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Classics
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BACH

Slava Grigoryan

CELLO SUITES • VOLUME I




ABC
Classics

It's been fifteen years since I last recorded a solo album. I can honestly say that I haven't missed playing on my own – but this extraordinary music has been the perfect reason to do so again!

I first stumbled upon a baritone guitar twelve years ago while visiting Graham Caldersmith's workshop near Port Macquarie in New South Wales. Graham was, and still is, a leading figure in creating brilliant 'guitar family' instruments, including of course regular classical guitars. He happened to have a baritone lying around the day I dropped by.

A baritone guitar is essentially a larger, deeper guitar tuned a fifth below a regular guitar. The moment I touched this beast I thought of Bach's Cello Suites. The resonance and sustain were so entirely different to what I was used to on a regular instrument – it was impossible not to play lyrically. Later that afternoon, I left Graham's workshop with that very same instrument, completely smitten and full of ideas.

In a very short amount of time I realised that it was possible to play all six of Bach's Cello Suites in the original keys on the baritone guitar, and I knew that at some stage in the future this would be an inspiring recording project. Although it has taken over a decade to get this particular endeavour off the ground, I've had the pleasure of using the baritone in other contexts – originally with Saffire – The Australian Guitar Quartet, later with MGT (my trio with Ralph Towner and Wolfgang Muthspiel), and most recently with Band of Brothers (a quartet with my brother Leonard and the Tawadros brothers). Sadly, the original Caldersmith lost some of its vigour, probably due to all the travel, and so I asked my current luthier, the extraordinary Jim Redgate from Adelaide, if he was interested in making one. He was. In 2011 Jim built a baritone instrument using a completely new construction method that he has pioneered – a double top with a three-dimensional wave running through the soundboard. Without going into anything too technical, it sounds and looks extraordinary.

Well, and now to the music. What can I say that hasn't been said about the Cello Suites before? I'm constantly staggered by the universe of ideas in each movement of every

Suite. The simplicity, the elegance, the structure and the spirit are simply breathtaking. It's been such an honour to play this music. I know that, over time, there will be many changes as I continue to play them in live performances, but I also know that that's kind of the point: there will never be a perfect version, just a long-term relationship with notes on a page that trigger feelings and emotions on a deeply profound level for the musician attempting to communicate through them. I look forward to my evolving relationship with this music, and I'm thrilled to be recording the other three Suites next year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who made this recording possible. A huge thank you to Toby Chadd and everyone at ABC Classics, to Ulrike Klein and Alison Beare for the privilege of recording at the UKARIA Cultural Centre, to everyone at Patrick Togher Artists' Management, to Shaun Rigney and Alex Stinson for their fantastic contribution in the control room and to Jim Redgate for the magnificent instrument. Lastly, a huge thank you to my dear friend and manager Reuben Zylberspic, to my brother Lenny, to my darling Sharon, for everything, and to all of the Grigoryans for their continued support and love.



Slava Grigoryan

October 2016

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH 1685–1750

Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV1007

[17'11]

| | | |
|---|-------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Prelude | 2'32 |
| 2 | II. Allemande | 4'44 |
| 3 | III. Courante | 2'24 |
| 4 | IV. Sarabande | 2'56 |
| 5 | V. Menuets I & II | 2'57 |
| 6 | VI. Gigue | 1'36 |

Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor, BWV1008

[19'32]

| | | |
|----|-------------------|------|
| 7 | I. Prelude | 3'38 |
| 8 | II. Allemande | 3'42 |
| 9 | III. Courante | 2'14 |
| 10 | IV. Sarabande | 4'44 |
| 11 | V. Menuets I & II | 2'43 |
| 12 | VI. Gigue | 2'31 |

Cello Suite No. 3 in C major, BWV1009

[22'00]

| | | |
|----|--------------------|------|
| 13 | I. Prelude | 3'33 |
| 14 | II. Allemande | 3'39 |
| 15 | III. Courante | 3'07 |
| 16 | IV. Sarabande | 4'31 |
| 17 | V. Bourrées I & II | 4'06 |
| 18 | VI. Gigue | 3'04 |

Total Playing Time 58'43

Slava Grigoryan *baritone guitar*

BACH, THE CELLO SUITES AND THE BARITONE GUITAR

Legend, theory, anecdote and history cloak JS Bach's six Cello Suites like perhaps no other piece of art.

There's the teenage Pablo Casals discovering a battered score in a ramshackle Barcelona bookshop at the turn of the 20th century, and those seminal recording sessions as the bombs of World War Two fell around him. As the theatre of history continued, Mstislav Rostropovich – his country divided from Casals' by decades of enmity – turned to Bach amidst the rubble of the Berlin Wall.

