



2CD

J.S. BACH

The French Suites



Alexandra Papastefanou

French Suite No. 1 in D minor, BWV 812 [14:53]

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|---|----------------------------|--------|
| 1 | I. Allemande | [3:30] |
| 2 | II. Courante | [1:51] |
| 3 | III. Sarabande | [3:33] |
| 4 | IV. Menuet I and Menuet II | [3:03] |
| 5 | V. Gigue | [2:47] |

French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813 [15:39]

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| 6 | I. Allemande | [3:12] |
| 7 | II. Courante | [1:43] |
| 8 | III. Sarabande | [3:15] |
| 9 | IV. Air | [1:25] |
| 10 | V. Menuet I and Menuet II (BWV 813a) | [3:37] |
| 11 | VI. Gigue | [2:23] |

French Suite No. 3 in B minor, BWV 814 [16:52]

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| 12 | I. Allemande | [3:41] |
| 13 | II. Courante | [2:04] |
| 14 | III. Sarabande | [3:30] |
| 15 | IV. Anglaise | [1:19] |
| 16 | V. Menuet I – Trio – Menuet II | [4:17] |
| 17 | VI. Gigue | [1:56] |

French Suite No. 4 in E flat major, BWV 815 [18:38]

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| 18 | I. Prélude (BWV 815a) | [1:48] |
| 19 | II. Allemande | [2:51] |
| 20 | III. Courante | [1:38] |
| 21 | IV. Sarabande | [3:01] |
| 22 | V. Gavotte I and Gavotte II (BWV 815a) | [4:37] |
| 23 | VI. Menuet (BWV 815a) | [0:48] |
| 24 | VII. Air | [1:34] |
| 25 | VIII. Gigue | [2:15] |

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|---|---|
| <p>1 Adagio in G major, BWV 968 [4:24]
 (transcription of <i>Sonata in C major</i>
 for Solo Violin, BWV 1005)</p> | <p>17 Fantasia in G minor, BWV 920 [7:49]</p> <p>18 Prélude (Fantasia) in C minor, BWV 921 [2:47]</p> |
| <p>French Suite No. 5 in G major, BWV 816 [17:28]</p> <p>2 I. Allemande [3:06]</p> <p>3 II. Courante [1:37]</p> <p>4 III. Sarabande [4:39]</p> <p>5 IV. Gavotte [1:12]</p> <p>6 V. Bourrée [1:22]</p> <p>7 VI. Loure [2:07]</p> <p>8 VII. Gigue [3:22]</p> | <p>19 Fantasia in A minor, BWV 922 [7:01]</p> <p>Keyboard Sonata in D minor, BWV 964 [19:56]
 (transcription of <i>Sonata in A minor</i>
 for Solo Violin, BWV 1003)</p> <p>20 I. Adagio [4:13]</p> <p>21 II. Fuga (Allegro) [6:18]</p> <p>22 III. Andante [4:49]</p> <p>23 IV. Allegro [4:36]</p> |
| <p>French Suite No. 6 in E major, BWV 817 [15:11]</p> <p>9 I. Allemande [2:35]</p> <p>10 II. Courante [1:33]</p> <p>11 III. Sarabande [3:42]</p> <p>12 IV. Gavotte [1:10]</p> <p>13 V. Polonaise [1:21]</p> <p>14 VI. Menuet [1:08]</p> <p>15 VII. Bourrée [1:22]</p> <p>16 VIII. Gigue [2:17]</p> | |

Johann Sebastian BACH: The French Suites

Bach produced a prodigious series of keyboard works in the early 1720s, mainly as instructional pieces for his students and new wife Anna Magdalena whom he married in 1721 – the 24 *Preludes and Fugues*, BWV 846–869 (recorded by Alexandra Papastefanou on FHR65), six *French Suites*, BWV 812–817 and the earlier six *English Suites*, BWV 806–811, six *Partitas*, BWV 825–830 and *Two- and Three-Part Inventions*, BWV 772–801. He also wrote the *Overture in the French Style*, BWV 831 during this period which is very similar to the *Partitas*.

The appellation ‘French’, to the set of suites BWV 812–817, was due to Johann Forkel who claimed in his biography of Bach published in 1802 that they were written ‘in the French manner’ although the first recorded use of this description of these works was by Friedrich Marpurg in 1762.

However, as with the *English Suites*, the title is not an accurate description and certainly not Bach’s. Indeed, the greatest French composer of the period, Francois Couperin (1668–1733), published four books of *Suites* (named *Ordres*) in 1713, 1717, 1722 and 1730 whilst in 1716 he had published his famous instructional work *L’art de toucher*

le clavecin (The Art of Harpsichord Playing). It is known that Bach admired these works and entered into correspondence with Couperin, but he obviously did not model his works on those of the French composer as Couperin’s *Ordres* comprise collections of short descriptive pieces with fanciful titles, some including more than twenty pieces.

