

MSC 1003 – Music in Civilization Winter 2017

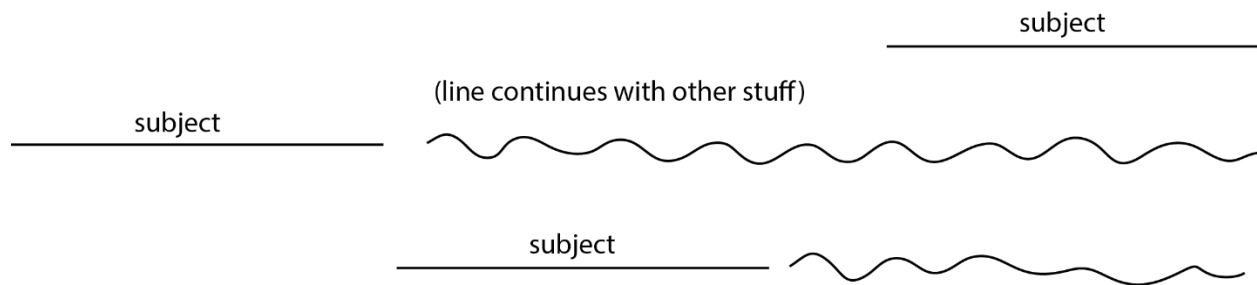
Prof. Smey

Session 10 – Tues, March 7 for Tue-Thurs classes, Thurs March 9 for double class.

Bach’s “Little” Fugue in G Minor

Our next work from the Baroque period is a Fugue, which I described as “the ultimate polyphonic piece.” A fugue features multiple lines (which we like to call “voices,” even though nobody is singing) that combine in a complex web of music.

It is organized around a frequently repeated melody called a *subject*. The subject is introduced at the very beginning of the piece in a single, unaccompanied voice. Additional voices then enter, one at a time, also leading with the subject, like so:



This opening sequence, in which each voice presents the subject, is called the *exposition*.

After the exposition we get more statements of the subject separated by *episodes*. Episodes are our in-between, connective parts which tend to be looser and more exploratory. Often they are based on little fragments taken from the subject.

Thus, the fugue is a lot like ritornello form – instead of ritornellos it has statements of the subject. Both are relatively stable areas of music that are characterized by instantly recognizable material, but the fugue subjects are a little more complicated and the boundaries between the subject and episodes is more fluid, less “chunky.” In both forms the more stable parts are connected by the looser episodes.

The Well-Tempered Clavier

Next, I put in a plug for what I think is J. S. Bach’s greatest achievement, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Bach wrote it in two volumes, each of which contain pairings of a Prelude (which is a short, introductory piece) plus a Fugue in every possible key. (So, there are 12 possible major keys on the piano and 12 minor keys. Multiply by two volumes and it’s 48 different pairs of Preludes and Fugues. This is sometimes referred to as “The Musicians’ Bible” because it is so voluminous and the contents are considered profound.)

These are usually played on a modern piano, or, sometimes, on harpsichord. Some people think that Bach may have originally composed them on a clavichord, a little box-shaped keyboard instrument that is sort of piano-like.

The term “Clavier” in the title is just a generic term meaning “keyboard instrument.”

The “Well-Tempered” part of the title refers to a surprising problem in music – the various scales do not mesh together perfectly. If we take an instrument and tune it so that a single scale (like, say, C major) sounds as good as it possibly can sound, this will cause other scales (like, say, A-flat major) to sound out of tune. The art of tuning the keyboard so that all keys are in a compromise that sounds reasonably good was called “finding the temperament,” and it took several centuries to perfect this practice. (Now that we have electronic tuners and know how to do logarithms it is easy to break an octave into 12 perfectly equal parts, but they didn’t have that technology back then!)

Thus, if you can play all the way through Bach’s volumes and every piece sounds good, you know that your keyboard instrument is “well-tempered.”

In class I played videos of Joanna Macgregor playing the Prelude and Fugue in G major, and then the Prelude and Fugue in G minor, both from Book I of the Well-Tempered Clavier.

This colossal work isn’t really covered in our book, and so it is another bonus piece that I am just going to show in class and leave aside. However, if you have any intention of listening to classical music in the future, I strongly urge you to check it out and consider adding it to your collection. For me this is the ultimate “desert island” piece, something that you could listen to every day and never get tired of.

On the quiz I want you to be familiar with the *concept* of the Well-Tempered Clavier. Know the meaning of the title and the fact that it is a complete set of preludes and fugues in every possible key.

The Baroque Dance Suite

Our exploration of Baroque Period pieces has mostly been organized according to their **form**, the way they are organized and the musical story that they tell. Up to now we’ve looked at some pieces that are built in “loops,” and some that I claim are built in “blocks” or “chunks.” It’s time to look at one last kind of form, which has a slightly different feeling than our somewhat serious and complicated violin concerto and fugue.