For some, the Suites represent the death and resurrection of Christ; others remain convinced that they were crafted by Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena. Since Robert Schumann created his first transcription (for cello and piano), almost every instrument has re-invented these 36 movements – not to mention the scores of recordings by cellists. For many of us, advertising executives have inextricably associated the most famous moments with any number of products and experiences.

It's difficult, then, to conceive the Suites without the three centuries since their composition – but on the bare facts of that composition, history is particularly unhelpful. There is no autograph manuscript, just versions by Anna Magdalena Bach and Bach's contemporary Johann Peter Kellner; we don't even know for certain whether the works were intended for performance on the cello, or on the *violoncello da spalla* (a smaller instrument played across the chest).

But this history – the palimpsest of sound and experience that the Suites have become – is fundamental to Bach's music. The Suites represent a structure within which thought can be played out and history written. This music is not dogmatic; it responds to the time of wherever and whenever it is played, with its rare combination of astonishing musical complexity, and a sparseness which demands that the performer and the listener become composers too. Recent scholarship suggests that Bach himself would have played this music on the harpsichord, using the single 'melodic' lines as the basis for elaboration and ornamentation. It would be different every time he sat down to play; different in music, and different in meaning.

Bach did not intend what has happened to Suites over the 300 years since they were written. But his music doesn't so much allow these events and interpretations as encourage them: it glimpses eternity in its ability to reach beyond its own historicity, to be reborn every time it is played, and to create meaning in each new context.



One of the few things that we do know for certain is that Bach transcribed Suite No. 5 for lute: that manuscript, penned by Bach around 15 years after the Suites were originally composed (probably around 1720), survives. In this recording on the baritone guitar, Slava Grigoryan takes on this precedent for plucked performances, whilst maintaining – unlike many transcriptions – the original pitch. As far as we are aware, this is the first recording of these works on baritone guitar; the venture is therefore both groundbreaking and rooted in history, and its musical revelations – from both Slava’s musicianship and the instrument – are, historical considerations aside, significant.

The Suites are ostensibly a collection of dances in the French style, each consisting of six movements: Prelude; Allemande; Courante; Sarabande; a pair of Menuets (in Suites 1 and 2), Bourrées (in Suites 3 and 4) or Gavottes (in Suites 5 and 6); and a Gigue. Whilst these names refer to established dances, there is no evidence that the music was intended to accompany dancing; rather, the movement titles act as stylistic indicators.

This regular template for each Suite brings a consistent structure. It also allows each movement to be conceived differently within each Suite, depending on the context given by the relative key and the timbre of the surrounding movements. The Sarabandes – the slowest of the movements – are the core of each, and their characters are deeply contrasting. The tender simplicity of the Sarabande from Suite No. 1, for instance, with its generous and open major key, provides a moment of quiet introspection. In Suite No. 2, the minor key combines with uncomfortable harmonic progressions to create a sense of angst and foreboding, of music writing itself into non-existence. The final chord comes with a dark sense of resignation, tempering the Menuets and lively Gigue that follow. The resonance and sustain of the baritone guitar allow the music to linger – relaxing or brooding – with the natural decay of each note, in a different way than it would with the more deliberate sustain of a bow.

Given their enduring popularity, it’s remarkable that the Suites contain so few discernible melodies. In their place, one of Bach’s key musical devices is arpeggiation: the first Prelude is made up almost entirely of arpeggios that spin off one another, constantly renewing and reinventing themselves; the third centres around constantly varying arpeggio progressions which return to repeated iterations of an E (grounded within the tonic of C major). These moments foreshadow the minimalism of the 20th century, whilst others establish Bach’s oft- (and rightly) referenced place as the founding father of jazz – a form with which the guitar has a long and rich history. Slava’s baritone guitar draws out rhythmic impulses in the Suites: listen for the groove of the second Gigue, or the shifting

syncopations of the third Courante, where rhythmic lines are placed into tension with one another and resolve, the different registers of the guitar picking out and blending those voices. In the first Courante, we hear two polyphonic lines emerge from the texture, as though played by a duet of instruments – a technique Bach also employs to great effect in his music for solo violin (in particular the Prelude to the Partita in E major).

