THE PARTITAS
(BWV 825-830)
or

Clavir-Übung */ comprised of preludes, allemandes, courantes, sarabandes, gigues, minuets and other galanteries, to entertain enthusiasts of Johann Sebastian Bach… Opus I, published by the composer in 1731.*

In the Tradition of a Genre

When J.S. Bach undertook composition of the first part of *Clavierübung («* keyboard practice »), he had just been appointed in the spring of 1723 to the position of *Cantor* at Saint Thomas's and *Director Musices* in Leipzig. There, he would find himself extremely active: in addition to composing cantatas for Sunday and passions, as well as teaching at *Thomasschule*, he completed the *"French" Suites* (circa 1725) which followed on from an impressive collection of *"English" Suites* for the harpsichord (c. 1723), Suites, Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, solo cello and solo flute, and the Six *"Trios for Keyboard and Violin,"* now called *"Sonatas for Harpsichord and Violin."* Right in the middle of such intense activity, Bach embarked upon his "great work," his *"Opus 1,"* in the sphere of keyboard music and the genre of the French-styled suite, going by the Italian term of *partita*.

As a matter of fact, Bach was preceded by his reputation as a virtuoso and unrivaled improviser on the organ and harpsichord. He had just completed the distinguished educational works of Inventions & Sinfonias comprising two and three parts (1720-23), and the first part of the Well-Tempered Clavier (1722). His activity was focused on all areas of composition and teaching, in keeping with the example set by his illustrious colleagues, Johann Kuhnau, Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer, Georg Philipp Telemann, Johann Mattheson, Christoph Graupner and Georg Friedrich Handel, who had issued various publications for an ever-growing, enlightened public of enthusiasts. In spite of this, Bach owed it to himself both to illustrate his art, which had attained the highest degree of maturity in a genre enjoying particular favour at that time, the Overture in the French Style, known as a suite or partita; and to publish his works. To this end, he could rely on an extensive network of acquaintances and colleagues in Dresden, Halle, Lüneburg, Brunswick, Nuremberg and Augsburg, helped along by his new, most enviable position in Leipzig.

Both of the terms "partita" and the one used for the collection, "Clavierübung," were employed by Bach's predecessor, Johann Kuhnau, in his two collections published in Leipzig in 1689 and 1692, making the work Bach had commenced into a kind of tribute. As such, Bach could also have published one of his previous collections of "English" and "French" suites, both of which were accomplished in their genre. However, he was fully aware of the progress which had been made since having composed the substantial collection of masterpieces represented by the Leipzig cantatas, the St. John Passion, followed by the St. Matthew Passion, the Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, cello and flute, Sonatas for keyboard and violin, and the chorales and great Preludes and Fugues for organ. Only a new composition would be capable of illustrating a style currently enjoying all the privileges of the world of music. This genre would be best demonstrated by something in line with the latest development in his art. The new publication distinguished itself for its totally new aspiration to reach out to the public at large (in the dedication, there was neither mention of a prince, nor a patron, but only "enthusiasts," i.e., the cultivated public). It would reveal the stylistic progress made over the space of a generation and the stature of the new *Cantor* who was at the peak of his art.

"The Work Made a Great Impression"

"This work caused quite a sensation among his contemporaries in the world of music; such splendid keyboard compositions had never previously been seen or heard. Whoever learnt to perform any of these pieces to a high standard could make his fortune in the world. Our young players today would profit by the study of them, so brilliant, agreeable, expressive, and original are they." (Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke, J.N. Forkel, Leipzig 1802).

Forkel added that unlike most Baroque suites, these have withstood the passage of time. More than any others, the Partitas – along with the Italian Concerto and the Goldberg Variations – have remained in the pianist's repertoire before the Baroque revival. This is the sign that they go far beyond the "galant" style, which is referred to by the title, and the realm of the harpsichord.

In the "English" Suites, Bach illustrated an "imported" model such as is to be found in Couperin's works, especially in The Nations, Sonatas and Suites, with which he was acquainted. Apart from the first "English" Suite in A major and its French-styled prelude, undoubtedly composed to the model of the Suites by Dieupart long before, the five others are evocative of the same pattern, as follows. They go by the name of Prelude, a sinfonia and the allegro movement of an Italian-style concerto (much longer than any prelude in the Partitas) and are in five different keys, followed by a suite of French-style dances, virtually interchangeable aside from their keys, and substantial contrapuntal elaboration, particularly in the gigues. The "French" Suites were the response to this smorgasbord of juxtaposed styles, being of reduced size without preludes but in which there is an equal share of French and Italian styles to be found in the varied dances, fulfilling more than ever the ideal of "goûts réunis" or the fusion of styles. The result was an array of more varied characters and styles, which became further personalized with each suite, in keeping with a principle of constantly evolving variety which found its crowning glory in the Partitas.

Far from being just another collection, the Partitas constitute the apex of the genre; a summit. They are much more than an assortment of dances, styles and various genres, and leave the inherited models far behind them. They set to music Bach's preoccupation which comes through in an entire series of masterpieces (cited above), and is central to the four volumes of the Clavierübung: within a chosen genre, to create a proficient synthesis of experience, styles and inherited genres in a work which conforms to the style, as well as being original and novel at the same time, all set within a perfectly mastered coherent whole.

The six Partitas were published, separately to start with, in 1726 (the 1st), 1727 (2nd and 3rd), 1724 (4th) and 1730 (5th and 6th). Partitas 3 and 6 had already appeared in a primitive form in the *Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena* in 1725. They all featured in a 1731 collection entitled as above. It seems they met with great success and were reprinted three times.

Order & *Varietas*

Whilst the six *Partitas* are highly diverse, they fall into a well thought-out structure.

Although two of them had existed before the collection was assembled, it appears that a plan had been conceived from the start with an obvious order but whose meaning has not been revealed to us. Overall, the cycle proceeds from the simple to the complex. The order of keys sets out an expanding series: B flat major – C minor – A minor – D major – G major – E minor, which in Clavierübung II would be complemented by the two missing keys of the German scale: F and B minor (h in German) - the French Overture would be transposed from its original key of C minor for this purpose. Moreover, one cannot say whether the content of the second volume had already been planned when the first one was published).

