

BACH'S KEYBOARD SUITES, A STUDY OF BACKGROUND

by

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Charles A. White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "C" and "W".

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CHAPTER I

THE CLAVIERÜBUNG

At the time that the first Partita in B-flat major was published in 1726, Bach had been cantor at Saint Thomas in Leipzig for about three years. An earlier work of Bach's had been printed before this time; the cantata, Gott ist mein König, had been engraved by his pleased employers for the annual inauguration of the city officials at Mülhausen in February 1708.¹ The B-flat major Partita was the first work that Bach himself published and as Bukofzer states, "The publication . . . confronts us with the anomaly that the opus I of a composer reveals him in his most mature phrase."²

The B-flat major Partita was the first of the Clavierübung to appear in publication. The title Clavierübung means keyboard study or exercise, a term that probably referred both to the keyboard skill of the performer and the inventive powers of the composer. Schweitzer adds, however, that "Übung" stands for more of a study for diversion rather than practice.³ Bach's Clavierübung, published over a period of sixteen

¹Philipp Spitta, Johann Sebastian Bach, trans. Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller-Maitland (London: Novello and Co., 1899), I, p. 344.

²Manfred F. Bukofzer, Music in the Baroque Era (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1947), p. 297.

³Albert Schweitzer, J. S. Bach, trans. Ernest Newman (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1923), p. 321.

years, is a compendium of the art of the keyboard, for every composition is a finished, inspired masterpiece that is in a class all by itself.⁴

The Clavierübung consists of four major parts:

- I. Contains the six Partitas, published in 1731.
 - 1) B-flat major -- Praeludium, A, C, S, MI, & II, G.
 - 2) c minor -- Sinfonia, A, C, S, Rondeau, Capriccio.
 - 3) a minor -- Fantasia, A, C, S, Burlesca, Scherzo, G.
 - 4) D major -- Ouverture, A, C, Aria, S, M, G.
 - 5) G major -- Praeambulum, A, C, S, Tempo di Minuet, Passepied, G.
 - 6) e minor -- Toccato, A, C, Air, S, Tempo di Gavotta, G.
- II. Contains an overture and concerto (1735)
 - 1) b minor -- Overture in the French manner
 - 2) F major -- Concerto in the Italian manner
- III. Contains four Duets and Organ Chorales (1739)
 - 1) e minor
 - 2) F major
 - 3) G major
 - 4) a minor

The organ chorales start with a Prelude in E-flat and go through twenty-one movements founded upon or associated with other chorales. They end with a fugue in E-flat known as the St. Anne Fugue.
- IV. Goldberg Variations (1742)

Contains 30 Variations

In 1689 and 1695 Johann Kuhnau, Bach's predecessor at Leipzig, published two works with the title Clavierübung. Each of these works contained seven suites; the first volume was in the major keys (C, D, E, F, G, A, and B-flat), and the second volume was in the minor keys (c, d, e, f, g, a, and b). In both Clavierübung I and II, the suites were called Partien. The basic arrangement of Kuhnau's suites are A, C, S,

⁴Paul Henry Lang, Music in Western Civilization (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1941), p. 509.

and G, with a few replacements. It is interesting to note that in Suite II, number 7, Kuhnau used the sequence of P, A, C, S, I, G, the same order that Bach used in his English Suites and Partitas.

Spitta remarked in his book, The Life of Bach,

In choosing for a collection of clavier suites the same title which had been used by his predecessor for the works that first made him famous as a composer for the clavier, . . . it is evident that he wished to appear before the world as Kuhnau's successor.⁵

However, there may have been at least another reason why Bach chose the title Clavierübung for his collection of clavier suites. Because of his unhappy employment at Leipzig, Bach might have decided to use the title Clavierübung, a title well known from a composer who was still well remembered, in an attempt to make his name known either in order to strengthen his position at Leipzig or in hopes of obtaining another job elsewhere. But more about this is mentioned in Chapter III.

Bach's title page for the Partita in B-flat major which appears below was also similar to the title page used by Kuhnau.

