

DANCE SUITE: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH'S
FRENCH OVERTURE AND BÉLA BARTÓK'S *DANCE SUITE*

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The origin of music, *musike*, in Greek, encompasses several art forms, such as music, poetry, dance and drama. In many ways, dance and music have developed side by side. Many early forms of dance and music were created to accompany each other and performed together. This paired development has continued throughout music history. Later in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, composers developed the form of dance suite by including several dance movements in the same key together and during the Baroque period, the dance suite reached its peak under the influence of the French court culture. The dance suite evolved and changed as society developed, moving in to several different directions. Composers have continued writing dance suites and among them, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and Béla Bartók (1881-1945), showed the most distinctive compositional and stylistic approaches for dance suite.

Johann Sebastian Bach is the most influential and prolific composer who wrote for every possible genre, except for opera, and integrated different styles in his music with masterful writing. He composed almost 40 dance suites for violin, cello, keyboard and orchestra. The *French Overture (Ouverture nach Französischer Art)*, one of these dance suites, is part of the collection, *Clavierübung II*, which also includes the *Italian Concerto (Concerto nach Italienischem Gusto)*. This displays the fact that Bach was not only aware of national styles such as French and Italian, but he was also a skillful master who combined orchestral genres such as concerto and overture and integrated these characteristics into his keyboard work. It is interesting that both the *French Overture* and the *Italian Concerto* were composed for a harpsichord with two manuals for dramatic

dynamic effect to bring out the contrast between piano and forte effectively. This displays the fact that when Bach was transferring the orchestral idioms to the keyboard writing by titling the work as the overture, he also had the sonority from orchestra in his mind. There are many similar aspects that are shown in the orchestral suites, such as structure, texture and key that will be discussed in Chapter I.

Two hundred years later, Béla Bartók wrote the *Dance Suite* in 1923 for orchestra to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the unification of Buda, Obuda and Pest. Followed by the enthusiastic reception of the performance, Bartók made a piano transcription in 1925. His vast knowledge of folk music learned from collecting them from Hungary, Eastern European countries and even North Africa influenced many of his compositions including the *Dance Suite*. Although there is no direct melodic quote from any folk music, folk music character is ubiquitous in this suite, which proves that Bartók digested all different folk music styles in his compositional writing and created his own folk music. Bach was mainly inspired by orchestral compositional writing when he was composing the *French Overture*; Bartók's piano transcription shows much more developed in compositional style and has more complex texture and sonority compared to his earlier piano works as shown in the orchestral *Dance Suite*.

The study will explain the dance origin, its relation to music, the development of the dance suite, Bach's *French Overture* and Bartók's *Dance Suite* focusing on the national and instrumental influences as well as social background, which affected their philosophy and compositional style.

Chapter I. DANCE, MUSIC AND DANCE MUSIC

1. Dance

Dance is a type of art that generally involves movement of the body, often rhythmic and to music. The origin of the term dance is *tanhā*, which in Sanskrit, means desire for movement, activity and life. It is performed in many cultures as a form of emotional expression, social interaction, or exercise in a spiritual or performance setting and is sometimes used to express ideas or tell a story. It is hard to know when dance became part of human culture since there is no clear written record.

According to Sutton, the earliest dances were religious in nature as people invented rituals and ceremonies of conciliation, supplication, or thanksgiving to the nature spirits and gods¹. Later, people invented dances for recreation, to satisfy their needs for emotional release through movement, and to share the sense of safety and community engendered by group activity. Later, dances were still performed for the entertainment or instruction of observers, producing the theatrical dances. There are many archeological evidences that show dance was originally part of ceremonies, religious rituals, celebrations, and entertainment in ancient Greek and Egyptian culture.

The Ancient Greeks believed that the Gods invented music and dance. One of the earliest written references is found in Homer's Iliad, where he describes the dancing of youths and maidens at country festivals and weddings or as entertainment in royal palaces. Homer's mention of maidens dancing in the choir of Artemis shows that the

¹ Julia Sutton, et al. "Dance." *Grove Music Dictionary*.

² Julia Sutton, et al. "Dance." *Grove Music Dictionary*.

cults of Olympian divinities then, as in later classical Greece, featured song and dance rituals, which became stereotyped in various poetic genres. The *pannuchis* ('all-night' festival) was a common setting, and deities such as Dionysus, Apollo, Artemis, and the semi-divine Helen were invoked as patrons of the choirs. While dancing at festivals and religious rituals tended to produce stereotyped patterns, there was also the uninhibited ecstatic dancing, particularly in honor of Dionysus. This resembled the outbursts of dancing mania that have periodically occurred in Europe and created concern among civic authorities by the social disorder they aroused. The contrast between such emotional dancing and the traditional use of the dance in education, and to some degree as a form of gymnastics, compelled Plato to recommend strict state control over forms of dance and music permitted to be performed.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Baroque period, dance was seen as a fundamental means of training the body for polite society, and as a result in time, its status as an art form increased. Under the patronage of the French monarchy, dance achieved official recognition through the establishment in 1661 of the Académie Royale de Danse (eight years before a similar academy was founded to support opera). During this period, dance technique developed tremendously, and dance language spread along with French dances out to the rest of Europe. At the same time, French dancing absorbed influences from other countries, especially Italy, Spain, and later in the century, England.

2. Music for dance and Dance suite

The earliest dance music was probably provided by the dancer by clapping, stamping, snapping the fingers, slapping the body or singing. These musical means can be extended by wearing bells, shells, boots, by striking sticks, swords or shields, or by playing castanets, finger cymbals, tambourines or drums hung on the body². Except for the voice, these devices are basically percussive providing basic metrical and rhythmic accompaniments and accents for the dancer. Rhythmic accents and phrase lengths normally coincide with those of dance as well as the mood of the music.

