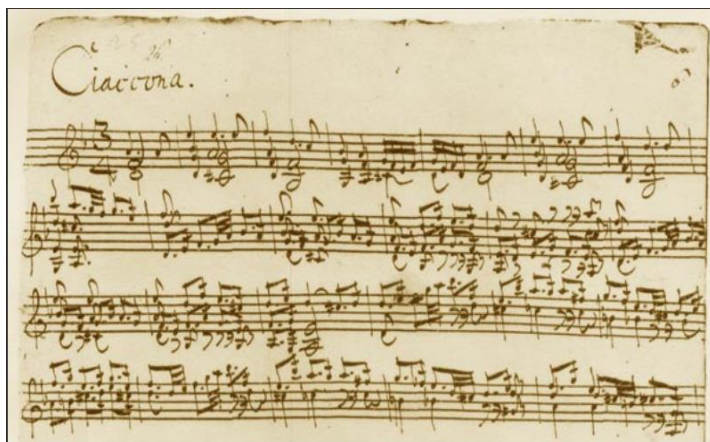




Eugene Drucker in Recital
J.S. Bach:
Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin



Saturday | April 27, 2019 | 5 pm
First Congregational Church
251 Main Street | Great Barrington, MA

www.berkshirebach.org | 413.528.9555 | info@berkshirebach.org

Eugene Drucker, Violin



Eugene Drucker, founding member of the Emerson String Quartet and active international soloist, has appeared as a violinist with orchestras in Montreal, Brussels, Antwerp, Liege, Hartford, Richmond, Omaha, Jerusalem, and the Rhineland-Palatinate, as well as with the American Symphony Orchestra and Aspen Chamber Symphony. A graduate of Columbia University and the Juilliard School, where he studied with Oscar Shumsky, he was concertmaster of the Juilliard Orchestra and appeared as soloist several times. He made his New York debut as a Concert Artists Guild winner in the fall of 1976, after having won prizes at the Montreal Competition and the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels. He has recorded the complete unaccompanied works of Bach (Parnassus Records), the complete sonatas and duos of Bartók (Biddulph Recordings), and (with the Emerson Quartet) works ranging from Bach and Haydn to contemporary repertoire on Deutsche Grammophon. A nine-time Grammy and three-time Gramophone Magazine Award winner, he is visiting professor of chamber music at Stony Brook University. In 2017 he was appointed Music Director of Berkshire Bach's *Bach at New Year's* concerts.

In 2008 his original setting of four sonnets by Shakespeare was premiered by baritone Andrew Nolen and the Escher String Quartet at Stony Brook. The songs have since appeared as part of the two-CD release "Stony Brook Soundings" by Bridge Recordings. Additional compositions include *Madness and the Death of Ophelia*, based on four scenes from *Hamlet*, and a setting of five poems by Denise Levertov, both for female speaker/singer and string quartet; and *Series of Twelve*, a string quartet commissioned by the New Music for Strings Festival that premiered in Copenhagen and Reykjavik in August 2018. His novel, *The Savior*, was published by Simon & Schuster in 2007 and appeared in a German translation called *Wintersonate*, published in 2010 by Osburg Verlag in Berlin.

The Berkshire Bach Society is pleased to present

EUGENE DRUCKER | VIOLIN

The Program

J.S. BACH Sonata No. 1 in G Minor, BWV 1001
(1685-1750) *Adagio / Fuga (Allegro) / Siciliana / Presto*

PAUL HINDEMITH Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 31, No. 1:2, *Sehr*
(1895-1963) *langsame Viertel*

J.S. BACH Sonata No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1005
 Adagio / Fuga / Largo / Allegro assai

= *Intermission* =

J.S. BACH Partita No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1004
 Allemanda | Corrente | Sarabanda | Giga |
 Ciaccona

Audio recording services provided by: Marlon Barry Audio

Reflections on Bach's Design

When considering a cycle of works like Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin*, it is tempting to find a progression, a direction—increasingly successful or elaborate solutions to certain problems the composer set for himself. When every one of the works in question is perfect, it may seem easy to find variety but harder to pinpoint progress, except when the genius has an astonishing ability to outdo himself. One way to identify the problems he faced—problems easy to overlook now because his solutions are so convincing—is to compare his procedures within similar forms from one work to the next. The *fugues*, especially their *subjects* (themes), provide an obvious starting point.

