

CAROLINE SHAW'S USE OF RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE DANCE FORMS IN HER  
*PARTITA FOR 8 VOICES*

by

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*To Caroline Shaw,  
who gave a deep well of joy.*

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## Chapter 1: Caroline 1

*“It’s as much of myself as I could possibly put into something.”*

Drawing a line from one point to another is a simple act: it begins, it connects, it ends. By connecting any two points, distant and unrelated objects become one. In examining these connections, we are able to draw parallels to the past, find commonality in our present day, and dream about the future. On an April day in 2013 at 3:03 p.m. outside of Williamsburg in Brooklyn, composer Caroline Adelaide Shaw received a phone call that would change her life. A friend shared with Shaw that she had just won the Pulitzer Prize for Music for her composition *Partita for 8 Voices*. At just thirty years old, she became the youngest winner in the Prize’s history. *Partita* presents a musical history of Shaw’s young career. These experiences allowed Shaw to draw parallels from these events and compose one of the most unique and inventive pieces in the modern-day repertoire. *Partita for 8 Voices* tells the story of Caroline Shaw.

On the inside cover of the score, Caroline describes the basic architecture and material for the work: “*Partita* is a simple piece. Born of a love of surface and structure, of the human voice, of dancing and tired ligaments, of music, and of our basic desire to draw a line from one point to another.”<sup>1</sup> Based on this description, it would be natural to assume that the work is uncomplicated, but this assumption would be incorrect. The 2013 Pulitzer Prize committee had the following to say when awarding the prize to Shaw: “A highly polished and inventive a cappella work uniquely embracing speech, whispers, sighs, murmurs, wordless melodies and novel vocal effects.”<sup>2</sup> Although the jury and the composer describe the piece in different ways, they both seem to agree on one central detail: the piece embraces a variety of influences. The title *Partita* and its four movements – “Allemande,” “Sarabande,” “Courante,” and “Passacaglia” – reference Renaissance and Baroque dance forms. While Shaw employs the forms as titles, she gives the listener little additional information about how these forms are integrated into the piece.

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices* (manuscript), Caroline Shaw Editions (unpublished), 2014.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/caroline-shaw>.

Why, then, did she decide to name the movements of her new work after seemingly antiquated dance forms? To find an answer, we need to look into Shaw's past.

Uncovering Caroline Shaw's development as a composer and her compositional style leading up to *Partita* is difficult. Shaw, herself, offers little help with this issue. Her professional biography highlights her work as a performer and collaborator, singing and performing with groups such as ACME (American Contemporary Music Ensemble) and Roomful of Teeth, and collaborating with popular rap/hip-hop artist Kanye West. The end of her personal biography on her website states that she "loves the color yellow, avocados, otters, salted chocolate, kayaking, Beethoven opus 74, Mozart opera, Kinhaven, the smell of rosemary and the sound of a janky mandolin."<sup>3</sup> So in order to reveal the inner workings of Shaw's compositional style and the compositional techniques used in *Partita*, we must begin with Shaw's musical roots.

Caroline Adelaide Shaw was born in Greenville, North Carolina in 1982. She began studying the violin when she was just two years old, beginning formal lessons with her mother at age six.<sup>4</sup> She sang in a local Episcopal choir growing up and composed her first string quartet at nine years old. Her love for chamber music led her to the Kinhaven Music School in Weston, Vermont. At Kinhaven, Shaw's first official premiere occurred with a piece for viola and piano, which she describes as sounding "very Brahmsian."<sup>5</sup> Shaw played the music of Clara Schumann in a piano trio alongside Kevin McFarland (of the JACK quartet). Shaw pinpoints her experiences at Kinhaven as formative, and the start to her path towards a career in music.<sup>6,7</sup> After graduating high school, Shaw attended the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. At Rice, she studied the violin with Kathleen Winkler and was active outside of her

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<sup>3</sup> <http://carolineshaw.com/#bio>.

<sup>4</sup> Nadia Sirota and Caroline Shaw, "Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully," *Meet The Composer*, WQXR, podcast audio, September 30, 2014, <http://www.wqxr.org/#!/story/meet-composer-caroline-shaw-show/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> She also attributes her time at Kinhaven to why she prefers to perform barefoot whenever possible.

musical life, writing for the school's newspaper, the *Rice Thresher*,<sup>8</sup> singing in an a cappella group for two years,<sup>9</sup> and performing in a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*.<sup>10</sup>

In 2001, after her first year as an undergraduate, Shaw was awarded a Rice Goliard Scholarship, which "offers students the opportunity for short-term, purposeful travel experiences abroad."<sup>11</sup> Shaw's project took her to Scandinavia where she worked on her project: *Spelmanstamma Street Musician*. While abroad in Sweden and Norway, Shaw spent the summer "learning tunes and busking on the street."<sup>12</sup> This experience clearly sparked her musical curiosity, and it encouraged her to pursue a musical career that was uniquely her own. Upon her return from Sweden, she continued her study of the solo violin repertoire, performing works by Beethoven, Mozart, Paganini, Grieg, Saint-Saens and Hilary Tann on her junior and senior recitals, as well as string quartets of Beethoven and Mozart.<sup>13</sup> Most notably for this paper's inquiry, Shaw began her senior violin recital with J.S. Bach's *Partita No. 2 in D-minor*, BWV 1004 (all movements except the chaconne), the very work that would eventually heavily influence her own *Partita*.<sup>14</sup>

During her senior year, Shaw applied to graduate schools, as she believed that a master's degree would be necessary for a career as a classical violinist. She also realized that she did not want a typical orchestral career, as she was instead drawn to chamber music and composition, especially the string quartet. Shaw concurrently applied to the prestigious Thomas J. Watson Fellowship, which Shaw describes as an opportunity to "design what you want to study for a year outside the country, a project you've always dreamed of that's outside the box."<sup>15</sup> Even though she had not composed since her years at

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<sup>8</sup> Her review of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* can be found in the Friday, March 15th, 2002 issue. <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/80435/thr20020315.pdf?sequence=1>. Accessed 23 April, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Shaw cites the influence of popular music group Ben Folds 5 as one of the arrangements that influenced her the most during this time singing his song "Brick" in the group. Sirota, "Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully."

<sup>10</sup> Shaw was cast in the role of Peep-Bo in the Rice Light Opera Society 2009 production of *The Mikado*. [http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~rlos/shows/mikado/mikado\\_cast\\_list.htm](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~rlos/shows/mikado/mikado_cast_list.htm), accessed 23 April, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> <https://ccl.rice.edu/students/fellowships/rice-nominated-fellowships/goliard-scholarship/>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://rubpa.rice.edu/blogs.aspx?blogmonth=4&blogyear=2013&blogid=269>. Accessed 6 February, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Caroline Shaw, "Violin, Junior Recital," Rice University, The Shepherd School of Music, Program accessed via <https://events.rice.edu/?EventRecord=3370#!view/day>, 12 February, 2003. Accessed 23 March, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Caroline Shaw, "Violin, Senior Recital," Rice University, The Shepherd School of Music, Program accessed via <https://events.rice.edu/?EventRecord=3370#!view/day>, 20 January, 2004. Accessed 23 March, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Sirota, "Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully."

Kinhaven, Shaw wanted to write music. She also wanted to study landscape architecture and gardens as she was drawn to their overabundance of intersecting lines. So, she submitted a proposal that would allow her to compose string quartets based on the aesthetic principles of formal garden design.

After graduating *cum laude* from Rice in the spring of 2004, she was awarded the Watson Fellowship and decided to postpone graduate school. During her year abroad, Shaw lived in Paris and visited a variety of gardens including French formal gardens, English landscape gardens, and Italian Renaissance gardens. While doing a lot of “walking, thinking, and meeting people,”<sup>16</sup> she was also composing, allowing the gardens’ architecture and her experiences with friends to slowly permeate her compositional style. Some of these influences would not find their way into her musical vocabulary until later in her career. For example, Shaw spent some of her time with a close friend in Brussels who introduced her to Bulgarian throat singing. Bulgarian throat singing is one of the many vocal techniques she would later explore in *Partita*.

Shaw’s attention to English landscape gardens was specifically focused on the structures known as follies. These buildings are constructed primarily for decoration, intended to enhance and add to the garden and its design. Shaw describes these structures as “fragments of a castle, a construct of something that wasn’t there before but a wistful longing of another time. It’s just there in the garden off in the distance on a hill, a fragment of a castle – a fake ruin.”<sup>17</sup> Shaw parallels this type of structure in her music, stating that she “puts in references to a music of another time.”<sup>18</sup> The connection of old and new worlds would evolve into one of the defining features of Shaw’s compositional style. In thinking about her own work, Shaw states:

The follies encapsulate nostalgia – a memory of something past in a little building off in the distance. My music is different from that. Instead, pieces such as *Gustav le Grey* and *To The Hands* nest older music inside of something else. I think making a garden is like making a piece of music: you place memories and design the space as you want it.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sirota, “Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully.”

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Caroline Shaw and Joshua Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, January 10, 2019.

Although string quartet sketches were composed during this time which drew from gardens, lines, and structures, they were unfortunately never completed.<sup>20</sup>

Shaw soon concluded her time in Paris, but not before taking her first and only orchestra audition for the Paris Opera. The orchestra had one violin position open that year and over 350 people auditioned.<sup>21</sup> When she did not make it past the first round, she determined that this was not the path for her. Instead, she returned to America to begin her Master of Music in violin performance at the Yale School of Music in the fall of 2005. While at Yale, she joined the choir at Christ Church in New Haven, singing plainchant and Renaissance motets by Tallis and Josquin in their candlelight Compline services on Sunday nights.<sup>22</sup> One of her first, formal compositions was written during this time. The piece is scored for solo cello titled *In manus tuas* derived from a Tallis motet that Shaw sang at Christ Church (which was also influenced by the garden follies). Her passion for vocal music was reignited and her appreciation and interest in liturgical forms grew. It was also here at Christ Church that Shaw found a new appreciation for the emotional connection derived from ensemble singing.

Outside of her violin program at Yale, Shaw found new avenues and opportunities for composition in addition to her singing. These tangents were born out of her desire to continue writing, even though she was wary of studying composition with a single teacher. Shaw states that she “enjoys following rules and worried that studying with a teacher would influence her in a way that was not positive,”<sup>23</sup> because she did not want to emulate any one teacher too closely.

After finishing her degree at Yale, she chose to stay and live in New Haven for a year. During this time, she began playing for dance classes at a local arts high school. Soon thereafter, she began traveling to Wesleyan University four days a week to play for beginning and modern dance classes. In these classes, Shaw would improvise new compositions on the violin, piano, and a variety of percussion instruments. These pieces were born out of requests from the dance teachers for specific styles, rhythms,

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<sup>20</sup> Caroline Shaw and Joshua Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, January 10, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Sirota, “Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

tempos and meters. When these guidelines were not requested, she was free to create music with the dancers working in a “free contact” improvisational style, where she would musically reflect the dancers’ physical motions and lines. Shaw says that she viewed these requests as specific compositional assignments which helped her to grow as a composer.<sup>24</sup> This was formative for Shaw, stating that in composing *Partita*, she “thought of the relationship of the music to the dancers. I am not a choreographer myself, but I was tied to this idea of tension and release found in dancing.”<sup>25</sup>

These ballet classes were extremely regimented and yet provided Shaw with the opportunity to experiment with dance forms, small slides, sprightly hops, quicker tempos, and jagged glissandi, around which she could improvise her music. Shaw guesses that she composed hundreds of hours of music during this time period, even though she had still yet to have a single formal composition lesson.

Shaw eventually moved to New York City in order to be closer to the professional ensembles she performed with and other job opportunities. She began work at New York University’s dance department alongside her classes at Wesleyan. During the 2008 – 2009 academic year, Shaw was awarded a Baroque Violin Fellowship at Yale, which allowed her to travel back and forth to New Haven and deepen her relationship with Baroque music at the professional level. The crossover of Baroque work in New Haven and new work in New York City had an enormous influence on Shaw and her compositional style. She continued to experiment in her music with new and old, past and present, structured and restructured, just as she had in Europe with the garden follies.

Shaw also continued her career as a singer during this period. She auditioned at Trinity Wall Street Church in New York City and was placed on their substitute choral roster. She describes her experience at Trinity as an extension of her days at Christ Church in New Haven. It is also where she met and began to collaborate with many of the members that would make up the ensemble Roomful of Teeth. While at Trinity she sang J.S. Bach’s *Mass in B minor* (another piece which explores the intersection of

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<sup>24</sup> Sirota, “Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully.”

<sup>25</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, October 17, 2017.



international compositional styles), and due to the vocal demands of the piece – particularly what Shaw calls the “long, fast passages” – she decided to take voice lessons.<sup>26</sup>

Shaw’s only formal voice training up to this point was one semester of lessons during her time as an undergraduate at Rice. A friend at Trinity Wall Street recommended that she take lessons with vocalist and pedagogue Jacqueline Horner-Kwiatek, a member of vocal ensemble Anonymous 4. Horner-Kwiatek and her ensemble’s music would become important influences on Shaw’s *Partita*: it was through her that Shaw would discover the hymn “Shining Shore,” which is quoted and sung wordlessly in “Courante.” Her association with Trinity Wall Street would eventually lead her to audition for Roomful of Teeth, a partnership that would change the trajectory of not only her career, but more importantly her entire life.

Roomful of Teeth is an octet of singers founded and directed by Dr. Brad Wells. Wells describes the ensemble as a “vocal project dedicated to reimagining the expressive potential of the human voice.”<sup>27</sup> In June of 2009, the newly formed ensemble traveled to the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) for a three-week residency in North Adams, Massachusetts. Wells invited vocal experts and teachers from around the world to come and teach singing techniques not traditionally heard in the Western vocal canon. Wells also invited notable composers to these workshops with the intention that they would create original works for the ensemble that incorporated these newly acquired vocal techniques. In addition to these invited guests, Wells extended the invitation to compose to the eight-member ensemble, allowing them the opportunity to contribute compositions or improvisational structures. These compositions were intended to fill out the concert program given at the end of the residency.

This invitation is how Shaw came to compose the first movement of *Partita*, “Passacaglia.” Shaw was fascinated with the vocal technique of belting and the use of vocal fry. During rehearsal breaks, Shaw says she would “walk around the galleries, listening to what was around me; listening to what was on the

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<sup>26</sup> Sirota, “Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully.”

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.roomfulofteeth.org/roomful/>. Accessed 24 April 2018.

walls.”<sup>28</sup> She would write late at night in Wells’s studio at Williams College, where Wells is on faculty, before waking up to go to the next Roomful rehearsal.<sup>29</sup> Shaw derived much of the text for her work from the paintings of visual artist Sol LeWitt, whose wall drawings encompass three floors in the massive space at Mass MoCA in the exhibition titled *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective*.

The instructions for Sol LeWitt’s wall drawings display rigor, structure, clarity, and precision. Of LeWitt’s work, Shaw says, “I saw LeWitt’s work, which I felt was talking and representing chaos, with all these little words written on the wall. I thought to myself, ‘this sounds like music to me, it sounds like chaotic conversation.’ In his paintings, you see the serene, bright, lovely wall of color, but behind that color there are all these technical directions, there’s craft behind it.”<sup>30</sup> In Jock Reynolds’s exhibition pamphlet, he writes of how LeWitt came to his Wall Drawing methodology:

Although LeWitt executed this first wall drawing in his own hand, he quickly realized that others could participate in the making of such drawings, just as musicians are guided by composers’ scores to give direction to their individual, ensemble, or orchestral performances.<sup>31</sup>

Shaw had encountered LeWitt’s work prior to her time at Mass MoCA, as the other primary installation of his drawings can be found in the Yale University Art Gallery. Shaw was drawn primarily to LeWitt’s early period. In the score, Shaw states, “the occasional spoken and sung text pulls from wall drawing directions of Sol LeWitt, square dance calls, found phrases from an urban environment, and original writing by the composer.”<sup>32</sup> Regarding LeWitt’s early work and why she chose to focus on it, she says “I was drawn to his early work because of his use of pencil. I particularly loved how he used the pencil and you could see the instructions for Wall Drawing 305.”<sup>33</sup> Shaw uses LeWitt’s instructions most frequently in “Allemande,” employing six sets of wall drawing instructions from his early period as sources for the text. She also uses a set of instructions in “Passacaglia.” Shaw’s creative work with these influences at

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<sup>28</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Anastasia Tsioulcas, “Caroline Shaw, 30, Wins Pulitzer For Music,” *Deceptive Cadence* from NPR Classical, April 15, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2013/04/15/177348405/caroline-shaw-30-wins-pulitzer-for-music>.

<sup>30</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, October 17, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Jock Reynolds, *Sol Lewitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective*, North Adams: MASS MoCA, November 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices*.

<sup>33</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

Mass MoCA in the summer of 2009 lit a spark that would only grow with each successive summer spent in North Adams with Roomful of Teeth.

When she returned to Mass MoCA in the summer of 2010, she wrote “Courante,”<sup>34</sup> the second movement to be composed, but the third movement of her suite. Earlier in the year, Shaw decided to pursue composition more seriously. Shaw applied to Princeton University for a doctorate in music composition. She was accepted, despite having no formal background in composition. At Princeton that fall, she was able to avoid weekly lessons with a single teacher and only meet with professors on a project basis as needed. She studied with Steven Mackey, Paul Lansky, and Dan Trueman. Shaw cites Trueman as being one of her most notable influences, primarily because of his identity as a violinist, composer, and folk musician.<sup>35</sup> The interdisciplinary nature of his musicianship happens to intersect with Shaw’s interests and her own background as a musician.

Shaw remained in New York City while pursuing her doctorate, continuing her work both as a singer and violinist. She joined the New York-based Red Light New Music Ensemble as a violinist. During the 2010 – 2011 academic year she also began to rediscover the Bach solo violin partitas, becoming reinvigorated by their sense of structure and style. With Roomful of Teeth back at Mass MoCA in the summer of 2011, Shaw composed both “Allemande” and “Sarabande.” However, the four separate pieces had yet to be performed as a single suite. Shaw said she did not want to take up twenty-five minutes of music on a program as she felt that might be “rude.”<sup>36</sup> Although the idea for a suite began percolating during 2010 while writing “Courante,” she did not convince herself of its formal unity until 2011.<sup>37</sup>

Shaw had entertained the idea of recording small “Gigues” during 2012 to add in between the movements, but eventually felt like they did not quite fit the feeling of the rest of the piece.<sup>38</sup> The four

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<sup>34</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Sirota, “Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully.”

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, October 17, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

movements were recorded and released on the group's first CD "Roomful of Teeth" on October 30, 2012. When she realized that composers may self-submit a piece for the Pulitzer Prize in Music, she decided to submit *Partita for 8 Voices*.<sup>39</sup> She claimed that she wanted to try and gain more exposure for Roomful of Teeth as an ensemble.<sup>40</sup> Not only did her submission gain Roomful of Teeth the intended exposure, it also resulted in the phone call outside of Williamsburg on April 15, 2013, informing Shaw that she had won the Pulitzer Prize.

Writing for *The New York Times*, Zachary Woolfe said:

She changes gears so quickly and so easily, and every turn is so unexpected and so full of joy. And it's in such a convincing and cohesive manner that you could never doubt the sense of architecture and the sense of premeditation.<sup>41</sup>

Brad Wells believes that this piece and its initial reception embodied everything he envisioned Roomful of Teeth to be: "[an ensemble] that makes use of the voice and engages with audiences directly... [the Partita] showed me that Caroline got it in the most perfect, beautiful way."<sup>42</sup> Justin David, in his review for *New York Magazine* echoes this sentiment:

You can hear in the luminous, sensual clarity of her sound that Shaw's not interested in faded ideological oppositions: agonized self – expression versus deadpan austerity; the embrace of the past versus the principled rejection of history. These are the battles of old men. Instead, she has discovered a lode of the rarest commodity in contemporary music: joy.<sup>43</sup>

After Shaw won the prize, Anastasia Tsioulucas of National Public Radio wrote an article reminiscing upon her initial review of the "Roomful of Teeth" album, stating:

Back then, I lauded the album in part for "the sheer virtuosity and total joy in the sounds they produce, like the supernumerous (sic) lines floating over churning breaths in 'Courante,' one of singer Caroline Shaw's Baroque-structured compositions that weave through the album like

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<sup>39</sup> "Music composed by U.S. citizens and premiered in the United States during 2018, in a concert or on a recording, is eligible. After submitting information and payment online, send one (1) recording and score (if available) to address below." - <http://bdmentrysite.pulitzer.org/>.

<sup>40</sup> Sirota, "Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully."

<sup>41</sup> Zachary Woolfe, "With Pulitzer, She Became a Composer: Caroline Shaw, Award-Winning Composer," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/18/arts/music/caroline-shaw-award-winning-composer.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/18/arts/music/caroline-shaw-award-winning-composer.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>42</sup> Sirota, "Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully."

<sup>43</sup> Justin Davidson, "An Avant-Garde That's Easy to Love: Three heartening moments from the new-music scene," *New York Magazine*, November 10th, 2013. <http://nymag.com/arts/classicaldance/classical/reviews/caroline-shaw-partita-2013-11/>.

glittering threads.”<sup>44</sup>

Although the work had been recorded and performed as single movements at the group’s residencies at Mass MoCA and other Roomful of Teeth concerts, *Partita* had yet to be premiered in its entirety. *Partita for 8 Voices* received its official live premier on Monday, November 4, 2013 at the New York City contemporary music venue, (Le) Poisson Rouge. In his review for the *New York Times*, Anthony Tommasini writes:

‘Partita,’ Ms. Shaw’s breakthrough piece, comes across as a summation of her exploration of diverse styles and techniques of singing. In another way, the work pays witty yet sensitive homage to the Baroque dance suite, with movements titled Allemande, Sarabande, Courante and Passacaglia, each one full of deft, often impish rhythmic writing.<sup>45</sup>

Life for Shaw quickly accelerated after winning the Pulitzer Prize. She was instantaneously “a name,” someone that critics and performers alike were discussing. Roomful of Teeth also began to generate a significant following, which led to invitations to perform across the country. She has now been commissioned by some of the most prestigious groups for solo and chamber music, including The Crossing, yMusic, ACME, I.C.E., A Far Cry, Renée Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, Sō Percussion, Tenet, the Netherlands Chamber Choir, and large ensembles such as the Baltimore Symphony, the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. These commissions came as a direct result of *Partita*’s success.