Keyboard Practice
consisting in
Preludes, Allemandes, Courantes, Sarabandes, Giges,
Minuets, and other Galanteries
Composed for Music Lovers, to Refresh their Spirits
by

⁵Spitta, III, 225.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Actual Capellmeister to His Highness the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen

and

Director Chori Musici Lipsiensis

Partita I

Published by the Author

1726⁶

On the twelfth of September, 1726, Princess Charlotte, the second wife of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, Bach's friend and previous employer, had given birth to a son. In commemoration of this event, Bach apparently copied out the B-flat major Partita and put it on the Crown Prince's cradle along with a dedicatory poem. However, the Crown Prince died two years later, and his father died shortly after, so the autographed copy of the Partita was not known to the world until 1879, when the owner sent a description of the Partita and a copy of the poem to the Magdeburg Zeitung. Spitta recounts the action he took to view the Partita and poem,

The steps I then took to obtain a sight of the autograph failed of any result; I had no answer to my application, and I cannot, therefore, be responsible for the accuracy of the communication. Any doubt, however -- though under the circumstances justifiable -- may, in my opinion, be allowed to vanish when we consider the form and purport of the documents, which seem to me a guarantee of their genuineness.⁷

⁶Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, ed., The Bach Reader (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1945), p. 105.

⁷Spitta, III, 225.

In his Musikalisches Lexicon of 1732, Johann Walther, Bach's kinsman and at one time close friend, devoted only a short entry to Bach. The only reference which mentioned his keyboard works is relative to the Partitas:

Of his excellent clavier works there have appeared in copper engraving: Anno 1726 a Partita in B^b major, under the title "Keyboard Practice, consisting in Preludes, Allemandes, Courantes, Sarabandes, Giges, Minuets, etc." This was followed by the 2nd, in c minor; the 3rd, in a minor; the 4th in D major; the 5th in G major; and the 6th in e minor, with which, presumably, the Opus ends.⁸

All of the Partitas appeared with the same title page except for changes in the titles of the movements and the years of publication. The second Partita was published in 1727 with the succeeding Partitas being published annually. When the Partitas were later reissued as a set, the same plates were used, but with altered pagination and a new title page. Bach eliminated the reference to Prince Leopold, who had since died, and added his own new title, "Actual Capellmeister to the Court of Saxe-Weissenfels."⁹

In his famous biography of 1802, On Johann Sebastian Bach's Life, Genius, and Works, Johann Forkel wrote concerning the publication of the Partitas:

The work made in its time a great noise in the musical world. Such excellent compositions for the clavier had never been seen and heard before. Anyone who had learnt to perform well some pieces out of them could make his fortune in the world thereby; and even in our

⁸David and Mendel, p. 46.

⁹David and Mendel, p. 106.

times, a young artist might gain acknowledgment by doing so, they are so brilliant, well-sounding, expressive, and always new.¹⁰

However, Spitta doubted that "the full value of this masterpiece of art" was recognized by Bach's contemporaries. He indicated that Forkel was "no impartial witness" to the "statements made by Bach's sons" informing Forkel that this was the general opinion of Bach's contemporaries.¹¹

Bach may not have foreseen the total plan and scope of the Clavierübung when the Partita in B-flat was published in 1726, but it is probable that he understood the importance of this new undertaking in extending his reputation as a composer. Leo Schrade states:

But it is unthinkable that a composer of Bach's proportions would always be able to avoid measuring his own work against all other European music Sooner or later, Bach was bound to consider his European reputation.¹²

Bach must also have been aware that his music was limited to the locale in which he lived.

Penetration into European range of music and musical activity, Bach must have come to doubt whether the work he had previously composed would ever attain the European rank to which, of course, he had a just title.¹³

Bach's reputation as a composer had spread among the organists of northern and central Germany through the scores copied and circulated by his students. If consideration of reputation was a factor in the

¹⁰David and Mendel, p. 337-338.

¹¹Spitta, III, 163.

¹²Leo Schrade, Bach: The Conflict Between the Sacred and the Secular (New York: Merlin Press, 1954), p. 69-70.

