

J.S. Bach: The English Suites

General Introduction

A suite in music consists of several movements based on dances that were common, mainly in the courts and the nobility of the late 16th and 17th centuries. J.S. Bach (1685-1750) wrote suites for various instruments (and for a whole orchestra), and three sets of six suites for the keyboard (mainly the harpsichord, though it is nowadays played mainly on the piano): the six English suites (BWV 806-811), the six French Suites (BWV 812-817) and the six Partitas (BWV 825-830). Only the last set was published during his lifetime (as *Clavier Uebung I*). There were of course many suites written before him, and some scholars believe he was particularly influenced by the *Six Suites de clavessin* (1701) of Charles Dieupart, of which he copied for himself at least one. In the past scholars, following Forkel and Spitta, believed that the French suites were written first, or that they and the English were worked on simultaneously in the mid-twenties. According to more recent research many scholars believe that the English suites are the earlier. Some date their composition as early as 1715 (while Bach was in Weimar), probably edited in the early twenties, before Bach's moving from Koethen (where he stayed from 1717 to 1723) to Leipzig. Their completed form cannot be later than 1725.

All Bach's suites contain the four regular movements – Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Gigue. Allemande was a German dance in 4 of moderate tempo. Bach's Allemandes have usually a particularly rich contrapuntal texture. Courante was a French dance in 3, of heavy and slow beats. Note-wise Bach's Courantes sound fast because there are many notes in between the beats. They are usually rather eccentric in rhythm and in an unusual and asymmetric phrase structure. Sarabande was a slow Spanish dance of highly emotional character, and Bach's Sarabandes retain that character. Gigue was a fast dance, probably originated in England. Many of Bach's giges are fast fugues. In Bach's suites all these are usually divided into two parts. Almost always there are additional movements (Minuet, Bourrée, Gavotte, etc.) that change from suite to suite, usually between the Sarabande and the gigue. It is almost certain that in spite of their dance-origins Bach's suites were not intended as dance music and were not actually danced.

The great organist and Bach scholar Albert Schweitzer writes that Bach's suites surpass previous ones in that he "always visualizes the form, and gives each of the principal dance forms a definite musical personality [...] He thus raises the suite form to the plane of the highest art, while at the same time he preserves its primitive character as a collection of dance pieces". On recent research Schweitzer's descriptions of the character of the various dances may need amendments, but the above general appraisal seems to me correct and important.

The English suites form a definite set (not just a collection of suites), which is indicated by their keys A (twice), G, F, E, D in that order, which form a descending fifth, and is the melody of the famous chorale "Jesu, mine Freude". The term "English" is not by Bach and there is nothing particularly English about these works (the same applies to the French suites). According to Bach's biographer, Forkel (1802), they were written for an "eminent Englishman", which is the origin of their name. A hint for that is also found on a manuscript of Bach's son. Originally they were called just "Suites with a Prelude".

The Preludes are indeed what distinguish them most from the French suites, and make them closer in character to the partitas. This may make calling them "English" somewhat strange because adding a prelude to the regular suite movements was typical of French suites in distinction to German ones; but as noted "English" and "French" are not Bach's terms and may not have musical meaning.

In general the English suites are grand and vigorous in comparison to the more modest and simpler French. In the notes for Gould's recording of the English suites Leslie Gerber quotes Charles Sanford Terry describing their character as "of happy humor and exuberant good nature ... [Bach] was an incorrigible optimist, and so his Suites proclaim him." If "optimist" is the right word, it is optimism, combined with a sense of trust and steadiness of a deep believer, which is characteristic of Bach's music even in its "secular" moments.

The following remarks are based on notes for a (private) performance with a talk (in Hebrew), in which much could be demonstrated. It is intended for people who can read music notes and know the basics of elementary theory. Much that requires more advanced knowledge (particularly harmony) could unfortunately not be included. In any case no deep analysis is intended, but pointing out and driving attention to features that are ostensible on the fore-ground. Since the intention is that remarks on each suite can be read independently, some repetition of short general remarks could not be avoided. In the following I assume the music notes to be open before the reader. I use the Bischoff edition, but any reliable one would do. Bar/measure numbers are indicated by "m." with a number. "/m" indicates the middle of bar m. "m/n" indicates the nth beat of bar m.

Gilead Bar-Elli, Jerusalem, April 2018

J.S. Bach: English Suite No. 1 in A major, BWV 806

Notes for a performance cum lecture

The Prelude

As noted in the Introduction, the English suites, unlike the French ones, begin with a Prelude before the Allemande. In most of them the prelude is a long Allegro, often of a definite fugal nature (in No. 6 the Allegro comes after a long Introduction). In many cases it is the longest and most substantial movement in the suite. Our prelude is different in this respect and of all the preludes it deserves the name mostly. It is a calm, not a very long moderato movement with a measured cantabile subject that enters after two bars of a simple introduction. It is not a fugue, but has, as always in Bach, a rich contrapuntal texture, which develops quite freely. There are many entries of the subject in all the three voices, often on the same key (e.g. the first three). The prelude can be naturally divided into two parts at m. 18, where a sort of inversion of the subject, hinted at already in mm. 5-7, enters in the relative minor (F#). From there to the end the direct subject and the inverted variation play against each other.

