



4235

Glenn
Gould
Plays
Bach

The
English
Suites
COMPLETE



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7
RECORDS

Album 1

Johann Sebastian Bach 1685–1750

The English Suites

Die Englischen Suiten · Les Suites anglaises

Suite No. 1 in A major BWV 806

A-Dur · en *la* majeur

1	I. Prélude	2:44
2	II. Allemande	2:11
3	III. Courante I	1:48
4	IV. Courante II	2:11
5	Double I	2:06
6	Double II	1:59
7	V. Sarabande	4:07
8	VI. Bourrée I	1:16
9	VII. Bourrée II (da capo I)	2:14
10	VIII. Gigue	2:01

Suite No. 4 in F major BWV 809

F-Dur · en *fa* majeur

11	I. Prélude	4:26
12	II. Allemande	2:46
13	III. Courante	0:54
14	IV. Sarabande	3:01
15	V. Menuet I	1:20
16	VI. Menuet II (da capo I)	1:57
17	VII. Gigue	2:17

Suite No. 5 in E minor BWV 810

e-Moll · en *mi* mineur

18	I. Prélude	4:44
19	II. Allemande	2:58
20	III. Courante	1:51
21	IV. Sarabande	1:59
22	V. Passepied I (en Rondeau)	1:06
23	VI. Passepied II (da capo I)	1:37
24	VII. Gigue	2:06

Total Time 55:56

Album 2

Suite No. 2 in A minor BWV 807

a-Moll · en *la* mineur

1	I. Prélude	4:32
2	II. Allemande	1:34
3	III. Courante	1:11
4	IV. Sarabande – Les agréments de la même Sarabande	3:03
5	V. Bourrée I	1:26
6	VI. Bourrée II (da capo I)	2:00
7	VII. Gigue	2:17

Suite No. 3 in G minor BWV 808

g-Moll · en *sol* mineur

8	I. Prélude	2:53
9	II. Allemande	1:44
10	III. Courante	1:20
11	IV. Sarabande – Les agréments de la même Sarabande	3:19
12	V. Gavotte I	0:50
13	VI. Gavotte II (ou la Musette) (da capo I)	1:10
14	VII. Gigue	1:54

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Suite No. 6 in D minor BWV 811

d-Moll · en ré mineur

15	I. Prélude	8:26
16	II. Allemande	3:12
17	III. Courante	2:46
18	IV. Sarabande	3:07
19	Double	2:15
20	V. Gavotte I	1:34
21	VI. Gavotte II (da capo I)	2:19
22	VII. Gigue	2:58

Total Time 55:44

Glenn Gould piano

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During his lifetime, Johann Sebastian Bach was better known as a performer than as a composer. His published compositions were few in number, and many of his important works were not published until long after his death. However, his reputation as a keyboard virtuoso spread throughout Europe and led to a number of invitations to perform at various courts.

Bach produced both sacred and secular works for the organ throughout most of his career. Since it is all secular, nearly all of his music for harpsichord was written during the relatively brief periods when he was not employed as a church musician. Among the harpsichord works, suites form a substantial segment: There are nineteen such complete works among Bach's best-known music, along with a number of more obscure alternate versions and fragments.

Conjecture as to the origin of the term *English Suites* has varied widely. (The Frenchness of the *French Suites* is even more mysterious.) Bach's autographs of these works have not survived, although we have good manuscript copies by some of his pupils. It is known that Bach himself did not use the title *English Suites*, but we do not know what he called them. A copy made by one of Bach's sons is subtitled *Fait pour les Anglois* (written for the English).

Bach's first biographer, Johann Nicolaus Forkel, stated quite positively, "They are known by the name of the *English Suites* because the composer made them for an Englishman of rank." Forkel gathered much of his information from Bach's sons and seems to have used it conscientiously, so that we must give any of his statements some weight, even though he cites no specific source for this one. Albert Schweitzer's opinion was that Forkel's explanation "was certainly not the case," although he cites no source either.

Philipp Spitta considered Forkel's opinion "trustworthy tradition" and suggested that Forkel "must have got (the information) from Bach's sons."

