

J. S. BACH  
6 PARTITAS

Asako Ogawa  
harpsichord



## 6 Partitas, BWV 825–830 (Clavierübung, Part I)

<b>CD1</b>	<b>[74:46]</b>	<b>CD2</b>	<b>[75:44]</b>
<b>Partita No. 1 in B flat major, BWV 825</b>	<b>[19:46]</b>	<b>Partita No. 3 in A minor, BWV 827</b>	<b>[20:13]</b>
1 I. Praeludium	[1:57]	1 I. Fantasia	[3:06]
2 II. Allemande	[4:19]	2 II. Allemande	[2:42]
3 III. Corrente	[3:00]	3 III. Corrente	[3:00]
4 IV. Sarabande	[5:21]	4 IV. Sarabande	[4:31]
5 V. Menuet I – Menuet II	[2:55]	5 V. Burlesca	[2:17]
6 VI. Giga	[2:15]	6 VI. Scherzo	[1:18]
		7 VII. Gigue	[3:18]
<b>Partita No. 2 in C minor, BWV 826</b>	<b>[20:59]</b>	<b>Partita No. 5 in G major, BWV 829</b>	<b>[21:56]</b>
7 I. Sinfonia	[4:38]	8 I. Praeambulum	[2:35]
8 II. Allemande	[5:17]	9 II. Allemande	[4:34]
9 III. Courante	[2:32]	10 III. Corrente	[2:07]
10 IV. Sarabande	[3:20]	11 IV. Sarabande	[4:54]
11 V. Rondeaux	[1:31]	12 V. Tempo di minuetto	[2:04]
12 VI. Capriccio	[3:41]	13 VI. Passepied	[1:39]
		14 VII. Gigue	[4:04]
<b>Partita No. 4 in D major, BWV 828</b>	<b>[33:51]</b>	<b>Partita No. 6 in E minor, BWV 830</b>	<b>[33:26]</b>
13 I. Ouverture	[6:14]	15 I. Toccata	[7:54]
14 II. Allemande	[9:30]	16 II. Allemande	[3:48]
15 III. Courante	[4:02]	17 III. Corrente	[4:20]
16 IV. Aria	[2:15]	18 IV. Air	[1:42]
17 V. Sarabande	[6:08]	19 V. Sarabande	[7:07]
18 VI. Menuet	[1:35]	20 VI. Tempo di gavotta	[2:16]
19 VII. Gigue	[4:07]	21 VII. Gigue	[6:19]

## Johann Sebastian BACH: 6 Partitas

‘The Kapellmeister to the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen and Director of the Choir at Leipzig, intends to publish a collection of clavier suites of which the first Partita has already been issued, and by and by, they will continue to come to light until the work is complete, and as such will be made known to amateurs of the clavier.’

This was the announcement by Johann Sebastian Bach when he published his first set of his *Six Partitas* in 1726.

The *Partita No. 1 in B flat major* is thought to have been dedicated to a new-born baby: Prince Emanuel Ludwig, the first child of Bach’s former employer, Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen and his second wife, Princess Friderica, to whom Bach was still very much attached. B flat major also happens to be same key as the *Sixth Brandenburg Concerto*, a work in which the parts for viola da gamba may have been designed for Prince Leopold. After testing the market with the publication of the *Partita*, Bach began issuing his intended systematic project, the *Clavierübung* series, publishing these *Six Partitas* together as *Clavierübung I* in 1731, followed by a further three volumes. *Clavierübung I-IV* is a culmination and showcase of the most up-to-date

keyboard skills. The works contained therein are some of the most innovative and avant-garde in keyboard music history.

What made Bach launch such an ambitious project?

It is possible that he was influenced by other composers’ works such as François Couperin’s *L’Art de toucher le clavecin* (1717), *Les Goûts réunis* (1724); Johann Kuhnau’s *Partien* (1689, 1692); Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer’s *Pièces de Clavecin* (1696) and Georg Philipp Telemann’s *Der Getreue Musik Meister* (1728). Some scholars suggest that Bach paid homage to his predecessor in Leipzig, Johan Kuhnau, by choosing the title *Partita* instead of *Suite*. It is also possible that Bach was strongly influenced by Couperin in many ways, which can be deduced from the fact that Couperin’s piece *Les Bergeries* was copied into *Anna Magdalena’s Notebook II* in 1725. Couperin was one of the most respected and celebrated keyboard composers of the time in Europe: there can be no doubt that Bach was aware of his style and work. Couperin published the ten concerts (instrumental pieces) of *Les Goûts réunis*, in Paris in 1724, in which he noted:

‘The Italian style and the French style have for a long time divided up the Republic of Music (in France); for my part, I have always appreciated things according to their merit without considering who wrote them or their nationality.’

Bach clearly indicates similar stylistic leanings, giving dance titles in Italian (*Corrente, Giga*), and French (*Courante, Sarabande, Menuet*), integrating them into a cosmopolitan display of versatile and fashionable dances of the time.

