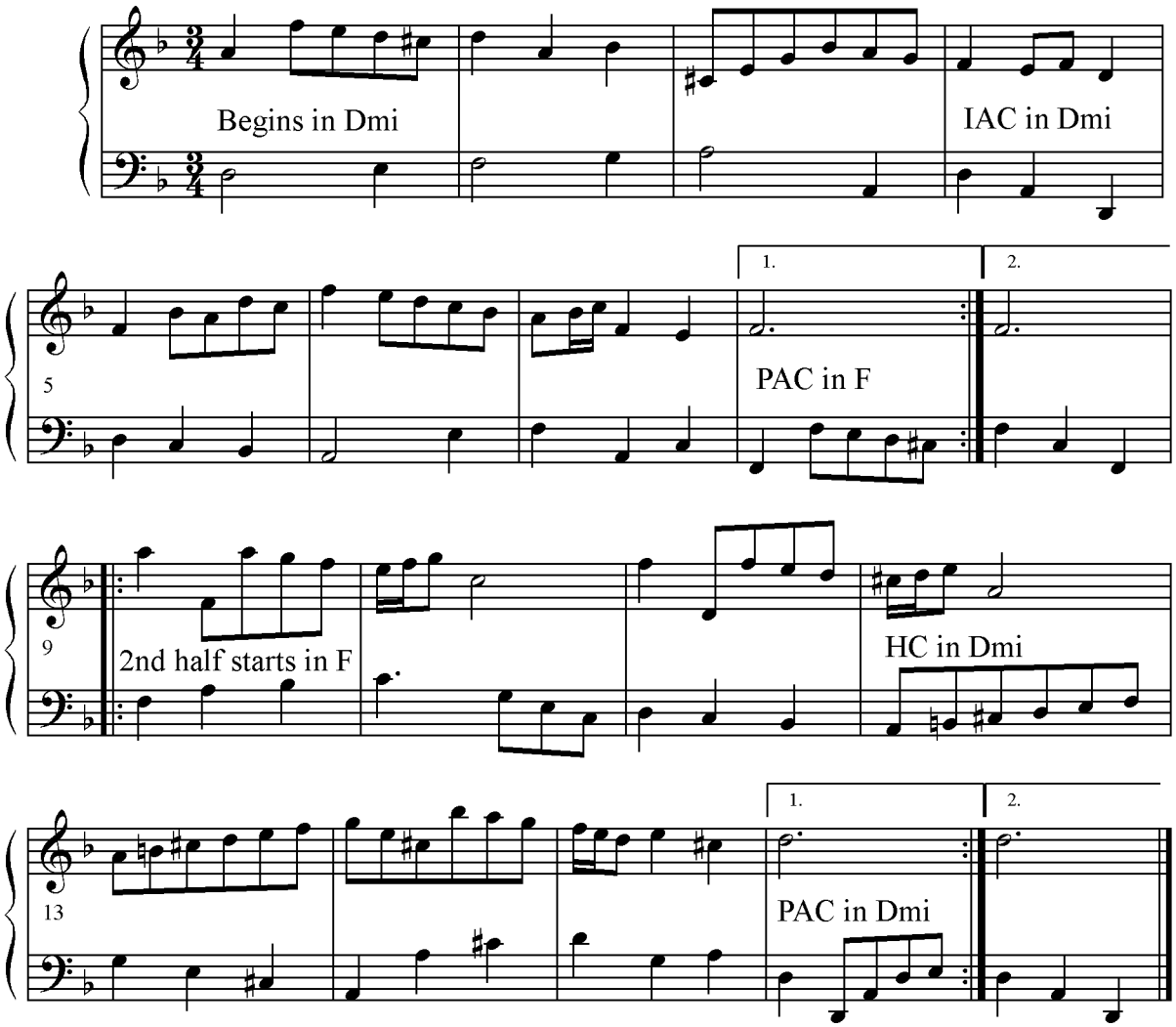
11 – Binary Form Dance Movements

In the Baroque era composers frequently arranged a number of short pieces into *suites*. Suites consisted of a number of fairly short movements in binary form in the same key, in the style of dances popular in the 17th century. A typical Bach suite would often begin with a Prelude, followed by an Allemande, Courante, Saraband, Bouree and Gigue. All of these dance movements have different meters, tempi, and characteristic rhythmic features, but they are all alike in terms of their basic construction - they are all in *binary form*. Characteristic features of binary form is an opening eight measure passage which cadences in a closely related key to the initial key of the form, and which usually has a repeat sign at the end of the eighth bar. The second half of the form will be at least eight measures long, but in most cases is longer. The minuet below is a straightforward example of binary form.

