Bach The Cello Suites

MICHAEL GOLDSCHLAGER
## CD1

**Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV1007** [18’49]

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I. Prelude</td>
<td>2’45</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>II. Allemande</td>
<td>4’43</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>III. Courante</td>
<td>2’51</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>IV. Sarabande</td>
<td>2’59</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>V. Menuets I &amp; II</td>
<td>3’41</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>VI. Gigue</td>
<td>1’49</td>
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**Cello Suite No. 3 in C major, BWV1009** [24’10]

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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I. Prelude</td>
<td>3’43</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>II. Allemande</td>
<td>4’33</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>III. Courante</td>
<td>3’35</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>IV. Sarabande</td>
<td>5’01</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>V. Bourrées I &amp; II</td>
<td>4’00</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>VI. Gigue</td>
<td>3’18</td>
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**Cello Suite No. 6 in D major, BWV1012** [34’31]

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I. Prelude</td>
<td>5’20</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>II. Allemande</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>III. Courante</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>IV. Sarabande</td>
<td>5’06</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>V. Gavottes I &amp; II</td>
<td>4’56</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>VI. Gigue</td>
<td>4’17</td>
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**Total Playing Time** 77’44
CD2

Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor, BWV1008

1. Prelude 4’06
2. Allemande 3’33
3. Courante 2’12
4. Sarabande 5’13
5. Menuets I & II 3’35
6. Gigue 2’45

Total Playing Time 21’26

Cello Suite No. 4 in E-flat major, BWV1010

7. Prelude 3’39
8. Allemande 4’00
9. Courante 3’29
10. Sarabande 4’17
11. Bourrées I & II 5’26
12. Gigue 2’47

Total Playing Time 23’39

Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor, BWV1011

13. Prelude 6’57
14. Allemande 5’36
15. Courante 2’15
16. Sarabande 4’40
17. Gavottes I & II 5’22
18. Gigue 2’08

Total Playing Time 26’59

Total Playing Time 72’18

Michael Goldschlager cello
There is, if you will, a suite of equations that the performer needs to balance in formulating an individual interpretation of Bach’s solo suites for cello. To date, no original manuscript has been found that is in J.S. Bach’s own hand. We are left with several period sources; of particular interest are those in the hand of his second wife, Anna Magdalena, and his contemporary Johann Peter Kellner.

The cellist’s need to balance what we believe Bach actually wrote with what he actually did write is but one consideration. (There is a metaphorical Rosetta Stone in the Fifth Suite – his C minor creation – which will be discussed presently.) Another is the instrument itself. This recording was made using a cello made by François Fourrier Nicolas in 1780. Though made some thirty years after Bach’s death and commissioned by the impresario Salomon, the instrument is modern, in the sense that its neck has been elongated from its original length, the set of the neck changed, and various other alterations made to bring it to what is standard for today. Both of the bows used in the recording were made by Eugène Nicolas Sartory, some time around the beginning of the 20th century. A spike, and strings made of steel and tungsten complete the outfit. Obviously, this is a significant departure from what Bach would have heard at the time of the composition of the Suites, both colouristically and in terms of the range of available dynamics.

As a result, the equations extend to cover questions of period performance practice in the context of the use of modern equipment. Within this general consideration are more specific matters, such as the question of whether the bowings indicated in the existing scores reflect period-specific performance style – and whether that style was to some extent determined by the properties of the equipment of the time. As just one example, the bow that would have been used by a cellist in the time of Bach would almost certainly have been convex in shape, sporting a much narrower band of hair. Because of that shape, there was far less tension in the hair. Add to this the fact that the bow was held at a point far closer to the centre than it is today. Combine these mechanical and physical properties of the bow with the fact that the cello’s bridge was far less curved than the modern one, and we know that the execution of three- and four-note chords needs to be different with the modern equipment. Similarly, 18th-century bows and the corresponding modern examples are each able to produce articulations that are more problematic or even impossible with their counterparts.

Respect for style is an important consideration in my interpretations. Vibrato, for example, is employed in a way that is consistent with the performance practice of the time, in that it is used to colour certain notes expressively for ‘affective’ purposes. However, it is my view that the performer should approach Bach’s music as if it were new, rather than old, music. I am of the opinion that Bach would have relished
the opportunity to hear his music on new and evolving instruments, in the same way that his Well-Tempered Clavier demonstrates such exploration. Bach was renowned as an improviser and many of his organ toccatas demonstrate that propensity. In this spirit, I have chosen, where appropriate, to add ornamentation and improvised material. Aesthetics change with the times and we, the listeners of today, are not the audiences of 1730 – and though this does not give performers licence to do whatever they feel, I believe that we are free to capture the spirit of the composer without having to adhere rigidly to 18th-century performance practice (which in any case was never rigid).