¹³Schrade, p. 73.

publication of the Clavierübung by Bach, it is significant that when he finally presented his work in published form he did not begin with sacred music. Rather, at a time when the church had again become the dominant influence in his career, he began publication with a set of keyboard suites written in his most galant and secular style. These featured the progressive trends of France and Italy, made distinctive through his own genius.

CHAPTER II

FORM

The meaning of the term partita is complex. Partita is the Italian form of the word; parthie or partie is the German form referring to a series of variation, or as Lang puts it, "a piece made up of parts or sections."¹ This definition of partita applies equally to the sonata da camera type of suite or to the earlier variations with which the name was associated. However in Italy during the 17th century, the sonata da camera characterized a freer nature chiefly in the form of chamber music. One of the early manuscripts by Vincenzo Galilei, dating 1584, contains lute compositions including a Romanesca con cento parti with each parti being a variation. The entire composition would be correctly called partite which is the plural form of parti. This work, as in other early Italian publications, referred always to a series of variations, not a suite of dances.

In Germany, the term occurred in connection with Froberger's variations as well as in chorale variations by George Böhm, Bach, Pachelbel, and several others. Mattheson claimed to be the inventor of rhythmic variations, a technique known as Veränderungen, or as Partita or Partie. Actually, this type of composition seems to have been introduced at least

¹Paul Henry Lang, Music in Western Civilization (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1941), p. 486.

as early as the time of Scheidt in his figured variations. According to Spitta,

A subject of simple construction, with a clearly defined and easily recognised melody, was selected for the theme -- an aria, sarabande, or chorale -- and so varied by running passages for the right hand that the salient points of the melody were just touched upon, or so slightly modified that the essential features remained recognisable throughout. Now and then, for a change, a running passage in the left hand occurred, while the simple theme was carried on above it.²

This type of variation had two different relationships with the dance. In one, a dance melody was used as the basis for the variation. In the other, dance rhythms were applied to chorale melodies, as in the sarabande, courante, and gigue on the chorale Auf meinen lieben Gott by Buxtehude.

The term partita was also used by the town pipers, or the municipal musicians, to refer to a collection of contrasting dances played one after another on festive occasions. It was this usage that was adopted by Froberger and other German composers of the 17th century when they applied it to the collections of dance movements for the keyboard.

Apel suggests the possibility that the name may have been derived from the French, and that partie in this sense may have denoted suite-like compositions. However, the French word was also used to refer to voice-part, as in a fugae a 3 parties.³ Since the suites in France were called ordres, Apel's suggestion seems unlikely.

In Italy the partita developed as a variation technique; in Ger-

²Philipp Spitta, Johann Sebastian Bach, trans. Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller-Maitland (London: Novello and Co., 1899), I, p. 126-127.

³Willi Apel, "Parthie, Partia, Partie," Harvard Dictionary of Music (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 645.

many it referred to groups of contrasting dances. But in Germany it was used also to refer to pieces which were varied through rhythmic transformations. In these pieces the relationship with the dance is frequently kept by using the dance melody or by applying the dance rhythms to transform another melody into a dance type. Something like this is apparent in some of the pavans and galliards published in lute tablature by Petrucci in the 16th century where the galliard is nothing more than a triple-time modification of the pavan.⁴

It seems unlikely that Bach was unaware of the many implications of the term partita. It is possible that the suites to which he assigned this name were so designated not only because Kuhnau had used it in the form Partien in 1689 and 1695 as earlier discussed, but evidently because they more nearly fulfilled the varied implications of the name than did his other suites.

Key and Mode in the Suites

In the keyboard Partitas Bach adhered to the old practice of maintaining the identity of key throughout an entire piece, a practice which had its origin in the songs and dances accompanied by the lute in order to avoid the necessity of re-tuning the open bass strings. Not even in the Menuet II of the Partita in B-flat major, the only alternative in the Partitas, is there a change of mode. In the English Suite in A major, the Bourrée II is in the tonic minor. Likewise, the Bourrée II of the

⁴ H. C. Colles, "Suite," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 5th ed., ed. Eric Blom (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1955), VIII, 165-166.

