

The background of the entire cover is a reproduction of Raphael's fresco 'The School of Athens'. It depicts various ancient Greek philosophers in a grand architectural setting. Plato is shown pointing upwards, while Aristotle points downwards. Other figures include Pythagoras, Socrates, and Euclid. The scene is filled with classical artistry and a warm, golden light.

Johann Sebastian  
**BACH**  
**Magna Sequentia II**

A Grand Suite of Dances  
compiled and performed by  
**Sonia Rubinsky, Piano**

## Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) Magna Sequentia II

<b>Overture in the French Style in B minor, BWV 831</b>		<b>Overture in the French Style in B minor, BWV 831</b>	
1 I. Ouverture	14:37	10 IV. Passepied I and II	3:11
2 II. Courante	2:19	11 VI. Bourrée I and II	3:03
<b>French Suite No. 1 in D minor, BWV 812</b>		<b>French Suite No. 6 in E major, BWV 817</b>	
I. Allemande	4:52	V. Polonoise	1:39
<b>Partita No. 5 in G major, BWV 829</b>		<b>Partita No. 3 in A minor, BWV 827</b>	
III. Corrente	1:49	VI. Scherzo	1:18
<b>English Suite No. 3 in G minor, BWV 808</b>		<b>English Suite No. 6 in D Minor, BWV 811</b>	
II. Allemande	5:19	VI. Gavotte I – VII. Gavotte II	4:54
<b>Partita No. 4 in D major, BWV 828</b>		<b>Partita No. 4 in D major, BWV 828</b>	
III. Courante	4:03	VII. Gigue	3:42
<b>Suite in F minor, BWV 823</b>		<b>Overture in the French Style in B minor, BWV 831</b>	
II. Sarabande en Rondeau	4:37	16 VII. Gigue	2:54
<b>French Suite No. 1 in D minor, BWV 812</b>		17 VIII. Echo	3:16
III. Sarabande	4:42	Compiled by Sonia Rubinsky	
<b>Partita No. 5 in G major, BWV 829</b>			
V. Tempo di Minuetto	2:03		

‘Joh. Sebastian Bach, youngest son of Joh. Ambrosius Bach, was born in Eisenach in the year 1685 on March 21.’ So begins the autobiographical entry Johann Sebastian wrote in 1735 in the course of compiling a family genealogy. Bach goes on to list the positions he had held up to that point: court musician in Weimar, organist in Arnstadt, Mühlhausen, and Weimar, Capellmeister in Cöthen, and music director and cantor at the St Thomas School in Leipzig.

Bach was born to a family of musicians, receiving his earliest instruction from his father and brothers. After being orphaned at the age of ten, he went to live with an older brother, Johann Christoph, an organist in Ohrdruf. At the local school the boy learned Latin, Greek, French, and Italian, as well as Lutheran theology. A precocious young man, in 1700 he moved away to attend the prestigious St Michael’s School in Lüneburg, where he furthered his musical education with Georg Böhm, and learned alongside aristocratic fellow students. Two recent discoveries from this period – a set of organ tablatures the young Bach had copied, and the Neumeister Collection of chorale preludes,

which contains over 30 compositions by Bach – show the work of a diligent young man working on his craft.

It was during Bach’s early years in Lüneburg that he first encountered, partly through Böhm, the genre of stylised dance music, or suites. Here, Bach also learned about French music, and deepened his knowledge of the North German organ tradition – styles and genres Bach would return to throughout his life. Later in his career, Bach would turn to Böhm as one of six colleagues in different cities to sell his first publication, *Clavier-Übung*, a collection of partitas, or dance suites. The composition of suites was a significant but by no means the only genre in which Bach worked. Over the course of his productive career, he composed hundreds of works for organ, hundreds of cantatas, and numerous solo works for keyboard and string instruments. His official catalogue of works, the *Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis*, numbers over one thousand compositions.