Each partita finds coherence with a compositional style and emotional or symbolic register dominating in relation to the chosen key[1]. Depending on criteria which derive as much from the affect as the style, a structure of contrasting pairs emerges: I & II (the most French and innocent / the most

[1] The composer was not in any way restricted by a particular context and was absolutely free to choose the key and make it the ideal framework for his thinking. The tradition has lost much of the sense of the characteristics of modes and keys. Equalising temperament is not the only cause. Above all, it has been down to the evolution of style and musical language (amongst others, key-related modes and the twelve-tone technique have broken down structure, along with tonal attraction and the "ethos" of keys which reflected as much, if not more, culture and symbolism than musical acoustics, resulting in different actions on the part of both the composer and the performer who was supposed to identify them.)

Italian and serious), III & IV (in the popular / court style), V & VI (virtuosity and badinage / lamento and gravity). At the same time, structuring into two parts places the French-styled Overture at the beginning of Partita IV, like the Goldberg Variations. Furthermore, the expansion shaping the series of keys can also be found in the dimensions: the collections thus formed are of increasing dimensions, and Partita VI reached beyond the scope of what is commonly called a "French Suite," both in its dimensions and complexity as for its emotional content.

The six Partitas are introduced by a prelude using a different name and style of writing (without there necessarily being an exact relationship between the title and content, simply due to a systematic approach to the variety: "Præambulum" at the beginning of Partita V and "Fantasia" for Partita III could equally be replaced by "Toccata" and "Invention," to refer to similar works by the composer). Each Partita is comprised of seven movements, except for Partita II which has six, so as to create forty-one movements (a symbolic number for J.S. Bach). All of them consist of the four usual dances: allemande (they are all in the same movement of the "allemande grave"); courante (three of Italian style in 3/4 or 3/8 timing going by the name of "corrente," two of French style in 3/2 timing); sarabande and gigue. Only Partita II ends with a Capriccio. Moreover, all of the dances in this partita, which promises to be Italian-styled with its Sinfonia and finale, have exclusively French names: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Rondeaux. However, the compositional approach is more violinistic (Italian-style) than luthé – lute-influenced – (French-style); and its final Capriccio, a concertante fugue is written in the typical Italian meter of 2/4.

This is a sort of figure of enjambment recurring across the dances and partitas, frequently repeated, and the expression of the desire to fuse styles at all levels. Each term encompasses music which is more complex than the title would seem to proclaim. From the French-style Overture in Partita IV, with its fugue-concerto and the Italian-styled Sinfonia in Partita II (dotted notes of this sort are not the French style!) through to the double fugues in the gigues, the courantes or corrente – all set to different rhythms – the Gigue in "archaic" style complicated by diminutions in E, the Sarabande in Partita VI with the superlative ornamentation, or the Allemande in Partita IV in the manner of the violinistic aria sprinkled with the luthé style, there is absolutely no systematism. Also, the compositional techniques, just like the styles and denominations, co-exist, melding into a multifaceted polyphony (a polyphony not only of voices but of styles, techniques, rhythms, genres and affects). The a-foregoing cannot really be expressed in words but is thrilling to discover with every turn of the page. We shall come back to this later for each work.

Intermedio: Sophisticated Music; and Dance!

It is customary to say: "In the Partitas, dance is only an excuse…" It is typical of our epoch to believe this. This is to accuse Bach of a vice which has rather more to do with the limitations of those who perform his work, brought about by a mismatch of cultures… Forkel in his time had already pointed out the following:

"The particular nature of Bachian harmony and melody was also combined with very extensive and diversified use of rhythm… More than those of any other period, composers of Bach's time found no difficulty in this, for they acquired facility in the management of rhythm in the "Suite," which at the time held the place of our "Sonatas…" whose rhythm is their distinguishing characteristic. Composers of Bach's day, therefore, were compelled to use a great variety of measures and rhythms (which for the most part are now unknown). Moreover, skillful treatment was necessary in order that each dance might exhibit its own distinctive character and rhythm. Bach far exceeded his predecessors and contemporaries in this branch of the art. He experimented with every kind of rhythmic characteristic in order to give as much variety and color to each of his pieces as possible."

The loss of ability to combine sophisticated music with the dance characters was later entrenched, as styles changed and diversified. This was first and foremost caused by the gradual compartmentalization of genres. However, it is said that Chopin, the custodian "mutatis mutandis" of this tradition dating back to Couperin and Telemann, had a unique gift to bridge dance, song, expression and, on occasion, bravura, much to the admiration of his peers.

Nowadays, a musician's training is rooted in quite different foundations from those of the musician of old. Their "moulding" is grounded in such diverse repertoires (if not grounded in a type of music theory unsuitable for everything by seeking to suit everything) that this huge eclecticism, relying on a profusion of standardized directives in the score (dynamics, touch, phrasing), results in a sort of leveling, of versatile "non-structuring," lending itself well to anything. (When such directions are lacking, this is often the reason why the type of musician "who works from the score" hastens to write a plethora of them in.) Even the "Baroque" schools of today have built on these revised foundations for the purposes of style purification, in treatises, and on the rhythmical concept of the *prima prattica* (in which the North of Europe traditionally excels) more than experiment with what Baroque art shares with later eras – which are often deemed to be impure – particularly court dances, their dynamics, various speeds and codified flexibility. Today, we see renewed interest in Baroque dance. However, when there is a genuine interaction, it is generally in "ballroom" dances and much less in sophisticated music, such as Bach's or that of opera composers such as the lamenti carried along by a sarabande or passacaglia movement (« Lascia ch'io pianga », the death of Dido).

