple subdivision of the beat as notated, and another choosing triple subdivision of the beat, which modifies what is notated.

In the first chapter, the author discusses the coherent use of three basic motives—a minor second motive, a consecutive descending four-note motive, and a repeated-note motive—in the E minor Partita and the functions and effects of each motive in different movements.

In the last two chapters, the author demonstrates how the motivic structure of the piece can influence one's interpretative decisions, such as articulation and grouping and especially rhythmic interpretation of the Tempo di Gavotta and Gigue movements.
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Introduction

The music of Johann Sebastian Bach, one of the most important composers in keyboard literature, is often performed today. However, there is no authentic interpretive tradition of Bach’s music, only a huge diversity of interpretation that has reflected “each generation’s image of Bach’s music and Bach himself.”

Interpreting Bach’s music is a challenging task for performers today for several reasons. First, neither Bach nor his contemporaries left any writings about interpretation of his music. Second, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors’ treatises on performance practices often contradict each other, causing inevitable confusions. Finally, pianists face the problems of using a different instrument from the one used in Bach’s time. Therefore, one must recognize that true authenticity in modern performances of Bach’s music is impossible to obtain.

However, performers today have available more resources than ever before. For the last few decades, musicological studies has been active in the music of J. S. Bach. There are new editions of his works and discoveries, which contradict previous convictions about

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dates and performance practices.\textsuperscript{5} Those who are serious in their own interpretation of Bach’s music should expose themselves to this musicological information.

Several types of analysis reveal the logic and inner coherence of music. For homophonic music, Schenkerian analysis is a helpful tool for understanding large structural points, but a basic motivic analysis better illuminates the many smaller challenges of performance in Bach’s music. Once one identifies the basic motives throughout the piece, they can guide one’s listening and can prevent one from getting lost in the elaboration of surface notes. A performer who knows the network of motivic elements can make conscious decisions about what kind of articulations, phrasings, or groupings will be used in performance in order to bring out the meaning and unity of the piece.

Bach’s E minor Partita involves one of the most controversial issues among musicologists and performers: the rhythmic interpretation of the gigue. There are two views: one supporting duple subdivision of the beat as notated and another choosing triple subdivision of the beat, which is a modification of what is notated. Good arguments and distinguished performers support each side.

In the next two chapters, the author will present a motivic analysis of the E minor Partita and a view of the rhythmic interpretation of the last two movements, the Tempo di Gavotta and the Gigue, from her perspective as a performer. In the final chapter, the author will discuss how the motivic analysis influences the interpretation.

\textsuperscript{5}David Schulenberg, \textit{op.cit.}, 1
Chapter I: Motivic Analysis

Many distinguished scholars and performers, such as Paul Badura-Skoda\textsuperscript{1}, David Schulenberg\textsuperscript{2}, Erwin Bodky\textsuperscript{3} and George A. Kochevitsky\textsuperscript{4}, have written on Bach's keyboard works in general. Their books have provided a good foundation for performers.

Some scholars and performers have focused on the interpretation of certain sets of Bach's keyboard works: a set of six partitas, \textit{Clavierübung} I, is one of them. Several books and dissertations have been dedicated to this set.\textsuperscript{5} In these documents, although the complete set is examined as a whole, none of these scholars has analyzed in detail the motivic structure of each work. For example, Eric Hicks, in his analysis of the E minor Partita shows that a certain motivic coherence exists in the work, such as the opening and ending gestures of each movement, but there is no thorough analysis of the motivic structure.

\textsuperscript{2}David Schulenberg, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{3}Erwin Bodky, \textit{The Interpretation of Bach's Keyboard Works}, (Cambridge: , 1960).
\textsuperscript{4}George A. Kochevitsky, \textit{op.cit.}
As a performer, one always struggles to find a work’s meaning in both an objective and a subjective way. In short, analysis must precede interpretation. I believe that objective analysis of the work’s motivic structure is an essential foundation for one’s subjective interpretation. The more thorough the motivic analysis becomes, the clearer one’s interpretation is to the audience.

The E minor Partita is one of J. S. Bach’s most abstract and complicated works, and is much loved for its depth of expression. The emotional depth of this piece is closely related to the complexity of its writing. Beyond the surface level of complexity and difference, however, many musical elements—basic motives—are shared among movements, unifying the work. The coherent use of the motives prevails in an amazing manner throughout the piece, yet at the same time each basic motive has a different role and character in each movement. The nature and use of motives will be explored in the following section.

Bach elaborates three basic motives in either an original or an inverted form throughout the piece: a minor second motive \((a)\), a consecutive descending 4-note motive \((b)\), and a repeated-note motive \((c)\).
Example 1: Basic motives.

A striking example is found in the construction of the subjects of the fugues from both the Toccata and the Gigue movements. As shown in Example 2, both subjects are built on motives $a$ and $b$. (The written ornaments on the main notes in both subjects can raise the question whether these motives can be heard in real performances. Since one of the major purposes of these ornaments is to enhance the main notes beneath them, the author believes that it is valid to acknowledge the existence of these motives in the following example.)

Example 2a: Fugue subject in the Toccata, mm. 27-29.
Example 2b: Fugue subject in the Gigue, mm. 1-3.

These two motives play a major role at many different levels throughout these two movements. First, motive $b$ appears both consecutively and as an outline of the head notes in the descending sequence.

Example 3a: Motive $b$ in a consecutive manner, Toccata, mm. 29-30.

Example 3b: Motive $b$ in a consecutive manner, Gigue, mm. 25-27.
Example 3c: Motive b as an outline form, Toccata, mm. 9-10.

As shown in Example 3a, motive b is used to construct counter-subjects in both fugues, which also becomes the basic material for episodes between each statement of the subjects. At a structural level, it is often used as the frame of harmonic progressions. A fascinating aspect is found in the outline of the subject of the fugue in the toccata: original and inverted forms of motive b make the mirror form.

