

*Inspired
by Dance*

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

3 Suites a Violoncello Solo senza Basso

Tormod Dalen
Violoncello

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Suite 1^{re} BWV 1007

1	Prelude	02:59
2	Allemande	04:00
3	Courante	02:44
4	Sarabande	01:51
5	Menuet I & II	02:56
6	Gigue	01:38

Violoncello:

Urs Wenk-Wolff, Oslo 1996

Bows:

Luis-Emilio Rodriguez, Den Haag 1998

J erome Gastaldo, Brussel 2011

Suite 2^{me} BWV 1008

7	Prelude	03:43
8	Allemande	03:31
9	Courante	02:39
10	Sarabande	03:11
11	Menuet I & II	02:55
12	Gigue	02:35

Artistic direction, recording & editing:

Alban Moraud

Recorded at *La Courroie*,

84320 Entraigues sur la Sorgue, France

November - 2012

Suite 3 BWV 1009

13	Prelude	03:27
14	Allemande	03:45
15	Courante	03:19
16	Sarabande	02:44
17	Bouree I & II	03:12
18	Gigue	03:00



Total time: 54:17

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Johann Sebastian Bach never intended his suites for solo cello to accompany dancing. It is also unlikely that he ever thought of a choreography for his keyboard partitas. The dance movements in his orchestral suites were also probably not meant for dancing. In fact we do not know whether Bach wrote any music at all to specifically accompany dancers during his many years of court employment.

Nevertheless, dance is omnipresent in his music; he wrote close to 200 titled dance movements and frequently used dance rhythms and dance forms in his cantatas, organ works and chamber music. His friend and superior J.M. Gesner described him as a musician with “rhythm in all parts of his body”, and early commentaries noted his familiarity with French style and court dancing. Considering this, it would be natural if his music retained a close connection with the choreographic models for the dance movements.

It was long customary to underplay the secular elements of Bach’s music. He had the image of a stern Lutheran church musician, the very incarnation of German seriousness. Maintaining this image meant minimizing the French influences, and therefore also the association to French court dances. Over the last thirty years this tendency has turned, and many musicians

have explored Bach’s attractive rhythms in various incarnations, both in jazz arrangements and period instrument performances. The dance element has also been brought to the fore, and many choreographers, both in modern ballet and in period dance have used Bach’s music for their creations. For most musicians, however, knowledge about baroque dance style has remained largely theoretical, and many questions still remain about how to interpret the connection with the baroque dance forms in Bach’s cello suites .



Most of the different dances in the cello suites were still in use when Bach learned his craft, and those that were not, still retained a strong link with the original step patterns.

This is the case with the Allemande, a dance that originated in 16th-century Germany as “*Teutcher Tanz*”. It made the tour of Europe in various incarnations before coming back to form the stately first movement of the baroque suite. The renaissance step patterns are still hidden beneath the surface of Bach’s Allemandes, giving structure and direction to the phrases.

Two forms of the Courante coexisted in the early 18th century: the French *Courante* and the

Italian *Corrente*. The first, Louis XIV's preferred dance, is slow and dignified whereas the second originates in a brisk, leaping dance. In the cello suites, Bach seeks variety by using both types, sometimes confusing the listener as to which is which.

The Sarabande must have been Bach's favourite dance. He wrote 39 of them in the course of his career, more than any of the other dances, and he used its form for some of his most profound music. Unlike the modern performing tradition that tends towards exceedingly slow tempos, the baroque danced Sarabande was performed at a relatively moderate pace. Its expression is calm and balanced, though sometimes passionate, and with a great variety of steps.

The most common dance in Bach's time was the Menuet. It was danced by people of all sorts and in many different social circumstances. The different *Pas de menuet* have in common that they cover two bars of music, which conveys an air of graceful flow to this dance.

Described as a joyful and sprightly dance, the Bourrée evolved from folk dances of the Auvergne region in central France, where it is still danced. Its own dance step, the *Pas de bourrée*, intermingles

with other vigorous steps like the *Jeté*, the *Contretemps* and *Pas de sissonne*.

The Gavotte, also originally a rustic French dance, enjoyed great popularity in Bach's time. It is described variously as joyful or sad, but always with grace. The basic step, the *Contretemps de gavotte*, ends with an *Assemblée* marking the first beat of the second complete bar.

In the closing Gigues, Bach fully exploits the great diversity of this originally English dance. The choreographic models feature a succession of leaps and skipping steps that convey a character of agility and vivaciousness.



For the last three years, I have been exploring the dance aspect of Bach's cello suites, immersing myself in the baroque dance style that was dominant in Bach's time, the French "*La belle danse*". I have studied with experts in the field, learnt the original dances and explored the original choreographies, with the aim to feel the baroque steps and gestures in all parts of my body. It has led me to reconsider some of the basic precepts of phrasing and tempo in the Bach cello suites and the present recording is a result of this work