

Edexcel A Level Syllabus – Analysis

JS Bach: Sarabande and Gigue from Partita no. 4 in
D major, BWV 828

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Background

JS Bach published his six partitas separately between 1726 and 1730, and then, in 1731, as a collected edition under the title of *Clavier Übung* (Keyboard Practice), cataloguing them as Opus 1. The BWV numbers used are a modern cataloguing system and refer to entries in Wolfgang Schneider's 1950 bibliography, *Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis*, the standard manner of identifying Bach's music today. Apart from two early Mülhausen cantatas, written for council elections, the partitas became Bach's first printed works. Their title consciously refers to the keyboard suites of Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722), Bach's predecessor at Leipzig, whose own *Clavier-übung* was published some years previously. Four years later, Bach was to publish the second part of the *Clavier Übung*, which contained the *Italian Concerto* and the *French Overture* in b minor, each an assimilation of the styles and tastes of their respective countries. The fourth and final part of the *Clavierübung* contains the *Goldberg Variations*, which was printed in 1742.

Despite the somewhat cool reception Bach's later printed works were to receive, the partitas achieved a wider acceptance amongst his contemporaries: the musical scholar Lorenz Christophe Mizler von Kolof (1711-1778) commented: 'Whoever does not know how to place his fingers better will only with difficulty learn to play at the keyboard passages of our celebrated Herr Bach of Leipzig'. Johann Nikolaus Forkel (1749-1818), Bach's first biographer, went further: 'Whoever learned to play well several pieces from this work could make his fortune in the world with them'. However, the importance of the collection is not so much in the virtuosity they require, but in their musical content, which ranges from the elegance of the French style to the more up-to-date *style galant* that was popular at the time.

It appears that seven partitas were planned initially, the precedent set by Kuhnau's publications, each of which contained seven suites; although six was Bach's preferred number for instrumental sets (cf. the orchestral suites, *English Suites*, etc.), the publication of the D major partita in 1730 indicated that another two were to follow. The keys of the partitas are arranged ingeniously: the set spreads outwardly from B-flat major in zigzag patterns: B-flat major, c minor, a minor, D major, G major and e minor, which corresponds to the notes of the Greek hexachord. One might expect the missing seventh partita to have had a key of F major, which is incidentally the key of the *Italian Concerto* which opens the second part of the *Clavier-übung*.

The movements of the partitas, and their sequencing, are oriented towards the model of the French suite, which had become an established genre in Germany by the beginning of the eighteenth century, following the examples of such composers as Jean-Henri d'Anglebert and Johann-Jacob Froberger. Bach had used a similar format in his so-called *French Suites* (BWV 812-817), the movements of which generally followed the following order: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. However, many dance styles had changed considerably from the early French models, favouring the more popular Italian style. Thus, we have more exciting Courantes and Giges, where subtlety becomes a casualty in favour of quicker models effused with sophisticated (and, the words of some, retrospective) German counterpoint.

The partitas also contain an extra large-scale movement at the beginning. Again, the precedent is French but the execution quintessentially Bachian. The suites of the French masters generally opened with a *prélude non-mesuré*, the harmonies of which were indicated in a series of metrically-free semibreves, without any formal rhythmic pattern. The opening of the first partita, a Praeludium, gives way to the Sinfonia of the second, in which the dotted rhythms recall the French style before a more subtle *cantabile bicinium*, which in turn leads to a fugal two-part invention; the a minor-centred Fantasia of the third partita yields to the D major *Overture* of the fourth, in which Bach's assimilation of the French style, made famous by Lully's operas, manifests itself in a slow, dotted introduction that is followed by a quick, three-part fugue. The opening of the sixth partita also displays the same discretion, where we have an Italianate toccata that opens with four decorated, arpeggiated chords that gives way to a *Corrente*-like figure, accompanied by a walking bass, that is finally capped with a three-part fugue.