The largest part of the repertoire of early music is related to dance but dance is not emphasized in sources of music until the sixteenth century. The practice was to have the slow and the dignified dance followed by a quick dance in triple time. In the seventeenth century, dance and dance related forms dominated the repertoire of French music. The forms and types represent dances popular at the time. The French composers, such as Charles Dieupart, Louis Marchand, Both Louis and François Couperin, made a selection of pieces in the same key and put them into a form of the suite or dance suite. The emphasis was on the dances as individual compositions and not to the whole suite, and performers were allowed to choose movements from the suite as they liked.

In most of these individual dances the form comprises two parts each to be repeated, thus the term binary form. A modulation from tonic to dominant (or relative key) takes place in the first section with a return to the tonic, often after passing through other keys, in the second. In many cases, the second section employs essentially the same thematic material as the first, or it commences differently and then restates, with changes, the first (rounded binary form).

² Julia Sutton, et al. "Dance." *Grove Music Dictionary*.

Composers often gave descriptive titles to such dances. While in some cases, the titles are dedicatory, in others they indicate the affect that the music is to express. Examples in the work of Chambonnières are the *Allemande dit l'afflige*, *La drollerie*, *Les barricades*, representing a battle scene, and the gigue *La villageoise*, among many others.

In the seventeenth century Germany, the suite shows a move toward a fixed form. The process involved several steps. The most important figure for the German harpsichord suite would be Froberger, who composed thirty suites. He organized the order of allemande-courante-sarabande-gigue and this became standard. Composers such as Johann Kuhnau, Georg Böhm followed this order. They included other dances between the sarabande and the gigue: the minuet, the bourrée, and the gavotte often appeared in the suite and sometimes the aria, with doubles. Many suites, such as those in Kuhnau's *Clavier-übung*, have preludes.

Handel and Bach, two giants of the Baroque period, derived the form of the suite to its highest point. Handel's keyboard suites are rather conventional in form but displays innovative use of galanteries: the chaconne, the 'abstract' fugue, or the air and the variations. Handel used sometimes materials from his earlier works and showed skillful ability to unite the suite with the same thematic material. His orchestral suites are better known such as the orchestral *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. Bach composed six cello suites, six violin suites, four orchestral suites, six French and six English keyboard suites, six keyboard partitas, and the *French Overture* as well as some other suites that are not played often. His suites follow the standard form with many galanterie movements. Bach's contribution is not only for great numbers of the suites, but

artistry and mastery of composition that synthesizes the many different national styles and compositional styles in his suites.

In the Classical period, the composers were attracted by the technique of using contrasting keys and affects (topics) and the thematic development. The sonata form, with this technique dominated the entire Classical and the Romantic period. In the late Nineteenth-century, traditional dance movements appeared in pieces with a programmed suite such as Dvorak's *Orchestral Suites* or by numbers extracted from a ballet or opera (Bizet's *Bizet's L'Arlésienne*, Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*). These suites continued as well as a new type to promote the Baroque suite, such as Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

Chapter II. JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH AND *FRENCH OVERTURE*

1. Background

Johann Sebastian Bach was born on March 21, 1685, in Eisenach, a town in the central German province of Thuringia, into a musical family. His father, Johann Ambrosius Bach, was the music director of the town. After his mother's death in 1694 and his father's in the following year, Bach moved to Ohrdruf to live with his brother, Johann Christoph. Johann Christoph instructed his younger brother in keyboard playing, but Johann Sebastian was self-taught as a composer by copying the works of others. In 1700, Johann Sebastian continued his study at St. Michael's School in Lüneburg in Northern Germany, a region with a rich tradition of great organ playing. In 1704, he was appointed as an organist at Arnstadt's Bonifaciuskirche, where he composed most of his organ pieces.

In 1707, he became an organist at St. Blasius church in Mühlhausen and married a cousin, Maria Barbara Bach. The following year, he accepted an appointment as court composer for the Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Weimar. By 1714, Bach became the Konzertmeister of the court as well. He composed many keyboard and orchestral pieces and also absorbed Italian musical aspects by transcribing Vivaldi's concertos for harpsichord and organ. Bach moved to Cöthen in 1717 to serve as Kapellmeister to prince Leopold. The prince admired Bach so much that he not only paid him well but also allowed him to compose and perform as he wished. There, Bach composed the orchestral suites, the six cello suites, the violin sonatas and partitas and the Brandenburg concertos.

At that time, Handel was in Halle, twenty miles away, but when Bach went to visit him, Handel had already left, so the most influential musicians of the era never met. In 1721, His wife died, and he married Anna Magdalena Wilcke.

In 1722, Bach accepted the position of Kantor at the Thomasschule in Leipzig, one of Germany's musical and intellectual capitals, and, was also royal court composer to August III. His duties included instructing students in singing and providing music for the church services—he wrote over three hundred cantatas here. While there, he became the director of the Collegium Musicum, a performance ensemble of professional musicians and students, and expanded his composing and performing beyond the secular music. Bach's health drastically declined after two eye surgeries in 1749, and he died the following year at the age of 65.

2. National Influence of the time

During Bach's lifetime, the dominant musical culture in Europe was Italian. Opera was performed throughout Germany and therefore the influence of Italian operatic style on Bach's music seems undeniable. Obviously the Italian style is significant in his vocal music—the cantatas, the St. John and St. Matthew Passions, and the Mass in B minor—but also in the music for keyboard. The exuberant Italian melodic style can be found in the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and the *Goldberg Variations*.

Bach admired Vivaldi's concertos for their enriching harmonies, broad structures, beautiful singing melodies, and passionate energy. The *Italian Concerto* is one example

of his mastery of this Italian style through his transcription of concertos by Vivaldi, Telemann, and others for harpsichord.