Along with these commissions, Shaw also received recognition and honorary titles for her work as a composer. In 2014, she was named the first artist-in-residence at Dumbarton Oaks Garden in honor of their 75th anniversary. During this time, Shaw was able to study the gardens, the estate, and cultivate her art with the gift of time to compose. The residency produced a string quartet for the Dover Quartet titled *Plan & Elevation (The Grounds of Dumbarton Oaks)*. The movements were titled “The Herbaceous

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<sup>44</sup> Anastasia Tsioulcas, “Caroline Shaw, 30, Wins Pulitzer For Music,” *Deceptive Cadence* from NPR Classical, April 15, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2013/04/15/177348405/caroline-shaw-30-wins-pulitzer-for-music>.

<sup>45</sup> Anthony Tommasini, “The Pulitzer Prize Was Nice and All, but a Work Is Finally Fully Heard Caroline Shaw’s ‘Partita’ Has Premiere by Roomful of Teeth,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 2013.

Border” and “The Beech Tree.”<sup>46</sup> It was an opportunity to continue the work that she began in Europe during her Watson Fellowship, ten years earlier.<sup>47</sup> In 2014, she was also appointed composer-in-residence for Music on Main in Vancouver for two seasons. She spent this time sharing her compositions with local audiences by hosting public salons, performing in concerts, and creating new works.<sup>48</sup>

The year 2015 was another important year for Shaw, as she garnered the attention of rapper, hip-hop artist, and producer Kanye West. “West attended a performance of Shaw’s *Partita* at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles in May 2015, and went backstage after the performance to meet Shaw.”<sup>49</sup> In September of that same year, West invited Roomful of Teeth to join him in his performance at the Hollywood Bowl where they sang backup for the live performance of the album “808’s and Heartbreak.” On October 17, Kanye West uploaded a remixed track arranged by Shaw of his hit “Say You Will” featuring Shaw on vocals and violin, employing vocal gestures developed in *Partita*. She was featured on West’s 2016 album “The Life of Pablo” on the track “Wolves,” where she is listed as an additional producer and background vocals. Shaw later joined West as one of three live musicians on his “Saint Pablo Tour.”<sup>50</sup>

In 2017, Shaw was the composer-in-residence at Music Academy of the West where she led master classes and premiered *Broad and Free* for voice and violin, which included her former violin teacher, Kathleen Winkler. She was named a MacDowell Fellow for the summer session in 2017. During summer 2018, she served as the Leonard Bernstein composer-in-residence at the Vail Dance Festival, creating works that were choreographed by Justin Peck, with whom she continues to collaborate.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Anne Midgette, “Hot composer offers lukewarm work at Dumbarton Oaks,” *The Washington Post*, November 2nd, 2015, Accessed April 13, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/hot-composer-offers-lukewarm-work-at-dumbarton-oaks/2015/11/02/a61ad4d0-818b-11e5-9afb-0c971f713d0c\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.2edc386698d9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/hot-composer-offers-lukewarm-work-at-dumbarton-oaks/2015/11/02/a61ad4d0-818b-11e5-9afb-0c971f713d0c_story.html?utm_term=.2edc386698d9).

<sup>47</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.musiconmain.ca/caroline-shaw-composer-in-residence/>.

<sup>49</sup> Alex Ross, “Kanye West, Obama, Caroline Shaw,” *Alex Ross: The Rest Is Noise*, October 12, 2015.

<http://www.therestisnoise.com/2015/10/kanye-west-obama-caroline-shaw.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Corbin Reiff, “Kanye West Floats Over Crowd in Unique Saint Pablo Tour Kickoff Our take on the Indianapolis show,” *Rolling Stone*, August 26, 2016, Accessed April 13 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/live-reviews/kanye-west-floats-in-unique-saint-pablo-tour-kickoff-w436236>.

<sup>51</sup> <https://vaildance.org/event/upclose-vail-premieres>, Accessed April 12th 2018.

When Shaw described *Partita for 8 Voices* in an interview with music critic and violist Nadia Sirota, Shaw said “[*Partita*] is as much of myself as I could possibly put into something.”<sup>52</sup> When you consider Shaw’s journey through life leading up to the creation of *Partita*, it becomes clear how logical her statement really is. The influence of physical spaces such as North Carolina, Kinhaven, Rice, Yale, Mass MoCA, and Princeton all find musical space in *Partita*. Time abroad in both Sweden and Europe introduced Shaw to new sound worlds and provided architectural structure for *Partita*. The combination of Renaissance motets experienced at Christ Church Cathedral along with the garden follies seen in London influenced the compositional style of the work. Improvisatory dance classes at Wesleyan combined with her love of BWV 1004 allowed Shaw to see the old dance forms through a new lens, one that sprung alive with fresh shapes and choreography for *Partita*. These many influences are connected, and they can be discovered within the score once we understand Shaw’s personal and musical journeys. This “new and highly inventive” work came into being because of one simple truth: it is as much of herself as she could possibly put into something. Shaw is the *Partita* and the *Partita* is Shaw, and it is one of the most significant pieces of music yet written in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>52</sup> Sirota, “Caroline Shaw Lives Life Beautifully.”

## Chapter 2: History and origin of Baroque dance forms (beginning around 1500)

*Partita* is complex. Identifying its many influences and how they grow like planted seeds throughout each movement demands further analysis. The purpose of this paper is to illuminate these many influences within Caroline Shaw's prize-winning work. Shaw opted for a traditional Baroque dance suite as the formal structure for her piece. Utilizing the allemande, courante, sarabande, and passacaglia dance forms, Shaw pays "sensitive homage to the Baroque dance suite."<sup>1</sup> But what stylistic features did she draw from these dances and the music that accompanied them? Why would a composer in the twenty-first century draw upon forms codified in the sixteenth century to write a new work that sounds like anything but the Renaissance and Baroque forms? What characteristics did she see in the iconic solo partitas by Baroque masters such as J.S. Bach that inspired her to write one of the most influential works of the twenty-first century?

An understanding of musical interpretation of the Baroque dance forms in performance can provide a sense of authenticity for both composers and performers alike. These forms also diversify the musical material in a typical Baroque suite. Scholars such as Wendy Hilton and Betsy Bang Mather have researched and written extensively on these dances and the music that accompanied them. However, Hilton, Mather, Richard Hudson, and others do not always include how the geographical origins influenced not only the composers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but also the style of the dances themselves. They also do not discuss how geographical culture influenced the development of the dances and music. The origins of these dances are difficult to trace because there is "a dance tradition extending back indefinitely into unwritten history and carrying forward to form one of many evolutionary threads of the Renaissance and Baroque suites."<sup>2</sup> In their interpretation of these dance forms, both the dancers and

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Tommasini, "The Pulitzer Prize Was Nice and All, but a Work Is Finally Fully Heard Caroline Shaw's 'Partita' Has Premiere by Roomful of Teeth," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Rifat J. Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance in the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, Thesis (D.M.A.), Rice University, 1994, 3.



musicians at court greatly influenced the forms as we know them today in the stylized dance suites of J.S. Bach and other Baroque composers. Shaw connects with the stylistic features of the four dance forms in *Partita* and their countries of origin.

The dance suite itself is not a single genre. Each of the suite's movements is defined by distinct styles. These styles are then expressed musically by the composer in a way that evokes emotional characteristics. By scrutinizing the genesis of these individual forms, particularly in their first notated versions (both choreography and music), we can make informed decisions regarding tempo, articulation, and interpretation. By acknowledging the countries of origin and the influence they had on the dance's progression through modern day Europe, both performers and scholars can better understand the unique characteristics of these musical forms.

Leon Stein states that "style refers to the distinctive characteristics of a work, a composer, or a period."<sup>3</sup> Robert Pascall defines style as "a term denoting manner of discourse, mode of expression;... it may be used to denote music characteristic of an individual composer, of a period, of a geographical area or centre, or of a society or social function."<sup>4</sup> Pascall also acknowledges in his definition that "in the discussion of music... the term raises special difficulties."<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I will define style as a distinctive musical characteristic of a geographical area. Geographical areas had distinct musical preferences. These geographical and cultural preferences influenced not only how dances developed in these regions, but also the music that was written to accompany these dances.

Style and musical form, while mutually distinguishable from one another, each provide important insight into this examination. André Hodier, in comparing style to form, says,

[t]he concept of *style* is more exact, yet no less complex. We must examine it from two angles: in relation to the composer, and as a function of the genre to which his composition belongs... Style can also be viewed as a function of the genre or form to which the composition belongs.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Leon Stein, *Structure & Style: The Study and Analysis of Musical Forms*, Expanded ed. Princeton, N.J., Summy-Birchard Music, 1979, x.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Pascall, "Style," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, 2011, 27 October 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000027041>.

<sup>5</sup> Pascall, "Style," *Grove Music Online*, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> André Hodeir, *The Forms of Music*, New York, Walker, 1966, 12-13.

According to Hodier, form comes before function. Style is a function of these dance forms. We can more deeply understand how this music should be performed by studying where the dances evolved into a codified choreography and musical form. In studying the countries of origin, we learn that particular gestures for each dance genre are synchronized to precise rhythms and melodic figures and that these pairings are related to the geographical origin of each dance. Tempo, meter, dynamics, and rhythm are derived from steps and gestures based upon geographic preference and style. Curt Sachs states that “the dance is at once a product and symbol of the fifteenth century.”<sup>7</sup> He goes on to describe the political climate in the sixteenth century, when these dance forms were more fully formed and characterized, as such:

The social culture of Italy in the sixteenth century is on the decline. In the chaos caused by the conflict of beliefs and the friction between the Latin and the Gallic spirit, France prepares to take over the leadership of the world of court and social life and at the same time the cultivation of the higher forms of the dance. The transition is shown clearly when about 1520 Federigo Gonzaga in Rome takes dancing lessons alla francesca. But this change affects only social dancing.<sup>8</sup>

These forms should not be separated from their geographical origins. The dance steps and the music accompanying the steps show specific stylistic influences based upon their geography and cultural preferences. By the mid sixteenth century, dance forms were customarily grouped together into what we now know as a “suite.” The first group of dances to appear together as a formal suite were the *Septieme livre de dancieries* by Estienne du Tertre (Paris, 1557).<sup>9</sup> These suites would either be a conglomerate of geographical styles or focused on one regional style.

Beginning in the fifteenth century, the geographical transmission of these styles gave composers and dancers agency to codify their creativity across Western Europe. For the first time, the printing press allowed for dance movements and the music that accompanied them to be disseminated beyond their local regions where they had been contained for many years. The importance of the printing press is essential to

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<sup>7</sup> Curt Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, New York, Seven Arts, 1952, 298.

<sup>8</sup> Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 345.

<sup>9</sup> Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance In the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, 4.

our understanding of the first representations of these dances and pieces of music in print, as these styles evolved from region to region. The dissemination of this music to a much wider audience in a much shorter span of time could not have happened without this invention, as Paul Nettl articulates:

At one stroke, we have a flood of printed dance music for instruments such as lutes, guitars, organs, stringed and key-board instruments, and naturally the variety and the manifold forms of the dances which prevailed, appear in the musical field.<sup>10</sup>

We start studying these dances from the fifteenth century onward – and not from their origins – because we know that parallel forms began to appear within other genres of music at this point in history. Composers of instrumental music began to craft their works with the dance forms as structural starting points, raising the form’s popularity. It is here that style begins to directly influence musical form at the levels of both a single movement and the suite as a whole.

If our goal is to understand the geographical origins of fifteenth century choreography and the stylized musical forms that resulted from them, then our best evidence comes from musical manuscripts and dance manuals of the time. During the fifteenth century, the first dance manuals originated in Italy and France from composers Domenico da Piacenza (1416) and Michel Toulouze (c. 1480).<sup>11</sup> It is here in the early fifteenth century that we are able to derive an early definition of these dance forms and establish a vocabulary for these steps and pieces of music. Sachs, in his *World History of the Dance*, acknowledges the importance of these manuals by saying “If we are able to speak here for the first time of a vocabulary of steps, it means that we have arrived at an important point in the history of the dance.”<sup>12</sup> In the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we observe a proliferation of important dance manuals and dance suites for musicians. Music published by Pierre Attaignant (1529 – 1530, 1557), Cesare Negri (1602), Giulio Cesare Barbetta (1603), Wilhelm Brade (1621), Jacques Champion de Chambonnières (1658) were followed by notated dance manuals by Jehan Tabourot (1588), Marin Mersenne (1636), Louis Pécour (1700, 1704), and Kellom Tomlinson (1720, 1735) which described how these dances

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Nettl, *The Story of Dance Music*, New York City, NY, Philosophical Library, INC., 1947, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance In the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 299.

should be performed. These important publications, although not an exhaustive list, began to define and solidify the dance forms in choreography and music.

## **Allemande**

Examples of the Italian *alemana* and the French *allemande* begin to appear in the mid-sixteenth century. Both of these words actually mean “German,” as the dance is thought to have originated in Germany.<sup>13</sup> In France, the earliest instructions for the allemande as a dance is found in Thoinot Arbeau’s<sup>14</sup> *Orchesography* of 1588.<sup>15</sup> Arbeau labels the dance as either the *alman* or *allemande*, noting that it is a “simple, rather sedate dance, familiar to the Germans, and, I believe, one of our oldest since we are descended from them.”<sup>16</sup> The allemande is said to have been adopted at the court of Louis XIV as a sort of trophy from the annexation of Alsace.<sup>17</sup> This new French version had nothing in common with the old allemande of the fifteenth century and very little to do with its sister dance, the Austrian Ländler.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Sachs states that around 1700 the French dance master Louis Guillaume Pécour “freely admits that everybody knows the allemande had come from Germany but that it was danced quite differently -- every master taught it in his own way.”<sup>19</sup> Arbeau’s mention of an “old” dance is a reference to the dance in fifteenth century Germany rather than the sixteenth century allemande. Sachs suggests that there is scarcely any concrete evidence describing the style features of the fifteenth century form, and in

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<sup>13</sup> Betty Bang Mather and Dean Karns, *Dance Rhythms of the French Baroque: A Handbook for Performance*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, 207.

<sup>14</sup> Thoinot Arbeau’s real name was Jehan Tabourot (1519 - 1595) – he rearranged the letters of his name to make his pseudonym – he was a cleric in France.

<sup>15</sup> Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance In the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchesography; a Treatise in the Form of a Dialogue Whereby All May Easily Learn and Practise the Honourable Exercise of Dancing*, Translated by Mary Stewart Evans, New York, Kamin Dance Publishers, 1948, 202.

<sup>17</sup> Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 414.

<sup>18</sup> A folkdance in 3/4 time of varying speed: generally fast in the west (Switzerland and the Tyrol) and slow in the east (Styria, Upper and Lower Austria). Mosco Carner, “Ländler,” *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/15945>.

<sup>19</sup> Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 414.

particular, no theoretical sources.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to distill a distinctly German style from the old fifteenth century dance form. Although the word itself means “German,” it is important when discussing geographical style that the allemande be labeled as a French-style dance for the purposes of this discussion.

The dance is a type of basse danse, which was the principal court dance during the late middle ages and Renaissance period in France.<sup>21</sup> Rifat J. Qureshi defines the allemande as “a processional dance of walking steps and was the first dance to begin an evening of formal dancing in the court.”<sup>22</sup> Arbeau, in discussing its German ancestor, says it is a dance in “four, or two long beats, to a bar time.”<sup>23</sup> He goes on to give the following instructions for the dance:

You can dance it in company, because when you have joined hands with a damsel several others may fall into line behind you, each with his partner. And you will all dance together in duple time, moving forwards, or if you wish backwards, three steps and one greve,<sup>24</sup> or pied en l’air<sup>25</sup> without saut;<sup>26</sup> and in certain parts by one step and one greve or pied en l’air. . . . when the musicians finish this part each dancer stops and engages in light converse with his damsel and then you will begin all over again for the second part. When you come to the third part you will dance it to a quicker, more lively duple time with the same steps but introducing little springs as in the coranto. You will grasp this easily by the tabulation which is scarcely necessary in view of the fact that there are no variations in the movements.<sup>27</sup>

There are a handful of qualities we can extract from Arbeau’s description which define the allemande’s musical character. Lightness and simplicity are important qualities in the execution of both the dance and the music. The allemande would be danced after a prelude as the introduction to the evening’s entertainment.

An understanding of the social context in which this dance was performed also influences understanding of style. Social conversation was used as a moment of repose. The use of conversation also

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<sup>20</sup> Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 331.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Heartz and Patricia Rader, “Basse danse,” *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed November 29, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02242>.

<sup>22</sup> Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance In the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Arbeau, *Orchesography*, 202.

<sup>24</sup> “strike” or “touch”

<sup>25</sup> “foot in the air”

<sup>26</sup> “jump”

<sup>27</sup> Arbeau, *Orchesography*, 125.

breaks the movement into two distinct parts, an important element when considering the form of the allemande, as the typical allemande of this time would consist of an A section, usually repeated, followed by a B section.<sup>28</sup> This AAB form is now referred to as bar form.

Tempo and meter are musical elements associated with the allemande that also warrant our attention. Meter informs the tempo: as Arbeau states, the opening dances were felt in two large beats, rather than four smaller beats, implying a certain tempo relationship. He also shares that during the “third part,” the tempo increases. Betsy Bang Mather notes, with regards to Arbeau’s description, that he neglects to say whether the dancers proceed again or dance in place once the tempo picks up, but that this two-part dance has “the same melodic skeleton.”<sup>29</sup> She goes on to say:

...[m]ost step-units of Arbeau’s part A are closed doubles whose individual steps are set to minims, or half notes, and whose ‘close’ is performed with a greve, or simulated kick. That the third ‘measure’... contains two simples instead of the usual two doubles agrees with the ambiguity of phrasing found in many concert allemandes of the *grand siècle*. In both parts of Arbeau’s allemande, the weighted step before each *grève* has some feeling of repose, because the dancers’ travel halts.<sup>30</sup>

Mather points out that this third “measure” contains simples as opposed to doubles, which also provides evidence that this final section was danced at a faster tempo. The steps should still be danced in a similar manner, but at a faster rate, with just one step in between as opposed to two in the previous section. With this basic knowledge of style, tempo, meter, and form, we can investigate music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and see how it reflects the steps and choreography as presented by Arbeau and his contemporaries.

In *Orchesography*, Arbeau provides the melody for the *alman* for both the first and second parts. Arbeau assigns the dance step associated with the note next to each note head (either *pas du gauche*, *pas du droit*, *grève droite*, or *grève gauche*<sup>31</sup>), instructing the dancer in the choreography.

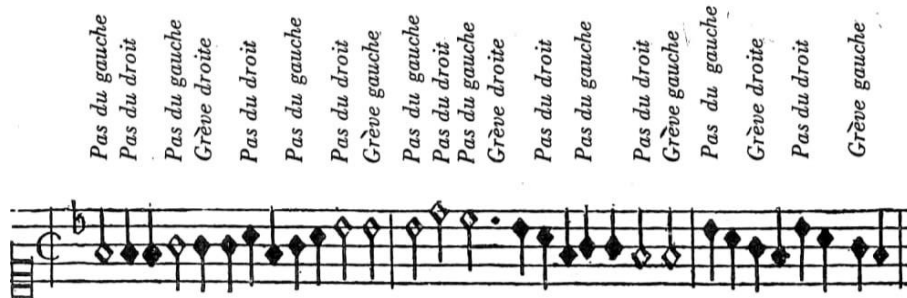
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<sup>28</sup> Mather and Karns, *Dance Rhythms of the French Baroque*, 207 – 208.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 207 – 208.

<sup>31</sup> For definition and description of steps, see Wendy Hilton, *Dance and Music of Court and Theater: Selected Writings of Wendy Hilton*, Stuyvesant, NY, Pendragon Press, 1997.



**Example 2.1. Movements to be made in dancing the *alman* from *Orchesographie* by Thoinot Arbeau (1589)**

The piece is not given a title or citation by Arbeau. However, G. Yvonne Kendall cites the melody's source as "Almand Savoye" by the French composer Pierre Phalèse (c. 1505-10 – 1573-6) from his collection *Leviorum Carminum* (1571).<sup>32</sup> Kendall cites two differences between the actual piece and the way Arbeau notates his example:

PhalèseLe<sup>33</sup> repeats the first four measures; Arbeau does not. Arbeau inserts two measures of rhythmic change... that serve as a repeat found in PhalèseLe, making the B section eight measures. The number of measures is the same since all steps of the Renaissance could be performed in either duple or triple meter, the meter change has no choreographic significance.<sup>34</sup>

The music is notated in cut-c mensuration in both Arbeau and Phalèse's manuscript. Meredith Little and Suzanne Cusick in their Grove Dictionary article on the allemande also state that the dance was "originally a moderate duple-metre dance in two or three strains."<sup>35</sup> Based upon these two musical examples and Cusick and Little's observations, I have chosen to assume duple meter as the meter of choice to be associated with the allemande moving forward. There are exceptions, but they are less common.

Although the manuscript does not mention any tempo change in the B section (beginning in measure eight), Arbeau explains the tempo change in his description of the dance (Arbeau references the

<sup>32</sup> Gustavia Yvonne Kendall, *The Music of Arbeau's Orchesographie*, Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2013, 132.

<sup>33</sup> Kendall notates the Phalèse consort versions as PhalèseLe.

<sup>34</sup> Kendall, *The Music of Arbeau's Orchesographie*, 97.

<sup>35</sup> Meredith Ellis Little and Suzanne G. Cusick, "Allemande," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, 2001, 25 September 2018,

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000000613>.

B section as the third part, as the A section is typically repeated): “When you come to the third part you will dance it to a quicker, more lively duple meter with the same steps but introducing little springs as in the *coranto*.”<sup>36</sup> Arbeau does not change the meter at this juncture, but Phalèse does in his publication. The dance would be successful with or without the meter change, but Arbeau assumed that the reader would implicitly understand this.

Along with presumed knowledge of tempo, there was also a presumed understanding of how specific dance gestures informed the musical phrasing of a piece. It is critical to understand which physical gestures were paired with which notes in the music for informed performance practice. When a dancer would slide, the music would reflect this gesture. When a dancer would hop, the music would reflect this movement as well. For example, a *pas de gauche* (hop) typically occurred between the doubles which would also occur in the music.<sup>37</sup> In this example, there would most likely be a lift inserted by the musicians in order to reflect the dance (and to keep time). With the aforementioned knowledge of tempo, along with the understood simplicity of the dance gestures, interpreters of these pieces can understand the style of this dance based upon geographical preferences on a deeper level.

