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GASPAR
CASSADO
BACH

6
SUITES
FOR
SOLO
CELLO

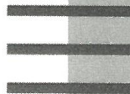


are prone to believe that, in these circumstances, art-
 Weinstein's genius, that difficulty's rather than hinder
 the creative artist. Satisfying as this notion may be to our peace
 of mind, it is nevertheless romantic and, above all, hypothetical, for
 while we know what Mozart, Beethoven, or Bartok were able to
 achieve in unkind surroundings and under various hardships, we
 do not know what more favorable condition would not have
 resulted in as great or even greater achievements.

Still, in the case of Johann Sebastian Bach, condition, do not
 seem to have had any bearing on the quantity or quality of his
 output. In the eleventh year (1702-1703), when his
 neighbors, the town councillors, made him the object of almost
 continual vexation, envy, and persecution (to quote his word),
 he composed the Magnificat, the St. Matthew Passion, most
 of the cantatas, the B Minor Mass, the second volume of the Well-
 tempered Clavier, the Anna Magdalena Book, and the Art of the Fugue.
 The preceding thirteen years (1700-1712) was no less fruitful,
 however, and saw the birth of the Brandenburg Concertos, the Little
 Book for Anna Magdalena, the French Suites, the English and French
 Suites, the orchestral suites, the sonatas and partitas for solo violin,
 and the six Partitas for solo violin and cello. And yet this period was a very happy one - the
 happiest Bach was ever to enjoy. True, the reformed cult in
 Leipzig did not permit him to write choral or organ
 works, and this was, ultimately, to cause him to keep out of
 their respect; his position could not have been more gratifying.

As Kapellmeister — that is, conductor, soloist, and composer of the court music — Bach had at his disposal a small but remarkable orchestra, received a high salary (equal to that of a marshal of the court), and worked, as he once said, for “a gracious Prince who not only loved but knew music.” Between the composer and Prince Leopold there were none of the invisible but real barriers that exist between an authentic artist and his patron when the latter feels he is exceptional in that talent. On the contrary, the Prince understood and respected his Kapellmeister and encouraged him in bold or difficult musical undertakings. This, joined with the high performing level of the members of the court orchestra, allowed Bach to explore exhaustively the technical and expressive possibilities of various instruments (and instrumental combinations). In the realm of the solo instrument, the sonata for unaccompanied flute, the three sonatas and three partitas for unaccompanied violin, and the six suites for unaccompanied violoncello, all written around 1720, bear eloquent testimony to this investigation. It is well to note here that in the baroque era writing without a *basso continuo* was a rarity, though not an absolute novelty.

If, in the sonatas and in the chaconne of the Partita No. 2, Bach asked instruments used to spinning out single melodic lines to play complex polyphonic structures — and even four-part fugues — in the partitas and especially in the suites he let the lyric character of the violin or the cello guide him and wrote chains of charming, limpid, and apparently simple melodies. But these melodies, as Sir



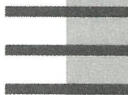
Donald Tovey pointed out, 'arc magnificently powerful line-
drawing which shows itself capable of indicating any and every
truth of perspective in its draughtsmanship. Of course these works
are 100 entirely or mainly without harmony.... Still the fact remains
that even in the most fully harmonized [sections]... there is a
constant exercise of the art of making single notes reassert their
old prehistoric power of conveying a complete meaning... Like
Tovey, but replacing it in the context of the period. Forkel
(1719-1818) had explained, in his famous and still indispensable
biography of the composer, the problem Bach set himself to solve
in these unaccompanied works: "At that time it was an established
rule that every union of parts must make a whole and exhaust all
the notes necessary to the most complete expression of the
content, so that no redundancy should anywhere be sensible...
Bach not only fully satisfied this rule in setting, for two, three, and
four parts, but attempted also to extend it to a single part... By
particular turns in the melody, he so combined in a single part all
the notes required to make the modulation complete that a second
part is neither necessary nor possible... Or, to round off with
another of Tovey's enlightening and epigrammatic statements,
"when the melody is unharmonized, it is in its own bass..."