France's musical culture was also an important influence on Bach's music. Serving as court musicians for Louis XIV, such eminent composers as Jean-Baptiste Lully, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Jacques de Chambonnières, both Louis and François Couperin, and Jean-Philippe Rameau composed sacred works, as well as opera, ballet, and other instrumental pieces, such as the French overture, the style and format of which had been widespread in Europe, and dances imported from all different European countries. The music was elegant and melodious but also profound and extensive. French music also had an elaborate and meticulously codified system of ornamentation, which Bach studied with the shrewd attention, with impressive results. He identified these French ornamentations in his work, *Clavier-büchlein* Volume 1.



Example 2-1: Bach *Clavier-büchlein*, Volume 1, Preface.

Bach demonstrated his mastery of synthesizing national styles and genres as well as his maturity with full richness of his imagination and complexity in his publication, *Clavier-übung* II in 1735. The first collection of *Clavier-übung* was published in 1731 containing 6 partitas. He named it after his predecessor, Johann Kuhnau, who had won great success with two sets of *Clavier-übung*, published in 1689 and 1692. Each set included a number of suites that he called partitas, which is the German word for the

suite. The second collection by Bach contained two works—a concerto, *Concerto nach Italienischen Gusto* and an overture, *Ouverture nach Französischer Art*—representing the two most popular orchestral genres and two different yet important national styles of the time. However, it is significant to see the fact that he combined not only the French and Italian styles in his music, but as a German composer, he absorbed both styles in his German writing. In the overture, there are three national styles present: French in the overture, with majestic, powerful dotted rhythm and ornamentations, Italian in the middle section, with solo and tutti alternation, and German also in the middle section, with highly complex contrapuntal texture.

3. Orchestral Suite vs *French Overture*

Both *Italian Concerto* and *French Overture* are composed for the harpsichord with two manuals. The *French Overture* is also defined as a partita but this work is a transfer to the keyboard of the French overture, which Bach titled both pieces from the significant orchestral genres from the era. It is essential to understand the characteristics of the Bach Orchestral suites.

There are four orchestral suites (BWV 1066-9) composed by Bach. It is not certain when exactly they were written but Bach performed them before the Prince of Cöthen and also in the Collegium Musicum in Leipzig. Bach titled these works orchestral suites, but they are in the same format as partitas or suites for the harpsichord except that the emphasis is less on the regular dances than on the galanterie movements. The allemande and the sarabande are replaced by traditional galanterie movements such as the

gavotte, the bourrée, the passepied, and the menuet as well as by unusual movements such as the rondeau, the air, the badinerie, and the réjouissance.

All the orchestral suites begin with an overture in the French style in binary form, |: A :||: B A1 :|. Although the design of the overture is French, it presents a *reunion des goûts* (reunion of different styles). The majestic and glorious first section featuring the dotted rhythms and rapid scalic ornaments, tirades, to the downbeat is particularly French but the second section, a fast, virtuosic section shows the Italian concerto style alternating between solo and tutti. The woodwinds solo in the first suite, a flute in the second, a violin in the third, and in the fourth suite, the various sections of the orchestra distinguish themselves from the tutti. All the other movements are derived from French court dances.

No. 1 in C major (1718?)

Overture, Courante, Gavotte I & II, Forlane, Menuett I & II, Bourrée I & II, Passepied I & II

No. 2 in B minor (1738-39)

Overture, rondeau, Sarabande, Bourrée I & II, Polonaise & Double, Menuett, Badinerie

No. 3 in D major (1731)

Overture, Air, Gavotte I & II, Bourrée, Gigue

No. 4 in D major (1725)

Overture, Bourrée I & II, Gavotte, Menuet I & II, Réjouissance

Bach's *French Overture* shows similarity to the *Orchestral Suites*. It begins with an imposing French overture, followed by a fast fugue in concerto form, just as in the orchestra suite. The dynamic indication, forte and piano, indicates that this was written for a two-manual harpsichord for dramatic effect, but more importantly shows the same

feature as the alternation between solo and tutti in orchestra. Bach leaves no dynamic indication, since it would be forte as the orchestra comes in full sound, but in the fugue, the two keyboards are indicated.



Example 2-2: Bach *Orchestral Suite* in D major, BWV. 1069, Overture, mm. 1-4.

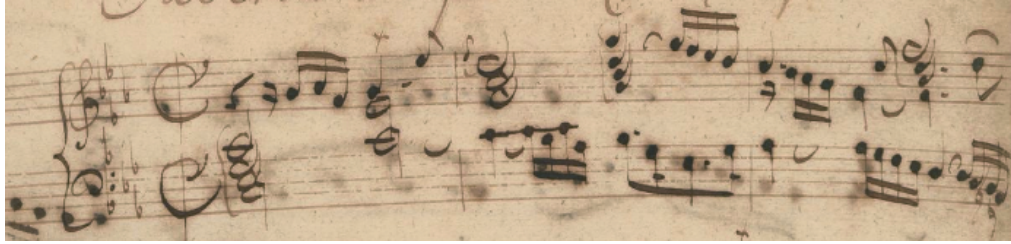


Example 2-3: Bach *French Overture*, Overture, mm. 1-3.

As in the orchestral suites, there is no allemande, and although the other standard dances of the traditional suite such as the courante, the sarabande and the gigue are

extensive, the emphasis is on the galanterie movements such as the gavotte, the passepied, the bourrée, which are all paired, and the final movement, echo.

The *French Overture* was originally in C minor but transposed to B minor, which was more suited to orchestral writing and has an exotic and evocative affect.



