

J.S. BACH***Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major, BWV 1007***

Prelude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Menuet I/II
Gigue

Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major, BWV 1007**Johann Sebastian Bach**

(b. Eisenach, Saxony, 1685 / d. Leipzig, 1750)

The “suite” form as understood by Bach is significantly different from the idea we have today. In Bach’s time, the suite was a French notion, a piece of music comprised of multiple movements. It begins with an overture or a prelude, followed by a series of dances, nearly always in French dance forms. And that is the format for the six *Suites for Solo Cello*.

These notes are written to accompany a performance of a Bach suite for solo cello played on a viola. And if there is anyone who would have thought nothing about such an occurrence, it was Bach himself.

Most of Bach’s considerable output was music written to order, and much of it for use by the Lutheran Church. He “indulged” his muse, writing secular, instrumental music, when he could, which was rarely. His most fruitful period for such music was 1717 to 1723, when he was Kapellmeister for the Court Orchestra of Anhalt-Cöthen – pretty much the only time in his career when he was not employed by a church. It is from this period that the six *Suites for Solo Cello* were composed, likely inspired by a gifted musician of Bach’s acquaintance. Christian Bernhard Linigke or Christian Ferdinand Abel are likely suspects.

The plain fact of the matter is that Bach, quite pragmatically, wrote many works with no clear idea of what instrument(s) would play it, and he realized that it could vary greatly from performance to performance. He also had no issue changing instrumentation to suit a certain complement of musicians. For a composer used to writing a work that would only be heard once, any performance was welcome.

Beyond all that, the genius and scope of Bach’s iconic *Six Suites* is a treasure alluring to more than just cellists. In the string family, if the cello is the tenor voice, the viola is the alto, nearest to it going upward. And several viola arrangements of the set have been done. Edmonton

Symphony Orchestra Principal Viola Ethan Filner is intimately familiar with many of these. But while he has consulted many of them during his career, he chose to “start from scratch” in many ways for this recording.

As he writes, “Several years ago I discovered on imslp.org an edition created in 2014 by Shin-Itchiro Yokoyama that was perfect for where I was with my career as a violist, and the closest thing to a holy grail of Bach *Suites*, second only to the fantasy discovery of a truly authentic manuscript: the entire set of suites published *without slurs* (nor dynamics). A totally clean slate! Just the notes. And, loading the file onto my iPad, I had a playground of Bach to experiment with, completely visually free of editors' (inherently personal and not necessarily justifiable) prejudices. Try something new in practice, write it in, live with it a while, change my mind? Use the digital eraser and it's gone forever. You get the idea.”

So while informed by the host of teachers, viola masters, scholars, and editors whose editions have been part of his life, Mr. Filner confesses that his version of the *Suite No. 1* is unique. “I'd been playing it ‘my own way’ from the blank Japanese version for a while, but went back to both the cello manuscript and the more familiar-from-my-student-days German edition for a bit of a reality check ... Perhaps in a way, I suppose it's my own edition!”

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