The Allemande

In Bach's suites the Allemande is the first of the regular movements that appear in all the suites: Allemande Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. It was a French court dance of moderate tempo in 4. Bach's Allemandes are usually very lyric and highly contrapuntal. The subject of our Allemande combines these two characteristics in a special way, where its three upper voices are organically intermingled in a way that makes their separation hide its lyric line. The movement has two equally long parts. The second, beginning on the dominant is the more daring harmonically. Note the subtle chromatic descent of A to E in the upper voice of the subject (mm.1-2), which is echoed with slight rhythmic change in the middle voice descent of G to D# at mm.3-4. The subject recurs many times throughout the piece in all four voices. The first part ends by a repeat of the main subject in B (m.13), leading to a cadence to the dominant, and the movement ends by its repeat in the dominant (m. 29) leading to a cadence to the tonic.

The Courante

The courante is the second permanent movement in a suite. In some respects the Courantes are the most interesting movements. It was a French court dance of a rather slow beat (usually a half) in 3, but in between these beats it had many rapid notes and movements, so that "note-wise" it sounds very fast. Moreover its rhythm and phrase structure are usually quite eccentric, and asymmetrical. The emphasis sometimes changes between the beats, but is often on the third (the last), which gives the phrases a rhythmic twist. In our Courante the first phrase is of 4 bars, and the fourth has a different beat structure than the previous three. Moreover, the second phrase is longer (6 bars) with varied beat-structure.

This suite is unique in the corpus in having two Courantes (I and II), and the second having two further "Doubles" – embellished variations, so all over we have four Courantes. Courante I is also divided into two parts exactly at its middle. It is

hard to miss a thematic kinship between the subject of this Courante and that of the Prelude. As we shall see, this is also true, though less obvious, of the Gigue.

Courante II has shorter phrases, the first two – of 2 bars, and this is then (from m.4) further shortened into phrases of 1 bar. Note the touching G natural at m./15, which, leading to F#, has a neopolitanic flavor.

It is noteworthy that the two "**Doubles**" are variations on Courante II, with improvisatory embellishments. One could expect, if at all, each of the Courantes to have its own "double", but Courante I has none; they are both of Courante II, and they differ mainly (though not only) in the bass accompaniment.

The Sarabande

The Sarabande, also a permanent movement in the suite, was a Spanish slow dance in 3, known for its intense emotionality. Melodically this is marked in our piece e.g. by high half-tones (mm.2-3), and harmonically – by chromatic passages and diminished chords. Our Sarabande is divided into two very unequal parts – the first consisting of 8 bars (4+4) and the second – of 24. The second part is a free development of the first, with many embellishments in the bass.

The Bourrées I and II

In many suites there are additional movements between the Sarabande and the Gigue. They vary from suite to suite. In our case it is the Bourrée - another French court dance in 2, but a fast one. There are two Bourrées - I and II - and, as is often the case, the first is to be repeated after the second, so that all together it is a ternary form of a-b-a. Our Bourrée I is divided into two unequal parts (that are to be repeated). It is of a quite jolly playful character, where the second voice sort of chases the first with a similar subject. The main subject goes up by motifs that are built on sequences of thirds from middle A to high B. There is great intensification in the last third (mm.5-8, G - A - B) towards the ending high B. The playful character is even enhanced in the second part by the repeated notes in the bass (mm.32-41).

Bourrée II is in obvious contrast to the open and brilliant character of I. It is in the minor and sounds like a whispers chat of two minor characters in the dance that are accompanying the main ones in Bourrée I. Here there is no chase, and no intense ascents – the left hand gives a very light, whispering accompaniment to the quite restrained melody of the right one. Note the chromatic descent of A to E in mm.25-28. Bourrée I is now repeated without its own repeats.

The Gigue

The Gigue is also a permanent movement in Bach's suites – the concluding one. It was originally probably a British dance, fast and lively, usually in compound 2 (6/8 etc.). It was not a court dance but quite popular by the nobility. Bach's Giges are often not strictly fugues but fugal in character. Our brilliant Gigue is also like that. It is in 2 voices that chase and imitate each other. We have already remarked that the subject of the Gigue is thematically related to that of the prelude (and of Courante I):

the most obvious similar feature is the sequence of two descending sixths in the tonic and dominant (from A to C# and from E to G#), but there are more. The second part, which is a bit longer than the first begins almost like an inversion, which is also very typical of Bach's Giges. But it soon departs from the subject of the first part and becomes a sort of variation on it. The phase between the voices is also longer: In the first part it was three eights; in the second it is twice as long. The difference becomes bigger in the playful rhythmic chase at mm.27-29, which has no image in the first part, and after which, discipline of inversion is regained and the links to the main subject come back to the fore.

