



J.S. Bach
French Suites

BWV 812-817

Julian Perkins
clavichord

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

French Suites BWV 812-817

Julian Perkins *clavichord*

Tracks 1–9 (disc one) and 12–26 (disc two)

Diatonically fretted clavichord by Peter Bavington (London, 2008)

after an instrument made in Nürnberg c. 1785 by Johann Jacob Bodechtel (1768–1831)

Tracks 10–21 (disc one) and 1–11 (disc two)

Unfretted clavichord made by Peter Bavington (London, 2005)

after a late-eighteenth-century German instrument probably by Johann Heinrich Silbermann (1727–1799)

About Julian Perkins:

'Perkins plays with just the right dash of theatricality'

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'Skilled and lovingly nuanced performances by Julian Perkins'

Clavichord International

Disc One

Johann Jakob Froberger (1616–1667)

Partita No. 2 in D minor, FbWV 602

From Libro Secondo (1649), dedicated to

Emperor Ferdinand III von Habsburg

- | | |
|--------------|--------|
| 1. Allemanda | [3:47] |
| 2. Courant | [1:25] |
| 3. Sarabanda | [3:25] |
| 4. Gigue | [1:15] |

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Suite No. 1 in D minor, BWV 812

- | | |
|------------------|--------|
| 5. Allemande | [4:19] |
| 6. Courante | [2:31] |
| 7. Sarabande | [2:54] |
| 8. Menuet I & II | [2:48] |
| 9. Gigue | [3:48] |

Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813

- | | |
|-------------------|--------|
| 10. Allemande | [2:58] |
| 11. Courante | [2:22] |
| 12. Sarabande | [3:16] |
| 13. Air | [1:37] |
| 14. Menuet I & II | [2:52] |
| 15. Gigue | [2:36] |

Suite No. 3 in B minor, BWV 814

- | | |
|-------------------|--------|
| 16. Allemande | [3:50] |
| 17. Courante | [2:34] |
| 18. Sarabande | [2:59] |
| 19. Anglaise | [1:32] |
| 20. Menuet & Trio | [2:42] |
| 21. Gigue | [2:30] |

Total playing time [58:11]

† From Six Sonates à Violon seul, accompagné par le Clavessin (Frankfurt, 1715), arr. Julian Perkins

Disc Two

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767)

Suite in A major, TWV 32:14

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------|
| 1. Allemande | [2:32] |
| 2. Courante | [2:27] |
| 3. Sarabanda, TWV 41: A1 † | [2:15] |
| 4. Gigue | [3:00] |

Johann Sebastian Bach

Suite No. 4 in E-flat major, BWV 815

- | | |
|----------------------|--------|
| 5. Prélude, BWV 815a | [1:43] |
| 6. Allemande | [2:51] |
| 7. Courante | [2:02] |
| 8. Sarabande | [3:24] |
| 9. Gavotte & Menuet | [2:39] |
| 10. Air | [1:55] |
| 11. Gigue | [2:37] |

Suite No. 5 in G major, BWV 816

- | | |
|---------------|--------|
| 12. Allemande | [3:39] |
| 13. Courante | [1:49] |
| 14. Sarabande | [5:05] |
| 15. Gavotte | [1:17] |
| 16. Bourrée | [1:29] |
| 17. Loure | [2:26] |
| 18. Gigue | [3:37] |

Suite No. 6 in E major, BWV 817

- | | |
|------------------------|--------|
| 19. Prélude, BWV 854/1 | [1:39] |
| 20. Allemande | [3:37] |
| 21. Courante | [2:06] |
| 22. Sarabande | [3:48] |
| 23. Gavotte | [1:19] |
| 24. Polonaise & Menuet | [3:16] |
| 25. Bourrée | [1:44] |
| 26. Gigue | [2:54] |

Total playing time [67:26]



J.S. Bach: French Suites, BWV 812-817

Origins and purpose

The French Suites were composed at a period of momentous change for Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). By anyone's standards, a bereavement followed by remarriage, changing job and moving a family to a new city are challenging and stressful events. But for Bach they came unexpectedly within the space of two years. Maria Barbara Bach (1684-1720) had died suddenly in July 1720; his new wife, Anna Magdalena Wülcke (1701-1760), was a singer who had come on Bach's instigation to the court Capelle at Cöthen. She was twenty, he thirty-six when they married on 3 December, 1721. At some point during the following year Bach started to write a collection of keyboard music expressly for her. This, the first of two *Clavier-Büchlein* compiled for his wife, opens with a series of suites we know now as the first five 'French' Suites.