Example 4: Original and inverted form of motive b, Toccata, mm. 27-29.

This mirror shape is also prevalent elsewhere in the movement. Example 5 is a perfect case that shows how these elements are elaborated in the movement.
Example 5: The mirror shape through the elaboration of motive $b$, Toccata, mm.37-39.

The frame of motive $b$ results in the recurrence of the harmonic relationship of $i$-iv. Musical material at the opening of the toccata forecasts the recurrence of these harmonic relationships.

Example 6a: Toccata, m. 1.
Example 6b: Recurrence of i-iv harmonic relationship (the bass line of e-a; d-g; e-f#).

Toccata, mm. 3-4.

Another recurring element of the suite is motive c. It is often combined with motives a or b. The most obvious references to these combinations occur at the initial measure of each movement except the Gigue.
Example 7: Recurrence of motive $c$ combined with motives $a$ or $b$ at the initial measure of each movement.
Sometimes, all three motives are interwoven to create a passage.

Example 8: The elaboration of all three motives, Toccata, mm. 9-10.

Insistence on the same note is a unique feature of the suite. As discussed before, it often occurs in a repeating manner in the same register. More often, it occurs like an echo between adjacent voices. The latter is found mostly in the Toccata and the Gigue.

Example 9a: Insistence on the same note, Toccata, mm. 37-39.
Example 9b: Insistence on the same note, Gigue, mm. 5-7.

(The special effect of these passages will be discussed later in the chapter.)

The motivic elaboration in each movement will be examined in the following sections.

**Toccata**

The Toccata is one of the most complicated and highly organic movements of the partita. It consists of three sections (ABA'): two outer free improvisational sections and the fugue in the middle. Although the characteristics of these sections differ, they grow out from the basic motives and the harmonic frame. The initial statement of i-iv-vii7*-i chord progressions impregnates the following events: arpeggios (mm. 3-4) are based on the sequences of the i-iv relationship (the bass line of e-a; d-g; c-f#; b-e), as seen in Example 6b. The next statement similar to the initial one (mm. 1-2) also carries on the same progression as m. 3 (e-a; d-g). The two-part counterpoint, as shown in Example 8, is based on what comes before in m. 1 (motives a and c) and m. 7 (motive b, the head
note of each beat). The chord progression in mm. 13-14, and the following arpeggios (mm. 15-16), have an emphasis on a minor second (motive $a'$).

![Musical notation example](image)

Example 10: Motive $a'$ in the bass, Toccata, mm. 13-17.

As discussed before, the fugue section is based on the basic motives $a$, $b$, and $c$. The subject is built on all three motives. The counter-subjects and episodes are built on motives $b$ and $c$. The fugue section reflects the material from the previous section: the outline of the bass of Episode 1, as shown in Example 5, shows the same progression in mm. 3-4 (e-a; d-g; c(#) - f#); the two-part contrapuntal material is used again after the C-major statement of the subject (mm. 72-77); the general shape of the subject, counter subjects, and episodes is a mirror or arch form that is already shown in arpeggios or in the passages of two-part counterpoint.

At the end of the fugue section, in order to create the climax of the fugue and to anticipate the return of the improvisational section, Bach brings back all the basic motives $a$, $b$, and $c$, using the initial dotted figure and the two-part counterpoint in the A
section. The way Bach blends these two materials is extraordinary. Returning to the first two-part contrapuntal material in mm. 9-11, Bach creates one more voice using the first and last notes from the sixteenth-note part in octave displacement. The new voice shows clearly what Bach wanted to bring out in the original passage (mm. 9-10, Example 8).

Example 11: Toccata, mm. 83-88.

The idea of thematic anticipation in Bach’s music has been discussed by Merton Shatzkin. He defines thematic anticipation as follows: “This is found when a theme or subject of a movement or section is anticipated near the end of the preceding movement

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or section by a brief and usually disguised allusion to it.” He further explains, “The specific thematic anticipations do not, by definition, appear in any but the latter part of the preceding movement, although a few exceptions to this are allowed.” His examples show the literal reference of the specific themes very well. However, I believe the above Example 11 illuminates how the concept of thematic anticipation can be applied in another way: the anticipation is not only for the theme itself but also for the entire upcoming section. In other words, the use of two-part contrapuntal material anticipates the return of section A. Therefore, if the dotted, repeated-note figure is an example of literal thematic anticipation, the use of two-part counterpoint is that of sectional anticipation.

Allemanda

The word “allemanda” is an Italian translation of the original German dance, the allemande. In fact, in Anna Magdalena’s version of 1725, Bach had used the original name, Allemande. Speaking of this change, Fernando Valenti proposes that Bach might have wanted to emphasize the more flowing and decorative Italian quality in this allemande. Indeed, this movement projects the feeling of improvisation due to the filling

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in of notes between the main harmonic pillars, usually thirty-second notes: the motive $b$ contributes to this filling-in as well as outlining harmonic changes in eighth-note figures.

Example 12: Motive $b$, Allemanda, mm. 5-6.

The dotted repeated-note figure, motive $c$, appears in the two ways: one exactly like the one at the opening of the Toccata (mm. 2-3, mm. 17-18) (marked “x” in Example 13); and another like the disguised one in mm. 9-10 of the Toccata (mm. 3, 5, 7, mm. 17-19) (marked “y” in Example 13).

Example 13: Motive $c$, Allemanda, mm. 3-4.
Like motive b, motive a appears frequently as a decorative device in this movement:
along with two layers of motive b in the left hand Example 14, it recurs between the main
harmonic notes and produces the illusion of a new voice. This pseudo-polyphonic effect,
the *style brisé* or broken style was a common compositional device in the Baroque
period, derived from lute music. According to Claude Palisca, this technique denotes
simulating several voices while playing one note at a time.⁹

Example 14: The *style brisé* through motives a and b, mm. 11-12.