J.S. Bach: English Suite No. 2 in A minor, BWV 807

Notes for a performance cum lecture

As noted in the introduction, the standard four movements of a suite are preceded in the English Suites by a prelude. The jubilant **Prelude** in our suite grasps us by its energy immediately from the beginning and keeps it throughout to the end. This is quite notable as in comparison to the preludes in later suites, e.g. 5 and 6, this one (and the next one in 3) is quite simple in its melodic materials, its harmony and its contrapuntal structure. Like most of the preludes in the suites, this one is built in an a-b-a form, (b) begins in m.55 and the return of (a) – in m.110, so that the sections are equal in length.

It is generally in two voices, and although the first bar of the upper voice is immediately imitated in the lower one, and there are many short such imitations in the sequel (as e.g. in mm.5-8), this prelude (unlike some of the later ones) is definitely not a fugue, and in fact quite simple in its contrapuntal structure and maneuvers. The longer imitation occurs towards the end of section (a) (mm.47-54). Let me incidentally add that the Gigue, which ends our suite, is, unlike many of Bach's Giges (e.g. in suites 4, 5, 6 in our series), also not a fugue and not even fugal in character (see later).

Section (b), somewhat quieter in character, inserts a simple rhythmic element (ta-fa-ta - te - ta - te) into the harmonic progressions governing it, with flashes of the main motif of (a) (e.g. in mm.82, 87, 91).

The **Allemande** is a charming piece of a continuous flow of two voices conversing, with momentary support of sustained notes by a third and sometimes even a fourth voice. As almost always in Bach, such conversing is full of imitations, some short and some longer, in which one voice imitates the other. The theme is built on the main notes of the chords of simple harmonic progressions. The second part begins as an inversion of the main theme, but soon departs into a freer variation of it, with more harmonic tension.

The **Courante** – a courante is in fact a slow dance in 3/2, i.e. 3 beats per bar, with many notes in between, so that note-wise it sounds very fast. In Bach's time there were two types of courante: the French Courante and the Italian Corrente. They were different in meter and character, and some scholars regard them as different dances. Bach was quite strict in distinguishing them. The first, which is in triple meter (3/2) is heavier and more moderate in tempo (which of course is on the half), as in our case. Our Courante consists, as usual, of two parts, equal in length, each of 12 bars, that should be repeated. Bach's courantes sound not only fast, but often rather eccentric in their rhythm. Our courante is basically in two voices, with occasional harmonic fillings by a third. The emphasis is usually on the third beat, which gives the whole a typical rhythmic pulse. But this pattern is often blurred by emphasizing also first beats, which gives many passages a hemiolic effect. This is also quite typical of Bach's courantes.

The **Sarabande** – A Sarabande was originally a Spanish dance – slow and highly emotional in character. In becoming permanent movements in the suites, sarabandes retained that character, as also in our piece. Our sarabande is in 3/4. It is divided into two

unequal parts, the second being four bars longer than the first. The main theme consists of three phrases of 4 bars each, and at the end of the second part another such phrase is added.

The main theme begins by a harmonically thick phrase in four voices, like a chorale. This is gradually changed, when the second phrase is somewhat thinner, and the third is still thinner, ending on the relative major (C). Note also the chromatic ascent in the bass of the third phrase. This has its image in the chromatic descent of the second phrase in the second part (mm.17-19). Note also the neapolitan turn (m. 26) at the end.

The **Bourrée I** – Bourrée was a French court dance in double meter, quite quick in tempo. Bach wrote some such pieces (e.g. in Suite No. 1), the most famous perhaps is for a lute (often played on a guitar) from the suite in E minor BWV 996. Our Bourrée, like most others, is a "simple" piece in two voices. It is of a very elementary melody built on various diminutions and embellishments of the descending third E (m.1) - D (m./4) - C (m.6) of the tonic A. It is accompanied by a tremollo on A with elementary upper notes, and broken chords. Its second part is 8 bars longer than the first. These 8 bars are a sort of a coda in which the right hand raises chromatically by almost an octave. Although the second part is not strictly an inverse of the first, the general direction of the first is downwards, while that of the second part is up-wards.

Bourrée I is followed by **Bourrée II**, which is divided in its third into two parts, each to be repeated, and then Bourrée I should be played again without repeats, the two together forming an a-b-a structure. This Bourrée is in three voices, the two upper ones going in parallel motion, first in thirds and then in sixths.

The **Gigue** – a Gigue was a fast dance, probably having originated in England. Unlike all the previous dances it was not a court dance. In Bach's suites there are giges of various meters - 1 (No.5), 2 (No.2), and 4 (Nos. 3, 4, 6). Bach's Giges are often fugues, usually of 2 voices, though sometimes of 3 (e.g. Suite No. 4). Our Gigue is an exception in this respect – it is not a fugue and not fugal in character. The dotted step at the beginning of its subject makes it perhaps the most dance-like of all the giges in the set. In much of it the two voices go in parallel motion. It is, as usual, divided into two parts, each one to be repeated (with a second "volta") and the whole than to be played again from the beginning without repetitions.

