



J. S. Bach

THE CELLO SUITES, VOLUME 1

Suites 1, 2 & 5

Lynden Cranham, Baroque Cello



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1–6. Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007	20:32
1. I. Prélude	2:48
2. II. Allemande	6:03
3. III. Courante	2:55
4. IV. Sarabande	3:13
5. V. Menuets I & II	3:26
6. VI. Gigue	2:07
7–12. Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1008	21:42
7. I. Prélude	4:57
8. II. Allemande	2:01
9. III. Courante	2:19
10. IV. Sarabande	5:13
11. V. Menuets I & II	3:49
12. VI. Gigue	3:23
13–18. Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor, BWV 1011	27:27
13. I. Prélude	7:10
14. II. Allemande	5:37
15. III. Courante	2:28
16. IV. Sarabande	3:48
17. V. Gavottes I & II	5:54
18. VI. Gigue	2:30

TOTAL TIME: 71:43

My earliest memories of Bach were overwhelming, sitting in the huge and resonant space of Westminster Cathedral listening to an organ recital. I subsequently became fascinated (as a listener and a player) by the Bach Cello Suites. It was especially poignant for me, as part of the orchestra during John Eliot Gardiner's Bach Cantata Pilgrimage, not only to play near the font where Bach had been baptised, in the Georgenkirche in Eisenach, but also to play in Köthen, where he probably composed the Cello Suites. The idea of recording the Suites had been at the back of my mind for most of my career, and when playing part of one of them in a chamber-music concert a few years ago I realised that I'd found an ideal venue for doing such a recording: the beautiful small church of St Peter and St Mary in Fishbourne, West Sussex, complete with its warm, intimate acoustic. The arrival of COVID-19 meant that this normally busy church was much more available than usual. As one concert after another was cancelled it gradually became clear to the recording engineer, the producer and myself that, dire as this situation was, it provided the perfect opportunity to begin recording the Suites. So, braving the cold (and maintaining strict social distancing), we recorded Suite I in G major and Suite II in D minor at the church in December 2020. Soon after that, in April 2021, we recorded Suite V in its original scordatura version; this needed to be recorded alone, as in that way I was able to keep the cello with the A string tuned down to G. Those three Suites seem to me to make an interesting contrast – the first two relatively conventional in sonority, the fifth introducing something entirely different. We thus decided to issue these three as the first volume of this two-volume series.

Lynden Cranham

What we don't know about Bach's Six Suites for Cello could fill (indeed, has filled) many a musicological page. Partly this is a result of Bach's relative obscurity during his lifetime and for some considerable time after; partly it is because the instrument for which he wrote the Suites was – at least in his part of Europe – little known as a purveyor of solos, still less ones unaccompanied by others. But whatever the reason, there has always been an air of mystery about the pieces, one that their gathering sanctity over the last century and more has done little to dispel.

The origin of most of this uncertainty comes from the simple fact that no manuscript of the Suites survives in Bach's handwriting. Because of this sad lack, performers are obliged

to rely on a number of copies, none of which entirely agrees with the others, and all of which present signs of apparent casualness about performance indications (particularly slurs) that these days are of intimate concern to performers. By common consent, the most reliable of these copies is that written by the composer's second wife, Anna Magdalena Bach, herself a musician of some distinction (she was a singer at the court of Anhalt-Köthen, where Bach was Kapellmeister from 1717 to 1723). Also of significance, although more prone to error than the generally conscientious Anna Magdalena, is a copy by the organist Johann Peter Kellner, one of Bach's most prolific copyists. To make matters even more confusing, it seems plain that Anna Magdalena's source text was different from Kellner's (what might be considered their "mistakes" are not always in common), which means that we must posit two lost J.S. Bach autographs (one probably a working copy and the other a fair copy). Further sources, all likely to derive from Kellner, are less important as they date from the late eighteenth century or later still; but each has its value and each poses further questions.

From this meagre material we cannot securely date the Cello Suites, although it seems very likely that they were written in Bach's years in Köthen (when most of his instrumental music was composed); nor can we know for whom they were written (again, the personnel at Köthen seem the probable place to look, with the resident viol player, Christian Ferdinand Abel, a strong suspect). What might be a significant piece of information, however, is that in both the Anna Magdalena and the Kellner manuscripts the six Suites are paired with the Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, which definitely date from the Köthen years. This proximity of solo violin and solo cello works seems to point to an obvious coupling, and suggests a possible didactic purpose for both collections. It is, though, apparent immediately that the violin pieces are far more complex and ambitious: perhaps the cello Suites were written first, in preparation for the violin works; or perhaps Bach simply regarded the cello (and its scant solo performing tradition) as a more fragile vessel for complex musical thoughts.

Given these tenuous musical traces and historical uncertainty, and the fact that Bach's reputation in general was not high in the musical culture of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it should come as little surprise that we have very few examples of the Suites being performed publicly in the century after their composition, although they evidently survived as didactic pieces. In the nineteenth century various famous cello

teachers tried to effect “rehabilitation” by adding piano accompaniments, something also attempted by Robert Schumann. But the definitive emergence of the Suites – as pieces at the centre of every cellist’s repertoire – came only in the twentieth century, when the renowned Catalan cellist Pablo Casals began to perform them and when, in the 1930s, he made a still-famous complete recording.