The Suites themselves are diverse in their character and spirit, though all operate within a structural framework which varies only in the penultimate dance movements, which in Suites 1 and 2 take the form of minuets, in 3 and 4, bourrées and in 5 and 6, gavottes. Unlike the Violin Sonatas and Partitas, the movements of the Cello Suites are given only French titles: Prelude, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Menuet / Gavotte / Bourrée, and Gigue. These movements were never intended to be danced to, but the forms and spirit of the dances need to be considered at all times. The sarabande, for example, is a product of 16th-century Spain. It was no longer being danced in the time of Bach, but we hear its steps in his music: firm first and second beats, with the latter often slurred over to the third beat – probably suggesting the dragging of the dancer’s foot.

These (non-literal) references to dance style offer the performer another insight: they are dances of different countries. The allemande has its origins in Germany, minuets, bourrées and gavottes in France, and courantes and gigues came in both French and Italian varieties. Bach’s preludes differ in style as well, with that of the C minor Suite in the French style, and the others in that of the Italian Baroque. The intersection of Bach’s cosmopolitan stylistic vocabulary with that of the period instrument dictated for me some indications for such matters as tempi: in very basic terms, Italianate movements require Italianate treatment, with fewer temporal liberties, and French movements need more ebb and flow and flexibility. It is however vexing to consider why Bach chose to use the title Prelude for all six of the Cello Suites, regardless of their style, whereas in works such as the Violin Partitas he is disposed to choosing the word Preludio instead.

Space does not permit an in-depth analysis of the individual movements, but a matter of great interest to me was what I referred to above as the Rosetta Stone: the Fifth Suite. Research suggests that Bach wrote the Cello Suites some time between the years 1720 and 1723, during which period he was Kapellmeister (Director of Music) at the court of Anhalt-Köthen. He wrote a great number of important
instrumental works during this time, including his ‘Brandenburg’ Concertos, the Orchestral Suites and his solo violin works. Some 15 years later, however, probably around 1740, give or take a year or two, Bach transcribed the Fifth (C minor) Cello Suite for the lute. That work (BWV995) offers great insight into the mind of the composer. Of paramount importance is the fact that the manuscript for BWV995 exists in Bach’s own hand, whereas the cello version of the Suite is missing.

What fascinated me was how much more ornate and harmonically rich the lute suite is, when compared to the cello version. As a performer, I had to ask myself what the implications of this departure might be. Certainly the cello is capable of playing the Lute Suite’s added double-stops, suspensions and embellishments – so what does this say about the Cello Suites as a body of work? Is it possible that all the suites were left in only a partially developed state when Bach moved on from them? It is clear that his thinking about the piece changed over the years. Consider the final chord of the C minor Suite’s Prelude: in the cello version this is a tierce de Picardie (a major chord at the end of a movement written in the minor) but in the Lute Suite, the movement is resolved in the minor, giving it more gravitas. The Lute Suite offers such insights in each of its movements, with great numbers of departures from the Cello Suite.

Bach often transformed music from his own creations into greater ones, such as the expansion of the Preludio of his E major Violin Partita (BWV1006) into the opening sinfonia of the Cantata BWV29. Similarly, in the Sarabande movement of the Fifth Cello Suite, we have a minimalistic version of a part of what is arguably one of Bach’s greatest creations: the Mass in B minor. Completed only a year before his death, the Mass contains some of his most profound music; the perfection of the chorus Et incarnatus est draws its harmonic and melodic content directly from the Sarabande of the C minor Cello Suite, a haunting soliloquy containing only twenty bars of music and 108 notes.

The Sixth Suite, in D major, also poses interesting questions for the performer today. It is unclear which instrument the work is composed for, given that the manuscripts tell the performer to tune the fifth string to E natural. A four-stringed cello of the period would simply have been incapable of producing what is required in the suite, given its technical demands and high tessitura. Of course, the instrument and its technique have evolved since then, and this recording offers the D major Suite using only four strings. Research suggests, however, that this Suite might have been written for the violoncello piccolo, an instrument that was common during the period, equipped with either four or five strings. Bach was fond of the instrument and wrote for it as an obbligato instrument in a number of his cantatas. As Bettina Schwemer and Douglas Woodfull-Harris write in the Bärenreiter edition of the
Suites, ‘It is entirely conceivable that Bach, who had an affinity for the viola, performed the work himself on an arm-held violoncello piccolo. Perhaps the instrument called for by Peter Kellner in his title for the cycle, “Viola de basso,” could be interpreted to mean a viola-like instrument, although the other four sources [in this edition] leave no doubt that the suites were meant for an instrument, whether large or small, that is held between the legs.’