It was in 1735, the same year that Bach wrote the autobiographical entry above, that he published the second in his series of keyboard studies, *Clavier-Übung II*. Four

years earlier, he had published the first in the series, *Clavier-Übung*. *Clavier-Übung II* comprises two works: the *Italian Concerto*, and the *French Overture*. Here Bach contrasts at the keyboard the orchestral music of the two preeminent national styles of the day. The *Italian Concerto* is a three-movement work that harkens back to an earlier stage of Bach’s career, when he transcribed concertos by Vivaldi and others for the organ. The *French Overture* is a sprawling eleven-movement dance suite, the only one Bach ever wrote as a freestanding work, not as a part of a collection of suites. Both the *Concerto* and the *Overture* call for the use of a two-manual harpsichord. The reason is clear: to imitate an orchestra. And in fact, both the *Concerto* and *Overture* make frequent use of indications of *forte* and *piano*, a quite uncommon sight in Bach’s scores.

While the *French Overture* we know today is in B minor, there exists an earlier version of it in C minor. It is not certain why he chose to transpose it to B minor, but it is significant that the two works of *Clavier-Übung II* are in F major and B minor, tonalities a tritone apart. Perhaps also significant is that *Clavier-Übung I* begins with the *Partita in B flat* (in German, this is called ‘B’) and *Clavier-Übung II* ends in B minor (in German, this is called ‘H’), thereby having the first and last letters of his name (‘B’ and ‘H’) bookend the two volumes. This was not an unusual move for Bach, whose last major work, *The Art of Fugue*, ends with what some scholars believe would have been a quadruple fugue – its full realisation was left unfinished – just at the point, according to his son Carl Philipp Emanuel, when he had added as a countersubject the notes B-A-C-H (B flat, A, C, B natural).

*Magna Sequentia II* follows the recording of *Magna Sequentia I*, and as in its predecessor, Sonia Rubinsky has created an expanded Baroque dance suite consisting of 17 dance movements. Bach’s suites contain a core of fixed dance movements (*Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, *Gigue*) based on a model that can be traced to a manuscript written by Johann Jakob Froberger in Vienna in 1649. To these, Bach might add a *Prelude*, and insert such *galanteries* as a *Minuet*, *Passepied*, *Burlesca*, *Bourrée*, *Loure*, and *Gavotte* before the *Gigue*. Bach suites typically contain six to eight movements. In all, he wrote 19 suites for keyboard. Chronologically, they are the six *English Suites*,

six *French Suites*, six *Partitas*, and the *French Overture*. He also wrote 14 other suites for solo instruments, and four for orchestra. Many other works contain dance movements.

Johann Nikolaus Forkel’s 1802 biography of Bach tells us that suites ‘were then common instead of our sonatas’. A number of treatises from Bach’s time have come down to us, both theoretical and practical. One of the best-known German theorists of the time, Johann Mattheson, taught that ‘affect’ was a significant feature of dance movements, and described the dances by their affections. According to him, many of the dances could have different affects, while some usually had one. So, while a *Gavotte* was usually characterised by ‘jubilant joy’, a *Sarabande* could be ‘serious’, ‘sad’, ‘honourable’, or ‘reverent’. Mattheson was familiar with the earliest musical dictionary to be published in the vernacular, by Sébastien de Brossard in 1703 in Paris. In it, Brossard writes entries for ‘*Affetto*’, ‘*Grave*’, and ‘*Tendre*’. The two main moods (or affects) of the dances are *Tendre* (‘sentimental, affectionate’) and *Grave* (‘regal, poised’).

While *Magna Sequentia I* was constructed around the *Partita No. 4* from *Clavier-Übung I*, this recording, *Magna Sequentia II*, is built around the *French Overture* from *Clavier-Übung II*. Of the 17 movements of *Magna Sequentia II*, six are taken from the *French Overture*: the first two movements, the last two, and two *galanteries* in the middle. There are movements from each of the other keyboard suite collections Bach composed: the *English Suites* (track 5, 14), *French Suites* (tracks 3, 8, 12), and *Partitas* (tracks 4, 6, 9, 13, 15). Also included is a movement from the *Suite in F minor, BWV 823*, an incomplete work consisting of only three movements, which survives only in a manuscript by Bach’s student Johann Peter Kellner. Each of the 17 movements comprising *Magna Sequentia II* was selected to illustrate the different styles and moods of Bach’s dance writing.