Disagreeing with Forkel, Charles Sanford Terry points to the quotation in the Prélude to the first *English Suite* of a theme by Dieupart, a French musician active in London. Since the music was obviously not written to be performed in England, Terry guesses that the pieces may have been written for Englishmen visiting at the court of Cöthen, where Bach was employed at the time the *English Suites* were probably written. The quotation would have been included as a gesture towards this audience. Terry also finds Bach's use of Préludes in these Suites "a distinctively English form," after the usage of Henry Purcell and his predecessors. Finally, Karl Geiringer feels that Bach was inspired to write the *English Suites* by his study of the suites of Dieupart, citing the fact that Bach had copied out one of Dieupart's suites in its entirety. Geiringer agrees with Terry that the Prélude to the first *English Suite* is based on Dieupart, citing that composer's Gigue in A as its model.

The truth is probably some synthesis of all of this information. There is, at least, in the connection between Bach and Dieupart at least one piece of solid fact, while in the case of the *French Suites* we have only guesses.

As with the *French Suites*, composition of the *English Suites* occupied Bach over a considerable period of time. They may even have been written simultaneously, although there is some internal evidence to indicate that the conception of the *English Suites* came later. The *English Suites* are in general somewhat longer, more brilliant, more complex, and more virtuosic than the *French Suites*. Karl Geiringer describes the *English Suites* as "vigorous and fiery" in contrast to the "delicate and intimate" *French Suites*. He takes this

contrast as evidence that the *English Suites* were written for harpsichord and the *French Suites* for clavichord. Spitta feels a similar contrast: "The *English Suites* are distinguished from the fanciful and beautiful French ones by their strong, grave, and masculine character."

Spitta is certain that the *English Suites* were written later than the *French*. He attributes the *English Suites* to Bach's last years in Cöthen or his first in Leipzig. However, as Schweitzer points out, during his first year at Leipzig Bach had to write a new cantata for almost every Sunday's service, and he would hardly have had time to be working on solo keyboard music for which he had no immediate use anyway.

Consensus and evidence seems to be that Bach wrote both the *French* and *English Suites* at Cöthen. While he probably began work on the *French Suites* first and completed them first, the work on the sets may have overlapped during a period of several years. The *English Suites* may even have been finished or revised after Bach arrived at Leipzig, since there are no manuscripts or copies dating from before Bach's arrival there.

During his lifetime, only four of Bach's works were published, one of them being the massive *Clavierübung*. The *English Suites* were not among them. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that the *English Suites* were not well known in Bach's time. "After 1720," writes Schweitzer, "there was scarcely a good German musician anywhere who did not possess at least one work of J. S. Bach" – usually in manuscript copies. Although the composer went to the expense of publishing his works only for somewhat more learned or useful music, manuscripts of the *English Suites* circulated widely.

While we unfortunately have no copies of these Suites in Bach's own writing, there are several extant copies made during the composer's lifetime by musicians associated with him. Four of the *English Suites* were copied out by one of Bach's students, Heinrich N. Gerber. These important copies were made sometime during the period of 1724–27, when Gerber was studying with Bach at Leipzig. Although there are only four suites in the manuscript, one of them is labeled the Fifth (the Suite in D minor, now known as the Sixth), and it is probable that all of the Suites had been written at the time. Spitta, from whom this information derives, points out that Bach began the composition of his third set of six keyboard suites (now known as the Partitas) in 1726. From this he draws the inference that the *English Suites* were all completed by 1726.

We also have a manuscript copy of five *English Suites* (lacking No. 4, in F) written by Bach's youngest son, Johann Christian. This is the copy inscribed *Fait pour les Anglois*. Johann Christian Bach was only fifteen years old when his father died, so the manuscript was probably written when its composer was already dead. However, it is a very carefully written copy and probably was derived from an excellent source, perhaps even the original autograph.

