

THE BAROQUE SUITE

INTRODUCTION

The Baroque Suite was a set of dances and was scored with or without soloists. The dances found in the suite were as follows: Overture, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Gigue, Gavotte, Bourree, Minuet, Passepied and Rigaudon. The Baroque suite can be, especially in later music, also broken down into the French dances, as well as the German. In Germany, the order of the suite was as follows: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue.

STANDARD MOVEMENTS

OVERTURE

The Baroque suite generally began with a French overture ('Ouverture,' in French).

ALLEMANDE

The Allemande was often the first dance of an instrumental suite. The Allemande was a German dance played at a moderate tempo in quadruple meter and could start on any beat of the bar.

COURANTE

The Courante is a moderate French dance in triple meter. The Italian version is called the corrente.

SARABANDE

The Sarabande is a Spanish dance, stately and in triple meter.

GIGUE

The Gigue is an upbeat and lively Baroque dance in compound meter (6/8 or 6/4), originating in the British Isles. The gigue can start on any beat of the bar and is easily recognized by its rhythmic feel. Its counterpart in folk music is the jig.

These four dance types (Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue) make up the majority of 17th century suites; later suites interpolate additional movements between the Sarabande and gigue.

OTHER MOVEMENTS

GAVOTTE

The Gavotte can be identified by a variety of features; it is in 4/4 time and always starts on the third beat of the bar, although this may sound like the first beat in some cases, as the first and third beats are the strong beats in quadruple time. The gavotte is played at a moderate tempo, although in some cases it may be played faster.

BOURREE

The Bourre is similar to the gavotte as it is in 2/2 time although it starts on the second half of the last beat of the bar, creating a different feel to the dance. The Bourree is commonly played at a moderate tempo, although for some composers, such as Handel, it can be taken at a much faster tempo.

MINUET

The Minuet is perhaps the best-known of the baroque dances in triple meter. It can start on any beat of the bar. In some suites there may be a Minuet I and II, played in succession, with the Minuet I repeated.

PASSEPIED

The Passepied is a fast dance in binary form and triple meter that originated as a court dance in France. Examples can be found in later suites such as those of Bach and Handel.

RIGAUDON

The Rigaudon is a lively French dance in duple meter, similar to the bourree, but rhythmically simpler. It originated as a family of closely related southern-French folk dances, traditionally associated with the provinces of Vavarais, Languedoc, Dauphine and Provence.

STANDARD FORM

Each piece consisted of a binary structure, which was repeated (A-A-B-B). The first part moved from the home key to the contrasting key; the second part moved from the contrasting key back to the home key. Each section was approximately equal length and finished with a cadence. The two parts often used closely related melodic material.

APPLICATIONS

The suite could be used for chamber, orchestral or solo music. Often the suite was arranged for solo keyboard, harpsichord and lute.