Although the intention is not made absolutely clear, the inference has always been that this was a bridal gift and that the music reflects Anna Magdalena's prowess as a keyboard player. Viewed in a wider context, though, we can see the French Suites as one of a series of

collections which Bach assembled around this time and which served a deliberately didactic purpose. In 1720, he had begun a similar *Clavier-büchlein* for his eldest son Wilhelm Friedemann (1710-1784) which contained a variety of pieces ranging in style from ornamented chorale settings, to preludes, fantasias and fugal-style movements, as well as lighter dance movements by contemporary composers. (The A major suite by Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) recorded here and previously attributed to Bach was copied for Wilhelm Friedemann.) Many of these pieces became the 2- and 3-part Inventions and Sinfonias, the fair copy of which was compiled in 1723. Other preludes were incorporated into the first book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, again formally collated in a calligraphic manuscript in 1722. Taken together, a picture emerges of Bach preparing final versions of what would become his teaching material for the next three decades. The purposes are clearly laid out: to provide 'those desirous of learning' not only models of composition but a systematic course which would develop them as performers. In particular, Bach highlights the need to learn how to play in a 'cantabile' manner.

When he took up his new post in Leipzig in May 1723, Bach had ample opportunity to use this new teaching material. In addition

to overseeing the musical education of the boys of St Thomas's School, he gave keyboard lessons to university students on an *ad hoc* basis. One such student was Heinrich Nicolaus Gerber (1702-1775) who studied with Bach for two years around 1725. Later in life, Gerber recollected the time spent studying under Bach and his reminiscences were recorded by his son. His account provides a tantalising insight into Bach's unique teaching methods:

At the first lesson he set his *Inventions* before him. When he had studied these through to Bach's satisfaction, there followed a series of suites, then the *Well-Tempered Clavier* [...] The conclusion of the instruction was thorough-bass, for which Bach chose the Albinoni violin solos.

Here, then, is Bach's blueprint for a keyboard player's training. Students were prescribed a course of study and as part of the instruction, Bach expected his pupils to make their own copies of his music. What is perhaps unsurprising is the emphasis on the contrapuntal forms contained in the *Inventions* and the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. But equally fascinating is the importance attached to the 'series of suites'. Clearly, Bach valued highly the ability to play the various dance-style movements that

made up the standard Baroque suite.

Fortunately, we know exactly which suites Gerber studied. Like those of a number of other Bach pupils, his copy of the French Suites has survived. It makes for a fascinating comparison with Bach's autograph versions in the 1722 Anna Magdalena *Clavier-büchlein*, and reveals something of the subsequent history of the pieces. For one thing, Gerber's copy contains many altered details of voice-leading and even a completely different second half for the 'Courante' of the C minor suite. But perhaps more significantly, the ornamentation that Gerber provides is much more detailed. Additionally, it seems that the suites were not established definitively as a set for some time. Gerber includes in his collection two (BWV 818 and 819) which are not normally included in the French Suites, while another student Johann Caspar Vogler omitted the third suite and transposed the order of the remainder, but like Gerber transmits later readings. It is only with a beautifully prepared copy by Johann Christoph Altnickol made after 1744 that we find all six suites in the order that we recognise, but – paradoxically – it preserves earlier readings. From the myriad of discrepancies between the main sources it appears that unlike his other collections of the time, Bach never



Fragment of 'Courante' from French Suite in D minor, BWV 812
Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz
D-B Mus. ms. Bach P 224 [1. Klavierbüchlein der A. M. Bach, 1722]



compiled a final, definitive version of the suites. There is, then, a certain latitude in the way that the performer may approach the music: any number of readings can be adopted, and while we cannot be entirely sure whether some of the changes – such as the addition of preludes to Suites 4 and 6 – were sanctioned by the composer, they nevertheless come from those closely associated with him.