On reading books about the harpsichord (for example, *Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena*, Wilhelm Friedemann or the young Mozart, et al.), we find that most of the musician's basic training was derived from dances, and that the rhythmical and structural concept was underpinned by "rhythmic characteristics.[2]" (This is as natural as it is for us to speak with emphasis, using the sounds and music of a language, or even "an accent from somewhere"). We also find that all music, whether it is vocal or instrumental, religious or secular, simple or sophisticated, was based on these varied and ever present principles.

For Bach, dance was not an occasional ornament. It was an essential structuring and symbolic component. This applied to his century in general and to composers such as Lalande, Rameau, Handel and Corelli (even in the Concerti da chiesa, where the dance characteristics are not mentioned). Dance was ubiquitous, even in the passions (cf. the sarabande movement in the finale of the St. John Passion). All the more so, as it is the French-styled suite, Bach approaches it with as much respect for that model as he does the Italian concerto or the instrumental sonata. Far from eluding characteristics, he accepts and transcends them. In other words, he keeps to their form, function and overall style (including the dance characteristics), and brings them face to face with an entire realm of heritage, acquired experience, invention and expression, which transcends the work from its heart outwards.

In this way, the Sarabande in A minor, within the partita "in the popular style," is mischievously disguised as a polonaise (both having compatible rhythmic features). It is the competition between the two superimposed characteristics which makes it so exciting. The apparently Italian-styled aria in the Sarabande in D major (Partita IV) and particularly the one in E (Partita VI) with extreme ornamentation, are effectively underpinned by the dance movements. The clash between the dramatic movements and rhythmical structure glorifies the expression which is both intense and noble.

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[2] Cf. "I find that we confuse measure with what is called cadence or movement. Measure is defined as the number and uniformity of beats, and cadence is properly the spirit and soul which must be added to it." François Couperin: *l'Art de Toucher le Clavecin* (The Art of Playing the Harpsichord).

In his exceptionally lucid analyses, Leopold Mozart speaks of the "Art der Bewegung": the manner and character of movement, the "rhythmic features," as distinct from "tempo." This is the thing which makes dances like the sarabande, chaconne, polonaise and minuet, which are all in triple meter, have a different "movement," which is immediately noticeable whatever their basic tempo actually is. "Before beginning to play, the piece must be well looked at and considered. The character, tempo, and kind of movement demanded by the piece must be sought out…" Violinschule, Augsburg, 1770.

Actually, this is nothing more than a sense of rhythm such as that which musicians of oral tradition passed down through imitation, and which cannot be written down. "It cannot be explained," said Pierfrancesco Tosi in, "*Observations on the Florid Song*," when speaking of the art of rubato, "One should listen to good musicians and imitate them." Hence, this is not to be found in essays on the subject…

Following the same principle, desperate lamenti rang out over the entire Baroque era, set to the rhythms of the sarabande or passacaglia. These were generally pared down to extremely slow, static movements, without the tension between twisting despair and aristocratic "flair" which gives it all a tragic dignity.

Dance movements are integral to the music which sought not so much to contrast tempi as "rhythmic characteristics," to the degree that there was often a series of movements in practically the same tempo but with a contrasting meter, movement or compositional technique[3]. Furthermore, the internal tension created by the rhythmic characteristics lends quite a different feeling of tempo. There is sometimes more energy than speed, or vice versa. This means that a tempo cannot be analyzed without it being done relative to the movement[4]. Here is a classic example: the restraint of a deep second beat following a lifted first beat – the standard today is a downbeat – was shared with almost all moderate and slow ternary dances, including the sarabande, passacaglia, the moderate minuet, polonaise, the Italian courante when it is restrained as in Partitas I and III, the English gaillarde… and all related music. This resistance creates momentum leading towards the first beat of the next bar which absorbs the momentum and is suspended before the following second beat, and so on. Accordingly, the rhythm becomes more complex, enriched, and is not drawn into the regular flow which longs for speed. This principle can also be observed in many dances of oral tradition, including, for instance, in the sophisticated art of the Argentine Tango[5].

Resistance…

Georg Muffat compared the tempo in French and Italian music, placing music by Lully, the first Couperin, and Corelli side by side. He noticed that Italian music was both faster in the allegro

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[3] In my experience of conducting ensembles – and I notice it every day – this is one of the main discrepancies in the training of modern-day musicians, thus constituting a stumbling block for the ensemble's playing. "Tempi" and contrasting tempi are always at the forefront of discussion; hardly ever "movement" or "rhythmic character" (which is created in various tempi, in the same way as there are slow and fast gavottes, "ballroom gavottes" and "gavottes de concert," or later on, slow, moderate and fast waltzes.) This distinction is at the root of any debate on rhythm and is a key to performance.

[4] One demonstration of this phenomenon which was very frequent, but extreme in this case, is the finale of Schumann's Violin Concerto. As with many concertos, since the Nineteenth Century, the widespread concept of a finale amongst performers has been a brilliant movement, and "di bravura" if possible. That is to say, fast and frenetic. However, in general, this approach did not work, until Harnoncourt (a native of Vienna who grew up with dance) and Gidon Kremer, made it into a "grande polonaise" movement, which should, as such, be in a reticent movement (the composer did indicate this but it has been generally neglected) although not precluding verve. The same, *mutatis mutandis*, could be said of the finale of the French-style *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5*, the Polish-style *Concerto for Harpsichord in D minor*, and the finale of Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* "alla polacca." The usual contrast in tempo, with which performers of all musical backgrounds have familiarized us, between the theme and the first of the *Goldberg Variations* is yet another example of the confusion between tempo and movement: instead of the *Sarabande* followed by the *Polonaise* in a similar tempo (separately this time, unlike *Partita III*), everything is radically changed, creating realms unrelated other than harmonically, in defiance of the whole tradition of Baroque variations. In the *Partitas* (but not exclusively), Bach embarks upon what would later be called "studies of rhythmic characters," comprising various characters in a similar tempo (the *Passepied* and *Gigue* from *Partita V*, *Menuet* and *Gigue* from *Partita IV*) and the same dance (the assorted Italian courantes – "correnti" – gigues and sarabandes) in a variety of tempos.