It is also possible that Bach, who reached his 45th year in 1730, wished to vaunt his worth and true power as a virtuoso keyboard composer. He was rather fed up with a tiresome dispute with the Leipzig Town Council throughout that year. We also know that Bach tried to impress King Augustus II ‘The Strong’ of Dresden, hoping to acquire a position at Dresden’s lavish court. This Saxon city had rapidly become an *à la mode* cultural centre under its monarch, attracting many artists and musicians from across Europe: a far cry from Leipzig. Thus, the publication of the *Six Partitas* as *Clavierübung I* was a significant statement by Bach as a mature, stylish, virtuoso keyboard composer, in addition to his hitherto 800 composed works (including the *Six Brandenburg Concertos*, the solo *Cello Suites*, and two *Passions*).

At the same time, these *Partitas* are rather intimate and personal. One can imagine Bach playing them at home or listening to his wife or sons playing them. In fact, *Partitas 3 and 6* were entered into *Anna Magdalena Bach’s Notebook II* (1725), which is like a record of Bach’s family’s domestic music making. It is possible that some or most of these *Partitas* were composed before 1725, at a time when Bach’s personal life took many dramatic turns. His first wife, Maria Barbara, died suddenly in 1720 while Bach was away accompanying his employer, Prince Leopold, as the Kapellmeister to the court. Bach was 35 years old and was left with four young children, including the 10-year-old Wilhelm Friedemann, and a six-year-old Carl Philip Emanuel. Bach also lost his eldest brother Johann Christoph Bach in 1721, and another older brother, Johan Jacob, in 1722.

One year after the devastating death of his first wife, Bach married Anna Magdalena Wilcke, who was 20 years old, a star soprano of the Ahnhalt-Cöthen court. A week later, his employer Prince Leopold also married. The first *Anna Magdalena Notebook* was possibly a wedding anniversary gift from Bach to Anna Magdalena. We know that Anna Magdalena was not only an excellent soprano but also an accomplished keyboard player. The title page is beautifully written in Anna Magdalena’s elaborate calligraphy; and



Bach entered the *French Suites, BWV 812-815*, himself, although the rest of the contents was lost. In 1725, as the *Anna Magdalena's Notebook* was started, Bach's family was already settled in Leipzig. Had Prince Leopold not married a princess who was described as 'eine Amusa' (someone who is disinterested in the Muses, hence unmusical), Bach may have stayed in Cöthen for the rest of his life.

Bach took a new position as a Cantor of the St Thomas Church and School in 1723 mainly for the purpose of educating his sons. His life as Cantor of St Thomas Church involved not only composing music for the Church services, but also teaching Music and Latin to the boys of the St Thomas School. As C.P.E. Bach later described, the Cantor Bach's spacious house was like a 'pigeon coop', in which people swarmed in and out, all of the time. *Anna Magdalena's Notebook II* reflects such a scene of domestic music making. This Notebook contains popular songs not only by her husband but by other contemporary composers; short pieces composed by his sons; an *Aria* which later appears as the theme of the *Goldberg Variations*, alongside *Partitas 3* and *6*. Initially, *Partita 6*, a rather complex and solemn work, might seem slightly out of place. However, considering the fact that death was as frequent as birth in Bach's household (Anna Magdalena lost

her first daughter in 1723), one can imagine the solace a grave sarabande such as, for example, that of the *Partita 6*, might bring to a mourning mother. Writing the first *Partita* as a dedication to the birth of a new-born baby, and writing the last of the set in the key of E minor, the same key as the opening of the *St Matthew Passion* of 1727, cannot be mere coincidence. Life and Death, Laughter and Tears, Humour and Seriousness, Light and Shadow: these *Six Partitas* present life's utmost extremes of emotion and expression.

### **Six Partitas – Dance Forms and Character**

Although Bach did not compose his *Suites* and *Partitas* for the purpose of actually dancing to them, we should never underestimate how well those dances were integrated into his life.

Germany was undergoing a long period of reconstruction following the Thirty Years' War when Bach was born in 1685. As part of the country's cultural revival, many elements of French and Italian art, architecture and music were imported by German courts and cities, often in friendly and open competition with each other, with French music and dance having a dominant influence in most places where Bach lived and worked. For example, the young Bach visited

and may have played in the court orchestra at Celle many times. The Duke of Celle-Lüneberg and his wife Eléonore maintained a ‘miniature Versailles’ in its recreation of French culture and employment of French musicians. Here Bach most probably encountered the music of Lully and even possibly that of Couperin, and orchestral suites derived either from recent works performed at the Paris Opéra, or local productions written in this style. Bach also had friends such as Johannes Pasch and the Dresden Konzertmeister Jean Baptiste Volumier, who were dance masters and had trained at the French court. It is evident that the suite, derived from the French *ballets de cour* of the 17th century, greatly influenced Bach’s music.

Each *Partita* opens with a unique non-dance movement, which is then followed by a series of dances. These movements serve as an overture to the episodes which follow. The first *Partita* starts with a sweet and charming *Praeludium*; the second with a resolute and dramatic *Sinfonia*; *Partita 3* with an affectionate duet-like *Fantasia*; *Partita 4* with a majestic and brilliant French *Overture*; *Partita 5* with an improvisatory sparkling *Prelude*, then *Partita 6* opens with a solemn and majestic *Toccata* built around a central fugue. Bach carefully links the dances to follow these opening movements; if not thematically linked, then certainly linked by character.