Ex. 11-1 – Menuet from the "Notebook of Anna Magdalena Bach"



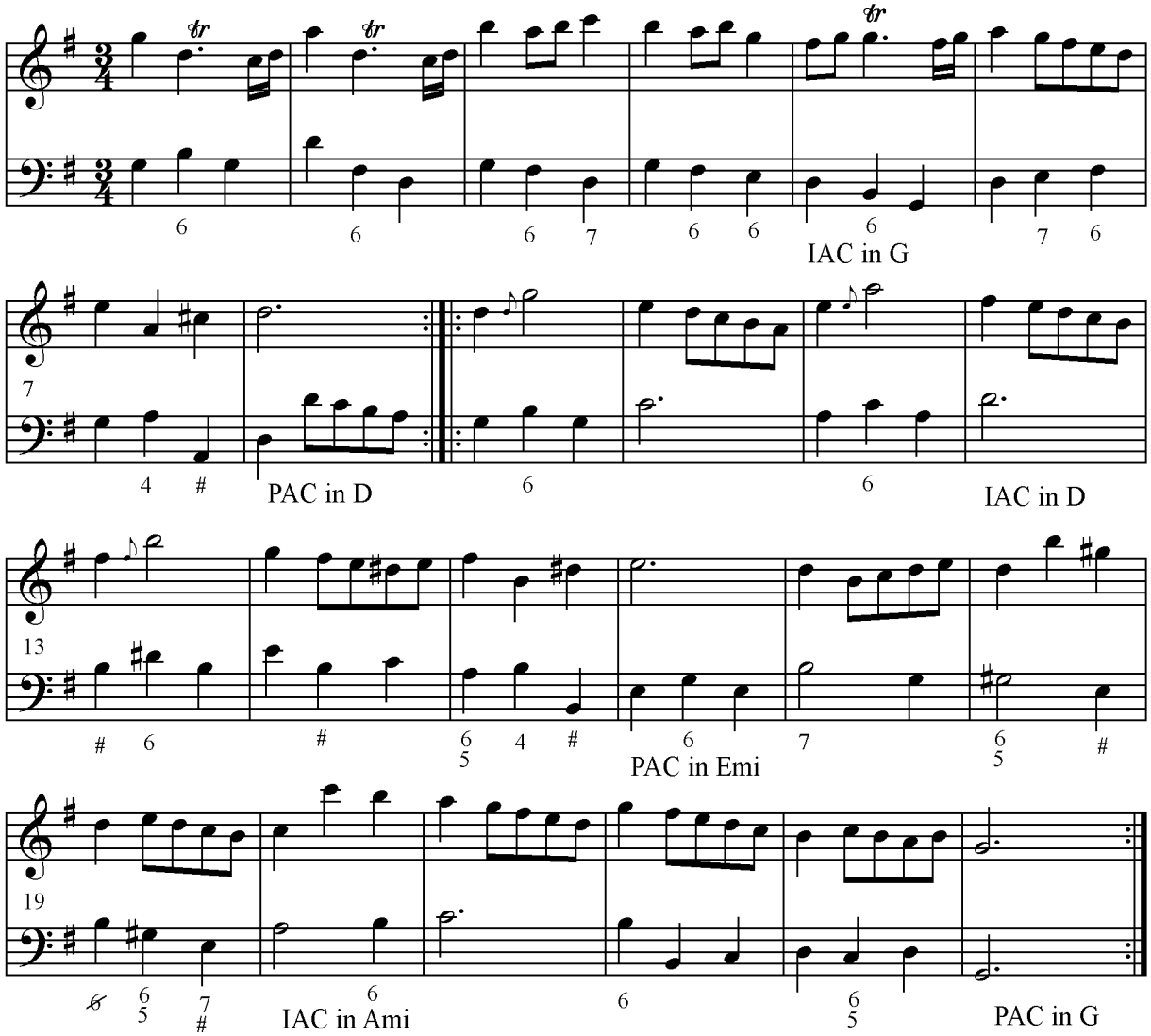
In ex. 11-1 the second section, which starts in bar 9, begins in the closely related key that the first section cadenced in, and often will modulate through other closely related keys until it

cadences back in the original key. Most phrases are four bars long, but some cadences may be obscured by rhythmic motion continuing in one of the voices.

A pair of repeat signs is found in all binary movements, unless the repeats are written out as sometimes occurs to permit the composer to add variations during the repeat. The use of first and second endings is optional.

Example 11-2 is a menuet by Handel in G Major. It is eight measures longer than example 1 and includes figured bass symbols to allow the keyboardist to flesh out the harmonies of the bass line. The added length of this menuet is the result of two extra four bar phrases being added to the second half of the binary form. Since this piece is in a major key the first section modulates to the dominant key in phrase 2 (bars 5-8). The second half begins with a two bar long gesture which is sequenced up a step in bars 11 and 12. The next phrase (13-16) modulates to the closely related key of E minor and ends in a PAC. The following phrase modulates to A minor, another closely related key, before the last four bar phrase which ends back in G Major.