The fugue subjects in the first two Sonatas are terse, each consisting of nine notes within four beats. The G minor subject is contained within a narrow intervallic range, a fourth. The first four notes have the same pitch, and these repeated notes impart a motor-like rhythmic drive to the entire fugue. The theme has an obstinate, almost primitive character. Though the fugue is in no way undeveloped or incomplete, one might guess that Bach was not yet sure how far he could push violin technique. Since a three-voice fugue on the violin—a primarily melodic, one-line instrument—would require a great deal of chord playing, initially it may have seemed wise to choose a subject that would repeat the same chord, instead of forcing the violinist continually to jump from one chord to another.

For the contrasting *episodes* between fugal *expositions*, Bach uses different material—sequential 16th-note passages that relieve the predominantly chordal texture, and a two-note, descending sighing *motif* of highly vocal character. In the G minor Fugue he also uses *pedal tones* that heighten the tension at three critical points—initially on the open D string, the *dominant* in this key, and ultimately on the *tonic* (G). The final *episode* begins and builds on the resonance of the open G string (the violin's lowest note) before climbing back to D for a climactic moment. In a powerful gesture, Bach uses a florid and chromatic cadenza to resolve the harmonic tension of the entire movement in G minor.

NB: *Italicized* terms are defined in the *Glossary of Selected Terms* at the end of these *Notes*.

The sighing figure is a unifying motif that first appears in the opening movement of the G minor Sonata. In the second phrase of the impassioned prelude we hear expressive two-note slurred figures that recur at key moments as the music builds toward important cadences. The last appearance of the two-note motif is syncopated, with the slurs beginning on the normally unstressed parts of the beat, and inverted—the sighs rising instead of falling as in the Fugue that follows—setting up a dramatic final chord progression.

After the angular textures of the Fugue, the gentle undulations of the *Siciliana* and the warmth of its B-flat major tonality afford some relief. The final *Presto* ripples with cascading arpeggios and propulsive sequences, ending the first Sonata with fire and flair.

It's not surprising that the opening *Adagio* of the Sonata in C Major has an entirely different character from its counterpart in G minor. This prelude introduces a fugue whose main characteristics are serenity and a sense of timelessness. Instead of harmonic progressions with clear, often urgent direction connected by florid cadenza-like passages, here we have a rocking, soothing effect created by a continually repeated dotted figure. Almost every melodic and harmonic event happens three times, corresponding to the 3/4 meter. The music is moving slowly in a certain direction, but with great patience, with time for each step along its path to sink in deeply.

The fugue subject moves step-wise and in a limited intervallic compass similar to the fugue subject in Sonata No. 1. But it differs from the fugues in the first and second Sonatas by conveying little sense of urgency or rhythmic propulsion. It expresses serenity, acceptance, perhaps even joy—no coincidence, since it derives from the Lutheran chorale *Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott (Come, Holy Spirit, Lord God)*. A duality inherent in the primary melodic material—the contrast between the *diatonic* subject and the *chromatic countersubject*—sustains interest throughout an immense structure. The longer subject, with its expansive feeling, lends itself to a more extended treatment. Similar to the G minor subject, it resolves harmonically on the third degree of the scale, but almost always flows into the countersubject rather than coming to a full stop. The character of the entire fugue therefore is smoother, more continuous. The second *exposition* is devoted mainly to *stretto*, a technique of piling up statements of the

subject before each voice has had a chance to state the entire theme. The third *exposition* turns the subject and countersubject upside down, in a technique known as *inversion*. The fourth *exposition* mostly duplicates the opening, giving the entire movement a cyclical shape. The music proceeds, evolves, but ultimately folds back upon itself. The C Major Fugue builds its power not so much through rhythmic propulsion as through a sense of timelessness, encapsulated in the open-ended, flowing character of its theme.

Following the complex texture of the Fugue, the *Largo* presents a simpler and more linear fabric that is consonant throughout. The final *Allegro assai* is a joyous and energetic affirmation of the key of C Major. In the absence of double-stops and chords, the counterpoint is woven into the texture of the sixteenth-note passagework.