Gilead Bar-Elli, Jerusalem

J.S. BACH: English Suite No. 3 in G minor, BWV 808

Notes for a performance cum lecture

The Prelude -

Like all English suites this one begins with a prelude; unlike many of them the prelude is not a fugue and not fugal in character. It is a sweeping piece of a fast tempo in 3/8 with a permanent sixteenth-note movement of a strong homogenous virile character.

As some scholars have pointed out this prelude can be seen as a kind of a Vivaldi-like *concerto grosso* movement with the typical ritornellos. Its first section, A, (mm.1-33) is of a sort of convex-like triple form, whose main short subject (a) is marked by a sequence of tonic-dominant chords leading to a definite dominant climax (m.7). This musical eruption gradually calms down by a sequential passage (b) descending a fourth from E-flat to B-flat (mm.9-15) with a harmony of descending fifths (C - F - B-flat - E-flat - D - G). This pattern recurs in a somewhat different form and relaxed manner in mm.16-23. This descent of a fourth is very important in the sequel, for example in the main motif of section B and e.g. in the modulation to the dominant at mm.173-176. The concluding (c) gains energy again by a sequence of tonic-dominant chords up to the cadence to the tonic.

Section B (mm.33-67) is of a more conversing and imitative character. When its subject enters in the left hand in the dominant minor, the right one recalls the beginning of the main subject of (A). On its recurrence (m.43) on the tonic, a new motif appears of a descending fourth (F to C) in the middle voice and an answering fourth in the bass (45-49) This is obviously linked to the descending fourth we have noted in (A).

Section C is a return to (A) in the relative major (B-flat mm.67-99).

(B) is then developed in the modulatory section D (mm.99-125), where the subject moves from hand to hand through the circle of fifths (F, C, G, D, A), reaching a peak in a short *stretto* at mm.115-117.

Section E (mm.125-161) returns to (B) transposed to A minor and ending on E-flat.

A transition (mm.161-183, t) leads to a smooth return to (A) which concludes the prelude. So all together the prelude consists of six sections.

These sections are marked by clear cadences. The two main subjects (of A and B) are thematically strongly linked, and the above division into section does not disturb the exemplary flow of the movement.

As can be seen from the above, sections (A) and (B) occur three times each, and in fact we have here a big triple form of three big sections [A-B] - [C-D-E] - [t+A], where (C) is in fact (A) transposed to the relative major, (D) is a development of A, and (E) is (B) transposed to A and then to E-flat, which leads back to a return to (A).

The Allemande, in moderate 4/4, is divided into two parts of 12 bars each that should be repeated. Its subject enters in the bass and is immediately imitated in the soprano (m.2). This pattern is duplicated in mm.6-9. The subject consists of two motifs: the ascending broken chord and the descending stepwise conclusion. There is hardly a

note in the sequel that is not built on one of them. One should note the (forbidden) parallel octaves in parallel motion between mm. 10 and 11 (in an internet article: Luke Dahn: [Consecutive 5ths and Octaves in Bach Chorales](#)) Dahn argues that out of about 430 chorales (consisting of over 2000 stanzas (bars) there are 20 genuine cases of consecutive parallels, and when relevant considerations (like whether the tones are harmonic) are taken into account only 2 remain, none of them of octaves. Our case is interesting for it is of octaves and none of these considerations seems to apply).

The second part begins with an inversion of the subject in the sub-dominant (C) in the soprano, immediately imitated in its own sub-dominant (F) in the bass. Entrances of these inversions continue chasing each other in B-flat, D, and G. A modulation to E-flat marks the last passage built on the ending of the main motif.

The Courante

There is an obvious affinity of motifs – both rhythmical and melodic – between the Allemande and the Courante. For instance, rhythmically cf. the entrance of the middle voice of the Courante to the soprano of m. 1/2 of the Allemande. Melodically, cf. the bass of m. 1/3-4 of the Allemande to the soprano of m.4/2-3/1 of the Courante. Spitta had already remarked that in Bach's suites the Allemande and Courante are a couple and these relationships are important for observing that.

The Courante is divided, as usual in the middle, each half being of 12 bars and should be repeated.

As in all of Bach's Courantes there is notable rhythmic eccentricity, and asymmetry of phrases in terms of their length and structure. Often, emphases occur in unexpected points (e.g. mm.4, 7, 9 etc.), and often, when we seem to reach the end of a phrase (even with a cadence), it turns out that it is not, and the phrase continues in an unexpected way (e.g. mm. 5, 9, 12 etc). This is paired by eccentric jumps of octaves in the melody (e.g. mm.4,7, 9, 12, 19).

The Sarabande was a Spanish dance in 3, usually slow and highly emotional. Here it consists of two unequal parts, the second being twice as long as the first. They are also different in character: The first is dominated by a slow and heavy harmony on a long organ point that lasts for the whole part (8 bars); the second, which is in the relative major (B-flat) begins in a much brighter and opener mood, with more movement in the harmony, slowly dimming on diminished chords to the gloomy mood of the first. In some editions there are "*agreements*" of the sarabande with many written out embellishments, and some performers play them instead of the repeats

The Gavottes I and II.