An additional problem with the Suites is that the exact nature of the instrument(s) for which they were written continues to be in some doubt. String instruments of the violin family in the eighteenth century were not as fixed as they are now, with a particularly bewildering array of bass instruments, some tuned differently, some with more than four strings, some played between the legs (so-called instruments *da gamba*) but others played on the shoulder (*da spalla*). In this respect, Bach’s Suites present two particular problems. The fifth Suite, as specified in Anna Magdalena’s manuscript, calls for an alternative tuning, with the uppermost string tuned down from A to G, an alteration that lends a darker, viola *da gamba*-like sonority to the instrument, and perhaps goes hand-in-hand with the evidently French-influenced musical style of this Suite (the French held on to the viola *da gamba* as a solo instrument much longer than did other regions in Europe). The sixth Suite asks for a yet more radical change, Anna Magdalena’s copy stipulating that a five-string instrument is required (with an additional E string above the A string). To play this Suite on the usual four-string cello requires an extended technique not found elsewhere in Bach’s cello music (indeed not found in any cello music of this period). Although there have been recent claims that a violoncello *da spalla* is the most appropriate choice, many performers these days decide to use a so-called “violoncello piccolo”, an instrument slightly smaller than the standard cello (the reduced size necessary to lessen the tension on the added E string). This smaller five-string cello was, we can be sure, known to Bach, as he used it as an obbligato instrument in several of his later cantatas; and it is the instrument that will be used in Vol. 2 of the present recording.

The term “suite” is, of course, widely used in eighteenth-century instrumental music, and – as a minimum – involved a sequence of four standard dances: the Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue, all of which – as danced music – had belonged to an earlier age and had now become idealised as instrumental forms and manners. To these basic ingredients, Bach added to all his Cello Suites two further movements: an opening, improvisatory *Prélude*; and, before the final Gigue, a pair of so-called “galantries”, additional movements

to extend and vary further the sequence (Menuets in Suites I and II; Bourrées in Suites III and IV; Gavottes in Suites V and VI). The unvarying nature of the sequence of dances in the Cello Suites is one aspect that encourages us to think of them as basically didactic pieces: works that, as in so many of Bach's collections, set out to demonstrate the compositional and technical possibilities of a given format.

However, within this fixed, unvarying structure, the level of musical variety within the Suites is remarkable. In the three Suites recorded here, for example (I, II and V), the opening Préludes could not be more contrasting. The Prélude to Suite I is very similar to that which starts Bach's famous keyboard collection, Book I of the Well-Tempered Clavier: it is frankly improvisatory, with its simple arpeggios describing an exploration of the harmonic possibilities the opening key provides. In sharp contrast, the Prelude to Suite II is a different kind of exploration, one in what the Germans like to call *thematische Arbeit*, the patient working-out of an initial musical motive into myriad melodic and expressive possibilities. And then the Prelude to Suite V is different again: it shows the dominant French influence in this Suite, being set in the form of a two-part French overture, with an opening section characterised by prominent dotted rhythms followed by a faster, fugal section.

This level of contrast, the sense in which the Suites demonstrate the sheer variety that the "dance suite" format can accommodate, continues throughout, although each dance movement clearly has certain characteristic rhythms that are always maintained. The three Allemandes in Suites I, II and V, for example, in some ways repeat the pattern of difference seen in their Préludes: in Suite I the Allemande is clearly improvisatory and exploratory; in Suite II it has a more definite shape and musical "argument"; and in Suite V it again parades its French influence, with prominent dotted rhythms. At the expressive heart of all the Suites is always the "slow movement" of the Sarabande, with its characteristic emphasis on the second beat of a triple time motion. In the first two Suites, this solemnity is wedded to an elaborate use of chordal effects, sketching in complex chromatic harmonies that might underpin the dance, but in Suite V there are no chords at all. Instead, the legato playing that is called for is movingly applied in a strange, hyper-expressive angularity of melodic shape.

Bach's Suites for cello are, as mentioned at the start, a continuing enigma. Born in obscure circumstances, written for an instrument that had virtually no history of such compositions,

practically unknown to the general public for a century, they have in the last hundred years ascended to occupy the peak of the cello repertoire, their well-nigh infinite variety, and the multiple decisions they demand of the performer, assuring that they will, for the foreseeable future, continue to inspire new interpretations and new groups of devoted listeners.

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Lynden Cranham studied with Jennifer Ward Clarke at the Junior Royal College of Music, with Douglas Cameron at the Royal Academy of Music, and subsequently with Maurice Eisenberg in New York and Christopher Bunting in London. A keen chamber musician, Lynden toured England and Germany with the Burnell Piano Trio, and America and New Zealand with the Accordo Perfetto Piano Quartet. Her love of baroque music, and especially of playing continuo, led her to the baroque cello and soon she began to play for the Academy of Ancient Music. Lynden lived for a time in the US where she played concertos and gave recitals, and taught cello at Cornell University, but she also focused on playing in ensembles and giving recitals on baroque cello. Since leaving America she has recorded and toured widely with such groups as the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, the English Baroque Soloists and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. Lynden also has a long-standing interest in nineteenth-century literature, and has a PhD from Birkbeck, University of London, focusing on aspects of music in nineteenth-century London. Lynden plays on a German cello, circa 1750.





WHR075. Recorded at 24-bit 192KHz resolution. Recorded in the Church of St Peter & St Mary, Fishbourne, West Sussex, UK on 8th-10th December 2020 (Suites Nos. 1 & 2) & 7th-8th April 2021 (Suite No. 5). Front Cover Photograph: Lucy Davis. Back Cover Photograph: Alan Frost (<https://alanfrostphotography.com>). Booklet Design: Hannah Whale, Fruition Creative Concepts & Willowhayne Records. Recording Engineering & Editing: Mark Hartt-Palmer. Recording Production: Emma Parker. © & © 2022, Willowhayne Records Ltd, Funtley, Hampshire, UK. <https://willowhaynerecords.com>. All rights of the manufacturer and of the owner of the recorded work reserved. Unauthorised hiring, lending, public performance, broadcast and copying of this recording prohibited. MCPS. Manufactured in the UK.