The Sarabandes of J.S. Bach:

Freedom of Ornamentation and Melodic Manipulation

by

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

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ABSTRACT

This document is intended to show the various kinds of stylistically appropriate melodic and rhythmic ornamentation that can be used in the improvisation of the Sarabandes by J.S. Bach. Traditional editions of Bach's and other Baroque-era keyboard works have reflected evolving historical trends. The historical performance movement and other attempts to "clean up" pre-1950s romanticized performances have greatly limited the freedom and experimentation that was the original intention of these dances. Prior to this study, few ornamented editions of these works have been published. Although traditional practices do not necessarily encourage classical improvisation in performance I argue that manipulation of the melodic and rhythmic layers over the established harmonic progressions will not only provide diversity within the individual dance movements, but also further engage the ears of the performer and listener which encourages further creative exploration. I will focus this study on the ornamentation of all six Sarabandes from J.S. Bach's French Suites and show how various types of melodic and rhythmic variation can provide aurally pleasing alternatives to the composed score without disrupting the harmonic fluency. The author intends this document to be used as a pedagogical tool and the fully ornamented Sarabandes from J.S. Bach's French Suites are included with this document.

DEDICATION

For my husband, Keith Kelly, whose brilliant mind and musical spirit inspire me each day to continue to create.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this document would not have been possible without the inspiration of creative pianists around the world.

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF ORNAMENTATION

The current standards of Baroque performance practice contrast starkly with the original intentions of Baroque composers. The concepts of originality and freedom in Baroque performance have been lost and replaced with technical rigidity and strict adherence to the score. By its very nature, musical notation is inexact; the notes on a score lack the ability to fully portray the composer's intentions (Cyr and Pauly 21).

> "The freely decorated, elaborate style of the Baroque era eventually gave way to the more restrained and formal approach of the Classical era" (Lloyd-Watts and Bigler 15).

Johann Adolph Scheibe was a contemporary of Bach. In his *Critische Musikus* of 1737 he commented that the structure, ornamentation and general compositional process was never depicted more perfectly than by the Germans, and most masterfully by the composers Handel and Bach. Even more specific are his comments on Bach's ability to improvise ornamentation throughout a melodic line which he called florid expression (David and Mendel 343). "Florid expression is nothing but the performance of a musical idea in a different and more lively form than it should really have according to the principal melodic notes, or according to the concatenation of the piece. It is a new and ornamental alteration of a short melodic idea in order to render it more emphatic or even more lofty, without hurt to the harmony" (translated by, A.C.F. Kollmann, 1820, in

David and Mendel 332). [1]During the Baroque period the compositions of Baroque composers were often performed either by the composer, one of their students or a close contemporary. The sparseness of the score left limitless opportunities for the performer to experiment with different expressions of the melodic line through ornamentation and manipulation of the melodic contour. “Baroque composers left much to the judgment of the performer (tempo, dynamics, phrasing, articulation, ornamentation, etc.). They relied on the knowledge and skill of the performer to perceive and execute their intentions. As contemporaries, performers were relied upon to fulfill the composer’s wishes” (Lloyd-Watts and Bigler 14). Ornamentation was viewed as an expressive necessity rather than as mere decoration; it therefore constituted a much greater significance within a piece and was considered an obligatory part of any outstanding performance (Cyr and Pauly 123).

The binary form, especially, utilized in the Dance Suites composed by J.S. Bach, invite different ornamental interpretations within a single movement and throughout the entire suite. Dance music can be challenging to interpret and understanding the rhythmic pulse, accents, mood, and movements is especially important when using the dance form as a basis for elaboration and embellishment (Carter 349). “The contrasts between sharp angles and curved shapes, making beautiful patterns of light and shadow, find their analogies in the

[1] *Grove* author George J. Buelow suggest that Scheibe’s criticism of Bach’s music for being ‘bombastic and confused’ has caused Scheibe to be overlooked by historians. *Grove Music* “Scheibe, Johann Adolph” (10 April, 2013).

different tempos of the movements of a suite and in sharply contrasting dynamics. The accentuation of dissonances, especially in the ornaments, adds light and shade to Baroque music" (Lloyd-Watts and Bigler 14). Sarabandes are especially conducive to experimentation of ornamentation because of their slow tempo. Sarabandes are the slowest of all the dances in the suites and this allows the performer more freedom to add more notes and more time to think and decide which ornamentations to employ. Characteristic of the Sarabande is the rhythmic tilt which is heard in the second beat of the second measure in most Sarabandes. This rhythmic tilt is usually presented as a half note and should be preserved regardless of the ornamentation employed throughout the rest of the Sarabande.

Repetition of specific ornaments and melodic motives can help to unify individual movements and emphasize specific emotional affects throughout the entire suite. According to Lloyd-Watts and Bigler, "In Baroque art, architecture and music, tiny details are repeated again and again, but always with slight changes. Contrast is important" (13).

In the Baroque era there was a strong establishment of trust between the composer and the performer. Because the composer trusted the performer to interpret his intentions appropriately he did not feel pressured to present the performer with the exact notation of his intentions. Although this freedom allowed the performer to incorporate his own personal ornamental preferences it also opened up the possibility for inappropriate interpretations and ornamental choices. This freedom of choice began an intense debate concerning which

ornamental choices were the most appropriate. “Two classes of ornaments developed during this period: 1. *Wilkurlich*: ornaments freely improvised by the performer, and 2. *Wesentlich*: essential ornaments. These included ornaments such as the cadential trill that were used so frequently that signs were developed for them. For most cadences, a trill was obligatory regardless of whether its sign was used, and it was mandatory for certain cadential rhythm formulas” (Lloyd-Watts and Bigler 15).

Many of the debates centered around the essential ornaments. Determining the note upon which an ornament should start was one source of confusion. Couperin states, “A trill must always begin on the auxiliary note a tone or semitone higher than the (main) note upon which it is written” (Couperin 38). Near the end of the Romantic era in 1893, Edward Dannreuther reemphasized statements by Hummel, Czerny and Spohr which said, “The trill should begin on the main note for music of all eras in order not to blur the melodic line” (Danreuther 165). [2]

To present a cohesive and aurally pleasing interpretation of ornaments the performer must understand the basic concepts of harmony, tempo, style and meter and be able to choose which ornament will portray the composers melodic intentions most appropriately without interrupting the harmonic fluency.

[2] J.N. Hummel, *Ausführlich theoretisch-practische Anweisung zum Piano-Forte-Spiel* (Vienna, 1828); C. Czerny : *Vollständige theoretisch-praktische Musikschule* op.500 (Vienna, 1839); L. Spohr : *Violinschule* (Vienna, 1832; Eng. trans., 1843).

To realize an ornament correctly the performer must answer the following questions:

1. What is the genre and who is the composer?
2. What is the technical notation of the indicated ornament?
3. What is the time signature?
4. How many beats or subdivisions of a beat are allotted for the ornament?
5. How is the meter subdivided?
6. Does the ornament begin on the main note or the auxiliary note?
7. How will the ornament be completed?
8. What are the minimum and maximum number of repetitions of the ornamented note?

According to Lloyd-Watts and Bigler, “Expressive performance of an ornament requires a technically correct realization of the ornament as well as accurate and smooth integration of the realized ornament into the score….these make it possible to perform an embellished melodic line accurately and expressively”(49).

The development of the piano added an additional layer of difficulty to the debates around ornamentation in the second half of the eighteenth century. Some felt that because the piano intrinsically had such a heightened ability to produce color changes and dynamic contrasts the performer should cease to take liberties with additional ornaments and melodic changes. “With such an expressive instrument, the addition of ornaments to heighten expression became

less essential and finally so ‘out of taste’ as to be condemned. Furthermore, by the end of the Classical period, composers began to consider the addition of notes by a performer unpardonable. Composers even began to write out their own cadenzas instead of allowing the cadenza to be the one section of the composition in which the performer was expected to improvise freely. The performer was no longer expected to be ‘co-creator’ with the composer. Good taste demanded that the composer’s written text be followed faithfully, so that the music was recreated as nearly as possible, just as the composer conceived it” (Lloyd-Watts and Bigler 18).

The general guidelines of proper ornamentation and melodic embellishment are critically important to producing an effective performance. Remembering the original intention of baroque compositions can greatly aid the performer in creating a dance filled with effective original ornamentation and emotional impact. “The theory of affects (*Affectenlehre*) was an elaborate system that set forth ways in which emotion can be expressed through music. During the Baroque era, all art was concerned with its power to arouse and affect a person’s emotional response. The theory defined which emotions were affected by specific rhythm patterns or harmonic progressions. It was the composer’s responsibility to write the appropriate patterns of rhythm and harmony into the music and the performer’s responsibility to interpret each affect or emotion so that the listener would immediately experience the desired reaction” (Lloyd-Watts and Bigler 14).

Ornamentation is often found in diminution, which involves dividing a single note of a long rhythmic duration into many notes of a smaller and rhythmically even duration (Carter 247). Rhythmic manipulation is another way of augmenting the melody without disrupting the harmonic flow. In his famous preface to *Le nuove musiche* (1602) Caccini stated that dotted rhythms are more graceful than even rhythms and are therefore more preferable because they more closely imitate the smooth fluctuation of the human voice (related in Carter 252).

The trill is the most commonly known ornamental device utilized in current performances of Baroque music and can be executed with many different variations depending on the context. A trill is a rapid alternation between two notes that are most commonly either a major or minor second apart and can vary in rhythmic duration and frequency of repetition (Blaker 33-34). The most important goal for any variation of a trill is to exploit the tension set up by dissonance and to intensify the melodic resolution to consonance (Hollick 17-18).

Melodic ornamentation is one of the most popular ways to alter and embellish any given melodic line. It varies previously stated material and provides the listener with a different aural experience. This kind of ornamentation should not alter or obscure the harmonies that they surround, but rather enhance and diversify the ideas presented by the composer. Forms of melodic ornamentation include the accent and various dynamic effects. Both accents and dynamics can be used in moments of increased emotion or drama within the music.

The following chapter and score will show a multitude of diverse ways to notate and execute original and creative ornamentation in the “Sarabandes” from J.S. Bach’s six French Suites. Extensive trills, melodic and rhythmic manipulation, motivic development and counter-motive imitation are different forms of notated ornamentation incorporated into the scores. Through the following chapters one can see and hear how extensive ornamentation can be while still maintaining the intended harmonic progression and metric intention.

These scores are intended to serve as examples of the possibilities available when ornamenting and improvising in the Sarabandes. They are intended to show different and specific techniques that can serve as the basis for other variations in ornamentation and show the freedom and expressiveness that are possible in ornamentation and melodic manipulation.

CHAPTER 2

EXPLANATION AND EXAMPLES

There are many different ways to create interesting and effective ornamentation. Each Sarabande had specific features that allowed the author to clearly demonstrate different ornamental techniques. In the Sarabande from J.S. Bach's French Suite No. 1 in D Minor, BWV 812 I filled in the melodic line to create a new motive out of eight sixteenth notes which can been seen in the comparison of Figures 1 and 2. Because the original melodic structure of the Sarabande was constructed mostly of eighth notes it was logical to fill in the melodic line with passing tones. This created a new motive comprised of sixteenth notes.

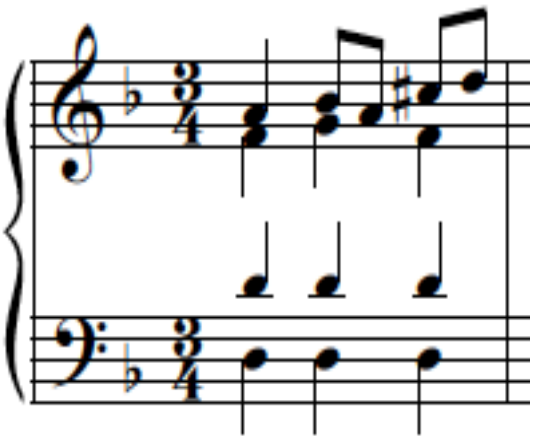


Fig. 1 Sarabande from French Suite No. 1 in D Minor, BWV 812, measure 1 – original notation

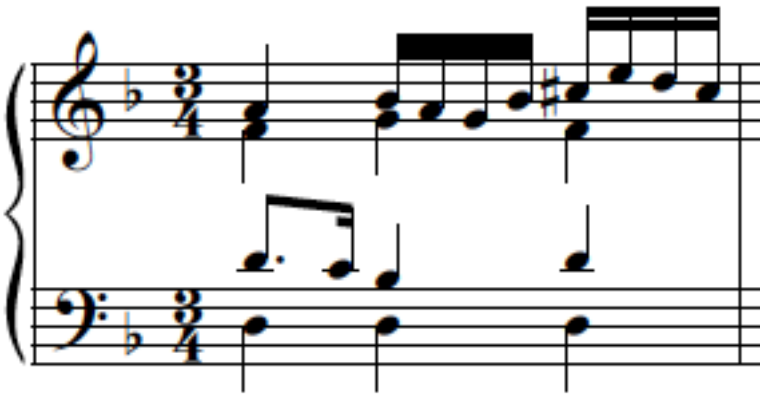


Fig. 2 Sarabande from French Suite No. 1 In D Minor, BWV 812, measure 1 – ornamented notation.

This new sixteenth note motive recurs several times throughout the Sarabande in the soprano, alto, tenor and bass voices. It is also manipulated, fragmented and inverted to better fit the contour of the harmonic progressions.

The Sarabande from French Suite No. 2 in C Minor, BWV 813 by J.S. Bach was the perfect composition to display ornamentation in the form of passing tone gestures and melodic flourishes. Because much of the melodic line was already comprised of sixteenth notes I employed octave displacement and inversion to create diversity in the second hearing of the Sarabande. I also focused more on the tenor and bass voices. These voices contain longer note values which are more conducive to manipulation. These ornamentations can be seen in figures 3 and 4.

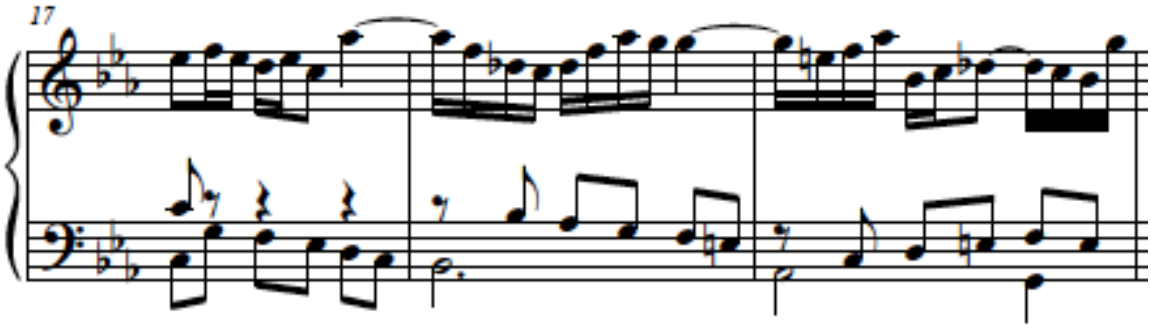


Fig. 3 Sarabande from French Suite No. 2 in C Minor, BWV 813, measures 17, 18, 19 – original notation

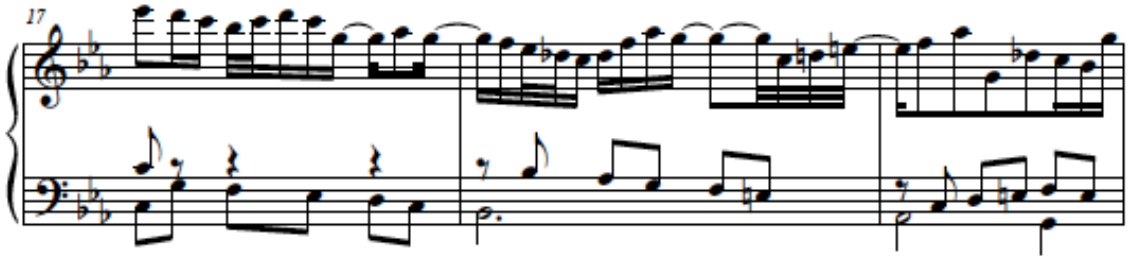


Fig. 4 Sarabande from French Suite No. 2 in C Minor, BWV 813, measures 17, 18, 19 – ornamented notation

In the Sarabande from French Suite No. 3 in B Minor, BWV 814 I employed heavy use of contrary motion and sequential use of a melodic motivic gesture. I created an entirely new melodic motive that is passed between the voices throughout various measures. Figures 5 and 6 display the use of melodic contrary motion.

