

*Winona
Zelenka*
J.S. Bach
Six suites for solo cello



CD One

Suite #1 in G Major BWV 1007

- | | | |
|---|--------------|------|
| 1 | Prelude | 2:30 |
| 2 | Allemande | 4:46 |
| 3 | Courante | 2:34 |
| 4 | Sarabande | 3:53 |
| 5 | Menuet 1 & 2 | 3:15 |
| 6 | Gigue | 1:38 |

Suite #3 in C Major BWV 1009

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|----|---------------|------|
| 7 | Prelude | 4:21 |
| 8 | Allemande | 4:12 |
| 9 | Courante | 2:51 |
| 10 | Sarabande | 5:27 |
| 11 | Bourrée 1 & 2 | 4:45 |
| 12 | Gigue | 2:54 |

Suite #5 in C minor BWV 1011

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|----|---------------|------|
| 13 | Prelude | 5:54 |
| 14 | Allemande | 5:17 |
| 15 | Courante | 2:00 |
| 16 | Sarabande | 3:56 |
| 17 | Gavotte 1 & 2 | 5:07 |
| 18 | Gigue | 2:34 |

CD Two

Suite #2 in D minor BWV 1008

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|---|--------------|------|
| 1 | Prelude | 3:28 |
| 2 | Allemande | 3:39 |
| 3 | Courante | 2:10 |
| 4 | Sarabande | 6:08 |
| 5 | Menuet 1 & 2 | 3:00 |
| 6 | Gigue | 2:45 |

Suite #4 in E flat Major BWV 1010

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|----|---------------|------|
| 7 | Prelude | 4:07 |
| 8 | Allemande | 4:36 |
| 9 | Courante | 3:28 |
| 10 | Sarabande | 4:33 |
| 11 | Bourrée 1 & 2 | 5:33 |
| 12 | Gigue | 2:47 |

Suite #6 in D Major BWV 1012

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|----|---------------|------|
| 13 | Prelude | 4:23 |
| 14 | Allemande | 8:49 |
| 15 | Courante | 3:39 |
| 16 | Sarabande | 5:15 |
| 17 | Gavotte 1 & 2 | 4:49 |
| 18 | Gigue | 4:14 |

A Cellist's

Reflections

My journey with the Bach Suites began at around age 10, a year or so after we'd moved to Toronto and I'd started studying with Bill Findlay of the Toronto Symphony. He had me learning major repertoire as early as possible. Meanwhile, I listened to LPs with my Dad, who had been a flutist in his native Slovakia and had a great collection. I remember one day coming in to a lesson and playing the Prelude of the First Suite, and when I was done Bill said "Have you been listening to Casals?" and I nodded, amazed. He said, "OK, you'll have to stop doing that for now, and let's get the metronome out." By the time I was 13 I had learned all the Suites and in particular was playing parts of the Sixth in local Kiwanis competitions - that Suite being the most challenging. I always loved practicing Bach more than anything else, and was quoted after one Kiwanis win as saying that I would "cheat" on my concerto practice by switching to Bach whenever I could. The approach of the time was the romantic Casals idea: big sound, lots of vibrato, and fingerings that went up each string for dynamic effect rather than crossing over to the next string as soon as possible, which I would later learn is more consistent with historic Baroque practice. My next teacher, the virtuoso poet of the cello Vladimir Orloff, brought a similarly romantic approach from Vienna.

When I started at Indiana University under Janos Starker, at age 17, a new Bach phase began that was about playing the cello as cleanly and perfectly as possible. Starker was a genius at teaching the kinesiology of cello-playing: he spoke constantly about getting rid of physical tension and



of performing the various motions required in an organic, circular manner. He taught us to be self-analyzing and self-prescribing. I performed most of the Suites while at Indiana and absorbed Starker's cellistic ideas of bowing, phrasing and fingering: everything should be geared towards beautiful sound production and perfect evenness and consistency of tone. And at this point, in the 1980s, people still did not favour open strings in Bach, at least not in the American schools - certainly Josef Gingold and all the other string teachers at Indiana were teaching us to play with vibrato all the time, and an open string was considered too "dead". But

Starker taught us to strive for extreme cleanliness and purity of intonation, with the shifts as hidden as possible, and bow speed and dynamics planned and controlled. We developed disciplined ears.

My next teacher, in London, England, was William Pleeth, who was famous for having taught Jacqueline Du Pré. His son Anthony Pleeth is an accomplished baroque and modern cellist, and historically informed baroque playing was obviously much more prevalent in England at that time than it was in the U.S. William Pleeth opened my eyes to a completely different way of playing Bach. While Starker gave his students all the technical tools we needed to be great musicians, Pleeth took a solid technical foundation for granted, focusing instead on how the music works, and on finding ways to make that clear to the listener. He took me through the Third Suite and showed me how to emphasize the motivic material through choices of bowings, with completely opposite results much of the time to what I'd been used to. He encouraged imaginative freedom within a musical phrase; he would ask you to come up with a different interpretation of a phrase after you'd played it, then play a third version himself, then talk about the different places where the phrase could peak, and the ways you could bring that out. It was the opposite of Starker's approach, yet in the end, I felt that these two mentors met in the middle, attaining a similar balance of freedom and discipline in their interpretations.