Instrumentation

Bach's original heading for each of the French Suites was 'pour le Clavessin'. While it is certainly true that he would have performed them on the harpsichord, by far the more common instrument in Germany in the eighteenth century was the clavichord. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the clavichord was the instrument of choice for personal practice and domestic entertainment. Johann Gottfried Walther (1684-1748), Bach's kinsman and musical lexicographer, described the clavichord as the 'first grammar', while for Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) it was 'beloved above all others'. It could render ornaments (*Manieren*) clearly, but its chief characteristic was that it enabled the player to achieve the 'singing style' so highly valued by Bach and his contemporaries.

By far the majority of surviving clavichords of this period are of the 'fretted' type. Almost exclusively these instruments have a four-octave compass from C to c² – in other words, the two octaves either side of middle C. Their advantage over other types of keyboard instruments was that they were portable, relatively cheap and easy to maintain: ideal for domestic music making. It is hardly a coincidence, then, that the keyboard compass required by Bach's 'teaching' pieces of the early 1720s is exactly the same as that of the majority of the surviving clavichords. Whereas the 'public' keyboard music – Parts 1, 2 and 4 of the *Clavier-Übung* series – required an extended 'harpsichord' compass to a low G, the 'private' music disseminated through manuscript copies only needed a range of four octaves. If any corroboration were needed for the ubiquitous use of the clavichord, one need look no further than the serial publication *Singende Muse an der Pleisse*, which appeared in instalments in the 1730s. It was aimed at the amateur market, and as if to emphasise the point, the title-page illustration shows two sets of couples singing to the accompaniment of small fretted clavichords.

Bach and the Suite

By Bach's time, the keyboard suite had

enjoyed a long and varied pedigree. The idea of linking dance movements together by key and musical motif was not new, but Allemande-Courante pairings coupled with a Sarabande came to the fore around the mid-seventeenth century. The chief exponent of this new format, certainly in German-speaking lands, was Johann Jakob Froberger (1616-1667) who fashioned an individual keyboard style that fused elements from his Italian training under Frescobaldi and his knowledge of the French harpsichordists and lutenists. In particular, he adapted the broken-chord lute writing known as the *style brisé* to the keyboard, a technique which we can hear reflected particularly in Bach's allemandes. The actual sequence of movements was very much up to personal choice during much of the seventeenth century, but by the 1690s the format allemande-courante-sarabande-gigue had become a standard. The suites of Bach's Leipzig predecessor Johann Kuhnau, for instance, consistently adhere to this pattern. By the 1720s, however, it had become increasingly common to insert further dance movements between the sarabande and the gigue. The choice of these lighter dance types – Galanterien – allowed for great flexibility, and while the French Suites are not as encyclopaedic

as, say, the Partitas, Bach includes the more fashionable polonaise in conjunction with the minuet, gavotte, air and bourrée. Though more unusual, the 'Loure' of the fifth suite is similarly derived from the French courtly dances of the late-seventeenth century.

Bach's French Suites have proved enduringly popular. First mentioned publicly as suites 'without preludes' in the composer's obituary, and given the 'French' tag for the first time by another Bach pupil, Friederich Wilhelm Marpurg (1718-1795) in 1762, they continued to circulate in manuscript before their eventual publication as part of the Bach Gesellschaft edition in 1881. Though no more 'French' in style than many other suites by Bach, part of their appeal is that they are technically less demanding for both performer and listener than the Partitas or the English Suites. The deliberately light, galant idiom that Bach adopts is certainly very beguiling. Hearing them on the clavichord underlines this dainty, intimate style, and captures the domestic music making of Bach and his new wife in 1722.