For the other movements, a similar variety occurs between the partitas. His treatment of the Allemande, always written as a serene movement in even time, demonstrates differentiated rhythmic and metrical structures: despite the movement deriving from a dance, no two Allemandes are the same, despite each's conformity to the standard binary structure. Bach not only provides a variety of form by changing the rhythmic and contrapuntal structures, but also varies the length of each and its *affekt* in a departure from standard practice. Its original inception was as a piece for the keyboard, in contrast to the other movements of the standard suite, and this gives the structure of the dance a large freedom of movement. Comment has already occurred concerning the Italian nature of the Courantes, and only two of the partitas (c minor and D major) contain movements that conform to the French practices of interplaying 3/2 and 6/4 bars, their style chosen to suit the French pretensions of their opening movements. The remainder incline towards the *Corrente*, a more rapid movement in 3/8 or 3/4 time, especially in partitas 1 and 5 (B-flat and G major), where they reflect the distinctly Italianate nature of their introductions. Those of the a and e minor partitas suggest mixed forms, the first an interplay between dotted rhythms and invention-like *bicinium* counterpoint, the second a play on syncopations in quavers. This discretion employed for the Allemandes is also to be found in the Sarabands. Finally, the Giges are distinctly diverse in metre from one partita to the next, employing the time signatures of C, 12/8, 9/16, 6/8 and 4/2. The last is interesting in that Bach used the old-fashioned designation once reserved for triple time, \emptyset . That of the first partita, distinctly modelled on the Italian Giga is non-polyphonic in nature and consists of flowing triplets that outline the movement's harmonic progressions. Four of the Giges are treated fugally, with that of partita 5 (G major) turning into a double-fugue in its second section. The D major Gigue (partita 4) is not as complex, but its counterpoint juxtaposes with its theme at the beginning of the second half. In the remainder, the theme of the second section mirrors the first, although in the e minor Gigue, rather than being in the dominant, is retained, inverted, in the tonic.

The remaining movements are not standardised. The Minuets follow discrete stylistic conventions: those of the B-flat major are distinctly Italian in their lightness; the D major is French whilst the G major has little in common with its designation of *Tempo di minuetto*, with a rhythmic structure that alternates between 3/4 and 6/8. The other dance movements included are the more conforming *Passepied* and *Tempo di gavotta*, as well as movements of a more virtuoso nature, the *Burlesca*, *Scherzo*, *Rondeau* and *Capriccio*.

On another level, the partitas provide a certain intellectual stimulus through their proportions and design, in which numerological 'games' occur: the first two movements of the B-flat major partita have 21 and 38 bars, the ciphered numbers of B-A-C-H, where B (the German label for B-flat)=2, A=1, C=3, H (B-natural)=8. Another important number, and one which appears constantly in the cantatas, is 14, the sum of the four letters of his name. Thus, the Sarabande of the first partita contains 28 bars (2 x 14) and the important cadence in the Sinfonia to partita 2 also lies at bar 28. The D major *Ouverture* contains 112 bars (8 x 14) and the G major *Praeambulum*, where the important fermata occurs at bar 86 (8 + 6 + 14), has 95 bars (9 + 5=14). Other numerological references are as follows:

Rondeau in c=112 bars
 Courante in a=56 bars
 Sarabande in e=28
 Allemande in D=28
 Minuet in D=28
 Allemande in G=28

Multiplications also occur since the product of BACH is 48 and corresponds to the Gigue in B-flat and the *Passepied* in G (48), the *Capriccio* in c and the Gigue in D (96). Further to this, adding the digits of the total number of bars in all six partitas also comes to 14!

Analysis

Type: Sarabande

Key: D major

Form: binary, with each section repeated

No. of bars: 38; 12 + 26 (2-bar introduction + 10 bars; 2-bar introduction + 14 bars; *petit reprise* of 10 bars)

Time signature: 3/4

Principal key structure: 1 - 12: Tonic - Dominant; 13 - 38: Dominant - Tonic.