Example 2-4: manuscript copy of an early version of the *French Overture* in C minor³,
mm. 1-3.

4. *French Overture* Analysis

- Overture

The overture opens with a statement in powerful dotted rhythm of the theme followed by a fast and virtuosic fugue. The fugue starts and ends in the tonic in B minor, which may have finished the movement, but at the end of the fugue, the opening dotted section returns heroically.

According to the manuscript copy by Anna Magdalena Bach, the dotted rhythms are notated less heavily. Bach must have been aware of a convention of over-dotting as well as lengthening a quarter tied to a sixteenth and perhaps renotated them in the B

³ This manuscript copy is kept in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

minor revision. The treatment of thirty-second notes as an embellishment intensifies the zealous and passionate motion, which enhances the French atmosphere.

- Courante

The term courante is from the French word courir (to run). As the name indicates, it is a dance in a compound duple meter such as 3/2 or 6/4 featuring fast, running notes and a broken contrapuntal texture. The time signature often generates the complex hemiola-like patterns.

The courante in the *French Overture* is intricate and highly decorated. The droning pedal-point that repeats every four beats creates the hemiola.



Example 2-5: Bach *French Overture*, Courante, mm. 1-3.

- Gavotte I & II

There are many different opinions about the gavotte. James Grassineau defined the affect of the gavotte in his dictionary, which was published in 1740, as brisk and lively by nature. Rousseau's *dictonnaire de musiqué* in 1768 indicated that the movement of the gavotte is ordinarily graceful, often gay, and sometimes also tender and slow.

Marpurg mentioned that it could be either sad or joyful. The gavotte could express a great variety of affect, ranging from tender and graceful to joyful. Due to this quality, it was popularized in France in the mid-seventeenth century by Lully.

The metric structure is duple and the beat is the half note, and the harmonic change is primarily on the beat and pulse levels. The gavotte with its balanced, rhythming phrases and its slower tempo, allows possibilities for subtleties.

The gavotte in the *French Overture* is the first galanterie movement following the courante. A pair of the gavotte is simple and balanced. Sixteenth-note tirades appear frequently in both upper and lower voices, which bring out the delightful affect.



Example 2-6: Bach *French Overture*, Gavotte I, mm. 5-10.

The second gavotte is in a narrower and lower range of the keyboard than the first. The key, D major, contrasts with the first, B minor, and the indicated dynamic, piano, illustrates different timbre and color of the instrument.



Example 2-7: Bach *French Overture*, Gavotte II, mm. 1-4.

- Passepied I & II

The passepied is a delicate, rhythmically exciting dance. It is considered a fast minuet but has unusual rhythms such as offbeat accents, which occur at surprising times to entertain listeners. It was from the Bretagne region in France, and became very popular in the French court although it appeared much less often in suites than did the minuet, gavotte, and the bourrée.

In the *French Overture*, the passepied I explodes with a strong and passionate offbeat to a virtuosic trill on the opening dissonant harmony in measure 1, rolling into the rest of the phrase.



Example 2-8: Bach *French Overture*, Passepied I, mm. 1-6.

The second passepied is elaborated and delicate in the contrasting B major, evoking the pastoral and peaceful mood. A drone bass imitates the musette and the balanced four-measure phrase structure is clear.

- Sarabande

This slow, elegant Spanish dance made it to the French court where it became one of the most beloved dances. It is in triple time and uses a long note on the second beat of the measure, giving a graceful but halting effect. This is one of the most popular dances used for the theme of many slow movements of the sonata or orchestral pieces.



Example 2-9: Beethoven Piano Sonata in E major, Op. 109, 3rd movement, mm. 1-8.

In the *French Overture*, the sarabande is one of the most beautiful and intimate dances that makes the highest point of the suite. It is in four voices, and each voice expresses its expressive melody fluidly from the beginning to the end, but each voice is also densely integrated with each other. Bach shows his masterful craftsmanship of counterpoint—the melody appears in different forms: reversed, inverted and decorated. Highly chromatic, causing many pungent dissonances, this requires a great deal of depth of expression.

- Bourrée I & II

The bourrée is originated from the Auvergne region in France and its joyful, cheerful, comfortable and yet pleasing character made the bourrée very popular in the

French court. The meter is duple, the beat is the half note, and the harmonic change is primarily on the beat. The tempo is fast but Charles Masson specifies that both the bourrée and the rigaudon have the same tempo as the gigue. Muffat, however, wrote that the bourrée is faster than the gavotte.

The bourrée I shows the textbook model of the style with syncopations, runs, skips, and upbeats while the second bourrée has an upbeat of three eighth-notes in a softer dynamic, piano.

- Gigue

The gigue originated in England and was adapted to France in the mid-seventeenth century. It became very popular and composers used it to finish the suite. It is usually in 3/8, or in one of its compound meters such as 6/8, 9/8 or 12/8. There are two types of gigue—French gigue and Italian giga. The French gigue is lively and has a sautillant rhythm throughout the piece in one or more voices.



Example 2-10: Bach *French Suite* No. 2 in C minor, Gigue, mm. 1-4.

The metric structure is either duple or triple. The harmony changes usually on the first beat but also frequently on the third beat, giving a skipping and jolting characteristic.

The fugue-like entrances at the opening of the first half make the gigue distinguishable.

The second half often starts with the inversion of the subject.

Bach selected the French gigue in the overture in two-part texture. The two voices are independent but the bass tends to be subservient almost to the end. The tirades as well as the sautillant rhythm dominate the entire movement with strong energy.



Example 2-11: Bach *French Overture*, Gigue, mm. 1-3.