The echoing device described above also recurs in this movement.

Example 15: The echo effect, Allemanda, mm. 11-12.

The mirror or arch form is observed in some of the passages based on motive $b$ as in the counter subjects and episodes of the Toccata (mm. 2, 11, 15, 16).

Example 16: The mirror shape, Allemanda, mm. 15-16.

Corrente

Along with the Tempo di Gavotta, the Corrente is one of two movements taken from an early version of the Sonata in $G$ major for violin and obligato cembalo, BWV 1090. The Corrente is another Italian dance movement and this is one of the longest correnti written by Bach (116 measures). It is framed as a binary form like other dances,
but its actual form is rounded binary, I:IA:I:BA:I. The constant syncopation between the hands is the main characteristic of the movement.

The construction of the opening phrase shows the combination of the basic motives.

Example 17: The combination of the basic motives, Corrente, mm. 1-4.

Motive $a$ is the prevailing motive in this movement. It adds a more urgent feeling to the syncopation because it breaks the steady flow of the eighth notes in another voice.

Especially in the following passages, the syncopated chain of motive $a$ makes the basic pulse unclear (mm. 13-15, 69-71).

Example 18: The syncopated chain of motive $a$, mm. 13-15.
Motive $b$, in either original or inverted forms, often appears in altered forms: it is extended beyond its usual four-note form to five or six consecutive notes.

Example 19a: Motive $b$ in altered forms, Corrente, mm. 16-17.

Example 19b: Motive $b$ in altered forms, Corrente, mm. 113-115.

Motive $c$ occurs as a pedal note in the two $A$ sections, establishing stability after the previous long rapid change of harmonies combined with the syncopation (mm. 29-35, 90-96).
Example 20: Motive c as a pedal tone, Corrente, mm. 29-35.

Air

Bach added the Air movement in the 1731 version. Its insertion between the Corrente and the Sarabande breaks the usual order of the allemande-courante-sarabande sequence, which was the norm of the dance suite in Bach’s time. This exceptional order is found in only two of Bach’s works, the D major Partita and the E minor Partita, which raises the question whether this order was intended by Bach himself or has occurred only for the efficient use of the page in the edition. This latter argument allows the

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possibility of playing this movement in a different place in the work, that is, after the Sarabande. The individual performer may well reach a different conclusion from this experiment, but for this author, it is logical to keep this movement between the Corrente and the Sarabande, for the sake of relief after the unusually long and complicated Corrente.

This movement is written in binary form with a little codetta. Like the opening of the Corrente, the first two measures show the combination of three motives clearly.

Example 21: The combination of the basic motives, Air, mm. 1-2.

The most characteristic feature is the flowing eighth-note passages. David Schulenberg suggests that these are based on a variation of the descending line in the opening two measures, which is shown in Example 21 as motive b.¹¹ The flowing eighths never stop in either of the outer voices except for the cadences. These passages often can be divided

¹¹David Schulenberg, op.cit., 295.
into particular groups: those of seven or eight consecutive notes, and those of four consecutive notes (motive $b$). Motive $b$ also appears in its original form in the second half (mm. 12-15).

Example 22: The variation of motive $b$, Air, mm. 5-9.

The combination of motives $a$ and $c$ at the beginning recurs as a major decorative figure throughout the movement (mm. 3-4, 8-10, 11-16, 21-22).

Example 23: The combination of motives $a$ and $c$, Air.

As in the Allemanda movement, the style brisé appears frequently to create an illusion of more voices (mm. 5-10, 24-27).
Example 24: The *style brisé*, Air, mm. 24-28.

At the codetta, the typical echo effect appears as in the Toccata.

Example 25: The echo effect, Air, mm. 28-32.
Sarabande

At first the Sarabande appears to be so similar to the Toccata that listeners might well wonder to which movement a given passage might belong. Only by a close analysis can one see how the two movements are related and discover the structural functions of the resemblance.

The Sarabande was originally a Spanish dance, written in 3/4 or 3/2. It requires a slow tempo with a stress on the second beat. Noble in character, it calls for a certain grandeur, dignity, and majesty. It has been said that the Sarabande in the E minor Partita is the ultimate “pulverization” of a dance form in all of Bach’s works.\textsuperscript{12} It has little to do with the original sarabande dance and sounds abstract and complicated due to its plethora of decorative thirty-second notes.

The opening measure strikingly resembles that of the Toccata: dotted motive $c$ is combined with the arpeggiations of the same $i$-iv-vii$^{7}$-i harmonic progression found in the Toccata.

\textsuperscript{12}Fernando Valenti, \textit{op. cit.}, 121.
Example 26: The resemblance of the opening to the Toccata, Sarabande, mm. 1-3.

This dotted opening gesture—the combination of motive $a$ and $c$—is prevalent throughout (mm.4-5, 13-14, 16-17, 24-25, 27-28, 30-31, 31-32, 32-33).

Motive $a$ plays a major role in this movement: almost every harmonic change occurs with motive $a$ and it often happens very quickly in a rhythmic pattern of sixteenths and dotted eighths.

Example 27: Motive $a$ at the harmonic changes, Sarabande, mm. 10-12.

However, in other places when the harmonic change is slower, Bach uses many decorative figures to enhance the harmonic tension. Even in these most complicated and
decorative passages, Bach makes the main harmonic notes stand out above others to keep the harmonic skeleton clear.

Example 28: The harmonic skeleton in the decorative thirty-second-note passages, Sarabande, mm. 28-29.

Motive c appears in several ways: in its original form, either by itself or combined with motive a, or in the “outer-note” form with decorative notes between (mm. 13-14, 19-20, 30).