Understanding the geographical origins of the allemande allows us to ascertain the following insights: First, the dance is a light, simple processional that begins the evening’s set of dances. Second, the meter is duple (not quadruple), with emphasis on the two large beats within the bar (beats 1 and 3). Third, the B section should be different from the two A sections; the tempo should be faster. Finally, specific dance gestures should be reflected musically by the players. “Slides” and “hops” should be performed by dancer and musician alike. One way of interpreting a slide and a hop musically could be with specific types of ornaments or embellishments between the steps, especially on the second pass of each strain. Another interpretation could be playing hops short and slides with a small glissando or

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<sup>36</sup> Arbeau, *Orchesography*, 125.

<sup>37</sup> Kendall, *The Music of Arbeau's Orchésographie*, 97.



“strisciando.”<sup>38</sup> The melody stays consistent in these dances, but the embellishment of the melodies are where style can be implemented.

EXAMPLE 18.1.  
Arbeau, *allemande*, 1589t, pp. 126–27.

Part A: (Sedate)

L R L (r) R L R (l) L R L (r) R L  
 double double double double

R (l) L (r) R (l) L R L (r) R L R (l)  
 simple simple double double

Part B: (Quicker)

L R L (r) R L R L (l)  
 hop hop hop grève hop hop hop grève hop  
 double double

Example 2.2. *Allemande* by Arbeau in Betsy Bang Mather, *Dance Rhythms of the French Baroque*, 208

## Courante

The courante was one of the most fashionable dance forms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Wendy Hilton describes some of the unique features of the courante:

[t]he extant notated seventeenth- and eighteenth-century courantes and their music have two essential characteristics: a rhythmic liveliness, requiring intellectual dexterity; and an inherent noble solemnity, a quality not to be confused with pomposity or an air of self-conscious superiority.<sup>39</sup>

Hilton’s two-point interpretation and description of the courante only applies to later historical forms of the dance. Most courantes written prior to the rise in popularity of the form at King Louis XIV’s court<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> John L. Snyder, “Evolution and Notation of Glissando in String Music,” *Indiana Theory Review* 1, no. 2, 1978, 35.

<sup>39</sup> Wendy Hilton, *Dance and Music of Court and Theater: Selected Writings of Wendy Hilton*, Stuyvesant, NY, Pendragon Press, 1997, 359.

<sup>40</sup> “Rameau also states that Louis XIV danced the courante better than did any other member of his Court and with a ‘quite unusual grace,’ suggesting that the king wanted his reign, his kingdom, and his person to be identified with

showcased different interpretations of how the dance should be performed. Little and Cusick define the two different types of courantes, stating:

The Italian ‘corrente’, a fast triple-metre dance (3/4 or 3/8), usually in binary form with a relatively homophonic texture, balanced phrases, virtuoso performance style and a clear harmonic and rhythmic structure; and the French ‘courante’, a ‘majestic’ and ‘grave’ triple-metre dance, usually in 3/2, characterized by rhythmic and metrical ambiguities, especially hemiola, frequent use of modal harmonies and melodies, and a contrapuntal texture.<sup>41</sup>

Bach wrote six dances that he labeled courantes, but five of these are composed in the Italian *corrente* style, with the other in the French *courante* style (found in the fifth suite).<sup>42</sup> Arbeau sets up the courante – a smooth, silky, gliding dance – after the vigorous volta, providing contrast to the “light touch required for the courante.”<sup>43</sup> He describes it in his dance manual as such:

[The Coranto] differs greatly from the lavolta and is danced in a light duple time. It consists of two simples and a double to the left and the same to the right, either moving forwards, to the side, or sometimes backwards, as it pleases the dancer.<sup>44</sup>

Arbeau goes on to discuss a “game” that is associated with the French courante. Sachs also discusses the game, alongside the first mention of the “wooing dance,” in 1515 France, by Clement Marot in his *Epitre des Dames de Paris*. He says:

Three young men invited three girls, led them one after another to the opposite side of the room, and left them standing there, while they themselves returned. Then one after another they went back and made themselves agreeable with amorous looks and gestures, dusting and pulling up their shoes, and arranging their shirts. The ladies, however, refused their hands and turned their backs, and the dancers had to go back again to their places without having achieved their purpose, and in great despair. At the end all three came forward and, on bended knees and wringing their hands, begged for mercy. Forgiven, they danced helter-skelter the courante. The typical coyness motif -- an amorous wooing with strong ritardando, in no wise “fantastic, hot and quick,” but already a game and a conscious caricature of the original form. This is an illustration of why the whole pantomime had to be rejected about the middle of the sixteenth century, because of its lack of sincerity. Only the procession remained.<sup>45</sup>

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this dance.” Meredith Ellis Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, Indiana University Press, 1991, 115.

<sup>41</sup> Meredith Ellis Little and Suzanne G. Cusick, “Courante,” *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed November 19, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/06707>.

<sup>42</sup> Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance In the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, 23.

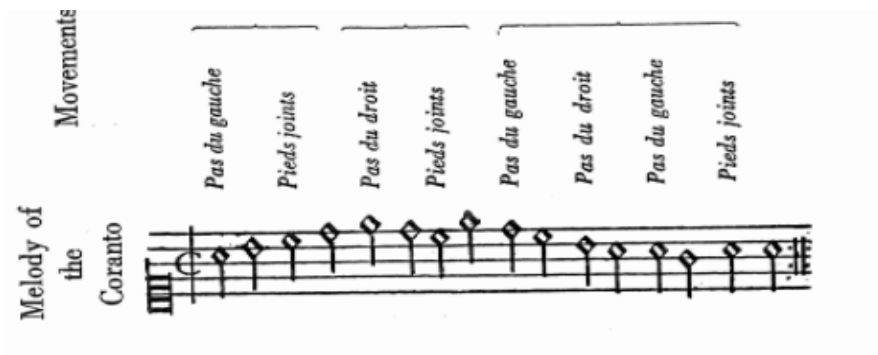
<sup>43</sup> Kendall, *The Music of Arbeau's Orchésographie*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Arbeau, *Orchesographie*, 123.

<sup>45</sup> Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 352.

An awareness of this game provides performers important insight into the style of the dance and its music. The music that accompanied the game would likely have been played softly, as an undertone to the entertainment at hand. The articulation of this music should reflect the steps when performed today – hot, and quick.

Arbeau lists a melody in his treatise to accompany the dance. This dance combines the steps *pas du gauche*, *pieds joints*, and *pas du droit*<sup>46</sup> into three dance sequences: *simple à gauche*, *simple à droite*, and *double à gauche*. The dance is to be executed in a “light duple time.”<sup>47</sup>



**Example 2.3. Movements to be made in dancing the *Corant* from *Orchesography* by Arbeau (1589)**

A similar dance can be found in Italian dance-master Cesare Negri’s (1535 – c.1604) famous treatise *Le Gratie D’Amore* of 1602. Kendall notes of this dance:

Similar to Arbeau’s dance, that of the Italian dance master allows dancers to move in a variety of directions incorporating hops into all the steps... Unlike Arbeau’s music for “courante,” however, Negri notates the music of ‘La Corrente’ in triple meter, the meter that became standard when the corrente joined the French baroque dance suite. Arbeau’s choreography more closely resembles the Italian corrente than the seventeenth-century French courante. The latter was slower in tempo and, in contrast to its sixteenth-century namesake, displayed smooth, gliding steps.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Step left, step together, step right.

<sup>47</sup> Arbeau, *Orchesography*, 123.

<sup>48</sup> Kendall, *The Music of Arbeau's Orchésographie*, 71.

*La Musica con la Intavolatura di liuto del ballo della Corrente, è tre parti, la prima si fa due volte, la seconda due volte, la terza due volte, e così si seguita fino al fin del ballo.*



Example 2.4. “La corrente” from *Le Gratie D’Amore*, Cesare Negri (1602)

The stylistic differences between the two regions resulted in two different meters. Style informs meter and consequently tempo. Arbeau’s French style *corant* from 1589 is in cut-c mensuration (imperfectum minor) written out rhythmically as “long-long.” This mensuration resulted in a slower tempo as previously mentioned by Kendall. However, Negri’s Italianate style *corrente* from 1602 is in triple meter incorporating more syncopated rhythms, usually written out as “short-short-long.” This rhythm and meter eventually became the preferred type of courante in later French Baroque suites, as also mentioned by Kendall. Rhythmic variations resulted from these metrical preferences, which in turn produced different steps for each dance. The French rhythmic iteration of “long-long” contributed to the “smooth, gliding steps.” The French originally preferred *corants* to be in a slower, duple meter and the steps reflected this stylistic character. The Italians preferred the *corrente* to be in a faster, triple meter and thus the choreography was influenced by the resulting “short-short-long” rhythm. There are no tempo indications given in these early manuscripts. Looking to the music’s geographic origins and resulting metrical preferences provides performers of courantes today insight into style and tempo implications not found in the score.

The music of Arbeau’s melody is unknown, but is typically attributed to the music of Giovanni Cesare Barbetta’s “Baletto Francese detto la Corante” from *Intavolatura di liuto* (1585), measures seven through eighteen. With regard to pitch content, the melody more closely resembles Francisque Caroubel’s

“Courante XCIII” from *Terpsichore* (1612). The primary difference between the two melodies is that Barbetta’s example is notated in triple meter, rather than Arbeau’s duple (as noted by Kendall<sup>49</sup>).

**73. Balletto francese detto la Corante** 1585, p. 19.

**Example 2.5. “Balletto francese detto la Corante” from *Il Terctio Libro De Intavolatura De Liuto* by Giulio Cesare Barbetta (ca. 1582)**

French musicians and dancers played and danced the courante in a slow, solemn, and serious manner. Italian musicians and dancers played and danced the *corrente* with smaller, quicker hops (on the eighth notes), faster tempi, wider leaps, and more rhythmic motion. Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne amplify this observation:

The French courante was variously described as serious and solemn (Dupont, Masson, Walther), noble and grand (P. Rameau, Compan), hopeful (Mattheson), majestic (Quantz), and earnest (Tuerk). All of these qualities employ a slower tempo. In fact, the courante is the slowest of all dances with three “temps” (beats) to the measure, followed in order of increasing speed by the sarabande, passacaille, chaconne, minuet, and passepied.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Kendall, *The Music of Arbeau's Orchésographie*, 115.

<sup>50</sup> Little and Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, 114.

The French dance presented a more simple and serious style compared to Negri's triple meter dance. The French courante would eventually take on the triple meter of the Italianate dances, but retain the French stylistic preferences. These French stylistic differences can be seen in two pieces: "La Bocanne" from Marin Mersenne's *Harmonie universelle* (Paris, 1636) and "La Bourgogne" from Guillaume Pécour's *Recueil de dances composées part M. Pécour* (Paris, 1700), which also has a more detailed and updated set of instructions for the choreography.<sup>51</sup> "La Bocanne" is a figured courante consisting of two nine-measure strains each played twice. Different step-sequences are performed to each strain and its repeat.<sup>52</sup> Binary form became synonymous with the courante as the dance evolved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The meter in both Mersenne and Pécour's courantes are triple, notated  $\frac{3}{2}$ .

In the Baroque era,  $\frac{3}{2}$  would indicate the more "French" interpretation (simple duple) and  $\frac{6}{4}$  would imply the "Italian" interpretation (compound triple). By the middle of the seventeenth century, these two meters and styles would begin to converge. Little and Cusick note that "Frescobaldi's correntes (*Il secondo libro di toccate, canzone, versi d'hinni, Magnificat, gagliarde, correnti et altre partite*, 1627) ... appeared in two meters."<sup>53</sup> This metric ambiguity would also become a characteristic of courantes in the Baroque era.



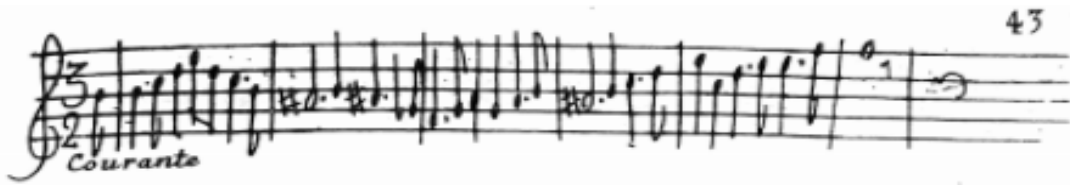
Example 2.6. "La Bocanne" from *Harmonie universelle* (Paris, 1636) by Marin Mersenne

<sup>51</sup> Pécour was the ballet master and choreographer of the Paris *Opéra* from 1687 – 1729.

<sup>52</sup> Hilton, *Dance and Music of Court and Theater*, 362.

<sup>53</sup> Little and Cusick, "Courante," *Grove Music Online*,

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/06707>.



## *la Bourgogne*

**Example 2.7. “la Bourgogne” from *Recueil de dances composees part* by M. Pécour (Paris, 1700)**

### **Sarabande**

The sarabande has a lengthy and somewhat scandalous history as it developed throughout modern-day Europe. The first dated mention of the sarabande occurred in 1583.<sup>54</sup> The sarabande is often associated with Spain, but the dance did not originate there. Instead, scholars believe it was derived from somewhere in Central America. Curt Sachs explains that it was brought over to Europe by colonists, deprived of its more “vulgar innuendos,” and then evolved north of Spain into the courtly dance with which we are now familiar.<sup>55</sup> Other arguments stem from the etymology of the actual word. The Spanish name is *zarabanda*, which sounds like the Persian “sar-band,” causing some etymologists to assume Middle-Eastern antecedents.<sup>56</sup> The first dated description of how the sarabande was danced and its particular style comes from Thomas Platter, who saw the dance performed in Barcelona in 1599. He describes the performance:

Also there was another dance so brisk and saucy it would seem to have been copied from that sarabande which our own people dance with such wriggings and faces and lewd grimaces that it could easily be taken for a dance of improper women and shameless men.” This dance they called *cuecuecheuyatl*, meaning “tickle dance” or “itching dance.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Stevenson, “The First Dated Mention of the Sarabande,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 5, no. 1, 1952, 29 – 31.

<sup>55</sup> Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 350.

<sup>56</sup> Stevenson, “The First Dated Mention of the Sarabande,” 29.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Giambattista Marino in “L’Adone” (1623, XX:84) offers a similar description:

The girls with castanets, the men with tambourines, exhibit indecency in a thousand positions and gestures. They let the hips sway and the breasts knock together. They close their eyes and dance the kiss and the last fulfillment of love.<sup>58</sup>

The dance was so contentious, that Philip II later banned the dance from the Catholic Spanish courts for its “loose motions,” “ugly words,” and “extraordinary obscenity.”<sup>59</sup> Its French adaptation was toned down for the courts of King Louis, as “choreographies reveal a dance that seemed calm and sometimes tender, but ordered, balanced and sustained.”<sup>60</sup>

What was it about this dance form that made it so provocative? This was a dance of a more natural kind, born out of a physical expression of bodies as opposed to carefully choreographed courtly entertainment. There are no specific step patterns existing from the period as the dance was of a more improvisatory and organic style. However, the steps of the evolved courtly dance are thought to be a hybrid of the *temps de courante*, *pas de bourrées*, and *pas coupés*.<sup>61</sup> It is heavily associated with guitar music of the early seventeenth century, where we are able to find some of the earliest notated forms of music accompanying the dance. The earliest dated examples appear in the Italian guitar tablatures of this time, beginning with Girolamo Montesardo’s book in 1606.<sup>62</sup> Richard Hudson describes the form of the dance, stating:

In these sources the zarabanda occurs at first as a single musical phrase with a particular harmonic progression. The identifying harmonic scheme then expands into a two-phrase plan. Finally, this same progression of chords persists and is joined by a second scheme as the zarabanda evolves into the more elaborately structured *zarabanda francese*.<sup>63</sup>

Two forms evolved from this Spanish dance in both Italy and France with separate sets of characteristics. In the Italian version, the music was usually composed in a  $\frac{6}{4}$  meter, which implied a

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<sup>58</sup> Mather and Karns, *Dance Rhythms of the French Baroque*, 26.

<sup>59</sup> Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance In the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Little and Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, 93.

<sup>61</sup> Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance In the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, 32.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Hudson, “The ‘Zarabanda’ and ‘Zarabanda Francese’ in Italian Guitar Music of the Early 17th Century,” *Musica Disciplina* No. 24, 1970, 125.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.



faster tempo, compound meter, and one accent per each group of three notes.<sup>64</sup> The faster tempo provided a dance similar to the Spanish version, “accompanied by castanets and a guitar or guitars playing continuous variations on a series of harmonies, the chords punctuated by the fiery *rasqueado* strums and rhythms so loved by the passionate.”<sup>65</sup> A traditional sarabande played today could include these characteristics: plucky, strummed, and fiery.

The French version was quite different from the Italian and Spanish versions. Preference was shown to meters of  $\frac{3}{4}$ , suggesting a slower tempo with three accented beats per measure.<sup>66</sup> The form was extremely popular and important to the French courts. Jean-Baptiste Lully included it frequently over a thirty-year period. In one of his guides, he notes the frequency of the dances preferred at court: “1653 - 1663... sarabande predominate. 1664 - 1672... sarabande remain[s] as popular as before. 1673 - 1687... sarabande... remain[s] constant.”<sup>67</sup> In the seventeenth century, the melody of the French sarabande would be elaborated upon as the dance progressed. Repetition of this single melody would begin to define the dance’s musical form. A more fully evolved musical form can be seen in the bipartite, AABB structured sarabandes of Jean-Baptiste Lully, André Campra, and Jean Boyer.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance In the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> Little and Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, 93.

<sup>66</sup> Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance In the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Little and Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, 37.

<sup>68</sup> Patricia Ranum, “Audible Rhetoric and Mute Rhetoric: The 17th-Century French Sarabande,” *Early Music* 14, no. 1, 1986, 22 – 28.

Bel - le ri - viè - re, / SUR qui / na guè - re //  
 (Lovely river, on whom long since)

Phi - LIS / jet - TOIT / SES DOUX re - GARDS //  
 (Phillis cast her sweet glances)

POUR BIEN PLEU - RER (//) l'ab - sen - CE // de SES char - mes, //  
 (To greatly mourn the absence of her charms,)

Tu AS MOINS / d'EAU // que je n'au - ray / de lar - mes. //  
 (You have less water than I shall have tears.)

**Example 2.8.** First stanza of “Belle riviere,” another “Sarabande pour danser” by Jean Boyer, *IIe livre de chansons a danser et a boire* (Paris, 1642), f.37v

A rhythmic gesture that permeates these early sarabandes is quarter note, dotted quarter note, eighth note with an accent on the second beat. The frequent usage of eighth notes occurring between the quarter pulse would allow for a more asymmetrical, rhythmic character. This specific gesture contributes to the physical, unpredictable style that the dance was known for in Barcelona. The syncopated rhythms contributed to the sexually suggestive character compared to other dances of the time. These rhythms can be found in both Pécour’s sarabande from *la Bourgogne* (Galliarde, 1700)<sup>69</sup> and Feuillet’s sarabande from *Sarabande pour un homme non dancée à l’Opéra* (Recueil De Dances, 1704).<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Raoul-Auger Feuillet and Guillaume Louis Pécourt, *Recueil De Danses: And, La Nouvelle Galliarde (par) Louis Pécourt*, Farnborough, Gregg International Publishers, 1970, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Raoul-Auger Feuillet and Guillaume Louis Pécourt, *Recueil De Danses: Contenant Un Tres Grand Nombres, Des Meillieures Entrées De Ballet De Mr. Pécourt, Tant Pour Homme Que Pour Femmes, Dont La Plus Grande Partie Ont été Dancées à L’opera*, Westmead, Gregg International Publishers, 1972, 210.



**Example 2.9.** “Sarabande pour un homme non dancée a l’Opera” by Raoul-Auger Feuillet, *Recueil de dances contenant un tres grand nombres, des meilleures entrées de ballet de Mr. Pécour, tant pour homme que pour femmes, dont la plus grande partie ont été dancées à l’Opera* (Paris, 1704), 210



**Example 2.10.** “La Bourgogne - Sarabande,” from *Recueil - Galliarde* by Louis Pécour (Paris, 1700)

In France, the suggestive qualities of the Spanish dance were toned down due to cultural preference. However, the dance still displayed a pseudo-improvisatory and free style that holds true to the original dance form taken from Central America. The sarabande was meant to be a physical expression of passion and intimacy between two dancers. In the same way that the partners of the dance would suggestively move towards the other, the music should reflect this using a more free and passionate style. Repetition of the melody and the AABB form can be seen as a dialogue between the two dancers, a conversation between bodies and music alike. Rhythmic figures were retained as well. While other dances of the time emphasize the downbeat, the sarabande stresses the second beat, differentiating it from the other dance forms of the time. This contributes to the unique style of this particular dance. These stylistic qualities, both rhythmic and emotional, should be represented when performing a sarabande.

### **Passacaglia**

The passacaglia originated in and was first documented in Spain. The first iteration of the dance, known as the *pasacalle*, is derived from the Spanish words *pasar* (to walk) and *calle* (street). Pasacalle

translates to “walking the street” and “more specifically as the sounding of the guitar when one goes to play music in the street.”<sup>71</sup> André Hodier believes that the form was originally a tenth century marching tune,<sup>72</sup> although this tune is unfortunately not identified in his writing. The first mention of the word pasacalle in literature or musical repertoire is found in the first decade of the seventeenth century, either 1605 or 1606. Richard Hudson attributes the first printed mention of the dance to Girolamo Montesardo, the Italian composer and singer.<sup>73</sup> In 1606 he describes the passacaglia as “one of the Spanish forms that entered Italy along with the guitar, as that which in his country is called a *ritornello*.”<sup>74</sup> In order to discover the original stylistic characteristics of the passacaglia, we must begin by looking at the ritornello in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Michael Talbot defines ritornello in the early seventeenth century as an “interlude or postlude (or any combination of these) for a vocal movement, most often an aria (employing this term in its broadest sense) organized in strophes... ritornellos could accompany dancing, the entries and exits of characters or scenic transformations.”<sup>75</sup> Thomas Walker posits that at least until after 1625, the word ritornello actually had no other formal principles outside of an interlude or postlude organized in strophes which was also synonymous with the word passacaglia.<sup>76</sup>

To better understand the origins of the passacaglia’s distinctive characteristics and style traits, we can examine its similarities to the ritornello. The passacaglia was considered a type of walk-on music or an introduction; a prelude. It was an accompaniment to everyday events such as walking the street. It was not highly structured, and it was used as a common pleasure and enjoyment. As the dance form developed, the choreography reflected the casual nature of the dance’s original musical qualities. The

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas Walker, “Ciaccona and Passacaglia: Remarks on Their Origin and Early History,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21, no. 3, 1968, 305.