English Suite in a minor is in the tonic major; the Gavotte II of the English Suite in g minor is in the tonic major; the Gavotte II of the English Suite in F major is in the relative minor; and the Gavotte II of the English Suite in d minor is in the tonic major. Of the English Suites only the fifth in e minor has no change of key or mode.

The French Suites like the Partitas are each in one key. Several writers seemed to think that maintaining the single key and mode indicated that the Partitas were composed prior to the English Suites. Others, however, thought that Bach was simply demonstrating his ability to achieve the greatest possible variety within limitations which had been established by long tradition. Spitta put it well when he said that:

The suite has no internal self-contradiction to overcome; it presents, on the level ground of one unchanging key, a concordant and reasonably differing variety . . . ; it is a single stone cut with many facets.⁵

By exploiting these "facets," Bach perfected the art of differentiating elements derived from a single source, a technique Hans David and Arthur Mendel have described as follows:

Bach's gift of differentiation was not confined to keeping apart elements derived from different sources. Even more strikingly, it seized on what to casual inspection would have seemed minor differences, and evolved out of these differences clearly distinguished types. By imparting to each piece the most consistent development of a particular technique and character, Bach gave to his work as a whole an inexhaustible variety An instance in which Bach explicitly calls attention to this favorite principle of his is in the First Part of the Clavier-Ubung,

⁵Spitta, II, 92.

which contains six suites called partitas, a name used by his German predecessors.⁶

Movements in the Suites

Each French Suite begins with an allemande, courante, and sarabande, without any preliminary movement, and each ends with a gigue. The optional group is always between the sarabande and the gigue. In the last Suite in E major, this group is extended to include four different dance types: gavotte, polonaise, bourrée, and menuet. The optional group is more varied in both the French Suites and the Partitas than in the English Suites.

The outstanding difference between the French and the English Suites is the addition of an opening prelude in the English Suites. With the exception of the first English Suite in A major, where the Prelude is only thirty-eight measures long, these preludes are among the longest and most expanded movements to be found in Bach's keyboard suites. The other movements of the English Suites are of comparable dimensions with the corresponding ones in the French Suites and in the Partitas. Again, as in the French Suites, the allemande, courante, and sarabande follow in order, with an optional group appearing before the closing gigue. The optional groups in the English Suites are less varied than those in the French Suites. Instead of combining the different dance forms, Bach inserts two bourrées, two gavottes, two menuets, or two passepieds. Bach also added two doubles to the courante in the first English Suite, and in

⁶Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, The Bach Reader (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1945), p. 29.

the sixth English Suite, the sarabande is with double. The doubles occur just in the English Suites.

The variety of forms in the Partitas is immediately apparent. Each one of the Partitas opens with a different type of movement: praeludium, sinfonia, fantasia, ouverture, praeambulum, and toccata. While in the English Suites the musical invention is largely confined to the manner in which different subjects are worked out within a limited number of dance types, in the Partitas the use of more varied forms contributes to the creation of new types.⁷ In this respect the Partitas are more closely related to the French Suites with their varied optional groups. However, the groups in the French Suites still contrast the simpler and more distinctive dance character of pieces taken from the French ballet of the 17th century with the older, more idealized and elaborate styles found in the allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue.⁸ In the second French Suite in c minor and the fourth French Suite in E-flat major, Bach inserted a melodic Air, a kind of "song without words," a sort of kinship with the dances by the same name in the French opera and ballet.⁹ All other movements in the optional groups in the French Suites belong to the standard dances of the French ballet.

In the Partitas, besides the movements already mentioned, the optional groups contain movements that can be described best as character pieces: rondeau, capriccio, burlesca, and scherzo. The apex of dance

⁷Spitta, III, 157.

⁸Apel, "Suite," p. 814.