In contrast to the Sonatas, Bach treats the Partitas largely as suites of conventional Baroque dances, with the first and third Partitas using shorter movements proportionate to the whole. The D minor second Partita begins similarly, but the concluding *Chaconne* is weightier than the first four stylized dances combined. This is the most ambitious movement of the entire set for solo violin, indeed one of the most ambitious movements of chamber music ever written. Brahms, one of several composers who transcribed the Chaconne for piano, said he would have gone mad with joy had such an inspiration been granted him. To claim that it expresses all the joys and sorrows of this life, as well as a yearning for something beyond, is no great exaggeration. This music is both urgent and timeless. There are radical changes of mood—sweeping climaxes are followed immediately by the softest imaginable utterances—but the continuity is never broken. The 32 variations on a simple bass line proceed with great fluidity, because a particular phrase often serves as a variation upon the preceding phrase as well as on the opening theme. The tonal center never strays from D: only the modality changes from minor to major in the often hymn-like middle section. There are three huge cadences in this mighty current of music—just before the D-Major variations, at the ecstatic conclusion of that section, and at the end.

One of the performer's tasks in playing the Chaconne is to find a subtly modulating tempo that corresponds to the ebb and flow of the music, to develop an improvisatory feeling that gives the impression that the

Chaconne is unfolding at the moment it is being played. Such spontaneity should not detract from the compelling logic of the entire structure; indeed, it should coexist with another illusion that we try to convey in this piece, whether consciously or unconsciously: that it has always been, and always will be.

In his *Sonatas and Partitas*, Bach may have set out to push the contrapuntal capabilities of the solo violin beyond its limits. Not only did he succeed at that, but he also transcended the emotional limits of any single instrument.

Paul Hindemith was condemned during the Third Reich as a "Bolshevik" composer, and his work was displayed as an example of "degenerate music" (*Entartete Musik*) in 1938. Its pungent harmonies, tonal ambiguities and often ironic stance—its complete lack of sentimentality—were all anathema to the Nazis. Hindemith wrote at least three sonatas for unaccompanied violin; the wistful, lilting slow movement of Op. 31, No. 1 carries us through constantly shifting keys and colors, intensifying into thorny chords. An *accelerando* leads to a *Presto* that plummets from the highest to the lowest registers, where the music briefly regains its repose. Near the end of the movement, the recurrent lilting figure makes one last appearance, extending itself and expiring on the keynote it has found, a tentative resolution in D. I include this movement here because of its metric and rhythmic similarity to the prelude of Bach's C Major Sonata.

—Eugene Drucker
New York City

History of the Music



JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750), known primarily as an organ virtuoso during his lifetime, was also a skilled violinist from an early age, who played “cleanly and powerfully” into his later years, according to his son, C.P.E. Bach. He likely began the *Sei Solo* [sic] *a Violino senza Basso accompagnato* (*Six Solos for Violin without Bass accompaniment*), BWV 1001-1006, in Weimar and completed them by 1720 during his time in Köthen (1717-1723), when he had accomplished musicians near at hand. This period, a particularly productive one, also saw the creation of the six

Cello Suites, BWV 1007-1012, the individual “Brandenburg” concerti, BWV 1046–1051, the Orchestral Suites, BWV 1066–1069, and other important instrumental compositions. The surviving autograph manuscript was passed from Bach to his son, J.C.F. Bach, to his grandson, W.F.E. Bach, and then to his grand-daughter, Christina Louisa Bach (d. 1852). The manuscript ultimately found its way into the collection of the Bach-Gesellschaft and survives with five other contemporary and near-contemporary copies in the Berlin State Museum.

In writing for solo violin, Bach was following a tradition established by H.I.F. von Biber (d. 1704), J.P. von Westhoff (d. 1705), J.J. Vilsmayr (d. 1722), J.G. Pisendel (d. 1755), and others that treated the violin as a legitimate solo instrument, not the lowly fiddle of the prior century. Biber was one of the most important composers and performers in the history of the violin, and one who, like Bach, pushed the technical limits of the instrument to include multiple stops (polyphony), virtuosic writing, and *scordatura* (non-standard) tuning. A student of J.H. Schmelzer (d. 1680), he composed his *Mysterien Sonaten* (*Mystery Sonatas*) for violin and continuo around 1676, concluding the series of 15 short works with a monumental *Passacaglia* for unaccompanied violin that may be the earliest example of its type.