<sup>72</sup> André Hodeir, *The Forms of Music*, New York, Walker, 1966, 97.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Hudson, “The Ripresa, the Ritornello, and the Passacaglia,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 24, no. 3, 1971, 364.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 364

<sup>75</sup> Michael Talbot, “Ritornello,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed November 21, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23526>.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Walker, “Ciaccona and Passacaglia: Remarks on Their Origin and Early History,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21, no. 3, 1968, 310.

style of the dance form is defined by a walking bass line, descending tetrachords, simple strums, and melodies sung by any common person, not just the royal court members.

The development and rise of the passacaglia as a musical form is parallel to the Spanish guitar and its migration through Italy and France. Italian guitar books of the early seventeenth century include many strummed tablatures for the *sarabanda*, *ciaccona*, *folia*, and *passacallia*. These guitar books contain works by Benedetto Sanseverino (1620, 1622) and Carlo Calvi (1646).<sup>77</sup> According to Walker, the *pasacalle* is music performed while promenading, generally played on the guitar.<sup>78</sup> In 1639, Montesardo produced a prolific amount of music consisting of many simple pieces for his students. The music is exclusively in triple meter with chords made up of five pitches. There are usually four measures of music that are repeated, followed by four new chords that are introduced and repeated.

**Example 2.11.** *Passacalli sopra la* from *De gli scherzi armonici trouati, e facilitati in alcune curiosissime suonate sopra la Chitarra Spagnvola* by Francesco Corbetta, Bologna 1639

<sup>77</sup> Mather and Karns, *Dance Rhythms of the French Baroque*, 27.

<sup>78</sup> Walker, “Ciaccona and Passacaglia,” 305.

From the middle of the seventeenth century into the eighteenth century, the passacaglia would evolve into a repeated eight-bar ground bass. This bass-line pattern, often a descending minor tetrachord, came to be one of the expressive musical features associated with the lament in the 1640s and 1650s. A repeated descending bass line would also become associated with the passacaglia. Leon Stein states that the word *ostinato* (from Italian, meaning “obstinate”) is also a ground or ground bass during the seventeenth century.<sup>79</sup> He presents three types of grounds: 1) ground motive, 2) ground bass phrase or *basso ostinato*, and 3) specific structure-types, like the passacaglia.<sup>80</sup> It does not matter whether the ground is a four-bar repeated phrase or one eight-bar figure. The repetition of the phrase links the ground bass (or strumming pattern) back to the dance’s humble beginnings as walking music.

The passacaglia was performed in the eighteenth century as an entertainment piece. In France, the chaconnes and passacaglias were notated dances found in the realm of theater. Walker notes that the form was found in music for dancing at the opera.<sup>81</sup> Based upon these two descriptions of the form, the passacaglia of this period could be described as somewhere between the highly specific, choreographed court dances of the *allemande* and *courante* and the less distinct, “sexual pantomime of unparalleled suggestiveness”<sup>82</sup> of the *sarabande*. The passacaglia’s music was transformed so that it allowed performers (dancers or singers) to take a few free steps onto a new part of the stage or dance floor as necessary. The repetition allowed a variety of uses for the dance when considering choreography, mood, and purpose. Little and Jenne state that “with no natural limitation as to length, they [the composers] felt free to invent elaborate compositions using a wide variety of techniques within the same piece, including strong contrasts in dynamic level, texture, ground bass pattern, mode and key, repetition scheme, melody, harmony, rhythm, and occasionally even meter.”<sup>83</sup> The style of the dance, however, would continue to

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<sup>79</sup> Leon Stein, *Structure & Style: The Study and Analysis of Musical Forms*, Expanded ed. Princeton, N.J., Summy-Birchard Music, 1979, 139.

<sup>80</sup> Stein, *Structure & Style*, 139.

<sup>81</sup> Walker, “Ciaccona and Passacaglia,” 320.

<sup>82</sup> Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 367.

<sup>83</sup> Little and Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, 199.

emulate the casual demeanor from which its name was derived even as it evolved within the realm of theater music.

Montesardo defines the *passacaglia* not as pieces in themselves, but as introductions (intermediate passages, conclusions) to other pieces (becoming part of the suite as we know it now).<sup>84</sup> Sachs says that “the true Spanish passacaglia is said to be in duple meter.”<sup>85</sup> Composers and musicians in Italy, France, and England were responsible for later developments of the passacaglia, influencing meter and in turn, geographical style. Kellom Tomlinson in “The Art of Dancing and Six Dances” (London, 1735 and 1720) is one of the first to notate actual dance steps to the passacaglia, and provides rhythmic patterns that typically accompany each dance step:

The Chaconne or Passacaille Step is composed of three Movements, first a Bound, secondly a Hop, and lastly a Bound, or Balone (a French term), and it is most usually taken from the third position.<sup>86</sup>

Little expands Tomlinson’s definition, stating:

...[a]mong the masters under discussion, only Tomlinson touches on the characters and relative tempi of the dance types. The adjectives which he used were intended to convey the quality and mood of the types, of which the tempo is but one aspect.<sup>87</sup>

Tomlinson uses adjectives such as “disengaged,” “at Liberty,” and “a Sink or Bending of the Knees; from whence the Body is thrown into the Air.”<sup>88</sup> These descriptions suggest that the dance moved away from the Spanish casualness that had characterized it previously. Tomlinson’s description reflects the formal dance manual terminology and choreographic steps. The dance eventually found its way into the formal French and British courts, but it never lost its free and energetic roots as a Spanish street song.

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<sup>84</sup> Walker, “Ciaccona and Passacaglia,” 307.

<sup>85</sup> Sachs, *World History of the Dance*, 373.

<sup>86</sup> Kellom Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing: And, Six Dances*, Farnborough, Gregg, 1970, 83.

<sup>87</sup> Hilton, *Dance and Music of Court and Theater*, 263.

<sup>88</sup> Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing: And, Six Dances*, 83.



*Mr. Peter Gifford, Esq. and Mr. Peter Gifford of Chillington in the County of STAFFORD. Esq. and a Master Thomas his Brother the PLATE is most humbly inscribed by their much obliged Servant, William Tomlinson.*



*To my ever regretted Schoole Thomas Grealley Esq. son and Heir to Sir Thomas Grealley of Drayton in the County of LINCOLN. this is most humbly inscribed by their much obliged Servant, William Tomlinson.*

**Example 2.12. The movements of the “chaconne” or “passacaille” Step from *Six Dances* by Kellom Tomlinson, (London, 1720)**

**Conclusion**

The allemande, courante, sarabande, and passacaglia each have their own distinct style, tempo, rhythm, and history. Music was paired with specific gestures to further express emotion. Dancing became an important cultural facet of the time period, particularly in the courts of Italy, France, Spain, and England. For performers of this music today, interpretation should be influenced by the specific accentuated qualities of the music that accompanied a physical skip or a hop. Performers of these suites can ascertain a deeper knowledge of style by discovering how the regional dances influenced composers writing music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By acknowledging the basic geographical origins of these dances, the style of the pieces can be interpreted more accurately.

Our knowledge of these dance forms is expanded when we look beyond the musical notes. Viewing these pieces through a historical and cultural lens allows performers a more complete view of how and why this music was written and executed. As musicians in the twenty-first century, it is integral that we study music of this time period in this manner if we are to represent it accurately. The style of these dance genres is still relevant when interpreting music labeled as these specific dances today. A prime example of these characteristics can be found in Caroline Shaw’s Pulitzer Prize winning work.



With our understanding of the stylistic and geographical characteristics of these dance forms, performers and listeners of Shaw's work can attain a deeper understanding of the piece. After all, the *Partita* was born from "a love of surface and structure, of the human voice, of dancing and tired ligaments."

## Chapter 3: Bach Celebrating the Dance

Johann Sebastian Bach's solo instrumental works are some of the most fascinating in the standard solo repertoire. A high level of difficulty paired with an abundance of analytical opportunity has resulted in a vast number of recordings and academic research. Analyses of the works tend to focus on interpretation, performance style, articulation, and phrasing. However, there is a paucity of research on the solo violin partitas and their relationship to the influence of Renaissance dance forms. Bach scholars such as John Butt, Dorottya Fabian, David Ledbetter, Joel Lester, and Jaap Schröder acknowledge Bach's debt to the Renaissance dances, but none spend more than a few sentences or paragraphs delving into exactly where these influences can be discovered.

Joel Ledbetter, in his book *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works*, asks whether the solo violin pieces are “a dance that has been expanded into a binary sonata movement, or a binary sonata movement based on dance characteristics?”<sup>1</sup> Ledbetter believes that Bach gravitates towards acknowledging the dance forms in the first two measures of each movement, but then quickly deconstructs these styles into a movement that more closely resembles the sonata form as it progresses. Ledbetter states “[t]he Allemanda has the usual two-bar opening phrase with a caesura, but the rest is in longer, sonata-style phrases. Here we are very close to a sonata movement woven from an economical selection of dance features.”<sup>2</sup>

Defining the difference between a binary sonata movement and a binary sonata movement based on dance characteristics is difficult. In order to do so, we must have a solid understanding of the salient style features of each dance genre and then apply these to Bach's compositions. In acknowledging that the partitas have been derived from the dance forms, Ledbetter draws parallels to compositional style and techniques between both the sonatas and the partitas. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this

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<sup>1</sup> David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works*, 72.

music was meant to be an accompaniment to the dance and to mirror the choreography closely. In Bach's solo partitas, the Renaissance dances and their choreography were less integral to his compositional process. So, then, which dance characteristics still survive in Bach's works? Should they be associated with the dance genres of old, or have they evolved into something completely new and different?

A strong analysis of Bach's works alongside an understanding of the dance characteristics of the Renaissance genres can lead performers, scholars and composers to an even greater understanding of Bach's *Partitas*. One way to draw comparisons between Bach's *Partitas* and those of the past as well as partitas of the future – such as Caroline Shaw's – is to observe broad similarities between the works.

Shaw herself has said:

*Partita for 8 Voices* is more tied to dance and dancers than it is to Bach necessarily. It is tied to the ideas of tension and release, but Bach is definitely in the background too – Bach is deeply within my bones.<sup>3</sup>

Shaw was intimately familiar with Bach's *Partita in D-minor*, BWV 1004. She played the first four movements (all but the "Chaconne") on her Senior recital at Rice University. This piece had a substantial impact on her life not only as a solo violinist, but also as a composer. Shaw consistently found herself rotating between the musical worlds of the Baroque era and today. However, there was something about Bach's second *Partita* that has stayed with the composer and influenced her writing:

My *Partita* parallels more closely with Bach's *Partita in D-minor*, even on a basic level with regard to dances used and number of movements. The D-minor partita is just one of the most gorgeous things ever written. I love the "Allemande" of it so much because it's just a single line. There are no chords, no harmony, and I love that he [Bach] said "No, I'm just going to write this weird, solo violin 'Allemande,'" which is not what you're supposed to do. Instead, he chose the form of a suite as a way to have a lot of fun writing music. At the same time, he made something so deeply profound in the "Chaconne." But even with the "Sarabande"... his "Sarabande" is one of the most beautiful things written ever also. There's a simplicity in that project, a small celebration of music in the solo violin and cello suites that is something I've always admired.<sup>4</sup>

I believe that it is these broad scale experiments that deter scholars from comparing Bach's *Partitas* with the Renaissance partitas. The lack of tangible evidence combined with the impossibility of hearing from Bach how he was influenced by the old genres prohibit scholars from writing in depth about these parallels.

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<sup>3</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, October 17, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Caroline Shaw and Joshua Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, January 10, 2019.

I believe that researchers should look for broader parallels both from compositions of old as well as geographical stylistic influences of Bach's time in their analysis of the composer's works. This type of analysis will allow the listener to experience the dance forms of old in new and deeper ways. By identifying these small celebrations and absorbing the musical worlds which surrounded them, Bach and Shaw were able to contribute significant dance suites to both the solo violin and vocal ensemble repertoires, perhaps genres not typically associated with dance suites of the Renaissance era.

One obvious parallel between the Renaissance partitas and the Baroque partitas (and on to the twenty-first century) is the absorption of cultural and geographical styles. During Bach's time, musicians in Germany and Vienna were absorbing a multitude of outside influences. The rise in virtuosic violin performance which developed in Italy during the early seventeenth century spread quickly to Germany.<sup>5</sup> This Italianate style was combined with the dance music of the French courts, which also found its way to Germany during the seventeenth century. This became known as the German mixed-style,<sup>6</sup> which fueled virtuosic writing by German composers during the early Baroque era. This, in turn, led to the decline of clearly delineated features of the dance genres during the early seventeenth century. Although many features of the dance were carried over from the French courts to Germany, the choreography did not follow to the same extent.

Italian violinists were moving to Germany during Bach's lifetime and French musicians also came to teach dance and dance music to people at the Viennese courts. Sonatas by Italians such as Dario Castello were composed in short phrases, whereas French music of the time was composed in longer phrases, often overlapping with subsequent melodies. In the 1620s, the primary genre of French solo instrumental music began to emerge – the suite. These suites quickly became the standard form for solo instrumental writing, consisting of an unmeasured or semi-measured prelude, allemande, courante, and sarabande. German composers combined these geographical influences and used the stylistic features of the music as they saw fit. The performance of music was now more about the soloist and the music's

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<sup>5</sup> Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

interpretation, rather than about accompanying social dances. The noticeable characteristics of style in the allemande, courante, sarabande, and passacaglia (among others) became more amorphous and less clear in the hands of composers writing with this mindset.

Ledbetter highlights the development of the German mixed-style by analyzing Arcangelo Corelli's "Corrente" from *Sonata da camera a tre* Op. 2, No. 1 as well as André Campra's "La Forlana" from *L'Europe galante*.<sup>7</sup> The dance characteristics in the Corelli represented in the second violin line are comprised of the central *corrente* note values of half note and quarter note. The sonata style is represented in division (or diminution) variation technique, where note values are regularly divided into smaller values. According to Ledbetter, this combination serves as a definitive example of German mixed-style.<sup>8</sup> We see the dance characteristics serving as influences concurrently with the modern evolution of sonata form.

Another characteristic of the French and Italian styles in German dance music can be discovered in these pieces' harmonic structures. In Joel Lester's book *Bach's Works for Solo Violin*, Lester amplifies Ledbetter's argument by noting that the harmonic progressions at the opening of each movement in Bach's *Partita in D-minor* have striking similarities.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Lester reveals that the opening sections of all five movements are conspicuously similar in regard to their bass lines, harmonic progressions, and even the chord voicings.<sup>10</sup> Dutch violinist and author Jaap Schröder observes that the five dances are linked motivically as well:

They all start with a succession of harmonies whose bass notes constitute a line of easily recognizable notes, D – C sharp – D – B flat – A. These common elements give the suite strong cohesion and are a convincing argument for not performing the Ciaccona in isolation. The dances are also united by a rather dark tone colour, even though all four open strings are part of the D-minor key.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach*, 65 - 72.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>9</sup> Joel Lester, *Bach's Works for Solo Violin: Style, Structure, Performance*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, 143 - 144.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>11</sup> Jaap Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works: A Performer's Guide*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007, 116.

Schröder also comments that despite Bach's Italian titles, the German mixed-style, or *gemischter Geschmack* (mixed taste), afforded composers the flexibility to use descriptive titles in both the Italian and French languages.<sup>12</sup> The partitas from all three eras have these characteristics in common: linked harmonic progressions, geographically informed melodic motives, and dance characteristics within each movement.

Apart from the unity within the suite and geographical stylistic influences, which dance influences of the virtuosic solo pieces exist in the suite? The "Allemande" in BWV 1004 contains notable parallels to the early dance genres, along with its own unique set of defining characteristics. First, as previously mentioned by Shaw, the entire movement is created by a single melodic line. Bach's compositions for solo instruments often include broken chords to provide a strong sense of harmony. The only moment when Bach writes more than one note at a time in his "Allemande" occurs at the ends of both the First Strain (mm. 1–16) and Second Strain (mm. 17–32). The *perpetuum mobile* style allows Bach to control and pace the piece in a way that allows for a strong sense of tension and release. Bach titles the movement "Allemanda" which translates to "German." Ledbetter believes the D-minor "Allemanda" is different from Bach's B-minor "Allemanda," which Ledbetter labels as in German-French style. The "Allemande" of BWV 1004 is in the German-Italian style. Pointing to the opening two bars, Ledbetter draws attention to the length of phrases as the first deviation from the typical allemande style:

Allemandes usually have some reference to the typical French two-bar opening phrase. There is a slight feel of this in the first two bars, with a caesura after the E, and a cadence into bar 3[...] there is no clear phrase ending at the beginning of bar 3[...] an enjambment from the balanced French-type phrase into a sequential Italian-type one.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jaap Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works: A Performer's Guide*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007, 116.

<sup>13</sup> Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach*, 130.

## Allemande.



**Example 3.1. “Allemande” from *Partita Seconda*, BWV 1004, Bach-Gesellschaft Ausgabe, Band 27, Leipzig, Breitkopf und Härtel, 1879**

There is a short sixteenth-note pick up at the beginning of the piece, which was traditional of the Italian style allemandes. Bach cements the piece firmly in D-minor by way of the F $\flat$  and the C $\sharp$  in the opening measure. Following a short descending passage, Bach leaps a major-sixth to an E $\flat$ , the ninth in the D-minor scale. French performance practice usually interprets this gesture as an expressive device, but should occur without accent. A caesura typically follows before the remaining sixteenth note resumes as a pickup into m. 2. As was traditional in the allemandes of the past, Bach retains the two stresses per bar, with beats one and three receiving the greatest stress. This is constant, not just within the first two measures, but throughout the entire movement. This influence from traditional allemandes remains consistent throughout the movement.

Bach’s “Allemande” is built upon a series of sequences. The first sequence begins in m. 2, four sixteenth-notes followed by two sets of sixteenth-note triplet figures. Bach uses sequences as a device to build and release tension. These rhythmic patterns are implemented by Bach as if they were his own unique form of choreography. The movement is delineated by the use of each rhythmic sequence, providing a guide to listeners of Bach’s musical development. Rather than having a strong cadence on D-minor in m. 3, which is present harmonically, Bach continues this rhythmic gesture. Instead of ending the phrase in a balanced nature like the French allemandes, Bach combines the phrase into a new sequence, representing the Italian-style allemande. Although Bach does not always begin each new melodic pattern or rhythmic idea on beat four, the pattern does occur at other cadential moments (such as in m. 8 and m. 14). In only three measures, Bach has already displayed influences from both French and Italian dance genres, incorporating the geographical styles he finds most useful as he develops his sequences. This





throughout his *Partita*. The harmonic pull which occurs in mm. 13–16 is similar to the harmonic traction felt at the end of a development of a sonata form movement. This harmonic event is one of the moments which leads the previously mentioned scholars to label these movements as sonata form influenced by dance characteristics. The slow rise within the melodic range paired with two successive dominant seventh chords in m. 14 leads Bach to the pitch D6, the highest note in the entire movement. In fact, Bach will not return to this pitch until the final “Chaconne,” providing a book end with regard to range for the entire *Partita*. What follows is a melodic A♯ pedal in the final two bars, leading the harmony to a Picardy-third cadence on A-major.

Divorcing the dance characteristics from these movements would be unfortunate. Claiming that the ideas (such as tension and release) are separated from the dance’s choreography (step-step-step-hop) would be an inappropriate narrowing of the analysis’ scope. These influences work in tandem for Bach, bringing together both the virtuosic solo sonata style with the dance characteristics of France and Italy.

Bach writes in the manuscript of the “Allemande” at the bottom of the last page, in French, “Segue la Courante.” However, Bach then titles the following movement “Corrente,” the Italian spelling. Ledbetter argues that this indication implies two points: first, performers should not take Bach’s spelling of the movements as the absolute geographical “style” that the piece should be played in, as this national identity appears unimportant to Bach.<sup>16</sup> Second, Bach was familiar with both styles of *courantes*, and therefore would have been aware of the inherent stylistic qualities of both spellings. This information provides evidence that the titles of the movements are flexible when defining geographical style, as are the characteristics that are commonly tied to these descriptions. Ledbetter argues that the “Courante” of BWV 1004 is in the Italian style due to Bach’s choice of rhythm. Triplet figures are pervasive and purposeful in this movement, as opposed to occasional or ornamental, which was typical of the French style.<sup>17</sup> We find further evidence in Bach’s choice of meter,  $\frac{3}{4}$ . French styles *courantes* were commonly

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<sup>16</sup> Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach*, 132.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

written in  $\frac{3}{2}$ , which also implied a slower tempo than the fast, Italian style. Another consideration for tempo comes from Bach’s instruction that the “Courante” should segue from the “Allemande.” Ledbetter argues that this would mean that the sixteenth-note triplets in “Allemande” would equal the eighth-note triplets of the of the “Courante,” resulting in a faster tempo – the Italian style. Bach’s use of the German mixed-style is already found in this description despite the fact that the music for the “Courante” has yet to begin.

The dance steps of the courante consisted of two simples (single steps) and a double (double step) to the left, followed by the same to the right, either moving forwards, to the side, or sometimes backwards. This motion of three steps per unit corresponds with the triplet rhythm composed in Bach’s “Courante.” Ledbetter focuses his argument on rhythmic and harmonic developments in the “Courante.” Although rhythm and harmony are indeed essential to understanding the movement, tying the rhythm and harmony to specific dance characteristics and dance styles can further develop understanding and interpretation.



**Example 3.3. mm. 1–5 from “Courante,” J.S. Bach, *Partita No. 2 in D-minor***

Bach creates distinct rhythmic characteristics out of the triplet and the dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythms. He then proceeds to develop the two ideas not just rhythmically, but also melodically (alongside the aforementioned harmonic development). Ledbetter alludes to this notion and Schröder amplifies it, stating that the “Courante” implies a style of question and answer.<sup>18</sup> Ledbetter states that the triplets are more present in this *corrente* because they are only one of two rhythmic motives and argues that performers and scholars alike can expect a significant usage and patterning of the two rhythmic ideas.<sup>19</sup> The two

<sup>18</sup> Schröder, *Bach’s Solo Violin Works*, 122.

