

Reflecting BACH
Christopher Hutton, violoncello

“Suite Sampler” (c.1717-1723)

J. S. Bach
(1685 – 1750)

Prelude *from* Suite in G major, BWV 1007
Allemande *from* Suite in D minor, BWV 1008
Courante *from* Suite in C major, BWV 1009
Sarabande *from* Suite in C minor, BWV 1011
Bourée I and Bourée II *from* Suite in E-flat major, BWV 1010
Gigue *from* Suite in D major, BWV 1012

We know that the Suites were written in Cöthen between 1717-1720, yet it is uncertain who exactly might have first performed them, and in what context. They may have been intended to impress Bach's employer Prince Leopold, who was an enthusiast of the Viola da Gamba. Bach surely never intended this music to be used to accompany actual dancing but his contemporaries enjoyed dance music so much that dance styles were commonly integrated into instrumental music written purely for amusement. This meant that Bach could readily draw upon styles with meters and figuration specific to each kind of dance that were immediately recognizable to his audiences. Each suite consists of an introductory prelude followed by a series of five dances, always appearing in the same order: Allemande (moderate-tempo in 4/4 time), Courante (quicker, in 3/4 time), Sarabande (slow and stately in 3/4, often with a particular emphasis on the second beat), and Gigue (fast, with triple rather than duple rhythmic subdivisions). Between the Sarabande and Gigue each suite has a pair of short dances called Galanteries: Minuets in the first and second suites (moderately quick, 3/4); Bourées in the third and fourth suites (quicker, in 3/4), and Gavottes in the fifth and sixth (relatively quick, in 4/4 time). All seven of these dance styles have their roots in courtly dances that had become standardized in France in the late seventeenth century, and although by 1720 the French court had moved on to newer dances, the older styles were still common in other countries.

Because a complete performance of the suites lasts well over two hours, today's program begins with a “Suite Sampler”, presenting one movement from each of Bach's Suites, each in a different key.

Suite for Cello No. 1, Op. 72 (1965)

Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

Canto primo: *Sostenuto e largamente*
I. Fuga: *Andante moderato*
II. Lamento: *Lento rubato*
Canto secondo: *Sostenuto*
III. Serenata: *Allegretto (pizzicato)*
IV. Marcia: *Alla marcia moderato*
Canto terzo: *Sostenuto*
V. Bordone: *Moderato quasi recitativo*
VI. Moto perpetuo e Canto quarto: *Presto*

Benjamin Britten wrote three suites for solo cello, between 1960 and 1974 for the Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich (1927-2007). The first suite was written in 1964 and premiered at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1965. Inspired by Rostropovich's playing of Bach suites rather than Bach's music itself, it still has aspects that clearly echo Bach. Both the Canto which recurs in different guises throughout the Suite (much like the Promenade of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*) and the Lamento relate quite strongly to Bach's Sarabande in C minor in the way they explore the dissonant interval of a half-step (semitone). In the Fuga Britten comes up with the ingenious idea of including silences in his theme which allows him more leeway in giving the impression of multiple voices. Rather than imitate the typical kinds of dance movements found in a Baroque suite, the later movements are distinctly Britten. This piece is a real tour-de-force both of composition and as a showcase for the abundant talent of its dedicatee.

Interval

Suite No. 1 in G major, Op. 131c (1914)

Prelude: Vivace

Adagio

Fugue: Allegro

The first solo cello works after Bach to have attained a place in the standard repertoire were three suites composed by Max Reger almost two-hundred years after Bach's suites. Written in 1914, Reger's suites are deeply rooted in the rich tonal harmonies of the Romantic era. Each suite was dedicated to a leading cellist of the day: Julius Klengel (1859-1933), Paul Grümmer (1879-1965), and Hugo Becker (1863-1941). These names are well-known to cellists as composers of etudes and other music, and as editors of music including Bach's suites – versions of which are still in print from each of these cellists!

The G-major Suite, Op. 131c No. 1, opens with a running semiquaver figuration recognizable as relating to Bach's prelude in the same key. In Reger's case, however, the range is greatly expanded, and the simplicity of Bach's model quickly gives way to more extroverted virtuosity. Bach only wrote one movement for solo cello that one might call a fugue, in the prelude to the fifth suite. Writing a fugue for a solo instrument is a challenge, but in the finale Reger uses a relatively simple subject that permits the layering of the theme over (or under) other voices, a remarkably effective technique.

Max Reger

(1873-1916)

from Suite No. 1 in C minor (1996)

I. Prelude

III. Bandinerie

V. Alla Sarabanda

The remaining works on this program were all composed within a span of three years (1993 - 96), and coincidentally were all written by living composers born in the same year (1938).

Bolcom adapted his Solo Suite No. 1 in C minor from his score for Arthur Miller's play *Broken Glass*. It was written for the cellist Norman Fischer who now teaches at Rice University in Houston, Texas. The Prelude is a brusque and angular march with percussive effects. That contrasts greatly with the playful third- movement Badinerie. The final movement titled "Alla sarabanda" is a direct homage to Bach with a recomposed version of Bach's C minor Sarabande followed by a series of five increasingly technical variations, and followed by a reprise of the theme.

William Bolcom

(b. 1938)

Suite for Solo Cello (1993)

Preludio

Fuga-Burletta

Sarabanda

Giga

Harbison's Suite is very much in the form of Bach's Sonatas for solo violin (written around the same time as the cello suites). It begins with a rhapsodic, improvisatory Preludio followed by a Fuga-Burletta which is – as suggested by its title – a comic fugue. It has similarities to the fugues of both Britten (with its use of silences in the subject) and Reger (with voices layered into double- and later triple-stopped chords).

The brief Sarabanda updates the style of Bach's Sarabandes with 20th century harmonies, while the Giga finale is a rip-roaring moto-perpetuo inspired by some of Bach's cello Giges (notably that of the fourth cello suite).

John Harbison

(b.1938)

Fancy on a Bach Air (1996)

John Corigliano (b. 1938)

Corigliano's introspective single-movement piece was inspired not by any of Bach's cello music, but rather the Aria of the "Goldberg" Variations for harpsichord. It was

written in memory of one Robert Goldberg who had commissioned a number of composers to write a series of variations for the 25th anniversary of his wedding to his wife Judy. The set of pieces was to be performed by Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax, but before the commission could be fulfilled Robert died of cancer leaving the variations to stand in memorium rather than their original, celebratory purpose. The long-breathed phrases of Bach's original air are imitated here in long, legato lines, written without notated rhythms to suggest a sense of freedom.

Christopher Hutton, violoncello

Originally from Wellington, Christopher Hutton is the cellist of the Poinsett Piano Trio and is Associate Professor of Violoncello at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina.

He has performed widely in his home country, his adopted home of the United States, and in Europe. He has recorded for New Zealand's Concert FM, Germany's SWF Radio, and appears on a disc of contemporary music on Albany Classics. Christopher served as co-principal cellist of the New World Symphony Orchestra and has played in the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra as well as other orchestras in the United States. He has enjoyed collaborating with composers, notably New Zealanders Helen Bowater and Christopher Marshall.

Christopher studied at Boston University and earned Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music. While at Eastman he was a teaching assistant and taught both for the University of Rochester and Eastman's Community Education Division. He later taught at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the University of Delaware, and the Eastern Music Festival before joining the faculty at Furman in 2003.

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