Each of the other Suites bears unique qualities which are in large part the product of their respective keys. The cheerful, breezy quality of the G major Suite, the melancholy and sometimes turbulent D minor and the triumphant and joyful C major rely upon the use of the open strings, C-G-D-A – exploiting these ringing notes to a far greater extent than the E-flat major Suite. Extant manuscripts of the C minor Suite indicate a scordatura tuning, with the pitch of the top string lowered by a whole tone; this tuning, which I have respected in this recording, gives the music depth and a chocolaty darkness. The Prelude of the C major Suite contains a curiosity in the bariolage section, about half way through the movement: as the chords roll out, Bach’s note selection requires the use of the thumb of the left hand to preserve continuity. This technical device was generally unknown at the time; it was the great cellist Jean-Pierre Duport (1741-1818) who began to employ it, in his études.

The Prelude of the E-flat Suite is reminiscent of two other Bach works: the first Prelude in C major of the Well-Tempered Clavier (BWV846) and his Prelude for lute (BWV999). These works’ motifs too rely upon the arpeggio and a relatively slow-moving harmonic rhythm. The brisk tempo that I have chosen reflects these parallels. Bach’s magical improvisatory sections are woven seamlessly into the fabric of the relentless four-note arpeggio theme.

What we do as performing musicians is no different today than it has ever been. We consider, perform, re-consider, revise and play again in an ongoing cycle. Perhaps performers and listeners alike need to consider that the Unaccompanied Suites for Cello by J.S. Bach are today as they were when Bach was alive: living things. In that spirit it has been my humble privilege to record the Suites. But of course, some of my interpretations have changed since then.

Michael Goldschlager

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1 Schwemer, Bettina and Woodfull-Harris: J.S. BACH 6 Suites a Violoncello Solo senza Basso, Bärenreiter-Verlag Karl Vötterle GmbH & Co. KG, Kassel, Fourth Printing 2006
MICHAEL GOLDSCHLAGER

Michael Goldschlager studied in New York with David Soyer and Timothy Eddy and at London’s Royal Academy of Music. He received a Master of Music degree from the State University of New York in 1976.

In New York City, he played with some of the great ensembles, including the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, New York City Opera, New York City Ballet, and the Orchestra of St Luke’s, of which he was Principal Cellist. He performed movements of the Bach Cello Suites on stage on Broadway for two years in the Tony Award-winning play The Elephant Man, part of a cast of seven alongside such notable actors as David Bowie, Mark Hamill, Jeffrey Jones and Philip Anglim.

After arriving in Australia in 1985, Michael Goldschlager was Principal Cellist of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra for six years, also featuring regularly as a concerto soloist. Today, he is a regular Guest Principal with the Tasmanian and Sydney Symphony Orchestras. He has also been Guest Principal Cellist of Orchestra Victoria and the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and has appeared at festivals all over the world.

Perhaps best known as the cellist of the Macquarie Trio, Michael Goldschlager is featured on numerous ABC Classics recordings, including the complete piano trios of Schubert, Brahms and Dvořák. Over the past 27 years, he has performed many times in solo and chamber music recitals for ABC Classic FM.

Michael Goldschlager has been Coordinator of Strings at the Australian National Academy of Music, and has held positions at several other tertiary institutions in Australia and in New York. He founded the 18th-century instrumental performance practice classes at the University of Western Australia, where he was a senior lecturer. He has also lectured in cello and pedagogy as Head of Strings at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), and has developed and delivered workshops for both students and teachers throughout Australia on the topic of practising.
Executive Producers Martin Buzacott, Robert Patterson
Recording Producer Stephen Snelleman
Recording Engineer, Editing and Mastering Alex Stinson
Publications Editor Natalie Shea
Marketing and Catalogue Coordinator Laura Bell
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Heartfelt thanks go to Stephen Snelleman, the Producer of this album, for his energy, his fantastic ears, his sensitivity and his diligence. Also to Alex Stinson for his engineering expertise, his keen interest and editorial prowess, and to Martin Buzacott for placing trust in me to give these iconic works their place in the ABC Classics catalogue.

– Michael Goldschlager

ABC Classics thanks Jonathan Villanueva and Virginia Read.

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