<sup>19</sup> Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach*, 134.

rhythms interact as if they are in conversation with one another. In the first half of the piece, Bach begins the two bar phrases with the triplet rhythmic idea. There is then a response of the dotted rhythm for two bars. Occasionally these alternating rhythmic motives are punctuated by an interruption of the other rhythmic idea (such as the dotted rhythm in m. 10 between the triplet rhythm in mm. 7–12). The first half of the piece ends with significant commentary by the triplet figure, moving the harmony to the dominant A-major.

I believe Bach's dialogue between the two rhythmic motives could be represented by a metaphor of two dancers. The triplet figure is a dancer consistently wooing, dancing smoothly and enticingly. The dotted eighth followed by sixteenth figure could represent the sudden shifts in direction and hops away from the other dancer's partner. This type of courante choreography is described by dance-master Cesare Negri (1535 -?) in his treaty *Le Gratie D'Amore*.<sup>20</sup> Ledbetter notes that this "spiral" effect can also be found in early *correntes* with music by contemporaries such as Georg Telemann and Francesco Veracini.<sup>21</sup> The notion of interpreting Bach's use of rhythm and meter as a metaphor for dance steps is not a new one. In discussing Bach's "Sarabande" of BWV 1004, Schröder draws these similarities as well:

The first two bars expose the typical sarabande steps, with a stress on the dotted second beat. This stressed beat propels the dancer upwards, after which the dotted rhythm – to be slightly overdotted – represents the dancer hovering on a toe and a subsequent falling onto the next downbeat.<sup>22</sup>

Not only does this metaphor provide insight with regard to phrasing, but it also exposes the character of the entire movement. The physical expression of a "hop" on the sixteenth note could translate to a small accent on these notes, particularly when played as a pickup to the next rhythmic idea. These short, more accented sixteenth notes fit the Italian profile of broken chords and sequences. Ledbetter argues his point for this specific Italian style "Corrente," which implies a strong, accented dotted rhythm as opposed to the French *notes inégales* which would have less of an accent.<sup>23</sup> When we view Bach's "Courante" this way,

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<sup>20</sup> Gustavia Yvonne Kendall, *The Music of Arbeau's Orchesographie*, Hillsdale, NY, Pendragon Press, 2013, 71.

<sup>21</sup> Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach*, 134.

<sup>22</sup> Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works*, 123.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

we see not only a sonata-like development of these rhythmic motives, but also an exciting game played by two dancers in dialogue. Their dance builds in tension (harmonically and melodically) as it reaches the end of each section. This sort of analysis can provide yet another piece of evidence for sonata style movements informed (or maybe directly influenced) by dance characteristics.

Bach was writing dance movements that were clearly unique and exploratory while still firmly associated with the old styles. In the “Sarabande,” Bach draws upon the intense emotional nature of the original form and composes what might be one of the most tragic “Sarabandes” in music history. Using balanced phrases of four and eight measures, Bach explores the depths of the genre’s emotional possibilities. This “Sarabande” is of the French style. The solemn and noble tempo is typically played around quarter note = 48 in triple meter,  $\frac{3}{4}$ .<sup>24</sup> Italian sarabandes were faster in tempo, usually in triple meter, but with one beat per measure.

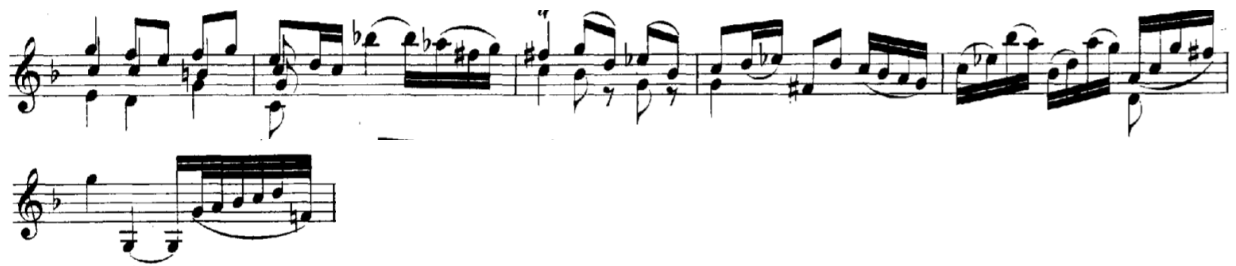
Bach again uses harmony as a driving force for tension within the movement. Worth noting is the use of the Neapolitan sixth chord in m. 22, the same Eb chord heard in the “Allemande,” (mm. 30–31) and the “Courante,” (m. 48). This same chord appears in the following “Gigue” as well (m. 37). This is a unifying theme used within the suite highlighting Bach’s intent to write a dance suite that is connected by specific harmonies. Another use of recurring harmony occurs towards the end of the movement in mm. 27–28. Bach uses a series of diminished seventh chords, one after the other, enhancing the movement’s tension and anguish.

Another specific dance characteristic of Bach’s “Sarabande” is the use of ornaments. This highly embellished style is also representative of the high French Baroque style. These ornaments add to the sense of anguish and grief characterized by the melody, drawing attention to the D-minor harmony more so than in any other movement. Bach uses these ornaments in particular when he wants to foreshadow a harmonic modulation, or actually begin modulatory sequences. One of his most interesting ornaments is the use of *coulé de tierce*, or the filling in of the third. Bach does this when stressing a new harmony. The

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<sup>24</sup> Schröder, *Bach’s Solo Violin Works*, 133.

most obvious example of this comes in m. 12, where Bach introduces the B $\flat$  pitch once more after spending a brief time in G-major. The first hint that Bach is moving towards G-minor, the secondary key area of the movement, is when he brings back this B $\flat$ , now written above the staff. This *coulé de tierce* gesture then leads to a succession of dominant seventh chords before finally landing on two strokes of G $\sharp$  displaced two octaves apart. Bach adds another dance to the sarabande genre, one that is wrought with intimacy, pain, anguish, and is vulnerable.



**Example 3.4. mm. 11–16 from “Sarabande,” J.S. Bach, *Partita No. 2 in D-minor***

Through Bach’s use of rhythm, meter, accent, ornamentation, and harmony, he parallels many identifiable characteristics of the “Sarabandes” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although purely his own creation, the influence of prior dance characteristics is intact.

As Bach and Shaw choose to end their partitas differently – Bach with a chaconne and Shaw with a passacaglia – I will not spend too much time on either form in this discussion. However, there are a few musical features in Bach’s “Chaconne” which are worth mentioning for comparison with Shaw’s “Passacaglia.” First, the “Chaconne” of BWV 1004 is built around a series of eight chords. Bach introduces the eight chords and then writes a grand series of melodic variations around these eight chords. The passacaglia is also a set of theme and variations, but the theme is usually melodic, rather than harmonic. Most often this melody would be a ground bass, on which the composer would write variations above the bass line. Although both the chaconne and passacaglia dance forms are different, it proves difficult to provide a singular definition for either genre. Both forms have exceptions, and composers in

the Baroque era took these forms to extremes both with regard to length and interpretation of the dance characteristics. However, the idea of a unifying theme followed by a variation upon it holds true for the majority of these two forms written during the Baroque era.

In her book *Dance and the Music of J.S. Bach*, Meredith Little also makes some important observations. First, she notes, “In contrast to the wealth of information about the chaconne and the passacaglia in France, there is no firm evidence concerning these dances in Germany at the time of Bach. Thus, our discussion of his contributions will focus more on structure than on performance practices, showing how he used his genius in a dance variation form.”<sup>25</sup> Second, the author draws comparisons between the famous “Chaconne” from BWV 1004 and the “Passacaglia in C-minor for organ.” She notes that:

The first five variations are a grand blend of Italian and French figuration: Variation 1 and 2 capitalize on the ‘Sarabande syncopation module’, and Variation 4 and 5 exploit various Italian *passaggi* and *tremolotti*. Variations 6-10 (especially 6-9) are characterized by the Germanic figure common in allemandes, [a sixteenth rest and three sixteenth notes followed by a half note].<sup>26</sup>

Although Bach’s “Chaconne” is not a piece of primary evidence in our study of Shaw’s *Partita*, the association of Bach’s “Chaconne” with his “Passacaglia” and both pieces’ use of theme and variation will become important to the discussion of Shaw’s work.

J.S. Bach’s *Partita in D-minor* is a primary example of a composer incorporating dance characteristics of old and updating them in a new and unique manner. Acknowledging the influence of these characteristics allows us a more focused lens to analyze partitas by composers after Bach. The dance forms evolved in the years leading up to Bach’s composition and continued to develop after they were completed. Using geographical influences of France, Italy, and Germany, Bach was able to expand upon these forms in new ways. The virtuosity of his writing for the solo instrument was a new evolution for the genre, but one that would become associated with the genre as it developed. The dance characteristics of old partitas go far beyond the first two bars of each movement. Instead, Bach continues

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<sup>25</sup> Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J.S. Bach*, Expanded ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, 202.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 203

to dance throughout, hopping and skipping, celebrating simple melodies, and composing music that would influence composers for years to come.

## Chapter 4: Partita for 8 Voices

### **Allemande**

The first movement of any partita sets the musical landscape for the suite. As the allemande was often used to open dance suites in the Renaissance and Baroque eras, Caroline Shaw also chose to begin her suite this way. It is important to remember that “Allemande” was the last movement Shaw composed for her suite. In writing backwards, albeit unintentionally, Shaw was able to look at the remaining three movements and organize her “Allemande” as a catalogue of techniques, a blueprint for her suite. She even states that “‘Allemande’ was written as a way to hint at ‘Passacaglia’.”<sup>1</sup> Overarching themes in the movement forecasted by Shaw include influences derived from the Renaissance dance forms, creative use of text, and the use of extended vocal techniques, including organic and almost chaotic material drawn from the environments that surrounded the composer both leading up to, and during, the writing of *Partita*.

When Cesare Negri described the rhythmic pulse of the allemande dance form, he mentioned the use of “short-short-long,” a rhythmic ratio which can be written as (1:1:2). This rhythmic cell became commonly associated with the Renaissance allemande and permeated the form well into the nineteenth century. Composers often tended to use the short note (or notes) as an anacrusic device to begin the movement. This pickup was popular in the French style. As the form progressed, this opening rhythmic gesture became a defining feature of many allemandes, including the allemande in BWV 1004. After “nesting herself within allemandes of the past,”<sup>2</sup> Shaw then chose to transform the ratio in her own unique way. The opening sequence on the text “to the side” is defined by two sixteenth notes as a pickup to bar

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Shaw and Joshua Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, January 10, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



one, whose downbeat is a quarter note.<sup>3</sup> This rhythmic gesture is repeated four times by other voices in order to cement the ratio in the listener’s ear.

**Example 4.1.** mm. 1–3 from “Allemande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices*, 2014, unpublished manuscript

At letter B in m. 14, Shaw then expands the ratio from sixteenths to eighths, followed by a quarter (1:1:2). As the previous measures were completely spoken, this pentatonic melody is the first sung material presented by Shaw. The rhythmic pattern is sung homophonically by all eight voices in parallel thirds. Shaw has used the rhythmic ratio in an augmented form to create the primary theme for what we will label as the First Strain (mm. 1–54).

**Example 4.2.** Voice 1, m. 14 from “Allemande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices*

<sup>3</sup> In an early manuscript version of the piece, Shaw notated this downbeat as an eighth note, maintaining Negri’s rhythmic idea. Although the most recent version of *Partita* has the downbeat as a quarter note, Roomful of Teeth’s recording reflects the original eighth note version.

After moving from the first theme to the secondary theme, whose material is largely based upon traditional Inuit throat games in m. 32, Shaw, again, expands the rhythmic relationship at letter E. Although the harmony is consistent with the opening theme (oscillating between vi, V, and I in G-major), the rhythm is augmented yet again: quarter note, quarter note, half note. This new rhythmic idea closes the First Strain, leading into the Second Strain at m. 55, which departs from this ratio relationship. However, at the recapitulation of the theme beginning in m. 82, the opening sixteenth/quarter idea returns with vigor. Not only are we able to discover a distinct parallel in this short-short-long ratio to allemandes of the past, it also reveals how Shaw manipulates this idea to work for her own unique sound world. It is in these moments that we find Shaw “nesting,” but now with her utterly new and fresh sound world at the same time (Example 4.3). The rhythmic idea which began as short *pas de gauche* hops has now transformed into material for the primary theme of Shaw’s first movement.

Shaw’s “Allemande” deconstructs many characteristics of the Baroque form, while still leaving some remnants behind. Just as past allemandes were two to three strains, Shaw’s “Allemande” contains two primary strains followed by a coda. Shaw also sets her “Allemande” in a lively duple meter, 4/4 time, and uses extended vocal techniques in place of the old ornaments found in Baroque dance suites. Allemandes of the Renaissance era were typically marked *moderato*, but Shaw’s is a bit faster than this (quarter note = 130). About this, Shaw says: “‘Allemande’ is somewhat fast, in four, and kind of square, but not all allemandes are in four.”<sup>4</sup> In thinking about geographical influences of the dance, the choreographed slides in Renaissance forms can be seen in the notated musical slides and stretches that Shaw often calls for in the movement (including mm. 16, 20, 27, and 39). Shaw also begins the opening of her “Allemande” with spoken text, which permeates the rest of the movement. As mentioned in Chapter 2, allemandes in their original dance form included time and space for conversation – dialogue between guests and dancers. Although this is certainly a new variety of dialogue, prescribed by the composer, the comparison is worth mentioning.

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<sup>4</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, October 17, 2017.

Another strong influence throughout *Partita* presented by Shaw in this opening movement can be found in her creative use of texts and how they relate to one another. Shaw uses text as a passageway to other worlds. In Shaw's opening "notes on the score," she states: "The occasional spoken and sung text pulls from wall drawing directions of Sol LeWitt, square dance calls, found phrases from an urban environment, and original writing by the composer."<sup>5</sup> "Allemande" is the only movement in which Shaw includes every single one of these text sources. These texts are pulled from LeWitt Wall Drawings (no. 154, 159, 164, 289, 381 and 419), "Allemande" square dance calls, a line from T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" (section V), IPA vowel sounds, and original text by Shaw, influenced by the cultural environments surrounding her in New York City and North Adams.

Using parallel words and phrases as a doorway, she travels time and links worlds that otherwise would not be associated with one another. One example is the pairing of square dance calls and Sol LeWitt's wall drawings. In the same way that a square dance caller speaks the choreography to the dancers, Sol LeWitt also provides instructions for visual artists to carry out his Wall Drawings. Shaw was heavily influenced by LeWitt, and wanted to parallel the Renaissance forms with another dance form – square dancing – and then mirror these instructions in her own musical writing. Shaw describes her use of the two texts in "Allemande," stating:

With square dance calls, the caller yells out these patterns, designing fun things for people to do, using words in this technical way. Square dance calls have this super bright delivery which I also wanted to reflect in the piece. I thought these calls were such a cool parallel with the Sol LeWitt concept of writing directions for a painting. I'm not a choreographer, but I would love to create this swirl of people that suddenly comes together.<sup>6</sup>

The line of text in the square dance call is "to the side and around through the middle and to the side" (as organized by Shaw). Using the word "middle" as a doorway, she pivots to LeWitt's texts for Wall Drawing 104: "through the mid-point of the line drawn from the left side." This phrase also incorporates the use of directional cues such as "left" and "right." In doing so, she joins two artistic directions which have no relationship on the surface, but work together when heard in her piece.

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<sup>5</sup> Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices* (manuscript), Caroline Shaw Editions (unpublished), 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, October 17, 2017.

The image shows a musical score for 8 voices, measures 14-16. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of eight staves, with the top four in treble clef and the bottom four in bass clef. The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. Dynamic markings of *f* (forte) are present at the beginning of each staff. Articulation markings, represented by a box containing the letter 'a', are placed above the first note of each staff. The harmonic structure is indicated by Roman numerals at the bottom: **G: vi I vi V I vi I vi V I**.

**Example 4.3.** mm. 14–16 from “Allemande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices*

Another example can be discovered in the analogous use of two words in the opening measures. Shaw first begins with the broken phrase “side and around” taken from common square dance calls.<sup>7</sup> She then uses this word to parallel the phonetic syntax of the word “allemande” and oscillates between the

<sup>7</sup> Although not cited as a definitive source for Shaw, one resource which has many of these calls can be found in: Margot Gunzenhauser, *The Square Dance and Contra Dance Handbook: Calls, Dance Movements, Music, Glossary, Bibliography, Discography, and Directories*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1996.

two (emphasizing “and around”) quickly, which results in the two phrases sounding almost identical. This fast juxtaposition can become confusing for the listener, which is precisely Shaw’s intent as her music swirls through the text into the opening theme.

“The detail of the pattern is movement” is a line of text from T.S. Eliot’s “Burnt Norton.” The line appears in the fifth section (V.) of the poem. Shaw first presents this new text at letter G in m. 55.

Here, Shaw tells the story of how she came to be enamored of this line:

There is a band called “Pattern Is Movement” based in Philadelphia and I followed them on Twitter. I became obsessed with their music. The guy who leads that band, whose twitter handle is @bearbait, retweeted someone, #thedetailofthepatternismovement and I had to know what this beautiful, evocative quote was. When I saw the fragment of the poem it hit a strange nerve. I then went back and read the true poem “Burnt Norton” and found it so perplexing and compelling and confusing and beautiful. From there it just lived in my mind. When it occurs in the piece, it is really just meant to depict the sense of when a specific phrase is recurring in your mind and you are trying to create something at the same time. I love how it encourages me to listen more closely, to try and find some detail or some pattern in something – you’ll start to find it all over the place in nature and in music.<sup>8</sup>

Shaw also has used this phrase in her percussion piece “Taxidermy,” similarly encouraging and challenging both herself and the performers to listen more closely. Shaw decides to use this textual challenge in *Partita* along with two new parallel texts in the Second Strain, beginning m. 63 at letter H. Shaw introduces a new line of text, “Find a way,” which is first sung by voice 8. Then, in m. 66, Shaw introduces another line of text in voices 1 and 2, “Fall away.” These two lines surround the Eliot text. Both the parallel phrases as well as the Norton poetic challenge allow Shaw to create a textual world which yearns for something more. This yearning becomes more evident when one realizes that the “Find a way” text continues on, saying “Find a way back home,” which then leads to the recapitulation of the first theme at m. 82. Although one might not typically associate Twitter and T.S. Eliot in the same sentence as a textual source, this is certainly one of the inventive examples the Pulitzer Prize committee was referring to when they stated that *Partita* was “a highly polished and inventive a cappella work.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, October 17, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/caroline-shaw>.

Example 4.4. mm. 62–67 from “Allemande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices*

**Example 4.4. mm. 62–67 from “Allemande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

J.S. Bach’s *Partita No. II in D Minor*, BWV 1004, was also another major source of inspiration for Shaw. Drawing upon many techniques and similar influences used by Bach, Shaw mirrors the composer in her own unique and inventive ways. A reminder of what Shaw stated earlier regarding the influence of Bach’s “Allemande”:

The D-minor Partita is just one the most gorgeous things ever written. I love the Allemande so much; it’s just a single line, there are no chords, no harmony. I love that Bach was like, “No, I’m just going to write this weird solo violin Allemande” which is not what you’re supposed to do, but he chose this form as a way to have fun writing music. He had a lot of fun doing that. There’s a simplicity in that project, and kind of small celebration of music in the solo violin suites that is something I’ve always admired.<sup>10</sup>

So, in similar ways that Bach pushed the boundaries of the musical form in his solo *Partita*, Shaw also explores these possibilities. One of the most interesting parallels is the use of multiple styles and influences within the pieces. As discussed in Chapter 3, cultural and geographical influences from France, Italy, and Germany influenced Bach’s *Partita*. Likewise, Shaw uses many extended vocal techniques,

<sup>10</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

practices not typically found in Western vocal writing. The most notable and often used techniques include Inuit throat singing, Korean P’ansori, Georgian pitch stretching, Mongolian Tuvan vocal practices, and yodeling. Shaw develops her own unique notation in order to describe these practices, and includes a guide at the opening of the score which she labels “a few notes on the less-usual notes...”.<sup>11</sup> The many text sources can also be seen as another layer of influence derived from a variety of places and times. “Allemande” is the only movement which includes every single one of these extended vocal techniques (the other movements typically use just one or two). Here in “Allemande,” Shaw presents us with the complete aural palette necessary to understand and engage with *Partita*.

The distinct influence of Bach in Shaw’s “Allemande” can also be seen in the use of rhythmic, textual, and harmonic sequences. In Bach’s “Allemande,” the composer draws upon small units presented in the first measure (such as a dotted eighth followed by sixteenth and sequential sixteenths) and develops and expands these two rhythmic ideas throughout the movement. Shaw, too, pulls from her first few measures, both in the opening section of overlapping spoken text, as well as the rhythmic ratios previously discussed. Bach finds new sequences in the First Strain with which to “have fun,” developing thematic and rhythmic material as he progresses.

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<sup>11</sup> See Example 4.5.

*A few notes on the less-usual notes . . .*

e.g.

“eat your sound”  
a multi-step tongue filter developed by Roomful of Teeth



This is one example of a yodel break. The diamond notehead indicates the use of head voice. The comma stroke just confirms the differentiation from the chest voice that precedes it.



*These are textured breaths, related to the Inuit throat singing tradition. They are featured primarily in Courante.*

Audible exhale. Typically on “ah”

Audible inhale. Typically higher in pitch, and on “oh”

An inhale-exhale gesture, as in Inuit throat games. These can be more or less “noisy” depending on the dynamic context.



A gentle, natural close-mouthed sigh, glissing up to the pitch that follows. It is an abstraction of a P'ansori articulation.



stretch pitch slightly in either direction,  
drawing from the intonation of Georgian singing



an expressive P'ansori gesture,  
involving diaphragm accentuation and pitch inflection

**Example 4.5. “A few notes on the less-usual notes...” from Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***



One example of this can be seen in mm. 11–15, where Bach introduces thirty-second notes in order to heighten the rhythmic motion, leading into the final cadence of the First Strain. Shaw’s “Allemande” is built around developing rhythmic motives. Alongside the previously mentioned rhythmic ratio, Shaw’s other thematic ideas can be seen in the introduction of the Inuit throat games (which become further developed in “Courante”) as well as the use of an improvisatory gesture of free oscillation between two pitches. Shaw begins this gesture in the Second Strain, mm. 55–56, and then further develops this idea in mm. 90–95, where both the fourth and eighth voices expand the melodic range of this “noodle-chant.”<sup>12</sup> Shaw takes this idea and transforms it into the material found in the coda (mm. 102–105), making what was once a simple dyad into a Mixolydian scale. Both Bach and Shaw in their “Allemandes,” thread and spin out the rhythmic and melodic material throughout the rest of their movements (and *Partitas*).