⁹Apel, "Air," p. 25.

stylization in the Partitas is probably reached in the fifth and sixth Partitas when the minuet and gavotte became Tempo di Minuetto and Tempo di Gavotta, after the manner of Corelli.¹⁰ In these movements, there is only an intimation of the dances; a kind of musical abstraction has taken place. The Partitas are suites with unparalleled inner unity. At the same time each Partita differs from the others in such ways that they are in complete contrast to each other. For the above reason Bukofzer wrote that stylistically the Partitas belong to the most advanced works that Bach ever wrote.¹¹

Because of the highly diversified nature of the Partitas, Parry believed that these suites were made up of early pieces collected without any special relationship to one another except for the identity of key.¹² His argument for a relatively early date of composition is based upon the fact that no keyboard works had been printed before 1726, and that the date of publication fixed only the latest date possible for their composition, but "it left the limit very elastic in the other direction."¹³ The fact that Anna Magdalena's notebook of 1725 contained two Partitas gives Parry's theory support.

¹⁰Spitta, III, 161.

¹¹Manfred F. Bukofzer, Music in the Baroque Era (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1947), p. 297.

¹²C. Hubert H. Parry, Johann Sebastian Bach (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), p. 458.

¹³Parry, p. 456.

The Dates of Composition of the Suites

Because the English and French Suites were not published during Bach's lifetime, it is difficult to affix dates of composition to them. Of the three sets of keyboard suites, it is generally assumed that the French Suites were the first to be composed because most of them were copied out of the Clavierbüchlein of Anna Magdalena Bach of 1722. In this copy the first three suites are incomplete, and the sixth suite in E major is missing. A complete copy of the first suite in d minor is found in the larger Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena Bach of 1725. This book also contains a more nearly completed text of the second suite in c minor, the third and sixth Partitas, and several other pieces. It is generally assumed that the French Suites belong to the Cöthen period, but there is no proof that they were put in final form before the Bach's move to Leipzig. One reason why the suites might not have been put in final form was that they were often referred to as Hausmusick, i. e., music that was intended for Bach's family. On holidays, in evenings, and for the large Bach gatherings, the members of the family would participate by performing and listening to the Hausmusick which was composed for the family's sheer pleasure and enjoyment.

Besides the major collection of suites, there were two small suites, a minor (BWV 818)¹⁴ and E-flat major (BWV 819), which are frequently associated with the French Suites in the early manuscript copies; an Overture

¹⁴ BWV is the abbreviation for Bach Werke Verzeichnis: Wolfgang Schmieder, Thematisches - systematisches Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke von Johann Sebastian Bach (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1950), p. 496.

in F major (BWV 820), which is apparently an early work; and a Suite in e minor (BWV 996), characterized by its low range. The above-mentioned suites, other incomplete fragments, transcriptions, and doubtful works were discussed by Fuller-Maitland in his book, Bach's Keyboard Suites.¹⁵ Evidently, Bach had a rich storehouse of Hausmusik.

Heinrich Gerber, a student at the University of Leipzig, who studied under Bach from 1724-1727, copied six of the French Suites.¹⁶ The name "French" was given later to the collection without Bach's agreement. Gerber's copy is the oldest complete copy of the suites one through five. The suite in E major was still not included, but this does not prove that it had not yet been written. It may, however, have indicated that the final selection for the set was undetermined.

The date of the English Suites is even more tentative. Gerber's copy of the suites in A major, g minor, e minor, and d minor belong to the same period as his copy of the French Suites. Since Gerber numbered the suites in his copy as one, two, four, and five, he must have known of the existence of the suite in F major or the suite in a minor, which he probably intended to copy as number three. If he had been waiting for Bach to complete one of these suites, in all probability he would not have skipped a number for it, but would have added it at the end. Thus we may assume that at least five of the English Suites had been completed when Gerber made his copy. Spitta believed that all of the English Suites were

¹⁵J. A. Fuller-Maitland, The Keyboard Suites of J. S. Bach (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), p. 61-74.

¹⁶Spitta, III, 289.

written at one time and that all six were actually in existence.¹⁷ Even so, it can not be proved that these suites were written before Bach's move to Leipzig. The earliest date for the composition of the English Suites which can be defended by unmistakable evidence is 1724, when Gerber began his study with Bach and may have made his copy. This is two years later than the earliest autograph of the French Suites.