Example 29: Motive c in various forms, Sarabande.

The use of motive b is not substantial in this movement.
Tempo di Gavotta

The penultimate movement, Tempo di Gavotta, has only a few characteristics of the gavotte: it is written in alla breve meter and begins on the upbeat with two quarter notes. However, the triple subdivision of the beat does not fit in the usual gavotte dance rhythm. In fact, Philipp Spitta suggests it is more in the manner of an Italian giga than a gavotte.\textsuperscript{13}

As in other movements, the style brisé is the main technique used to create the illusion of several voices with basic motives. For example, as shown in Example 7, the combination of motives $a$ and $c$ exists at the opening, yet this intertwining is almost hidden because it happens at the weakest sixteenth-note level.

Another example of this combination, as in the Air, appears with motive $a$ inserted between motive $c$, which serves as a pedal tone.

Example 30: The combination of motives $a$ and $c$ as a pedal tone,
Tempo di Gavotta, m. 3.

The echo effect is prevalent throughout (mm. 2-4, 8-10, 14-18, 18-20).

Example 31: The echo effect, Tempo di Gavotta, mm. 15-20.

Motive $b$ in an inverted form, normally four consecutive notes, is usually extended into a
five- to seven-note group and used as a form of voice leading (mm. 4-6, 8-10, 10-11).
Example 32: The extended motive $b$, Tempo di Gavotta, mm. 8-10.

**Gigue**

The typical gigue is a lively and spirited piece usually in 6/8, 12/8, or 12/16, which characteristically contains a triple grouping of notes. The Gigue in the E minor Partita is an exception, which gives rise to different views on the rhythmic interpretation of this movement. (This controversial issue will be dealt with later in the chapter on rhythmic interpretation.)

Like the courante, the gigue developed into two forms, French and Italian. The French gigue is imitative in texture, and its initial theme is usually stated in an inversion at the opening of the second part. The Gigue in the E minor Partita follows this example.

In dance suites in the Baroque period, it is often common to find a stronger connection between the first and the last movements than among other movements. This is also true in the E minor Partita, especially since both movements, Toccata and Gigue,
contain the fugue form. Additionally, as shown earlier in Example 2, the motivic
construction of the subjects in both movements is strikingly similar, in spite of their
seemingly different appearance: first, both are built on motives \(a\) and \(b\); and second, both
reflect the arch form, in which motive \(b\) fulfills the role of closure. Also, motive \(c\) or the
echoing effect is the next most important constructive device of these two movements,
mostly found in the episodes.

In the first part of the Gigue, the counter-subject is based on inverted motive \(a\)
and motive \(c\) in octave displacement. It can be divided into three parts according to the
voice-leading pattern (the short version of motive \(b\)), which does not coincide with the
division of the subject into two parts. This discrepancy increases the independence of
each voice even more.

Example 33: The different divisions of the subject and the counter-subject,
Gigue, mm. 3-4.
In the bridge passage between the second and third statements of the subject, motive \( b \) outlines the harmonic changes in two voices. Simultaneously, motive \( c \) appears as the insistence on the same note either in the same voice or in the different ones.

Example 34: Motives \( b \) and \( c \), Gigue, mm. 5-6.

This insistence is continued in three-voice interaction (mm. 7-8, 11-12). Especially in the episode passages, the insistence is intensified (mm. 9-10, 15-16).

Example 35: The insistence of motive \( c \), Gigue, mm. 9-10.
What, then, is the significance of this type of insistence, or the echo effect, in the musical context? I believe that it sets up the harmonic stability or provides the resting points in the journey for our ears in the complicated and fast-moving interwoven voices. In other words, it makes the beginning of the sequences stand out (mm. 9-10) and the boundaries of the unit of sequential pattern clear (mm. 11-12, 18-19). Therefore, if listeners connect those heightened points, they can grasp the structure of the piece. It is easy to follow those points since they are connected in the stepwise voice-leading manner.

Motive $b$ is often used simultaneously in more than one voice for the closure of a passage (mm. 17-18, mm. 18-19, mm. 43-44).

Example 36: Motive $b$ in the closure of a passage, Gigue, mm.17-18.

In the second half of the gigue, the subject is inverted, as mentioned before, so that the counter-subject is recreated on motives $a$, $b$, and $c$. Especially for the closure, all
three motives work together to enhance the cadence weakened by the inversion of the subject.

Example 37: The combination of basic motives in the counter-subject, Gigue, mm. 27-28.

As in the first half, the bridge and episodes are similarly constructed: motive c appears as an echo effect or as an effect of the insistence of the notes.

Example 38a: The insistence of motive c, Gigue, mm. 29-30.
Example 38b: The insistence of motive c, Gigue, mm. 41-42.

The restatement of the subject in the original form ends this movement. Using the original theme at the end of the second half is often found in other gigues Bach wrote—for example, those of the D major Partita and the D minor French Suite; however, the way Bach elaborates the return in the E minor Partita is special. In the second half, he delays the return of E minor so that it coincide with the return of the original subject in the very last statement of the movement, which creates a dramatic closure for the Gigue and indeed for the whole suite.
Example 39: The use of original subject for the closure of the movement,  
Gigue, mm. 49-52.

