

# BACH

## THE CELLO SUITES

PAVLOS  
CARVALHO

Suites 1 – 3 VOL.1



# BACH

## THE CELLO SUITES

### Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007 21:33

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|------------------|------|
| 1. Prélude       | 2:44 |
| 2. Allemande     | 6:18 |
| 3. Courante      | 2:49 |
| 4. Sarabande     | 4:02 |
| 5. Menuet I & II | 3:42 |
| 6. Gigue         | 1:58 |

### Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1008 22:17

- |                   |      |
|-------------------|------|
| 7. Prélude        | 4:23 |
| 8. Allemande      | 4:29 |
| 9. Courante       | 1:59 |
| 10. Sarabande     | 5:28 |
| 11. Menuet I & II | 3:20 |
| 12. Gigue         | 2:38 |

### Cello Suite No. 3 in C major, BWV 1009 24:10

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|--------------------|------|
| 13. Prélude        | 4:02 |
| 14. Allemande      | 4:37 |
| 15. Courante       | 3:07 |
| 16. Sarabande      | 5:14 |
| 17. Bourrée I & II | 4:09 |
| 18. Gigue          | 3:01 |

There has not been a more important or influential body of cello music written before or since the 6 Bach Cello Suites of 1720. Now treated almost reverentially by cellists, for two hundred years they were virtually unknown until a young Catalan cellist, Pablo Casals, discovered them in a little shop and breathed life back into these masterpieces. For some the music is deeply spiritual, for others the pieces are closely connected with nature... or perhaps it is the ingenuity of their structure and symmetry that inspires people to be moved by the Cello Suites. Whatever the reasons, people always come back to Bach. One may practise the epic sonatas by Brahms, then move to Beethoven or Rachmaninov... perhaps work at the big concertos... Dvorak, Shostakovich, Elgar, Schumann. These beautiful masterpieces come and go according to what performances demand. Bach, however, is always there... part of the daily necessity of the cellist's routine, whether preparing for a concert or just to clear the mind and soul for oneself, despite what else

one is practising for concerts. Through, seemingly the most simple means, Bach speaks to the soul and the intellect at once. Like the best fairy tales or myths, his music is layered and can be enjoyed and understood at different levels at different times of our lives. The sheer playfulness and light tunes for an 8-year-old beginner, the labyrinthine puzzle of subtle connections to be solved by the more experienced musician and academic. He is everywhere and a deeply rooted part of our lives, from performances in the greatest concert halls to contemporary films, used as music of political statement, as exciting imaginative music to be explored by the greatest jazz musicians, for mothers to soothe their babies, for people to celebrate weddings or deep consolation at funerals. The profound imagination behind the cathartic simplicity of Bach's Cello Suites makes his music a companion for life for the listener and a mystery to be constantly re-examined and explored by the performer.

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Amongst the most revered masterworks that thrill audiences and musicians alike, hardly does the word 'enigmatic' feel so apt than to describe Bach's Cello Suites. Most likely the Suites were composed somewhere between 1717 and 1723 when Bach served as Kapellmeister in Cothen. Their genesis is shrouded in secrecy. With the manuscript lost, the Cello Suites survived as a copy made by his second wife, Anna Magdalena Bach. The numerous errors and variations in the three surviving 18th-century copies suggest the dedicated efforts of now-forgotten individual musicians who were held enough in awe of these works, that they hurriedly wrote out memento copies to take away with them. It was only in 1825 – two years before the death of Beethoven; twenty-five years after the birth of Schumann – that they finally saw their publication. Nearly sixty-five years later, in 1889, an edition of the

Cello Suites fell into the hands of the prodigious cellist Pablo Casals. The chance find of the teenage Casals as he browsed a second-hand book shop changed the status of these neglected pedagogical exercises forever. In 1936 the sixty-year-old Casals was finally convinced to commit his interpretation of the Suites to record. The project at London's Abbey Road finally sealed the Suites' fate as the rite of passage for every cellist who wanted to legitimately claim the mantle of a true virtuoso.

With all the innovation that music has witnessed over the centuries it can be hard to identify what is so mesmerising about works that, like the Cello Suites, feel to us like long-established icons. To put it into perspective, however, a gap of almost two centuries separates the conception of the Cello Suites by Bach and another significant attempt at

composing for the unaccompanied cello. Indeed 1915 saw the Bach Cello Suites inspire Zoltan Kodály and Max Reger to pay homage to the instrument and Bach's ingenuity. The result was a century in which more music was composed for solo cello than for any other instrument, with the sole exception of the piano.

When Bach had dared to conceive of writing these substantial cycles for an instrument, he himself did not play, he had undertaken to give a voice to an instrument that was relegated to the role of accompanist. Hidden in the perfect symmetry of a systematic cycle of six six-movement dance suites (Prélude; Allemande; Courante; Sarabande; Galanteries (Menuets in Nos. 1 & 2; Bourrées in Nos. 3 & 4; Gavottes in Nos. 5 & 6), is a miraculous unveiling of the cello's potential. What Bach asked of it was not only to take the limelight –

exposing us to that unforgettable and haunting experience of hearing the most human-like 'voice' of a string instrument – but also to provide its own accompaniment in all but five movements in the entire set of six suites (the second Menuet of Suite No. 1; second Menuet of Suite No. 2; second Bourrée of Suite No. 3; Gigue of Suite No. 4; and Sarabande of Suite No. 5).

Filled with demanding string crossings and chord shifts that explore the entire timbral range of the instrument, the Cello Suites demand as much ingenuity from performers today as they must have in Bach's day. The thrill that the Cello Suites, however, contain is also their wonderful evolution as the cycle progresses.

Whatever prompted Bach to create his Cello Suites, their power in expressing the joyful, sorrowful and glorious continues to unite and inspire.

To borrow the words of Steven Isserlis: "All human emotion and spiritual states come together in these dances to form a unified 'Sacred Mystery'". They elate the humble, serving the cello into an all-encompassing voice that transcends its self to speak of sublime perfection.

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**Pavlos Carvalho** has been a prize-winner in international music competitions in England, Italy, Germany and Russia. He has performed as a solo and chamber musician in venues such as the Purcell room, Royal Albert Hall, Cadogan Hall and the Teatro dal Verme, Milan and recorded for the BBC. As well as regular performances of the complete Bach suites and Beethoven sonatas in the Brighton and Chichester festivals over the last years, he has performed concertos with orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic, Southern Pro Musica, The Covent Garden Chamber Orchestra, Sussex Symphony Orchestra, and Chichester Symphony Orchestra.

Pavlos is one of the founding members and Artistic Director of Ensemble Reza and as such is also involved in many outreach and community projects. He is currently the director of the Pro Corda cello courses and is a founding member and director of the Rebetiko Carnival, a charity and festival dedicated to the music of Greece and Asia minor.