Like its predecessor, *Magna Sequentia II* has selections that showcase the ornate and sophisticated French style, the more straightforward and sometimes virtuosic Italian style, and the stricter fugal writing of the German style. It begins with a *French Overture*, followed by three *Courantes* which alternate with two *Allemandes*, followed by two *Sarabandes*. There are six *galanteries* which follow the

*Sarabandes*, before two *Gigues*. The *Echo* which ends this collection is taken from one of the two instances in which Bach ends a suite with a different dance. In this case it is from the *French Overture*. What Sonia has done in contrasting the national styles is not unlike what Bach did in publishing the *Clavier-Übung II*, with the *Italian Concerto*, and the *French Overture*.

For this recording, Sonia worked extensively with the harpsichordist and musicologist Edmundo Hora. Throughout, one can hear her deep reverence and dedication to the music of J.S. Bach.

**Harold J. Bott Jr**

### **Sonia Rubinsky**

Sonia Rubinsky was awarded Best Recording of the Year in the Classical Category of the 2009 Latin GRAMMY® Awards for the eighth volume of the complete piano works of Heitor Villa-Lobos, recorded for Naxos (8.570504). She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in piano performance from The Juilliard School, New York. Her discography includes works by Scarlatti, Mozart and Mendelssohn, as well as contemporary composers, and she recently recorded *Magna Sequentia I* (Naxos 8.574026) and this present volume *II*, her own compilation of dance movements by J.S. Bach arranged into large suites, in which she employed a historically-informed approach. She has been a three-time recipient of the prestigious Carlos Gomes Prize in her native Brazil, and was nominated by Murray Perahia to be artist-in-residence at the Edward Aldwell International Center for Piano Performance and Musicianship in Jerusalem, where she regularly gives masterclasses. She lives in Paris, teaching masterclasses, and performs as a soloist and recitalist around the world. [www.soniarubinsky.com](http://www.soniarubinsky.com)



Photo © Isabela Senatore

Sonia Rubinsky's *Magna Sequentia I* (8.574026) was constructed around a *Partita* from Bach's *Clavier-Übung I* but this second volume focuses on the *French Overture* from *Clavier-Übung II*. Each of the 17 movements has been selected to illustrate the different styles and expressive moods of Bach's dance writing. This unique sequence showcases three specific national styles: the ornate and sophisticated French school, virtuosic Italian writing, and the stricter fugal writing of the German style. Contemporary insights abound in Rubinsky's historically informed playing.

Johann Sebastian

**BACH**

(1685–1750)

**Magna Sequentia II**

A Grand Suite of Dances compiled by Sonia Rubinsky

<b>1</b> Overture from Overture in the French Style	14:37	<b>10</b> Passetier I and II from Overture in the French Style	3:11
<b>2</b> Courante from Overture in the French Style	2:19	<b>11</b> Bourrée I and II from Overture in the French Style	3:03
<b>3</b> Allemande from French Suite No. 1	4:52	<b>12</b> Polonaise from French Suite No. 6	1:39
<b>4</b> Corrente from Partita No. 5	1:49	<b>13</b> Scherzo from Partita No. 3	1:18
<b>5</b> Allemande from English Suite No. 3	5:19	<b>14</b> Gavotte I and II from English Suite No. 6	4:54
<b>6</b> Courante from Partita No. 4	4:03	<b>15</b> Gigue from Partita No. 4	3:42
<b>7</b> Sarabande en Rondeau from Suite in F minor	4:37	<b>16</b> Gigue from Overture in the French Style	2:54
<b>8</b> Sarabande from French Suite No. 1	4:42	<b>17</b> Echo from Overture in the French Style	3:16
<b>9</b> Tempo di Minuetto from Partita No. 5	2:03		

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

**Sonia Rubinsky, Piano**

Recorded: 6–10 January 2018 at The Theatre, Florida, USA

Producers: Alexander Berne, Harold J. Bott Jr, Sonia Rubinsky • Artistic direction: Edmundo Hora

Engineers: Gary Baldassari, Alexander Berne • Editor: Alexander Berne

Piano: Yamaha CFX • Piano tuning: Justin Elliott • Booklet notes: Harold J. Bott Jr

Cover image: Ceiling fresco, The Hofburg, Vienna, Austria © Jorisvo / Dreamstime.com



8.574027

DDD

Playing Time  
68:32



Made in Germany  
[www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com)

© & © 2019 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd  
Booklet notes in English