



BACH CELLO SUITES

Peter
Martens

At the time of making this recording there were already well over a hundred printed editions of the Bach Cello Suites. In addition there are already almost as many recordings and one would be hard pressed to avoid the question; why another recording? In around 1720, Bach wrote his unaccompanied cello suites whilst employed as Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold in the court of Anhalt-Köthen. Although known as a deeply religious man, it is in this period, prior to his long serving commitment to the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, that he composed much of his well-known secular music. The Cello Suites conform to the traditional Baroque Dance Suite design in that they all have an Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. In the case of these cello suites, each opens with a Prelude and between the Sarabande and Gigue, one finds a set of gallantries. In the first and second suite these are a pair of Menuets. In the third and fourth suite, a pair of Bourées and in suites five and six, a pair of Gavottes.

The Suites were first published in 1824 in Paris and little is known about performances thereof until the famous story of Pablo Casals having discovered the sheet music in a second-hand shop in Barcelona in 1890. His interest in the works was immediate and a fascination soon developed into a deep and all-consuming love affair that remained with him until the end of his life. Each suite has its own distinctive character and as Casals so eloquently explains, these are clearly encapsulated by the preludes alone. The first suite in G major is optimistically naive. The Prelude begins with a simple arpeggiated chord progression not unlike that of the first of his 48 Preludes and Fugues. After an unexpected fermata about half way through, it meanders in a quasi-improvisatory style through several keys until one can't help but sense the now distant key of G major again at which point the music bursts forth into a rising crescendo ending optimistically in the home key. The other movements are relatively short, the Menuet being the only dance still actually danced in Bach's time. The Suite ends with an unsophisticated Gigue that conjures up images of peasants in a jovial mood, enjoying a warm mug of English beer after another day in the fields.

...THE LORD AND MY SPIRIT HATH REJOICED IN GOD MY SAVIOUR FOR HE HATH REGARDED THE LOWLINES OF HIS BORN...





The second suite in D minor is deeply moving, but in an introverted sort of way. The first two notes, open D and open A strings, set the tone for the entire suite, which because of its apparent outward stillness, leaves the listener either feeling somewhat empty, or with plenty of room for their inner most emotions. Even the second menuet in the major key is sad and although the concluding Gigue is something of a celebration, the absence of real optimism is evident throughout. The third suite in C major is majestic and joyful. The undulating waves of optimism reach stormy proportions in the middle of the prelude and even the quiet Sarabande exudes contemplative positivity. This suite ends with the fastest and most rambunctious Gigue of all. The Prelude of Suite Four is positively bold although the key of E-flat major lends itself to a far more complex emotional palette. The Allemande and Courante are less bold and strangely similar in complexity of mood. Whilst the short second Bourée brings some momentary relief in the form of uncomplicated positivity, the suite ends with an intricate lively gigue.

Whereas the first four Suites can be viewed as conventional in terms of the instrument for which they were written, the last two can most certainly not. For the Fifth Suite, Bach has chosen the key of C minor to convey a serious melancholy. To further enhance this feeling, evoking the most sombre sonorities from the instrument, Bach has instructed the cellist to tune the A string down to a G, thus also enabling chords to be played that would ordinarily not be possible. This practise known as scordatura, although seldom used in Bach's time, is not uncommon to Baroque music and can also be found in violin sonatas by Biber for example. I have chosen, as many modern cellists do, to play this suite without the scordatura. Doing so is the subject of much debate amongst cellists and my choice is simply an acknowledgment that although historically informed performance practise has to a large extent informed my interpretation, by virtue of the fact that I play with a modern instrument and bow this is essentially a modern interpretation. The Fifth Suite is also unconventional in that the Prelude is comprised of two parts. The first, in the

style of a French Overture is slow and punctuated by dotted rhythms, and the second is a magnificent three part fugue, the only one of its kind in all the Bach Cello Suites. The central Sarabande is perhaps most profound in that its complexity lies in its simplicity. The sixth suite in D major can be described as heroic. This suite of substantial proportions is written for a cello with five strings. An E string, one fifth above the regular top A string needs to be fitted to do justice to Bach's original conception. It is thought that he himself would have played this suite on the viola-pomposa, a now extinct instrument that he is thought to have invented. Present day research seems to indicate that the suite was written for a normal cello with an extra string. Whatever it was written for, most modern cellists have no choice but to play it on four strings, a convention that is not without its challenges even for the most accomplished of contemporary cellists. Playing and/or listening to this suite can be likened to standing in awe in front of a massive ornate Baroque cathedral. Its sheer size and the extent of its detail make for something ostentatiously magnificent, all of which can simply not be fully appreciated in one hearing alone.

So why another recording? It would be foolish to claim any degree of authenticity or supremacy for any modern recording of these works. The great master cellists of the past have done it all before, yet opinion is still divided as to whether anyone can really lay claim to the ultimate recording of these works. I have recorded these works, because like so many other cellists, these works have captured my imagination, my heart and my soul in an indescribable way. What attracts us all to these works is clearly more than their perfect proportions. It is more than the instrument's proximity to the range and timbre of the human voice. Every time I play these works I am humbled to be given the opportunity to do so and this recording is simply a testament to my quest to be continuously involved with the greatest music written for the cello.

Soli Deo Gloria

Peter Martens 2011





I have chosen to dedicate each suite to one of my teachers or to a cellist who has influenced my cello playing significantly.

Suite no 1 in G major BWV 1007 – to **Harry Cremers**, who was my first cello teacher and who started my love affair with the Bach Suites by teaching me the Prelude of the first Suite when I was still a child.

