



# Pieter Wispelwey plays the Bach Cello Suites

<sup>SPECIAL EVENT</sup> Sunday 6 August, 2pm Monday 7 August, 7pm





sydney symphony orchestra

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	Pieter Wispelwey plays the Bach Cello Suites JS BACH Cello Suites Nos. 1 to 6 Pieter Wispelwey cello	Special Event Sun 6 Aug 2pm Mon 7 Aug 7pm City Recital Hall
	Shefali's Playlist Music by HAYDN, BRITTEN, MENDELSSOHN, and JS BACH arr. Oguey Goldberg Variations, BWV988: Selections Toby Thatcher conductor	Playlist <b>Tue 8 Aug 6.30pm</b> City Recital Hall
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	Beethoven & Bruckner Simone Young Conducts BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No.2 BRUCKNER Symphony No.5 Simone Young conductor Imogen Cooper piano	Thursday Afternoon Symphony <b>Thu 17 Aug 1.30pm</b> Emirates Metro Series <b>Fri 18 Aug 8pm</b> Great Classics <b>Sat 19 Aug 2pm</b> Sydney Opera House
	Imogen Cooper in Recital BEETHOVEN 7 Bagatelles, Op.33 HAYDN Sonata in C minor, Hob.XVI:20 BEETHOVEN Variations on 'La stessa, la stessissima' ADÈS Darknesse Visible BEETHOVEN Sonata in A flat, Op.110	International Planists in Recital <b>Mon 21 Aug 7pm</b> City Recital Hall
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SPECIAL EVENT SUNDAY 6 AUGUST, 2PM MONDAY 7 AUGUST, 7PM CITY RECITAL HALL

# PIETER WISPELWEY PLAYS THE BACH CELLO SUITES

**Pieter Wispelwey** cello

### JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

## Suite No.1 in G major, BWV 1007

Prelude Allemande Courante Sarabande Menuet I & II Gigue

# Suite No.2 in D minor, BWV 1008

Prelude Allemande Courante Sarabande Menuet I & II Gigue

# Suite No.3 in C major, BWV 1009

Prelude Allemande Courante Sarabande Bourrée I & II Gigue

INTERVAL (20 minutes)

# **BWV 1010** Prelude Allemande Courante Sarabande Bourrée I & II Gigue

Suite No.4 in E flat maior,

# Suite No.5 in C minor, BWV 1011

Prelude Allemande Courante Sarabande Gavotte I & II Gigue

INTERVAL (15 minutes)

### Suite No.6 in D major, BWV 1012

Prelude Allemande Courante Sarabande Gavotte I & II Gigue



These Sydney recitals will not be recorded for broadcast. However Pieter Wispelwey's performance of the same program in Melbourne will be broadcast live on ABC Classic FM on Thursday 17 August at 7.30pm.

Pre-concert talk by Zoltán Szabó in the First Floor Reception Room 45 minutes before each performance. Visit sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for

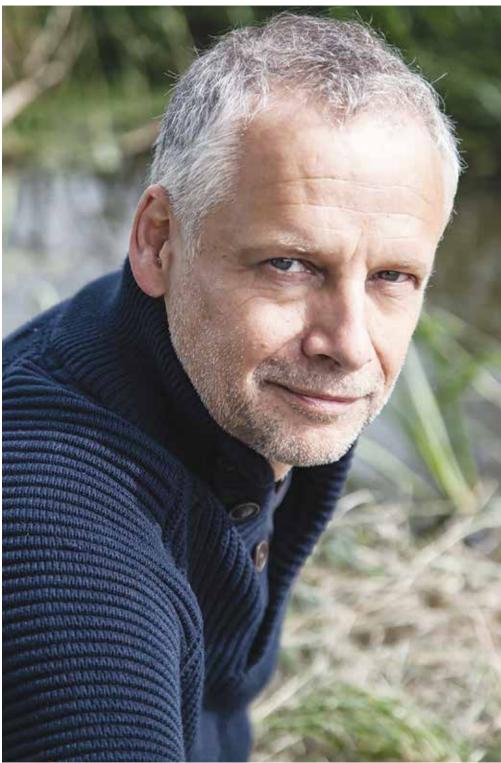
sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations: 18 minutes, 17 minutes, 23 minutes, 20-minute interval, 26 minutes, 24 minutes, 15-minute interval, 25 minutes The recital will conclude at

approximately 4.55pm (Sun), 9.55pm (Mon).