Ex. 11-2 – Handel: *Menuet* from Sonata Op.1, No. 5

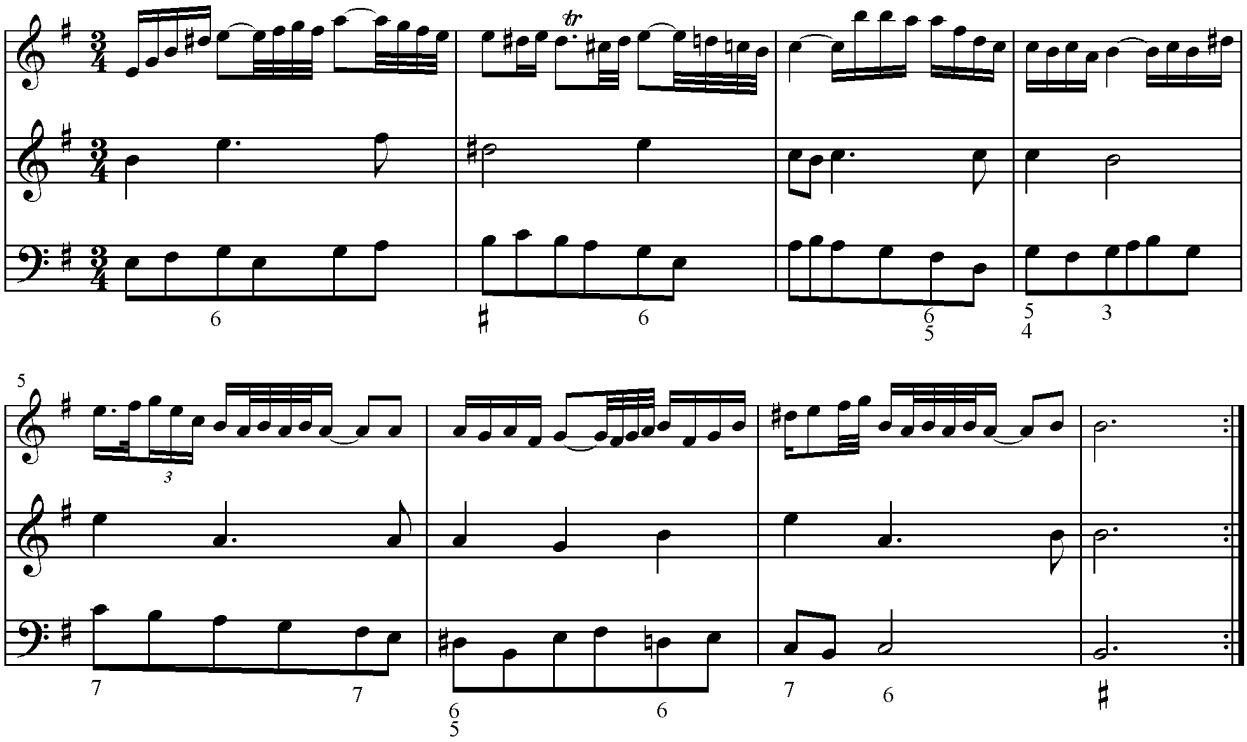


Corelli's *Sarabanda* in ex. 11-3 is an excellent example of the *monothematic* nature of music of this era. The original melody (seen in the middle staff) begins with a rhythmic motive

of ♩ ♩. ♪ which recurs in every odd numbered measure with only slight rhythmic variations, although the pitches and harmony change at each reappearance. A *saraband* is a Baroque dance in a slow triple meter with a pronounced emphasis on beat two. As in the Handel menuet the second half is extended by two phrases and is twice as long as the first half. The first section of this piece is once again eight bars long, but unlike the Bach example the cadence in bar 8 is a half cadence in the initial key of E minor and not a PAC in a closely related key.

The highest staff in example 3 is a transcription of the highly ornamented variation a performer played on a recent recording[1] of this Corelli sonata. Baroque composers expected performers to embellish their music in a manner similar to this rather than slavishly repeating an intentionally simplistic melody. Notice that the notes of the original melody (the middle staff) are incorporated into the florid variation. Unlike the previous examples this one features a bass voice "walking" in continuous eighth notes. It also includes figured bass symbols to allow the keyboard performer to enrich the music harmonically. Unlike the earlier examples the first four bar phrase modulates to the relative major (G) and the second returns to the original key ending in a half cadence in measure eight.