Suite no 2 in D minor BWV 1008 – to **Prof Gerhard van der Geest**, with whom I only had a few lessons, but who made me think profoundly about the sound I produce.

Suite no 3 in C major BWV 1009 – to my father, **Eric Martens**, who provided me with the initial inspiration to play the cello and who taught me that interpretation of the Bach Suites is always a work in progress.

Suite no 4 in E-flat major BWV 1010 – to **Dalena Roux**, with whom I learnt several Bach Suites, and who as my teacher in my formative years, is largely responsible for the way I play today.

Suite no 5 in C minor BWV 1011 – to **Prof Heidi Litchauer**, with whom I studied in Salzburg, for teaching me with few words that every note, every phrase and every nuance, must be beautiful.

Suite no 6 in D major BWV 1012 – to **Benjamin Staiger**, my young nephew, whose love for the cello will ensure the continuation of a family tradition.

El Cant dels Ocells (Song of the Birds) – to **Marian Lewin**, the doyenne of South African cellist's with whom I have had the privilege of sharing the stage for many a performance and who I can call a true friend.

Peter Martens

PETER MARTENS



Peter Martens was born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1971 and began his cello studies at the age of 8. Whilst still at school and studying with Dalena Roux at Stellenbosch University, he won a scholarship to participate in the World Youth Orchestra in Michigan U.S.A. where he led the cello section. He continued his studies at the Mozarteum, Salzburg, with Prof Heidi Litschauer from 1991 to 1993 where he also had master classes from William Pleeth, Ivan Monighetti and Heinrich Schiff. During this time he performed extensively as solo cellist for the Austrian Ensemble for Modern Music and as a member of the chamber orchestra, Salzburger Musici. His career as orchestral cellist saw him occupying principal positions in several South African orchestras as well as having worked with the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg and the Philharmonia Orchestra in London. He currently divides his time between the management of the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival and the Endler Concert Series at Stellenbosch University, a busy chamber music and solo schedule as well as being an active family man.

His first concerto engagement was with the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra at the age of 15. He has recorded for the South African Broadcasting Corporation as well as for "Cello Classics" of London with the sextet "I Grandi Violoncellisti". He is a member of the Amici String Quartet and Bass-ically Brilliant with bassist Leon Bosch. Other

chamber music activities have included partnerships with the late Lamar Crowson, Nina Schumann, Luis Magalhães, Benjamin Schmid, Daniel Rowland, Tom Carroll, Suzanne Martens, Ivry Gitlis and members of the Osiris Piano Trio, Amsterdam. As Chamber Musician, he has participated in Festivals in Russia, Holland, Austria, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Portugal as well as having performed in the U.K. and U.S.A. Concerto engagements have resulted in collaborations with a number of fine conductors including Victor Yampolsky, Bernard Gueller, Douglas Boyd and Jonas Alber. In 2008 he formed the highly acclaimed Stellenbosch University Camerata, whose first CD recording released by TwoPianists Records won a SAMA in the only classical music category in 2010. He has recently released a double album of the complete Beethoven Sonatas with pianist Luis Magalhães that is available internationally on the TwoPianists label. Including much praise in significant international publications, this album won the 2011 Classical music SAMA. South African composers including Hendrik Hofmeyr and Paul Hanmer amongst others have written for him, the most notable composition being the Cello Concerto by Allan Stephenson. This was recorded with the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra for CD by Meridian Records and released in London in October 2011.

Peter plays on a Locke Hill Cello and is married to violinist, Suzanne Martens with two children.

BACH CELLO SUITES

Peter Martens

CD 1

Suite no. 1 in G major, BWV 1007

- 01 1:52 Prelude
 02 4:07 Allemande
 03 2:36 Courante
 04 3:50 Sarabande
 05 3:24 Menuet I - Menuet II
 06 1:46 Gigue

Suite no. 2 in D minor, BWV 1008

- 07 3:29 Prelude
 08 3:29 Allemande
 09 2:08 Courante
 10 5:00 Sarabande
 11 2:56 Menuet I - Menuet II
 12 2:21 Gigue

Suite no. 3 in C minor, BWV 1009

- 13 3:04 Prelude
 14 3:43 Allemande
 15 3:03 Courante
 16 5:03 Sarabande
 17 3:32 Bourrée I - Bourrée II
 18 2:46 Gigue

Total: 58:25

CD 2

Suite no. 4 in E-flat major, BWV 1011

- 01 4:10 Prelude
 02 3:50 Allemande
 03 3:26 Courante
 04 4:29 Sarabande
 05 5:01 Bourrée I - Bourrée II
 06 2:23 Gigue

Suite no. 5 in C minor, BWV 1011

- 07 5:25 Prelude
 08 5:20 Allemande
 09 2:17 Courante
 10 4:44 Sarabande
 11 3:58 Gavotte I - Gavotte II
 12 2:02 Gigue

Suite no. 6 in D major, BWV 1012

- 13 3:47 Prelude
 14 7:16 Allemande
 15 3:40 Courante
 16 5:11 Sarabande
 17 4:06 Gavotte I - Gavotte II
 18 4:26 Gigue

Bonus Track

- 19 1:35 **El Cant dels Ocells (Song of the Birds)**

Total: 77:29

Recorded at: Endler Hall, Stellenbosch University, South Africa,
 Sep 7 - 13, 2009; Cello: Peter Martens; Produced by: Peter Martens;
 Balance engineer: Gerhard Roux; Edited and Mixed by: Gerhard Roux;
 Mastered by: Tim Lengfeld; design by: Glitz-Design.com;

2P
 TwoPianists

DDD
 DOUBLE
 COMPACT
 disc
 DIGITAL AUDIO