A gavotte was a French fast dance in double meter. Our first Gavotte is a very famous piece. It is divided into two parts, the second of which is three times as long as the first. Here, after the notable asymmetry of the Courante and the Sarabande, symmetry regains. Its main motif is built on a descending third (B-flat to G) with a typical rhythm of ta - ta-te-ta - ta-te-ta - ta-te-ta - .Each phrase (with one exception) is a

period of two bars (4 halves). The exception is in the middle of the second part (mm./18-26/2). It is naturally heard as one long phrase and is a playful little variation on the main motif with repeated trills and mordents on G in the bass.

The **second Gavotte** ("or a Musette") is in the major, but is a sort of a compressed variation on the first. It is also in two unequal parts, much shorter but in the same proportion as the first. Its motif is built again on the descending third of B to G (mm. 2-3) with the above typical rhythm, but, though in the major, it is all in a narrow and limited range with elementary accompaniment in the middle voice, with a fixed organ point in the bass. In this it is in a marked contrast to Gavotte I.

The Gigue was a fast dance, probably of English origin, and though danced by the nobility was not a court dance. Here, in fast 12/8, it is a fugue in 3 voices. It has two parts, the second a bit longer than the first. In the first part, after the exposition with its three entrances of the subject, there is a short development with two more entrances of the subject in the bass and soprano. The second part is in fact another little fugue. It begins as an inversion of the first, the middle voice first and then the bass and soprano. The inversion stops at the development (m.28), but here again two more entrances of the subject occur, first in the bass (m.35-36) and then, with the direct subject of the first part, in the soprano (the last two bars).

Gilead Bar-Elli, Jerusalem, April 2018

J.S. Bach: English Suite No. 4 in F, BWV 809

Notes for a performance cum lecture

The Prelude - Like all English suites, this one begins with a prelude. It is basically in two voices (a third voice and sometimes even fourth is often inserted mainly for harmonic filling). Both in its structure and texture this prelude is quite special in the mixture of various styles – contrapuntal and concerto-like. It is, again like many other preludes, in an a-b-a form. The first section (a) has a very simple and stable harmony of tonic (F), dominant (C, mm.6, 12) and tonic (F, 18, 20), marked by cadences almost every six bars. This simple harmonic structure is reflected in the melodic kernel of a neighboring second: F (m.1/2) - G (m.1/4) - F (m.2) and, when the second voice takes the subject, of the minor second: F - E - F (m.2) with its typical dotted rhythm.

The first subject has two motifs: the semiquaver legato move of m.1 and the dotted motif of m.2. One should note the descent of the dotted fourth (C to G) in the upper voice of m./6-12. This is obviously taken from the lower voice of mm.3-4, which itself augments the descending fourth of m.1/3. It is then followed by the dotted minor second F - E - F (m.8/4-9) taken from the upper voice of m. 2. These two elements – the descending fourth and the dotted minor second – will prove very important in the development.

Bischoff in his edition ties the semiquaver motif up to the second quaver (F) of m.2. This is quite natural and convincing (though he is not clear on whether it relies on authentic sources). Alternatively this F can be taken as an upbeat to the high F of the dotted motif (and likewise in all similar places). Both readings are reasonable. In favor of Bischoff's reading one could also mention entries in which there is no such upbeat like mm.12, 27. The alternative upbeat reading gives an interesting rhythmic impetus to the subject. In its favor one can also refer to places like m.5/1 or 19/1 in which it is more natural, and also to the connection of the dotted motif with the "new" motif of the development section (m.28/4 etc), which sort of replaces it, and in which an upbeat seems obvious. The first two quavers of m.2 may also be played as detached, and not tied to the motif before or after.

Section (b), the development, is three times longer than (a), and could itself be divided into two parts at m. 51. It has a dynamic harmony with a copious of modulations. The section begins with a transition whose motif may sound new (20). However, it is in fact an augmentation of the descending fourth we encountered before (cf. m. 1/3). The minor second (repeated throughout the development) starting this subject of the development (m.20) is taken from the minor second in the upper voice of m.2 mentioned above. At m.27/3 a development begins in which a somewhat new motif is inserted in the upper voice of 28/4 - 34, in an ascents and descents of a fifth, while the lower one develops the semiquaver motif of m.1. This new motif will be the main material of the development in section (b) (mm.60/3-70; 77/3-83).

The close relationship with the main subject of (a) becomes obvious in the dotted descent of this fourth (G to D) in the upper voice of mm.32-33. When this is realized one sees that it together with the new motif mentioned above actually dominate the

whole development. (e.g. D to A and B-flat to F in mm. 20-21 and all similar places). It is emphasized in the harmonic progression of mm.24-27 whose upper voice descends by a fourth of F to C. The harmony goes to A, beautifully suggested at m.42 (with the following neapolitanic move at m.43) and fully established at m.51 (and again at 55). Note the full downward circle of fifths in mm.45-49, and the chromatic descent of an octave in the lower notes of the right hand at its end (mm.48-51).