COVER PHOTO: Carolien Sikkenk





# **Pieter Wispelwey**

cello

Pieter Wispelwey is equally at ease on the modern or period cello. His acute stylistic awareness, combined with a truly original interpretation and a phenomenal technical mastery, has won the hearts of critics and public alike in repertoire ranging from JS Bach to Elliott Carter.

Born in Haarlem, The Netherlands, Pieter Wispelwey studied with Dicky Boeke and Anner Bylsma in Amsterdam, and later with Paul Katz in USA and William Pleeth in the UK. His career spans five continents and he has appeared as a concerto soloist with many of the world's leading orchestras and conductors. He also appears as a guest artist with a number of string quartets, including the Australian String Quartet.

With regular recital appearances in London (Wigmore Hall), Paris (Châtelet, Louvre), Amsterdam (Concertgebouw, Muziekgebouw), Brussels (Bozar), Berlin (Konzerthaus), Milan (Societta del Quartetto), Buenos Aires (Teatro Colón), Los Angeles (Walt Disney Hall) and New York (Lincoln Center), as well as the Sydney Opera House Utzon Room, he has established a reputation as a charismatic recitalist.

A major strand of his activity is the performance of the complete Bach cello suites during the course of one evening, and in 2012 he celebrated his 50th birthday by embarking on a project showcasing the suites. He recorded them for the third time, together with a DVD featuring debates on their interpretation with Bach scholars Laurence Dreyfus and John Butt.

His impressive discography of over 20 albums has attracted major international awards. His most recent release features CPE Bach's Cello Concerto in A major and he is midway through recording the duo repertoire of Schubert and Brahms. Other releases include Walton's Cello Concerto with the SSO and Jeffrey Tate.

He appeared in the SSO's Great Cellists Play Bach series in 1995 and made his first concerto appearance with the SSO in 2007. He returned in 2011 as soloist and director (Mozart and Haydn), and in 2013 (Lutosławski concerto). This month, in addition to these recitals in Sydney and a concert in the SSO's Mozart in the City series (10 August), he will appear at the Melbourne Recital Centre performing the Bach suites, Beethoven's complete works for cello and piano, and the Brahms cello sonatas over three consecutive evenings.

Pieter Wispelwey plays a cello by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini (1760).

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

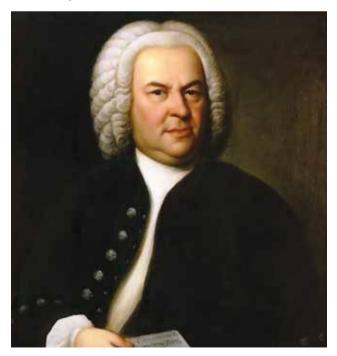
# The Bach Cello Suites

You know why you are here. You've come to hear all of Bach's suites for solo cello, played one after another, in a single concert, by the same player. A tour de force, certainly, but Bach is so revered that the whole performance may also be considered a ritual – an enjoyable one – for player and listener alike.

Yet there are many things about this concert that could be thought odd, or at least unexpected, historically and practically. How can the sound of a single instrument keep interest for the better part of three hours? Won't Bach's music be limited, by contrast with his music for multiple instruments, with or without voices? Even three hours of solo keyboard music, surely, would offer a richer range of musical possibilities? And how is it that Bach's cello suites – apparently the very first music of their kind for the instrument – have remained unsurpassed?

## Implied polyphony: writing for a single-line instrument

Consider this: Bach is a famous master of the art of combining many voices in music, which is called polyphony. On an instrument such as the cello or violin, the bow can sound only two adjacent strings simultaneously – the chords that make harmony generally require at least three notes. By writing for solo cello, Bach seems to be 'limiting' himself, making rare, if not impossible, both harmony (several notes sounded simultaneously) and polyphony (the weaving of melodic lines).



# **Keynotes**

# JS BACH

Born Eisenach, 1685 Died Leipzig, 1750

Bach's career has been defined by three major periods of employment. In 1708, he was appointed court organist and then conductor of the orchestra in Weimar. But when he was passed over for the post of Kapellmeister, it was time to move on, and in 1717 Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen offered him the Kapellmeister post in his own court. It wasn't an easy departure: the Duke of Weimar briefly placed him under arrest! In Cöthen, where the young prince 'loved and understood music' and the orchestra was a particularly fine one, Bach completed much instrumental music, including the Brandenburg concertos and his pieces for solo violin and solo cello. In 1722 he applied for the post of cantor at the school attached to the Thomas Church in Leipzig. He wasn't the town council's first choice - they preferred Telemann – but he won the job and spent the remaining 27 years of his life in Leipzig: teaching, performing, organising the musical life of the church and composing his great series of church cantatas.

