

# Glenn Gould Bach: The French Suites, Vol. 2 Nos. 5 and 6 Overture In The French Style

Produced by Andrew Kazdin

M 32853

Side 1  
**BACH: FRENCH SUITE NO. 5 IN G MAJOR**  
(BWV 816)  
Allemande Gavotte Loure  
Courante Bourrée Gigue  
Sarabande

**BACH: FRENCH SUITE NO. 6 IN E MAJOR**  
(BWV 817)  
Allemande Gavotte Bourrée  
Courante Polonoise Gigue  
Sarabande Menuet

Side 2  
**BACH: OVERTURE IN THE FRENCH STYLE**  
(BWV 831)  
Overture Passepied I Bourrée II  
Courante Passepied II Gigue  
Gavotte I Sarabande Echo  
Gavotte II Bourrée I

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The Suite occupies a prominent place among Bach's instrumental works. In addition to four for orchestra, Bach wrote Suites for unaccompanied violin, unaccompanied cello, lute, and keyboard (clavichord or harpsichord). Various titles Overture, Suite, or Partita, there are nineteen well-known examples from the period of Bach's full maturity written for the keyboard, composed in sets of six except for the *Overture in the French Style*.

Why twelve of these keyboard Suites have been labelled "English" and "French" is not known. The titles were added later, not by Bach. However, the title *Overture in the French Style* is definitely Bach's original. This work, also known as the *Partita in B minor*, was first published in 1735 as Part II of the *Clavier Übung*, a series of harpsichord and organ works that Bach issued at regular intervals in emulation of his predecessor at St. Thomas Church at Leipzig, Johann Kuhnau. Publication of these volumes was timed to coincide with Easter festivals, during which they would usually find a substantial number of potential customers.

Part II of the *Clavier Übung*, which also contains the well-known *Italian Concerto*, represents Bach's attempt to write orchestral music for harpsichord. (The music was specifically intended for two-manual harpsichord.) Rather than merely imitate a few orchestral effects with the harpsichord's two dynamic

levels, Bach takes over orchestral forms, and his melodic writing often suggests specific instrumental combinations. The noted harpsichordist Ralph Kirkpatrick writes of the *Overture in the French Style*, "I can think of many movements of this piece as suggesting oboes and bassoon, flutes, strings alone, or strings doubled by oboes."

Like the French orchestral suites upon which it is based (as were Bach's orchestral suites), the *Overture in the French Style* opens with a lengthy, elaborate movement. It begins with a slow, majestic passage characterized by French dotted rhythms, moves into a lengthy and complex fugue, and returns to the mood (but not the same melodic material) of the opening. Many French orchestral suites were ballets on mythological subjects, which were the delight of the French aristocracy. The opening movement had to set an appropriately serious tone, but the audiences were not prepared to endure seriousness forever, and the following dances were lighter. So it goes in Bach's work, with the prevailing lightness offset only by the solemnity of the beautiful *Sarabande*.

The sequence of dance movements is typical: *Courante*; two *Gavottes*; two *Passepieds*, the *Sarabande*; two *Bourrées*; a relatively subdued *Gigue*; and finally, a sprightly *Echo* which, of course, makes great use of terraced dynamics but avoids the exact repetition so beloved by Haydn's contemporaries. In the case of the paired dances, the first is repeated after the second.

While the six *French Suites* have an overall design and were intended to convey a sense of unity (towards which end Bach seems to have eliminated an introduction he had written for the fourth), they were not all composed at the same time. In a manuscript of 1723, written out for Bach's new second wife Anna Magdalena (to whom the pieces were dedicated), only the first four of the *French Suites* appear, along with two others (BWV 818 and 819) later eliminated from the sequence. The last two *French Suites* were written somewhat later; exactly when, we do not know, although the fifth has been tentatively dated 1723, and the sixth is taken from a manuscript copy made about 1725.

The basic sequence of the dances in the Suite (*Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, and *Gigue*) was apparently established by German (not French) composers during the mid-seventeenth century. Additions were allowed between the *Sarabande* and *Gigue*, and Bach made additions in all six of the *French Suites*. Each of the first four contain two additional movements; the fifth adds three (*Gavotte*, *Bourrée*, and *Loure*) and the fifth adds four (*Gavotte*, *Polonoise*, *Bourrée*, and *Menuet*).

The *Allemandes*, deliberately given by Bach an

introductory quality to compensate for the lack of *Preludes*, are quiet dances. The *Courante* is a livelier dance, in triple time. The *Sarabande* is a slow, dignified dance, also in triple time. By Bach's day, all three of these were outmoded as actual dances, existing only in their stylized forms in instrumental suites.

The movements added by Bach, however, were currently in use in his time. The *Gavotte* was a French dance, in moderate tempo. Its movements are characterized by lifting the feet off the ground, a departure from the shuffling motion of similar earlier dances. The *Polonoise* (the French name is used even in Poland) was originally a primitive folk dance, slow and stately, in three-beat rhythm, most commonly done at weddings. Later it was taken up by the Polish nobility, who maintained much of its original character but enhanced its grandeur. Bach's *Polonaises* are of an earlier type than Chopin's, naturally, but they are already the dances of the nobility—instrumental pieces, rather than the sung *Polonaises* of the peasants.

