



Wednesday, May 1, 2019, 8pm
First Congregational Church, Berkeley

Alisa Weilerstein, *cello*
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
The Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello

Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Minuet
Minuet II
Gigue

Suite No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1008

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Minuet
Minuet II
Gigue

PAUSE

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Patron Sponsor Patrick McCabe.
Cal Performances' 2018–19 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.*



Suite No. 3 in C major, BWV 1009

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Bourrée
Bourrée
Gigue

Suite No. 4 in E-flat major, BWV 1010

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Bourrée
Bourrée
Gigue

INTERMISSION

Suite No. 5 in C minor, BWV 1011

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavotte
Gavotte
Gigue

Suite No. 6 in D major, BWV 1012

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavotte
Gavotte
Gigue

A Note from the Artist

In 1888, a 12-year-old boy in the provinces of Catalonia discovered something on a dusty shelf of an old music store: a tattered score of the Six Suites for Violoncello Solo by Johann Sebastian Bach. He couldn't believe what he had found, and immediately recognized it as an invaluable treasure. He bought the score and took it home with him to practice. It would be 13 more years before he dared play the suites in public. This remarkable boy is one of my personal heroes; the legendary artist, musician, cellist, and—above all—humanitarian, Pablo Casals.

We cellists owe an incalculable amount to Casals. He is largely credited with modernizing cello technique, and was one of the few pioneers who helped bring the cello into the 20th century as a solo instrument. But I personally think that among his largest contributions to cellists, and to music lovers everywhere, were his discovery and timeless interpretations of the Bach suites. Growing up, I listened to his recordings of the suites several times daily, and I lovingly return to them often. Casals also impressed upon me the sacred nature of this music, and I have always approached the suites with a special reverence.

Therefore, the idea of performing the complete Bach suites in one concert is something that has always thrilled and terrified me at the same time. I can only say how very honored and humbled I am to bring this music to you this evening—music that perfectly marries the most profound emotions with impeccable intellect. Berkeley has been part of my life since my earliest childhood; my father grew up in the Berkeley Hills and his father, my grandfather, passed away here only three years ago at the age of 104, in the house he had lived in since 1950. My love for the cello and for Bach's suites, specifically, blossomed here in Berkeley, whether in practice sessions in my grandparents' living room, or, as a very young girl (not more than four or five years old), in lessons with the late Margaret Rowell. To me, the Bach Suites for Solo Cello have always represented a "circle of life." I can't think of a more fitting place to perform them all than in Berkeley, home to some of my deepest and most cherished memories.

—Alisa Weilerstein

Johann Sebastian Bach

The Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello, BWV 1007–1012

In 1713, the frugal Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia dismissed his household musical establishment in Berlin. The young, cultured Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, 40 miles north of Leipzig, took the opportunity to engage some of Friedrich's finest musicians; he provided them with excellent instruments and established a library for their regular court performances. In December 1717, Leopold hired Johann Sebastian Bach, then organist and *Kapellmeister* at Weimar, as his director of music. Inspired by the high quality of the musicians in his charge and by the Prince's praise of his creative work, Bach produced much of his greatest instrumental music during the six years of his tenure at Cöthen, including the *Brandenburg* Concertos, the suites for orchestra and the violin concertos, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, many chamber and keyboard compositions, and the works for unaccompanied violin and cello. The six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello were apparently written for either Christian Ferdinand Abel (whose son Carl Friedrich became the partner of Sebastian Bach's son Johann Christian in an important London concert venture in the 1760s) or Christian Bernhard Linigke, both master cellists in the Cöthen court orchestra.

The cello in Bach's time was still an instrument of relatively recent origin. It was the Cremonese craftsman Andrea Amati who first brought the violin, viola, and cello to their modern configurations around 1560 as the successors to the old, softer-voiced family of viols. (The modern double bass, with its tuning in fourths and its sloping shape—compare its profile with the square shoulders of the other orchestral strings—is the only survivor in the modern orchestra of that noble breed of earlier instruments.) For the first century of its existence, the cello was strictly confined to playing the bass line in concerted works; any solo passages in its register were entrusted to the viola da gamba. The earliest solo works known to have been written specifically for the instrument, from the 1680s, are by Domenico Gabrieli, a cellist in the orchestra of San Petronio in

Bologna (unrelated to the Venetian Gabriellis); notable among them are his *Ricercare* for Unaccompanied Cello of 1689. The first concerto for cello seems to be that composed by Giuseppe Jacchini in 1701. The instrument gained steadily in popularity as it displaced the older gamba, a circumstance evidenced by the many works for it by Antonio Vivaldi and other early-18th-century Italian composers. When Bach proposed to write music for unaccompanied cello sometime around 1720, however, there were few precedents for such pieces. The examples with which he was most familiar were by a tiny enclave of composers (Westhof, Biber, Walther, Pisendel) centered around Dresden who had dabbled in compositions for solo violin, and it was probably upon their models that Bach built his six Sonatas and Partitas for Violin and the half-dozen suites for cello. In comparing these two series of Bach's works, Philipp Spitta wrote, "The passionate and penetrating energy, the inner fire and warmth which often grew to be painful in its intensity [in the violin works], is here softened down to a quieter beauty and a generally serene grandeur, as was to be expected from the deeper pitch and fuller tone of the cello."

Bach's solo cello suites, like his contemporaneous English Suites for Harpsichord (BWV 806–811), follow the traditional form of the German instrumental suite—an elaborate prelude followed by a fixed series of dances: *allemande*, *courante*, *sarabande*, and *gigue*. Between the last two movements of the cello works are inserted additional pairs of minuets (Suites Nos. 1 and 2), *bourrées* (Nos. 3 and 4), or *gavottes* (Nos. 5 and 6).