Throughout these suites Bach answers a challenge he clearly enjoys, in many resourceful ways. One writer on the cello suites, Peter Eliot Stone, sums up: Bach 'fools the listener into thinking that he hears more than one line at a time by restricting each melody to its own discrete register and by sounding successive fragments of each melody in alternation with another.' The polyphony is implied; your ear fills in the blanks.

For generations to come, this seemed a problem. The Romantic composers, even those who revered Bach, thought this music, if it was to be played outside the practice studio, needed piano accompaniment, which Robert Schumann provided. The most celebrated movement from Bach's similar suites and sonatas for solo violin, the mighty Chaconne, was most often heard in piano transcriptions, of which Busoni's was the most famous.

Were these solo suites for a single string instrument, then, a one-off mutation in music's evolution? Not quite.

When Bach first joined the musical establishment of the ducal court of Weimar, in 1703, he probably met Johann Paul Westhoff, a virtuoso violinist at that court. In 1696 Westhoff had published the earliest known multi-movement compositions for solo violin. Scholars think Westhoff's example gave Bach the idea for his own similar compositions.

It's hard to be sure of dates, but Bach's three suites and three sonatas for solo violin, and his six suites for cello, seem to have been written about the same time. Or perhaps his ideas for both sets were a long time in gestation. (Some of the cello suites may have been written in Weimar but the set appears to have been compiled in the 1720s in Cöthen.) What is certain is that writing this kind of music for cello was more unexpected than for violin.

### Why the cello?

The cello, although it had existed in something like its modern form since the mid-16th century, had tended to serve mainly to contribute to the bass line of the music, rather than featuring as a soloist. Especially in Germany, solo music in the same pitch registers as the cello was usually given to the slightly more ancient viola da gamba ('leg viol'), which had more strings than a cello and frets on the finger board (like a lute or guitar). In Italy, however, Antonio Vivaldi composed some 27 cello concertos, and even in Germany around the time Bach composed his suites, there must have been cellists capable of playing them. As their modern revival has shown, they are practical, not abstract, and they are expressive, not mere technical exercises.

Bach must have had a masterful player in mind – and two of his colleagues at the court of Prince Leopold at Anthalt-Cöthen are likely suspects – but there remains a question: why the cello,

# Who played Bach's cello suites first?

The search focuses on Bach's time in the employ of the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen (1717–23). Sure enough, Bach's musical colleagues at Cöthen included two accomplished cellists who had come to Cöthen from the disbanded orchestra of the Prussian court in Berlin: Christian Friedrich Linigke (or Linicke) and Christian Ferdinand Abel (who also played gamba). It is thought Bach composed the suites for one or both of these cellists. rather than what was still the more popular solo instrument, the viola da gamba? A fanciful but intriguing suggestion comes from an amateur enthusiast, Eric Siblin. Noting that the gamba parts in the Sixth Brandenburg Concerto, composed at Cöthen, are undemanding, whereas the violas and cellos are given solo work, and noting also that Prince Leopold was a gamba player, who liked to play with his court musicians, Siblin suggests that it may not have been tactful at Leopold's court to compose extremely demanding music for the gamba, whereas 'with the cello, Bach could be as musically adventurous as he wanted'.

### Why suites?

The suite (Bach also uses the term 'partita') was the most common form for instrumental music in the Baroque period, the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The name comes from the French, and means a sequence of movements. As the French used the term (for example, the harpsichordistcomposers of the Couperin family) an instrumental suite was a string of dances, sometimes up to 18 in all, from which the performer could select according to whim. Typically the movements were united by being in the same key (or its corresponding minor or major key).

In Germany, the suite became more standardised. The dancederived movements found in the suites of German composers are, in order: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. Often there was an introductory movement, not dance-based and improvisational in style – usually a Prelude (as in all six cello suites by Bach). The core movements in the standard suite were transformed from their dance originals, often strikingly so. Slightly closer to dance music were the other movements that completed the suite. These were called *galanteries* and in Bach's cello suites they include Bourrées, Menuets and Gavottes. Each of the suites then ends with a Gigue.

It would have been natural for Bach to choose this wellestablished form, providing a familiar structure for a novel kind of music, virtually unprecedented for the cello.