2 Principal motif types in 2-part writing

BAR	COMMENT
	Section A: The first four bars have the function of an introduction - with the tonic key remaining somewhat ambiguous, not becoming properly established until the beginning of bar 5, with the first important cadence. It is only after this point that its melodic rhythm alters to include the semiquaver decoration that forms the bulk of the melodic movement.
1 - 2	General: 2-bar introduction that acts as a fermata before the first principal motif is introduced.
1.1- 1.2	Progression: D maj. (I) to Em7 (II7) is a 7 - 6 suspension. Whilst in actuality it is chord VII, it acts as a fake dominant seventh (A7) before an anticipation (with last semiquaver of bar) of the tonic.
2	A single line with a C-nat. that suggests the dominant of G maj.. The A minim, which follows the C-nat. in fact suspends the harmonic rhythm, adding to the ambiguity before:
3	a statement of the principal motif in the sub-dominant. However, the ambiguity of the preceding bar suggests G maj. as a tonic, and it is only with the introduction of the C# on the second beat, that we are again certain of the key-centre. The walking bass, reminiscent of a continuo line suggests the harmonic outline of the bar: SD - ST7 - D before
4	the proper establishment of the tonic key as an extended perfect cadence. The rhythm, however, is not allowed a fermata since in
5	the harmonic and melodic movement, in which demi-semiquavers are introduced ornamentally for the first time, shifts quickly: the G# (RH) suggests A maj., as does the second quaver beat, in which the use of the b7 (beat 1.5) acts as chord II7 before a return to A maj. (beat 2) and the E6 chord (beat 3.5) (which becomes the dominant of the dominant), facilitating a temporary modulation to
6	A maj. The harmonic rhythm continues, however, sequentially in the dominant (A maj.), leading to the dominant of its dominant (B maj) to settle on
7	E maj. in which the same sequence starts, but disperses with the minor 7th leap in the bass (beat 1.5) to form the dominant 7th of A maj. (E maj7). Beat 3 sees a stroke of genius in that chord VII of E maj. is set up with the introduction of the D# (as in bar 1, acting as a false dominant) of
8	E maj., which is arrested by the movement of the treble to a D-nat, making a dominant seventh chord of A maj. Beat 3 extends this dominant with a demi-semiquaver scale leading to
9	A maj. in which the melodic line becomes saturated with demi-semiquaver decoration

	over a relatively still harmonic bass, and
10	D maj., a sequentially-treated repeat of the previous bar, now acting as the subdominant of
11	E maj.. This bar is certainly the dominant of the dominant, on beat 3 of which there is an introduction of a 3rd part and
12	a 4th part, A maj. with, in the second beat, the use of a chord VII9 (last inversion) to add a touch of spice.
13	Section B: Like the beginning of Section A, this opens with the arresting introductory motif. Here, rather than a suspension, Bach uses a diminished chord of C# that creates a false dominant of the tonic key and suggests a return to D maj.. Instead, however,
14	he twists the harmony with the introduction of an A#, creating an F# maj7 chord which acts as the dominant seventh of the relative minor (b), here extended with the only use of triplets in the whole work.
15 - 16	(cf. bars 3 - 4) Similar function to bars 3 & 4, but here with touches of demi-semiquaver movement.
17	Note how the rising motif in the RH takes the melody to a pitch-peak at the beginning of 18
18 - 19	from where the melodic line descends two octaves, still in b min. using mainly tonic and dominant chords.
20 - 22	The only appearance of an appoggiatura in the work, here forming a 9 - 8 suspension and used rather than a conventional note to firmly establish the key centre of b min. In the next three bars, we see the reverse of the previous three, with the melodic line rising two octaves, and despite touching e min., remaining firmly in the new key.
23	The chromatic twist of this bar allows for a B maj.7 chord to be set up on beat 3, thus acting as a new dominant, this time through a cycle of fourths:
24	first to e min., then
25	a min. (beat 1) and D maj. (beat 2), which here includes a min. seventh (Dmaj.7) to take the music transitorily to
26	G maj. (beat 1), which has the function of chord IV in the home tonic; A maj.7 (beats 2 - 3), acting as chord V and a return to
27	the tonic for an extended tonic melisma. Here a G# is introduced to the RH to suggest the dominant of A maj., which, although appearing to established by the end of the bar
28	is in fact still acting as the dominant of the home key. Note how the writing in the bar deliberately avoids the seventh, thus creating yet another harmonic ambiguity.
29 - 30	<i>A petit reprise</i> that reiterates the opening two bars,
31 - 32	suggesting a restatement of bars 3 - 4, but instead continuing Bach's very distinctive figuration through
33 - end	an extended melisma that firmly establishes the perfect cadence in bar 38.