The *Bourrée*, yet another French dance, is said by some experts to have originated in Spanish Biscay. It is a rapid dance, similar to the *Gavotte* except that it has two beats to the bar instead of four. Its phrases begin on the second beat of the measure. The *Loure*, which appears in Bach's works only in the fifth *French Suite*, is a French bagpipe dance, similar to the *Gigue* but slower. The *Menuet* is too well-known to require much description, but it is interesting to note that despite the derivation of its title (from the French "menu," "small") the dance was characterized by its slow tempo and grace of execution, not necessarily by small steps.

All of the *French Suites* end with the *Gigue*, derived from the sixteenth-century Irish or English jig. However, by Bach's time, the *Gigue* had taken on European characteristics, and those ending the fifth and sixth *French Suites* have an obvious Italian flavor.

—Leslie Gerber

Engineering: Kent Warden, Frank Dean Donowitz  
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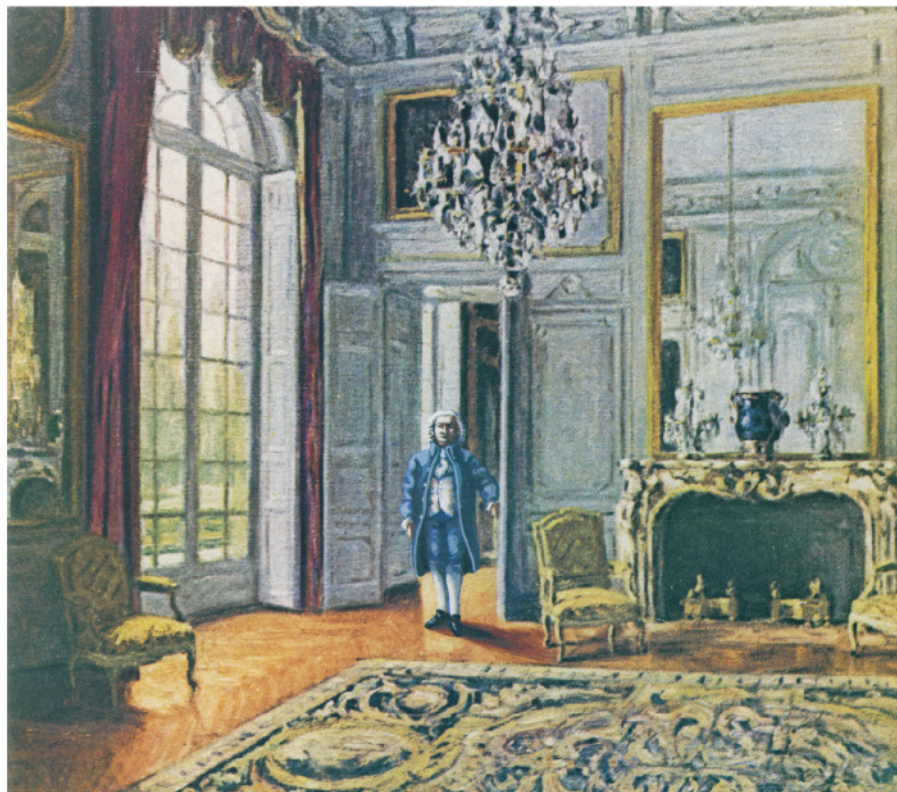
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## Johann Sebastian Bach 1685–1750

### *The French Suites Vol. II*

Französische Suiten · Suites françaises

#### Suite No. 5 in G major BWV 816

G-Dur · en *sol* majeur

1	I. Allemande	1:49
2	II. Courante	1:16
3	III. Sarabande	2:52
4	IV. Gavotte	0:40
5	V. Bourrée	0:46
6	VI. Loure	1:07
7	VII. Gigue	2:26

#### Suite No. 6 in E major BWV 817

E-Dur · en *mi* majeur

8	I. Allemande	1:33
9	II. Courante	1:00
10	III. Sarabande	2:38
11	IV. Gavotte	0:36
12	V. Polonaise	0:54
13	VI. Menuet	0:47
14	VII. Bourrée	0:58
15	VIII. Gigue	2:05

## Overture in the French Style in B minor BWV 831

Ouverture nach Französischer Art h-Moll

Ouverture dans le style français en *si* mineur

16	I. Ouverture	9:49
17	II. Courante	3:28
18	III. Gavotte I	0:39
19	IV. Gavotte II (da capo I)	1:13
20	V. Passepied I	0:36
21	VI. Passepied II (da capo I)	1:03
22	VII. Sarabande	1:47
23	VIII. Bourrée I	0:42
24	IX. Bourrée II (da capo I)	1:49
25	X. Gigue	2:10
26	XI. Echo	2:00

Total Time 46:59

## Glenn Gould piano

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Producer: Andrew Kazdin · Recording Engineers: Kent Warden & Frank Dean Dennowitz

Cover Design: Henrietta Condak · Liner Notes: Leslie Gerber

LP Matrix: AL 32853 [1–15], BL 32853 [16–26]

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