### The legend of the cello suites and their revival

The story is well-known how the great Catalan cellist Pablo Casals came across a tattered 19th-century edition in a secondhand music store in Barcelona, in 1890 when he was 14, and single-handedly restored the suites to the concert repertoire. But the implications usually drawn from this story need some qualification.

The suites had not been completely forgotten – the very fact that there was a 19th-century edition shows that. Even the claim that, before Casals, the cello suites were considered only as pedagogical exercises is too simple. But even those cellists who could play these suites and recognised their musical quality would have had little opportunity to perform them in public. There was no current concert genre to fit them into, and that no doubt is why Schumann – following the example of what Mendelssohn had done with Bach's unaccompanied violin music – provided the cello suites with a piano accompaniment. The harmony Bach implied was thus made more explicit – even though the title page in Anna Magdalena's writing clearly says 'senza basso', i.e. without accompaniment.

Casals waited many years before he dared play a Bach solo suite in a concert, not only because he wanted first to master the music thoroughly, but because of the likely reaction of public and critics.

The reaction is typified in a 1909 review of a Casals concert in Hamburg:

As a second solo Casals played something very uncommon. Just fancy one single 'cello playing solo without accompaniment in the large concert hall! It looked odd at first sight, but when one heard him play the C major Suite for 'Cello by J.S. Bach one was really charmed.

### All the suites in one concert?

Casals began playing the Bach suites in public in the early years of the 20th century, in the context of recitals for cello and piano, one suite at a time. By then he had been preparing for at least ten years.

He would choose which suite to play according to key (fitting the concert program), and according to mood, both his own and the music's. Unwittingly, he also created the modern mania for completeness through the influence of his recordings. He was the first to record individual suites complete and to record all the suites. Made between November 1936 and June 1939, these recordings have never been out of the catalogue.

The appetite for the Bach cello suites created an audience, both for more complete recordings and eventually for marathons such as Pieter Wispelwey's playing of all the suites in a single concert. Notable complete recordings came from János Starker in the 1950s, from Pierre Fournier in the 1960s, and eventually from virtually every cellist of note. Wispelwey himself has recorded the complete suites no fewer than three times. Earlier this year, SSO principal cello Umberto Clerici released *Suite Cubed: Bach and Beyond*, taking the Bach suites as a starting point to reveal their pervasive influence among contemporary composers.

Bach's original manuscripts have been lost, but the cello suites survived through two copies made during his lifetime, one by his second wife, Anna Magdalena Bach (of which the Prelude from Suite No.1 is shown here) and another by Johann Peter Kellner.

# What instrument?

This has become a double-barrelled question. First: what kind of cello? Second: historical or modern? It was clear all along that one of the suites, the sixth, was written for an instrument with an extra, fifth string. Was it, scholars wondered, the viola pomposa? (Albert Schweitzer believed this was an instrument Bach invented.) Was it the violoncello piccolo, a small cello with five strings, or was it perhaps even an ordinary cello fitted with an extra string? The solution adopted for the sixth suite by players of the modern cello, following Casals, has been to find the technical solutions necessary to play on four strings music written for five – more difficult, but demonstrably possible.

There are a very small number of examples of the violoncello piccolo in museums, and some that are available to players. In a search for authenticity, and a historically informed performance practice, cellists such as Anner Bylsma began to play all the suites on historical instruments set up in the 18th-century way – the most visually obvious differences being that the instrument has no end-pin (spike) and is held by the player's legs, the bow is shorter and is differently held. (Bylsma has recorded the sixth suite on a violoncello piccolo made in the South Tyrol about 1700.)

Rather than delve further into this complex subject here, suffice it to say that when Pieter Wispelwey plays the suites on modern cello, his playing is informed by the experience of playing them on instruments Bach would have known, and on knowledge of how they were played.

# LISTENING GUIDE

## Common features of the suites:

## Prelude

Like a prelude on a keyboard instrument, the Prelude of each cello suite is a free-style 'warming up', exploring the instrument and how it sounds in the particular key – the key of all the dance movements to follow. Virtuosic in places, the music of the preludes is rhapsodic in feel, each idea being as long as it needs to be. The Prelude of Suite No.5 is the most elaborate, containing the only fugue in the series.

### Allemande

The French idea of a German dance (that is what the title means) had become by Bach's day, in Germany too, moderately slow, often serious and solemn, in duple time. Bach's contemporary Johann Mattheson described the Allemande as 'the image of a content or satisfied spirit, which enjoys good order and calm'.