Summary

Like the organic relationship among motives in the E minor Partita, the 
relationship among its movements is equally organic and structural. Movements alternate
between heavy and light in terms of texture and length. Among the heavy movements,
motivic co-relation is stronger than among other movements. For example, the
resemblance among the Toccata, Sarabande, and Gigue movements is due to the constant
and similar construction of the basic motives or the harmony: motive a plays an
important role in the harmonic progress; motive c, through the echo effect or insistence
on the note, captures our ears at one point and guides us to the next sequence or musical
event; and motive $b$ often plays a role in the closure of a phrase or a musical event, and, when combined with motive $c$, shows the outline of the sequences or the voice-leading.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this partita is Bach’s unconventional treatment of his musical material. An extraordinary example is shown in the Toccata: at the end of the fugue section (mm. 72-78), Bach starts to use two-part contrapuntal material from the previous section to prepare for the return of the improvisational section, followed by the last statement of the subject. Then, as discussed before, thematic anticipation takes place once again with the two-part contrapuntal material (mm.85-88) to anticipate the return of the previous section. The most interesting fact comes next: at the returning improvisational section, Bach omits the two-part contrapuntal material. In short, he wants to avoid overusing the same material and simultaneously to make the returning section concise and compact. The effect he creates in these passages reminds the author of the convention in the Romantic period, where the composer often omits one of the themes at the recapitulation section in the sonata form. For example, F. Chopin begins the recapitulation without the first theme material in the first movements of his piano sonatas: the B-flat minor Sonata and the B minor Sonata. Bach’s instinct and genius put his composition ahead of his time. This is also true with other movements of the E minor Partita. Each dance movement surpasses its usual boundaries: an unusual Italian name and decorative character in the Allemanda, the longest Corrente ever written
by Bach which also has a consistently unclear pulse, the odd placement of the Air, the
most complicated Sarabande, the unconventional rhythmic use in both the Tempo di
Gavotta and the Gigue, and ultimately the use of the mysterious time signature in the
Gigue. The E minor Partita is truly the ultimate abstraction of dance forms.
Chapter II: Rhythmic Interpretation

The possibility of different rhythmic interpretations of Bach’s notation results from Bach’s unusual time signature and rhythmic pattern in the Gigue. The time signature of the final Gigue poses an interpretive problem. In terms of note values, this Gigue is in 4/2. However, the time signature that appears in the 1731 edition is a circle with a vertical slash (ϕ); Bach never used this signature in his other works. Neither did Bach’s contemporaries, so the proper performance has been a matter of ongoing debate.

As Karyl Louwenaar summarized in his article, there have been several attempts to interpret this symbol. It has been suggested that this time signature is only a copyist’s error for alla breve (ϕ). In fact, in the 1725 version, Bach used this alla breve sign. When he revised the piece for the 1731 version, he doubled the note values and added a new time signature. Some have speculated that Bach meant to use an older time signature notation, Φ, with a new meaning to indicate alla breve for 4/2 meter. In mensural notation in the Renaissance period, the circle, O, was the sign of tempus perfectum equivalent to modern 3/4 meter. A circle with a vertical line, ϕ, indicated diminution, that is one third of all values was reduced, or even an imprecise diminution.

of note values. A third view is that Bach used this time signature as a tempo indication. As Printz’s *Compendium Musicae* of 1714 or Walther’s *Musikalisches Lexikon* of 1732 explained in Bach’s time, even though this signature was no longer in use, some musicians understood that it implied a swift or presto tempo.

I use a combination of the second and third views to interpret this signature. Since the 1725 version shows *alla breve*, I believe Bach wanted two beats implied in that signature for the 1731 version. If he had used a time signature of 4/2, there would have been no way for performers to understand that Bach wanted two beats per measure. Additionally, in the earlier version, it might have been true that performers played thirty-second notes too fast so that Bach doubled the note value, but at the same time he might still have wanted to keep a fast tempo for the Gigue. In short, in terms of note values, the Gigue with longer note values in the 1731 version can be played in a much slower tempo than one with shorter note values in the 1725 version. Therefore, Bach needed a tempo indication that confirms a fast tempo for the gigue. If the signature of $\frac{1}{4}$ could represent *alla breve* as well as a fast tempo, it might be a reason why Bach chose this sign over *alla breve*, which was commonly used for a time signature of 4/2 as well as for 4/4.

Another problem also confronts performers, namely, relating this Gigue to Bach’s other treatments of the gigue. Only two of Bach’s gigues are notated entirely in duple

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2Karyl Louwenaar-Lueck op. cit., 2, quoted in Margaret Bent, “Notation,” III/3, in *The New Grove*
meter, in which all the metric levels contain duple, not triple groupings of notes. These are found in the D minor French Suite and in this E minor Partita. The issue for performers is whether to perform them exactly as written, or change some of the rhythms into triple groupings. Musicologists have discussed the subject for over twenty years, but there is no agreement. As Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne discussed in *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, two lines of argument support a performance with triple grouping.\(^3\) One is based on a study of notational practices. In the binary notation of some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gigues, even though some gigues were written in duple notation, they were supposed to be performed in triplet figures. According to Michael Collins, some of the gigues by Froberger appear in different sources either in duple meter or in triple. In short, the one with triple rhythm in a later version might be "someone else's idea of how Froberger's gigue ought to be notated."\(^4\) Another argument is based on writings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For example, Sébastian de Brossard states that "the Italians usually indicate the movement of the gigue in 6/8 or 12/8 time for the violin and sometimes with the sign of C or quadruple measure

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for the bass. The bass is played then as though it were dotted.” In fact, Corelli indicates different meters for the violin and bass in some gigue movements of his trio sonatas.  

While the violin parts are in 6/8 or 12/8, the bass parts are in common time, that is, 4/4. In this situation, the quarter notes of the bass are then played as if they were dotted. Another seventeenth-century writer who supports this argument is Bénigne de Bacilly. In his treatise, *L’Art de Bien Chanter* of 1679, the word “gigue” referred to the performance practice, in which a duple-meter allemande was to be played with intensified dotted rhythms. In this practice, the allemande became a gigue.

Other arguments favor performing the Gigue as it is written. Little and Jenne suggest that “the strongest argument is that the evidence given above is not conclusive, but suggestive; and since there is no consensus, a performance in duple meter may be as correct as one using a tripleness.” The second argument is that the duple-meter gigue is a unique type and its aesthetic impact is special: it is “more angular, dynamic, or aggressive.”