The second part of the development is again rich in modulations and passes through various tonalities. It begins in A minor (m.51) and contains many short inversions of motifs of the main subject (e.g. the upper voice of m.52-3, the lower voice of mm. 60-63). Section (a) is then repeated, rounding up the a-b-a structure.

The Allemande - This is perhaps the simplest Allemand in the set. It has, as usual, two equally long parts. Its theme is built on the chord-tones with exchanges of semi-quavers and triplets. The counterpoint is quite elementary and consists mainly in the two voices interchanging in taking the subject. A particularly moving German (augmented) sixth is notable towards the end of the first part (m.10). The second part begins as a sort of inversion of the first, but soon departs into a freer variation.

The Courante - is, as usual in 3/2 with a quite eccentric rhythm and phrase structure. The eccentricity of the rhythm can become clearer if one tries to hear the subject as if in 2/2. This may seem quite natural as in many places the emphasis seems to be on the third beat of the bar. It begins with a short phrase of one bar which is immediately imitated in the lower voice. The main theme continues then in the upper voice in a sort of a counter-subject, which is very long (7 bars) and asymmetric, to the end of the first part. The second part is a bit longer and is a free variation on the first.

The Sarabande - The sarabande was originally a Spanish slow dance, which was considered to be highly emotional. This Sarabande combines the typical emotional intensity with a choral character. It is very harmonious, with thick chords, and symmetric in its phrase structure. The first part consists of two 4-bars phrases; the second part, which is twice as long, has four 4-bars phrases. Note the diminished chord at the second beat of the second phrase. It inspires those at the second and fourth phrases of the second part.

Menuets I, II - A menuet (or minuet) is a moderate dance in 3. It was one of the commonest court dances in 17th and 18th centuries, and is the only one that kept a long career deep into the 19th century and found its way even into sonata-form pieces. As a sort of repose from the eccentricity of the Courante and the emotional intensity of the sarabande, menuet I is fluent, symmetric and well organized polyphonic piece in two voices. It is divided in the middle into two parts, each consisting of four 4-bars phrases. It has a vigorous character with a definite emphasis on the first beat. **Menuet II** has a different general structure and a contrasting character – much milder and softer. Its tremolo accompaniment in the bass contributes to its tranquility. It consists

of two parts – the second of which thrice as long as the first. Its last eight bars are in fact a repeat of the first part, so we have actually an a-b-a form, (b) inserts some harmonic and melodic intensity before coming back to the tranquil (a). Menuet I is then repeated, so the two together form a bigger a-b-a structure.

The Gigue - A gigue was a fast dance, originated probably in England. It is the only suite movement that was not a court dance, though probably popular by the nobility. Our gigue is a fugue in 3 voices, though most of it is in two. It is in 12/8, and like most giges has a steady homogenous rhythm throughout. It consists of two parts, the second is a bit longer than the first. The subject of the second is an inverse of that of the first. The subject is built on triplets of the broken chord, ending with an emphatic jump of an octave, which is much exploited in the second part. It is full of vigor and pulse like a trumpet call or a hunting horn. Most of what goes on, even the minimal counter-subject, is built on this. In the development there are some stretto episodes (m.14) which are adumbrated already in m.1.

Gilead Bar-Elli, Jerusalem 2017

J.S. Bach: English Suite No. 5 in E minor, BWV 810

Notes for a performance cum lecture

The prelude is a fugue in "four" voices, and I put "four" in quotation marks because, although there are in the exposition four entrances of the subject – alto, soprano (m.3), tenor (m.7) and bass, (m.12) – the piece is really in three voices. It is naturally divided, as often, into three parts in an a-b-a form. The first part (a) (mm.1- 39); the second (b) is the longest (mm.40-116); the third (c) is virtually a repeat of (a).

The main subject is quite short and virile in character. It has a typical dotted rhythm with wide interval jumps over a basic minor-second move of E - D#(B) - E(G). It is immediately followed, while the soprano takes the main subject, by a counter-subject which is quite the opposite in character – flowing sequences of steady sixteenth notes motifs. This counter-subject is often accompanied by its inverse throughout the piece (e.g. mm.9-11, 22-24 etc.).

Section (b) begins in phrases of a very different character than the main subject – rising thirds of an almost begging character, resolving on the fourth. This rising third is inverted in an expanded form in the right hand in the move of E (m.40) -D (m.41) - C (m. 42). Harmonically it moves in a simple E-A, A-D, D-G, G-C progression, which expands on a similar more compressed progression in mm.9-10, 17-19 etc. of section (a). In mm.52-56 the main subject re-enters in the soprano and the bass. Note how elegantly Bach combines the counter-subject of (a) with the right-hand motif of (b) in the left hand of mm.79-80, which prepares their real synthesis in mm.92-104.

A suspended cadence leads to section (c) in which we go back to the main subject and to a repeat of section (a) in m.117.