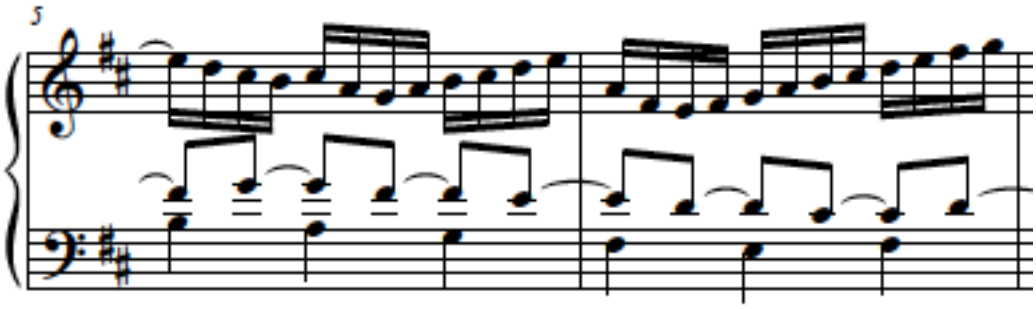


Fig. 5 Sarabande from French Suite No. 3 in B Minor, BWV 814, measures 5 and 6 – original notation

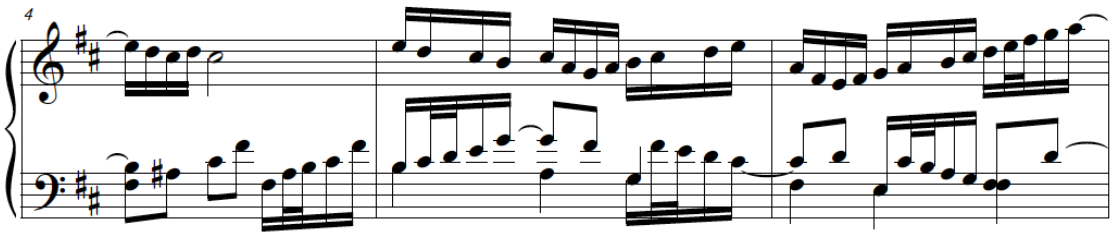


Fig. 6 Sarabande from French Suite No. 3 in B Minor, BWV 814, measures 4, 5 and 6 – ornamented notation

I also fragmented the motive and composed various sequences which are shown in figures 7 and 8. Because the original composition of this Sarabande already contained diverse melodic figures it was a challenge to find motivic ideas that would fit seamlessly with the harmonic progressions and the melodic gestures already employed.

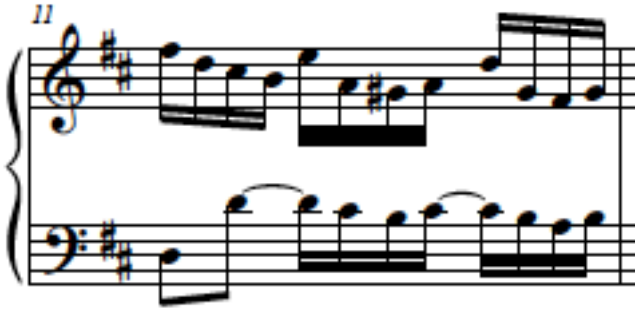


Fig. 7 Sarabande from French Suite No. 3 in B Minor, BWV 814, measure 11 - original notation

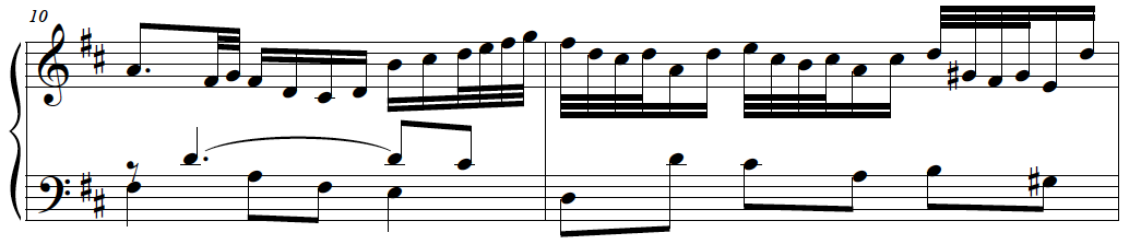


Fig. 8 Sarabande from French Suite No. 3 in B Minor, BWV 814, measure 11 – ornamented notation

I took advantage of the long note values in the Sarabande from the French suite No. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 815 to extend the original melodic gesture into a complex melodic statement that is passed between the voices and inverted in the second section of the Sarabande. Figures 9 and 10 show the original creation of the melodic motive.

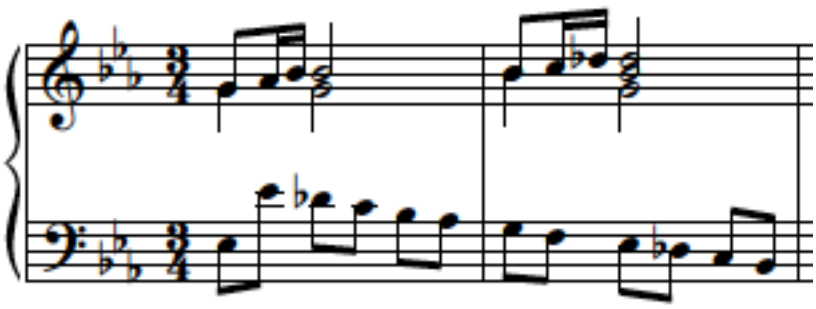


Fig. 9 Sarabande from French Suite No. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 815, measures 1 and 2 – original notation

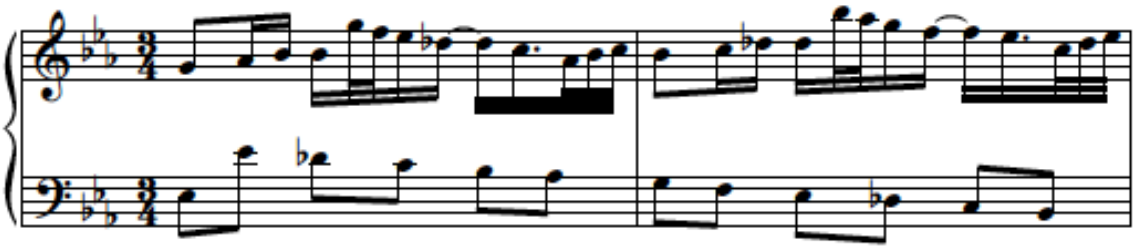


Fig. 10 Sarabande from French Suite No. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 815, measures 1 and 2 – ornamented notation

Figures 11 and 12 show the inversion of the melodic motive.

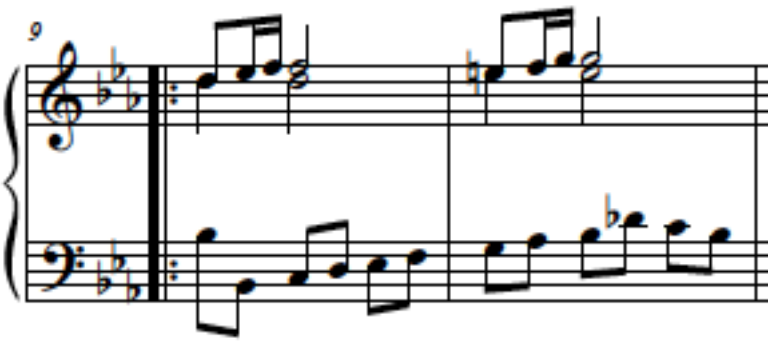


Fig. 11 Sarabande from French Suite No. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 815, measures 9 and 10 – original notation

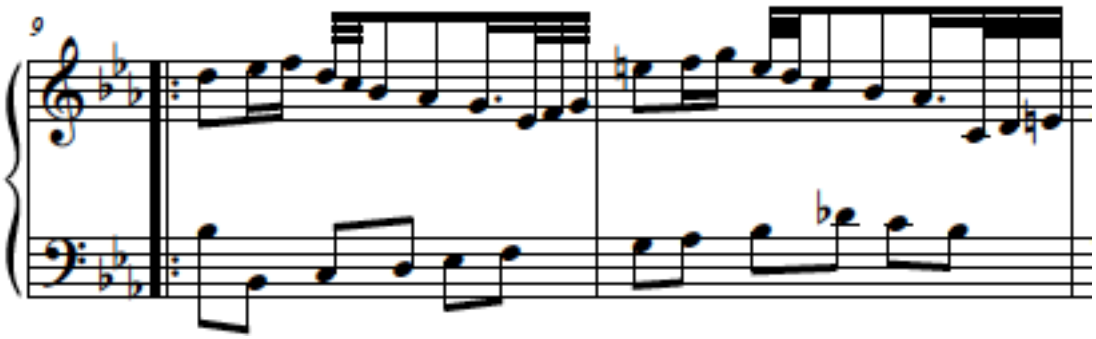


Fig. 12 Sarabande from French Suite No. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 815, measures 9 and 10 – ornamented notation

The Sarabande from French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816 is ornamented in what might be considered the most traditional way. Again taking advantage of the long note values I utilized trills, melodic extension and syncopation, figures 13 and 14 show the different possibilities in length and repetition of various trills. Trills can generate confusion concerning which note to begin the trill on, how many note repetitions there should be and how to exit the trill. The choices seen in this Sarabande show different ways to enter and exit the trill and a varying number of repetitions. When deciding how use trills as ornamentations the performer should be primarily concerned with making sure the trill does not interrupt the harmonic line or disrupt the rhythmic pulse of the music.

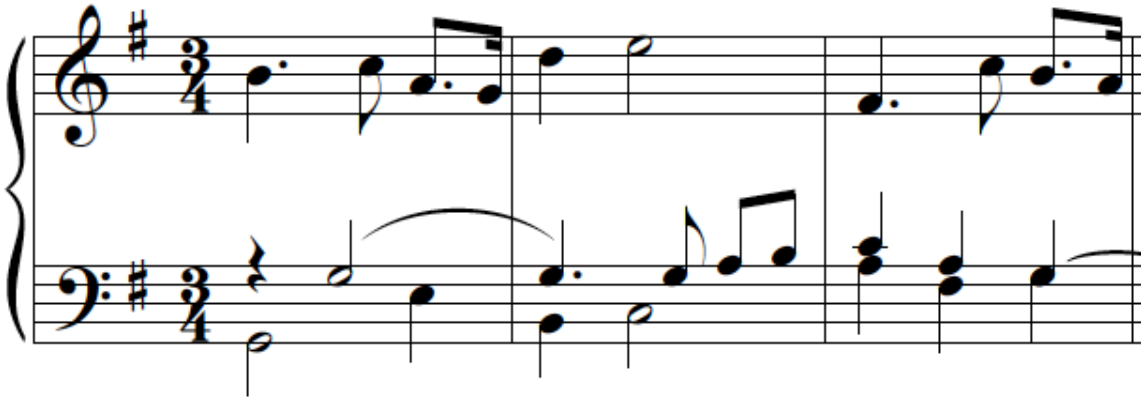


Fig. 13 Sarabande from French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816, measures 1, 2, 3 – original notation

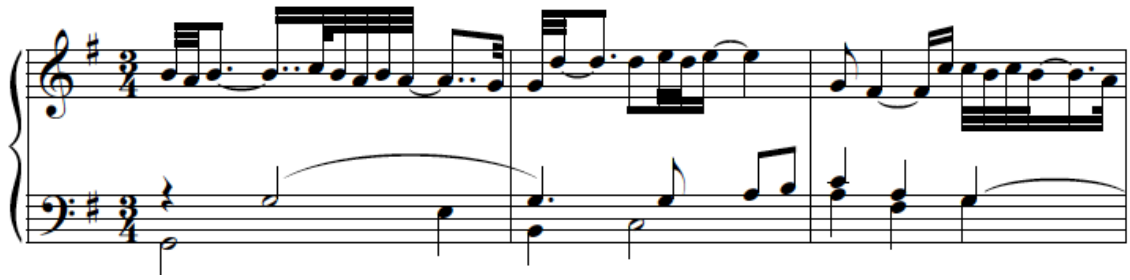


Fig. 14 Sarabande from French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816, measures 1, 2, 3 – ornamented notation

The final Sarabande from French Suite No. 6 in E Major, BWV 817 employs a variety of ornamentation techniques included extensive trills, melodic manipulation and passing tones. This original composition of this Sarabande is rhythmically to begin with and made it difficult to vary the given melodic material. Figures 15 and 16 show these techniques. Because there is so much already going on in the original composition I decided to use a conglomeration of ornamental techniques to finish the set of Sarabande from the French Suites

showing a variety of different techniques.

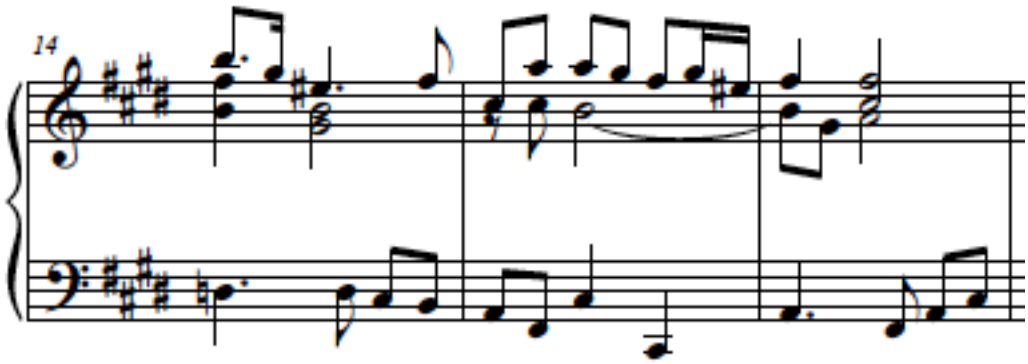


Fig. 15 Sarabande from French Suite No. 6 in E Major, BWV 817, measures 14, 15, 16 – original notation

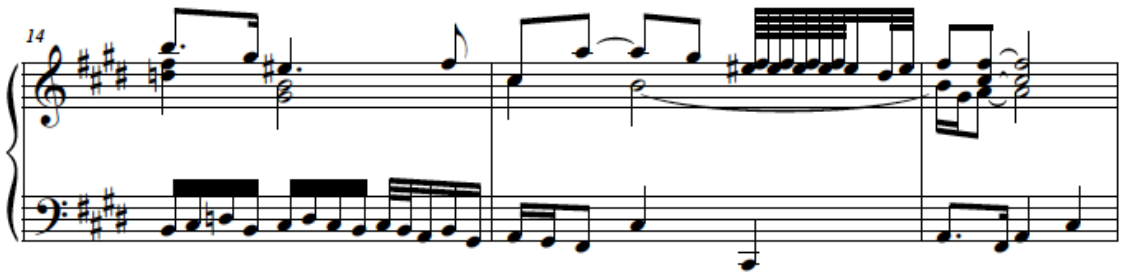


Fig. 16 Sarabande from French Suite No. 6 in E Major, BWV 817, measures 14, 15, 16 – ornamented notation

The ornamentation techniques employed in the Sarabandes are extremely adaptable to any situation where the performer wishes to embellish or vary the melodic and rhythmic texture of any given notation. If the performer is sensitive to the given textures of the music the result of thoughtful and extensive ornamentation can provide creative and aurally pleasing repetitions of the original material.