Bach relies heavily on the dominant harmony to signify important events, particularly when the chord functions as a dominant seventh. Bach also withholds specific notes of the diatonic scale in order to present them only when he needs to catch the listener’s attention. Examples of this observation include the G $\sharp$  in m. 7 of Bach’s “Allemande” as well as the E $\flat$  found not until the Second Strain (representing the Neapolitan sixth, in particular, in m. 31). Shaw does this as well in her Second Strain, with the notable use of D $\sharp$  in m. 96 and B $\natural$  found in free m. 102, signaling the modulation to B-major (used as a common tone modulation) in m. 103.

The last parallel I will mention between Bach and Shaw pertains to the way they use tension to build climatic moments. Bach builds tension towards structural cadences using harmony and register. As his *Partita* is for a solo instrument, Bach reserves the uppermost register in order to signal these important events. Leading up to the final cadence in his First Strain, Bach builds up to a high B $\flat$  in m. 13, which is the highest note heard so far in the piece. Three notes later, this music moves a half-step higher to a B $\natural$  in m. 14, which is then usurped by the end of the measure, where Bach writes a D $\natural$ , the highest note played

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<sup>12</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, October 17, 2017.

in the entire movement. Although Bach never indicates dynamics in his work, there is a natural crescendo that occurs through these measures, which the listener perceives organically, aiding in this structural understanding of the piece. Similarly, Shaw also uses range, crescendo, and textual overlap in order to signify important moments. One of the most climactic events in the piece happens at letter B, where the first sung chord occurs. Shaw begins a crescendo in m. 12 which slowly adds a new voice with each passing eighth pulse. This confluence of overlapping speaking, also marked “ALL CRESCENDO,” leads to the forte entrance at m. 14 which is extremely exciting to hear. Then, in mm. 78–82, Shaw notates a change in vowel along with a crescendo in order to bring about the most fulfilling climax of the piece, the return of the First Strain’s material which occurs at letter J. This climax is sustained by the gradual ascent of register in voice 2, up to an A5 (also the highest note in the movement). Although not singular to Bach and Shaw, the way Shaw clearly reflects a compositional device that Bach chose in his exploration of the “Allemande” is worth noting.

One of the final overarching ideas in *Partita for 8 Voices* that Shaw first presents and hints at in “Allemande” is her desire to “organize chaos.” When I asked her about how the piece represents the world around her and her past experiences, Shaw had the following to share:

In writing *Partita*, I was asking myself “how do you create the sound within your head and put it on the page and make it happen outside yourself?” Everything you’re taking in, visual stimulus, people, internet, conversation, talking... how do you encapsulate that, and then make something totally nonverbal out of it?<sup>13</sup>

Shaw also drew chaotic inspiration from Sol LeWitt and how he organized chaos in his works:

At Mass MoCA, I found myself on breaks wandering over through the galleries, listening to what was around me, looking what was on the walls and what the artists were thinking about. I felt like they always suggest some sort of musical idea. And then the Sol LeWitt text appeared next to the paintings and something clicked for me. I saw LeWitt’s work, which I felt was talking and representing chaos, with all these little words written on the wall. I thought to myself, “this sounds like music to me, it sounds like chaotic conversation.” In his paintings, you see the serene, bright, lovely wall of color, but behind that color there are all these technical directions, there’s craft behind it. With “Allemande,” I was trying to think of Sol LeWitt and different aspects of his work that I would present in each movement.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, October 17, 2017.

There are a few ways Shaw does this in the opening movement. First, she begins with chaotic material that gradually becomes organized material. The opening of the piece does exactly this: spoken texts overlap into an unintelligible combination of instructions which eventually organize into concrete harmonies. The First Strain contains mostly phrases of six to seven measures. In the Second Strain, Shaw rounds these phrases out to eight measures. Despite these rounded phrase lengths, Shaw juxtaposes this organization with more overlapping texts and rhythms – some spoken, some sung. This momentary “organization” of congruent phrases then falls back into the asymmetrical lines at the recapitulation in m. 82, returning to the most electrifying sounds, albeit with inconsistent measure lengths.

The closing harmonic sequences can also be heard as chaotic or, more so, unexpected. Shaw finds her way to unrelated key areas through chordal sequences that somehow resolve beautifully, despite presenting harmonic progressions which are unusual. Her first major harmonic shift, from G-major to B $\flat$ -major in mm. 96–102, occurs via a circle of fifths progression, a harmonic trademark of Shaw’s. The difference between Shaw’s circle and other composers’ use of the progression occurs towards the end of Shaw’s harmonic sequence, where the composer pivots via the third, rather than the fifth. In this instance, Shaw moves from an A-minor chord (supertonic, first inversion) to F-major, a sonority which captures the listener by surprise due to the heavy use of F $\sharp$  up until this point and the fact that Shaw uses the mediant of the chord to pivot, rather than the fifth. This F-major chord becomes the dominant of the new central harmony, B $\flat$ -major, ushering Shaw into her intended harmonic world. This type of modulation occurs in other places of *Partita*, as well as some of her other pieces, including *To The Hands, Fly Away I*, and *Music in Common Time*. These moments feel unstable, and yet when Shaw arrives at the B $\flat$  major cadence in m. 102, there is a feeling that the quick, unexpected journey led us exactly where Shaw intended to land harmonically. Somehow, the chaos has been contained.

Shaw’s catalogue of techniques sets the stage for the exciting three movements which follow. Although it is impossible to foresee just how Shaw will incorporate these techniques within the following movements, the listener is now prepared for the unique sound worlds presented in each movement.

“Allemande” is the perfect prelude to Shaw’s suite, unveiling the musical landscape for the evening’s entertainment to come.

## **Sarabande**

In the Summer of 2011, Shaw composed “Sarabande” alongside “Allemande.” When she was deciding in 2012 how to arrange the four movements into the suite that we now know as *Partita for 8 voices*, she chose “Sarabande” as the second movement, despite the historical precedent where a courante typically follows an opening allemande (the structure in BWV 1004). When I asked the composer why “Sarabande” came second in her suite, she had the following to share:

When I was writing the piece (Sarabande), I didn’t know I was writing *Partita*. I just made a decision in my head when putting the pieces into an order that it felt too soon for “Courante,” because “Courante” is kind of a monster. It felt like “Sarabande” was this gentle thing that should happen after Allemande. I didn’t care if it matched the order of the Baroque suite.<sup>15</sup>

The original sarabande of the seventeenth century was meant to be a physical expression of passion and intimacy between two people. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the Baroque era, the provocative and scandalous characteristics of the old dance transformed into an intimate portrait of personal sorrow. Bach’s “Sarabande” in BWV 1004 is a strong example of this new genre defining characteristic. Shaw continues her deconstruction of the Baroque forms in her own “Sarabande,” referencing many similar characteristics of Bach’s movement while still offering something new. When I asked Shaw about her “Sarabande,” she said: “It’s not a scholarly study on the sarabande, but more a modern commentary on the sarabande.”<sup>16</sup> This “modern commentary” can most easily be observed in three ways: first, in the dialogue between the two sets of voices (set one: voices 1 – 4 and set two: voices 5 – 8); second, in the rhythmic and metrical influences of the Renaissance dance form paired with diatonic scales not typically found in these dances; and third, in the use of extended vocal techniques, most notably her incorporation of the Korean P’ansori style of singing. Although referenced in

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<sup>15</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

“Allemande,” Shaw now takes the time to dive deeper into these influences, using the structure of the Baroque form as a blueprint for her modern work.

Where the genesis of the Renaissance sarabande began with a passionate and heated dance between two people, and where Bach’s “Sarabande” is a singular outcry of an individual, Shaw brings back the idea of two people interacting in her movement. However, instead of individual people, the two dancers are now represented by four voices each – set one: voices 1 – 4 and set two: voices 5 – 8.

Although Shaw labels these voices by number, rather than by gender, she does state in the score the vocal quality that should be used for each singer:

Voices are indicated 1 through 8 – essentially SSAATTBB. In the original Roomful of Teeth configuration, 1 – 4 were women and 5 – 8 were men. The top two and bottom two voices are specialists in the extreme upper and lower ranges. The middle four tend to be wide-ranging and flexible – or in soccer terms, sweepers.<sup>17</sup>

The two groupings are similar in registral and timbral setup, where voices 1 and 5 are high, 4 and 8 are low, and 2 – 3 and 6 – 7 are necessary to provide a wide range of vocal qualities. Shaw also introduces the two clearly delineated sets of voices, making no mistake that each group represents a specific entity.

Structurally there are two sections, A and B, followed by a twelve-measure recapitulation, or A’. Bach’s “Sarabande” is also comprised of two sections followed by a brief coda. The A section in Shaw’s work is sung by voices 1 – 4. This A section is sung almost completely homophonically. One good reason to label the movement in the key of B-major is that the movement begins and ends on a B-major triad. Other supporting evidence includes the key signature and important structural cadences on B-major. The exploration of B-major comes to define the first set of voices characteristically, forging a new musical identity for the first person represented by voices 1 – 4 in the movement. Shaw stays in this harmonic landscape for the first few chords (G#-minor nine, F#-minor nine, G#-minor seven, and then back to B-major in root position) before rotating via a circle of fifths in the second phrase (mm. 5 – 8). She then moves away from this tonal center, making the B-major root position triad act as the five of E-major followed by E-major, A-major seven, D-minor, G-minor nine for the first three bars of the third phrase

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<sup>17</sup> Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices*, 2014 (manuscript).

(mm. 9–13), coming to somewhat of a half cadence on the minor Neapolitan chord, C-minor, before returning to B-major. These ten chords repeat on three more occasions in the movement, but with rhythmic variations and pedal tones beneath each following occurrence.

Chord progression for the first system (mm. 1-8):

B: I vi<sup>9</sup> v<sup>9</sup> v<sup>7/6-5</sup> B E A<sup>M7</sup> Dm

Chord progression for the second system (mm. 9-17):

Gm<sup>9</sup> Cm<sup>6/4 5/3</sup> B

Section A is marked with a box and includes dynamics like *mp*, *p*, and *mf*. It also includes performance instructions like "audible inhale" and "V".

**Example 4.6. mm. 1–17 from “Sarabande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

In the B section, the second set of voices join with their own unique musical identity. The A section is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, as was typical for Sarabandes of old, but the B section is where Shaw adds her “something new” to the musical folly of old. The B section’s measures are unmetred, taken completely out of time.

Immediately, this dissolution of consistent pulse begins to move the listener, incorporating a new characteristic to define the second set of voices away from the old dance forms. The second set of voices sing mostly in unison step-wise figures, reflecting the “noodle-chant” found earlier in “Allemande.” The line begins almost as if it is a line of chant, but then a solo voice embellishes the unison melody, creating

a heterophonic texture. Later, Shaw adds more voices to the chant line, beginning in what I label as m. 25a. The melody oscillates between B-major and A-Lydian scales, then B-major and D-Lydian scales. These melodies are intertwined with the same harmonic progression in the first set of voices seen in the A section. Due to the A $\sharp$  and D $\sharp$  in the second set of voices, the chords are colored with a different hue due to the effect of the second person, or the second set of voices.

**Example 4.7. m. 25 from “Sarabande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

The climax of the piece comes at m. 25b. The second set of voices move into the most extreme register found yet, A $\sharp$ 5. When recalling that this set of voices includes voices 7 and 8, voices that are supposed to be experts in the extreme lower range, it comes as no surprise that Shaw asks for this passage to be sung at a *fortissimo* dynamic. Helping define the sound world of this phrase is Roomful of Teeth’s use of Georgian belting, which adds new colors to the singers’ vocal palette when listening to the recording. Although not discussed in the score, it is safe to assume this line contains the influence of Georgian belting because in Shaw’s “notes on the score,” which precede the piece, she states:

The 2012 recording by Roomful of Teeth can be considered an essential part of the score. Many sounds and gestures cannot be notated in a conventional way, and the composer encourages

drawing on a variety of sources available with today's technology to realize this piece with other ensembles in the future. However, no single document should ever be treated as ultimately prescriptive. Be free, and live life fully.<sup>18</sup>

**Example 4.8. m. 25b from “Sarabande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

After the second set of voices sing passionately, they slowly meld into the continuing harmonic sequence of voices 1 – 4, morphing back into a metered  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, arriving on F $\sharp$  which sits below the E $\flat$ -major chord. The following reprise of the A section material begins almost identically, with the second phrase having a faster harmonic rhythm than in the previous iteration. One other difference occurs after the first phrase of four chords, a bar of silence. The silence is deafening, especially when considering the sonority which happened not far before in the second set of voices. This is a moment of silent emotion; grief, pain, anguish, or longing.

The final measure is once again taken out of time, with voices 1 – 4 and 7 – 8 sustaining a B-major chord while voices 5 and 6 continue to meander, noodling *ad libitum* in overtones influenced by Tuvan throat singing practices. Voices 7 – 8 eventually arrive at C $\sharp$ , leaving the final harmony sounding as a B-major with an added second. There is a sense of rest in the tonic cadence, but not entirely due to the added second in the chord.

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<sup>18</sup> Shaw, *Partita for 8 voices*, 2014 (manuscript).



The image shows a musical score for eight voices. The first four staves (1-4) are vocal parts, each with a lyric 'mm'. The fifth staff (5) is a vocal part with an 'ad lib' marking and a melodic line. The sixth staff (6) is an instrumental part with an 'ad lib' marking and a melodic line labeled 'overtones'. The seventh and eighth staves (7-8) are instrumental parts, each with a lyric 'mm'. The score concludes with a double bar line.

**Example 4.9. m. 45 from “Sarabande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

Another piece of the past that Shaw clings to quite closely is her use of rhythm and metric accent. One of the most defining features of Renaissance and Baroque sarabandes was the heavy accent on beat two of each measure in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. This emphasis on beat two was emphasized due to the rhythmic pattern that was often seen in the first bar: quarter, dotted quarter, eighth. Shaw follows both this rhythmic and metric accent as well. Her “Sarabande” is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time with the accent on beat two in each bar. In thinking about the emphasis of the downbeat in “Allemande,” it is worth noting that here in the second movement of *Partita*, the emphasis is now placed on the second beat. In an early draft of the work, Shaw notated the first measure’s rhythm as quarter, dotted quarter, eighth. In the final version of the score, she changed this to a quarter note followed by a half note. However, on Roomful of Teeth’s recording, the singers lift for an eighth rest between each bar, leaving the sarabande rhythm intact. When I asked the composer about this rhythmic gesture, she had the following to say:

In the Renaissance dances, the second beat is wider. Some of the most fancy footwork happens on the second beat. I was playing with the idea of something melting or dripping into the second beat, which is where all the content is in the bar.<sup>19</sup>

Her description of the “Sarabande” melting into beat two is achieved by the use of what Shaw calls a “closed mouth sigh – an abstraction of ‘P’ansori’.”<sup>20</sup> Brad Wells describes the vocal technique as such: “... we were studying Korean P’ansori, which is sort of a high blues that uses vibrato in a very particular way.”<sup>21</sup> Shaw has developed her own notational marking to represent this sound, with the character looking close to an unpitched quarter note. This closed mouth sigh is represented textually by { hmm } with the singers opening up to { ah } on beat two (see Example 4.10). This particular vocal slide from closed mouth to open mouth allows for a natural crescendo, further amplifying the accent on beat two.

The image shows a musical score for four voices, numbered 1 through 4. Each voice part is written on a single staff in treble clef, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. The notes are: Voice 1: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter); Voice 2: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter); Voice 3: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter); Voice 4: D4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter). Below each staff, there is a dynamic marking 'p' and a vocal instruction '{ hmm ah }'.

**Example 4.10. m. 1 from “Sarabande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

<sup>19</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on Korean P’ansori, see: Hae-kyung Um, “New ‘P’ansori’ in Twenty-first-century Korea: Creative Dialectics of Tradition and Modernity,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 25, no. 1, 2008, 24-57.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Matthews, *Coffee Conversation: Roomful of Teeth’s Brad Wells*, January 2, 2014, [https://www.feastofmusic.com/feast\\_of\\_music/2014/01/coffee-conversation-with-roomful-of-teeths-brad-wells.html](https://www.feastofmusic.com/feast_of_music/2014/01/coffee-conversation-with-roomful-of-teeths-brad-wells.html), accessed March 25, 2019.

The sarabande in the seventeenth century was influenced not only by its Spanish origins but also by dancing practices of the French courts. The French were the first to codify and assign a strict choreography to the dance, albeit toned down and stripped of its wilder innuendos. Shaw's "Sarabande" is geographically influenced by the Korean P'ansori, Georgian belting, and Tuvan throat singing practices. There is no text in Shaw's "Sarabande." Instead, she focuses on the different vocal colors which can be obtained by the change or shift in the vowel sounds of the human voice:

The consideration of vowels was what I was most concerned with (opposed to the throat singing or belting) – cultivating the vowel and finding the particular colors by shaping the mouth, shaping the mouth in not the "right" way.<sup>22</sup>

Shaw draws upon the raw, evocative and stirring power of the human voice to convey her personal interpretation. There is a sense of coarse, unbridled emotion in the second set of voices during the B section, rising up to the A#5. It is imperfect; even in the recording, the sounds produced by the four voices are not as clean and polished as they are throughout the rest of the piece. Although not Shaw's direct intention, one could speculate that the A section is depicting the French style dance and its "choreographies," which reveal a dance that seemed calm and sometimes tender, but ordered, balanced and sustained.<sup>23</sup> The B section, then, would be depicting the improvisatory and free characteristics of the original Spanish dance.

There are other references to the Baroque form by Shaw in "Sarabande." One of the most notable is the use of the Neapolitan chord in Shaw's "Sarabande," and how Bach uses the Neapolitan harmony differently in BWV 1004. Similar to "Allemande," Bach withholds specific pitches and chords until critical moments in order to grab the listener's attention with the idea that something important is about to occur. In Bach's "Sarabande," one of these moments takes place in the second section. The movement is in D-minor, with a brief modulation to the submediant, G-minor. Bach begins working his way back towards D-minor and solidifies this return with a harmonic drive to the cadence via the use of Eb-major

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<sup>22</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Meredith Ellis Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J. S. Bach*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991, 93.

(bII) in m. 22. Although we have heard the Eb pitch before in this movement, it is here that we find the first Eb-major chord, resolving downwards into D-minor where Bach ends the phrase.

Shaw also makes use of the Neapolitan, although she decides on the minor bii quality as opposed to the major bII quality. In her harmonic sequence of ten chords, Shaw delays the use of this specific harmony until the final chord, using it as the cadential figure before returning to B-major. In Western tonal harmony, the bII<sub>6</sub> chord is typically found before a cadence, preceding some sort of dominant harmony which leads to tonic. Bach follows his bII with the leading tone chord before returning to D-minor. Shaw skips the use of either a five chord or a diminished seventh chord. In doing so, and in repeating this harmonic sequence three times, the Neapolitan becomes normalized as cadential harmony for the movement. Where Bach withholds the use of this harmony until near the end of the section (to make the cadence unique), Shaw uses the harmony early and normalizes the harmonic gesture. Her use of harmony becomes even more fascinating when we realize that the Eb can be spelled as the enharmonic third of the following B-major chord. In pivoting by way of the third after six prior pivots via the circle of tonic/fifth relationships, Shaw continues to expand on her signature harmonic progression, first heard in “Allemande.”

The image shows a musical score for four staves (1-4) in G major. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score is divided into measures 1 through 8. Chord progressions are indicated below the staves: Gm<sup>9</sup> (measures 1-2), Cm<sup>6/4 5/3</sup> (measures 3-4), and B (measures 5-8). Dynamics include *mp*, *p*, and *mf*. There are accents over notes in measures 5 and 6. A box labeled 'A' is placed above measure 5. Performance instructions include 'audible inhale' and 'V' (breath mark) above measure 8. A double bar line is at the end of the score.

**Example 4.11. mm. 9–14 from “Sarabande,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

Both Bach and Shaw use the sarabande dance genre and its unique rhythmic qualities as a vehicle to express a greater depth of human emotion. Besides the emphasis on beat two, one of the most interesting and deeply expressive moments in Bach’s “Sarabande” occurs in mm. 22–25. David Ledbetter comments on Bach’s use of rhythm:

The jagged figurations in bars 22–3 and elsewhere [in BWV 1004, “Sarabande”] are of a type used in the Baroque period to represent tortured anguish: Monteverdi, in the madrigal ‘Mentre vaga Angioletta’ from his eighth Book (Venice 1638) goes through a useful catalogue of such affective *figurae*, using this sort to demonstrate the words ‘ritori giri’ (twisted turns). The *petite reprise* from the second-time bar reinforces the effect in a continuous sixteenth-note division.<sup>24</sup>

This disruption in musical style is notable in Bach’s “Sarabande,” as the melodic contour becomes disjunct and broken with sharp interjections of thirty-second notes among the sequential sixteenths. Shaw also disrupts her “Sarabande” rhythmically with the introduction of the second set of voices. The phrases in the A section are mostly 4 bar phrases, although occasionally Shaw speeds up or slows down the harmonic rhythm, moving the sequences to 5 or 3 bars respectively. Bach also composes his “Sarabande” mostly in 2 – 4 bar phrases. In Shaw’s B section, meter and bar lines are completely eliminated, and the improvisatory melody from the second set of voices disrupts the order and metric pulse that existed prior. Shaw marks the tempo as quarter note = 54, which is very similar to the tempo that many performers take Bach’s “Sarabande,” quarter note = 48.<sup>25</sup> Where Bach agitates his rhythm, Shaw relaxes hers, still disrupting the steady, sequential pulse seen in the previous section. Shaw’s rhythmic disturbance then, can be found in her use of range and vowel color, leading to the climax in bar 25b.

This free, melodic chant could also be described as “freer note values.” The exact rhythm is left up to the second set of singers, notated by small black note-heads with no stem or indication of rhythmic pacing. Only the final note-heads in the line are left open (white notes) to represent a moment of sustained pitch. Therefore, the exact “melody” is somewhat difficult to discern. The only melodic certainties lie in

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<sup>24</sup> David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, 135.