Westhoff, the leading proponent of the Dresden school of violin playing, published a set of *Six Partitas for Solo Violin* in 1696 and probably wrote similar works from the early 1680s, contributing to a rich body of literature, now largely lost, that Bach knew when writing his *Sei Solo*. Westhoff’s *Six Partitas* each comprise four dance movements typical of the Baroque suite that appear in the usual sequence—*Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, and *Gigue*. Bach was likely familiar with the works and acquainted with Westhoff in Weimar, where the older composer served as a court musician from 1699 to 1705, and where Bach was employed for a short time during 1703.

Similarly, Bach may have known the *partitas* for solo violin of Vilsmayr, a student of Biber, who published six in his *Artificiosus Conventus pro Camera* of 1715. Another model in the same tradition is the virtuosic sonata for solo violin (1716) by Pisendel, who met Bach in Weimar in 1709 and was the leading violin virtuoso of his time. Pisendel has been suggested as the musician who may have premiered the *Sei Solo* in Bach’s lifetime,

although there is no evidence of a date or venue for such a performance. Indeed, there is evidence that the works were performed publicly as keyboard pieces (BWV 964 and BWV 968) and only played on the violin privately.

Whatever the origin and performance history, Bach called his works *Sonatas* and *Partia*, perhaps consciously avoiding a change to the then-current meaning of *partita* as *variation*. The *Sei Solo*, published posthumously in 1802, were first titled *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin* in the Bach-Gesellschaft edition of 1879. Today they are considered essential repertoire, and the absence of continuo is unremarkable. This was not the case in Bach's time. He was very clear that the works were to be played unaccompanied, spelling it out with *senza Basso accompagnato* in the autograph manuscript to dispel any notion of an implied use of continuo. Technically, the *Sonatas* are examples of the *sonata da chiesa* form as established by Corelli, and each has four movements that alternate in a slow-fast-slow-fast pattern. The first two movements of each sonata comprise a prelude and fugue; the final two movements show more variety while adhering to the slow-fast-slow-fast pattern. In the first Sonata, Bach uses a *Siciliana* in the third movement, the only dance form to appear in the Sonatas. The polyphonic writing in each Sonata creates the impression of multiple voices and rich harmony that is a masterful achievement.

The *Partitas*, examples of the *sonata da camera* (court sonata) form, are more varied than the *Sonatas*, both in the number of movements and in style. They use both standard dances and optional *galanteries* that provide variety and the chance to include less familiar dance types. The first Partita opens with an *Allemande*, followed by a *Courante* and *Sarabande*, in keeping with the standard Baroque suite, and concludes with a version of a *Bourrée*. Uncharacteristically, however, each movement is followed by its own variation—a *Double*—making a total of eight movements. The second Partita similarly begins with the typical pattern, opening with an *Allemande*, followed by a *Courante*, *Sarabande*, and *Gigue*, which customarily concludes a suite. Here, however, Bach adds a *Ciaccona* (Chaconne)—a type of variation— as his concluding movement, reminiscent of the Biber *Passacaglia*. The composition, considered one of the greatest works for solo violin by any composer, is the most famous piece from the entire set. The third Partita varies the standard movements with *galanteries*, opening with a *Preludio*, followed by a *Loure* (slow *Gigue*), a *Gavotte* with a recurring

refrain, two *Minuets*, a *Bourrée*, and a final *Gigue*. Similar to the serenity of the third Sonata, the third Partita concludes the *Sei Solo* with a lighter, less complicated and optimistic tone.

The Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin are masterpieces of musical form and artistry that are unequaled anywhere in the repertoire. Bach was writing in an established tradition for solo violin, but his works stand apart from those of his predecessors and contemporaries—a summation of all that came before and a model for those who would follow.