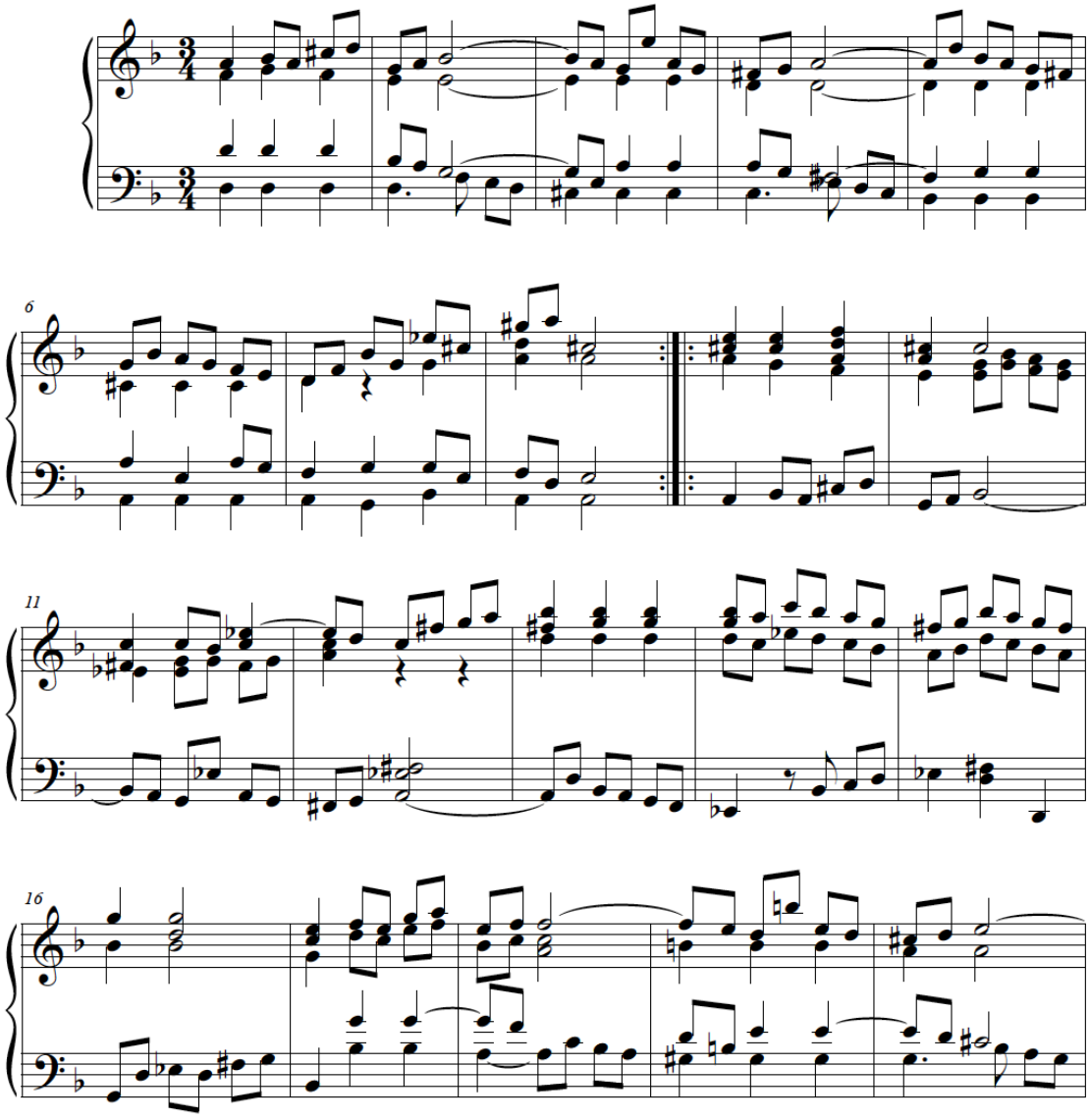
CHAPTER 3

NOTATED SCORES

French Suite No. 1 in D minor, BWV 812

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach



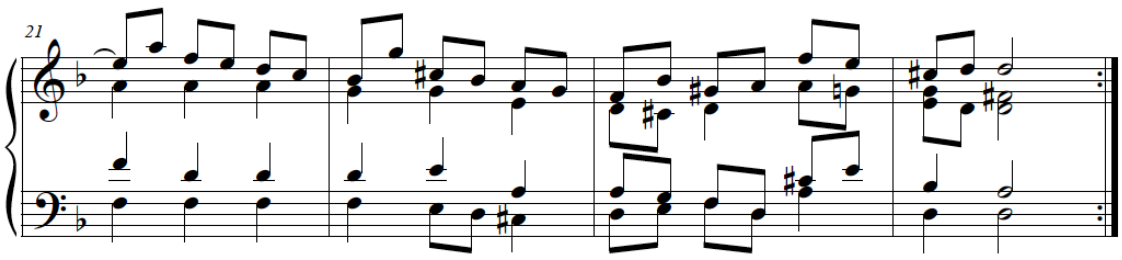


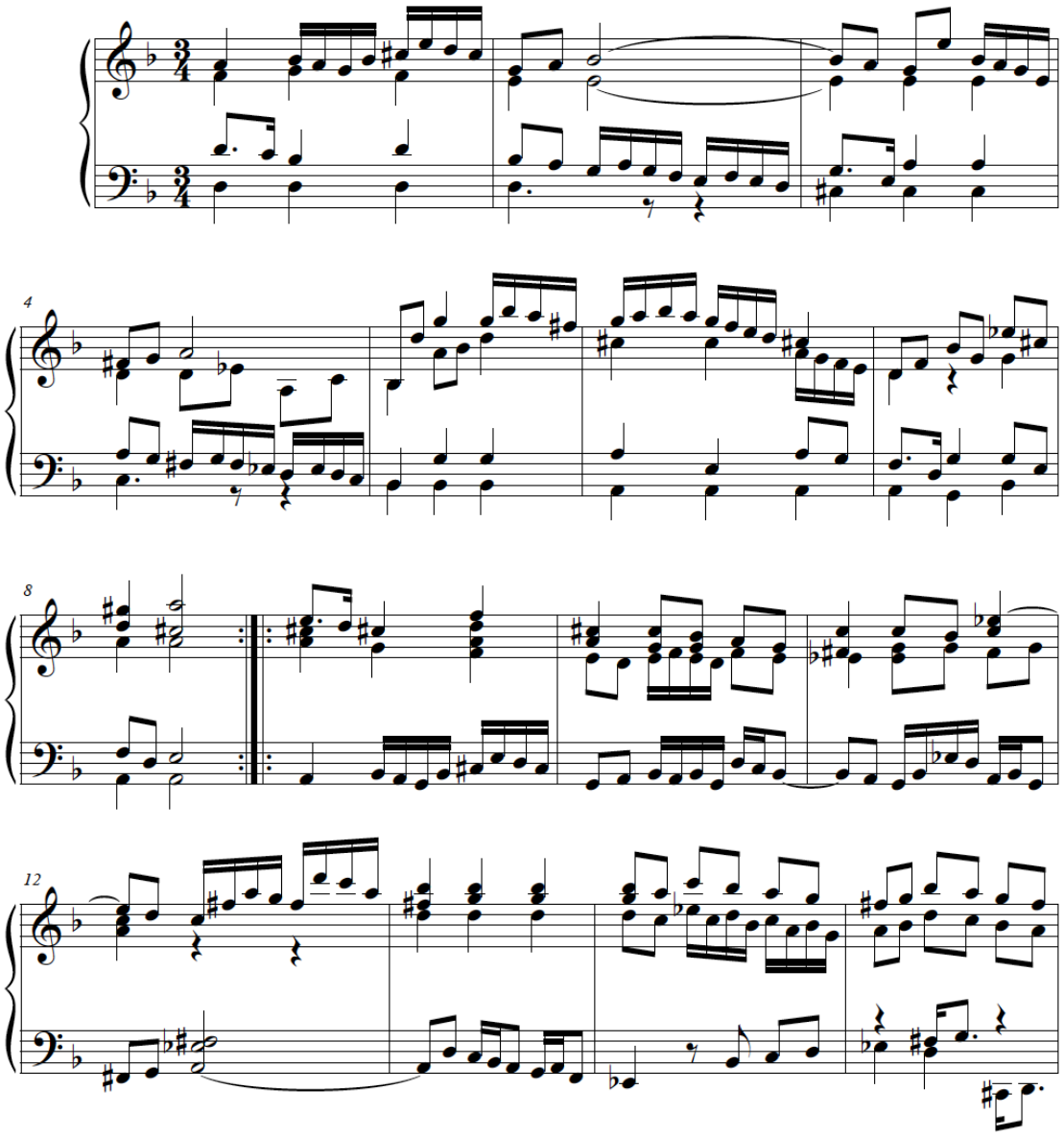
Fig. 17 Sarabande from French Suite No. 1 in D minor, BWV 812 – original notation

French Suite No. 1 in D minor, BWV 812

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach

Ashley Oakley



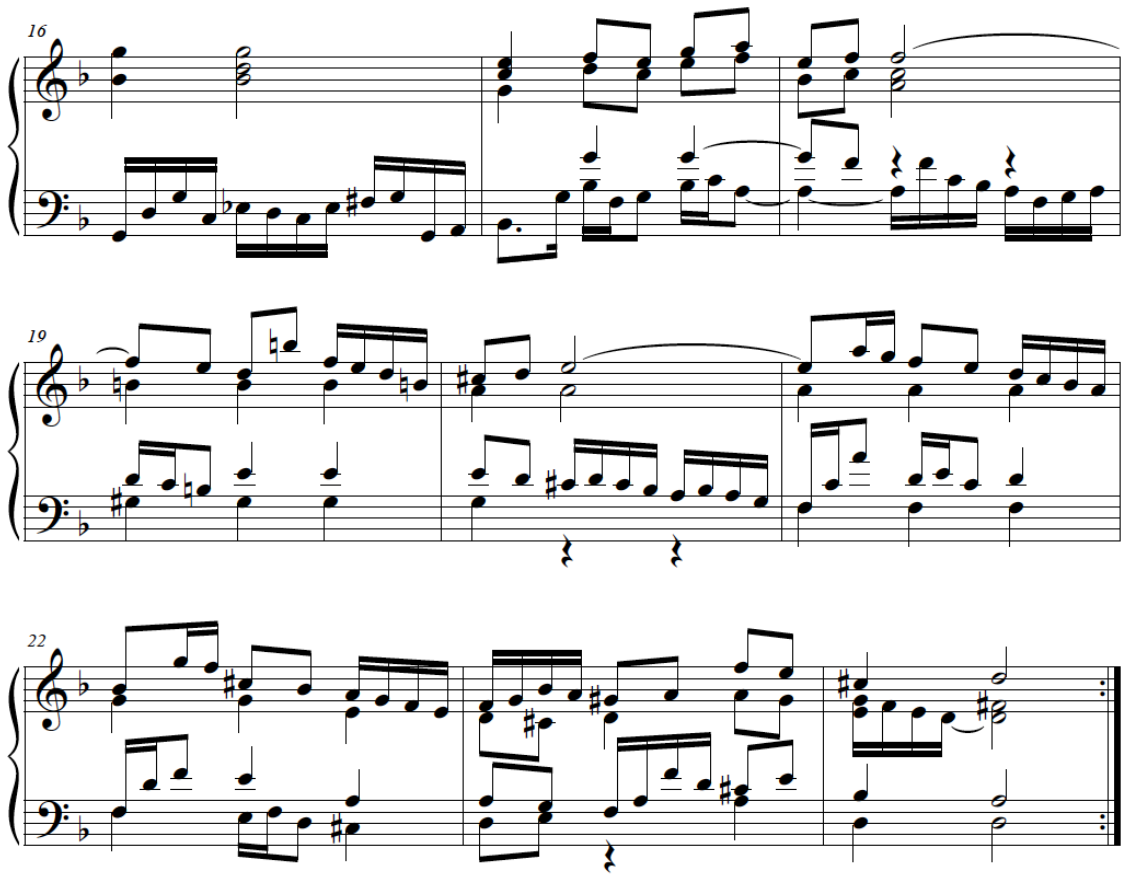
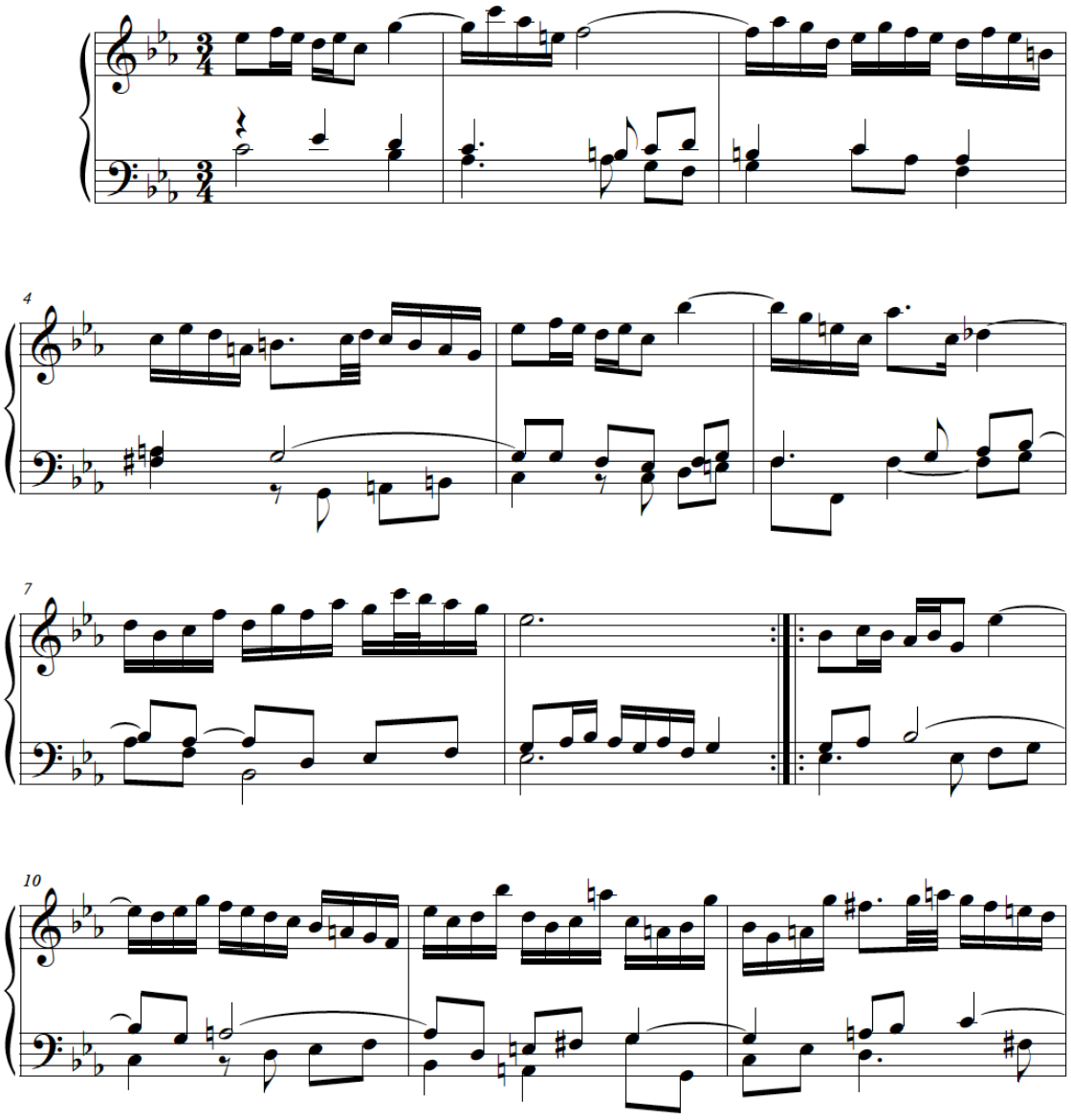


