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Dance Workshops as a Tool for Performing the Allemande in a Baroque Dance Suite

Nurul Ain Syazwani A Rahman¹, Mireia Frutos Fernandez², Sharifah Faizah Syed Mohammed^{3*}

¹ Conservatory of Music, College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia

² Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, USA

³ Conservatory of Music, College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia

ainsyazwani999@gmail.com, mfrutos@iu.edu, sharifahfaizah@uitm.edu.my
Tel: 6013-9037884

Abstract

This paper aims to derive musical characteristics through dance choreography that will give shape to one of the movements, the Allemande. The study aims to establish a framework by investigating the dance steps to generate musical interpretation. The objective is to give specifications or indicators or markings by adding slurs and accents and providing the tempo or tempo range to evoke the characteristics of the dance within the keyboard suite. The methods involve a review of the literature and an inquiry to consider the use of dance steps or choreography to refine the characteristics of the pieces performed.

Keywords: keyboard suite, dance, interpretation, Allemande

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1.0 Introduction

The dance suite was one of the most popular musical types throughout the Baroque period, and it often included four regular movements: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. This paper uses the Allemande as an example from JS Bach's English Suite No.2 in A minor BWV 807. Bach's earliest keyboard pieces are often charming, earnestly rhetorical, and occasionally quite inventive (Schulenberg, 2006). Consequently, understanding it becomes extremely difficult, and their awareness is limited to only experts in the field. A suite typically consists of individual pieces whose character and identity derive from outside sources (Armstrong, 2011). For example, the names of the movements also derived from Allemande (German), Courante (France), Sarabande (Spain) and Gigue (England). Because each movement has its identification character, this paper considers dance motion to give the music its characteristics.

Furthermore, the suites consisted of several movements based on actual dances performed in the courts of the nobility during the late 16th and 17th centuries. To recreate the sound, one must recognize the standard features in that period that can help to define the stylistic characteristics to interpret the notation (Cyr, 1993). Although these instrumental suites are not typically performed as dance accompaniment, it is crucial to be aware of the dance's character to convey its essence throughout the performance effectively.

The suites have distinct characteristics, yet without adequate guidance to explicate the individual characteristics of each dance, understanding may be limited to a few moderately superficial musical elements (Burdick, 2007). The relationship between dance and music is significant for the Baroque period, as music and dance were inextricably linked, even if the music was not used to dance (Coorevits & Moelants, 2016). J.S. Bach, for example, composed an extensive set of music in which both the title and the musical

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characteristics imply a relationship to French court dancing (Coorevits & Moelants, 2016; Hsu, 2012; Little & Jenne, 2001; Qureshi, 1994). However, the popular dances in instrumental music, such as Allemande, were not performed as choreographies anymore in the 18th century (Coorevits & Moelants, 2014).

The primary purpose of the composer was to incorporate national styles in the composition of his suites. Each dance movement in the suites has distinct characteristics influenced by either the French or Italian genre (Qureshi, 1994). Bach resided and worked inside the city of Weimar, a locale characterized by a prominent French cultural environment that exerted a discernible impact on his artistic creations. The vast transmission of French Baroque dance motivated by political considerations was set to influence Germany. Bach and the notation system helped preserve and disseminate the traditions (Burdick, 2007: pp 10-12).