Pieter Wispelwey with a fivestringed cello, such as might be used to play Suite No.6.

'Are Allemandes the most mysterious, the most profound pieces in the suites?' Cellist Anner Bylsma

# Courante

The title means 'running', and the dance included hops and springs, the music either in the Italian style with short running notes, or French with alternations of 6/4 and 3/2 metre. A courante provides a contrast to the Allemande, and can be cheerful and even humorous.

# Sarabande

Often played by cellists as an encore after a concerto, to settle the audience down with meditative music, Bach's sarabandes have come a long way from the dance's Spanish origins, when the dance and its music were considered lascivious. For many listeners the Sarabande will be the emotional heart of each suite.

'The Sarabande's movement is calm and solemn, suggesting Spanish haughtiness, and its tone is grave and calm.' Bach's biographer Philipp Spitta, 1873

# Galanteries - the optional extras:

All three of the galanteries in the cello suites are French court dances. They come in pairs, the second providing a contrast before a return of the first.

## Menuet

The triple time Minuet had evolved into a relatively stately (although not necessarily slow) walking dance. It was the most popular and widespread of all dances in courtly society well into late in the 18th century.

## Bourrée

Bach's Bourrées in the cello suites are particularly dance-like, characterised by jaunty rhythms in duple time, with frequent syncopation. Theorists of the time indicated this dance should be played lightly.

## Gavotte

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Dictionary of Music, in 1768, described the duple time Gavotte as '...normally graceful, often gay, and sometimes also tender and slow'.

# And to finish:

# Gigue

Each of Bach's cello suites ends with a Gigue. The word, in French and English, derives ultimately from the German 'geige' or fiddle. A jig, then, is danced to a fiddling ditty. Lively and upbeat.

'The hearer goes away with a sensation of pleasant excitement' Spitta

# Some standout features of each suite:

### No.1 in G major

The Prelude of this suite introduces Bach the master-improviser. (One of the best-known movements from the suites, more recently it was adopted for the cello-playing Dr Maturin in Peter Weir's *Master and Commander*.)

### No.2 in D minor

The first of two Suites in minor keys (the other is No.5). Weighty, noble music, ending with a powerful Gigue where minor and major take turns.

## No. 3 in C major

C major is the richest and most resonant key for the cello, bringing the bottom C string into play. The Bourrée movement has become one of the most popular in the Suites.

### No.4 in E flat major

In the Prelude Pieter Wispelwey finds strange intervals, mysterious corners, and little secrets under the surface.

### No.5 in C minor

The only suite calling for altered tuning. (Scordatura is the technical name, in early manuscript copies this is signalled by the phrase 'Discordable accord'.) The top A string is tuned a tone lower, to G, with the result that the sound is more subdued, and the mood darkened in the minor mode.

The beginning of Suite No.5 as it appears in Anna Magdalena Bach's copy, showing the instructions for scordatura, or retuning of the strings.



## No.6 in D major

It's a challenge to play on four strings music written for five, as the music of the Prelude works its way up to E, which is not an available string! The Gavotte is music many will recognise.

### DAVID GARRETT © 2017

### Further reading:

Canadian enthusiast Peter Siblin's *The Cello Suites – J.S. Bach, Pablo Casals and the search for a baroque masterpiece* (2009) tells its story engagingly and accessibly conveys the necessary musical information.

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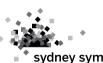
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Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world's finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world's great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the SSO also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales. International tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence, and it is well on its way to becoming the premier orchestra of the Asia Pacific region.

The orchestra's first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, and this is David Robertson's fourth year as Chief Conductor. The orchestra's history also boasts collaborations with legendary figures such as George Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Otto Klemperer and Igor Stravinsky.

A legacy of the SSO's ABC origins is a tradition of presenting visiting guest soloists in recital, which saw singers and instrumentalists of all kinds performing solo programs in Sydney concerts, on air from the studio, and in major regional centres. In addition to the longstanding International Pianists in Recital series, the SSO also presents special event recitals including, in 2017, Pieter Wispelwey's performance of the complete Bach cello suites.

The SSO's award-winning Learning and Engagement program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and commissions.



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Janet and Robert Constable with Associate Principal Flute Emma Sholl. 'When we first met her in the Green Room at the Opera House,' recalls Robert, 'it was a lovely hug from Emma that convinced us that this was not only an opportunity to support her chair but to get involved with the orchestra and its supporters. It has been a great experience.'

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Stuart Challender, SSO Chief Conductor and Artistic Director 1987–1991

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