Fig 18 Sarabande from French Suite No. 1 in D minor, BWV 812 – ornamented notation

French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach



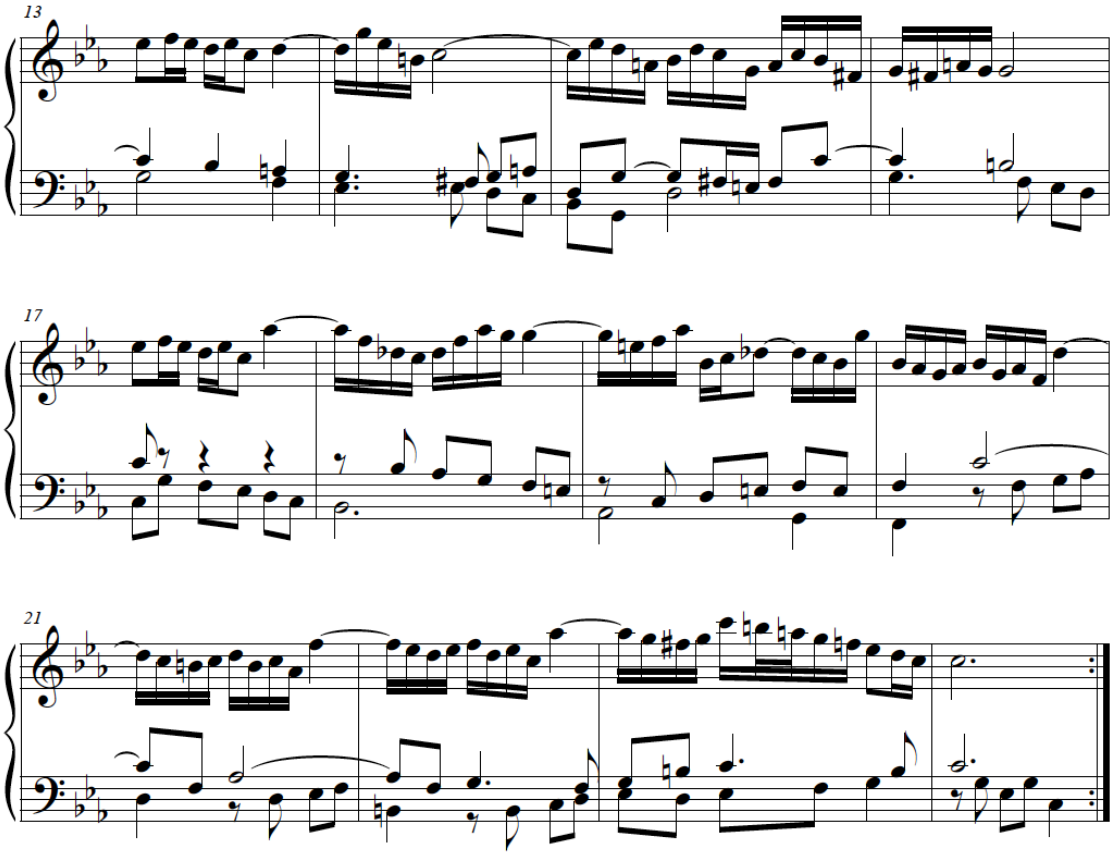


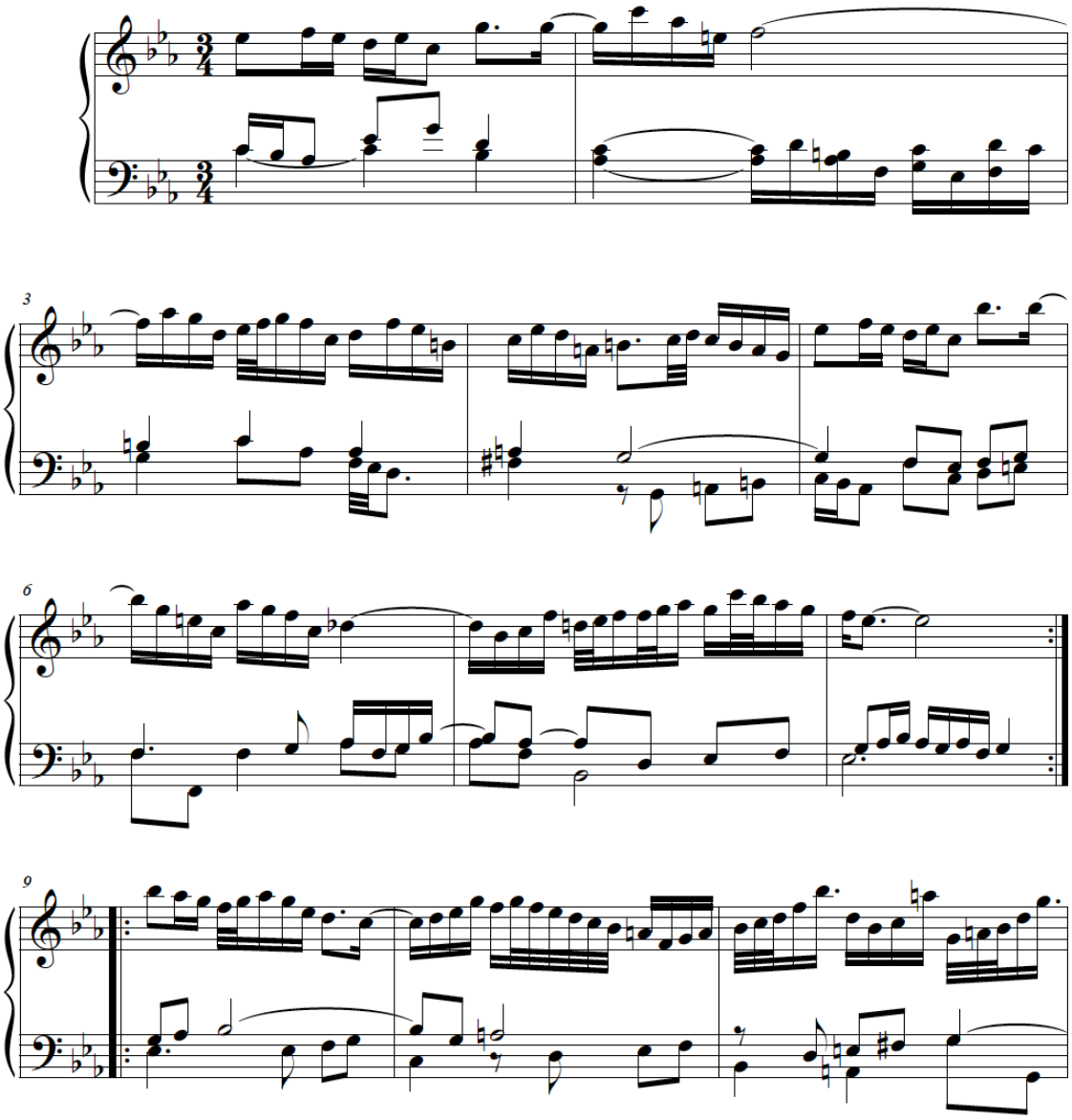
Fig 19 Sarabande from French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813 – original notation

French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach

Ashley Oakley



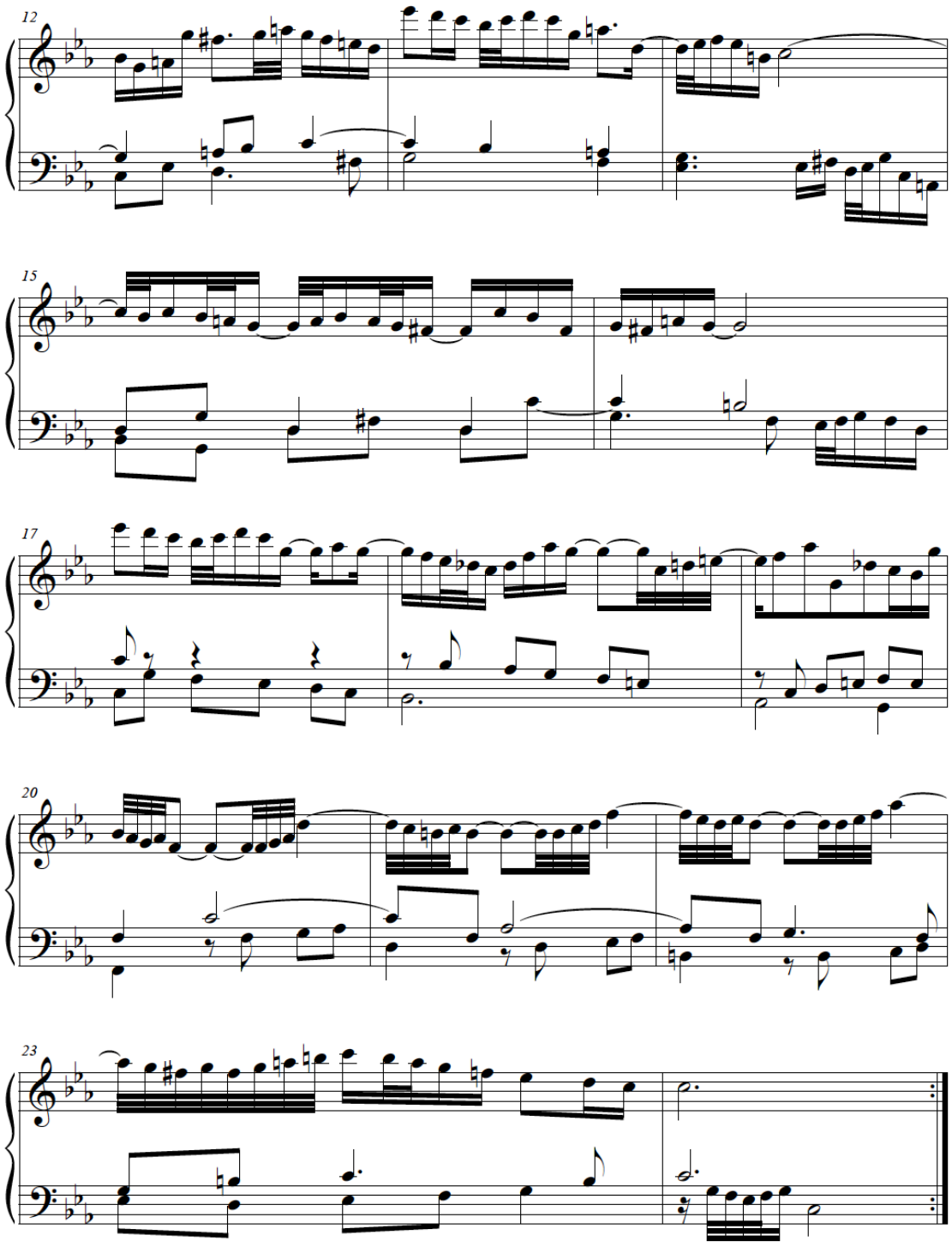
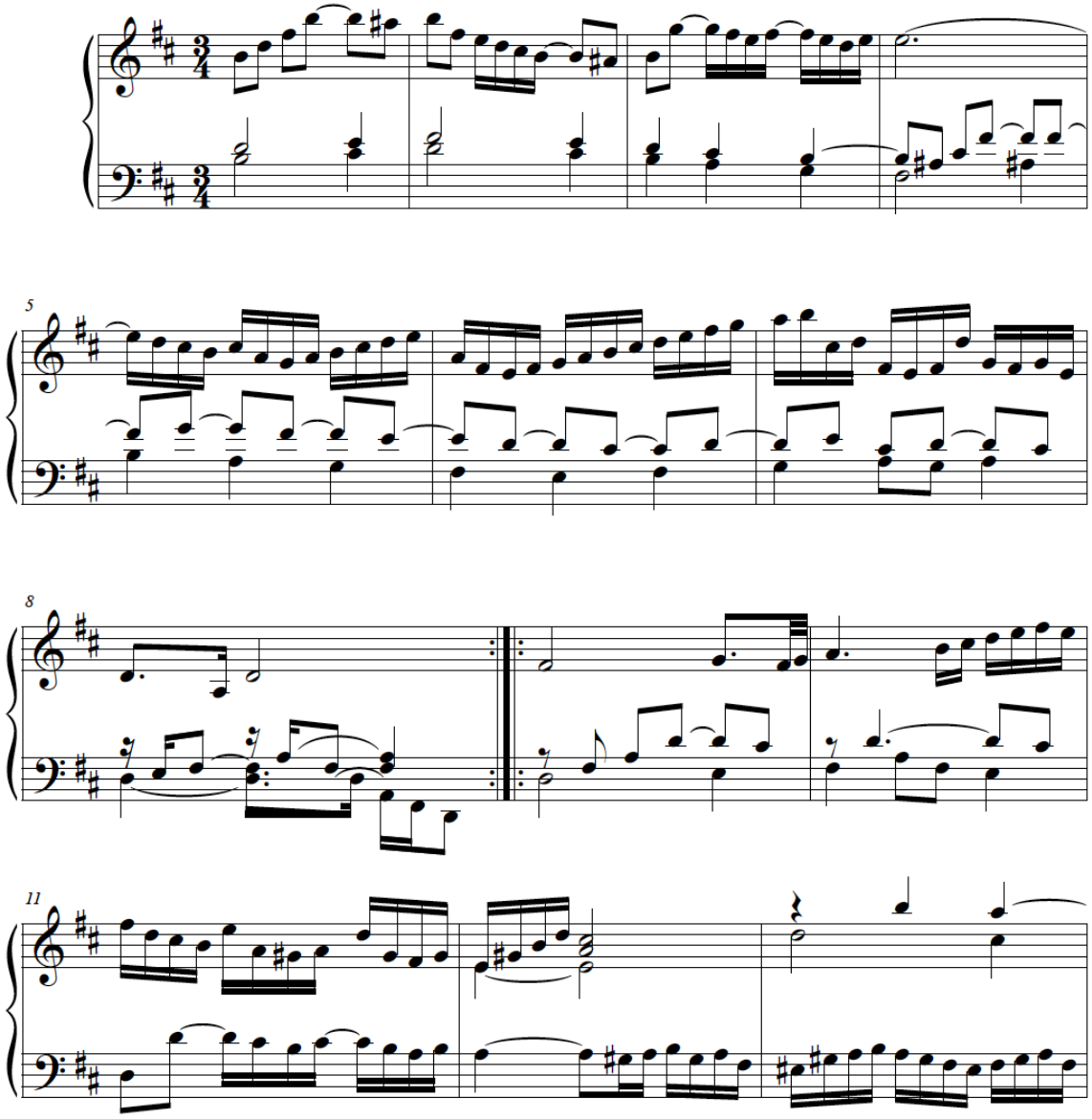