Type: Gigue, fugal, three-parts

Key: D major

Form: binary, with each section repeated

No. of bars: 96; 2 x 48 bars

Time signature: 9/16

Principal key structure: 1 - 48: Tonic - Dominant; 49 - 96: Relative minor - Tonic.

BAR	COMMENT
1 - 6	Section A: Fugue subject, consisting of 6 bars of rapid semiquaver movement that touches G maj. and e min. before a codetta takes the harmony to the dominant in bar 6.
7 - 12	Real answer in the dominant that mirrors the harmony of the opening bars. The countersubject dovetails with the subject so that there is a constant stream of semiquavers; its figuration is the antithesis of the subject, however: where the subject relies on arpeggiated figures, this employs conjunct movement until bar 11, where dotted quavers add harmony notes.
13 - 15	Episodal material that takes the harmony through b min., G maj. (acting as Chord IV), A maj. (15.3) and
16 - 20	D maj. for a statement of the subject in the tonic, with the alto voice carrying the countersubject
21 - 25	Episode. The material in the bass is a sequence derived from the codetta, and is here accompanied in the upper register by dotted-quaver chords which point the harmonies through a series of perfect cadences: A maj. (22); E maj. (23); b min. (24); f# min (25). The cycle of fifths is played to its natural conclusion with the three f# min. chords, these ultimately acting as a dominant of
26	b min., the dominant of
27	e min., where a false statement based on the subject takes the music through a cycle of fifths, to
28	A maj. and
29 - 32	D maj (note how the top part alludes to the inverse subject); G maj and then its relative minor (e) which acts as the dominant of
33 - 37	A maj. that picks up on the arpeggiated feature of the subject.
38 - 40	D maj. acting as IV of the dominant. The figuration alludes to second half of the subject, here accompanied by a string of arpeggios firmly in A.
41 - 44	Four bars where the figuration interplays between the RH and LH, the harmony of each seeming to build up to the final cadence of this section: A maj. (41); Amaj7 in its last inversion (42); D# dim7 (43) and a min. (44), which virtually arrests the harmonic rhythm.
45	A diminished seventh chord on D# prepares us for
46	Emaj7 (last inversion) that has to lead to

48	A maj. (1st inversion); D maj (IV of the new key) and a perfect cadence on A.
49 - 54	Section B: Bach provides a new subject for the fugal material in b min. (based on dominant chord). Similar to Section A, 6 bars (5 + codetta) which unusually takes the harmony to D maj. for the answer.
55 - 60	A stroke of genius: the original subject from Section A is used as the countersubject to achieve unity, the second bar of which, once again, prepares us for a transitory modulation to G maj. (56 - 57), a min. (57 - 58), etc. The codetta, which finished the original subject, is inverted and transferred to the other part. The last beat of 60 presents a perfect cadence
61	in G maj. which gives way to a dominant seventh of E maj.
62	Acts as dominant of A maj. Perfect cadence takes us to
63 - 66	A maj. This is only transitory: Bach is preparing the way for b min. by giving us a diminished chord on E#, acting as a fake dominant to take the music to f# min (VII - I, bar 64) with a restatement of the new subject in f# min. accompanied by chords.
67 - 69	take the harmony to e min. for
70 - 73	episodal material based on the three-note groupetti figuration of the subject, which in turn prepares the way for
74 - 77	the new subject, here in the dominant, again without the Section A subject as countersubject, instead accompanied by chords.
78 - 85	Free writing in three parts that takes the music to G maj. for
86 - 89	two-part writing that combines the 4th - 6th bars of both subjects, preparing the way for a
89 - end	a tonic restatement of material used in bars 41 - 48.