The study of dance is essential to teach the musician the proper tempo for the piece and maintain a steady pulse (Muffat in Harlow, 1993). One can approach the tempo solution through its choreography because every dance piece has a definite speed dictated by the metre and note values (Little & Jenne, 2001). A statement from Muffat suggested that "the lack of understanding dance rhythm occurred because the characteristic of dance rhythm had been forgotten" (Harlow, 1993). Harlow (1993) stated that the research on Baroque dance was still in the early stages and only began to benefit from dance historians' knowledge. How this knowledge affects Baroque music's performance is still unknown among the musicians in the 1990s, and even more so nowadays. However, the performers who understand dance characteristics in Bach's music can apply a different approach to the performance of that music (Burdick, 2007). Also, the performer must recognize the importance of dance in this work, even for this instrumental suite (Qureshi, 1994). The influence of dance music is very prominent in other genres: instrumental music often takes dance movements as a model and vocal genres such as cantatas and oratorios primarily reference dance movements (Coorevits & Moelant, 2014). As a result, understanding the music of the Baroque period requires understanding the era's dance practices (Coorevits & Moelant, 2014). Therefore, many performers would like to take the opportunity to learn and gain more about expressing the dance qualities in Bach's music, but only a few resources exist to guide them (Harlow, 1993; Burdick, 2007). Thus, most instrumentalists have limited exposure to period dances, hindering their inquiry into choreography's applications in Baroque dance. This limitation can be attributed to cultural or geographical barriers that restrict the availability of significant music.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the potential impact of dancing workshops on the decision-making process regarding tempo and articulation in the Allemande of a Baroque Suite.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review covers several topics based on the research objectives. The sources such as books, dissertations, and articles provide valuable information that will assist in understanding the development of Baroque dance characteristics, the application to the piano, and how the articulations help define the features of the dance.

2.1 How it started

According to (Miron, 1983; Chio, 2001), since the early Middle Ages, wandering minstrels entertained various town and village festivities by accompanying singers and dancers with stringed instruments. Although most of the medieval songs and dances have not survived in written records, the age-old tradition of the roving musician has been depicted in numerous literary works and paintings. The musical entertainers carried with them many popular regional dances in their travels throughout the continent and thus familiarized Europeans with a colourful, versatile and multi-national dance repertory. As compositions for solo instruments and ensembles began to emerge, the vast literature of old and contemporary dance forms served as a natural bridge and reference source for the new idiomatic language. The growing repertory of instrumental dance music is reflected in the collection of lute, keyboard and ensemble compositions published. These piece dances usually had distinct rhythmic patterns, clearly defined sections, and little or no contrapuntal interweavement. The juxtaposition of two or more contrasting dance types represented a link with dancers' time-honoured tradition of coupling a fore-dance-stately and in moderate duple meter with an after-dance-live in triple meter. We can see from the terminology that Italian and German composers of the Baroque period combined several dance movements into sets or suites. Based on a previous study (Miron, 1983), the Baroque Dance suite represents the activation and galvanization of nearly all viable elements and tendencies operant in Baroque music. Its utilization of composite structures, conception of idiomatic technique, incorporation of dance types and rhythmic patterns, manipulation of formal and textural contrasts, blend of homophony and polyphony, and fusion of national styles and compositional characteristics are noteworthy. According to Watchorn (1995), the collection of the English Suite consists of six large suites in a mixture of French and Italian styles—each suite preceded by a long and a highly developed prelude.

2.2 Allemande

The allemande was an ancient primitive dance of German origin (Miron, 1983; Lee, 2020). It was one of the most famous Baroque instrumental dances and became a standard movement of the suite, along with the courante, sarabande, and gigue. The word comes from the French word for "Germany", "Allemagne". The Allemande is a charming composition that consists of a continuous flow of two voices conversing, with the occasional supporting of sustained notes by a third and, sometimes, a fourth voice (Bar Elli, 2018; Lee, 2020). As an instrumental dance movement, the allemande displayed a sober character, highly decorated melody, pseudo contrapuntal texture, and moderate 4/4 meter with an eight-note or sixteenth-note upbeat. According to Armstrong (2011), only one French dance choreography source with music for the allemande is extant from this period, that given by Thoinot Arbeau (1520-1595) (a highly regarded expert on courtly dancing) in *Orchésographie* (1588). However, according to Jenne (2001) and Lim (2004), the Allemandes, by Bach's time, no longer reflected a particular dance form. In this study of Allemandes of this period, no evident choreographic roots,

distinguishable recurring rhythmic patterns, or any choreographies existed. Although most sources are of little or no help in this regard, two eighteenth-century theorists, F. W. Marpurg and J. P. Kirnberger, shed some light on the problem of performance.