Nothing is known about the date of composition of the Partitas beyond the fact that they appeared in print beginning in 1726, and that earlier, similar versions of the a minor and e minor Partitas, numbers three and six, are found in the Notenbüchlein für Anna Magdalena Bach of 1725. The evidence above may have indicated that the French Suites were written first along with the a minor and E-flat major Suites (BWV 818 and 819), the English Suites second, and the Partitas last. This, however, can not be proven, and, according to Parry, the Partitas were written before the English Suites. Parry considers the "exceptional irregularity and diversity" of the Partitas to stand out before the coherence of the English Suites warranting that the Partitas were, in fact, a series of revised, separate pieces designed for publication.¹⁸ Although Parry's view is not widely held by the more recent scholars, he argues further that one constant feature of Bach's artistic progress is that the expansion of individual movements, by which the English Suites must be regarded

¹⁷Spitta, III, 153.

¹⁸C. Hubert H. Parry, Johann Sebastian Bach (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), p. 465.

as Bach's most deliberate and developed advancement in Suite-form. So, because the dates of composition of the suites cannot be determined and related to their stylistic evolution, the stylistic evolution itself may well be a clue to the order of composition.

CHAPTER III

STYLE IN THE SUITES

Historical opinion has tended to follow Parry's judgment that the Partitas are inferior in the English Suites, which supposedly represented the culmination of Bach's "grand" keyboard style. One may question why Bach did not have the English Suites engraved, therefore, in 1726, rather than the Partitas. Schweitzer's answer to the question is that the English Suites were not sufficiently "difficult and ingenious" to win professional recognition. He adds, "

As compositions in those days, however, were valued less for their aesthetic qualities than for their ingenuity, it would not have benefitted Bach to have published these simple suites.¹

However, Charles Rosen, in his chapter on "Bach and Handel", suggested a completely different idea why Bach chose to publish the Partitas.

The suite is the most useful and most characteristic form of court music. Did Bach choose a set of six for his first publication in order to further his attempts to exchange his appointment such as he had previously at Cöthen, where he spent the most fruitful years of his life?²

¹Albert Schweitzer, J. S. Bach, trans. Ernest Newman (London: Adam & Charles Black, Ltd., 1923), I, 325.

²Charles Rosen, "Bach and Handel," Keyboard Music, ed. Denis Matthews (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 87.

Rosen also concluded that the dance suite was the closest the High Baroque ever came to public, secular music for solo keyboard, and that the popular dance forms were indispensable at semi-private musical occasions. Most likely, Bach had hoped that the Partitas would help his reputation as a composer of other than sacred music, and with his letter to Georg Erdmann, Imperial Russian Resident Agent in Danzig, started to inquire for another position as early as 1730.

An interesting opinion of the evolution of Bach's suites is advanced by Bukofzer, who believed that "on stylistic grounds it seems certain that the English Suites were composed first."³ His reason for this assumption is based on the fact that the English Suites show a "radical assimilation" of French and Italian styles, but that these styles are kept apart in the different movements. In general, the preludes follow Italian models, while the other movements show French influence, particularly in the addition of more than one courante and in the written out doubles in the first and sixth English Suites. In the French Suites, on the other hand, Italian, French, and German styles are fused in such a way that Bach's personal style emerges. "This fusion," Bukofzer argues, "is in itself internal evidence for the later date of the second set. Moreover, the conciseness of all the movements bespeaks the economy of maturity."⁴ The above is a convincing argument, but at opposite poles with Spitta's statement, "the French Suites are certainly older."⁵

³Bukofzer, p. 288.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Spitta, III, 153.