Bach did not publish the *French Suites* during his lifetime. However, he wrote the first five in a book (*Clavier-büchlein*) he gave to his new wife shortly after they were married. It is possible that *No. 6* was in the book as well, but was probably removed as about forty pages are missing from the end of the book. We also have another *Clavier-büchlein* from 1725 in which Anna has written revised versions of the first two suites. There are a number of copies written out by his pupils (there are five versions of the *Courante* from the C minor suite) so the complete score we have today is based on all of the accepted variants of the existing versions.

The most noticeable feature of these works is their intimate nature. They are on a small scale, primarily melodic rather than contrapuntal, and

more suited to the clavichord than harpsichord. Indeed, one can imagine that Bach wrote these for his students who had first been prepared by the *Two- and Three-Part Inventions*, of which he wrote in the preface:

‘Forthright instruction, wherewith lovers of the clavier, especially those desirous of learning, are shown in a clear way not only 1) to learn to play two voices clearly, but also after further progress 2) to deal correctly and well with three obligato parts, moreover at the same time to obtain not only good ideas, but also to carry them out well, but most of all to achieve a cantabile style of playing, and thereby to acquire a strong foretaste of composition.’

The first suite is primarily written in three parts, but after the *Allemande* of the second suite, two parts are predominantly used. As these works were given to his new wife whose capabilities at the keyboard were not of a virtuosic nature, it may be that Bach decided to make the works less technically demanding because the first suite is a fair copy while the second and third are draft scores.

The clavichord is a single manual instrument small enough to be placed on a table top. The

method of sound production differs from the harpsichord in that instead of the strings being plucked by a quill, a metal tangent strikes the string to create a delicate sound. In this way the instrument resembles the piano in that a range of dynamics, albeit fairly limited, can be applied by the performer. Bach was concerned that his pupils should ‘most of all achieve a cantabile style of playing’ and the clavichord would be the ideal keyboard instrument of the time to create a singing vocal line. The *French Suites* are therefore also ideally suited to the piano.

All of the *French Suites* begin with an *Allemande*, *Courante* (some in the French style and some in the swifter Italian *corrente* style) and *Sarabande* giving a progression of moderate, fast and slow tempi. All end with a *Gigue* which is preceded by an assortment of differing movements – *Minuets*, *Bourrées*, *Gavottes*, an *Air* and a *Polonaise*. The styles are not necessarily consistent; for example, the *Gigue* to the first suite has four beats to the bar and is in the style of a French overture with a dotted rhythm, while most of the others are in the more commonly used 6/8 or 3/8 time. It is known that during his revisions Bach later added the minuets to the second and third suites, and that the early form of the fourth suite had no minuet. On this recording Alexandra Papastefanou plays

the additional movements to the fourth suite (published as *BWV 815a*) – a *Prelude, Gavotte* and *Minuet*.

The *Adagio in G major, BWV 968* is a transcription of the first movement of the *Violin Sonata in C major, BWV 1005*. First published in the 1880s, it is doubtful whether this transcription is by Bach. The *Fantasia in G minor, BWV 920* is also of doubtful authenticity and was first published in 1880.

The *Prélude (or Fantasia) in C minor, BWV 921* was apparently composed in 1713 but not published until 1890. These fantasias would have derived from extemporisation at the keyboard although one wonders why Bach would have had *BWV 921* published during his lifetime as both this and the *A minor Fantasia, BWV 922* are curious works lacking invention and based on limited rhythmic ideas. The *A minor Fantasia* was composed around 1710 but first published in 1867.

It is well known that Bach recycled and arranged his works into other forms. The *Keyboard Sonata in D minor, BWV 964* is Bach's own transcription of his *Sonata in A minor, BWV 1003 for Solo Violin*. The work was first published in 1866. It is interesting to see how he harmonises the original four movement work, particularly in

the *Fuga* where he adds extra parts. Indeed, the transcription to keyboard is wholly successful making one wish Bach had transcribed all of his violin sonatas and partitas for keyboard. Comparison with the 'free transcription' by Leopold Godowsky from 1924 is fascinating.

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Alexandra Papastefanou – Pianist

Born into a musical family, Alexandra Papastefanou graduated from Athens Conservatoire, where she studied piano under Aliko Vatikioti. She followed her studies with Olga Zhukova at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, with Peter Solymos, at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest and, on a scholarship from the Alexander Onassis Foundation, at the University of Indiana in Bloomington, with György Sebök. She has also taken lessons from Alfred Brendel who praised her playing and as well as her edition of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (Ph. Nakas Music Publications).