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6Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *op. cit.*, 176.


8Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *op. cit.*, 177.
As a performer, the author chooses to use the duple subdivision interpretation. As discussed among supporters of the duple interpretation, it is doubtful whether Bach wanted sixteenth notes to sound like eighth notes. If he really wanted it that way, he could have written these figures in triplets as in the previous movement, the Tempo di Gavotta: the *Neue Bach Ausgabe* edition, one of the most reliable sources of Bach’s music, shows that in this movement, Bach even wrote down number 3 above those triplet passages to make clear what he wanted.⁹

Another reason comes from the context of the music. The effect caused by rhythms as written puts more emphasis on the eighths than on the sixteenth notes, whereas that of even triplets has natural emphasis on the first notes of the triplets. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Paul Badura-Skoda also supports a duple subdivision interpretation by giving an argument that Bach can hardly have wanted the same rhythms in two successive movements, since Bach had already notated the Tempo di Gavotta in gigue rhythm, which is in a triple subdivision of the beat.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Paul Badura-Skoda, *op.cit.*, 48-49.
The Tempo di Gavotta has a similar problem. As mentioned before, it is obvious that Bach wanted triple subdivision of beats for this movement. Therefore, it is clear that figures of a dotted eighth and a sixteenth note will sound as triplet figures. However, a real problem lies at the beginning of the movement. How should one play a figure of two sixteenth notes and an eighth (\(\text{}\))? Should one play it as written or make some adjustment? Those performers who prefer smoothness of this passage play it as an even triplet, the same as that of the gigue, which is the most common interpretation today.

According to Badura-Skoda, it is fashionable, particularly in Britain.\textsuperscript{\,11} Howard Ferguson is one of those who propose the change of the rhythm in his book, \textit{Keyboard Interpretation}.\textsuperscript{\,12} In fact, this “tripletization” can be heard on the recordings of most renowned Bach interpreters of today such as Rosalyn Tureck, Glenn Gould, and Andras Schiff. However, if one thinks of figures such as the descending sixteenth notes in m. 6 and m. 21 as \textit{tiratas}, which means to rush to its destination, it is undesirable to reduce this effect by forcing them into plain triplets.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{example.png}
\end{center}

Example 40a: as written.

\textsuperscript{\,11}Paul Badura-Skoda, \textit{op. cit.}, 47.
\textsuperscript{\,12}Howard Ferguson, \textit{Keyboard Interpretation} (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 91.
Example 40b: tripletization.

I recommend neither of these approaches. Rather, one should play two sixteenth notes equal to a third of a triplet and make an eighth note equal two thirds of a triplet. Erwin Bodky also supports this rhythmic change for this figure. The same re-division has to be applied in the tied four-sixteenth-note figure for consistency. In this way, one could achieve a flowing tirata effect and resolve the awkwardness of playing different divisions of rhythm at the same time such as in mm. 7, 8, 13.

Example 41a: as written.

Example 41b: suggestion.

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The above examples are the main problems in rhythmic interpretation that one can encounter in several places in Bach’s music. As in the E minor Partita, the problems involved in playing Bach do not easily yield to satisfactory solutions. Performers need to consult with some musicological research and to have knowledge of styles and of conventions, and then make their own decision on which way will bring out the character of his music best.
Chapter III: Interpretation

In this chapter, the author will show how motivic construction of the piece influences one's interpretative decisions such as articulation, phrasing, and choice of the rhythmic pattern in each movement.

Toccata

Paul Badura-Skoda identifies the most serious and most common fault in modern performance of Bach as non-existent or incorrect articulation, which ignores the inner coherence of music and obscure the meaning of the passage.1 In other words, the right articulation can make the inner coherence or the meaning of the passage clear to the listeners.

Furthermore, Badura-Skoda suggests a few rules on how to articulate Bach's music. First, stepwise passages should on the whole be played legato, whereas larger intervals and leaps should be detached. Second, taking into account the harmony, dissonances are linked to their resolutions.2 These rules could be excellent starting points when one tries to make decisions on articulation, though, as Badura-Skoda admits himself, there are exceptions and modifications caused by all kinds of nuances and

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1Paul Badura-Skoda, op. cit., 92.
2Ibid., 96.
different affections. In this chapter, the author proposes a third view with regard to
Bach’s articulation involving the motivic construction of the piece, which can reveal the
inner coherence of his music.

At the opening of the improvisational section of the Toccata, the presentation of
motives \(a, b, \text{ and } c\) can be clearly shown with different articulations: \(a\) with legato, \(b\)
with \textit{tenuto}, and \(c\) with staccato or non-legato.

Example 42: Toccata, mm. 1-4.

Then, in the two-part contrapuntal section, motive \(b\) and \(c\) can carry the same kind of
articulations. On the other hand, motive \(a\) shows two different possibilities of
articulation. In the eighth-note part, due to the conjunction with motive \(c\), motive \(a\) is
detached to distinguish itself from the texture. However, in the sixteenth-note part, for the contrast and the continuity of the passage, motive a carries legato.

Example 43: Toccata, mm. 9-10.

The subject of the fugue can carry various articulations since its character is instrumental as well as vocal in terms of frequent leaps; a detached articulation in the manner of style brisé can be applied for the natural breathing point and for making basic motives stand out.

Example 44: Toccata, mm. 27-29.
This kind of detachment is beneficial in a practical way: without separation between certain notes, it is almost impossible to make each voice clear in a complex situation as follows:

Example 45: Toccata, mm. 58-59.

In the counter-subject, one has to clarify the existence of motive b by playing legato, then detaching the last note from the next note.

Example 46: Toccata, mm. 28-29.

In the bridge passages, one can separate sequences in the right hand by detaching the last note in order to make clear the unit.
Example 47: Toccata, mm. 33-34.