I was with Pleeth for only 18 months, and then started my professional career. Had we done more than the Third Suite together perhaps he would have introduced me to the original scordatura

tuning of the Fifth Suite, which no teacher had mentioned previously. Incredibly, the first time I heard anyone play the Fifth that way – with the top string of the cello tuned down a tone from A to G – was when a student brought it to me in 2006.

In recent years I've listened to recordings of Anner Bylisma and other cellists who are devoted to historically inspired performance practice, but my latest great influence is the Italian viola da gamba player Paolo Pandolfo. His incredible freedom of expression has excited my creative soul, and his embellishments are amazingly beautiful and sound completely spontaneous. I have been so jealous of the wonderful harmonies that he adds with those huge gamba chords, sometimes sounding so orchestral, and with some unusual embellishments, that I attempted to add a few to my own performance, especially in the Sixth Suite.

My years as an orchestral player have also brought some interesting baroque influences, through colleagues who brought baroque bows to rehearsals, and through visiting conductors attuned to baroque performance practice – Nicholas McGegan and Helmut Rilling in Toronto; Harry Bicket at the Santa Fe Opera. I have become more familiar with a style of playing that features the pure sound of open strings, and that treats vibrato as the exception rather than the rule, with expression coming from the different strokes and nuances of the bow rather than the left hand. I've come to appreciate the use of the cello not just as a melodic instrument but as a sort of vibraphone where you can activate many overtones, allowing the sound to become so much freer and more complex by doing so; in this way you increase your colour palette in many ways. I now use my ideas for fingerings to express different colours and provoke various



emotions – for a darker and more closed mood, I will stay on a string as the line goes up, but to express something more open and perhaps excitable I will stay close to and use open strings. Vibrato has become another tool for expression for me, used less in an automatic fashion and more to enhance the overtones of a chord or to emphasize specific places in a melodic line.

These recordings represent the incredible musical odyssey through the Bach Suites that I've had the privilege to travel. In some ways the journey has been typical of a cellist of my generation: from the ultra-romanticism of Casals, which is the starting point for the post-Bach performance tradition of these suites, to the modernist logic of Starker, to a European school that has been more open to historical performance practice

than the North American establishment has been.

At the same time, the journey has been like the growth of my bones, or my consciousness, so much a part of me that I cannot imagine myself without these works. The search is always for the voice that Bach intended to convey – orchestral, operatic or choral – and for the true meaning in Bach's compositions, the intellectual and emotional depth of which have always been my passionate goal to express. It is my life's work, as it is for every cellist who knows the Suites.

I continue to believe that there is nothing in human experience that can't be said with this amazing music.

Winona Zelenka

Winona Zelenka

Winona Zelenka is one of Canada's finest cellists, known for her gorgeous, luminous tone and expressive brilliance. Active as a soloist, chamber and symphony musician, she electrifies her audiences with her impeccable musicality, superb technique and elegant style. "Some of the most beautiful singing... came from the cello of Winona Zelenka. Her opening solo...was breathtaking – floating with effortless musicality yet free of display or garishness." - National Post

A dedicated recitalist and chamber musician, Winona Zelenka performs across Canada and the U.S.A. Her debut as soloist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra was in 2006, playing Strauss's Don Quixote. In addition to numerous concerto appearances since then, she has appeared on many prominent stages and series, such as the Ottawa Chamberfest, and with the Zukerman Chamber Players at the 92nd St. Y in New York.

Ms. Zelenka is also a proponent of new music. Several composers have written especially for her, including Chris Paul Harman and Michael Pepa. She is featured in the soundtrack to such notable films as Atom Egoyan's "Adoration," István Szabó's "Being Julia," and the IMAX film "Under The Sea." Exciting new projects include films inspired by the Suite for Solo Cello by Gaspar Cassado, by Moving Head Productions.

Winona Zelenka made her concerto debut at the age of 13 with the Calgary Philharmonic, and appeared as soloist at Carnegie Recital Hall at the age of 17.

She began her professional career at the age of 22 as Assistant Principal Cellist of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Ms. Zelenka has served as Acting Principal Cellist of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Principal Cellist of the Santa Fe Opera.

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About the Cello:

The cello used in this recording was made in 1707 by Joseph Guarnerius of Cremona, Italy, son of Andrea and father of Joseph "Del Gesu".

The Cremonese instruments of this period are considered the summit of achievement and this Joseph Guarneri filius Andreae cello proves the rule. It possesses an exceptional amount of dark red varnish for its age and is known for its rich magnificent tone. It was owned for many years by renowned teacher and soloist Janos Starker, who played it in Europe for his frequent tours and recordings. The current owners are enthusiastic patrons of the musical arts, Dr. Edward Pong and Mrs. Amy Pong of Toronto.

About the Recording:

This recording was made in a natural acoustic setting and recorded in high definition, without the use of added effects or reverb, in order to capture the true sound of the instrument.

Produced by Ron Searles and Winona Zelenka
Recorded, edited and mastered by Ron Searles
Recorded at Pong Studio on:
Suite 6, Dec 2 and 29, 2007; Suite 1, March 2, 2008; Suite 2, May 19 and 25, June 6, 2008;
Suite 3, Dec 13 and 14, 2008; Suite 4, Oct 31 and Nov 1, 2009; Suite 5, Feb 6 and 7, 2010.
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