Fig 20 Sarabande from French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813 – ornamented notation

French Suite No. 3 in B Minor, BWV 814

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach



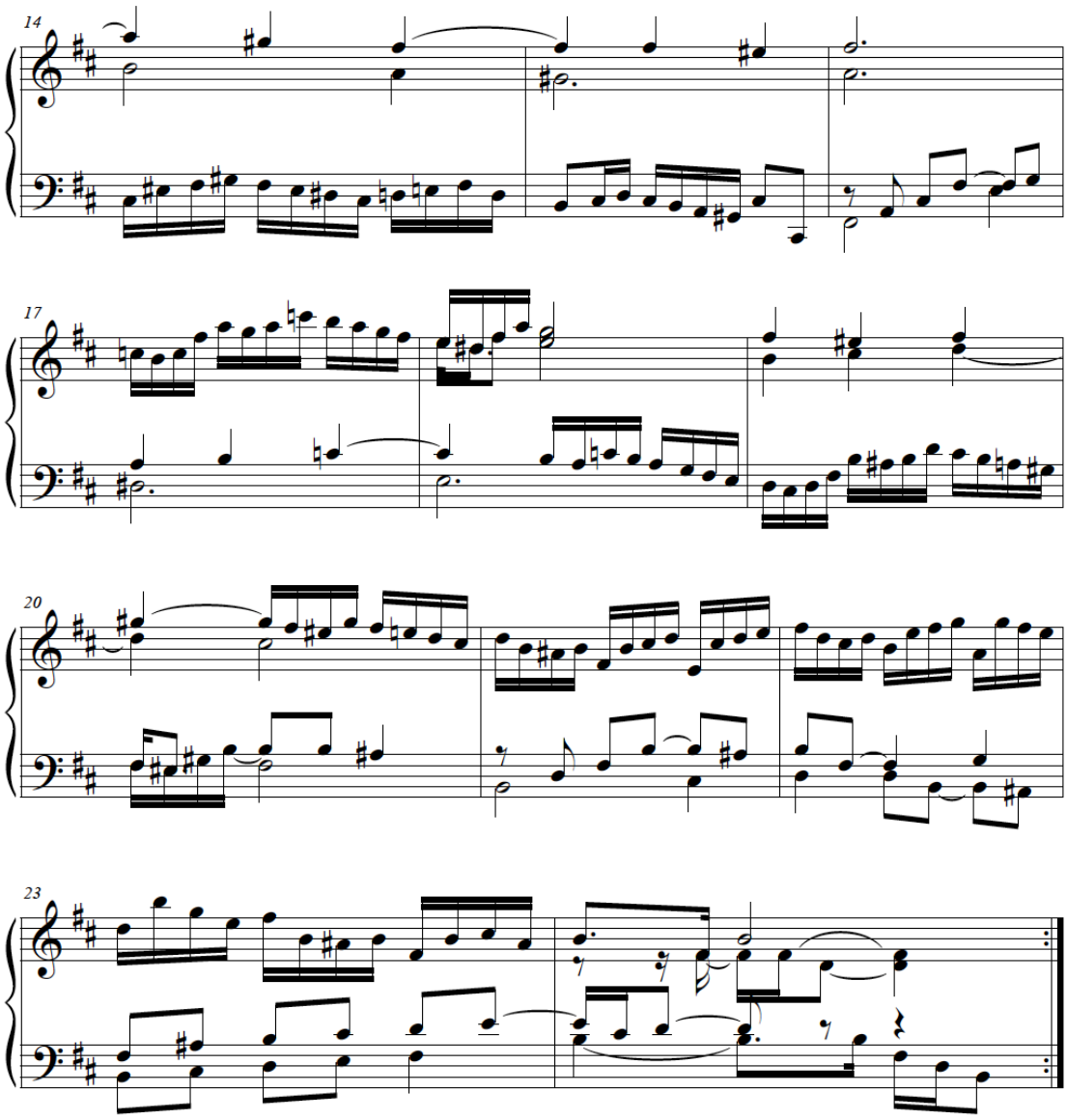


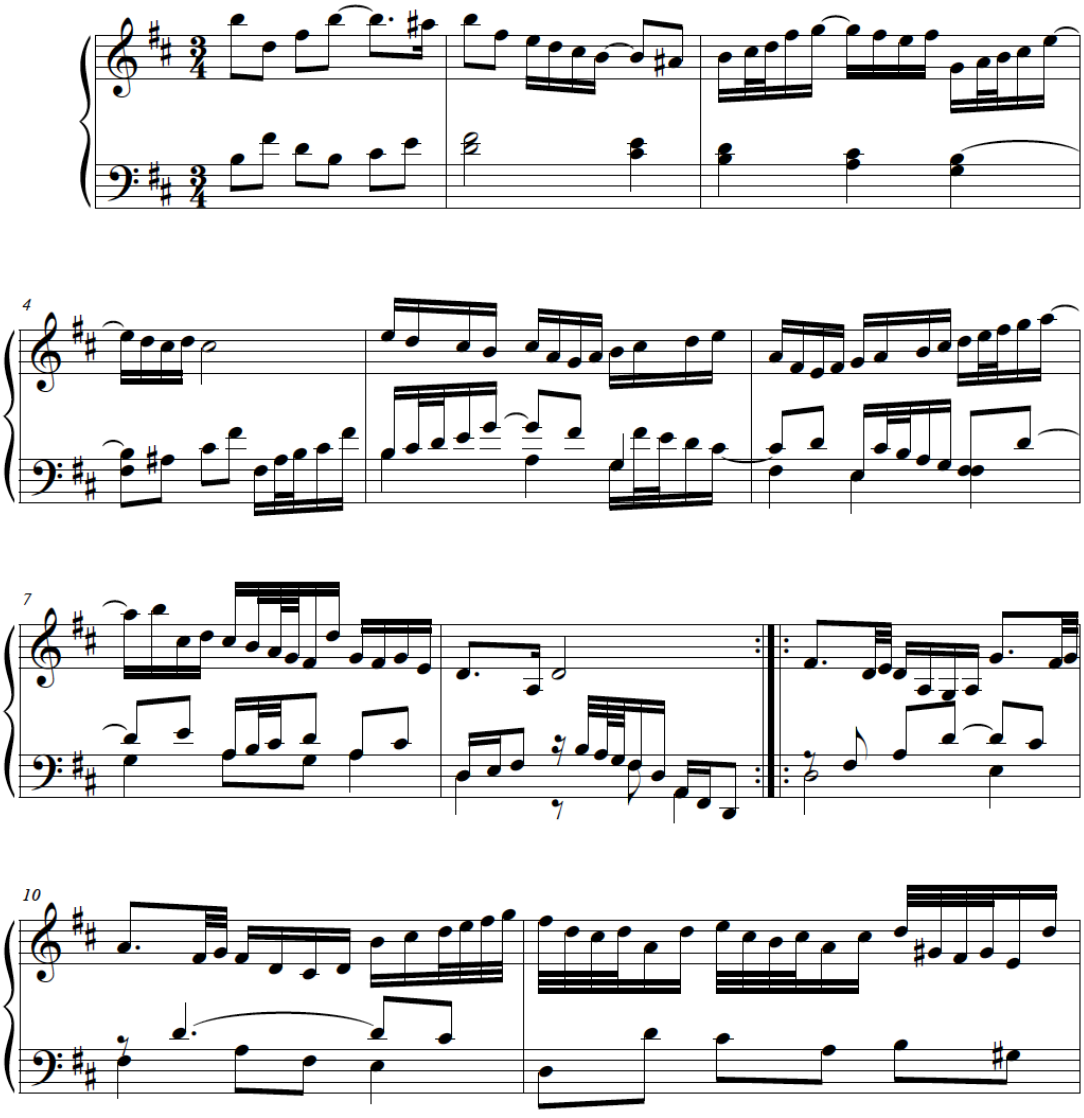
Fig 21 Sarabande from French Suite No. 3 in B minor, BWV 814 – original notation

French Suite No. 3 in B Minor, BWV 814

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach

Ashley Oakley



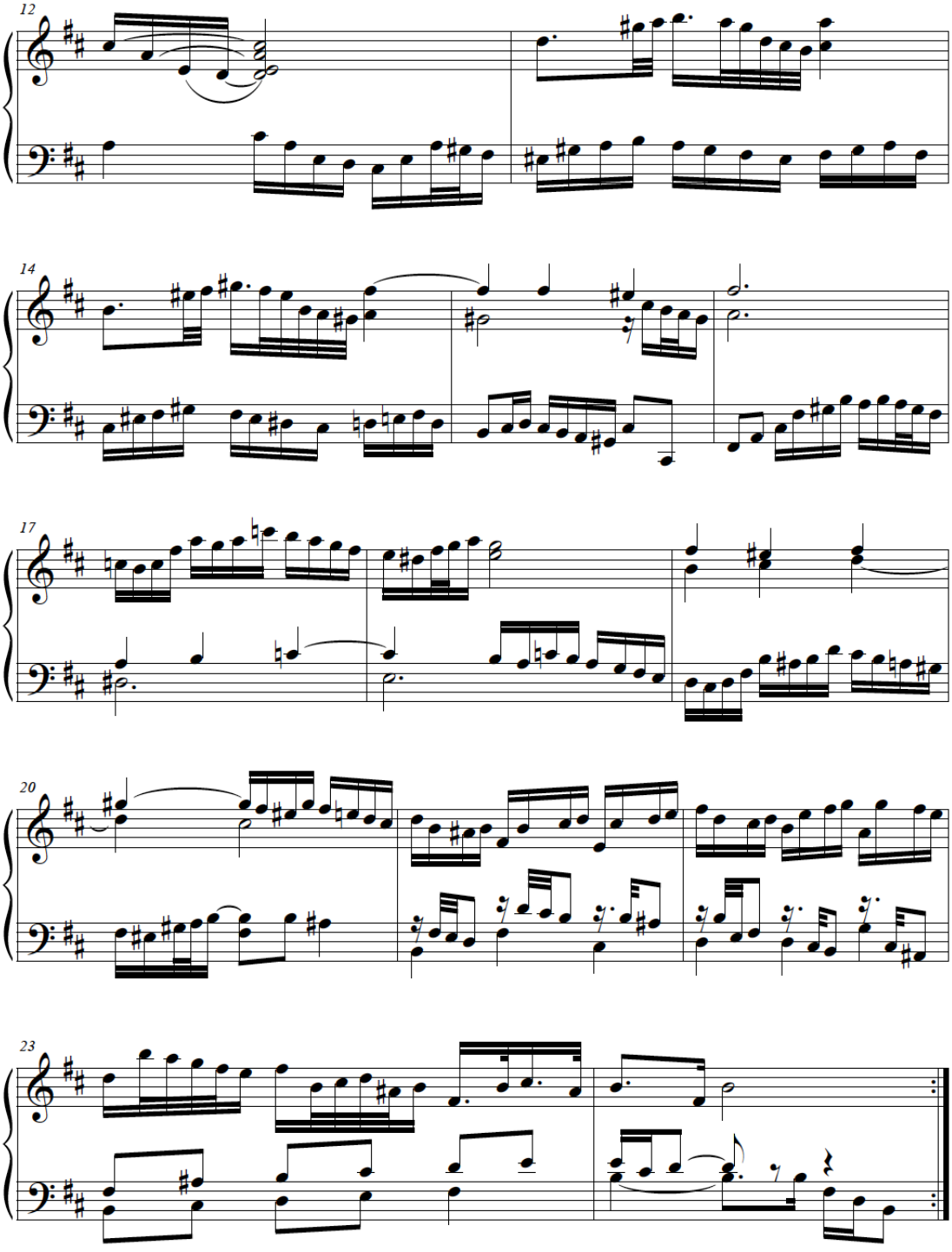
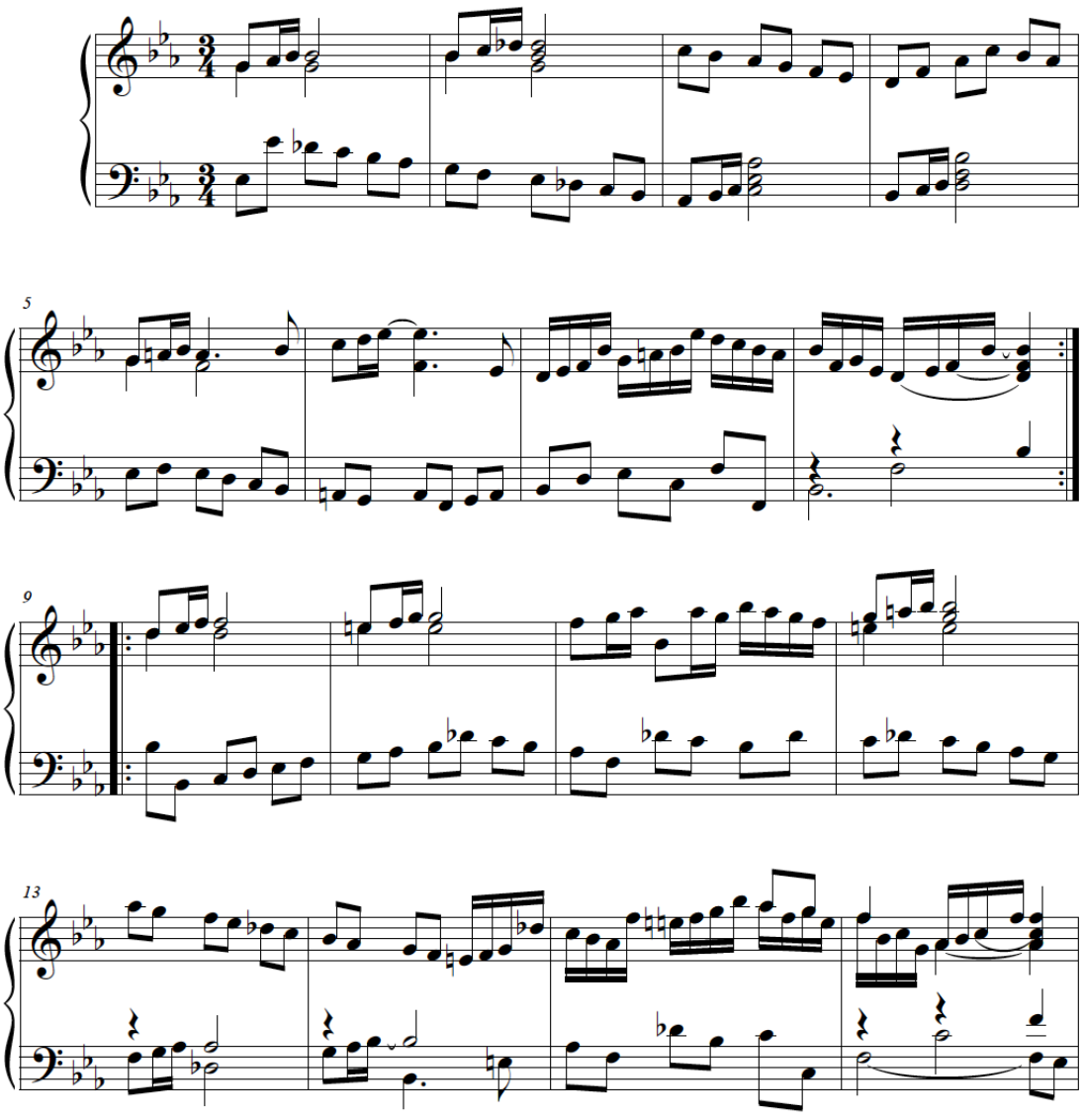