[5] On a closer look at this, which is but one example amongst others, we observe that this highly rhythmic dance gives rise to numerous variations and works within a limited range of tempi just like Baroque dances. It makes no use of the slow-down principle, that cliché of "musicians who rely on the written page," which dancers do not know what to do with.

movements and more lingering in the slow movements. More than any other kind of music, French or French-styled music of that time was structured by dance and versified declamation (as applied in the recitative of opera or cantata, and which even influences the melody sung). French music was made up of a great variety of "movements," and found its internal tension in the resistance contrasting the recited word, the dance step, and the instrumental gesture which imitated them and moreover disrupted or held back the flow at times with extreme ornamentation (cf. Couperin's gavottes and gigues). In a torrent, these are the stones and obstacles which create energy and interest by disturbing the flow.

It is the rhythm and energy of the actor speaking (whose speed is not multiplied by three or four) and of the dancer dancing, which are blended together by French music, not the vigorous pace of a machine slickly moving forward at every speed imaginable. Speed was an ideal pursued by the Nineteenth Century "School of Fingering." This latter aimed to equip the performer with the ability to play streams of notes of quite a different speed and kind with the greatest of ease. However, this school was so intoxicated by speed that it even managed to compare Bachian heritage with fingering exercises to be played "with ease," or even adagios and fugues to be played smoothly with devotion, in which ornamentation was a never-ending melody. This still applies today…

It is these considerations as understood in the context of the world of Bach the organist, choirmaster and composer, who was as interested in adapting texts to music as he was in putting together various ensembles for a wide range of venues and audiences, which must guide our approach to the keyboard and the difficulties in recreating music which devolve upon the performer. His gift was to bring together the many types of resistance caused by the interweaving of counterpoint, text, dance moves, and various instrumental styles into the same melting pot. Lots of movements evoke one cantata's melody here, another orchestra overture there, or mimic their style or manner. And the experience of the organist who plays "with gravity" and that of the Kapellmeister beating time for the orchestra does not disappear into thin air when he composes or plays a Partita. Bach composed a kind of music which far exceeded the instrumental medium, whilst accounting for it and being conversant in all the styles which made up his tremendous experience as a composer, musician, educator and preacher – using his musical techniques within the community. Therein resides his virtuosity.

Perspectives

Bach's music is not limited to one dimension or another. "His music was created with the distance of synthesis"[6]: it cannot be narrowed down in regard to structural concepts or handling of counterpoint, styles or dances, the art of rhetoric, or the science of harmony. Harmony, if it must thus be named, is in this instance the absolute mastery of all these parameters: constraints of order and expressiveness; counterpoint or melody and dance characteristics; public expectations and rigorous reflection interact in continuously reinvented combinations without any one of these strictures ever casting out or making us neglect the others. They are all important, from the dance to the ornamentation, elaborate in the extreme and composed with outstanding precision.

As a man of his time, Bach was at one with the thinking of his contemporary, Gottfried Leibniz, who took the concept of universality to its peak: his "best of all possible worlds" contains "as great variety as possible, along with the greatest possible order." However, this order is constantly changing and any isolated substance or action is at one with the principle of the universe. As counterpoint was traditionally the ideal symbol for representing the cosmic order, Bach tended to mingle the new ideal of bringing melody, harmony and dance together with the harmony of spheres, connecting horizontality and verticality, past and present, "natural" humanity and cosmos (God, order) within a higher harmony. "Everything comes from the One; everything is in the One," he seemed to be saying. This is all the more evident in a cycle such as the Partitas, conceived as a major work to unite known knowledge in the field; the first step up in the Clavierübung, following on from previous attempts –

[6] J.S. Bach: Leben und Werk, Hamburg, 2000. This conclusion is very much in line with the ones in this remarkable book.

which were nonetheless most accomplished works – towards The Art of Fugue, a complex and recapitulative work based on a single subject. From this perspective, every creation – in this case, every partita and the entire cycle – was both a specific and general creation, confined to one field and genre, bearing faraway, universal and symbolic overtones.

As the Work Unfolds

Partita 1 in B Flat Major, BWV 825

The collection opens with the supremely delightful and most French-styled of the works, in keeping with what one would expect of a "suite." In an initial version from 1726, it had been dedicated to the newborn son of Leopold, Prince of Anhalt-Köthen. This is revealed by the handwritten dedication appended at the back of the title page and which is now lost[7]. It reads: "His Serene Highness, tender prince, you who in truth is still in his swaddling clothes… Here is the first fruit my lyre gives me / You are the first prince to be cherished by the princess / She who will be the first to sing your glory…

I say that the sounds / To which the child you are, give birth, are pleasing, clear and pure / This means your life shall take an agreeable, happy and beautiful course / And that it will be a harmony of sheer joy…

The prelude is in the style luthé and after the manner of François Couperin (whose piece Les Bergeries in B flat appears in *Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena*). It starts with innocence, on tip-toe, revealing an initial harmonic and melodic pattern rising towards the treble notes underpinning the whole piece. It ends with expanding registers and texture – does this represent the growth of the person and renown of the young Prince? Although the Allemande starts with the same harmonic motif, it is composed in a marked half-French, half-Italian luthé style with varying textures. The Corrente shows more of a lively than flowing character and retains the triple-meter format of the dance, subdivided into triplets (as does the Gigue later on). It is not so far removed from the moderate minuet movement just like the courantes in Partitas 3 and 6 of the Burlesca in Partita 3, formerly called Menuet with its distinct emphasis on the second beat. The Sarabande not only keeps strictly to the stately character of the dance, but also boasts a lavish, flowing ornamentation, as could be the case with some doubles in the English Suite, but in a more organically integrated fashion. Following the French-style Menuets of an almost pastoral simplicity, the Gigue in C with triplets (another way of writing 12/8) applies the precepts of Rameau's Trois Mains. From then on, this "gesture" became an enduring part of commonplace elements in French Eighteenth Century repertoire.