The First Suite (G major) opens with a fantasia-like *prélude* whose steady rhythmic motion and breadth of harmonic inflection generate a sweeping grandeur that culminates magnificently in the heroic gestures of the closing measures. The ensuing movements follow the old custom of pairing a slow dance with a fast one: an *allemande* (here marked by wide-ranging figurations and swiftly flowing rhythms) is complemented by a *courante*, a dance type originally accompanied by jumping motions; a stately *sarabande* is balanced by a pair of min-

uets (the second of which, in G minor, exhibits a delicious, haunted languor) and a spirited *gigue* of vibrant character.

The *prélude* of the Second Suite (D minor) is of a solemn, brooding cast. The *allemande*, rich in double stops and implied counterpoint, continues the mood of the opening movement. The *courante* is serious in nature but determined and forceful in rhythm. The *sarabande* provides one of the most thoughtful episodes in the suites. The first minuet, intense and densely textured, is nicely countered by the graceful second minuet that occupies the movement's center. A powerful *gigue* closes the suite.

The Third Suite (C major) opens with a *prélude* that exploits the rich scales and arpeggios of the instrument's middle and low registers. The *allemande's* elaborate quick figurations make its tempo seem faster than a metronome would allow. The *courante* is light and animated. The stately *sarabande* is balanced by the twin *bourrées* (the second of which slips into C minor) and the spirited *gigue*, whose few measures of implied bagpipe drone are among the most novel tonal effects in Bach's instrumental catalog.

The Fourth Suite (E-flat major) begins with a *prélude* that is broad in character and rich in harmonic implication. The *allemande* is marked by wide-ranging figurations and swiftly flowing rhythms. A nimble playfulness is captured by the *courante*, while the *sarabande* is notable for its wealth of double stops. The two *bourrées* are the most lighthearted and dance-like music in the suites. The closing *gigue* is a rousing *perpetuum mobile*.

The Suite No. 5 (C minor), often characterized as the most profound and austere of the set, begins with a *prélude* reminiscent of a French overture: a slow, deeply melancholic opening section with dotted rhythms is followed by quickly moving music whose subtle shifts of register imply the intertwining of fugal voices. The ensuing movements use the forms and styles of the traditional dances, though their expressive state is not one of diversion but of sadness in the slow movements (*Allemande*, *Sarabande*) and firm determination in the fast ones (*Courante*, *Gavottes*, *Gigue*).

The Suite No. 6 (D major) was originally composed for a now-obsolete instrument with an added fifth (high E) string. This extended upper register prompted Bach to make the D major the most overtly virtuosic of the six suites, a quality reinforced by the music's many string crossings, elaborate figurations, and frequent double stops. The *prélude* is given a glistening sheen by its many cross-string bowings. The *allemande*, the largest movement in the

suites, is spacious and smoothly lyrical. The *courante* is imbued with the leaping energy of the dance on which it was modeled. The *sarabande* moves through long arches of carefully embellished melody. The first *gavotte* is joyous and energetic; the second imitates the drone of the *musette*, a small French bagpipe. The *gigue* provides a brilliant close to one of Bach's most remarkable achievements.

—© 2019 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

ABOUT THE ARTIST

“A young cellist whose emotionally resonant performances of both traditional and contemporary music have earned her international recognition... Weilerstein is a consummate performer, combining technical precision with impassioned musicianship,” stated the MacArthur Foundation, when awarding American cellist **Alisa Weilerstein** a 2011 MacArthur Fellowship. In the 2018–19 season, Weilerstein releases *Transfigured Night* on the Pentatone label, joined by Norway's Trondheim Soloists for three masterworks of the First and Second Viennese Schools: Haydn's First and Second Cello Concertos and Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, from which the album takes its title. Two Scandinavian performances of the album repertoire with the same ensemble open the season.

In the spring, she returns to *Verklärte Nacht*, this time in a trio version, when she tours Europe and the US with pianist and frequent collaborator Inon Barnatan, violinist Sergey Khachatryan, and percussionist Colin Currie. Between these bookends, she also performs the Schumann Concerto with the Rotterdam Philharmonic, and gives accounts of Saint-Saëns' First Cello Concerto, Britten's Symphony for Cello and Orchestra, Richard Strauss' *Don Quixote*, and Bloch's *Schelomo: Rhapsodie Hébraïque* in cities from San Diego to Vienna. Finally, she gives two performances of Matthias Pintscher's new cello concerto *Un despertar* (*An Awakening*), with the composer leading both the Danish National Symphony Orchestra and the Cincinnati Symphony. In

the midst of her orchestral engagements are five solo performances of Bach's complete cello suites, including concerts in Beverly Hills and Paris, and at Boston's Celebrity Series and the Elbphilharmonie.

Weilerstein's career milestones include an emotionally powerful account of Elgar's concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic and Daniel Barenboim in Oxford, England, and a performance at the White House for President and Mrs. Obama. An ardent champion of new music, she has worked on multiple projects with Osvaldo Golijov and Matthias Pintscher and premiered works by Pascal Dusapin, Lera Auerbach, and Joseph Hallman. Weilerstein, whose honors include Lincoln Center's 2008 Martin E. Segal Prize and the 2006 Leonard Bernstein Award, is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music and Columbia University. Diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, she is a Celebrity Advocate for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

alisaweilerstein.com
twitter.com/aweilstein
facebook.com/AlisaWeilerstein
instagram.com/alisaweilerstein/

Exclusive Management

Opus 3 Artists
470 Park Avenue South, 9th Floor North
New York NY 10016
www.opus3artists.com