Fig 22 Sarabande from French Suite No. 3 in B minor, BWV 814 – ornamented notation

French Suite No. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 815

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach



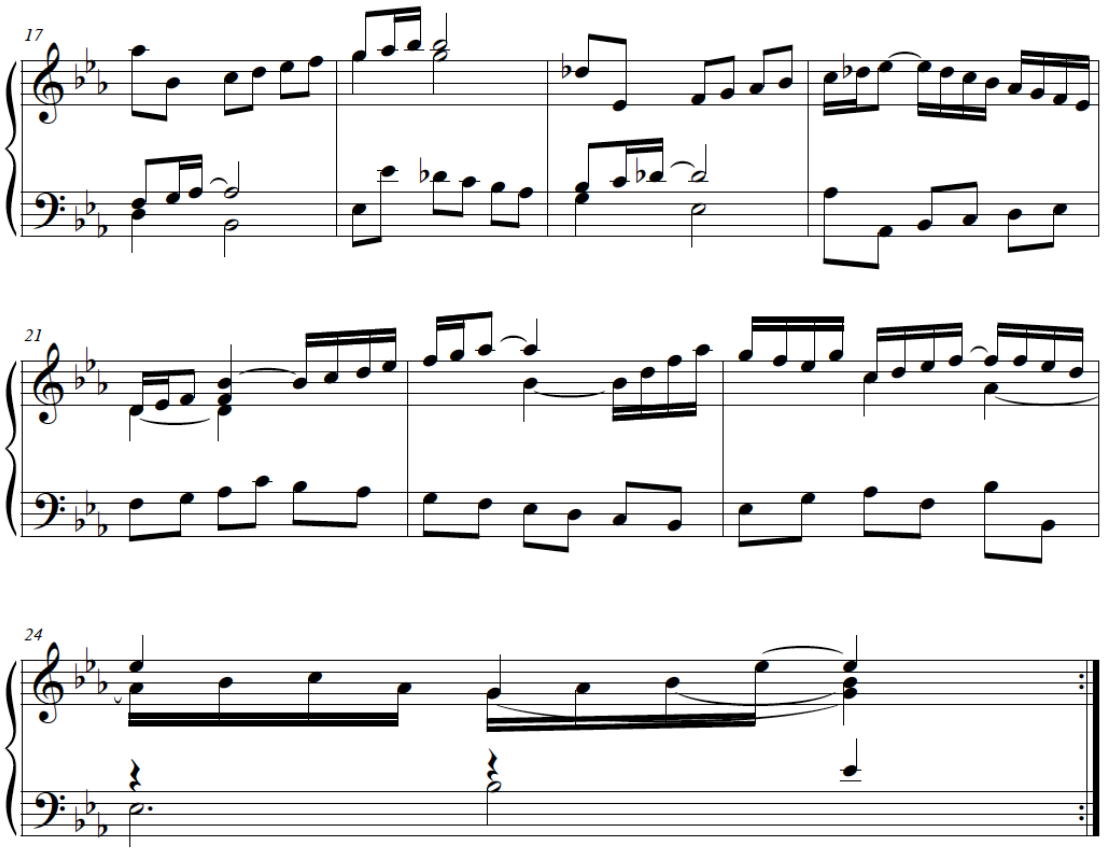


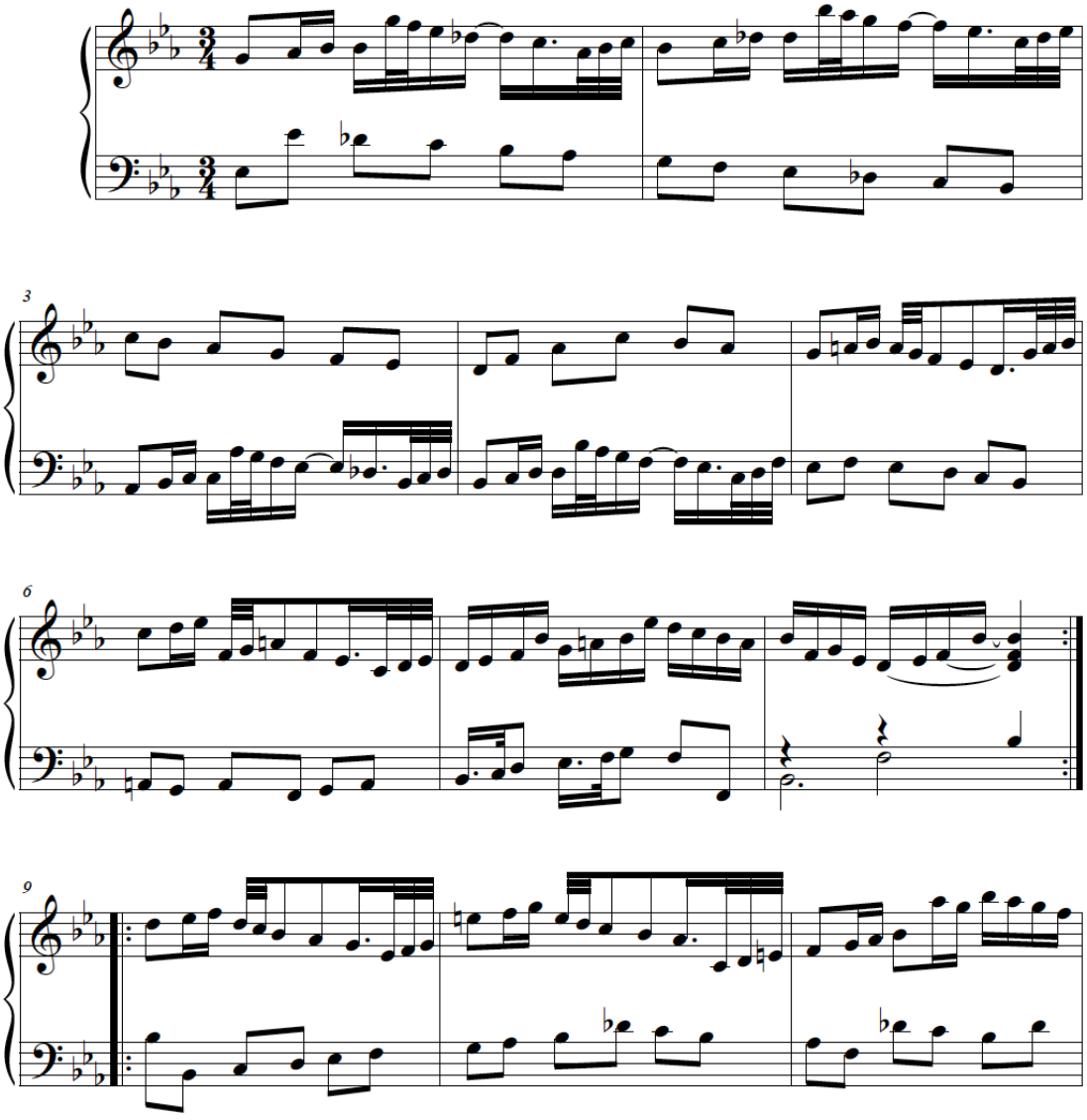
Fig 23 Sarabande from French Suite No. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 815 – original notation

French Suite No. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 815

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach

Ashley Oakley



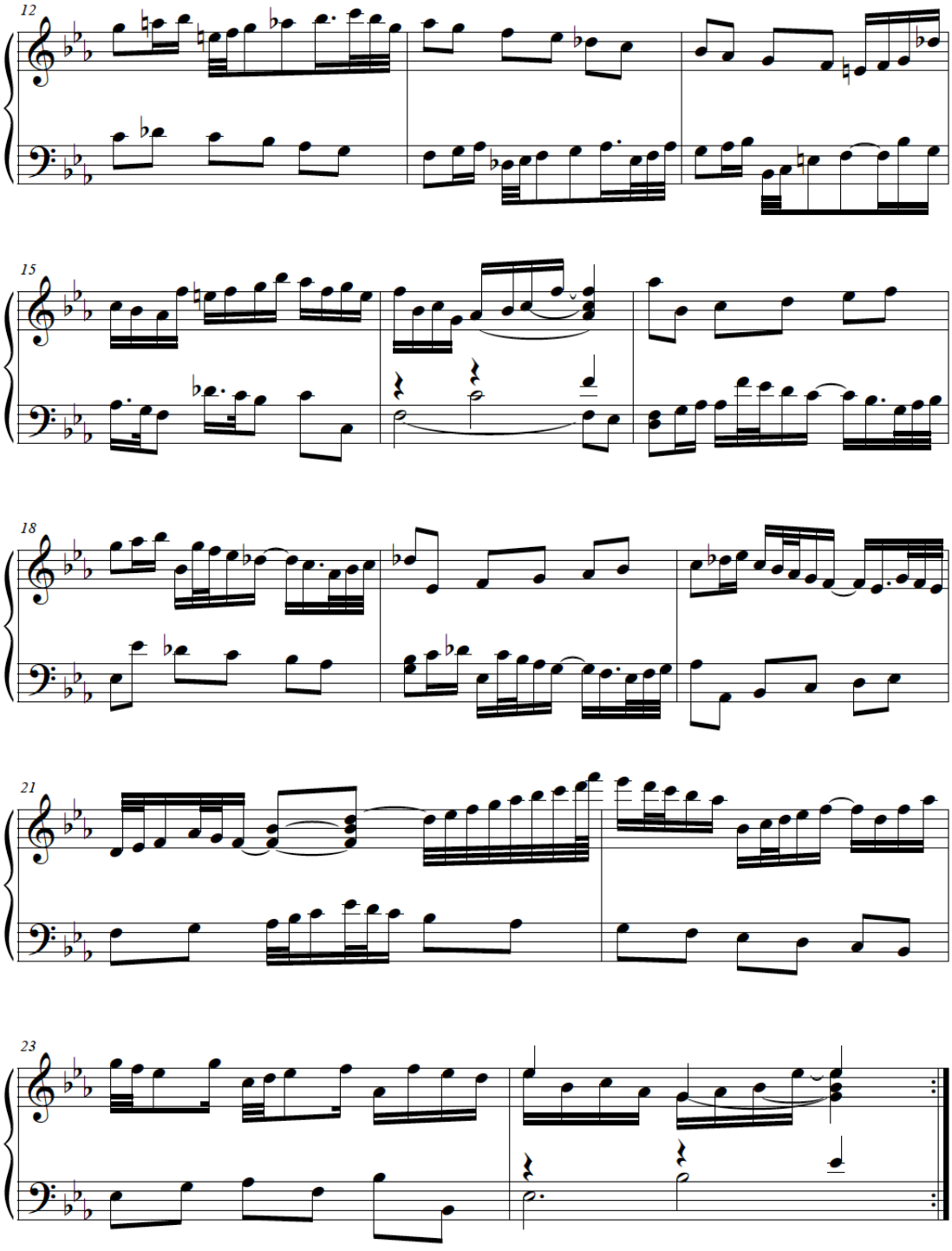
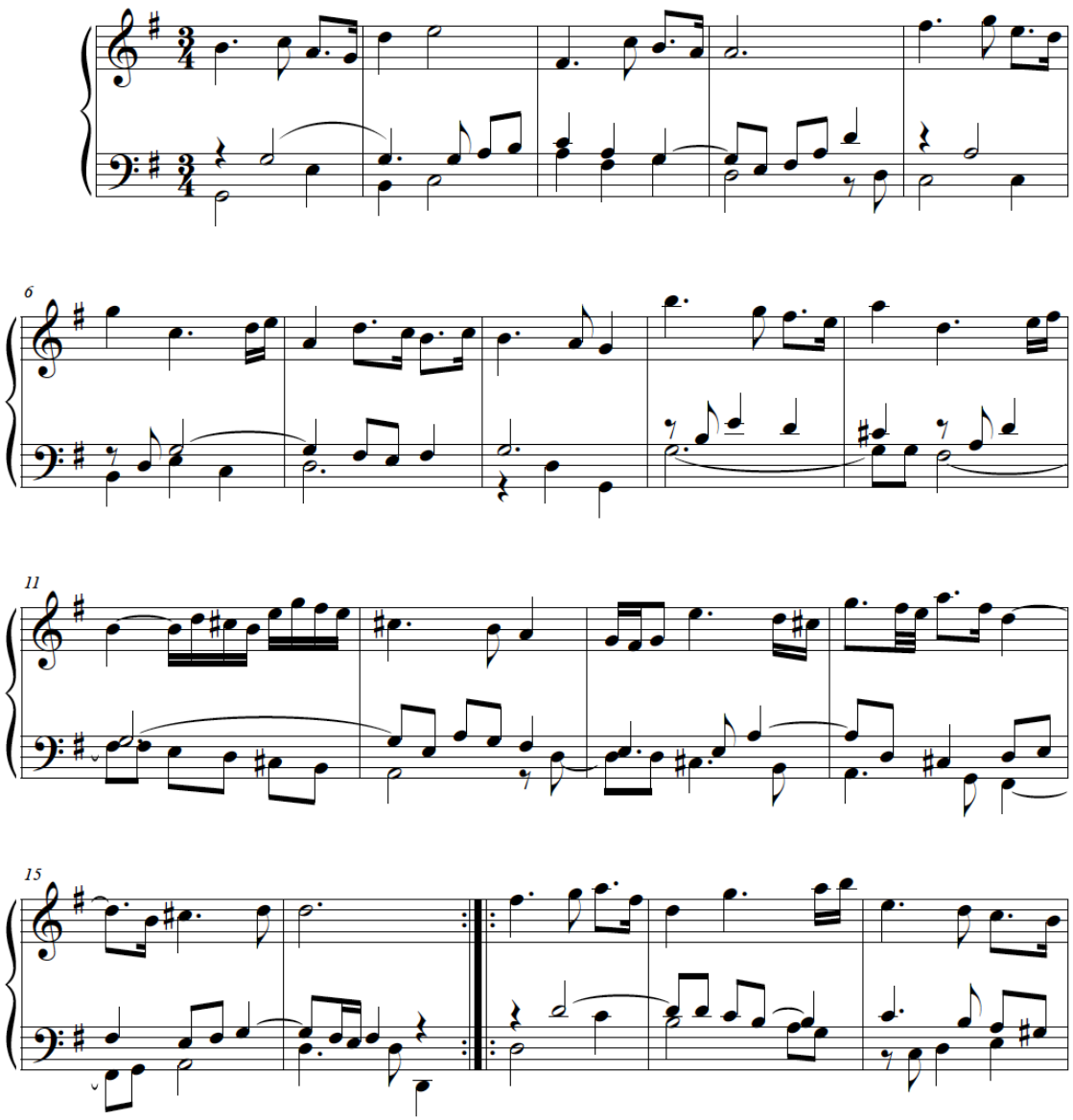