<sup>25</sup> Jaap Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works: A Performer's Guide*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, 123.

the fact that these passages outline both major and Lydian scales. Ledbetter also comments on how Bach uses these “lighter and freer values:”

In spite of elaboration, the sarabande’s decorative level of note value is still the eighth-note, with sixteenths and 32nds as progressively lighter and freer values. Standard French inequality would be quite out of place, but eighths do need a feeling of on-beats and off-beats, particularly after a dot... Sensitive rhythmic placing of decorative note values is all-important for the maturity of expression latent in this piece.<sup>26</sup>

Both Bach and Shaw use these free improvisatory gestures to reflect back to the Spanish Renaissance dance form, tying all three sarabandes together with similar intentions, styles, and expressions, while still creating an atmosphere that feels both new and refreshing at the same time.

### **Courante**

Dances of the seventeenth century were often choreographed for pairs. The two dancers executed carefully constructed choreography learned at an early age. These motions flowed seamlessly, one dancer responding to the other’s steps or mirroring them. The cultural influences from Italy and France influenced the choreography over time – but the pair of dancers remained constant. We see the cultural and historical influences from France and Italy in the rhythm, meter, tempo, and style of the courante.

Akinisie Sivuarapik brought her culture’s vocal influences to Roomful of Teeth during one of their first residencies at Mass MoCA. Sivuarapik is from Puvirnituk, a village in Québec. Along with Evie Mark, the two women taught the ensemble an Inuit vocal game, an abstracted form of Katajak (or *katajjaq*), which is the primary musical genre of Inuit culture. This game came from the Canadian Arctic regions and was first documented in the nineteenth century. It is both musical and playful, traditionally involving two women holding forearms and producing racket-like sounds back and forth between one another. Jean-Jacques Nattiez describes Katajak in *Ethnomusicology*:

It is made of a morpheme, a particular rhythm, an intonation contour, a pattern of voiced and voiceless sounds, a pattern of sounds inhaled and exhale. [...] In the frequent situation where the second voice imitates the first one, the global effect results from the superimposition of both voices which are canonically crossed phased. So, at the very moment when one woman produces a low sound, the other woman produces a high one. Hence the feeling of hearing two strings of homogenous sounds, the lower and the higher ones. This motif of the vocal games is repeated a certain number of times, and the concatenation of these motifs creates a kind of phrase. But a

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<sup>26</sup> Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works*, 135.

second motif may occur, which, through repetition, creates a second phrase, etc.<sup>27</sup>

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff contains the lyrics: ham ma he ha ham ma ha ha he ha ham ma ha he. The bottom staff contains the lyrics: ha a ha a ha a ha a ha a ha a ha. Both staves feature rhythmic notation with accents and slurs.

**Example 4.12. “Example 1. Transcribed by Nicole Beaudry.” Jean-Jacques Nattiez, “Inuit Throat-Games and Siberian Throat Singing: A Comparative, Historical, and Semiological Approach,” *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 3, 1999, 402.**

These two homogenous sounds produced in this musical game for pairs parallel the dance and choreography of seventeenth century courantes.

Shaw was inspired by these particular sounds and incorporated it as the primary source of material for her “Courante.” Shaw shares the Inuit vocal gesture among small groups of singers throughout the entire piece. The breath noises that are produced are intimate, shared closely between the two participants. The game is not meant to be one for performance or for an audience, rather it is intended to be an experience between the two players. I believe Shaw was drawn to this level of intimacy and the notion that this sound was something shared closely between two people. Shaw would not have been concerned with these sounds being audible in performance, as Roomful of Teeth regularly rehearses and performs with the use of microphones for amplification. The specific microphones used by Roomful of Teeth (Shure 58s) allow for a very clear and precise amplification of all sounds produced by the voices.<sup>28</sup> Knowing that amplification was possible, Shaw was able to incorporate the intimate and soft sounds in a unique and creative manner.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez, “Inuit Throat-Games and Siberian Throat Singing: A Comparative, Historical, and Semiological Approach,” *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 3, 1999, 401 – 402.

<sup>28</sup> Roomful of Teeth Tech Rider 2015-2016, accessed on 27 November, 2019.

**Example 4.13. mm. 4–7 from “Courante,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

“Courante” exhibits the largest display of extended vocal techniques in *Partita for 8 Voices*, using the Inuit vocal game as a springboard for techniques not often heard in Western vocal practices. At m. 185, Shaw instructs voice 1 to produce an “akinisie rumble,” a deep, breathy, sustained growling sound named after Akinisie Sivuarapik. This rumble was a sound Roomful of Teeth came up with during their time with Sivuarapik and Mark, and is performed four successive times, every other measure.<sup>29</sup> Besides the Inuit vocal game, Shaw also draws upon Tuvan throat singing practices, taught to the ensemble by Eliot Stone, Ayan-Ool Sam and Sean Quirk. The composer calls for the use of xöömei in voice 4, m. 132, which is a type of middle range, multi-phonetic, overtone style of singing derived from Tuvan throat singing practices of Mongolia. Xöömei returns in mm. 201–206 among the final twelve measure passage in voices 5 and 7. Surrounding these sounds is another style of Tuvan throat singing, kargyraa. Kargyraa is a lower range style of overtone singing, which produces higher ranged overtones. This type of throat singing is produced by voices 6 and 8.<sup>30</sup>

Rather than choosing between the French *courante* style and the Italian *corrente* style of the Renaissance era, Shaw draws from both styles in her choice of meter. Shaw’s “Courante” includes two

<sup>29</sup> Chris McGovern, “Roomful of Teeth,” *The Glass Blog*, 6 August 2012, Accessed on 1 April 2019, <https://chrismcgovernmusic.wordpress.com/2012/08/06/roomful-of-teeth/>.

<sup>30</sup> For a better description of each of these sounds, see The Alash Ensemble web-page which provides descriptions of the sounds as well as examples: [https://www.alashensemble.com/about\\_tts.htm](https://www.alashensemble.com/about_tts.htm).



time signatures:  $\frac{3}{2}$  and  $\frac{6}{4}$ . By not definitively rooting herself in either metric world, Shaw allows herself the flexibility to compose in long phrases of  $\frac{3}{2}$  (French style) bars, and then at other times faster passages in  $\frac{6}{4}$  (Italian style) bars, granting both geographical styles a presence within the movement. Meter informs tempo, and Shaw's tempo recognizes both meters, due to the tempo marking paired with that tempo's description. The tempo marking is quarter = 146, a tempo that allows the faster  $\frac{6}{4}$  passages to flow at a rapid pace. Shaw's tempo description speaks to the longer,  $\frac{3}{2}$  passages: *silk shoes gliding over marble mosaic*. This indication harkens back to Negri's description of the dance and the French *courante* style. As mentioned in Chapter 2 in describing the French *courante* and the differences between it and the Italian *corrente*, Negri said that "[t]his latter dance (the French *courante*) was slower in tempo and, in contrast to its sixteenth century namesake (Italian *corrente*), displayed smooth gliding steps."<sup>31</sup> When I asked Shaw about her tempo description and what made her decide on the specific phrase, she said:

That's what I wanted it to sound like. Louis XIV was, in many ways, the beginning of ballet. This time makes me picture a really smooth, cold, elegant, beautiful floor with colored silk – super soft slippers – gently sweeping over it, whether its French, or almost like a Japanese silk kind-of-feel. Then going between the duple and triple meter feel has this super smooth quality to it. Unlike the Allemande which is rigid and square, it's smooth.<sup>32</sup>

The French court had a major influence on many dance genres, especially the *courante*. King Louis XIV often danced the *courante* at court and in royal performances. The French style came to characteristically define the most commonly known *courante* form. The “solemn, noble, grand, and majestic”<sup>33</sup> style allowed the genre to become one of royalty. This style of choreography permeated French culture throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The definition of style can change depending upon who is defining the term and the context the word is used within. Scholars and theorists have done their best, but there is no one, decisive definition. I asked Shaw what she thought about the word “style.” She said:

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<sup>31</sup> Gustavia Yvonne Kendall, *The Music of Arbeau's Orchésographie*, Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2013, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Rifat J. Qureshi, *The Influence of Baroque Dance in the Performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Suites a Violoncello Senzo Basso*, Thesis (D.M.A.), Rice University, 1994, 23.

When I first think of the word style, I think of it as something on the surface, but also style could be something underneath; part of the larger structure. Usually, you can hear style on the surface: what are the ornaments, what is the general tempo or vibe? It's kind of like how someone dresses, it's a style, it's their surface, but you don't see everything. It's maybe a symptom of what's underneath, but it's also hard to say.<sup>34</sup>

On the surface, Shaw incorporates stylistic elements from courantes of old: meter, tempo, metric accents (such as the strong use of hemiola) and cultural influences of both France and Italy. But Shaw also infuses the music with her own unique style. Not only does she bring in the cultural influence of Japanese imagery, but also her unmistakable harmonic language. Most importantly, Shaw imbues her “Courante” with the Inuit vocal game. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there was a game played when the courante was danced in the seventeenth century. Shaw also plays a game in her “Courante,” and it is perhaps the single greatest influence of her style within the movement.

Shaw explains the notation for the Inuit gestures as “audible exhale, typically on ‘ah’” and “audible inhale, typically higher in pitch, and on ‘oh’” (see Example 4.5). The imagery of two people, each one imitating and responding to the other, becomes the seed that Shaw plants and grows. “Courante” is the longest movement in *Partita for 8 Voices*, and these pairings permeate the movement: a set of paired voices, like in “Sarabande,” 1 – 4 and 5 – 8; a pair of meters,  $\frac{6}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{2}$ ; and a pair of musical themes: the Inuit vocal game and a shape note tune, “The Shining Shore.” The singers participate in the game back and forth, constantly looking to outwit and outdo the other player.

It is important to understand the analytical form of Shaw’s “Courante” in order to move forward. The First Strain of “Courante” is sixty-four measures long. In this opening section, Shaw presents the first musical theme, the Inuit vocal game, along with the harmonic landscape in which the piece will live (G-major). The Second Strain lasts from mm. 65–113 and begins with the shape note hymn “The Shining Shore.” Shaw then combines the two musical ideas, deconstructing the tune in mm. 82–113. In mm. 114–159 Shaw resets the Inuit vocal game, with voices 5 – 8 taking over the opening gesture and voices 1 – 4 singing and outlining the harmonic progression (which is now based upon “The Shining Shore” and its

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<sup>34</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

harmony). The final measures of the movement – mm. 160–209 – I label as a Coda, bringing both of the musical ideas to an exciting climax via the use of extended range and faster and faster tempo changes.

The Inuit vocal game in “Courante” begins with voices 1 – 4. These inhales and exhales are unpitched until m. 13, where Shaw adds pitch to the “mmb” made on beats 1, 3, and 5. Voices 5 – 8 do not enter until m. 36. Although not participating in the game yet, these voices provide the harmonic world for “Courante.” The harmonic progression that defines the First Strain is G: I – iii<sup>6/4</sup> – VI<sup>6</sup> – I. While Shaw will manipulate this progression throughout the movement, these four chords and their harmonic qualities are a defining characteristic of the opening.

The Second Strain begins with a wordless rendition of “The Shining Shore” by George F. Root (Example 4.14). This shape-note hymn, composed in 1855, was discovered by Shaw when she was studying voice with Jaqueline Horner-Kwaitek in New York City during her days with the Trinity Wall Street Choir. Horner-Kwaitek sings with Anonymous 4 on their 2006 album “Gloryland: Folk Songs, Spirituals, Gospel hymns of Hope and Glory” which includes the track “The Shining Shore.” When I asked Shaw why she decided to use this hymn in her piece, particularly at this moment, she shared:

I love the sound of the brightness in shape note singing. I love all these old songs. There’s something about that moment in “Courante” where I wanted things to settle and to feel warm and comfortable and soothing. I settled on the “Shining Shore” song for this reason. There is an Anonymous 4 recording that I love so much – I love that particular song especially on their album. It was also an interesting anecdote to the feeling that comes before it (the First Strain), compared to the shape note song. When we were trying the breathing, exhale and inhale, which is related to Inuit vocal tradition, the guys were like “this sounds funny” – it has this sexual sound. So I thought to myself, what if you get to that point and you just want to shut all that off? I decided, then, that “I’m going to take you to church for just a moment.” No one really knows that, but it was my funny little take on “I’m going to take you to church.” And then we’re going to say “goodbye church,” we’re going to combine church with this other sound.<sup>35</sup>

Shaw assigns the hymn to voices 1 – 4, mirroring the same vocal texture as Anonymous 4 (SSAA). The singers hum the tune on [mm] in G-major. As the hymn moves into the refrain, voices 5 – 8 join with a very different sound on a unison G<sup>4</sup>, paired in the score with the following instructions: “with crisp glottal

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<sup>35</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, October 17, 2017.

and quick decay” in voices 7 – 8 and “re-articulate with glottal” for voices 5 – 6. The hymn ends with voices 1 – 4 singing alone, similar to how the hymn began.

Following the hymn in mm. 82–113, Shaw pairs the two musical themes. Shaw adds a clearly defined harmony to the Inuit vocal game, outlining the First Strain’s familiar progression of I – iii, and then vi – I (it is worth noting that Shaw changes the E-major chord to E-minor at this point). As the upper voices move rhythmically in steady eighth notes, the lower voices transition from a mumbling hoquet into sustained chords. Shaw introduces the III<sup>6/4</sup> chord following the now familiar four chord progression, contributing a new color beneath the G-major sonority of voices 1 – 4. These two musical ideas begin to press ahead sequentially, with a new chord sounding for a full measure every other bar. This sequence leads to m. 114, where Shaw resets the Inuit game.

# 584 My Days Are Gliding Swiftly By

David Nelson, 1835.

(SHINING SHORE. 8s, 7s. D.)

Geo. F. Root.

1. My days are glid - ing swift - ly by, And I, a pil - grim stran - ger,  
2. Our ab - sent King the watch - word gave: "Let ev - 'ry lamp be burn - ing;"  
3. Should com - ing days be dark and cold, We will not yield to sor - row;  
4. Let sor - row's rud - est tem - pest blow, Each cord on earth to sev - er;

Would not de - tain them as they fly, Those hours of toil and dan - ger.  
We look a - far a - cross the wave, Our dis - tant home dis - cern - ing.  
For hope will sing, with cour - age bold, There's glo - ry on the mor - row.  
Our King says, Come, and there's our home For - ev - er! O for - ev - er!

REFRAIN.

For, O we stand on Jor - dan's strand, Our friends are pass - ing o - ver;

And just be - fore, the Shin - ing Shore We may al - most dis - cov - er. A - MEN.

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Example 4.14. "The Shining Shore," Willa A. Townsend, *The Baptist Standard Hymnal: With Responsive Readings: a New Book for All Services*, Nashville, TN, Sunday School Board, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., 1924, 503.

Shaw flips the voice pairs in m. 114. Voices 5 – 8 take over the game, beginning almost identically to the opening measures of the First Strain. Then in m. 123, Shaw reintroduces harmony via a broken, chorale-like manipulation of “The Shining Shore.” Shaw disrupts the hymn with rests, which are further punctuated by the steady eighth notes in the lower voices. The sonority remains rooted in G-major until m. 138 where the harmony in voices 5 – 8 shifts upwards to B-major. In m. 138, voice 4 leaves the hymn tune and joins the lower four voices, adding another layer to the Inuit game.

Starting at letter I, m. 160, she begins a long, but well-paced, race to the finish (as was traditional in the original Canadian game). Shaw briefly steers away from the game in mm. 158–188. The composer writes in the score “let the tempo move a little bit, naturally, gradual *accelerando* to J.” The tempo has stayed at quarter = 156 throughout the movement, with only a slight fluctuation at letter F. The broken chorale and the Inuit game beneath continue to pick up speed in m. 184. By letter J, Shaw marks the tempo up to half note = 100 followed by a *molto accel...* all the way up to half note = 160, reconfiguring the tempo relationship with the half note now becoming the quarter note (so half = 80 now). She writes “*still more accel...*,” half note = 106 at letter K. It is at this moment that the tempo stabilizes. Racing ahead, Shaw begins to end the movement by having the lower voices finish their game in m. 206, sustaining a G-major chord followed by the upper voices suspending their motion in the next measure, sustaining B-major. In m. 209 the lower voices release with a descending pitch motion followed by the upper voices in the following bar. The final free measure of the piece is a cacophony of exhales by all eight voices. The two pairs have finished the game, exhaling and releasing any emotion left in reserve. Although the winner is unclear, the enjoyment and pleasure derived from such a long and complex game is impossible to miss (Example 4.15).

Bach also plays with a pair of musical ideas in his “Courante” from BWV 1004. Two distinct rhythmic patterns interact throughout the entire movement, playing their own game. The first idea is represented by eighth note triplets. Bach incorporates this figure after the opening D-minor chord in m. 1. Mm. 3–4 display the next rhythmic idea, a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note. Rotating between these two rhythms in mm. 1–6, Bach sequentially explores other key areas.



**Example 4.15.** mm. 206–209(a) from “Courante,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices*

Bach’s “Courante” is made up of two primary strains, with the two rhythmic ideas in dialogue throughout the entire movement. In fact, except for a handful of quarter note chords used to emphasize specific

harmonic events, Bach relies completely on these two rhythmic patterns for forty-five of the fifty-four measures of the movement. Aside from the playful banter between these two ideas, Bach also keeps the listener intrigued by his use of harmony.

### Courante.



**Example 4.16.** mm. 1–5 from “Courante,” J.S. Bach, *Violin Partita No.2 in D minor*, BWV 1004, Bach-Gesellschaft Ausgabe, Band 27, Leipzig, Breitkopf und Härtel, 1879.

Bach, again, incorporates the Neapolitan chord in his “Courante.” He oscillates between  $E_b$  and  $E\flat$  in four consecutive measures beginning with the first sequence in m. 6. Bach uses this  $bII$  chord as harmonic inspiration. The sonority provides Bach with a wider range of harmonic possibility, especially here in “Courante.” Bach ends his First Strain with a modulation to the minor dominant, A-minor. He then flips back to D-minor via the parallel A-major chord in m. 25. Not five bars into the Second Strain, however, Bach reintroduces  $E_b$ , leading to new tonal centers such as  $Bb$ -major and G-minor. Shaw also incorporates this half-step oscillation in her work in order to access fresh tonal worlds. Although her “Courante” stays rooted in G-major primarily, Shaw pivots between B-minor (the minor-mediant) and B-major throughout her work. The B-major sonority slowly permeates the movement, occurring more frequently as the piece progresses.

As mentioned, the First Strain is defined harmonically by the chord progression  $I - iii^{6/4} - VI^6 - I$ . Shaw first flips from the minor-mediant (iii) to the major-mediant (III) in m. 46, but then quickly returns to iii in the following measure. Shaw withholds the B-major harmony (and the use of  $D\sharp$ ) until m. 92, where the composer begins building a new harmonic sequence:  $I - ii - iii - IV - III^{6/4}$ . Although only occurring twice in this particular sequence, the B-major harmony has begun to slowly make its way into the movement at large. More time passes as voices 1 – 4 develop the broken chorale. At m. 131, Shaw begins yet another harmonic sequence with all eight voices in four bar phrases. The bottom four voices drone a G-major chord (the tonic chord of the primary key area of the movement) while the upper voices



sequentially expand on the previous melodic material. Then, at m. 138, the lower voices shift the drone upwards to B-major. Only now can we see that Shaw has been using this chord throughout the movement with increasing frequency leading finally to this important and exciting moment. Another fascinating realization arrives when we recognize that Shaw is using the third of the chord to create change in the progression, a similar gesture to the harmonic progression seen in the two previous movements. All eight voices begin to accelerate, firmly rooted in B-major thanks to the repetition of D $\sharp$  in voices 1 and 2. Shaw briefly returns voices 5 – 8 back to G-major in m. 148, but voices 1 – 4 continue their B-major sequence at the same time. Shaw re-incorporates the D $\sharp$  at letter H, m. 152, but the G-major harmony lasts only three measures before Shaw launches into her quintessential circle of fifths progression.

By now, the listener knows Shaw's harmonic circle, here heard as G – C – F – B $\flat$  – E $\flat$  – A $\flat$  – D $\flat$  – G $\flat$  – C $\flat$ , which can be found throughout *Partita*. The third of the C $\flat$  chord, E $\flat$  in voices 1, overlaps with the E $\sharp$  down an octave in voice 3. Here we have a clash of E $\flat$  and E $\sharp$ , which includes the pitch (enharmonic, D $\sharp$ ) that Shaw has been manipulating throughout the movement. Shaw uses this pivot, by way of the adjusted third, to find her way back home harmonically, E – A – D – G, for a full cycle of the circle. Shaw's slow introduction of D $\sharp$  that began back in m. 46 is now even more so fully realized at this pivot in m. 156. And although one might have expected Shaw to pivot her final "circle of fifths" sequence via the third, she does not. Instead, she holds off until the next sequence at m. 160, which now includes the expected third pivot, where she takes the F $\sharp$  of a D-major triad in m. 166, and then pivoting to F $\sharp$ -major within the same measure. This new twelve-measure sequence, repeats four more times, with each sequence becoming faster before the final release. It is as if Shaw first denies the listener's harmonic expectations by providing a "normal" full circle of fifths progression, but then returns to what feels "right" in her harmonic world a few bars later, pivoting via the third four successive times as she races to the final climactic moment of the movement.

C F Bb<sup>M7</sup> Eb Ab<sup>M7</sup> Db Gb<sup>M7</sup> Cb E<sup>M7</sup> A D<sup>M7</sup> G C

**Example 4.17.** mm. 154–158 from “Courante,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices*

Inuit vocal games are built around rhythm and pace. Once a rhythmic cell is established, it is then up to the leader of the game to try and throw off the follower with a new gesture or a new rhythmic idea.

Another way to create difficulty for the follower is to change the tempo or pace. It is up to the following player to respond to the lead player’s tricks, adapting in the moment to stay in the game. Shaw’s

“Courante” mirrors this game. Almost precisely every twelve measures, Shaw slightly adjusts her music.

This modification is done by a variety of means: tempo, rhythm, meter, harmony, texture, musical idea, and contour. When looking at Shaw’s “Courante” as a piece built in twelve measure phrases, it becomes clear that this movement truly is a game similar to the one played by the Inuit tribes in Northern Canada.

By adjusting the pace, manipulating rhythms, taking away and bringing back specific musical ideas, Shaw develops a movement that is unlike anything ever heard before.

With a simple understanding of the playful Inuit game, alongside an understanding of the history of the “Courante,” we can more easily see the intricacies that make this movement so exhilarating. Shaw is right to view “Courante” as “a monster,” but what an exciting monster she has created.