II. Partita 2 in C Minor, BWV 826

In many respects, *Partita II* stands in contradiction to Partita I. Here, the grace and innocence turn into gravity (of weight, character and movement) which is the hallmark of the key of C minor (the key used for the almost contemporaneous St. John Passion), contradicted three times by the incisive lightness of its allegro movements (the end of the Sinfonia, Rondeaux, Capriccio). The introductory Sinfonia is in three parts: the first, grave adagio, in the orchestral style and dotted in the Italian style, is followed by two sections with two parts: a lyrical andante in an allemande movement ending with an adagio cadenza of a concerto in the Italian style, then a fugal allegro in a rhythmic con spirito movement set to the energetic Polish-style pace. Just like the Sarabande and Rondeaux later on, the Allemande is also inspired by the sonata for violin and continuo although it makes frugal use of the style luthé while preserving the dance movement in an underlying layer. As for the Courante, this is well and truly in French style, moderate in 3/2, but it has such contrapuntal and ornamental abundance that the performer is tempted to co-opt it.

There is nothing French about the rondo other than its title "Rondeaux," as the form and manner is very concertante and Italian (the French courante had already made an appearance in the corrente

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[7] Quoted by Alberto Basso, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, Paris, 1985 / Torino, 1983

movement of the Partita), as did the « sonate a tre » movement in the fugal style and Italian 2/4 time, entitled Capriccio. (Clérambault also ended his organ suites of 1710 with a "Caprice," but we can also find this term applied to light, polyphonic works by Handel, Boehm, and, much earlier, Froberger.)

Partita 3 in A Minor, BWV 827

The meaning of this *partita* swiftly becomes clear on interpretation of its "character pieces;" a Scherzo, the twin of the famous Badinerie (it too sets a "Polish" context, in B minor this time for the purposes of the traverso) and an impish Burlesca, originally named Menuet. These pieces belong to the comic, popular, rural category which is often identified with the key of A minor (musettes, Polish and Turkish-style music, music by Telemann, Couperin, et al., also refer to the prelude in A minor of WtC 1, which is as farcical as can be). They enlighten us to how to decipher the other movements by means of concentric circles: Sarabande (starting with an anacrusis, but we find this with Couperin too) is disguised as a Polonaise (the polonaise is one of the most featured dances in *Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena*), and makes use of the similar rhythmical pattern (suspension or emphasis on the second beat: a sarabande can be danced to this polonaise and vice versa, if desired); the stirring Corrente is like Harlequinade from a Telemann suite, without openly acknowledging it; the Allemande, which in this light seems to be surprisingly interspersed with leaps, intervals, combined with luthé features. The Gigue finally showcases a double fugue based on a contorted theme ending with a pirouette. Lastly, Fantasia (formerly entitled "Prelude" in the first version), whose name was undoubtedly chosen only for variety's sake, could well be taken here in the literal sense of the word: Invention with two voices, in which the seemingly normal parts undergo curiously complex and disjointed transformations.

This Partita is entirely based around popular themes and scherzando, the burlesque style.

Partita 4 in D Major, BWV 828

We enter into broader dimensions with Partita IV in D major, the key of ostentatious music of the court, with trumpets and timbales ("Saeculum," in Concerts by G. Muffat).

Opening the second half of the collection, as would the 16th of the Goldberg Variations, in radical contrast to the previous partita, we have a splendid French-style overture evoking the orchestral style. It highlights the harpsichord by compensating for the relative thinness of the sound, with superb ornamentation in "tirate" (flurries). This, however, must not make us lose sight of the impeccable structuring of a royal genre of music. The fugue which comprises the second part is similar to the Vivaldian model due to its episodic structure of the concerto. The Allemande, just like the Sarabande a little later on, achieves a marvelous balance between the Italian cantabilità of a richly inspired violin concerto with its impressive development, and the form and movement of an allemande grave or French-styled noble sarabande. These movements should not be left out along the way for risk of cancelling out this tension, this resistance. (It is all too common a practice to make these into simple, slow movements and to consider the ornamentation as continuous melody, akin to how one would confuse the tree with its foliage…)

The Overture, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue start with a related harmonic progression which is extremely similar in the Allemande, Sarabande and Gigue. The Courante is the second French-type example in the collection, and is just as elaborate and filled with 'Italianisms' (bass in quavers, strings of anapests) as the one in C minor. The Aria is a light movement, and bears an Italian name for its blend of tastes: we should rather refer to it as an "air" in the sense of an "orchestral intermedio" in a French opera, although the compositional style is Italian. The Sarabande starts with an initial gesture, its first step, followed by an expressive suspension which does not herald such rich developments. The joyful Menuet is apparently orchestral in nature, vertical and divided up, often in a rather staccato style, and starts with a similar formula which will outline the Gigue's theme (the same suspension of the second beat of the second bar, the same harmonic signature as the Sarabande). The Gigue is exhilarating, swirling and virtuosic. It seems to be the Menuet's fugue in the same movement in a similar tempo.

Partita 4 is entirely based around magnificence, radiance and public joy. This is the glowing, royal

Partita.

Partita 5 in G Major, BWV 829

In instrumental works, chiefly those on the keyboard, Bach tended to associate the key of G major with bubbling, animated and frivolous joy. (See, for example, Pièce d'Orgue BWV 572, in which the middle section is the complete antithesis; and the preludes and fugues of WtC in the same key.) This granted a prominent place to arpeggios in the tradition of "toccate di salti" contrasting with routinely combined scales or movements. The general character is giocoso, holding a certain amount of surprise in several respects[8]. The opening Præambulum (thus named out of the sheer need for variety – it is an unmitigated toccata) is exhilarating and cutting with surges of arpeggios and underpinning runs, like the Prelude for Organ BWV 541, through the Polish-styled rhythmical formula, emphasizing or suspending the second beat to contrast the virtuosic speed with resistance which gives it such verve. The Allemande in the same movement flows more easily with the broad ambitus or range, and the ornamentation style with triplets occasionally blended with binary forms. Following a Corrente which is somewhat reminiscent of the fugue in G major from WtC 2 in the same meter with its final cadenza (which one is tempted to mention here), there is a very French Sarabande (see, for example, "Oiseaux qui sous ces feuillages" in the 1716 *Muse de l'Opéra ou les Caractères Lyriques*, by Clérambault: G major, three voices, same movement, same rhythm, practically the same melody…) evoking delightful joy in suspense.