Fig 24 Sarabande from French Suite No. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 815 – ornamented notation

French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach



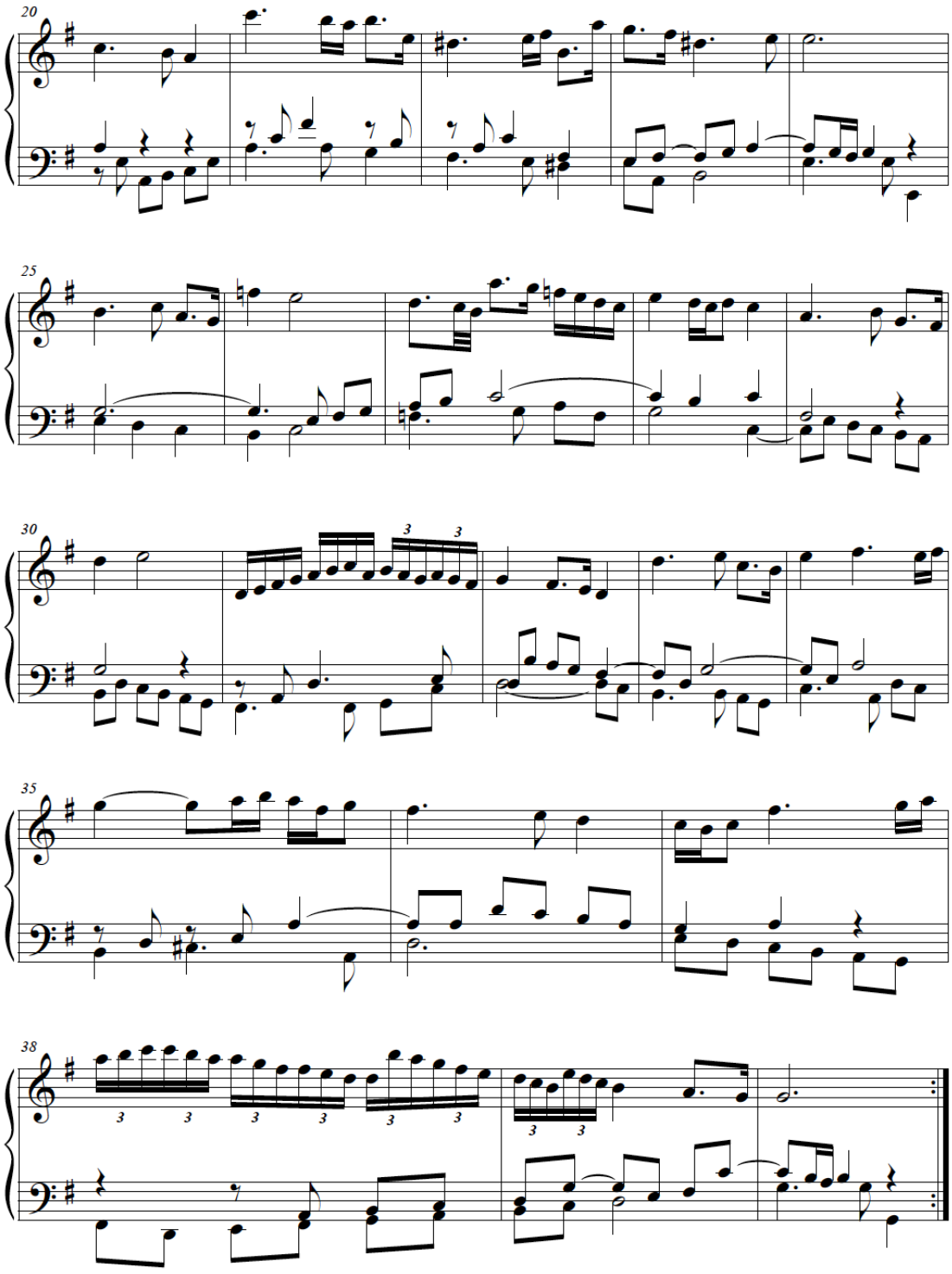


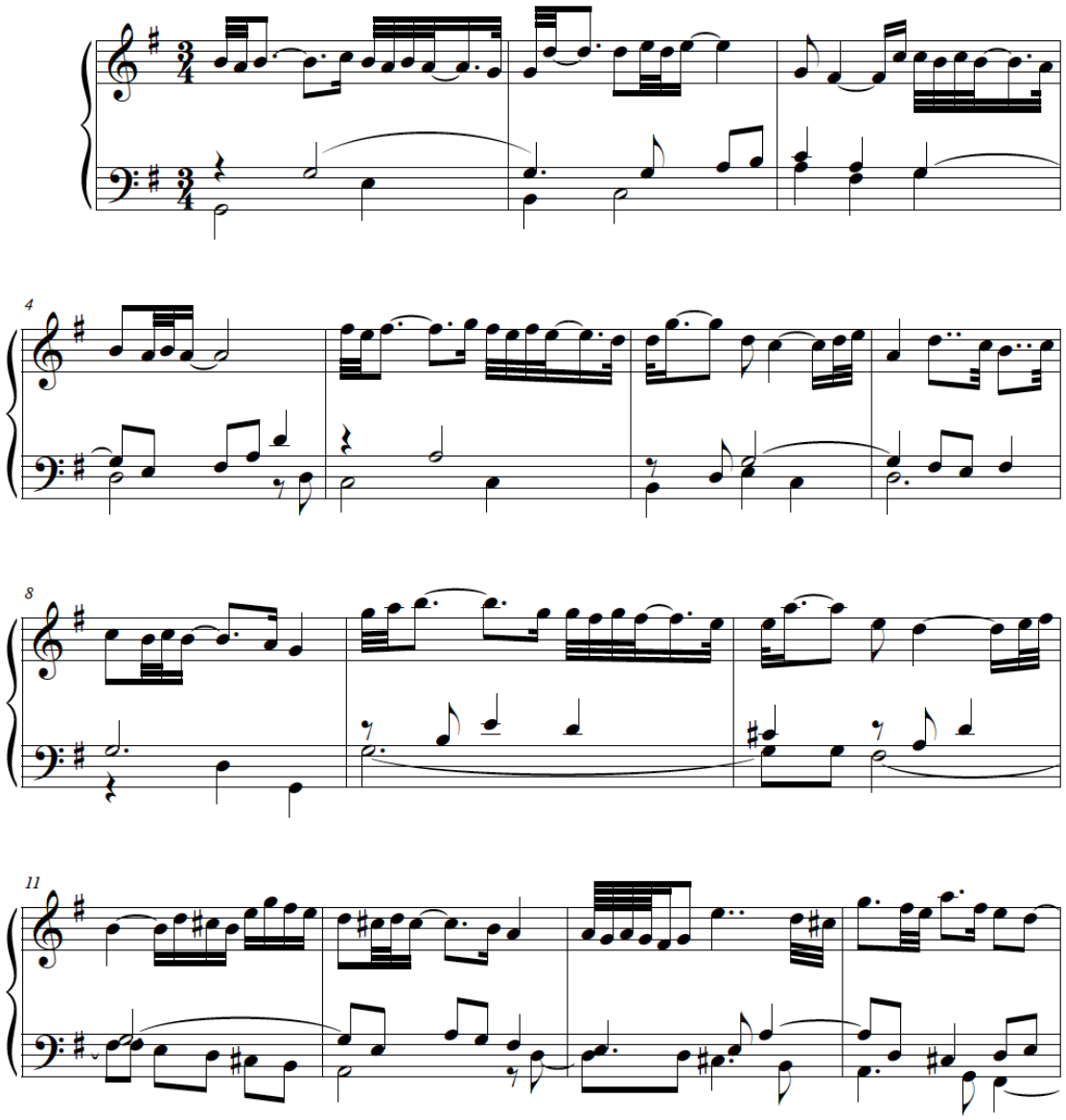
Fig 25 Sarabande from French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816 – original notation

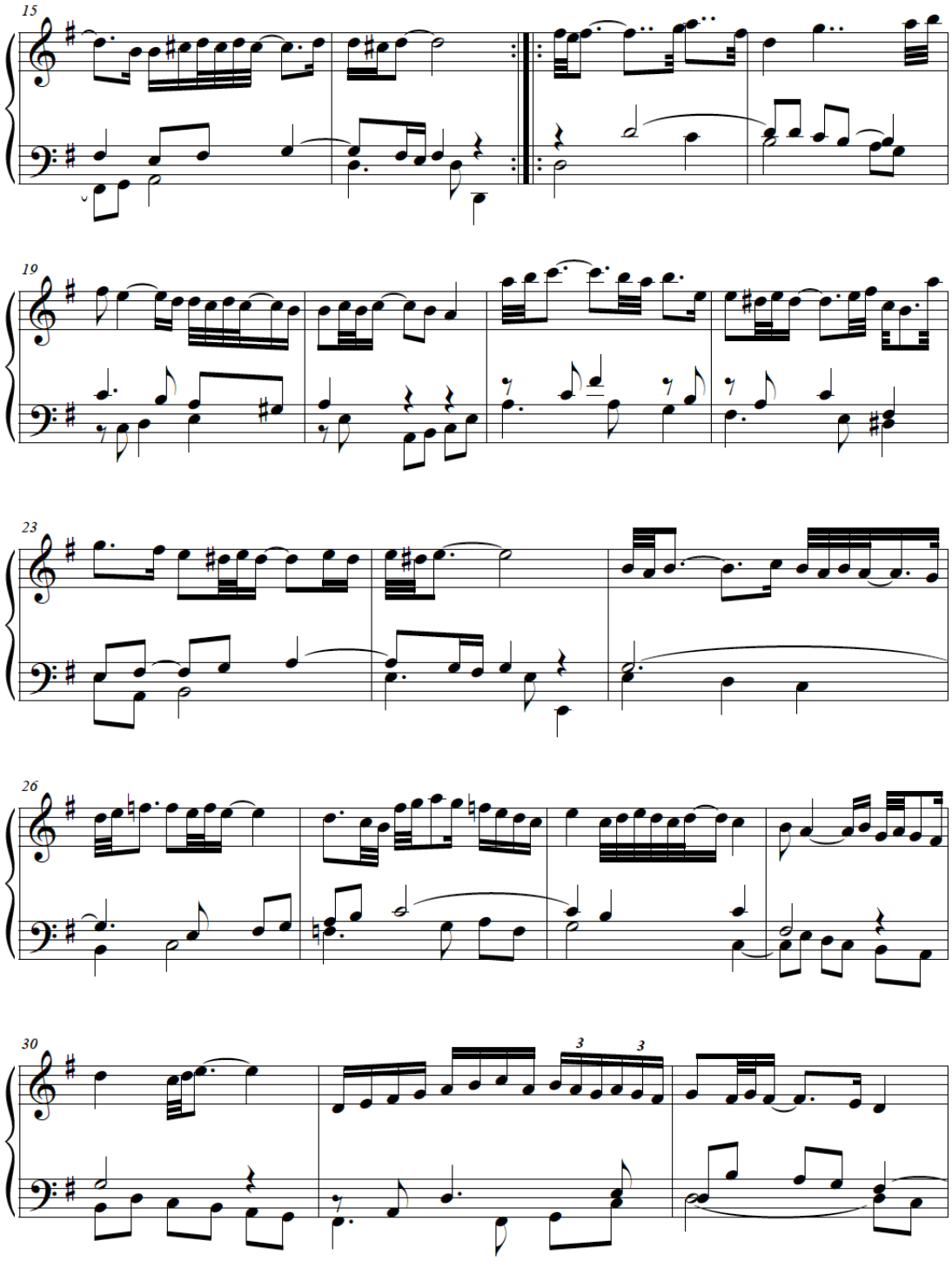
French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach

