



Johann Sebastian Bach
ENGLISH SUITES BWV 806 - 811

Andrea Bacchetti



DECCA

Johann Sebastian Bach ENGLISH SUITES BWV 806 - 811
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CD 1

English Suite No. 1 in A major, BWV 806

1	Prélude	2.29
2	Allemande	4.24
3	Courante I	1.37
4	Courante II	2.48
5	Double I	2.46
6	Double II	2.50
7	Sarabande	4.38
8	Bourrée I	2.08
9	Bourrée II	2.40
10	Gigue	2.41

English Suite No. 2 in A minor, BWV 807

11	Prélude	5.33
12	Allemande	3.34
13	Courante	1.50
14	Sarabande et les agréments de la même Sarabande	4.06
15	Bourrée I	2.23
16	Bourrée II	2.16
17	Gigue	2.29

English Suite No. 3 in G minor, BWV 808

18	Prélude	3.41
19	Allemande	3.30
20	Courante	2.16
21	Sarabande et les agréments de la même Sarabande	3.48
22	Gavotte I	1.47
23	Gavotte II	1.48
24	Gigue	2.51

total timing	71.18
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CD 2

English Suite No. 4 in F major, BWV 809

1	Prélude	4.49
2	Allemande	3.54
3	Courante	1.35
4	Sarabande	3.37
5	Menuet I	1.16
6	Menuet II	1.56
7	Gigue	3.15

English Suite No. 5 in E minor, BWV 810

8	Prélude	6.49
9	Allemande	4.02
10	Courante	2.18
11	Sarabande	3.33
12	Passepied I	1.09
13	Passepied II	1.55
14	Gigue	3.07

English Suite No. 6 in D minor, BWV 811

15	Prélude	8.59
16	Allemande	4.00
17	Courante	2.27
18	Sarabande	3.15
19	Double	1.40
20	Gavotte I	1.55
21	Gavotte II	2.26
22	Gigue	3.43

total timing 71.58

Andrea Bacchetti, piano

Johann Sebastian Bach THE ENGLISH SUITES

Johann Sebastian Bach was possibly the first composer to realize that the scoring, technique, structural typology and even sonority of the orchestral music of his time could be transferred to the keyboard. Obviously with full awareness of his own ability in terms of knowledge of composition in assimilating different musical styles into his own language. And so, while putting himself to the test with the classical forms of the German keyboard tradition (organ fugue, variation, chorale, toccata and so on), achieving an unusual breadth and a surprising artistic level, he also showed his ability to use the harpsichord keyboard to imitate a baroque concerto (*Italian Concerto*), an overture in the style of Lully (*French Overture*) or a dance suite. He produced three series of these dance suites, using themes that he had composed himself: the *French Suites*, the *English Suites* and the *Partitas* (or German suites).

The basic structure of Bach's suites was inherited from the instrumental tradition and he himself kept to it essentially in the form of the *French Suites*. It consists of four dances, usually given their French

names: *allemande* (of German origin), *courante* (French), *sarabande* (Spanish) and *gigue* (English). They are stylized dances, not suitable to be used for dancing. In the larger-scale works, such as the *English Suites* or the *Partitas*, Bach introduces extensive opening preludes, which in the *Partitas* have a variety of titles (*Preambulum*, *Sinfonia*, *Fantasia*, etc.), and before the closing *gigue* he inserts other dances - generally in pairs - known at the time as *galanteries*, of French derivation: *bourrées*, *gavottes*, *menuets* and *passepieds*.

Various hypotheses have been put forward since the time of Bach's first biographers to justify the use of the word "English" in the name by which these suites are now known; the term is stylistically inaccurate, because the style is typically French, and the original title was simply "Suites with preludes". Bachian numerology has also emphasized the fact that these suites are six in number, each having six movements, and that there is a stepwise descent in the sequence of tonalities: A major, A minor, G minor, F major, E minor, D minor.

The most characteristic and novel and

certainly most impressive movement in these suites is the opening prelude, almost always in fugue style, with a repetition of the first part; more concise in the first suite and more extensive in the sixth (with two episodes: *adagio*, *allegro*). In these preludes Bach foreshadows something that he succeeded in showing with what I would describe as even more "instructive" clarity in the *Italian Concerto*: the use of the harpsichord with two keyboards (not yet explicitly requested) to recall the first movement of a baroque "concerto grosso", with its alternation of *Tutti* and *Soli*. Obviously the performance on the piano makes up for the lack of a second keyboard with the dynamic differences that the modern instrument allows.

The prelude is followed by various dances. The *Allemande* is generally a flowing andante of a melodic nature, the *Courante* even more flowing (excessively so with some performers!), a mixture of melodic and joyful with a torrent of ornaments, the *Sarabande*, by contrast, is the lyrical moment in the suite, somewhat static and often enriched by an ornamented echo of

itself (*Double*), and finally the *Gigue* provides a rapid, brilliant conclusion, often in fugue style - complex and harmonically bold in the last suite. Deservedly famous among the *Galanterien* in these suites are the *Bourrées* in the second and third suites, also because they are the only suites included in our conservatoire programmes.

Riccardo Risaliti
Translated by Karel Clapshaw

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