### **Allemande (French) / Allemanda (Italian)**

A binary form dance in quadruple or duple time in moderate tempi. Bach’s contemporary, the composer Johann Mattheson, described the *allemande* as ‘a serious and well-composed harmoniousness in arpeggiated style, expressing satisfaction or amusement, and delighting in order and calm’. The significance of its etymological origins as a German dance were not lost on Bach and his contemporaries, who imbued the form with proud and noble sentiments as were proper to a dance of national pride.

### **Courante**

The French *courante* was a slow dance in triple time (normally 3/2). It was variously described as serious and solemn (Dupont, Masson, Walther), noble and grand (Rameau, Compan), hopeful (Mattheson), or majestic (Quantz).

### **Corrente**

In contrast to the French *courante*, the Italian *corrente* was an early-18th-century virtuoso instrumental piece which allowed a soloist to show off. Originally it was a fast dance in triple time with a succession of hops and steps. Its character is often lively and cheerful.

### **Sarabande**

Despite the original dance of probable Spanish

origin being described as tempestuous, passionate and erotic, the French courtly *sarabande* was tamed into a graceful dance which evoked tender passion by the time of the early 18th century. Its tempo seems to have varied, since it carried indications such as ‘Sarabande grave’ or ‘Sarabande légère’, or simply ‘Sarabande’. It was also often written with ‘doubles’, or varied repeats, showing virtuosity and improvisational prowess.

### **Menuet**

A French dance in triple time whose tempo and character seem to have changed over time. Interestingly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, writing in the mid-18th century, disagreed with Brossard’s description of the dance of half a century earlier:

‘Menuet; a kind of dance which, the Abbé Brossard tells us, came originally from Poitou. He says that this dance is very lively and its movement very fast. This is not quite right. The character of the *menuet* is of noble and elegant simplicity; the movement is moderate rather than quick. It may be said to be the least gay of all the kinds of dances used in our balls...’

Mattheson describes its affect as of ‘moderate gaiety’, which is perhaps the most likely a close description as regards Bach’s *Menuet*.

### **Passepied**

A rhythmically exciting yet delicate dance in triple time, played at a fast tempo, and is often described as a ‘fast menuet’. Passepieds often have longer phrases with fewer points of arrival than menuets and may be accented in a more vigorous manner.

### **Gigue (French) / Giga (Italian)**

This dance offers a mystifying variety of styles, and metric structures. The French *gigue* tends to be a lively and fast dance but slower than the Italian *giga*. The most prominent feature of the *gigue* is its graceful lift or skipping quality. Mattheson describes the Italian *giga*:

‘Italian gigue, which are not used for dancing but for fiddling (from which its name may also derive), force themselves to extreme speed or volatility; though frequently in a flowing and uninterrupted manner: perhaps like the smooth arrow-swift flow of a stream.’

### **Gavotte**

This duple time French dance is described variously as ‘graceful’ (Duport), and ‘joyful’ (Mattheson). In Rousseau’s *Dictionnaire de musique* (1768), one finds that ‘the movement of the gavotte is ordinarily graceful, often gay, and sometimes also tender and slow’. Thus, the choice



of tempo was also varied. Quantz mentioned that it is more moderate in tempo than the *rigaudon*.

### **Asako Ogawa, 2020**

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**Asako Ogawa (Ginova)**, a leading Japanese-born harpsichordist based in London, actively performs as a soloist and as a continuo player in UK, Europe and Japan. She is also a baroque repertoire coach at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Her main appearances include: the Halle International Handel Festival, Leicester International Music Festival, Faversham Music Festival, London Bach Festival, Brighton Early Music Festival, BBC Radio 3, and the Georgian Concert Society, Edinburgh. Ogawa is also a

regular performer at the London Handel Festival since 2008, and one of the official accompanists for the London Handel Singing Competition after winning the Accompanist's Prize in 2007.

Ogawa's recently issued début recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* was praised by the critic Robert Hugill: 'There is a clarity to her approach; every detail of Bach's part-writing is clear'. Ogawa completed her Postgraduate Diploma and Fellowship as a harpsichordist at the Historical Performance Department at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where she has also completed a MMus as a pianist and works as a staff accompanist. She has participated in the international courses and masterclasses given by Bob van Asperen, Colin Tilney, Ton Koopmann, Ketil Haugsand and Christophe Rousset. She studied harpsichord with Nicholas Parle, James Johnstone, and Laurence Cummings, and fortepiano with Steven Devine.

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Harpichord by Alan Gotto, 2009, after Jean Goermans/Pascal Taskin, Paris 1764/1783  
Harpichord tuned and prepared by **Weronika Janyst** and **Edmund Pickering**

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Page 12: J.S. Bach holding his *Riddle Canon, BWV 1076*, portrait by **Elias Gottlob Haussmann**, 1746

Digifile manuscript: J.S. Bach: *Gigue* from *Partita No. 6*  
from *Anna Magdalena's Notebook II* manuscript

(Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Musikabteilung mit Mendelssohn-Archiv)

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