- Echo

Bach throws in the spectacular echo to end the work. The term refers to the repetition between forte and piano, but unlike in the suite in B flat major, BWV 821, no full bars are repeated but the echos are more ornate than the initiative passages. Echo movements were popular before Bach's time, but it is ingenious and artistic making the echo a variation.



Example 2-12: Bach *Suite* in B flat major, BWV 821, Echo, mm. 31-34.



Example 2-13: Bach *French Overture*, Echo, mm. 1-6.

Chapter III. BÉLA BARTÓK AND *DANCE SUITE*

1. Background

From the middle of the nineteenth century, a movement to rediscover national or ethnic roots began to appear in many parts of Europe. The results of this movement can be seen in the emergence of small new nations, or in the case of the United Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR), the formation of a massive union. National music schools also grew up at the same time, often rejecting the German Romanticism and employing the idioms of their native cultures. Composers incorporated characteristics from folk song and dance into their scores and used subject matter from folk history or legend as the basis for stage works or programmatic content. Sometimes, nationalistic traits were still mixed in with the mainstream of German Romanticism to some degree. Regardless of the extent of their involvement with the trend, the continued use of these folk materials with the development of national schools elsewhere became an important force in twentieth-century music.

Brahms and Liszt pioneered the use of Hungarian gypsy music, or folk music, in their compositions. However, there was no significant composer who researched the true folk music. Most Hungarian composers had been trained in Germany and remained true to the ideals of the grand tradition. Among them, was Ernő Dohnányi who composed a large amount of piano music, mostly character pieces, but also sets of variations and some etudes.

Béla Bartók was one of the most unique and important musical figures of the twentieth century. He was born on March 25, 1881 in Nagyszentmiklós, which became part of Romania with the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. His parents were both musicians—his father was a cellist and organized an amateur orchestra and his mother was a pianist who gave him the first piano lessons. According to Broughton, Bartók’s “first musical experiences were of his mother’s dance pieces, the ubiquitous gypsy music and the performances of his father’s amateur orchestra.”⁴ His father died when he was only seven, which left his mother in a serious financial situation. Despite these difficulties, Bartók showed extraordinary talent in piano and composition. He was always studying, practicing and composing, and took every opportunity to hear concerts. In his autobiography, he wrote that by the time he was eighteen, he “had acquired a fairly thorough knowledge of music from Bach to Brahms. In 1899, he was accepted to the Budapest Conservatory with a full scholarship, where he studied piano with István Thomán and composition with János Koessler.

During his school years, Bartók met Koessler’s private student, Zoltán Kodály, who was a year younger. Hungary was one of the places where nationalistic politics and culture prevailed. Along with Kodály, Bartók began to wear Hungarian costume all the time, even on the concert stage. He studied Liszt’s music diligently and put Liszt as one of the most important figures for the future development of music. His studies at the Conservatory were mostly successful, but his insistence on the fact that as a composer he wanted to develop a specifically Hungarian kind of music, was not popular with his teachers, who were trained in the German Romantic style.

⁴ Simon Broughton, Bartók and ‘World Music’ from *The Stage Works of Béla Bartók*, 13.

In the summer of 1905, Kodály and Bartók went on their first field trip to collect Hungarian folk music from different parts of the country, which inspired them to continue such trips to different neighboring countries soon. He wrote later, “I was seized with the desire to travel, so I began to explore Hungary. As I went from village to village I heard the true music of my race—folk music. This was just the stimulus I needed... I wanted to do two things: to bring back the spirit of folksong, and to harmonize the melodies in modern style.”⁵ He and Kodály published their first collection of folksongs in 1906, and Bartók published his first arrangement of folksongs, *Three Folk Songs from Csík Country*, for piano in 1907 and later the *Six Rumanian Dances*, the *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs* and two sets of *Rumanian Christmas Songs*.

Bartók’s direct transcriptions and arrangements of folk music for piano are simple and unpretentious. The most important of these are the *Six Rumanian Dances*, the *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs*, and two sets of *Rumanian Christmas Songs*. They reveal features that were to become important in his larger works: the slow declamatory type, which he named “parlando-rubato”, and the rapid dance type using strong, clear and periodic rhythms, which he named “tempo giusto”. Later, he was not just interested in making an arrangement of the folksongs, but wished to internalize the idiom, melodic types, phrase patterns, rhythms and instrumental colors to his manner of composing, in a way that it would become his language. Bartók’s admiration for new approaches to the sound and color of Debussy’s music made it possible for him to incorporate irregular meters, modal scales, and dissonant intervals and chords.

⁵ Lajos Lesznai, Bartók, London, 1972, 51.

Following his successful career as a pianist in Europe, in 1907, Bartók became a professor of piano at the Budapest Conservatory. His effort to organize a New Hungarian Music Society for orchestral concerts failed and he retired from public life and devoted himself to teaching, composing and studying. Bartók's reputation as a composer grew and his compositions were played throughout Europe and the United States. However, his inclination toward the ethno-music became the target for nationalists, and also he felt troubled with the rise of fascism in Europe. He refused to play concerts in Germany after 1933, and in 1937 he forbade performances of his works there. As Hungary and Romania fell under the influence of fascist politicians, Bartók became a target for criticism in the Hungarian press.⁶ In 1940, he immigrated to the United States. He held a research appointment at Columbia University where awarded him an honorary doctorate and also he took an offer from Harvard as a visiting appointment to present one recital and two lecture series on recent Hungarian music. His illness caused suffering throughout his stay in the States and in 1945 he died in New York after a month-long relapse.