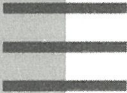
of the six Suites " Violoncello Solo se11za Basso.
Each composes par Sr. J.S. Bach. Maître de Chambre (and probably
written for the first cellist at Court, Ferdinand Christian Abel)
rigorously adopts the same pattern of dance movements - i.e.,
alkmandt, courante, sarabande, "galant-tie" (a group of lighter

dances), and gigue — the whole being introduced by a majestic prelude somewhat polyphonic in texture. All of the movements of any one suite are in the same key, with the exception of the second “galanterie,” often in the relative minor or major. Within these very strict formal limits, however, Bach’s wealth of invention pours out freely, giving the cello not only countless opportunities to display its wide range, its versatility, its special blend of nobility and good humor, and its subtle voice shadings, but also some of the most intrinsically beautiful utterances in musical literature.

Written in the style of free fantasies and developed broadly, the préluces are the most imposing movements of these suites; though their scope, their nonlinear writing, and the improvisational mood pervading them contrast strongly with the traditional dances that follow, they give — as is fitting for preludes — a general impression of the suite they introduce. Thus the prélude of the third suite (C major) is the most romantic and the most exuberant, and so is the remainder of the suite; thus the grandiose fifth suite (C minor) is prefaced by a magnificent prélude, the second section of which is a two-part fugue, the only fugue of the set.

The allemande was a slow, flowing, ornate piece in 4/4 rhythm. Here, unexpectedly, three of the six allemandes (the first, fourth, and fifth) are in 2/2, but this is not so unorthodox as some have thought, for Bach certainly knew that the folk-dance from which the allemande came was in the more bracing 2/2 rhythm particularly welcome in the three cases in question.





Of the two types of courantes, the French and the Italian, the composer preferred the latter – brilliant and lively, in a rapid triple time. The fifth suite (C minor), however, gives us a fine specimen of the less voluble and more powerful French form, with its intricate cross-rhythms in 3/2 measure.

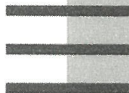
Bach found an ideal frame for his warm and virile lyricism in the stately, noble triple rhythm of the sarabande, and the six examples of this dance in these suites are among his tenderest and most poignant pieces.


The engaging “galanteries,” the choice and number of which were left to the discretion of the composer, released the tension built up by the preceding sarabande. They consist here of a pair of dances differing in key or in mood, the first being repeated after the second, as a minuet after is “trio.” As a matter of fact, two minuets make up the “galanteries” of each of the first two suites, whereas two bourrées make up those of the third and fourth suites, and two gavottes, those of the last two suites.

Half a century before the present works were written, Chambonnières had first introduced the gigue as the last movement of the instrumental suite, and indeed its rapid tempo, its bouncing triple time, and its gaiety suited it admirably to the role of a finale. Although the giges of the cello suites are not all gay (the last, for instance, is more martial than joyful), they have inexhaustible energy, and their irresistible sweep brings these masterpieces to the whirlwind close.

The Suites are in the following keys: No. 1 in G major (BWV 1007), No. 2 in D minor (BWV 1008), No. 3 in C major (BWV 1009), No. 4 in E-flat major (BWV 1010), played in this recording by Mr. Cassadó in the key of F, No. 5 in C minor (BWV 1011), and No. 6 in D major (BWV 1012). Let us add that the fifth suite demands an unusual tuning of the cello — the A string being lowered to G — and that the sixth suite is written for a five-stringed instrument today extinct (possibly the *viola pomposa* said to have been invented by Bach, but more likely a cello with an additional string); this of course, makes its performance on the normal cello all the more difficult.

Robert Cushman





Gaspar Cassadó, the world-renowned cellist, was born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1897. When he was only five years old, he entered the music school of "Las Mercedes" of which his father was the director. He soon began to show his predilection for the cello. After only two years of study he gave his first recital with great success, and the Barcelona authorities decided to award him a scholarship for study abroad with some famous cellists. Cassadó went to Paris where he pursued his studies and came in contact with Ravel and de Falla. He played with Alfred Casella and Ricardo Viñes and made a sound reputation for himself. After the first World War, Cassadó began his brilliant career touring Europe and South America and he played with all the famous orchestras and conductors such as Furtwaengler, Mengelberg, Weingartner, Beecham, Gaubert and many others. Cassadó was also active as a composer and many of his works have been performed on both sides of the Atlantic.

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