2.3 Uncertainties in Interpretation

In the interpretation of early music, performances valued spontaneity. In addition, as performers, one must know the general performance style for the version to be reasonably authentic. Donnington (1992) states that the responsibility of performing musicians is to make historical authenticity a living thing. However, one must accept that some authenticity aspects are more critical under modern performance conditions than others. During Bach's time, one fundamental aspect was the lack of specific articulations such as slurs, phrase marks or staccato indicated on the score. Badura-Skoda (1995) acknowledged that the most severe and common fault in modern performances of Bach is 'non-existent or incorrect articulation'. Articulation is often linked to three types of relationships between notes: legato, staccato, and non-legato. It's also linked to note groups that are defined by how notes join or disconnect from each other (Chih, 2019). Due to the uncertainties in the interpretation, these simple rules emerged (Badura-Skoda, 1995):

Bach's articulations rules:

- The stepwise passages should, on the whole, be played legato.
- Larger intervals and leaps should be detached.
- The syncopated passages concerning articulation create a state of flux.
- Octave leaps should rarely be played legato.
- Broken triads should usually be played non-legato or staccato, especially in allegro or forte passages. And this does not apply to arpeggios.

The Baroque period of music had such balance, and this time has now achieved such a tremendous comprehension of affections. Most composers from J.S. Bach onwards possessed the secret of balancing passion and serenity but balancing them at a high level of intensity (Donnington, 1992). A few types of articulations can be used to enhance the musicality of the pieces (refer to Table 1). Articulations often help to clarify rhythmical and metrical relationships (Badura-Skoda, 1995).

Table 1. Types of articulations and functions

Types of articulations	Descriptions	Functions
Slur	Indicate a general degree of articulation for the movement or passages as a whole.	The slur that occurs in Baroque music with increasing frequency. It may be used to tie notes to show extreme legato or to show separate notes grouped in one phrase. The simplicity of the slur is an essential element in the naturalness of most Baroque idioms. The beam connecting groups of quaver, semiquaver and others in place of separate tails, while sometimes used as indications of phrasing
Staccato	The standard Baroque sign for staccato is the dash, of which the form is either or either way down or the dot under the note.	It should be played as detached
Ground Bass	A typical feature of Baroque slow movements is the 'walking bass', usually in even quavers.	Walking basses should usually be played slightly detached. The combination of staccato and legato can be used with certain exceptions to the principle that stepwise motion is slurred and leaps are detached

3.0 Methodology

The methods used were the involvement of the literature review and participation observation. The tempo was evaluated using two recordings as illustrative instances for the study. They are Andras Schiff (recording 1) and Ivor Pogorelich (recording 2). The literature review supports the method of learning how dance knowledge or vocabulary affects music interpretations. Insight will give the pianist ideas of how to shape articulation and determine the tempo. The study will collect data through participant observation, specifically by attending a dance workshop. The observations were conducted by analyzing the leg motions and relying on the experience of the researchers to determine how they correlated with the music. The study will focus on gathering suggestions related to the limited characteristics of the Allemande dance. These recommendations will be supplemented with existing research studies to raise awareness about the significance of dance education and its potential impact on piano playing. For example, in considering body movements, the pianist will learn about the duration of selected notes or essential beats of the Allemande. Hence, the pianist or selected recording examples will determine the shaping of notes and tempo, and both aspects will be calibrated through the dance experience.

4.0 Findings and Discussions

A Baroque dance workshop was held at UCSI University, Malaysia, on July 22, 2023. In the workshop, the participants are exposed to the foundation movements of the dance, which include i. the basic steps of Baroque dance, such as walking step unit, moving to side (glide), bending (plie) and rising (leve). ii. Participants move in a circle using a counting pulse involving the rise (leve) and bend (plie). iii. Participants incorporate additional steps introduced by the instructor accompanied by the piano. During the demonstration, one measure of the music incorporated multiple footsteps that will serve as an underlying pulse to the music.