The Allemande is, as usual in Bach's suites, a rich contrapuntal piece in two voices. Here again there are short flicks of three voices (e.g. mm.4-5). Its main subject is built on the rising third of E (m.1) - F# (/1) - G (m.2), which is immediately inverted in a compressed form at the beginning of m.2. This is repeated in the left hand in mm.2-3, and this whole structure is repeated in a modulation to the dominant in mm./4-6, this time the left hand first and right hand second. The second part is a free variation of the first. Note how the descending third of the beginning of m.2 is recalled by the soprano at the beginning of m.13, and then by the bass at the beginning of m.15 and then in the soprano of m.18.

The Courante is, as usual, in 3/2. One cannot miss some affinity of its subject to that of the Allemande. It is marked by an eccentric, asymmetrical rhythm in which the heavy beat is often blurred, and sometimes the third half (e.g. mm. 1-2), sometimes the middle half is accentuated (e.g. mm.3-4). It is, again as usual, divided into two sections. This division is often done at about the third, so the second section is twice as long as the first. Here, note how at the end of the first one we are led into G (the III degree) and then, as if suddenly recalling that we have to end on B (the dominant), Bach adds three more bars to the first section ending really on B (making it 12 bars out of the total 28).

The Sarabande, is also divided into two unequal sections at its third. In comparison to other of Bach's Sarabandes the first section of this one is of a quite, calm and simple melody, built on a descending fifth, almost of the nature of a chorale. The harmony is also relatively simple. The second section is more complex and tensed, both melodically and harmonically. This seemingly simple piece is a masterpiece in building tension, which comes to its peak in mm. 21-2, resolved by a simple return to the descending fifth of the beginning.

Two **Passepieds** are inserted between the Sarabande and the Gigue. A passepied is a French court dance, usually in 3/8, which is much faster than the minuet. Our Passepied has two parts I and II, where the first one is repeated after the second one, making the whole, with the repeats, the longest movement in the suite, except for the Prelude. The first Passepied is in the form of a rondo, where the main subject (16 bars) is repeated after each of the two interludes, i.e.: a-b-a-c-a. (b) is built on the same motivic elements of (a) but inserts gentle rhythmic asymmetric syncopation (mm.20-24). The second Passepied has two sections (each repeated) and is divided in its third. It is in three voices, one of which is often held as an organ point for several bars, where the main theme is built on a descending fifth.

The Gigue is a fast fugue in three voices, whose main subject is a chromatic descent from E to A# proceeding in dual steps. Chromatic descent is often associated in Bach with sadness and agony. Not here. The fast tempo and the triple meter exclude any such association, and the general character of the subject projects certainty and assurance. The chromaticism of the subject infects also the counter-subject and many of the ensuing developments (e.g. mm.31-34). The gigue has two parts, equal in length, the second of which begins as an inversion of the first. At m.69 the inversion stops and the hands switch their roles at the parallel place in the first part (mm.21-4), and at m.73 some slight developments lead to a re-entrance of the inverted subject in the secondary dominant (F# major) at m.85, leading to an impressive emphatic coda in the major.

Gilead Bar-Elli, Jerusalem, January, 2018

J.S.Bach: English Suite No. 6 in D minor, BWV 811

Notes for a performance cum lecture

The Prelude in our suite is the longest in the series. It begins with an improvisatory introduction of a moderate and serious character, which may pay tribute to the old unmeasured French Preludes. It is itself divided into two parts – the first in the tonic and the second on the minor dominant (A). It is built on the rising third D-E-F in the bass (mm.1-2), which is the main motif on which the whole movement is built. Harmonically, the diminished VIIth on the second note of this motif is also recalled by many features in this and in subsequent movements. One should also note the short chromatic ascent of D to G in the upper middle voice of mm.2-4, which is inverted e.g. in the soprano of m.120.

The **Allegro** that follows (from m.38) is basically a long fugue in three voices. It is quite jolly in character and full of idiomatic repetitive and sequential patterns, typical of Bach's concerti. It is naturally divided into three parts in an a-b-a form: (mm.38-86; 86-147; 147 to the end, which is an exact repeat of the first part), which is also the form of other Preludes in the set. The first part has a rhythmic subject, built on the inversion of the above third of the main motif of the introduction (call it A), preceded by a rapid rising sixth in semiquavers (B). This is the kernel for whatever goes on later. The exposition ends on F major (the relative major) and a development with the inversion of the subject begins (m.48), where one voice plays the subject and another enters with its inversion (mm.48-9, 57). Stretti of these two add salt to this game (mm.52, 57). Along the fugue, (B) and slight variants of it often appear as a sort of a counter-subject to (A).

The second part (from m.86) introduces another subject in the soprano, which distillates the rhythmic pattern of two triplets of the descending thirds of (A). The bass (and middle voice) reminds those who need it that this is also built on the third of (A) – in fact, a little variation on it – and the connection becomes even clearer in the upper voices of m.90. The dominating third is operative also on a larger scale in the harmony, e.g. where Bach moves from C (90) to D (91) to E(92). One should also note the chromatic descent in the soprano of mm.120-2 which is then echoed in mm.127-9.

