

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

4 SUITEN FÜR ORCHESTER
4 SUITES FOR ORCHESTRA
4 SUITES POUR ORCHESTRE

ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS

Dirigent/conducted by/direction:

NEVILLE MARRINER

William Bennett, Flöte/flute/flûte (BWV 1067)

Celia Nicklin, Barry Davis & Susan Leadbetter, Oboe/oboes/hautbois

Graham Sheen, Fagott/bassoon/basson

Michael Laird, William Houghton & Edward Hobart, Trompete/trumpets/trompettes

Nicholas Kraemer, Cembalo/harpsichord/clavecin

9500 530

Seite 1/Side 1/Face 1:

Suite Nr. 1 C-dur/
in C/
en ut majeur

BWV 1066

Ouverture

Courante

Gavotte I-II

Forlane

Menuet I-II

Bourrée I-II

Passepied I-II

Seite 2/Side 2/Face 2:

Suite Nr. 2 h-moll/
in B minor/
en si mineur

BWV 1067

Ouverture

Rondeau

Sarabande

Bourrée I-II

Polonaise

Menuet

Badinerie

9500 531

Seite 3/Side 3/Face 3:

Suite Nr. 3 D-dur/
in D/
en ré majeur

BWV 1068

Ouverture

Air

Gavotte I-II

Bourrée

Gigue

Seite 4/Side 4/Face 4:

Suite Nr. 4 D-dur/
in D/
en ré majeur

BWV 1069

Ouverture

Bourrée I-II

Gavotte

Menuet I-II

Réjouissance



Around 1700, while the concerto and symphony were the typical Italian forms, the orchestral suite (also called overture, after its opening movement) was developed in France. The creator of the overture is generally agreed to be Jean-Baptiste Lully. Half-Italian, Lully entered the service of Mademoiselle d'Orléans in 1646 as *Garçon de la chambre*, was trained as a musician, and very soon began to compose. He then joined the court orchestra as a violinist, performed also as a dancer and an actor, and finally rose to the position of court composer, leader of the celebrated *Petits violons* and *Maître de la musique de la famille royale*. This French overture was a necessary, indeed indispensable preliminary to every *Ballet de cour*, comedy ballet or lyric tragedy mounted at the French court in the late seventeenth century. Its use of comparatively large orchestral forces, the solemn and stately rhythms of its outer movements contrasting strongly with its fugal middle section, mark it as typical baroque "entrance music," an outward expression of the power and might of the sovereign, who made his entry to its strains.

It was similarly defined in 1732 by Johann Sebastian Bach's friend Johann Gottfried Walther, in his "Musicalisches Lexicon": "Overture signifies opening, since this instrumental piece opens, as it were, the door to the suites or other pieces which follow. Its proper place is at the beginning of an opera, or other stage performance, though it is often placed before chamber-pieces." Its being put "before chamber-pieces," particularly before a suite of dances for a fairly large instrumental ensemble, was the final stage in the development of the overture.

Originally, around 1600, the orchestral suite consisted of a succession of pavaues, entrées, galliards, courantes, allemandes, and other, less usual dances. In the middle of the seventeenth century the cyclic form established itself in Germany. A free opening movement was followed by allemande, courante, and sarabande; occasionally other dances were interpolated. This kind of suite, of which Johann Rosenmüller was the foremost practitioner, became more strongly influenced in the second half of the century by the French suite, particularly that of Lully; and fashionable dances like the gavotte and minuet ousted the older forms. At the beginning was put the majestic overture, whose weight and importance finally gave its name to the whole suite.

While Italy continued autocratically to cultivate her own particular forms, the French suite aroused lively echoes in the other neighbouring countries. In Germany it first became popular in those courts which were culturally and politically oriented towards France; a generation later it had spread to all courtly and bourgeois circles. The year 1695 saw the publication in Augsburg by Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer, *Kapellmeister* of the Margrave of Baden, as his Op. 1, of eight overture-suites for orchestra under the title of "Journal du printemps." These already show a marked development since Lully. Fischer certainly uses the French five-part string section (it differs from the four-part Italian in having two violas of different sizes); but he lavishes greater care on the development of detail, particularly in the fugal middle section, as well as being a great deal more inventive than his models, so that his orchestral suites are rightly regarded by music historians as forming an important link between Lully and Bach.

In the early eighteenth century, almost all German composers of any importance wrote orchestral suites. I mention here only Georg Philipp Telemann, Johann Christoph Graupner, and Johann Friedrich Fasch. Johann Sebastian Bach transcribed in his own hand many overture-suites by the last named. Only four orchestral suites by Bach himself have come down to us. Heinrich Bessler, who edited these works for the "Neue Bach Ausgabe," maintains that there were very probably other works of this type which have been lost. Unfortunately also, the four we do possess have come down to us in inadequate

form. Since the autograph scores are lost, we have to depend nowadays on the parts Bach, and a copyist, wrote out for performances by his Leipzig Collegium Musicum between 1730 and 1740, or on other, later transcriptions, for example those of Christian Friedrich Penzel. Some of these performing copies were inherited by Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel.

In these circumstances it is not easy to arrive at an exact reconstruction of these works. It cannot be definitely said what Bach's instrumentation was, when, and for what occasions he wrote the suites, and, most important, how often, and in what ways he revised his original settings. The fact that Bach's re-use of numerous works - one has only to think of the St. John Passion - regularly involved often far-reaching changes, makes it reasonable to assume that these suites also underwent certain metamorphoses. All we know for certain about the fourth suite is that in 1725 a third instrumental group containing trumpets and drums was added to the original strings and winds. Suites one to three we also know only in the Leipzig settings, not in the original.