Allemande begins with an upbeat and is worked out in brief imitation points throughout. Through the demonstration, the Allemande dance contains more frequent spring movements and quick footwork. The landing motion is on most of the downbeats of the music, and there are three quick steps and spring at the end of the sequence, finishing with landing (Lee, 2018). Dance phrases consist of a combination of steps and springs grouped in units (a step is a movement that shifts the weight from one foot to another, and a spring is a rising followed by a landing involving both feet (Watchorn, 1995; Lee, 2018). Bach's English Suites contain Allemandes written in an imitative and contrapuntal style. According to Harlow (1993), there are three types of Allemande. The first type of Allemande is in a 4/4 time signature, begins with an upbeat, is performed in a severe manner and is not played too fast. This is common in Suites and Partitas, and dance played a minor part in developing this genre. A dotted rhythm characterizes the second type of Allemande, a more homophonic style and slow half-note pulse, and Wilfrid Mellers stated that it was related to the Pavanne (Harlow, 1993, pp44-45). The third type is musical Allemande, which is associated with Allemande choreography, is little known and has a few examples. Matthew and Turk described it more as a Rigaudon than a true Allemande, in 2/4 measures, lively character and light execution as well as rapid tempo.

Most significantly, by the time of the composition of the English Suites, the Allemande appeared to have lost its essential characteristics as a piece of dance music and was merely a stylized and elaborated version of it (Jenne, 1979; Watchorn, 1995). However, most sources need more help in this regard. The descriptions from eighteenth-century theorists by F.W.Marpurgh and J.P.Krinberger will help the performance practice and ideas of shaping the articulations (Jenne, 1979).

4.1 Tempo

In recording 1, the tempo is slower in the range of Adagio, at 70 beats per minute (bpm). The illustration in Figure 1 shows that the music starts with an upbeat semiquaver and sits on the chord longer at the first beat of bar one. One bar contains four beats, and beat one is always in landing motion. One must emphasize the chord and landing motion or the dissonance note to make the phrasing properly prepared and resolved. Recording 2 displayed a bit of pull and push in tempo. According to Lee (2018), the Baroque version of dance contains more spring movements and quick feet. The spring movements always occur in beat two and beat 4. However, previous studies (Little & Jenne, 2001; Harlow, 1993; Watchorn, 1995; Qureshi, 1994; Coorevits & Moelants, 2016) dance played a minor part in the development of this genre and was merely stylized and elaborated versions of it. The Allemande has most of its nature as a prelude (Watchorn, 1995), and one such choreography is of no help in determining the nature of the highly stylized keyboard for Allemandes (Jenne, 1979).

Table 1. Tempo comparison between Andras Schiff and Ivor Pogorelich

Element	Andras Schiff (recording 1)	Ivor Pogorelich (recording 2)
Tempo	1. Adagio, 70 bpm 2. Slight pull and push of tempo.	1. Largo, 50 bpm 2. Slight pull and push of tempo.
Proposed tempo	The Allemande can have a tempo range between 60-70bpm or more than 70bpm. The Allemande dance includes a hoping or spring movements. The pace range depended according to the agility of the dancer. The hoping, bends, and rising steps may become stiff and unnatural if the tempo is sluggish. The decision of the tempo should be appropriate for executing the dance steps, displaying the music's character and accommodating these movements freely and naturally, accommodating the dancer to be suspended in the air. However, due to the intricate and elaborate structure of the Allemande dance piece, which has a significant number of rapidly played semiquaver notes, the tempo range may vary depending on the individual performer.	

4.2 Slur, Accent and Detached



Fig. 1: English Suite No.2 in A minor BWV 807 by Johann Sebastian Bach excerpt bar 1- bar 3

Based on the figure above, this Allemande begins with upbeat and short points of melodic imitations. Typical of instrumental Allemande music are broken chords of running sixteenth notes divided in both hands. Based on the discussion above, these particular Allemande types can be addressed as types one and two. The character of type one Allemande is in a 4/4 time signature, begins with an upbeat, and is performed severely. In contrast, the character of type two Allemande is dotted rhythm, homophonic style, and slow half-note pulse. (refer to figure 1). The stepwise passage must be played as a slur. On the other hand, leaping notes can be played as detached.