In general, Bukofzer's analysis of French and Italian influence in the French and English Suites is supported by Dart, who identifies the Italian style in the preludes, allemandes, and gigue of the English Suites, excepting the Gigue of the suite in d minor, in which he identifies the influence of the French style. All of the courantes, sarabandes, bourrées, and gavottes of the English Suites are in the French manner, according to Dart.⁶

The separation of national styles is far less neat in the French Suites. Dart identifies the French courante in suites one and three. The other suites have Italian correntes. The gigue of suites one and two are French; the remainder are Italian. The sarabandes show a mixture of styles, and the remaining movements are unidentified in terms of stylistic influences.⁷

It is possible to separate the different national styles in many instances in the Partitas. The spelling of the title, Partita, in itself is a recognition of Italian influence according to Willi Apel.⁸ At any rate, Bach did not draw attention to the Germanic nature of the Partitas with his titles. Instead he seemed to draw attention to the fact that these pieces were in the latest international styles. Thus he wrote a giga in the style of Domenico Scarlatti and a rondeau in the manner of the French clavecinists; he utilized the exaggerated rhythms

⁶Thurston Dart, The Interpretation of Music (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1955), p. 95.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Willi Apel, Masters of the Keyboard (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 146.

of the French overture as well as the instrumentalized bel canto of Italian opera.

Like Handel, Bach studied and transcribed both French and Italian models in order to acquaint himself with the distinguishing characteristics of each style. And like Telemann, he was capable of writing in any or all of the current styles, expecting the performer to recognize which was being used in any particular piece.⁹ The recognition of these national styles may help the performer determine his approach to the interpretation of a movement and in some instances his choice of ornamentation. In general, the performer should remember that the Italian style is more fiery and impetuous than the French, and has a more melodious, violinistic flow.¹⁰ The differentiation of dance types according to specific rhythmic patterns was more marked in the French style than in the Italian.¹¹

In most of the dances, Bach's spelling of the title indicated the style, as in the use of the French and Italian spellings, for example, courante and corrente. Partitas one, three, five, and six have Italian correntes, while only two and four use the French courante. Unfortunately, not even the Bach-Gesellschaft Edition keeps this distinction. Among editions now in print, the Urtext editions prepared by Rudolph Steglich and Kurt Soldan have restored this important difference. Allemande, sarabande, and gigue indicated the French manner of execution,

⁹Dart, p. 77.

¹⁰Dart, p. 90

¹¹Spitta, II, 24-85.

while allemanda and giga indicated the Italian style. The rondeau, menuet, and passepied are French; the capriccio, burlesca, and scherzo are Italian. Airs are French; arias are Italian. Movements marked Tempo di Minuetto or Tempo di Gavotta are Italian. The ouverture is French, while the sinfonia is Italian. According to Dart, the use of Italian tempo markings in the c minor Partita is an added indication of the Italian style.¹²

It is worth noting that in none of the suites does Bach write consistently in one style. It seems clear that to Bach the French and Italian styles served as elements of contrast, especially in terms of rhythmic differentiation.

However, the argument for maintaining separate styles of interpretation can not be pushed too far. Even by the beginning of the 18th century, the dividing lines between the styles were not always clear. As the century progressed, the fusion of the Italian with the French classical tradition produced the galant style,¹³ which, in turn, was merged with the German tradition. In 1737 Johann Adolph Scheibe wrote:

In some types of clavier pieces there is a clear distinction between the German style and others. In foreigners we find that neither the structure, nor the ornamentation, nor the working out of these pieces, is so perfect as in the Germans. For they know how to exploit this instrument with the greatest strength and according to its true nature better than all other nations. The two great men among the Germans, Mr. Bach and Mr. Handel, illustrate this most strikingly.¹⁴

¹²Dart, p. 94.

¹³Dart, p. 77.

¹⁴David and Mendel, p. 230.

Spitta also remarked upon the fusion of French and Italian elements with the German tradition.

The Germans continued to work up foreign materials "in a German style," and to associate them with their own forms, as they had done at the beginning of the century.¹⁵

Bukofzer maintains that in the clavier works of the Cöthen period, Bach avoided succumbing to the Italian and French influences, but rather assimilated them.¹⁶ Because of this assimilation, he gave to these works a degree of stylization that "carried them to the peak of baroque characterization."¹⁷ This deliberate fusion of national styles brought forth a musical universality and distinction which is the most remarkable single factor in Bach's instrumental music.¹⁸ Or, as Hans David and Arthur Mendel wrote:

With his talent for differentiation and his striving for perfection, Bach succeeded in giving to every form included in these works (Clavierübung) what appears its ultimate and perfect shape.¹⁹

¹⁵Spitta, II, 74.