The minuet is mischievously called, "Tempo di Minuetta." As in Partita III, the dance is adhered to and hides behind the appearance of something else (here we hear binary 6/8 within a 3/4 meter). The movement could have been called Scherzo in the true sense of the term, or, as with Couperin, *Les Amusemens* (one piece – in G major – with binary features in the ternary measure). It might also signify fickleness as it did with others, as if to say, "I am not what you think I am." However, it is a proper, danceable minuet. A Passepied exceedingly similar to the Aria in the previous Partita for its precise, linear and allegro style (nevertheless avoiding the hemiolas characteristic to this dance) leads straight to the Gigue in the same tempo. It is a double fugue which seems to be the polyphonic extension of the passepied. Here too, the theme seems to derive from the prelude's initial motif, sharing its rhythmic curtness, whimsical aspect, and additionally the polyphonic complexity, with its counter-accents and abundant trills. Partita V is all about joy, animated movement, virtuosic runs and surprises.

Partita 6 in E Minor, BWV 830

We find the musical discourse and dimensions shifting into a completely different register with the Partita in E minor, that key which is heir to the E Phrygian mode of lamentation and torment. The Toccata alone could be an equivalent to early toccatas, structured in three parts: an apparently free-

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[8] I stressed this fact in relation to our recording of works by Muffat (Tempéraments, 1998). It is striking to note that in Muffat's "magnum opus," *Apparatus Musico-Organisticus* from 1690, he illustrates the following various styles in his toccatas composed in the "modern" modes: the Lully style in toccata XI written in an overture style in D major (cf. *Partita 4*), giving the title "Sæculum" (the world) to his concerto in D major *Auserlesene Instrumental-Music*; and the Italian style à la Corelli in toccata X in concerto style in C minor (cf. *Partita 2*). Furthermore, his toccata VIII in G major ("*Propitia Sydera*," the benevolent stars) is a perfect instance of a cheerful, exhilarating and virtuosic treatment with similar formulæ to most of Bach's pieces in G major (and cycles of variations, "ludic" works such as *Variations* "*Auf die Mayerin*" by Froberger, Buxtehude's "*La Capricciosa*," Boehm's "*Freu Dich Sehr*," Handel's *Chaconne*, and so on. The last example of these is the *Goldberg Variations* with their exceedingly virtuosic facet, although, yet again, this is not their only quality. Even if Bach had not been acquainted with Muffat's works, which cannot be proven, these commonplaces were widespread then and have fallen into disuse today. Hence, they did not require directives of, "giocoso, scherzando, con spirito, tempo di gavotta, alla polacca," etc., which, when used routinely later on, caused performers of subsequent generations to lose their ability to recognise old codes and commonplaces.

form section – the fugue – return to the free-form section modified into a sort of ABA, to be found the other way round in the fugue of the no less impressive Prelude and Fugue for organ BWV 548 from the same period. In that one, it is the free-form section which makes up part B; the central "entertainment" interspersed with the fugue returning by way of concerto ritornellos. So, here we find the fugue, concerto and toccata genres intertwined. However, the motif dealt with here in both sections is lamentation: hence lamento, but fitted snugly into a movement enjoying only relative freedom. At this point in Bach's development, far from the toccatas of his youth and quite the reverse of his son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, he was more concerned in having rhythmic and dynamic continuity. (In the Partitas, a second keyboard is never required, with parts 2 and 4 of the Clavierübung being the specified exception, and it is rare to come across keyboard changes in the organ works of that period.)

The Allemanda is in line with the serious movement of the dance and, as it is in the key of E, it demonstrates chromatic, tortuous characteristics, fraught with pitfalls and is consistently dotted. However, all this falls within the boundaries of a relatively flowing musical discourse.

The Italian-styled Corrente is usually a rather brisk dance, undoubtedly related to the Duetto in E minor from the Clavierübung III, which is a series of pitfalls, and recalls the style of the air from Cantata 47 with violin obbligato, "Wer ein wahrer Christ will heißen." Here, however, it is restrained by the tension of the syncopation and the waterfall of demisemiquavers which never land on the beats except when the same phenomenon of avoidance passes over to the left-hand quavers. To this can be added some frequently harsh harmony (diminished chords, differing cadenzas) and a finale replicating a concerto cadenza which is convoluted but in tempo. So, this is a Corrente restrained by figures of torment and avoidance – of resolution, downbeats, linearity – these figures being used to express incompleteness, difficulty and/or instability.

The Air which follows was not in the first 1725 version. This gavotte-like air is the only truly light movement in the Partita. (In this instance, it is actually a real gavotte, only it is not named so, making for another bit of "evasion.") Accordingly, the work starts to take on the appearance of the "galant" genre with a French-style "petite reprise" (a little repeat) for the only time in the collection.

As for the following Sarabande, it plunges us into deep reflection. It is a pure lamento and perhaps the most intensely expressive piece in all of Bach's works for harpsichord. It is based on the same plaintive motif as the Toccata, frequently repeated throughout a harmonic discourse riddled with pitfalls, dissonant harmonies and a light sprinkling of acciaccatura chords (a rare occurrence in Bach). At the same time, as in numerous Baroque lamenti, it remains a sarabande (with its suspended second beat, often accentuated by delays) becoming extraordinarily complex in the middle part for the sheer profusion of reliably organic expressive diminutions.

