

Corelli's Sarabanda and Gavotta for Oboe

Engaging with Baroque Dance Movements

These dances (A5, Grade 4) are a pair of movements from one of the first concertos that young oboists learn.

The Sarabanda and Gavotta were written by the Italian violinist and composer Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713).

The concerto from which they are taken is a Baroque *Sonata da Camera* (chamber sonata) which takes the form of a suite of stylised dances.

Despite their dance suite titles, they were not actually intended for dancing.

The mood of the Sarabanda is slow and stately. In contrast, the Gavotta is lively and rustic.



Learning Objectives

- Understand, identify, and describe the stylistic features of the Sarabanda and Gavotta from Corelli's compositions.
- Identify key musical elements in the two movements.
- Develop the technical and expressive skills required for performing Baroque dance movements on the oboe.
- Interpret and perform Corelli's music using the ABRSM Marking Criteria: Pitch, Time, Tone, Shape, and Performance.

Musical Features

Element	Sarabanda	Gavotta
Tempo	Slow & Stately	Moderate to Lively
Time Signature	Triple	4/4 time
Character	Noble, expressive & solemn	Buoyant & agile
Texture	Homophonic	Contrapuntal
Harmony	Frequent, clear cadences	Simple harmonic progressions
Melodic Style	Ornamented, lyrical oboe line	Repeated motifs, rhythmic

Key Teaching Points

Focus on secure technique, stylistic awareness, and expressive interpretation.

Technical Goals

Sarabanda	Gavotta
Breath control	Crisp tonguing
Legato phrasing	Light articulation

Tonal warmth	Rhythmic drive
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Musical Detail

Sarabanda	Gavotta
Subtle emphasis of beat 2	Upbeat entries (anacrusis)
Beautifully shaped cadences	Dance-like momentum
Well-controlled trill	Contrasting articulation

Lesson Flow

This outline offers a flexible structure for a 30–45 minute lesson. It can be adapted to group or individual teaching.

1. Warm-Up (5–10 mins)

- Begin with breathing and articulation exercises tailored to the technical goals:
 - **Sarabanda:** long notes with expressive shaping. Explore legato phrasing and breath control to support tonal warmth (**Tone, Shape**).
 - **Gavotta:** Use crisp tonguing and rhythmic exercises to develop agility in the articulation. Always maintain a firm pulse (**Time, Pitch**).
- Introduce clapping exercises to internalise the rhythmic feel of each dance (**Aural**).

2. Context & Listening (5 mins)

- Briefly introduce Corelli and the concept of the concerto and dance suite in the Baroque period (**Performance**).
- Play short excerpts of each movement and ask students to describe the music's character (**Aural**).
- Use Baroque dance images to help visualise mood and movement.

Teacher's Tip:

Revise F major and D minor scales and arpeggios (from Grade 2) to embed the tonality of each movement (**Pitch, Scales & Arpeggios**)

3. Score Exploration (10–15 mins)

- Look at the score together:
 - Identify time signatures, cadences, sequences, and ornamentation (**Shape, Theory**).
 - Use coloured pens to mark phrasing, dynamics, and articulation (**Performance, Theory**).
- Discuss stylistic features and how they relate to Baroque performance practice.

Teacher's Tip:

Use coloured pens to mark cadences and sequences. Ask students to explain how these shape musical flow (**Shape, Time, Theory**).

4. Focused Practice (10–15 mins)

- Work on short passages from each movement:
 - **Sarabanda**: shape cadences, emphasise beat 2, explore tonal warmth (**Shape, Tone**).
 - **Gavotta**: highlight anacrusis, maintain rhythmic drive, contrast articulation (**Time, Performance**).
- Encourage students to experiment with expressive choices and reflect on ABRSM Criteria (**Pitch, Time, Tone, Shape, Performance**).

Teacher's Tips:

Model phrasing with breath gestures (**Shape, Tone**).

Use dance imagery to inspire appropriate tone colour (**Tone, Performance**).

Focus on rhythmic clarity for newer learners (**Time**).

Encourage close listening to intonation, especially on interval leaps (**Pitch**).

5. Aural & Musicianship Integration (5–10 mins)

- Use Q&A rhythmic dialogue and echo exercises to reinforce metre and character (**Time, Aural**).
- Invite students to identify musical features by ear and describe their expressive impact (**Aural**).

6. Wrap-Up & Extension

- Reflect on stylistic differences and performance challenges.
- Suggest one extension activity (e.g., mini performance, composition task, or further listening).

Developing Aural and Musicianship Skills

- Compare the rhythmic feel of each movement through interactive rhythmic clapping: physically clap or tap the characteristic rhythms of the Sarabanda (slow, stately) and Gavotta (lively, upbeat) together. Develop this into a Q&A rhythmic dialogue.
- Play one of the distinctive rhythmic patterns from either movement (2–4 bars) on the oboe or piano and encourage accurate repetition with a firm pulse. Ask students to state the metre without looking at the score.
- Play a melodic phrase from one of the movements (2–4 bars) and encourage accurate repetition with a firm pulse.
- Extend the above to passages from other (unfamiliar) movements of the concerto. Ask students to describe the musical character and explain the musical features that suggest it.
- Look at the score together and identify the cadences and sequences.

Ideas for Visual Engagement

- Baroque Dance Posters: Display images or posters illustrating Baroque dance poses to help students visualise the character of each movement.
- Score Marking: Use coloured pens/highlighters to annotate dynamics, phrasing, and ornaments directly on the music.

- Live Demonstration: Where possible, use live demonstration to model stylistic features.

Extension Activities

- Research other dance movements from Corelli's suites (e.g., Allemanda, Giga) and compare their features.
- Compose a short Baroque-inspired dance for oboe, following the stylistic traits explored in the lesson.
- Arrange a mini performance for peers or parents featuring Corelli's Sarabanda and Gavotta.

Further Listening and Resources

- Recordings of [Corelli's Opus 5 violin sonatas](#).
- Recordings of [Handel's oboe concerto in G minor, HWV 287](#) (especially the Sarabande).
- Video clips of Baroque dance.