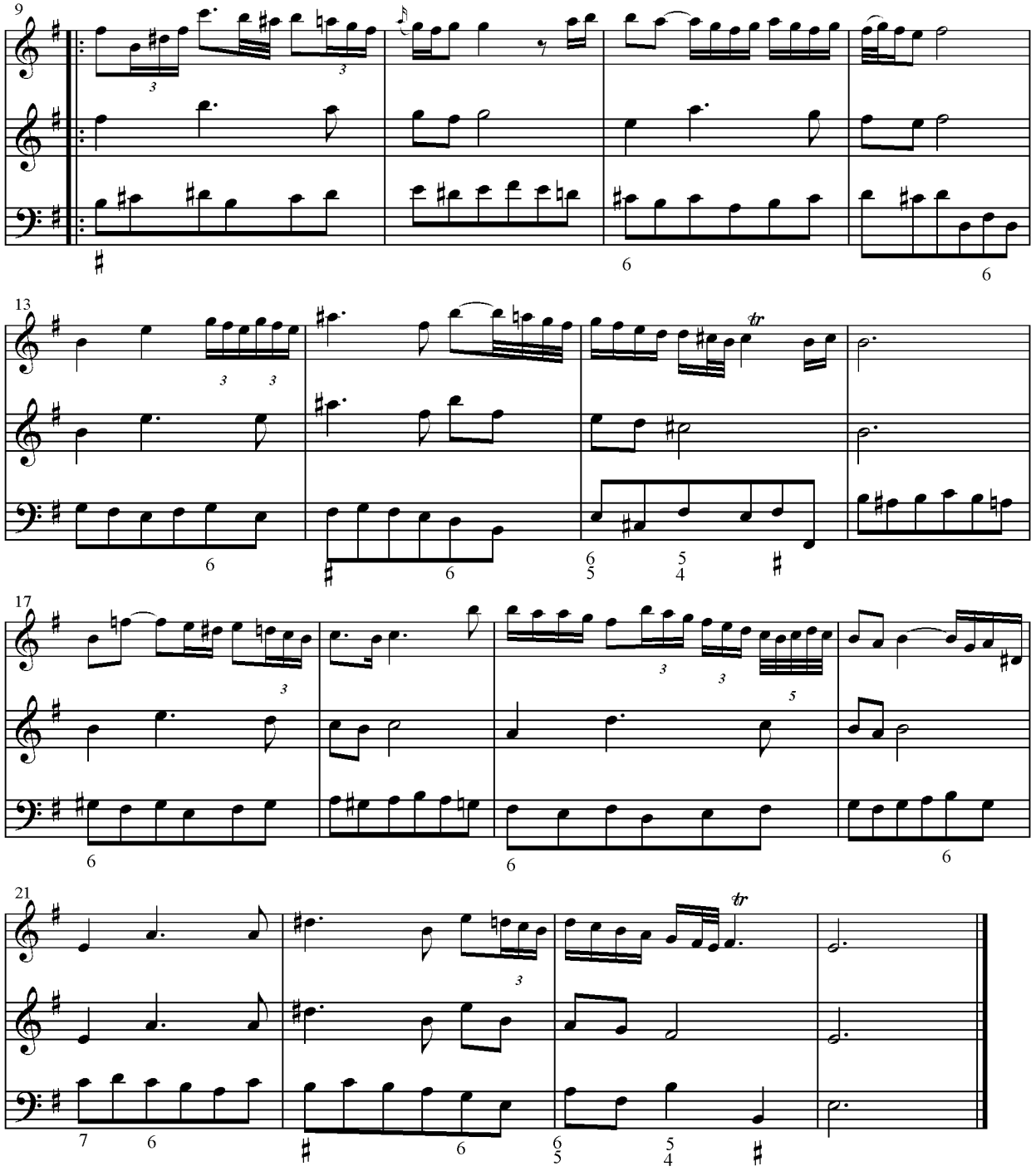
Ex. 11-3 – Corelli: *Sarabanda* from Sonata op.5, No. 8 for violin and continuo



The progression in bars 6 – 8 is frequently used to lead to a half cadence. The tonic chord in bar 6, beat 2, is followed by a minor v6 (bar 6, beat 3) , then a iv6 (bar 7, beats 2 & 3) and then the major V chord in bar 8. This approach to a half cadence is called a *Phrygian half cadence.* The second half of Corelli's *saraband* (ex. 11-3b) is twice as long as the first section, and cadences weakly in D Major in bar 12, but reaches a strong PAC in B minor in bar 16.

[1] The embellishments are transcribed from a 2003 recording by Andrew Manze of the Corelli Violin Sonatas on Harmonia Mundi

Ex. 11-3b – Corelli: *Sarabanda* (second section)



The last eight measure passage (bars 17-24) is virtually an exact sequence of bars 9-16 transposed down a perfect fifth so that the final cadence is back in the original key of E minor. Corelli's original melody contains two unusual and prominent augmented fourth leaps in bars 14 and 17. The embellished variaton includes some very striking chromatic appoggiaturas in bars 9 and 17 which emphasize the minor ninth of the dominant chords heard in these two measures.