Papastefanou was a finalist at the Clara Haskil Competition in Switzerland and received the Liebstoeckl and Fazioli Prizes at the International Geneva Competition, as well as the Spyros Moutsenigos Prize from the Academy of Athens.

Whilst pursuing her piano studies, Papastefanou took up music theory and composition, firstly with I. A. Papaioannou, and then later, in the United States, with Frederic Fox.

Along with her activity as a performer, Papastefanou pursued her in-depth study of J.S. Bach's music, the meaning and enduring appeal

of which she examined in a lecture series. She has performed all of Bach's keyboard works and, in a series of recitals, has presented his complete *Well-Tempered Clavier*, *Goldberg Variations*, *The Art of Fugue*, and *The Musical Offering* as well as his keyboard concertos. She has also performed and recorded the works of Robert Schumann.

In 2018, Papastefanou recorded J.S. Bach's complete *Well-Tempered Clavier* for FHR [FHR65] to much critical acclaim. Furthermore, she was awarded the 'Best Recording of 2018' for the album by the The Union of Greek Theatre and Music Critics 'for the virtuoso and expressively impeccable approach of a monument of the world's pianistic literature, crowning a distinguished, consistent, long-lasting personal artistic journey.' On listening to her *Well-Tempered Clavier* recording, Alfred Brendel commented 'I find Papastefanou's Bach riveting. This is Bach playing on a high level – full of life, controlled in all strands of the music, pianistically immaculate, and highly personal. Here is a Bach player who has lived a lifetime with this music.'

Papastefanou's diverse repertoire extends from composers of the baroque era to more recent composers such as George Crumb, György Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen and

Toru Takemitsu. She has also repeatedly performed and recorded the piano works of major Greek composers Dimitris Mitropoulos, Nikos Skalkottas, George Koumendakis, I.A. Papaioannou and Vangelis Katsoulis. Her musical career has also extended to lecture-recitals, featuring innovative thematic cycles.

Papastefanou has appeared, always to enthusiastic acclaim, with symphony orchestras, in solo recitals and with chamber music groups across Europe (Germany, France, Great Britain, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Spain, the Czech Republic, Russia, Finland and Hungary), the United States and Canada.

Papastefanou has also recorded her début album as a composer, entitled *Enamel (Smalto*, in Greek), a collection of songs to her own lyrics and musical arrangements (Lyra Records). Her composition cycle *12 Minerals* for solo piano, and *12+1 Shells and Shadows* for voice and piano, were recently published by Ph. Nakas Music Publications and the album *Minerals* was recently published by Subways Music.

Papastefanou teaches and heads the piano department at the Philippos Nakas Conservatory, Athens.

For more information, please visit:

www.alexandrapapastefanou.com

Recorded at Dimitris Mitropoulos Hall, Megaron, Athens, 25 March and 24 April 2019

Produced by **Alexandra Papastefanou**

Engineered by **Nikos Espialidis**

Mastered by **Peter De Pian**

24bit, 48kHz hi-resolution recording and mastering

Piano: Steinway & Sons, Model D, #572712

Piano technician: Giannis Karydas

Booklet notes by **Jonathan Summers**

Artwork by **David Murphy** (FHR)

Photos:

Album cover and page 8 taken by **Lia Zanni**

Page 12 taken by **Georgia Salambasi**

DigiPak manuscripts:

French Suite No. 4, BWV 815: Allemande. (Klavierbüchlein für Anna Magdalena Bach (1722))

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Keyboard Sonata, BWV 964: Adagio (7 Instrumentalstücke)

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FHR thanks Peter Bromley and Alexandra Papastefanou

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[FHR65]

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'Beyond question, Papastefanou more than holds her own alongside the catalogue's top piano versions of the '48'' **(Gramophone)**



Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

The French Suites

CD1

[1-5]	French Suite No. 1 in D minor, BWV 812	[66:20]
[6-11]	French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813	[14:53]
[12-17]	French Suite No. 3 in B minor, BWV 814	[15:39]
[18-25]	French Suite No. 4 in D minor, BWV 815	[16:52]
		[18:38]

CD2

[1]	Adagio in G major, BWV 968	[75:09]
	(transcription of Sonata in C major for Solo Violin, BWV 1005)	[4:24]
[2-8]	French Suite No. 5 in G major, BWV 816	[17:28]
[9-16]	French Suite No. 6 in E major, BWV 817	[15:11]
[17]	Fantasia in G minor, BWV 920	[7:49]
[18]	Prelude (Fantasia) in C minor, BWV 921	[2:47]
[19]	Fantasia in A minor, BWV 922	[7:01]
[20-23]	Keyboard Sonata in D minor, BWV 964	[19:56]
	(transcription of Sonata in A minor for Solo Violin, BWV 1003)	

Alexandra Papastefanou *piano*

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