The Aria di Gavotta is of the same typically French "gay et piqué" movement to be found in Clérambault and Rameau, and which underpins the third French-style movement of Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, offset in time by a quaver. As the only "light" movement in the first version of the partita, it avoids (again) the characteristic cheerfulness of the gavotte with the title "tempo di…," by its key and complex development (dotting, leaps, and so on) which imposes a restrained tempo.

Lastly, the final Gigue is in binary measure (as with Froberger in the first French Suite which established the pattern). This is an archaic model as confirmed by Johann Gottfried Walther in his Musikalisches Lexicon; here with 2 semibreves per bar (2 minims in the initial version, but Bach chose this double archaism for the definitive version); a double fugue with one subject and its inversion, tortured like a Way of the Cross, drawing the sign of the cross three times and recalling the subject of the abovementioned fugue from BWV 548.

The entire Partita focuses on stretching time and dimensions, distortion, avoidance, difficulty and suffering, lamento and the stylistic discrepancy between a modern genre (the French-styled Suite, the "galanterie") and old-fashioned techniques (counterpoint, outmoded time signatures, gravity, symbols) loaded with meaning.

To Go Further…

For Bach, philosophical – and theological – reflection was one thing. In contrast to his

predecessors, he incorporated both these spheres into the area of instrumental music. Bach was a believer and a music preacher too, being the Cantor of Saint Thomas. For him, in the quest for the One, the act of creation included reference to the cosmic, divine order in which the believer finds its meaning, and towards which his activities and works congregate, of which music is for him its reflection and symbol.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that in this secular genre which comprises the collection of Partitas[9], there are other interpretation methods which may also enlighten us as to meaning and, to some extent, nurture performance.

The collection, its order and progression, from the pleasant Partita I up to its conclusion with Partita VI in E minor, demand questions from us. It is problematic to end a collection of French-styled suites or "galanteries" with a partita which, although conforming to the genre's formal requirements, is like a "tomb," or a "passion disguised as a suite." It shuns the spirit of entertainment which is usually associated with it, whilst retaining the genre's facade and superficial principles. (It should be noted that we are close to the date when the St. Matthew Passion was composed, which also starts in E minor.)

Bach did not exactly provide us with the keys. He expressed himself exclusively through music. His language was infused with symbols derived from analogical thinking and dives into an immemorial past of which we can only just grasp the meaning using the imperfect instrument of our rational culture. For Bach, it was enough for the composition and symbolism to exist, regardless of whether they were noticed and how they were perceived. ("Suffice it to be of the universal order in the eyes of God," he might have said.) We need a great deal of intuition and familiarity with that epoch and previous eras even to have a hope of approaching the meaning. However, having only a superficial understanding for want of evidence risks forever depriving us of the sense, because the lack of evidence for a phenomenon does not prove its absence. In this regard, whoever wants to play at being an angel will act like a beast…

Our experience, along with Jocelyne Chaptal's[10] analysis on Baroque symbolism, help us interpret the following:

Basing our debate on the language components we have defined, from the symbols he seems to unlock for us, we contrast the items which give us food for thought in the *Partitas*:

- It is true that the Prelude and triple fugue in E flat from Clavierübung III have a confirmed symbolic meaning. Nonetheless, the instrumental music of the four *Duetti*, which belong to a collection more targeted at the church and preaching, are subjects of conjecture as to their meaning, which to this day remains without any definitive explanation[11].
- A leaf showing the 11th of the 14 Canons BWV 1087 (a purely speculative work), is marked with the following script under the staves, "Symbolum. Christus Coronabit Crucigeros" (Symbol. Christ will crown those who carry His cross).
- *Partita VI*: In ancient symbolism, the number 6 is associated with man, the work of the sixth day

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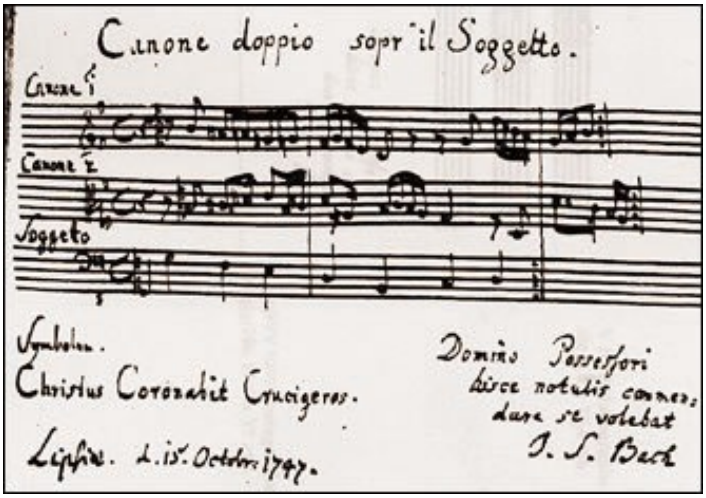
[9] Others have put forward similar interpretations of some violin partitas (see Helga Thoene about *Ciacona* in d minor in *Cöthener Bach-Hefte* 6, 1994).
Moreover, Chr. Graupner's *Monatliche Clavir Früchte* (each Suite dedicated to a month of the year) were published between 1718 and 1722, and his *Vier Jahreszeiten* in 1733. J.K. Fischer's last Book (the *Musikalischer Parnassus* of 1738) contains nine Suites, each dedicated to one of the Muses...). Bach never used such titles. But his music is full of representative symbolism - of which numerology is but one element - as a means of projecting the complex rhetoric that forms the basis of the musical discourse).

[10] Chaptal, Jocelyne: *Renaissance et Baroque*, Paris, 2012.

[11] In turns: the Four Evangelists, the Four Elements, the union of bread and wine, the Saviour and Grace… Also see the numerical deciphering of the Duetto in F Major, by Ulrich Siegele (U. Siegele, *Bachs Theologischer Formbegriff und das Duett F-Dur,* Neuhausen-Stuttgart, 1978).

of the creation of the world according to the Bible. Lamentation, tomb, Way of the Cross. Man, or the Son of Man, Cross, Passion, and so on.