2. Dance Suite Analysis on national influence

In my opinion, all the progressive music of our day has in common two attributes, which, however, are interlinked, so to speak, like cause and effect. The one attribute is a more or less radical turning way from the music of yesterday, particularly that of the Romanticists. The second attribute is the urge to approximate the musical styles of older periods. In this harking back to quite ancient musical styles . . . either there is a reversion to olden peasant music . . . or

⁶ Malcolm Gillies. "Bartók, Béla." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 14, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40686pg6>.

there is a reversion to the older art music—namely the art music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷

Bartók composed the *Dance Suite* originally for orchestra (1923), commissioned for a concert celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the unification of Buda, Obuda and Pest. Buda was an old city with its imperial traditions and aristocratic residences and Pest was a fast-growing commercial center and abode of both the middle and working classes. The city instantly became one of Europe's major metropolitan areas. The commemoration was significant for Hungarians who lost more than two-thirds of their land to neighboring countries and also all of natural resources after the Treaty of Trianon (1920), following the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the World War I. Having lost his hometown to Romania, Bartók integrated Hungarian and other national folk materials from Rumanians, Slovaks, Arabs and weaved them into one masterpiece as a victorious chant to celebrate and memorialize the unification of a city which implies a unification of diverse people, culture and land. Brogton wrote, “in the Dance Suite, the peasant-like melodies of diverse character are juxtaposed. It is a musical statement of his belief in the brotherhood of the peasant.”⁸ However, Bartók omitted a movement with a Slovak character in the final version.

Zoltán Kodály and Ernő Dohnányi also contributed *Psalmus Hungaricus* and *Festival Overture*, Op. 31 respectively. The concert, on November 19, 1923, was successful but Bartók was not happy. Glass wrote, “[Bartók’s] *Dance Suite* was so badly

⁷ Béla Bartók, “The Folk Songs of Hungary” (1928), in *Béla Bartók’s Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 331.

⁸ Simon Broughton, Bartók and ‘World Music’ from *The Stage Works of Béla Bartók*, 16.

performed that it could not achieve any significant success.” Bartók was complaining “in spite of its simplicity there are few difficult places, and our Philharmonic musicians were not sufficiently adult for them. Rehearsal time was, as usual, much too short, so the performance sounded like a sight-reading, and a poor one at that.”⁹ The Suite was performed again in the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Prague by the Czech Philharmonic under Václav Talich two years later. The reception was enthusiastic with performances throughout Europe following and Bartók subsequently transcribed it for piano.

The *Dance Suite* does not contain direct quotes of original folk melodies but it reflects with every detail the spirit of the national character of these peasant sources. All of these folk sources become united in the finale of the *Dance Suite*. Bartók wrote, “This could not have been written by anyone but an Eastern European musician.”¹⁰

... six small dance-like movements, one of which, the ritornello—as its name indicates—returns several times in the manner of a leitmotif. The thematic material of all the movements is in imitation of peasant music. The aim of the whole work was to put together a kind of idealized peasant music—you could say an invented peasant music—in such a way that the individual movements of the work should introduce particular types of music. Peasant music of all nationalities served as a model: Magyar, Rumanian, Slovak and even Arabic. In fact, here and there is even a hybrid of these species. Thus, for example, the melody of the first subject of the first movement is reminiscent of primitive Arabic peasant music, whereas its rhythm is of East European folk music ... The fourth movement is an imitation of quite complex Arabic music, perhaps of urban origin... The ritornello theme is such a faithful imitation of a certain kind of Hungarian folk melodies that its derivation might puzzle even the most knowledgeable musical folklorist... the second movement is Hungarian in character, and the third is alternately Hungarian and Rumanian.¹¹

⁹ Herbert Glass, *Dance Suite*, LA Philharmonic Orchestra Concert Note, 2013.


¹⁰ Béla Bartók, “Hungarian Music” (1944), in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff, 396.

¹¹ Tibor Tallián, “Béla Bartók: The Man and His Work,” 133.

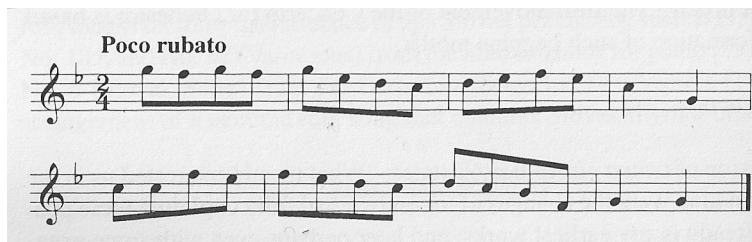
- I. Moderato

The opening melody is built on a four-note chromatic motif influenced by Arab music and microtonal folk instruments heard on his trip to North Africa. He wrote, “My first chromatic melody I invented in 1923. I used it as the first theme of my *Dance Suite*. This music has some resemblance to an Arab melody. This kind of melodic invention was only an incidental digression on my part and had so special consequences.”¹²

In 1913, Bartók traveled Algeria and Morocco to collect and record folk music and classified various types of Arabian and African folk melodies. He indicated two characteristics, which are not found in European music: 1. Percussion instruments accompany almost every tempo giusto melody and 2. The intervals of the scale are only infrequently based on the diatonic or chromatic system. These intervals change according to locality, performer, and the instrument used.

The 2/4 rhythmic schema of constant eighth-notes over three measures ending with a bar of two quarter notes,  is typical of Ukrainian *kolomyjka* (round dance) melodies and was taken over by Transylvanian-Hungarians for their *kanásztánc* (hogherder’s dance) melodies.

¹² Béla Bartók, “Harvard Lectures” (1943), in *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff, 379.



Example 3-1: Ruthenian folk-song melody. The underlying folk text has fourteen syllables.

The arrangement of slurs is an ingenious adaptation of Romanian “shifted” rhythm resulting in emphatic rendition of melodic intervals of a minor third, major second, and minor second.



Example 3-2: Bartok, Dance Suite for Piano, 1st movement, mm. 1-6.