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References

- Walther, J.G., *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1732)
Mattheson, J., *Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg, 1713)
'Sperontes' [J.S. Scholze], *Singende Muse an der Pleisse* (Leipzig, 1736)
David, Mendel and Wolff (ed.) *The New Bach Reader* (New York, 1998)

The manuscript copies of the French Suites by Bach and his pupils can be studied online.

A representative sample can be found as follows:

- Bach (1722) <http://bit.ly/1PHnF3d>
Anna Magdalena Bach (1725) <http://bit.ly/1Rl60yj>
Gerber (c 1725) <http://bit.ly/1MOZvgJ>
Vogler (c 1725) <http://bit.ly/1OG2AY8>
Altnickol (post 1744) <http://1.usa.gov/1mzw8tN>

Performer's Perspective

I like to believe that the French Suites were Bach's wedding present to his second wife, Anna Magdalena, whom he married in 1721 following the death the previous year of his first wife, Maria Barbara. Originating from his largely halcyon years in Cöthen, the French Suites are evocative vignettes of domestic music-making *chez* Bach. With their vocal qualities – which are perhaps a tribute to Anna Magdalena, who was a professional singer – and their open, *galant* textures, these works seem particularly well suited to the intimate hues of the clavichord.

The posthumous title accorded to the French Suites may have had as much to do with differentiating the collection from the larger-scale (and more overtly French-styled) English Suites, as celebrating *bon goût*. Despite the music's grace and nobility, the French Suites could just as well be called the Italian Suites – with four zippy Italian-style correntes alongside two more intricate French-style courantes, sarabandes imbued with lyrical pathos, and rumbustious giges that often combine Vivaldian brilliance with the rustic qualities of an English jig. Although each suite has a consistently entitled Courante in the sources, their running figurations show them to be Italian Correntes – does such a discrepancy merely show an effort on the part of the early

scribes to maintain French decorum in the so-called French Suites, or could it also imply a particular way of playing these pieces? I have enjoyed discovering all these qualities on the seemingly delicate clavichord.

A particular thrill associated with the French Suites is the lack of any one definitive source. The differences between the early versions of the first five suites in Anna Magdalena's notebook and the plethora of handwritten copies compel the performer to decide how best to approach the musical text. As Davitt Moroney writes, musicians are 'invited to take up the exhilarating, if dangerous, challenge' of devising their own edition of these works. Collating the sources has indeed proved exhilarating and challenging – though I hope the results do not sound distractingly dangerous! It has allowed me creative freedom in combining different versions, adding some extra movements, varying repeats and realising chordal patterns – whilst also inspiring the occasional 'Perkinism'.

When recording the French Suites, many fine musicians opt to include Bach's two miscellaneous suites, BWVs 818 and 819. But, treasuring Bach's indefatigable curiosity for music by both his peers and his forbears, I have instead chosen to include pieces that may have inspired him. There is an

archaic quality to Bach's first French Suite that draws in part from composers such as Froberger, Kerll and Pachelbel, whose music Bach is alleged to have studied secretly by moonlight in his youth (comparable to Handel's claim of clandestine clavichord sessions in his parents' attic). The key of D minor was described by Bach's contemporary, Mattheson, as having a 'devout' or 'grand' character, and the melancholic quality of Froberger's Allemande is echoed in the opening Allemande to the French Suites which, being in the tradition of the French *Tombeau*, may have been a tribute to Bach's first wife.

Given their close friendship, it is touching that Telemann's suite (except the Sarabanda) was long attributed to Bach as BWV 824 and forms part of the notebook for Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann. Its open textures could have been a model for Bach's French Suites, and the posthorn-like theme to Telemann's Gigue finds a distinct resemblance in the Gigue to the fourth French Suite. The curiously un-contrapuntal aspect of much of the French Suites is perhaps another nod to Telemann, whose music so often evokes the then fashionable *galant* style. It is an apt emblem of the way in which Bach's music embraces the new as much as the old that a whole century separates the deaths of Froberger and Telemann.