Ashley Oakley

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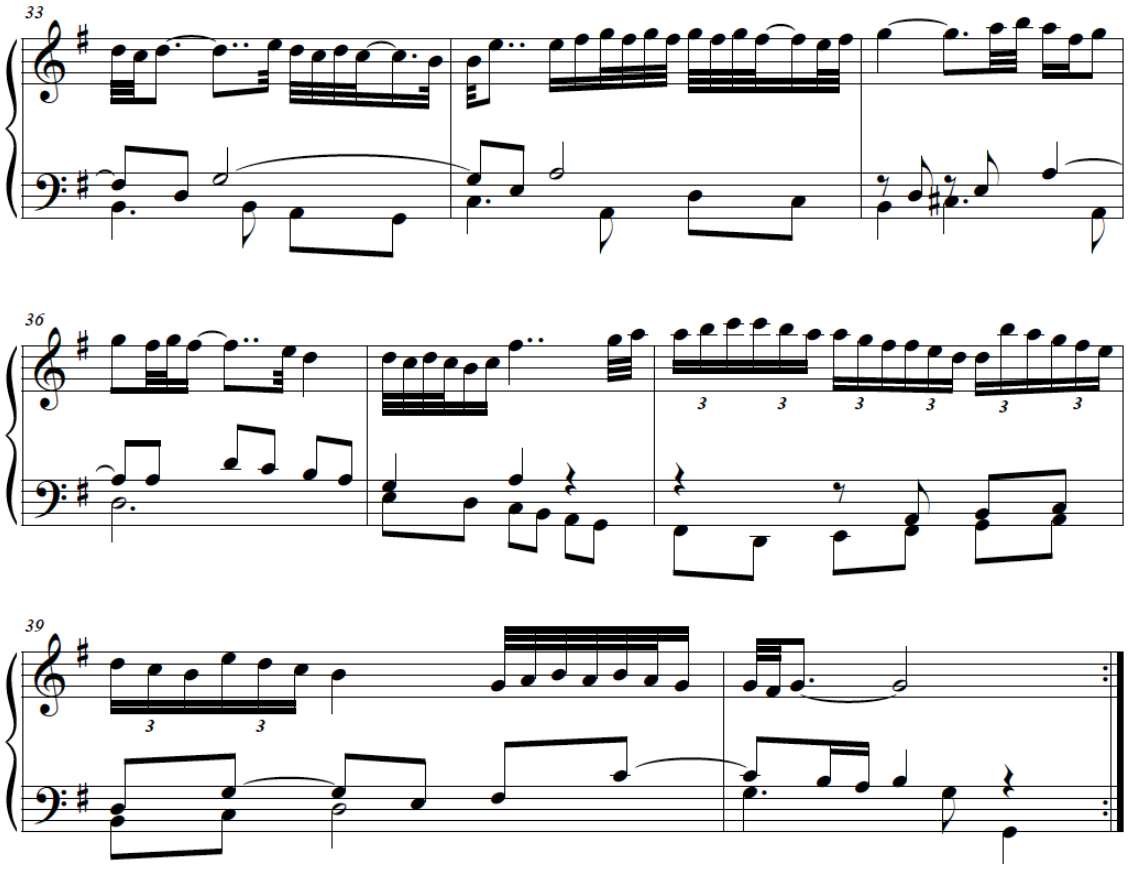
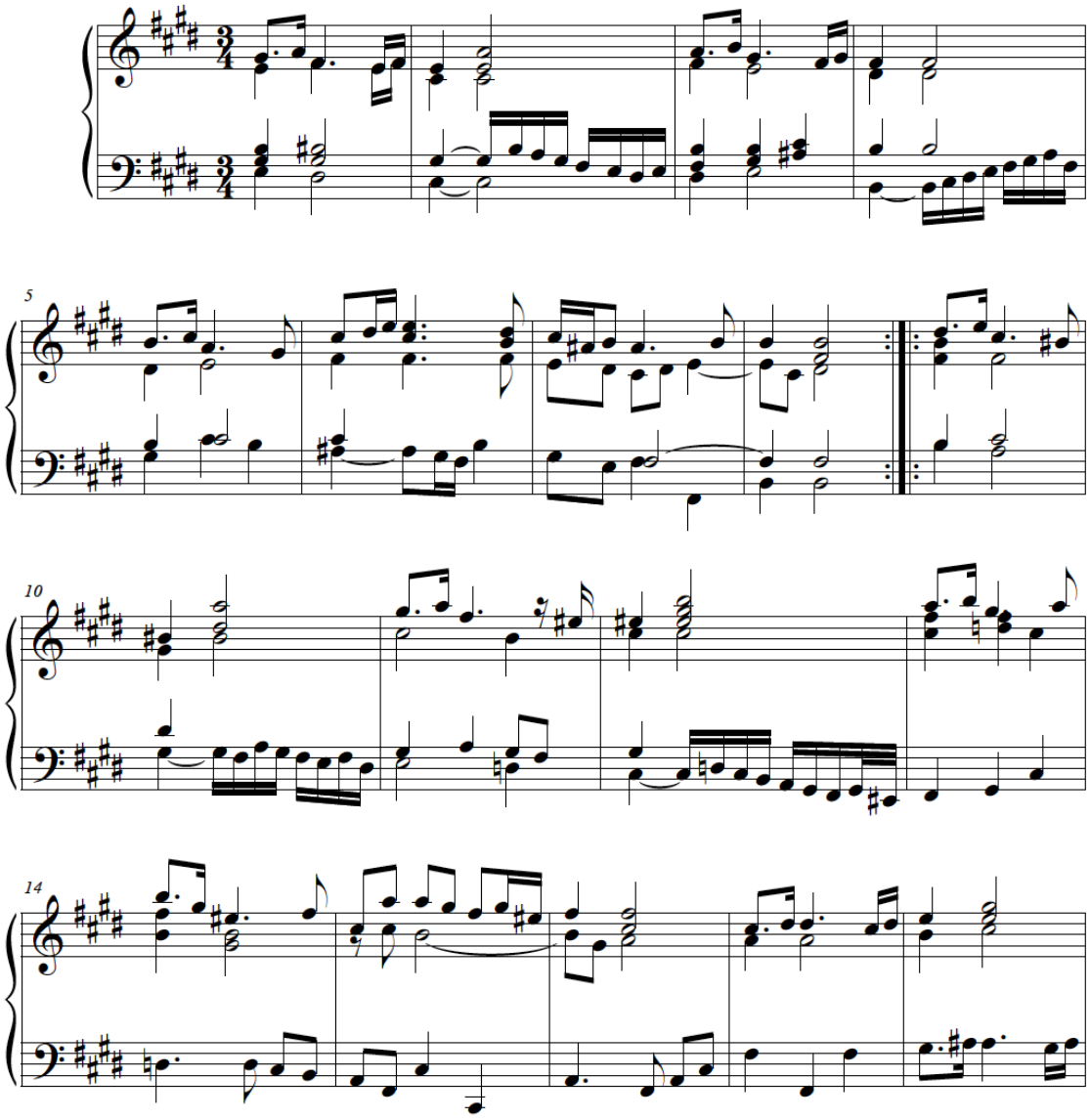


Fig 26 Sarabande from French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816 – ornamented notation

French Suite No. 6 in E Major, BWV 817

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach



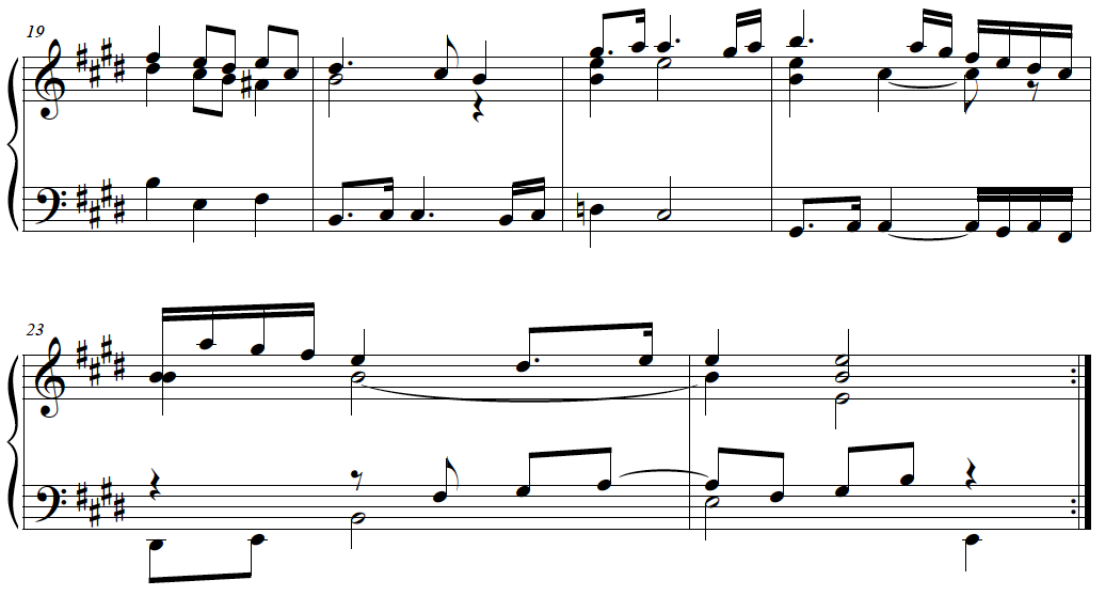


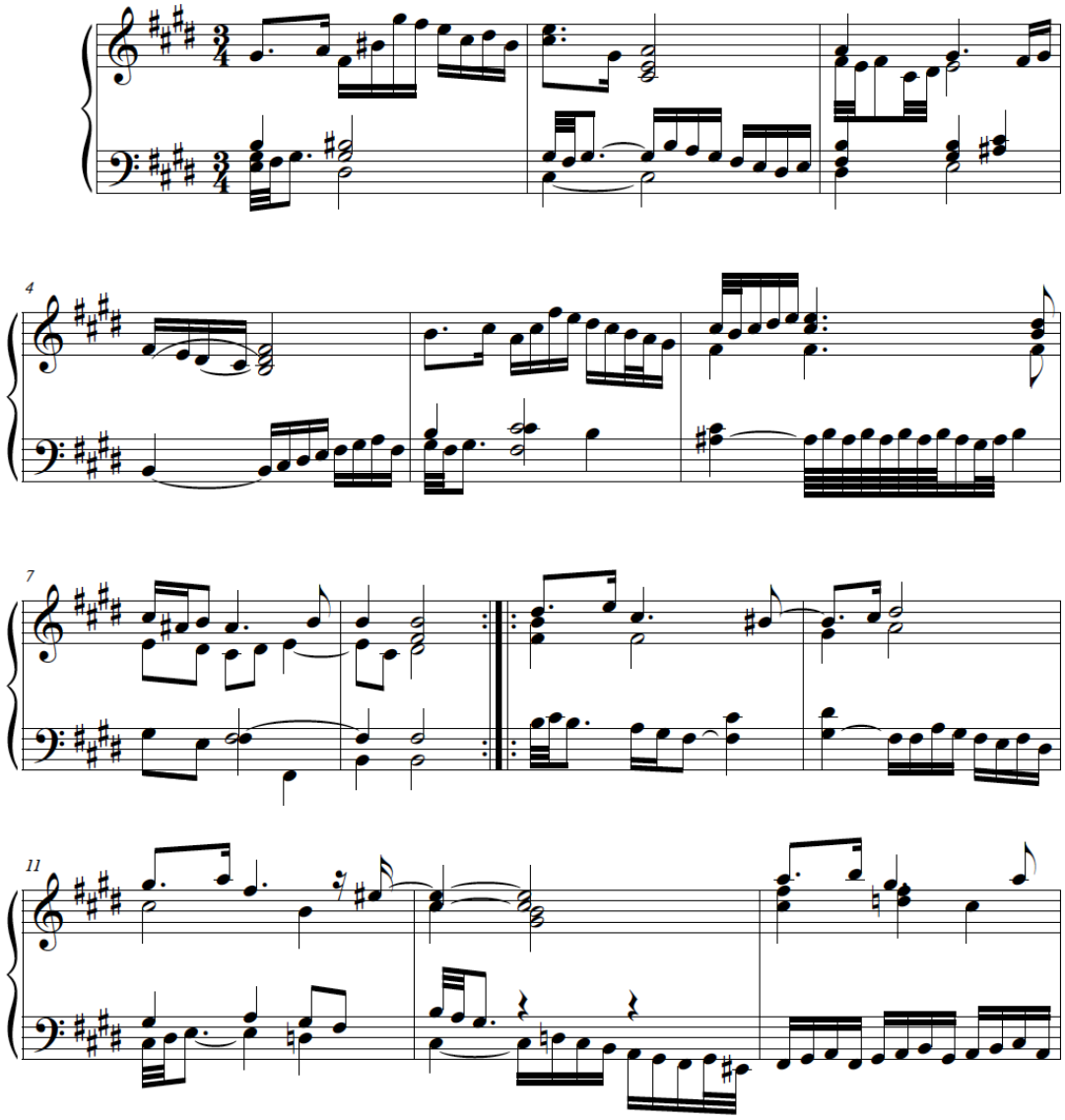
Fig 27 Sarabande from French Suite No. 6 in E Major, BWV 817 – original notation

French Suite No. 6 in E Major, BWV 817

III. Sarabande

J.S. Bach

Ashley Oakley



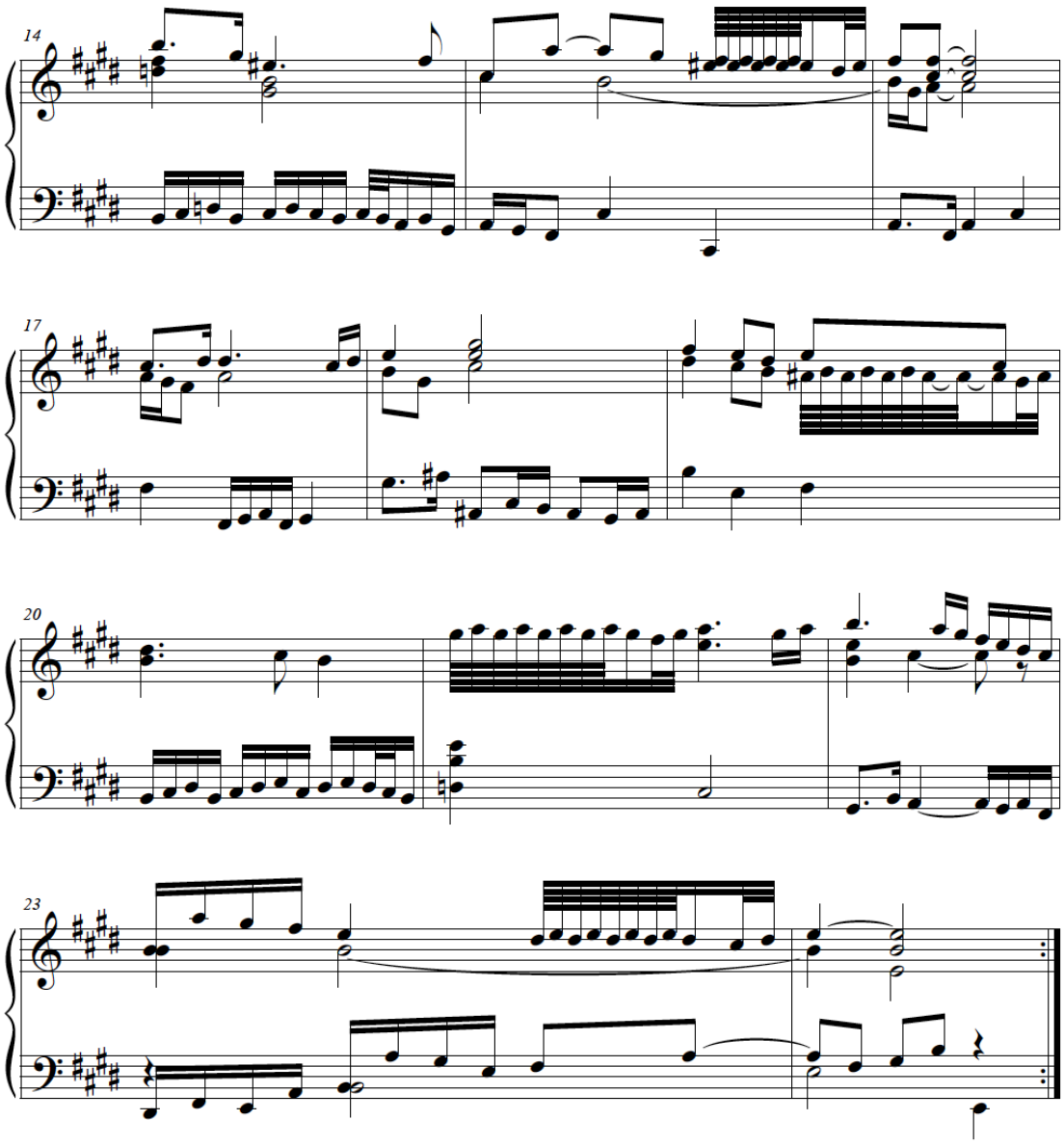


Fig 28 Sarabande from French Suite No. 6 in E Major, BWV 817 – ornamented notation

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Glenn Gould and Piotr Anderszewski are champions of Bach's music and both pianists assume the improvisational liberty to vary and ornament material beyond what is notated in the score. Performances and recordings from these pianists have received accolades of praise and criticism, and their work continues to be debated among those concerned with the proper performance practice of Baroque music. J.S. Bach encapsulated the rhythmical impulses and the ornamental spirit of the dance throughout his suites. He improvised freely in his own performances of his music and instructed others to do the same. Current performance practice mentality dictates one to learn all notes and rhythms perfectly without any kind of deviation, and although this can be helpful in the hopes of attaining technical perfection, it does not depict the way these dances were intended to be performed.

Knowledge and understanding of the harmonic framework and natural rhythmical impulses of the dance can allow the performer to properly ornament and improvise different embellishments throughout both sectional hearings of each dance movement. Flexibility of ornamentation allows the performer to create melodic phrases and rhythmic accentuations according to their whim and encapsulates the spirit and improvisational feeling of the dance. Improvisational performances allow the listener to hear spontaneity and variety throughout each repetition and I believe are consistent with the desires of Baroque composers and the accepted performance practice in the Baroque period.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ashley Oakley is a Baroque specialist currently residing in the Phoenix metro area. She is an Adjunct Faculty member at Paradise Valley Community College and maintains a large private studio of students studying piano and violin. She has performed her transcriptions in various countries including Europe, South Africa and Israel as well as many locations across the US.