PAUL HINDEMITH (1895-1963) was born in Hanau, Germany, and had a distinguished career as violist, violinist, teacher, conductor, and composer. Educated formally at the Hoch'sche Konservatorium in Frankfurt (whose faculty earlier included Clara Schumann), he studied violin, composition, and conducting before going on to perform as a violinist with various dance bands, musical comedy ensembles, and—more seriously—the Rebner String Quartet and Frankfurt Opera Orchestra. Shortly after his appointment as leader of the Opera Orchestra in 1917, he was conscripted into the German army and served in Alsace and Flanders. After the war he returned to Frankfurt and resumed his performance career with the Rebner Quartet (as a violist), founding and touring with the Amar Quartet (1921), composing new works, and promoting music by avant-garde artists. In 1927 he joined the faculty at the Berliner Hochschule für Musik. During the 1930s his music, alternately denounced and supported by the Nazis, was finally banned in 1936 as degenerate. In 1938 his works appeared in the *Entartete Musik* (*Degenerate Music*) exhibition in Düsseldorf with music by fellow composers Arnold Schoenberg, Kurt Weill, Franz Schreker, Alban Berg, and others. Pressured into an indefinite leave of absence from his teaching post in Berlin in 1935, he eventually settled in the United States and became a U.S. citizen in 1946. He taught primarily at Yale University, and also at the University of Buffalo, Cornell University, and Wells College, and lectured at Harvard University in the 1949-50 Charles Eliot Norton Lecture series that had hosted Igor Stravinsky some ten years earlier. Published in 1952 as *A Composer's World: Horizons and Limitations*, the lectures reflect on the compositional process. In 1953 he returned to Europe, teaching at the University of Zürich until 1957. He died in 1963.

Hindemith was an influential composer whose style ranges from late romantic to expressionist to neo-classical. Like Bach, he wrote music with sophisticated and complex counterpoint, but unlike his predecessor, Hindemith did not use the harmonic rules endemic to music of Bach's time, preferring a system that while tonal is not diatonic, using all twelve tones freely in thematic material and modulation. Perhaps his most famous works—and exemplars of his style—are the 1938 opera *Mathis der Mahler* (*Matthew the Painter*) about artist Matthias Grünewald (d. 1528) and the *Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl Maria von Weber* (1943).

The *Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 31, No. 1* was one of two violin sonatas that Hindemith wrote in the spring of 1924 and published together with a sonata for solo viola and sonatina for two flutes later in the year. Hindemith dedicated the piece to Hungarian violinist Licco Amar, who gave the first performance in Freiburg im Breisgau shortly after the work was completed, and with whom he had formed the Amar Quartet in 1921. The Sonata has five movements—*Sehr lebhaftes Achtel* (*Very lively Eighth*), *Sehr langsame Viertel* (*Very slow Quarter*), *Sehr lebhaftes Viertel* (*Very lively Quarter*), *Intermezzo, Lied* (*Intermezzo, Song*), *Prestissimo*—and was Hindemith's second complete work for solo violin, following the sonata in G minor from 1917 that was long thought to be a fragment. He was clearly influenced in his solo violin sonatas by J.S. Bach, particularly in his 1917 work, and in the slow movement of Op. 31, No. 1, which shares a metric and rhythmic similarity to the Prelude of Bach's third sonata.

—T.A. McDade

Glossary of Selected Terms

Dance Forms used in the Sonatas and Partitas

- Allemande* (*Allemanda*) A dance of German origin in a moderate tempo and 4/4 time; typically used to open a Baroque suite.
- Bourrée* (*Borea*) A dance of French origin in a moderate tempo; typically begins on an upbeat; usually one of the later movements of a Baroque suite.
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- Corrente* (*Courante*) A dance in moderate to fast tempo, usually in triple meter; typically the second movement of a Baroque suite.
- Gavotte* A dance of French origin in moderate tempo and 4/4 time with an upbeat of two quarter notes and phrases usually beginning and ending in the middle of a measure; an optional *galanterie*.
- Gigue* (*Giga*) A dance of English-Irish origin in a quick tempo often in compound duple meter (6/8 or 6/4) and using dotted rhythms, wide intervals, and fugal writing with inversions; typically used as the final movement of a suite.
- Loure* A dance in moderate 6/4 time with dotted rhythms, emphasizing the strong beats; an optional *galanterie*
- Menuet* (*Minuet*) A moderately slow dance of French origin in 3/4 meter; an optional *galanterie*; the only Baroque suite dance type to survive Bach's era.
- Sarabande* A slow, dignified dance in triple meter with an emphasis or long tone on the second beat; typically the third movement of a Baroque suite.
- Siciliana* A dance of Sicilian origin in moderate 6/8 or 12/8 time characterized by lyrical melodies and dotted rhythms; typically used to evoke pastoral imagery; an optional *galanterie*.