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Subscribers were essential in supporting music publications throughout the eighteenth century, and I have adopted this tradition in order to help fund this recording. I am very grateful to the British Clavichord Society (www.clavichord.org.uk) and the subscribers listed below for their much valued interest in and support for this project.

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Julian Perkins





Clavichords

Suite by Froberger & French Suites Nos. 1, 5 and 6

Tracks 1–9 (disc one) and 12–26 (disc two)

Diatonically fretted clavichord made by Peter Bavington, London, 2008, after an instrument made in Nürnberg c. 1785 by Johann Jacob Bodechtel (1768–1831).

The original was in the collection of the late Christopher Hogwood CBE, and now forms part of The Michael & Sonja Koerner Collection at the Royal Conservatory of Music, Toronto, Canada.

Compass: BB–f³

Pitch: a¹=415 Hz

Tuning: Bendeler III

Case: Cherry

Kindly loaned by Peter Bavington

Suite by Telemann and French Suites Nos. 2, 3 and 4

Tracks 10–21 (disc one) and 1–11 (disc two)

Unfretted clavichord made by Peter Bavington, London, 2005, after a late-eighteenth-century German instrument that is probably by Johann Heinrich Silbermann (1727–1799).

The original is in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg.

Compass: FF–f³

Pitch: a¹=415 Hz

Tuning: Werckmeister III

Case: Walnut

Kindly loaned by David Griffel

Clavichords prepared and maintained by Peter Bavington, and tuned by Oliver Sändig
(www.peter-bavington.co.uk)

For more information about these instruments, please see: www.julianperkins.com/recordings

Julian Perkins

Described as 'exuberantly stylish' by *The Sunday Times*, Julian Perkins enjoys a varied career as a keyboard player and conductor, is artistic director of Cambridge Handel Opera and founder-director of Sounds Baroque. His discography has seen acclaimed solo and chamber recordings for Avie, Coro, Chandos, Opus Arte and Resonus Classics on a wide range of instruments, including the Royal harpsichord by Burkat Shudi at Kew Palace. These have included world premiere recordings playing Stephen Dodgson's clavichord suites, harpsichord suites by James Nares and John Christopher Smith, and directing Daniel Purcell's opera-oratorio *The Judgment of Paris*. Clavichord recitals have included appearances for international festivals at St Albans, Buxton, Canterbury, Colchester, Oundle, Ryedale and Two Moors, in repertoire including J.S. Bach's two books of *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*. As a harpsichordist and organist, Julian has appeared with many leading soloists and ensembles at venues such as the Wigmore Hall, London, Lincoln Center, New York, and Sydney Opera House, as well as at the BBC Proms and Edinburgh International Festival. In addition to participating in productions at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden,

and Welsh National Opera, he has performed concertos with groups including the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Orchestra of the Sixteen and New London Soloists. As a conductor, he has performed staged opera productions for organisations such as the Buxton Festival, Dutch National Opera Academy, Grimeborn Festival, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Kings Place, New Chamber Opera and New Kent Opera, and concert performances with, among others, the Bampton Classical Players, Barts Chamber Choir, Bury Court Opera, New London Singers, Rodolfus Choir, Southbank Sinfonia and Spiritato.

Julian read music at King's College, Cambridge, and completed his formal studies at the Schola Cantorum, Basle, and the Royal Academy of Music, London. Singing is central to Julian's approach to music; the prestigious Baylis programme at English National Opera and tours with the Monteverdi Choir were formative experiences. His mentors have included Noelle Barker OBE, David Parry and Trevor Pinnock CBE. A visiting teacher at the Royal Northern College of Music, Julian is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, and was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in recognition of his contribution thus far to the music profession.

www.julianperkins.com

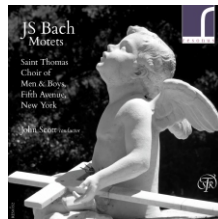
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