

TANZ

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Guitar*



Tanz, Danza, Dance, Tanzen.

Ironically, none of the music on this CD was actually meant for dancing. I had often heard that the suites and the partitas were idealized sets of dances that were not suitable for actual courtly dancing, and always wondered how this could be: how could something sound like a sarabande and yet not be one? For example, if I wrote a waltz and gave it three beats per bar, a couple could waltz to it. These courtly musical gems had the right number of beats per measure and included the necessary anacrusis; what then was the problem?

I found part of my answer while accompanying Baroque dancers performing sarabandes on YouTube. They consistently ended the dance before I finished playing; and they always broke off at the same place, at a strong internal cadence, just before a piece might become more complex.

Now, the waltz is danced with just three repeated steps; the steps for a sarabande, however, work in four-measure segments, for sixteen bars. If the music then continues, then this is where we enter the realm of an idealized dance.

***The B-minor Partita, BWV 1002,** takes this to an even further degree because each movement is accompanied by its own double, or variation of itself. While the main movements, the Allemande, Corrente, Sarabande and Bourrée, can be easily recognized for the dances they represent, their doubles make no such effort, and simply run in streams of continuous eighth notes.*

*Take for example the **Tempo di Borea:** Just looking at the title, Bach did not call it “Bourrée”; rather, he wrote “tempo di” i.e., “in the tempo of.” Why is this not a real bourrée? Bach does allude very specifically to the anapestic rhythms, which conform with the “pas de bourrée.”*

The Tempo di Borea also makes great use of French endings, inserting the little signature tag where it belongs in the dance, reminding us that this is undeniably a bourrée. Its double disregards those conventions entirely, indeed using a three-note pick-up rather than the customary two. However, the Bourrée itself refers to the Double, foreshadowing its lyricism, breaking off from the bourrée type rhythms, and soaring out in long melodic lines. All this alludes to sonata-type writing, and it is seamlessly interwoven into the strong rhythmic fabric of the dance.

We must understand that this music was meant for cultured folk who

knew the dances and who were also heavily steeped in the current tradition of the sonata, which was a more introspective and narrative type of music. As David Ledbetter points out in "Unaccompanied Bach, Performing the Solo Works", it is as if sonata-type writing is so tightly intertwined with the dance style, that we sometimes have to wonder if this is a dance trying to emulate a sonata, or a sonata trying to eclipse the dance. Bach's patrons could follow this interplay and took part in the game.

*The **Allemanda** that opens the suite is about as stylized as it gets. Because we have have no surviving*



choreographies and not a single written account that describes the dancing of an allemanda, it is likely that it was not danced at all.

*The **Corrente** is in the Italian style, faster than the slow French courante. The Presto, the Corrente's double, is actually marked "Double Presto." Was Bach aware of his pun, not only calling this a presto but actually a **Double** presto? He and his family were notorious for making musical puns in all manner, naughty and nice. Perhaps here Bach was thinking: "Have a fast Italian Corrente! --on the double!!"*

*If you think about Bach's music as emulating what was common practice in that time, and pushing it to the extreme, we could then expect that the dances in **Weiss' Lute Suite N° 34** show less complexity insofar as how the dance and sonata styles are intertwined.*

Although Weiss' dates are almost identical to Bach's, Weiss was a friend of Bach's son W. Friedman; he was also lutenist in Dresden, at the same court where Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach eventually found employment. So there was a multifaceted connection between Weiss and the Bach family, and we have several touching anecdotes about family visits such as the following account by Johann Friedrich Reichard:

"Anyone who knows how difficult it is to play ... on the lute will be surprised and full of disbelief to hear from eyewitnesses that Weiss, the great lutenist, challenged J.S. Bach, the great harpsichordist and organist, at playing fantasies and fugues."

*While the **Aria detta la frescobalda** makes no immediate pretence at being a dance, there is a variation explicitly named Galliard e Corrente. Here is perhaps one of the earliest instances of the crossover between sonata and dance-type writing.*

Frescobaldi advocated interpreting music so as to effect a vocal style of performance, in which the rhythm may be unequal and where the mood or emotion of a piece is allowed to shine above all else.

*Living during a time when there was a lot of strife and division of opinion as to what the best temperament for tuning might be, Frescobaldi was not alone in the search for answers. Astronomers, scientists, clergy, philosophers, and even a clockmaker, all took vociferous part in the heated debate--for well over two hundred years. The **Variazioni** highlight the interplay between the perfect fifth C/G, and distantly-related major third B/D#. Since it was composed for a keyboard instrument, one must wonder if these two intervals, a pure fifth moving to a raucous third, were purposefully juxtaposed or if he had chosen to retune his harpsichord in a way that would serve only that piece but would allow both those intervals*

to be in tune. However, Frescobaldi, who first and foremost was a great proponent of musical expressivity, also said that "harsh dissonances should be repeated, so as to enhance the expressive effect"; and so it is possible that the crunching major thirds, which occur at cesurae in this piece, while not actually dissonant, did provide a sense of angst because of what we may now consider a problem of unequal temperament.

*The **Dowland Fantasia** begins by copying Renaissance choral music exactly: An opening phrase is sung by the soprano section, repeated an octave lower by the tenors, and then an octave lower again, this time by the bass. This technique, called "pointing," made its way into instrumental music and later grew into the fugue, where the initial melody, or subject, tends to be shorter and more rhythmically animated, and the entries come on the tonics and dominants, allowing a composer to*

set up the strong sense of tonality that was the hallmark of the Baroque period. All this notwithstanding, in his fantasia John Dowland is very gradually, stealthily and surreptitiously transforming strict Renaissance sacred-counterpoint into a dance and, by the end, both clergy and noblemen would have found it hard to stay in their seats.

*The **Minuets** by **David Clenman** were composed in this century and, ironically, of all the music on the CD*

this may be the one that most closely follows the model of its traditional courtly dance. Here we have a dance historian composing music with the express goal of making something lovely that one could easily dance to, rather than a court composer writing sophisticated music for his witty and cultured patron.



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