A great flexibility of rhythm is required as the underlying pulse of these tempo giusto dance movement must be maintained while allowing for rhythmic shifts and occasional stretchings of tempo. Articulation is essential and will help to make the rubatos indicated in the score sound more like the natural continuation of the rhythmic pulse.

- Ritornello

The ritornello plays a role of leitmotif, providing points of reference to bind the piece together and connect the dances to each other. It has a reflective, sentimental character. The first ritornello begins with a delicate upward glissando in the harp that leads to the theme in the Aeolian mode in G, in four muted solo violins accompanied by muted strings and horn. According to Gilles, Bartók was pleased with the theme and wrote “the ritornello theme is such a faithful imitation of a certain kind of Hungarian folk melody that its derivation might puzzle even the most knowledgeable of musical folklorists.”¹³

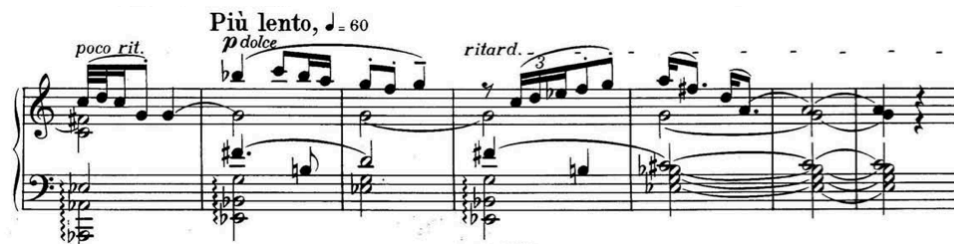
Example 3-3: Bartók *Dance Suite*, 1st movement, mm. 118-131.

¹³ Malcolm Gilles, *Dance Suite, Bartok Companion*

The ritornello theme is influenced by Hungarian folk music. Bartók and Kodály categorized the Hungarian, Magyar folk music into three types: 1. Free, declamatory rhythm in slow melodies, “parlando-rubato”, 2. Strict rhythm generally in 2/4 time, “tempo giusto”, and 3. The dotted rhythm.¹⁴ This parlando music derives its rhythmic characteristics from the Hungarian language in which the vowels may be divided into short and long or long short, . Each word has its accent on the first vowel. The ritornello theme of the Dance Suite has this parlando-rubato rhythm, and it brings the nostalgic and distant, which reflects the sentimental mood of Hungarian romanticism.



Example 3-4. *Béla Bartók's Essays* p. 385 music example No. 21.



Example 3-5: Bartók *Dance Suite*, 1st movement, 139-145.

- II. Allegro molto

¹⁴ Harvard lectures, from Béla Bartók *Essays*, 385.

The second movement *Allegro molto* is very Hungarian and vigorous and peasantry in character with full of pounding and hammering minor-second interval. It has more concentrated texture than the first movement and has more lively and active rhythm as well. The meter is complex with quick alternation between 3/8, 5/8 and 7/8. Suddenly, the music stops with a strong dissonant chord, and a harp glissando leads to the ritornello, with clarinet solo and changed melodic line.

Example 3-6: Bartók *Dance Suite*, 2nd movement, mm. 83-97.

- III. Allegro vivace

The third movement starts in a lighter, more cheerful mood. The tune is introduced by a Hungarian pentatonic bagpipe tune over a drone on horns and piano but

soon becomes more active, both harmonically and rhythmically. The melody appears twice later, each time with different orchestration and with thematic variation, creating a rondo form.



Example 3-7: Bartók Dance Suite , 3rd movement, mm. 1-6.

The second theme shows the Rumanian influence with its violin style and irregular meter.¹⁵ There is no ritornello at the end and it finishes energetically with a main theme in a vivacissimo, fortissimo.



Example 3-8: Bartók Dance Suite, 3rd movement, mm. 29-33.

- IV. Molto tranquillo

¹⁵ Malcolm Gilles, Dance Suite, p. 492.

After a pause, the very tranquil dance, No. 4, *Molto tranquillo* is introduced by the English horn and the bass clarinet establishing the completely different world. Each phrase comes with an added instrument, which enriches the color but also expands the dynamic. As the music reaches the climax, it dies gradually by withdrawing instruments in reverse order. It is evocative of Arabian night in the stillness of the desert that Bartók experienced and remembered vividly. At the end of this poignant, beautiful movement, there is a reflective remembrance of the ritornello theme.

- V. Comodo

After the ritornello, the quiet but urgent fifth dance begins. The music piles up the interval of fourth on top of the other with hardly dynamic changes. Suddenly a strong low brass statement interrupts the exotic and primitive mood. According to Bartók, this lacks a particular ethnicity: “the theme of No. 5 is so primitive that one can only speak of a primitive peasant character here.”¹⁶

- Finale, Allegro

The Finale displays Bartók’s craftsmanship to combine all the dance themes as well as the ritornello and interweave them into one piece. The energetic and pompous first movement theme announces the beginning of the festival following the fanfare-like motive of the superimposed fourth. With its fast and exciting sectional contrasts and

¹⁶ Béla Bartók letters, p. 202.

shifts, sonorities, and texture, the Finale is perhaps the most technically and musically challenging movement of the entire suite. This movement is like the ballet or the opera when all the characters show up back on the stage and get introduced again and celebrate all together. For Bartók, this piece was significant to celebrate his recent marriage but also to commemorate the anniversary of the unification of the Hungarian cities, which brought all the nationalistic folk materials together and braided into one piece to celebrate the other unification.