In discussing Bach's keyboard suites, Schweitzer provides us with interesting insight into the development of the suite form. It owes its origin, he writes, "to the pipers of the seventeenth century, who used to string together various national dances. The German clavichord players adopted the form from them and developed it." The keyboard suite begins with a basic series of four dances: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue. As mentioned, Bach also adds a Prélude to each of the *English Suites*. He had earlier written

a Prélude for the fourth of the *French Suites*, but it was eliminated in his final revision.

Schweitzer also gives us an illuminating discussion of the national characteristics of suite composition. "Italian composers as a rule retained only the meter and rhythm of the various dances, without troubling to preserve their essential character. The French were more scrupulous in this respect, and made a point of pursuing to its conclusion the rhythmical characteristic of each dance form. Bach," he concludes, "goes still further; he always vitalizes the form, and gives each of the principal dance forms a definite musical personality. For him the Allemande represents vigorous but easy motion; the Courante represents a grave and majestic walk; in the Gigue, the freest of all forms, the motion is quite fancy-free. 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."

Most of the dances Bach used in his suites were obsolete by the time he used them. Bach's music was never meant for dancing; it is pure music, intended for the pleasure of playing and hearing. Nevertheless, the motion and spirit of the original dances, as Schweitzer suggests, are integral to the meaning and feel of the music.

The Allemande is a quiet German dance in 4/4 time, usually characterized by beginning on an upbeat. The Courante, in 3/2 time, is livelier than the allemande and has lengthy passages of equal notes. The Sarabande, also in 3/2 time, is a slow, dignified Spanish dance, accented on the second beat, "the heavy notes of which," says Schweitzer, "are surrounded by coquettish embellishments." The Gigue (better known in Ireland and England as the

jig) is a rapid dance in triple rhythm. Schweitzer says the name of the dance originated in France, and that it comes from a satirical term for the violin.

In the *English Suites*, Bach adds only one pair of dances between the Sarabande and the Gigue. The first two use pairs of Bourrées, an “angular” dance in rapid 4/4 time originating in Auvergne. In Nos. 3 and 6, Bach uses the Gavotte, a dance in 2/2 time beginning on a grace note. For No. 4 he chose the well-known minuet, a slow, dignified dance in triple rhythm. The most unusual addition is in No. 5, the Passepied, a Breton dance similar to the minuet.

The Courantes of the First Suite and the Sarabande of the Sixth are followed by *doubles* or variations. Geiringer writes, “It is not clear whether the performer is supposed to play all these pieces or to make a selection between them.” It may be that the *doubles* are intended as instruction for the performer in how to produce ornaments when repeating other sections of the suites. Ornamented repeats are written out for the Sarabandes of the Second and Third *English Suites*, reflecting, according to Geiringer, “the pedagogic Bach of the Cöthen period; he wrote out every detail and took no chance of being misunderstood by an incompetent performer.” Spitta states positively that “it was not intended that the simple and the adorned Sarabandes were to be played in succession, but it was left open to the performer to choose between the two.” In support of this he cites the fact that Johann Christian Bach’s manuscript of the Third *English Suite*, which has an ornamented repeat of the Sarabande, includes the simple version only. Evidently Johann Christian had received good enough instruction from his father to be able to make his own ornamentations.

Most writers agree in valuing the *English Suites* highly among Bach’s instrumental compositions. The very first commentator, Forkel, said, “They all have great worth as works of art; but some single pieces among them, for example, the jigs of the fifth and sixth suites, are to be considered as perfect masterpieces of original harmony and melody.” Spitta has a similarly high opinion. Contrasting them with the simpler *French Suites*, he says of the *English Suites*: “The richer style of the music demands forms of greater extension. The character of the separate pieces is sharply and distinctly marked, and their feeling intensified by richness of harmony. Bach never wrote Sarabandes of such breadth and beauty, or Giges of such wild boldness.”

While they have their reflective and melancholy movements, the overall expression of the *English Suites* demonstrates Bach’s joy in life and in music. “Their pervading tone,” writes Terry, “is of happy humor and exuberant good nature. It has been suggested that Bach was a disgruntled revolutionary, beating his wings with angry futility against the circumstances that confined him. The picture is out of drawing. He was an incorrigible optimist, and so his Suites proclaim him.”

LESLIE GERBER