¹⁶Bukofzer, p. 285.

¹⁷Bukofzer, p. 297.

¹⁸Bukofzer, p. 260, 285.

¹⁹David and Mendel, p. 39.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

A study was made which delved into the background of Johann Sebastian Bach's keyboard suites. After all the facts have been sufficiently covered regarding the suites, i. e., composition, tonality, stylistic influences, etc., there still remain questions that are not yet satisfactorily answered. It remains to be seen that the speculation of the many Bach scholars can be put to rest only when there is more sufficient research brought to the surface in regards to the keyboard suites.

As of now, we can only base our research upon the information researched by such prominent scholars such as Spitta, Forkel, Parry, Schweitzer, Bukofzer, and many others. An attempt was made to present these men's opinions regarding the various aspects of the suites, and in conclusion, it can be stated that each one has valid points worthy of much merit and consideration.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the French Suites were the first to be composed; the English Suites were written next followed by the Partitas. The fact that Bach chose the Partitas instead of the English Suites for publication in 1726, undoubtedly proves that he felt that the Partitas were the ultimate in keyboard style.

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BACH'S KEYBOARD SUITES, A STUDY OF BACKGROUND

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BACH'S KEYBOARD SUITES, A STUDY OF BACKGROUND

In 1726, Bach published the B-flat Partita which became the first of six to be included in his Clavierübung. The title Clavierübung, which means keyboard study or exercise, was published over a period of sixteen years and became a compendium of art for the keyboard. Bach's predecessor at Leipzig, Kuhnau, published two works with the same title which contained seven suites called Partien. The B-flat Partita was originally given to the infant son of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. Bach later eliminated the reference to the Prince and added his own title when the six Partitas were later reissued as a set in 1731.

The meaning of the term partita has many different meanings and spellings. Partita is the Italian form; parthie or partie is the German form. The definition of partita is a piece made up of parts or sections. At first partita referred to the separate portions of a collective composition of pieces in the same key, but later referred to the collection as a whole. In Germany choral melodies were transformed into dances by rhythmic variation, a technique known as Veränderungen, or as Partita or Partie. The usage of the term partita came to mean a collection of contrasting dances played one after another.

Each of Bach's French Suites and Partitas are in one key. The English Suites change to the tonic major, minor, or to the relative minor in the second Gavottes and Bourrées.

The movements in the French Suites begin with an allemande, courante, sarabande, and end with a gigue. The optional group is always between the sarabande and gigue and includes four different dance types: gavotte, polonaise, bourrée, and menuet. The English Suites contain an opening prelude, and except for the first suite, are among the longest and most expanded movements of all the suites. The dances follow the same order as the French Suites but contain two of each of the optional dances. Each of the Partitas opens with a different movement. The optional group contains movements that can be described as character pieces, and in the fifth and sixth Partitas, the menuet and gavotte are written after the manner of Corelli.

It is assumed that the French Suites were the first to be composed because most of them were copied out in the Clavierbüchlein of Anna Magdalena in 1722. The English Suites were copied in 1724 when Gerber began his study with Bach. Versions of the third and sixth Partitas are found in the Notebook of 1725 and later appear in print beginning in 1726.

Bach assimilated the Italian, French, and German styles and incorporated them into his suites. The English Suites show a great deal of French and Italian influence but are kept apart in the different movements. The preludes, allemandes, and giges, except the Gigue of the Suite in d minor, follow Italian models, while the other movements show French influence. The separation of national styles in the French Suites is not as simple. The courantes in suites one and three and the giges in suites one and two are French; the other suites contain Italian correntes and gigas. The sarabandes show a mixture of styles.

The spelling of the pieces separate the different national styles in many instances in the Partitas, and many of the pieces were written in the latest international style. In none of the suites did Bach consistently write in one style but used the styles as a means of contrast. It was this deliberate assimilation of national styles that brought forth the keyboard suites of J. S. Bach.