Other Musical Terms from the Sonatas and Partitas

- Accelerando* A gradual increase in tempo over the course of several measures.
- Answer* In *fugue*, the second statement of the *subject*.
- Cadence* A musical formula that concludes a phrase, section, or piece of music.
- Cadenza* An improvised musical flourish at the cadence of a piece of music, usually of a virtuosic nature to show off the technical capabilities of a performer.
- Ciaccona* (*Chaconne*) A popular Baroque form of continuous variations on a harmonic structure rather than a theme; similar to the
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	<i>passacaglia</i> , which uses an ostinato or repeated bassline known as a ground.
<i>Chromatic</i>	Musical color, achieved by raising or lowering notes with sharps or flats to sound all twelve half-tones of the octave.
<i>Counter Subject</i>	In <i>fugue</i> , the contrapuntal passage between the statement of the <i>fugue subject</i> in each voice; uses a recognizable motif and recurs throughout the <i>fugue</i> .
<i>Diatonic</i>	The natural eight-tone scale without alteration; comprises five whole tones and two half-tones.
<i>Dominant</i>	In tonal music, the fifth note above the <i>tonic</i> , designated by the numeral <i>V</i> . In tonal harmony music typically moves from the dominant to the <i>tonic</i> at the <i>cadence</i> , creating a sense of finality.
<i>Episode</i>	In <i>fugue</i> , a secondary passage that does not include a statement of the <i>fugue subject</i> .
<i>Exposition</i>	In <i>fugue</i> , the passages with the imitative presentation of the <i>subject</i> .
<i>Fugue</i>	(<i>Fuga</i>) A musical texture that is created from three or more independent voices carrying a <i>subject</i> in imitative fashion.
<i>Galanterie</i>	An optional dance movement in a Baroque suite such as the Gavotte, Loure, or Menuet
<i>Inversion</i>	The vertical reversal of a theme, either harmonically—playing the original notes in a higher or lower octave—or melodically—playing the theme as a mirror image of itself.
<i>Motif</i>	A short, distinctive figure that recurs throughout a piece of music or as a unifying element.
<i>Partia</i>	The 17 th - and 18 th -century German term for a <i>suite</i> .
<i>Partita</i>	Before the publication of Bach's <i>Clavier Übung I</i> in 1731, a variation; afterward, a <i>suite</i> . In the manuscript of BWV 1001-1006, Bach called the works <i>Sonatas and Partia</i> . The 1879 Bach-Gesellschaft edition first called them <i>Sonatas and Partitas</i> .

<i>Rondeau</i>	(<i>Rondo</i>) A musical form based on 13 th century French poetry in which an opening section recurs as a refrain throughout the piece.
<i>Pedal tone</i>	A sustained or repeated note in the bass that creates harmonic dissonance as the upper parts proceed, ultimately requiring resolution. Originally derived from organ music.
<i>Scordatura</i>	The non-standard tuning of a stringed instrument to achieve special harmonic effects, timbre, or unusual chords. H.I.F. von Biber was one of the first composers to experiment with scordatura, using the technique throughout his <i>Mysterien Sonaten</i> (c. 1676).
<i>Sonata</i>	In Bach's time, an instrumental form with three or four movements, alternating slow and fast tempi and played by one to four players; Corelli standardized the <i>sonata da Chiesa</i> (Church-style) as four movements alternating slow-fast, and the <i>sonata di camera</i> (Chamber- or Court-style), as an introduction plus a few dance movements.
<i>Stretto</i>	In <i>fugue</i> , the overlapping of the <i>subject</i> in quick succession with the next voice entering before the previous voice has completed the <i>subject</i> ; typically used to build intensity before the <i>cadence</i> .
<i>Suite</i>	A musical form comprising several dance movements, all in the same key, and alternating between slow and moderate or fast tempi; includes both standard movements and optional <i>galantries</i> .
<i>Subject</i>	The melodic material on which a <i>fugue</i> is based; always stated at the opening.
<i>Tonic</i>	The note on which a piece of tonal music is based, and the harmonic structure built upon that note. It is designated by the numeral <i>I</i> .

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