3. Orchestral Dance Suite vs Piano Transcription

With the piano transcription, Bartók discloses a significantly different orientation toward the piano. The thin texture of his other piano suites is replaced by a thicker and much more intricately woven fabric. The simple homophonic vocal model of melody plus accompaniment is still present, but its heavier texture indicates that Bartók started with a rich and varied orchestral sound palette already in his ears. Had Bartók originally composed the Dance Suite for piano, its style would probably have been less repetitive, much simpler.



Example 3-9: Bartok *Suite*, Op. 14, 1st movement, mm. 1-6.



Example 3-10: Bartók *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs*, Op. 20, No. 2, mm.

1-6.

Although the wide dynamic resources of the full orchestra are not available to the piano, Bartók's extremely virtuosic and naturally pianistic writing makes it easier for the pianist to explore the inherent orchestral sonorities and rich color possibilities of the instrument. Substituting the medium of the solo piano provides a more unified sound, similar to the homogenous fabric of stringed instruments within a string quartet. The ear naturally adjusts to these boundaries, and contrasts can be equally bold and dramatic. Thus, the solo and orchestral versions of the *Dance Suite* emerge as two separate and quite individual sound paintings, each possessing its own integral unity.

Bartók achieves wonderful orchestral effects: the opening bassoon melody and the trombone and brass of the second movement, the antiphonal string and brass writing in the third movement, the English horn solo and harp writing in the fourth movement, the trumpets of the finale, and the uniquely individual colors and voice clarity created with doubled brass and woodwinds. All are impossible to duplicate at the piano. However, the imaginative pianist, possessed with a good technical facility and knowledge of his instrument, will be able to deliver a different but totally satisfying performance of the *Dance Suite*.

As with most solo transcriptions of orchestral works, what formerly was divided among any instruments is now transferred to one soloist, who has only two hands to carry the entire load. Because of these orchestral roots and the piano's limitations, frequent use of the sostenuto pedal will be necessary throughout the piece to faithfully observe all of Bartók's pedal points.

The musical score for Example 3-11 is written in bass clef and 3/8 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system begins with a *ritard.* marking, followed by a *a tempo* marking. The first system includes dynamic markings of *sf* and *mf*. The second system begins with a tempo marking of *Meno mosso, ♩ = 84*, followed by an *accel.* marking. The second system includes dynamic markings of *dim.* and *p*.

Example 3-11: Bartók *Dance Suite*, 1st movement, mm. 21-35

The musical score for Example 3-12 is written in treble clef and 3/8 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system begins with a *poco rit.* marking, followed by a *cresc.* marking and a *sf* dynamic marking. The second system begins with a tempo marking of *a tempo (♩ = 104)* and an *mf* dynamic marking. A measure number '5' is indicated at the end of the second system.

Example 3-12: Bartók *Dance Suite*, 1st movement, mm. 76-81

In the third movement, there is a four-voice canon played by the four hands piano, with each entry at the interval of one-quarter note, but due to the dense scoring, the polyphony cannot be heard. In the piano transcription, the each entrance is written out only for the first two quarter-notes with the accompaniment of the harp and the rest of the orchestra.

The image shows a page of a musical score for Bartók's *Dance Suite*, 3rd movement, measures 83-88. The score is written for a full orchestra and harp. The top staves include Piccolo (Fl.), Clarinet in A (Cl. (A)), Bassoon (Fg.), Cymbal (Camp.), Triangle (Ptti.), and Harp (Arp.). The harp part features a four-voice canon, with each voice entering at a quarter-note interval. The string section (Violins I and II, Violas, and Cellos) and woodwinds (Flutes, Clarinets, Bassoons, and Contrabass) provide accompaniment. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *pp*, *mf*, and *p*, and performance instructions like *colla mano*, *sempre simile*, and *con sord.*. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 130. The score is numbered 31 at the beginning of the section.

Example 3-13: Bartók *Dance Suite*, 3rd movement, mm. 83-88.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a tempo marking of quarter note = 130. The middle staff is in treble clef with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The bottom staff is in bass clef. The music consists of rhythmic patterns with various intervals and accidentals, including sharps and naturals. Vertical dotted lines connect the staves at specific points, indicating harmonic or rhythmic relationships between the parts.

Example 3-14: Bartók *Dance Suite*, 3rd movement, mm. 84-87.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study of Bach's *French Overture* and Bartók's *Dance Suite*, we have seen how distinct and similar Bach and Bartók were in their compositional approaches toward the dance suite. As a Kantor or a Kapellmeister employed by princes or the church, and under the heavy influence of French court culture, it is evident to see that Bach wrote his dance suites with French court dances in mind. However, as a German composer, he synthesized both the French style (French overture and dance music) and Italian style (opera and concerto) in his German, polyphonic writing to create his own musical language. Similarly, Bartók, who searched for his Hungarian identity by studying folk music and expanded his musical boundaries to neighboring and African countries, also developed his own compositional language. Both Bach and Bartók showed impeccable craftsmanship to combine various national influences in the development of their own musical voices.

Both composers chose the medium of orchestra for their dance suites and wrote keyboard versions later, which shows how differently these pieces were composed in comparison to their earlier keyboard compositional styles. Bach's *French Overture* shows a similar movement structure and dynamic contrasts while Bartók's *Dance Suite* achieved the maximum level of piano writing in terms of texture, sonority, and technique. With this in mind, one needs a great deal of imagination to perform these pieces on the piano.

As Kodály pointed out, "[A] German musician will be able to find in Bach and Beethoven what we had to search for in our villages: the continuity of a national musical

tradition. . . to become international, one must first be national, and to be national, one must be of the people.”¹⁷ In this sense, both Bach and Bartók, who were of the people and masters of their own musical languages, were truly international.

¹⁷ David Burge, *Twentieth-Century Piano Music*, New York, Shirmer Books, 1990, 74.

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