This is the Baroque Dance Suite, which is simply a short collection of different dance-type movements. We think that these are “stylized” dances, meaning that they were intended more for listening and not for social dancing.

We listened to a set of Bourrées from Bach’s Suite No. 3 in C major for Solo Cello, BWV 1009. The suite has six movements overall, and we are picking the fifth one. Each one of these would have its own distinctive style and “groove.”

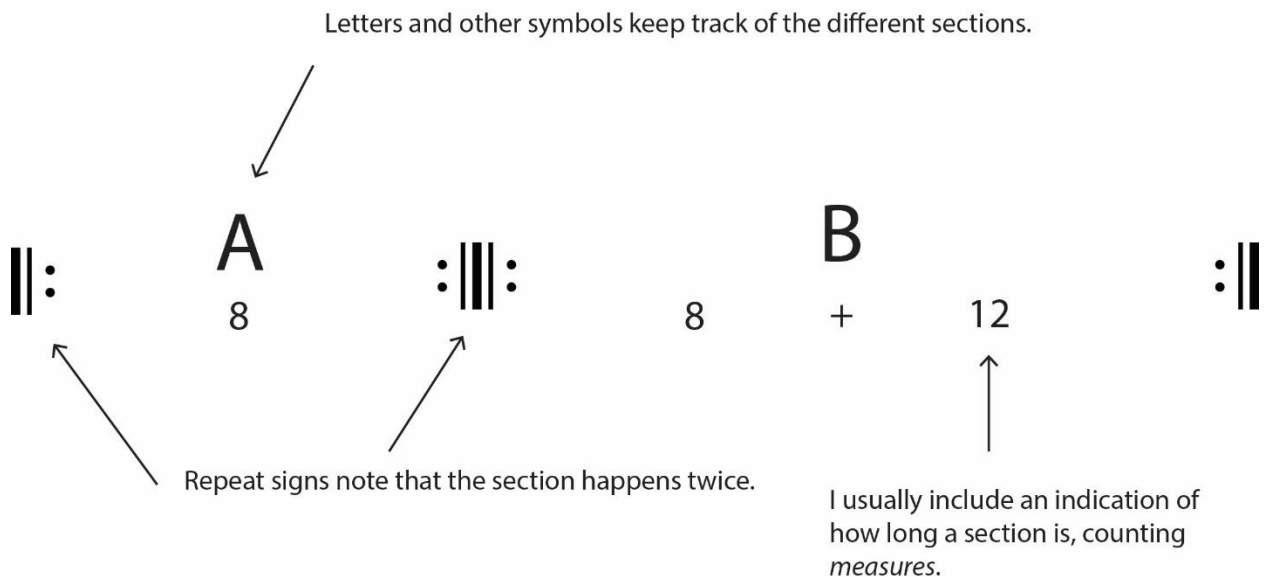
- I. Prelude
- II. Allemande
- III. Courante

- IV. Sarabande
- V. Bourrées I & II
- VI. Gigue

These dance movements seem a little more organized and compact than the other kinds of pieces we've looked at in this unit. Our loop-based compositions as well as our ritornello forms and fugues all seem to flow out rather loosely – they are made of a lot of little parts strung together. A composer could easily insert even more material into the middle of these works and it wouldn't really mess up the form in any way.

Baroque dance movements, on the other hand, tend to have a fixed plan – they are divided into two sections that repeat.

In order to follow this structure I will use a new kind of formal map for this piece, with a new vocabulary that we are going to see more in the future. It just has a few different elements.



So, here we've got two sections, each of which are repeated. The first one is usually pretty short and straightforward, and the second part tends to be a little longer and wilder. (My sample diagram above is our Bourrée I, where the first part is 8 measures long but the second part is a total of 20 measures.)

In general there are two versions of this basic structure which are called **Binary Form** and **Ternary Form**. The only difference between the two, really, is whether the "A" material makes a return appearance at the end. If it does, it is a Ternary form (because the A-B-A makes three parts). If it does not, and the second half of the piece is completely different, it is Binary (= A-B, two parts).

Here are sample Binary and Ternary Forms.

Binary Form



Ternary Form



So, our Bourrées are in binary form. In addition, there's one more wrinkle. There are two of them, and they alternate in their own A B A pattern.

Bourrée I



Bourrée II



Bourrée I



I've made a video of this movement, which is hosted on our website. It features an animated version of our form diagram which you can follow, as well as more fun choreography from the Mark Morris Dance Group.

In general, you want to remember:

- These Bourrées are in *binary form*. Two parts A + B, first one is short, second one longer, both sections get repeated.
- They are part of a Baroque Dance Suite, a set of *stylized dances*
- The middle dance (Bourrée II) is more "flowing" and in a minor key. On the quiz I may play Bourrée II by itself.