In the episodes, the same principle used for motive b in the counter-subject can be applied.

Example 48: Toccata, mm. 37-39.

In the strettos of the subject heads, one has to maintain carefully the original articulations for the coherence of the passages.³

³Ibid., 109.
Example 49: Toccata, mm. 60-62.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, from the passage using two-part contrapuntal material at the end of the fugue section, one can find the clear answer to what kind of articulations and grouping of the notes are needed for this material throughout: Bach makes motive c stand out by separating it from the rest of the sixteenth-note passages and creating a new voice.

Example 50: Toccata, mm. 83-88.
Allemanda

In this movement, one of the most important issues for performers is how to play every thirty-second note with clarity. Especially when the thirty-second notes are tied with eighth notes, it is very easy to lose the definition of the following thirty-second note. The solution to this problem is to put the breathing point or the detachment after the tied notes are played. This rule can also be applied to shape the longer passages; at m. 10, the long thirty-second-note runs can be divided into several groups of scales by the breathing points after the leaps and tied notes.

Example 51: Allemanda, m. 10.

In the prevalent dotted sixteenth- and thirty-second-note pattern, one has to be careful not to lose the clarity of the thirty-second note. If one makes a subtle break right before the thirty-second note and connects it to the next dotted sixteenth note, it will provide the
emphasis on motive a as well as the solution to the problem. Johann Joachim Quantz also suggests this kind of break between the dotted rhythm.\(^4\)

Example 52: Allemanda, m. 5.

Corrente

The first four-measure phrase in the treble can be divided into three groups, with each group slightly detached from the others in order to clarify hemiola effects and the thirty-second rhythm. Underneath, the walking bass can be played staccato or non-legato to provide the contrast to the theme in the treble.

Example 53: Corrente, mm. 1-4.

\(^4\)Erwin Bodky, *op.cit.*, 187. Quoted from Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, chapter
The hemiola effect can be emphasized in the passage of mm. 13-15 by playing motive a legato and detaching it from the following note.

Example 54: Corrente, mm. 12-15.

The dotted rhythm is to be played the same way explained in the Allemanda to achieve clarity. Thirty-second notes in this movement, on the other hand, should be played differently from those in the Allemanda due to its character and the tempo: in the Allemanda, thirty-second notes are to be played quasi legato because they are the part of the melody; however those in the Corrente are to be played with articulation quasi staccato due to its vital and vigorous rhythmic character. Another practical reason behind this choice of articulation can be found in the fast tempo of this dance: if one plays the thirty-second notes legato, one cannot have the clarity of each note.
Air

The long and fluent eighth-note passage is the unique feature of this movement; it also challenges performers to divide it into several groups, which provide both natural breathing points and musical meaning to the passage. A simple rule of articulation is extremely useful in the process of grouping. Stepwise passages should be played legato. A breathing point or detachment should happen after the last note of the stepwise motion passages and before the leap. The consecutive leaps consisting of a certain triad are the exception to this rule; these should be played legato.

Example 55: Air, mm. 5-9.

In the meantime, quarter notes against eighth-note passages should be played all detached regardless of their intervals for the distinction of the two different voices.
Example 56: Air, mm. 2-4.

Example 57 shows the only three-part writing in this movement, which can be interpreted as the most dramatic place of the Air. Motive b is the main material used here in the top and bottom voices. These two voices create tension by syncopation and different groupings. The added middle voice plays a role of easing the complexity.

Example 57: Air, mm. 12-14.

The principle of grouping gives vitality to the music, especially when eighth-note passages happen simultaneously in both voices: breathing points at different moments in
each voice create intricacy out of the plain texture. Furthermore, it clarifies the echo
effect in this passage.

Example 58: Air, mm. 29-32.

**Sarabande**

The combination of motives $a$ and $c$ at the beginning of the phrases should be
treated in the same way as the opening gesture of the Toccata: $a$ with legato and $c$ with
non-legato. In the meantime, motive $a$ in the following example should be played non-
legato in order to clarify the harmonic changes and the main beats.

Example 59: Sarabande, mm. 10-12.
Due to its plethora of long passage of decorative thirty-second notes, an important part of interpretation is to divide them into several musically sensible groups. One should place breathing points or slight detachments between these groups in performance. Breathing points or detachments could be added at the following points: before the leaps, between sequences, after the cadence or leading tone-tonic resolution. The results of adding a little room at those points are beneficial: the harmonic skeleton stands out from the mass of the thirty-second-note passage (Example 60a); sequences could be identified by the ear clearly (Example 60b); phrasing could be easily defined (Example 60c).

Example 60a: Sarabande, mm. 1-2.

Example 60b: Sarabande, mm. 8-9.
Example 60c: Sarabande, mm. 6-7.

**Tempo di Gavotta**

As mentioned in the analysis chapter, the combination of motives $a$ and $c$ exists at the weakest level of the beat, almost hidden at the opening (m.1). Two choices of rhythmic interpretation for this figure are available as discussed in the rhythmic interpretation chapter: one with an even triplet, and another with two sixteenth notes and a quarter in a triplet. These two could cause totally opposite effects: the former has the emphasis on the first note of figure $\left(\frac{\text{1}}{\text{2}}\right)$; the latter has emphasis on the last note $\left(\frac{\text{1}}{\text{4}}\right)$. If one recognizes the existence of motives at the weakest level of beat in this figure, the latter could be a better choice. This is another reason for the choice of the rhythmic pattern.

The best choice of articulation for the whole movement is *quasi* detached except for the sixteenth-note figures; with this articulation the *style brisé* effect and the rhythmic vitality can be maximized.
The next issue is how to handle the echo effects caused by the combination of motives \( a \) and \( c \) (e-d\#-e in mm. 2-3 and b-a\#-b mm. 18-20).

