

Produced by Andrew Kazdin M 32347

GLENN GOULD/BACH
THE FRENCH SUITES, Vol. 1
Nos. 1-4

FRENCH SUITE NO. 1 IN D MINOR
Allemande/Courante/Sarabande/Menusel/
Menuet II/Gigue

FRENCH SUITE NO. 2 IN C MINOR
Allemande/Courante/Sarabande/Air/
Menuet/Gigue

Side 2

FRENCH SUITE NO. 3 IN B MINOR
Allemande/Courante/Sarabande/Menuet—
Trio/Anglaise/Gigue

FRENCH SUITE NO. 4 IN E-FLAT MAJOR
Allemande/Courante/Sarabande/Menuet/
Cavotte/Air/Gigue

The selections are in the public domain.

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Much of the credit for the social and cultural phenomenon of the public concert must, of course, be awarded to the pianoforte, that late-18th-century development that changed the whole character of the keyboard art. With its ability to communicate sound and subtlety, the piano replaced the harpsichord (never really adequate for large halls, anyway) and relegated the clavicordo to oblivion (it was always best suited for private performance).

It is useful to keep this instrument-time-place situation in mind when listening to Bach French Suites, for these compositions are certainly among the least "public" or declamatory works in the entire repertoire of great music. (The late Thurston Dart, a sage authority on the Baroque era, considered the French Suites best suited to the clavicord and played them himself on that instrument.) Today, we probably come closest to the original experience of the music when we hear

it at home, on the phonograph or radio, played by ourselves.

The French Suites were among the first compositions in suite form written by Bach, but their exact chronology is uncertain. The first four were certainly finished by 1723, for they appear in a manuscript of that date as part of a traditional set of six but in company with two other suites (now known separately as BWV 818-9) instead of those now known as the Fifth and Sixth. It was Thurston Dart's supposition that the first four suites were composed over the period of about 1717 to 1723. Surviving bits of evidence suggest that the pieces were revised a number of times, both in their internal content and in their order. The last two of the suites were apparently added somewhat later, and the sequence as we know it does not seem to have been completed until at least 1725.

The purpose of all these revisions is obvious. What had begun merely as a set of pieces in dance styles was transformed by Bach into a unified group, perhaps even to be regarded as one work.

The first three of the suites, seemingly the earliest in order of composition as well, are in minor keys and are of a serious nature, while the last three are in major and show increasingly joyful qualities. The first used the (by then) archaic device of beginning all of the dances with variations on similar musical themes, a 17th-century device known as the "variation suite," while the others are more "progressive" in style. The very number of movements increases from six in the first two suites to seven in the Fourth and Fifth, and to eight in the Sixth. (Karl Geiringer suggests that the Menuet of the Fourth Suite was a later addition, evidence of another revision aimed at musical progression.) And so far as we can determine, the exact ordering of the suites may well conform to their chronology of composition as well as an over-all musical plan. Another indication of Bach's efforts toward uniformity is found in the Fourth Suite, which was first written with a prelude. The prelude was eliminated, and all six of the suites as they now stand consist of dance movements only. (An apparent contradiction to this principle, the "Air," is explained easily; this was actually a French dance, as well as a term for a song.)

The term "French" for these suites is so shrouded in obscurity that the true origin may never be known. The title of the original manuscripts is written in French, but so is that for the English Suites, and neither one mentions "French"

or "English" as part of the title. Bach's first biographer, Johann Nicolaus Forkel, said the name had been given to these works "because they are written in the French taste," but that explanation has been discarded along with Forkel's wrong guess that the English Suites were "made for an Englishman of rank." (There is, however, still validity in Forkel's description of the music: "By design, the composer is here less learned than in his other suites, and has mostly used a pleasing, more prominent melody.") Bach biographer Philipp Spitta wrote that "the name 'French' was given to them on account of the meagre form of their component sections, which, even in external dimensions, adhere as closely as possible to the dance type on which they are founded." But he admits that "there is no idea of imitating or carrying out any specially French characteristics; none such are to be discerned anywhere in Bach, nor could they be possible except in his very earliest work." All we know for certain is that both titles, "English" and "French," were added after the fact by an unknown hand and that they do make convenient handles.

While much is made of the dance-like qualities of Bach's music in these suites, there has never been any suggestion that the music was actually used for dancing. In fact, most of the dance forms used were obsolete when Bach composed. And though it is fine for the performer to bring out the kinetic qualities of the music, particularly in the fast movements, the music was written primarily for expressive purposes—a fact that should be paramount in the minds of performers and listeners alike.

—Leslie Gerber

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Glenn Gould

Bach: The French Suites

Vol. 1, Nos. 1-4



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Johann Sebastian Bach 1685–1750

The French Suites Vol. I

Französische Suiten · Suites françaises

Suite No. 1 in D minor BWV 812

d-Moll · en *ré* mineur

1	I. Allemande	1:33
2	II. Courante	1:03
3	III. Sarabande	2:50
4	IV. Menuet I	1:12
5	V. Menuet II	2:28
6	VI. Gigue	2:08

Suite No. 2 in C minor BWV 813

c-Moll · en *ut* mineur

7	I. Allemande	2:35
8	II. Courante	1:08
9	III. Sarabande	2:16
10	IV. Air	0:54
11	V. Menuet	0:50
12	VI. Gigue	1:44

Suite No. 3 in B minor BWV 814

h-Moll · en *si* mineur

13	I. Allemande	1:34
14	II. Courante	1:10
15	III. Sarabande	1:39
16	IV. Menuet – Trio	2:01
17	V. Anglaise	0:49
18	VI. Gigue	1:41

Suite No. 4 in E-flat major BWV 815

Es-Dur · en *mi* bémol majeur

19	I. Allemande	1:09
20	II. Courante	1:08
21	III. Sarabande	2:09
22	IV. Menuet (BWV 815b)	0:57
23	V. Gavotte	0:45
24	VI. Air	1:04
25	VII. Gigue	1:55

Total Time 39:02

Glenn Gould piano

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