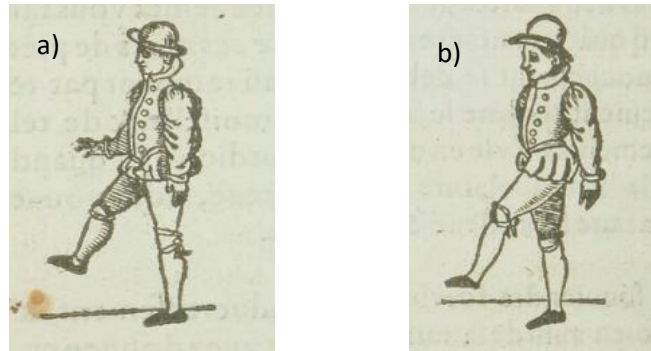


Fig. 2: a) foot in the air right or hop right and b) foot in the air left or hop left by Arbeau, T (1589). *Orchesographie*. Vintage Dance Manual.

Figure 2 depicts the visual portrayal of the hop steps as illustrated. According to the data, the hop step consistently takes place on beat 4, but the walking step is observed on beats 1, 2, and 3. These are the basic steps for the Allemande movement, which occurs in a prominent section followed by the single or double steps. Moreover, in Figure 3, this is the rhythm pattern for the Allemande. Based on the observed rhythm and dancing pattern, it is recommended that emphasis be placed on beats 1 and 3. During beat three, the remaining legs must be prepared to transfer weight from one leg to another in anticipation of the hop action. In the context of stylized dance music, maintaining a consistent pulse and comprehending its underlying structure play crucial roles in enhancing the distinctive qualities of dance movements. The fundamental rhythm, when paired with the initial coordination of dancing movements, will assist pianists in developing an intuitive perception of motion and structuring the execution of musical articulations. In order to incorporate this technique into piano performance, it is possible to transcribe it onto the musical score, emphasizing the first and third beats (see Figure 1). Nevertheless, in the case of the slur section, it is necessary to perform it in a legato manner while avoiding excessive lyrical qualities like those found in chorale music. The detached articulation is executed on the leaping note occurring on the downbeat and upbeat, particularly on beats 2 and 4 inside a measure, as shown above.

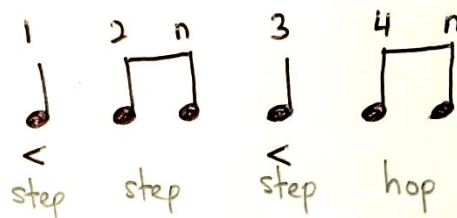


Fig. 3: Rhythm of Allemande with courtesy and permission from Collins. M (2023)

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the pieces' demographic and national background information is needed for performers to understand the underlying characters for stylized dance compositions. The presence of diverse nationalities in the movement in the suites requires an examination of additional factors, including the time's economic, political, and social contexts. The limitation of this study is the limited sources we can gain from the previous study, especially the keyboard suite and the dance study. This study demonstrates that within the context of the dance movement experiment, it was observed that certain aspects of the Allemande, particularly its rhythmic pattern, displayed a diminished connection to the character of dance compared to other specialized dance movements. Moreover, this study aims to assist pianists and instrumentalists in exploring innovative methods by looking at the unique characteristics of different movements through diverse methodologies. Additionally, it offers potential alternatives for new editions of articulations and raises awareness regarding the significance of dance studies in enhancing performance quality. A thorough study is needed to preserve the intricate nuances of Baroque dance and its accompanying styled music, ensuring the continuation of its distinctive rhythmic patterns. This paper will help future readers to have a better understanding of the specific dance music and interpretations.

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