One of the marked differences between Bach’s own lute transcription of Suite No. 5 and the surviving manuscripts of that same Suite from Anna Magdalena and Kellner is the significant ornamentation in the lute transcription. There are a number of possible explanations for this: that the lute, with its relatively limited resonance, needed extra ornamentation to sustain the musical line; or simply that the ornaments, like dynamic markings and other performance indicators, were never added to the cello manuscripts. With the opportunity presented by the baritone guitar’s colourful and multi-registered sound, ornaments are lightly used here, reserved for repeated sections. Instead, this recording turns the focus onto the musical intricacy and richness that lies inherently within Bach’s music.



At the turn of the 20th century, the composer Edvard Grieg heard Casals perform the Suites when they were virtually unknown. ‘This man does not perform, he resurrects!’ he exclaimed – the voice of a world in which art was seen as an archaeological exercise, a means to rediscover the great minds of yesteryear.

Now, over a century later, it’s no longer a case of uncovering the past, but of engaging in an ongoing dialogue between this music and our world. Strange to think that in the 100 years since Grieg’s remark this has become some of the world’s most beloved, most heard, and most recorded music, and yet we are presenting here the first volume in a series of ‘world premieres’: Bach’s Cello Suites recorded on baritone guitar and at the original pitch. The musical revelations of this album pay testimony to the depth of Bach’s conception and the superlative musicianship of these performances, and to the sheer joy of our ongoing engagement – as performers, as listeners – with this music.

Toby Chadd © 2016

SLAVA GRIGORYAN

Regarded as a 'wizard' of the guitar, Slava Grigoryan has forged a prolific reputation as a classical guitar virtuoso. Born in Kazakhstan, he immigrated with his family to Australia in 1981. He began studying the guitar with his violinist father Eduard at the age of six; by the time he was 17 he was signed to the Sony Classical Label. His relationship with Sony Classical, ABC Classics in Australia, and his own label Which Way Music has led to the release of over 20 solo and collaborative albums spanning a vast range of musical genres.

At the age of 18, his first tour was with guitar legends Paco Peña and Leo Kottke. Since then he has travelled the world as a soloist in recitals and with orchestras in Europe, Asia and North America. He has appeared with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, the Dresden Radio Orchestra, the Israel Symphony and the Hong Kong Sinfonietta, and performed at dozens of national and international arts festivals and guitar festivals. He has won ARIA Awards for Best Classical Album and performs regularly as a soloist with all of Australia's major symphony orchestras. He has made three critically acclaimed tours with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, and internationally his performances have taken him to some of the world's leading venues. From numerous appearances in London's Wigmore Hall and Royal Festival Hall, to New York's Carnegie Hall, Vienna's Konzerthaus, and Tokyo's Sumida Triphony Hall, Slava Grigoryan has developed a talent for bewitching his audiences.

Collaborations have played a huge part in his career, most notably the guitar duo with Leonard Grigoryan. Together they have released three duo albums and appeared on many others. Their touring has seen them perform throughout Europe, America, Asia, Russia and the Middle East. Other collaborations in the classical sphere have been with ensembles including the Goldner, Flinders and Australian String Quartets in Australia, and the Endellion, Skampa and Chilingirian Quartets in Europe. Slava Grigoryan regularly performs with the Southern Cross Soloists, has worked extensively with pianist Michael Kieran Harvey and baritone José Carbó, and was a founding member of Saffire – The Australian Guitar Quartet. He has also collaborated with numerous composers and premiered many new works, significantly with composers William Lovelady, Nigel Westlake and Shaun Rigney.

Outside the classical world Slava Grigoryan has had long-term collaborations with MGT – a guitar trio featuring jazz icons Ralph Towner and Wolfgang Muthspiel – and as a duo with Austrian electric bassist Al Slavik. With Leonard Grigoryan and with Joseph and James Tawadros he has formed Band of Brothers, performing a fusion of contemporary jazz, classical and Middle-Eastern music.

Slava Grigoryan's appointment as Artistic Director of the Adelaide International Guitar Festival has been a thrilling addition to an already rich musical life.

'A guitar player of uncommon originality and authority. Musicality, expressivity and daring ... a singular talent.' – The New York Times

'... a truly dazzling and brilliant performance – go and see him if you have the opportunity, he is one of the very best talents to have emerged in recent years.' – Classical Guitar Magazine

www.grigoryanbrothers.com





At www.abcmusic.com.au/GrigoryanBach

- Find out more about Slava Grigoryan's Bach project and future albums
- Watch footage of Slava in performance and discussing the music
- Read articles and reviews.

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UKARIA
Cultural Centre

www.ukaria.com

Slava Grigoryan plays a baritone guitar made by Jim Redgate, 2011

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