

EXPLANATION 3.8: INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC: THE SUITE AND THE SONATA

3.8.1. THE SUITE

The suite is a set of several pieces, often dances, which together form a complete work. It originated in the Baroque. The dances are played one after another in the order established by the composer and all are in the same key (they are governed by the same scale) or in their relative minor (one tone and a half below the major scale that governs the work). The suite evolved in a more sophisticated way that mixed tonalities and re-exposed materials that had been exposed at the beginning. For this reason, the suite is the origin of the 17th century sonata, since the latter is based on re-exposing material already heard.

The basic dances of the suite were (in French): allemande, courante, sarabande and giga. The sarabande is the slowest dance and the giga the fastest one and always was the last one to be played. Usually the suite had more dances and even a prelude to start with. The suite could vary this traditional scheme and not always had the basic dances, as in the orchestral suites of Handel where there were other dances. Great German composers of suites were J.S. Bach and F. H. Handel, S. L. Weiss.

The dances were danced in courtly environments, although with the instrumental boom they ended up being works for solo instruments or orchestra. The suites of French composers, especially F. Couperin, were called "ordres" and could reach twenty or more short pieces. In Germany the suites for solo instruments were called "partitas" and Bach called "overtures" his suites for orchestra. Suites were composed for all kinds of instruments, but especially for harpsichord and for orchestra.

3.8.2. THE BAROQUE SONATA

A baroque sonata, in a general sense, is a composition for a small group of instruments composed in sections that contrast in tempo (speed) and texture (counterpoint, homophony, imitations, etc). Corelli was one of the Baroque composers who stood out in this genre called "sonata a trio" because it had three instruments. Other composers outside Italy were: Purcell (England) and Muffat (Germany).

The precursor of the sonata originated in the Renaissance. At that time there was a sung musical form called "canzona". Later, this form was being played with instruments, so that the sung melody was transcribed (adaptation of the notes) for the instrument. Thus, the canzona led way to the baroque sonata, of which there were two types:

- Sonata da chiesa (church sonata): played in the churches. Its sections were slow-fast-slow-fast and had no dance names or dancing rhythms.
- Sonata da camera (chamber sonata): played in the aristocratic precincts such as palaces, halls, etc. It was a suite of stylized dances.

According to its members, which were a set of instruments, sonatas are classified as:

- Trio Sonata: for four instruments, usually two violins, one bass and the continuo. That is, two melodies over a bass, plus the accompaniment played by the harpsichord who received the name of "continuo".
- Sonata a solo: for two instruments, but one of them played the continuo, that is, the

accompaniment. If the sonata did not have continuo it was written in the score: "senza continuo" (without continuo).

COMPREHENSION TEXT QUESTIONS 3.8

1. **What is a suite?**
2. **Name two aspects of the evolution of the suite.**
3. **Why is the suite the origin fo the the sonata?**
4. **Name 4 baroque dances and a quick dance.**
5. **How do the Handel suites differ from the traditional scheme?**
6. **What different names did the suites have in countries like Germany and France?**
7. **Name two composers of German suites and one of French suites.**
8. **What musical form is the precursor of the Baroque sonata?**
9. **What is a musical transcription?**
10. **What are the two types of Baroque sonata called and how do they differ from each other?**
11. **Classify, in a diagram, the Baroque sonata according to its members.**