- As a later (2017) addendum to our notes of 2014 : There is a Lutheran tradition to associate the numbers 1-6 with the days of the Creation (cf Werckmeister's attempt to correlate Creation and harmonic series, quoted in Ben Shute's book : *Sei Solo : Symbolum* ? *The Theology of J. S. Bach's solo violin works*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon 2016). « In this light, it is perhaps not surprising to find German Baroque composers crafting purely instrumental music that is not merely susceptible to interpolated significance (as all music is) but makes use of musical structures that are intended to correlate with particular extramusical concept, event or narrative, in other words, creating distinctly allegorical music » (ibidem). The 7th day being the accomplishment, the *Apotheosis* : is there a relation between *Clavier-Übung 2*, which completes the key structure (F-major and B-minor, after transposing the *French Overture* from previous tonality C-minor) and Couperin's *Apothéoses de Lully / de Corelli* ?

Fig. 1.1. Werckmeister: the harmonic series as an allegory of the days of creation (condensed)

Partial		Octave	Significance
[32.]		VI.	Day 6: Humanity is created to have dominion over all creatures of the earth, just as the musician is needed to bring order to the intervals already introduced, using "clean" and "unclean" sounds (consonance and dissonance) each according to its proper time and usage, so as to create *Harmonia* that is pleasing to God and man.
17.			
16.	*c‴*		
15.	[*b″*]*	V.	Day 5 (and 6): God creates every manner of animal, some clean and some unclean, usable to man only at certain times. Similarly, this octave yields some well- and some ill-sounding intervals.
14.			
13.			
12.	*g″*		
11.	–		
10.	*e″*		
9.	*d″*		
8.	*c″*	IV.	Day 4: As the greater and lesser lights (sun and moon) are created for signs and seasons, so now two types of third emerge, one greater (major third) and one lesser (minor third). The intervals in this octave also show times and seasons: the dissonant seventh partial signifies that not all seasons are good; dissonance is part of this life. The completion of the triad parallels the completion of the heavens and earth.
7.	–		
6.	*g′*		
5.	*e′*		
4.	*c′*	III.	Day 3: Vegetation and trees appear, standing between earth and clouds, just as in the third octave *g* appears, standing between the upper and lower C.
3.	*g*		
2.	*c*	II.	Day 2: The first separation occurs, dividing the waters below the firmament (i.e., on the surface of the earth) from those above (clouds). In the same way, the second octave brings the first separation between *C* below and *c* above.
1.	*C*	I.	Day 1: The fundamental *C* exists alone at the beginning of the series and is the source from which all else springs. As such, it is an image of God, the eternal Being and the source of all that is. Because the fundamental is the first pitch that the senses distinguish from chaotic, non-musical sound, it is like light, the first of God's creations, that is clearly separated from confusion.

* Originally *a″*, a typographical error

Opus 1: Creation…

Partita I (B flat major) has a story to tell: it is most tender, delightful and innocent and linked by Bach with the birth of a little prince. (Cf. the lost dedication below – all this is true but is it conceivable that Bach would withdraw and forget the dedication to the prince whom the work was honouring and who subsequently died in his second year?) Birth and childhood are associated with creation by analogy. Moreover, the partita denotes growth with its motif in the first expanding movement as it also does in the expansion of texture (from the modest and gracious to the majestic), this being a motif we find later at the beginning of several dances. Such expansion was unusual for Bach who took great care to be consistent.

Partita II (C minor) contrasts with the first, acting as a figure of separation between the initial features: light / heavy; tender and delightful / incisive and virtuosic; French and gracious / Italian and poignant – without the style being pure, as contamination here is the very language itself: these are obvious predominant features.

Partita III (A minor, the favourite key for popular music) represented popular music, and thus the music of the land, whose Polish style (in Saxony) illustrated it well with its frank, craggy and occasionally burlesque characteristics. *"And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth."* This contrasts with:

Partita IV (D major): the Sun, the King, the Court, the French-style overture and the royal style, resplendent and magnificent, of which the French style in general and the reference to Versailles is the symbol. *"And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night…"*

Partita V (G major): The Key of Mercury (cf. Abraham Bartolus: Musica Mathematica, Leipzig 1614), connected with vivacity and volatility (especially with Bach) and the associated jubilance: *"And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven."*

Partita VI (E minor): at the end of Creation and the story, man is born into a land of passage, "to carry his Cross" (the expression is J.S. Bach's own), and yearn for the afterlife : *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him…"*. This quest is symbolised by the succession of notes corresponding to the keys of the Partitas, and comprising the first notes of the chorale, "It is enough." (Later on, in oneness of thought, this was quoted by Alban Berg in his Violin Concerto, "To the Memory of an Angel"…) "It is enough, Lord, when it is pleasing to you, then grant me release." The succession of notes comes to an end as if its ascent is unfinished. The non-completion can also be noted in the figures of avoidance applied at various levels: diversion from emotional content, from the meaning relative to the genre of the suite; from the Corrente relative to the usual lightness; the melismas in the Corrente relative to the beat; from the Gavotte by the complex nature of the Tempo di Gavotta; from the expected gigue with a binary, serious, complex and extravagantly chromatic Gigue whose subject and inversion show a whole series of signs of the cross…

After having published three collections, including two of 7 Partitas and one of 7 Sonatas, J.S. Bach's predecessor, Johann Kuhnau, produced a string of Biblical Sonatas (*Musicalische Vorstellung einiger Biblischer Historien*) in 1700. While it is true that Bach symbolised the first and most seminal of the biblical stories in his Opus I, he put the finishing touches to the Totalitas - the totality - in a work which brought together accumulated experience and known styles. All of this was achieved within the boundaries of a genre which he thus elevated to an unprecedented height and intensity.

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Creation according Luther's Bible :

1st day: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth… And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."*

2nd day: *"And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament."*

3rd day: *"And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth."*

4th day: *"And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also."*

5th day: *"And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven."*

6th day: *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him…"*