Bessler convincingly justifies the proposition that Bach wrote the suites in the order of their modern numbering - No. 1 circa 1718, No. 2 circa 1721, No. 3 circa 1722, and No. 4 circa 1723; the last named achieved its final form in 1725, in the Sinfonia of the cantata "Unser Mund sei voll Lachens" (BWV 110). By this reckoning, the suites were composed in the Cöthen period. Thanks to the researches of Smend, Vetter, and Bessler, we now know the exact make-up of the little court orchestra at Cöthen; and it requires no great effort of imagination to reconstruct the instrumentation of the suites as they would have been performed there. These considerations lead us to the conclusion that Bach's orchestral suites were performed by a chamber orchestra, and not by any larger forces; this is supported by the fact that normally music for only one desk has come down to us. This recording by the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields under Neville Marriner takes full account of these historical findings.

The Suite No. 1 in C, besides being presumably the earliest, is also the most compendious, having altogether 11 movements. Bach obviously wanted to make his first work in this genre a model of its kind. This is borne out by the meticulous care with which he developed detail. The soaring melodic lines of the overture's outer movements are distinguished by that long breath which gives the work its sublime dignity. The fugato theme of the middle section relies on the usual seventeenth-century *ricercare* style, and shows no great striving towards original invention; this very fact points to its early date. After the striking opening we have six dance movements, of which gavotte, minuet, bourrée, and passepied are in pairs; with the second of each pair, mostly in reduced orchestration, Bach achieves contrasts which give the whole cycle life and colour. Courante and forlana appear only once, in straightforward settings. The latter was originally a sixteenth-century Venetian folk-dance, distinguished by its 6/4 time and highly individual rhythms.

The fact that three years separate Suite No. 1 from Suite No. 2 in B minor is evident in the more mature handling of the fugato theme in the overture of the latter. This is constructed in what was then the modern dualistic form, with a two-bar opening figure answered by a two-bar second figure, so that it deserves the name of "characteristic theme." The overture is followed by six dances: rondeau, sarabande, bourrée, polonaise, minuet, and badinerie, of which only the bourrée is set as a pair, and the polonaise contains a "double," or variation. The suite has, as it were, an ulterior motive; it is really, strictly speaking, a flute concerto, and indeed one of the first in the history of music. For this reason Bach does not require the services of the normal Cöthen orchestra, with oboes and bassoon; the solo instrument is accompanied by the strings alone. As in the great solo cadenza in the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto he had first singled out the clavier as a solo instrument within the framework of a concertante group, so here he uses the suite form as camouflage or framework

for the solo flute. Bach presumably wrote this suite for the distinguished Cöthen flautist Freytag. It is probable that the six flute sonatas were also intended for him.

The magnificent Suite No. 3 in D remains the best known, ever since Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, as he reports in one of his letters, played the overture for Goethe in 1830. This work is for double orchestra; one group consists of three trumpets (clarini) and timpani, the other of strings with harpsichord, supported for the occasion by oboes. The overture, with a broad opening motive and concertante alternations between the two instrumental groups, has a middle section which is more like a fugue than a fugato, based on a short, single-figure theme. After the overture there are only five movements. Four of these are dances: two gavottes, a bourrée, and a gigue; and they are preceded by a slow air for strings alone, the only one Bach wrote for orchestra. This lyrical instrumental movement, rightly one of the most famous to come from his pen, is full of tenderness, charm, and grace. The perfectly judged balance of the piece is manifest in its broadly arched cantilena which, in spite of obvious Italian inspiration, contains not a single musical commonplace. There can be but few propitious hours in the life of even a genius like Bach that produce music-making at once so relaxed, so profound, and so deeply expressive.

In its final form, Suite No. 4 in D requires three oboes and a bassoon in addition to the strings, three trumpets and timpani; the triple setting lays great stress on *Mehrchörigkeit* (multiple orchestration). In its original form Bach did not use the trumpets; and the two minuets were first heard in Leipzig. After the overture, the suite has six dance movements, of which two again are in pairs: bourrée I/II, gavotte, minuet I/II, and réjouissance. There is no slow movement in the cycle, no clear point of rest. The prevailing mood is one of conviviality; this is salon music in the best sense of the term, for the pleasure and enjoyment of players and audience alike. As has already been mentioned, Bach re-used the overture as the Sinfonia of his Cantata No. 110, thus demonstrating that for him his music was equally pleasing to God and man; it is a musical embodiment of Luther's often expressed conviction that spiritual and temporal are not opposites, but have a common foundation.

English translation by Thomas A. Quinn

ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS NEVILLE MARRINER

The Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields was founded as a string group in 1957 to provide music at midday concerts in the famous London church whose name the orchestra bears. Since then its numbers have grown and its repertoire widened from Italian Baroque concertos through the Classical and Romantic composers to the music of our own day. The Academy's fame has become world-wide through its many recordings for which it has won the highest honours, including the Dutch Edison Award for three years in succession and the 1974 "Wiener Flötenuhr" (the latter for its Philips recordings of the complete Mozart wind concertos). The international reputation of the group means usually more concerts abroad than in London, but in 1973 the Academy organised its first "Festival" in the Trafalgar Square church which is their base.

The orchestra, which counts among its members some of the foremost players from leading British orchestras, is led and directed by its founder Neville Marriner, formerly a principal violinist with the London Symphony Orchestra and now also conductor-director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and associate conductor of the Northern Sinfonia. Mr. Marriner, who studied violin at the Royal College of Music and the Paris Conservatoire and conducting with Pierre Monteux, was earlier in his career a founder-member of several notable chamber groups, including the Virtuoso String Trio and the Jacobean Ensemble.