The Allemande is as usual in two parts (tonic and dominant). Its distinctive feature is that each part is one long intricate anfractuous phrase, somewhat like a long Moebius strip. On some points a cadence is suggested, but never really stated and the whole phrase is one long breath. Note the highly expressive dotted jumps (sometimes of a tritone, as in mm.3-4; 8-9 etc.). Also note the rich contrapuntal fabric, where the stem of the melody (soprano of mm.1-3) is echoed in a beautiful counterpoint by the bass of (/5-8). And part of the melody (mm.2-3) is repeated in the soprano of mm.8-9.

These beautiful contrapuntal maneuvers continue in the second part, where the bass at the beginning is an inversion of the beginning of the main subject, and this inversion is itself repeated in part in the soprano of mm.17-18, elements of which are used elsewhere (e.g. mm.15, 22/4-23). In all the suites the Allemande has a rich contrapuntal texture; in some the second part begins by inverting part of the subject (e.g. in Nos.4, 5, and even 2 in which it is semi-inversion), but our one (6) is particularly noteworthy in this respect.

The Courante consists, as usual, of two parts, equal in length, that should be repeated.

Melodically, as we have remarked about No. 5, one cannot miss some affinity between the subject of our Courante and that of the Allemande. Indeed, some scholars maintain that Bach generally regarded the Allemande and the Courante as a sort of contrasting pair. Harmonically it oscillates between two dominant poles: the relative major (F, m.10) and the major V (A), while rhythmically it oscillates between emphasizing the dotted rhythm of the first half (mm.4-7) and that of the third (mm. 1, 3, 9, 12-14)). There are cases where both occur (mm.8, 9), which causes a sort of rhythmic ambiguity and tension. This somewhat nervous and squally character (quite typical of many of Bach's Courantes) is found also in the range of the melodic diapason where the melody goes from high f' to middle c and back within three bars ((mm.8-10), while the bass descends two octaves within a bar and a half, and then again in the nervous rise from e to high a' towards the end of the first part.

The Sarabande – As noted before a Sarabande was originally a Spanish dance – slow and highly emotional in character. In becoming permanent movements in the suites, sarabandes retained that character, as also in our piece. It is also in 3/2 but often has the stress on the middle, the second half of the bar (like in mm. 1-2, 5-6 etc.). It also has a stressed harmony, full of chromatic moves. Unlike the previous movements it is divided with a repeat sign not in the middle but after its third, so that the movement is asymmetrical in structure, which enhances its stressed character. The harmony is also strained and kept moving by septachords in many of the endings of a seeming cadence (like in mm.4, 12 etc), and sometimes in succession (mm.4-5).

In the second part (which is twice as long the first) there is a slight intensification of the movement.

The Sarabande is repeated by a **Double**, containing embellishments of the harmony. Like the Sarabande this Double has two parts that should be repeated with indicated different endings. However, some performers play these as the repeats of the main Sarabande and ignore the indicated repeats in the Double. There is some evidence that this was done already in Bach's time, but strictly it is against the written version.

The Gavottes (in 2/2) – The first Gavotte has a simple symmetrical subject, built on the descending fifth from A to D (mm.2-5). It is accompanied by a permanent quaver staccato movement in the bass like a Fagot. It is again divided not in the middle but in its third. Its second longer part is a slight development, with a touching intensification of the melody, going up to high c" by inverting the descending third of mm. 2-3 (/13-14), and the subject then re-enters in its regular form in the middle voice of m.24/3

The second Gavotte is a major variation on the first with the accompaniment moving around a fixed drone of D like in a music machine. The first Gavotte is then repeated.

The Gigue (in 12/16) concludes the suite and the whole set of the English suites. A Gigue (Giga) is a fast and lively piece, originated probably in Britain, and is virtually the only suite-movement that was not a royal dance, though it was probably danced by the nobility. Like most of Bach's Giges (though definitely not all) this one is a strict

contrapuntal piece in three voices, where the subject is taken by each voice in a fugato character. Each of its two halves is virtually a short Fugue. Here the counter-subject, if we may call it so, is not a real separate voice; it is a minimal doubling of the main tones of the subject, letting long trills color the main voice. The subject consists of a rising fifth and a descending sixth, which are the motivic elements of the entire movement. The meter of 12/16 may suggest here that it should not be played too fast, letting the trills buzz clearly through the other voices.

Again, like in many of Bach's Giges the second half, except for the last eight bars, which are added as a sort of a coda, is an inverse of the first and the hands also switch roles. In most Giges in the set the subject of the second half is an inverse of the main subject. In some of them (like in Nos. 3 and 4) not only the subject but the entire second half is a sort of a free inverse of the first, with various degrees of freedom (where the hands also switch roles). Our one is the strictest in this respect: the second half is almost a strict inverse of the first.

Gilead Bar-Elli, Jerusalem, 2017