Since this figure repeats itself very closely in each hand, it creates the effect of a pedal tone. Simultaneously, it allows performers to bring out the other notes and make a sharp contrast to it. This generates both an interesting interaction between the hands and clarity in the voice leading. For the articulation of this passage, one can play *tenuto* on important notes of the voice leading to make it clear to the listeners.

Example 61: Tempo di Gavotta, mm. 2-4.

The sixteenth-note figures in mm. 6, 14, 22, and 26 cause trouble for performers in terms of the division of the beat. If one wants to deliver a sweeping effect, *tirata*, which is already shown in the opening measure, one has to keep the same rhythmic values for each sixteenth. This creates a big breathing moment after the first sixteenth note, which is tied to the previous quarter note. In short, the author suggests the re-division of the four sixteenths into six sixteenths equal to a triplet.
Example 62a: as written.

Example 62b: performance.

Gigue

One of the biggest challenges in Bach is how to play a fugue; one should bring out the linear sense of each voice independently as well as the vertical sense of harmonic entities. For the linear task, the articulation is the key to the problem. Since subjects and counter-subjects are repeated in both different voices and different keys, one should find the right articulations that could fit in every situation. For the vertical task, bringing out outlines or voice leading patterns from the harmonic progression could be a major solution to the Gigue in E minor Partita; with this method, a simple harmonic skeleton comes out from the complex texture, which makes harmonic changes easy to follow.

One could accomplish these tasks more easily by understanding the structure of basic motives in this movement. As discussed in the motivic analysis chapter, the subject consists of motives a and b. Motive b plays an important role of closure and brings about
the division of the subject. If the subject is divided this way, the first group starts and ends with the tonic note in the key. If one emphasizes these notes by a slight *tenuto*, it could bring out a certain sense of the key. After the first group of the subject, the counter-subjects reinforce even more the feel of the key to which they belong by insisting on the same tonic note.

Example 63: Gigue, mm. 1-5.

The emphasis on the main note of the harmony continues in the episode passages. The insistence on the main note happens at the beginning of each sequence, and these main notes are connected by a stepwise voice-leading pattern. As mentioned in the motivic analysis chapter, this outlines the harmonic progression well. In order to deliver this effect clearly, one should detach the first notes of each sequence from the previous notes.
For the sixteenth-note passages in mm. 18-20 and 43-44, one could use the same reasoning as those in the previous movement, Tempo di Gavotte. The author thinks Bach has the clear intention of using this rhythmic pattern combined with eighth notes in order to emphasize certain notes, which are the eighths after the sixteenths, the main notes of the harmony. This theory could be reinforced by the fact that interestingly enough the emphasized notes are already held in an adjacent voice. In the meantime, this rhythmic pattern allows listeners to feel the closure of each sequence and prevent performers from rushing to the next sequence.

Example 64: Gigue, mm. 19-20.

In the second half of the gigue, the combination of motives $a$, $b$ and $c$ is newly used in the counter-subjects to reinforce the closure of the subject. This device is necessary to provide the tonic note of the key since the subject ends with a non-tonic tone
due to the inversion of the subject from the previous section. As discussed in the first chapter, this combination of motives can be divided again into two layers: motives \( a \) and \( c \) against motive \( b \), creating the style *brisé* effect. In order to intensify this effect, detachment can be added between these layers.

Example 65: Gigue, mm. 31-33.

For the closing statement of the original subject at the end, one could create plenty of breathing room before the subject begins in order to set up the statement. The emphasis on this statement is important for the closure of the whole suite as well as the Gigue.
Conclusion

As discussed in the first chapter, one can find the coherent use of three basic motives throughout the whole E minor Partita. In each movement these motives serve for the different characters; however, in a musical structure they function in a very similar way. Motive $a$ and $b$ are the main materials. The former is used for an expressive quality such as harmonic change. On the other hand, the latter fulfils all the structural needs, such as closure of phrase, outlining the sequential patterns or the harmonic progression, sequential material, and filling in between the main harmonic pillars. In other words, if motive $a$ is a characteristic decorative device in the Baroque architecture, motive $b$ is material for the main pillars behind all the decoration. The use of motive $c$ is less prominent than the other two, but unique: it is associated often with motive $a$ and sometimes with motive $b$ or other effects such as echo effect and insistence on a particular note, which is an original feature of the piece. Its role is assertive and emphatic. Good examples for these roles are found especially in the construction of subjects, counter subjects, and episodes in the Toccata and the Gigue.

What are the benefits from understanding the motivic structure of the E minor Partita and the function of the motives? First, to a performer, this understanding can influence one’s process of interpretation; one can bring out certain patterns of motivic
structure through different ways of articulation, and by doing it coherently throughout the piece one can deliver the inner coherence that Bach intends for a whole suite. Second, it makes it easier for a listener to follow and remember the musical events and even makes the listening process more interesting due to active listening. Third, it can be a good starting point for those who try to find the essence of the greatness of the E minor Partita and ultimately Bach’s music.

The great depth of expression of the E minor Partita can be delivered equally by many different but convincing interpretations; a variety of tempos, articulations and dynamics can be easily found in them. However, every successful interpretation will reveal the inner logic of the work and capture its spirit. To understand the logic and the spirit are two different matters, even though they are well integrated in great performances. While the spirit of the work is abstract and difficult to discuss, the inner logic of the piece can be explained on a concrete level. The purpose of this dissertation is to reveal the inner logic and the unity of the E minor Partita on a practical level through motivic analysis and to give performers a new perspective for understanding the piece.

Finally, all musicians know that understanding the deeper meaning of Bach’s music is much more important than knowledge itself. Only those who recognize the greatness of expression in his music and desire to communicate its beauty will find the right expression for it, a task that might take one’s lifetime.
Bibliography