### **Passacaglia**

Caroline Shaw’s original attempt to organize chaos came during Roomful of Teeth’s first Summer at Mass MoCA. During this time, Shaw soaked up the sounds and extended techniques taught by the master teachers in rehearsal as well as the visual art that resides in the museum. It is expansive, with over 200,000 square feet of space for visual art as well as stages for live performances. *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective* is one of the long-term exhibits housed within the museum. It opened in November 2008 and it is currently set to remain through 2043. One hundred and five wall drawings take up almost an acre of specially designed walls by LeWitt, laid out over three levels in the 27,000 square foot “Building #7,” which was renovated especially for the LeWitt exhibit. The museum was an ideal location for Roomful of Teeth’s beginning as an ensemble: it was the type of artistic space which encouraged new, exciting, modern pieces of art and it was close to Brad Williams’ home and place of work. In between rehearsals, Shaw would wander these galleries, particularly the first floor of the LeWitt exhibit which contains his earlier work from the late 1960s and 1970s. These drawings were created using lead and colored pencils. When I asked Shaw how the museum initially sparked her curiosity, she shared:

At Mass MoCA, I found myself on breaks wandering over through the galleries, listening to what was around me, looking what was on the walls and what the artists were thinking about. I felt like they always suggest some sort of musical idea. And then the Sol LeWitt text appeared next to the paintings and something clicked for me[...] I loved the simple design aspect and use of pencil. It looked like someone scribbling with pencils, which is how I do many of my own drawings, kind of a scribbly technique. And then in Wall Drawing 305, you see the actual activity of making the painting in the painting itself.<sup>36</sup>

It was this particular piece of art, “Wall Drawing 305,” that would inspire Shaw to begin writing the first section of *Partita for 8 Voices*, “Passacaglia.”

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<sup>36</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

Although the movement shares parallel characteristics with the passacaglias of old, this movement has less to do with the forms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than the other three movements of *Partita*. Rather than a ground bass, which repeats throughout a typical passacaglia movement, Shaw's "Passacaglia" repeats a harmonic sequence, more closely mirroring a theme and variations form. When I asked what her piece had in common with passacaglias of the Renaissance and Baroque eras, she offered:

Really, it is not a passacaglia at all. I believe the definition is a repeated bass line, sort of more like a chaconne. I thought of it more as a theme and variations, so over time, variations on a repeated sequence of chords.<sup>37</sup>

Her "theme" is a series of seven chords. These chords are first sung softly on [ ♩ ] by all eight voices in a four part texture (SATB). The chords are D: I – bIII – bII – I – III – IV – i<sup>6</sup>. It is interesting to note that a chaconne typically includes eight chords around which composers write their own melodic variations. So, in some ways, Shaw's movement is more closely related to a chaconne, due to the piece being based upon a harmonic progression, rather than a single bass ostinato. A Chaconne, interestingly enough, also ends BWV 1004, rather than a passacaglia. However, Shaw's variations surround seven chords, leaving the listener wondering where the eighth chord could be due to the harmonic gap. Shaw repeats these seven chords seven complete times, growing this planted, harmonic sequence with each successive iteration. The major changes and developments are focused on the use of dynamics, vowels and vowel color, and the use of text.

We do find evidence of the seventeenth century passacaglia within the piece. The actual name of the dance was derived from the Spanish word *pasar*, meaning "to walk." These walking songs were simple, common songs, sung by everyday people. During the seventeenth century, the word was also synonymous with the ritornello. The ritornello was also defined during this time as a postlude. Although "Passacaglia" was written first, the movement is a fitting way to end the suite. Shaw blurs the line between forms and we are not really sure if we are hearing a passacaglia, a chaconne, or a theme and

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<sup>37</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation, January 10, 2019.

variations. I believe the theme and variation form is the most accurate. The first variation outlines the harmonic sequence in ten measures. The I and III chord are repeated, which happens in other variations as well, but not frequently enough to include the repetition as part of the sequence. Shaw shifts the dynamic from *piano* to *mezzo-forte* for the second variation and changes the vowel to [ ɛ ]. She also instructs the singers in the first measure to sing using their chest voice and then in the second measure, although still the same chord, to sing using their head voice. She notates the vocal shift in the second measure with a yodel break. Shaw says: “This is one example of a yodel break. The diamond note head indicates the use of head voice. The comma stroke just confirms the differentiation from the chest voice that precedes it.”<sup>38</sup>

**Example 4.18. mm. 11–17 from “Passacaglia,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

The third variation continues to alter vowel color and dynamic.

The fourth variation includes the largest shift in sound so far. The texture becomes denser, with Shaw expanding the two voices of each section (SATB) into their own line, the familiar SSAATTBB, or voices 1 – 8. The “noodle-chant,” heard in the previous movements, is again incorporated. This chant oscillates with Shaw instructing the musicians to sing “plainchantish improv on these two pitches.” These improvised pitch rotations eventually shift into notated triplets and quintuplets. Prior to this moment, all

<sup>38</sup> See Example 4.5.

singers have been singing in exact homophonic statements. Now at m. 32, Shaw has broken away to a more complex rhythmic texture, creating a sense of disruption and confusion within the harmonic sequence. Although the previous variations have lasted ten measures (with variation three receiving a one measure extension), Shaw uses this change in rhythmic texture to move into an interlude, which begins after the fourth, ten-measure variation. The interlude lasts from mm. 43–51 and is to be sung using “floaty head voice” in a *pianissimo* dynamic. During the interlude, the voices continue to oscillate between two pitches, now notated in measured quarters. The moment of rhythmic chaos that began in the fourth variation becomes organized again by letter E, the start of the fifth variation.

The fifth variation is the longest of all seven and introduces the text from Sol LeWitt’s Wall Drawing 305. Wall Drawing 305 is described on Mass MoCA’s website as such:

Wall Drawing 305 is composed of one hundred random specific points that are determined by the draftsman. The points are random in that they may be placed anywhere on the wall. The draftsman uses Sol LeWitt’s vocabulary and geometric lexicon to guide the mapping of the points. This lexicon includes the corners, midpoints and center of each wall, which serve as reference points that are connected and traversed by lines and arcs. The one hundred points are specific in that they are created at the meeting of the junctures of these formal elements. As the draftsman maps out each generated point, he or she writes a description of how he or she arrived at that point next to it. This allows the viewers to trace the process of the placement of the points.<sup>39</sup>

Shaw slowly introduces the text in each voice, where they speak LeWitt’s instructions with specific numerical points. Voice 6 enters first surrounded by the other singers, using a variety of extended vocal techniques that create a morphing of sound. These techniques include “e.y.s.” (eat your sound – the multi-step tongue filter developed by Roomful of Teeth in 2009, and heard earlier in the Partita’s “Allemande”) and an instruction for voices 2, 3 and 4 to move from *sygyt* (Tuvan throat singing) which began at letter E to “mixy” and then to “head.”

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<sup>39</sup> <https://massmoca.org/event/walldrawing305/>, accessed 7 April 2019.

**Example 4.19. mm. 55–61 from “Passacaglia,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices***

Slowly, these pitched meanderings evolve into repeated spoken texts from the Wall Drawing, creating a chaotic and confusing spoken texture which becomes unintelligible and overwhelming for the listener.

Following a momentary silence, the singers begin their overlapped speaking once more. After one measure (or about four seconds, per Shaw’s instructions), the composer provides the following instruction in the score:

At cue, restart your text from the beginning and vamp on it through this next section. Speak clearly and naturally. Each bar should last around four seconds and can be cued either by a conductor or just by ear among the singers themselves. (The harmony changes on each bar; it is the same harmonic progression stated at the beginning). The spacing of pitches throughout the bar, for each part, is approximate. Don’t feel too tethered to it, but maybe use it as a guideline.<sup>40</sup>

With this set of instructions, the sixth variation has begun.

The sixth variation sounds quite different from the prior variations due to the use of a broken harmonic sequence. The vowel on which the pitches should be sung by each part is not specifically

<sup>40</sup> Shaw, *Partita for 8 voices*, 2014 (manuscript), 44.

written in the score, but on the Roomful of Teeth recording the vowel sounds somewhere between the most recently notated vowel, [ ɔ ] (back in m. 57) and another closely related vowel used in the piece, the [ ɛ ] vowel. Although the score indicates that at some point the speaking should cease and the pitches alone should sound, the recording differs from this instruction. There is some form of speaking happening until the next direction provided by Shaw in m. 82: “Note for all: All speaking descends to vocal fry. Big fat crescendo. Try to maintain the fry crackle as much as possible, without an overdramatic gliss... (Microphones will help).”<sup>41</sup> This moment is directly inspired by Sol LeWitt’s wall drawings. Shaw describes how she first came up with this moment in the piece during the first summer at Mass MoCA:

I was initially looking for a sense of talking and chaos and I saw the Wall Drawings of Sol LeWitt and it kind of just sounded like music to me – it sounded like chaotic conversation, a roomful of people talking. So, I had the group try speaking the text and then going into vocal fry and then going into music and it was the perfect representation of what the music sounds like.<sup>42</sup>

The large vocal fry leads into the seventh and final complete variation, the loudest and most exciting of all seven. Sung at a *forte* dynamic on the bright and forward [ æ ] vowel, the harmonic sequence is clearly defined once again, sung homophonically by all eight voices. Each of these chords are released without pitch, similar to the yodel break heard previously in the movement. Missing in this variation, however, is the use of bIII. Instead, Shaw repeats the first D-major chord and then moves directly to bII. The final four chords (IV – i<sup>6</sup> – III – IV – i<sup>6</sup>) return to a *piano* dynamic on [ u ], followed by a fast crescendo to *fortissimo*, morphing the vowel back to [ æ ]. After a fermata over a half-note rest, the final seven measures commence. These seven bars contain half of the harmonic sequence, with only the first three chords heard, I – bIII – bII. There are two beats of rest between each chord, allowing silence to occur regularly for the first time, foreshadowing the final moments of the piece.

Ending with Eb-major is noteworthy for two reasons. First, the Neapolitan chord (bII), has been an important harmony throughout the entire work. This chord is often used in other pieces in the Western canon as cadential material, so one could argue the piece ends unresolved, with no resolution. Second, the

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<sup>41</sup> Shaw, *Partita for 8 voices*, 2014 (manuscript), 44.

<sup>42</sup> Shaw and Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, October 17, 2017.



ending on the Eb pitch recalls other central moments in *Partita*. Eb was also the pitch that Shaw oscillated between (Eb, enharmonically spelled D#) many times in “Courante.” The actual Eb triad was also the exact triad Bach incorporated as his Neapolitan chord during his “Allemande” in BWV 1004. This reference has pervaded *Partita* extensively, and it is therefore fitting that Shaw would decide to end *Partita for 8 Voices* on this triad.

At the end of “Passacaglia,” the final chord seems to dissolve because of the “eat your sound” tongue filter. The sequence starts at a marked *pianissimo* and then in the final two bars, Shaw marks a decrescendo, incorporating the “eat your sound” filter with a long fermata placed at the end of the final chord. Bach’s *Partita*, BWV 1004, begins and ends in D-minor. Shaw’s *Partita* gradually sinks downward, ending just slightly lower than the E-minor tonality where she began.

On their website, Roomful of Teeth describes themselves as “a GRAMMY-winning vocal project dedicated to reimagining the expressive potential of the human voice.”<sup>43</sup> Shaw certainly fulfills this mission here in “Passacaglia,” and it is no wonder why she continued to experiment with these sounds and vocal possibilities during the following three summers. Shaw’s use of vowels and vowel color is another unique facet of “Passacaglia.” Besides the set of Wall Drawing instructions by LeWitt, the movement is wordless. Instead, Shaw elects to experiment with vowel shapes in order to achieve the colors desired from the eight voices. This manipulation of vowel color was Shaw’s primary curiosity and a major reason she decided to experiment with composition during the first summer at Mass MoCA. As mentioned earlier, Shaw says she was more concerned in writing the piece by focusing on how the change of vowel sound affected the color of the chord, rather than the actual extended vocal techniques.

Shaw mentioned that “Allemande” was written as a way to hint at “Passacaglia” in “Allemande’s” use of Sol LeWitt’s instructions, extended vocal techniques, vowels, and morphing of vowel color, along with musical parallels from the Renaissance forms. Once the listener arrives at “Passacaglia,” the catalogue of techniques has been placed on full display, almost normalized by this

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.roomfulofteeth.org/roomful>, accessed 9 April, 2019.

point. In doing so, “Passacaglia” becomes one of the most exciting movements to listen to as the audience has become acquainted with her style. This simple set of seven chords sung seven times pulses with energy, but eventually is contained within the sound world and compositional voice of Caroline Shaw. Although the piece seems to contain all of Shaw’s world and her history, she ultimately organizes all of these influences into a resonant, beautiful, disintegrating Eb-major triad.

The musical score consists of eight staves, numbered 1 through 8. Each staff contains a vocal line with notes and rests. Below the notes, there are lyrics: 'æ fff' and 'pp u'. The score includes a Roman numeral 'I' above the first staff and a chord progression 'D: III IV i6 I bIII6/4 bII' below the staves. The score also includes a triplet of notes in the first measure of the first staff.

**Example 4.20.** mm. 91–100 from “Passacaglia,” Caroline Shaw, *Partita for 8 Voices*

## Conclusion: Caroline 2

*“Partita is a simple piece. Born of a love of surface and structure, of the human voice, of dancing and tired ligaments, of music, and of our basic desire to draw a line from one point to another.”*

Caroline Shaw’s career post-*Partita* has been a whirlwind. She is a composer in high demand within multiple genres: vocal and choral ensembles, symphony orchestras, string quartets, and other instrumental chamber groups. In 2019 alone, her work has been used as the soundtrack to pop artist Pharrell’s Chanel clothing line and both “Courante” and “Passacaglia” can be heard in Beyoncé’s *Homecoming* documentary. The first album devoted solely to Shaw’s music was released by the Attacca Quartet in April 2019. The album includes her completed string quartet “Plan and Elevation,” the work she began during her time on the Watson Fellowship studying landscape architecture. Alongside her composing, Shaw continues to travel and perform with Roomful of Teeth, with the group continuing to highlight their ensemble-defining piece, *Partita for 8 Voices*.

As of May 2019, there have only been two other ensembles allowed to perform *Partita* in its entirety. (There have been performances of single movements by a handful of other ensembles, including Indiana University’s NOTUS.) I asked Shaw about her decision to keep the piece so close, rather than letting other ensembles perform the work. She said:

I don’t know why I hold it so close, I like seeing what other people do. I never meant to hold it so close to the nest, but it just felt like a little quality control before people are ready for it. But whenever I hear someone else do it, or hear a recording, I’m so overwhelmed and overjoyed that someone is performing it. Things that are different introduce something new to me and there’s always a recording to go back to see what it sounded like originally. But if someone wanted to do something radically different, or felt really strongly about it, I’m really excited about that. There’s been a ton of dance performances, and in those I’m really open to letting people do whatever they want.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Shaw and Joshua Harper, Personal conversation with the composer, January 10, 2019.

Quality control is a valid concern for Shaw. So much of the piece relies upon understanding of the techniques taught by the master teachers, perhaps similarly to the Renaissance dances that were so taught. Yet Shaw acknowledges the benefits of having the piece interpreted by other performers. She is open to artists adding to the conversation, contributing their own unique influences to a work that already has many creative fingerprints.

Although Shaw has written other vocal and choral works that are similar to *Partita*, there is something pure about the work that launched her career as a composer. *Partita*'s simplicity is born out of the basic elements that have surrounded and fascinated the composer for most of her life. Shaw continues to draw lines from pieces of the past to her new pieces in the present, celebrating the dance and other well-worn forms. While the future of *Partita for 8 Voices* is still unknown, Shaw's musical autobiography is an important addition to the modern vocal ensemble repertoire. Shaw says that she is not a choreographer, but the lines drawn from dance music of the Renaissance, through the solo *Partitas* of J.S. Bach, to her own personal experiences create one of the most unique musical works today. Shaw's dance is joyous; it is full of life, patterns, and associations; and it has only just begun.

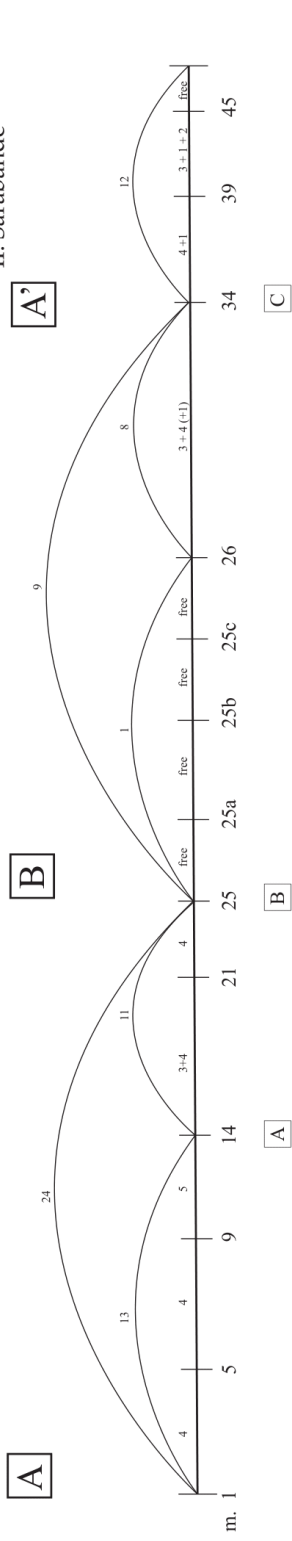
## Appendix: Analytical Graphs of *Partita for 8 Voices*

Allemande	100
Sarabande	101
Courante	102
Passacaglia	104



Caroline Shaw  
Partita for 8 Voices

II: Sarabande



B: I V1<sup>9</sup> V<sup>9</sup> V<sup>6-5</sup> B<sup>6/4</sup> E A<sup>M7</sup> Dm Cm I<sup>6</sup> - sequence repeats  
 A: I V1<sup>9</sup> V<sup>9</sup> V<sup>6-5</sup> B<sup>6/4</sup> E A<sup>M7</sup> Dm Cm I<sup>6</sup> - sequence repeats  
 C: I V1<sup>9</sup> V<sup>9</sup> V<sup>6-5</sup> B<sup>6/4</sup> E A<sup>M7</sup> Dm Cm I<sup>6</sup>

B-major A-Lydian B-major D-Lydian  
 homophonic voices 1-4  
 homophonic voices 1-4  
 unison chant + voices 5-8  
 homophonic voices 1-4  
 displaced homophony voices 5-8  
 homophonic voices 1-4  
 overtone chant + 5-6  
 + 7-8 B5

*p* *mp* *p* *ff* *p*  
 Text: 1-4: { hmm ah }  
 5-8: { hmm ah } [ o ] [ e ]  
 all fade out ad libitum

3  
 4  
 FREE  
 3  
 4

Graph by Joshua Harper

Caroline Shaw  
Partita for 8 Voices

III: Courante 1/2

First Strain

Second Strain

G: I - iii<sup>6/4</sup> - VI<sup>6</sup> - iii III I - ii - iii - IV - III<sup>6/4</sup>

*mp*  $\langle$  *mf*  $\langle$  *f* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *f*

imitative homophonic  $\rightarrow$  hemiola displaced

imitative homophonic

homophonic hymn

imitative & displaced

Inuit Vocal Game  
Voices 1 - 4: [ mmb - oh ]

$\downarrow$   $\downarrow$   $\downarrow$   $\downarrow$

audible exhale / audible inhale inhale-exhale gesture

“The Shining Shore” - George F. Root  
[ mm - v - o - v ]  
- v. 5 - 8 + v. 5 - 8 [ v - mm - v ]

mm - ah  
[ v ]

$\frac{3}{2} \frac{6}{4}$

silk shoes gliding over marble mosaic  $\downarrow$  = 146

Graph by Joshua Harper



First and Second Strains combined

114 122 132 144 152 160 172 184 196 200 205 205a

[F] [G] [H] [I] [J] [K]

I III I I-IV-III  $\frac{b}{\flat}$

G-C-F-Bb<sup>tr</sup>-Eb-Ab<sup>tr</sup>-Db-Gb<sup>tr</sup>-Cb-E<sup>tr</sup>-A-D<sup>tr</sup> A-D-F#

full circle of 5ths

*mp* *mf* *p* *sub. p* *ff*

imitative & displaced "homophonic" imitative

imitative displaced

Inuit Vocal Game - Broken Chorale

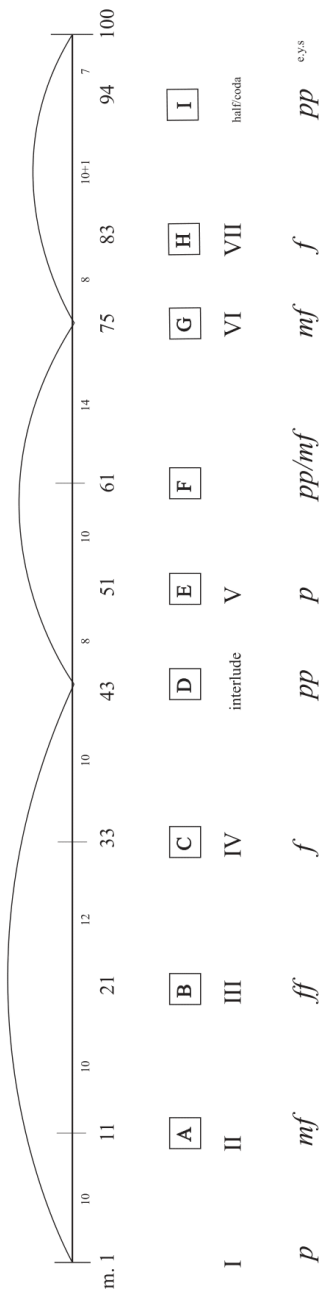
- v. 1 - 4 + v. 1 - 4 [ v ]

v. 5 - 8: [ mmb - oh ]

- v. 5 - 8 + v. 5 - 8 [ mmb - oh ]

inhale-exhale return *xöömei* "akiniisie rumble" *xöömei* *kargyva*

Caroline Shaw  
Partita for 8 Voices  
 IV: Passacaglia



Variation: I

*p* *mf*

Text: [ɔ] [æ] [v]

[ɔ] “Sol Lewitt: WD 305”

[u]

$\frac{2}{2}$

Ground Bass - 8 measures  
 DM: I, bIII, bII, I, III, IV, i<sub>6</sub>

Graph by Joshua Harper

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