

TELEMANN AND THE FRENCH STYLE
REVISITED: TRANSFORMATIVE IMITATION
IN THE ENSEMBLE SUITES (*TWV* 55)

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When Georg Philipp Telemann died in 1767, having enjoyed for decades an enviable reputation throughout Europe, he was the most famous German composer of his generation. The reasons for this are manifold, but one secret of his success was his early and complete mastery of *le goût français* of Lully and his disciples.

Telemann probably became properly acquainted with French music while a school pupil at the Hildesheim Gymnasium (1697–1701) and certainly went to hear the French-style court orchestra at Hanover (the young J. S. Bach trekked from Lüneberg to Celle for much the same reason). Telemann wrote in his 1718 autobiography:

At that time I often had the good fortune to hear the Kapellen at Hanover and Wolfenbüttel. . . . I thus became acquainted with the French style from the former . . . and from both I learned the diverse nature of various instruments.¹

Although his lifelong love affair with Gallic music began while he was still a teenager, further intensive study and practice led to greater things, especially the celebrated mature publications of the late 1720s and 1730s. These include nine ensemble suites,² as well as the dance-

¹Translation from Steven Zohn, “The Ensemble Sonatas of Georg Philipp Telemann: Studies in Style, Genre, and Chronology” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1995), 124.

²The extant works are *TWV* 55: a1, Es1 and g1 from *Six Overtures a 4 ou 6*, (Hamburg, 1736 [The original prints, and the three other suites, were lost in 1945.]) and *TWV* 55: B1, D1 and e1 from *Musique de table* (Hamburg, 1733). Further details of these, and indeed of other ensemble suites mentioned in the text, will be found in