



HANNEL CLASSICS

CCS 12298

Johann
Sebastian
Bach

*6 Suites
per violoncello solo
senza basso*

Pieter
Wispelwey

baroque cello
violoncello piccolo

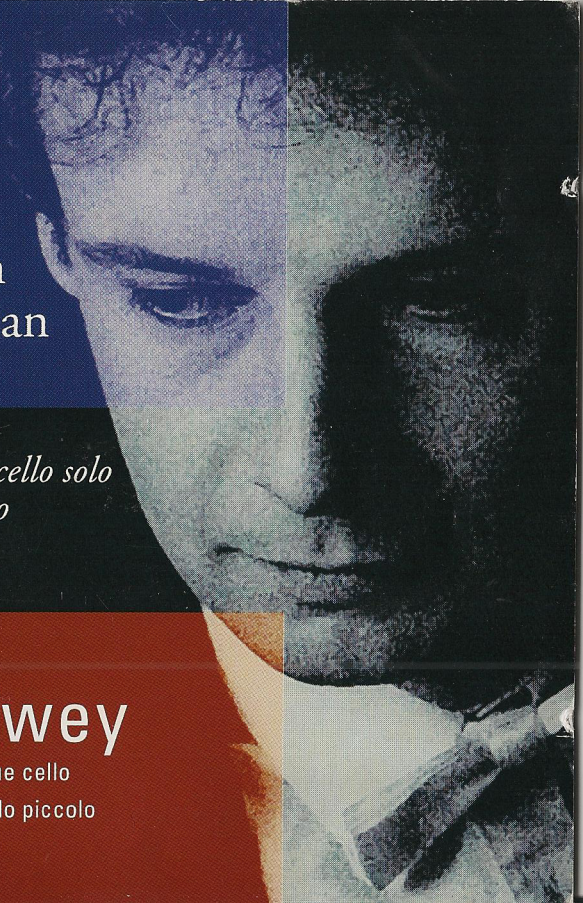




Photo: Marco Borggreve

Pieter Wispelwey is one of the first of a generation of generalist specialists, performing equally outstandingly on historical instruments as on modern instruments, based on and inspired by expert stylistical knowledge, highly original and deep musical understanding and superior technique. His repertory ranges from works by J. S. Bach to Elliott Carter, Kagel, Schnittke and young contemporary composers. Pieter Wispelwey was awarded the Elizabeth Everts Prize, an award given biennially to the Netherlands most promising musician in 1985. In 1992 Wispelwey received as first cellist the highly prestigious Netherlands Music Prize. For many years he has given complete, widely acclaimed, performances of the suites for cello solo by J.S. Bach and Britten and the sonatas by Beethoven and Brahms, on period as well as on modern instruments.

Pieter Wispelwey received his early training from Dicky Boeke and Anner Bijlsma in Amsterdam and continued his studies with Paul Katz (Rochester, USA) and with William Pleeth in England.

Wispelwey regularly performs the major concerts from Haydn to Dutilleux.

His CD's all receive wide acclaim in the international press, including awards.

upcoming releases:

fall '98: Bach gamba sonatas (played on piccolo cello) with Richard Egarr

spring '99: Concertos by Elgar and Lutoslawski

upcoming recordings:

Franck and Brahms (op.78) Sonatas with Paolo Giacometti

Shostakovitch 1st Concerto with the Australian Chamber Orchestra

SIX SUITES FOR CELLO?

The need is strong to imagine these pieces having just been written - as fresh music, without the burden of interpretations, connotations and obligatory associations. Music that simply refers to earlier music: in short, new, modern, intriguing music. Music for a single cello, but written by a composer with an enormous aptitude for the rich, polyphonic baroque language. Why though? What was Bach's aim? An experiment, an upbeat to compositions for solo violin? Whatever the case, the endeavour must have amused him. Perhaps it cost him no trouble at all and maybe he even wrote them in a flash. Undoubtedly the commission, whether or not autonomous, to write suites for solo cello was particularly challenging and unusual. The idea probably made him grin from ear to ear. Perhaps he envisaged the lay-out almost immediately: a simple start, then gradually leaving the realm of the cello via a complex key, possibly E flat major and a scordatura suite colouring the cello even further, darkening it and turning it into something

aloof and threatening, eventually to abandon the conventional cello by adding a string to it and writing unbridled, radiant music, music defying gravity (that is, if dancing were possible without it).

Fantasizing along these lines, the plan for the pattern of keys occurring to him practically instantly, thinking in D major about the violoncello piccolo Suite, perhaps even hearing the orchestral design of the prelude, growing excited about the exuberance of a turbulent 12/8 time signature, already thinking that instead of a normal allemande after this prelude something sounding more like a prayer or meditation was needed, he probably realized for the first time how truly special the other 'normal' suites could become, how unusual and strong the introversion of the unaccompanied 4-string cello, how unorchestral, how personal, the voice of the cello as a god-fearing individual could be - vulnerable, valiant and moving.

Thus, a simple start - with an unpretentious key, G major for instance. This would allow the cello to introduce itself with its most natural sound, the re-

laxed resonance of the open G-string: the prototypical cello sound, honest, harmonious, organic and consoling. (Admittedly, even though the instrument happens to be a little clumsy, it does have a particular kind of beauty.) The second suite could begin with an open D-string. Not in D major though, because that is the key reserved for the sixth suite. This opening could also be a mini-portrait of the cello, the two top strings moulded into a triad by the minor third F on the D-string, a note that on most cellos sounds unruly and full of protest.

Then for the remaining C string. What better way of presenting it than by preceding it with a dramatic decline, allowing its depth to come into its own!

Apart from the cello as an instrument, three personages have thus been introduced: one innocent, one hurt, and one self-assured. Say, for example a child prince, a bastard and a crown prince, all of whom mature in the second half of the cycle, the bastard developing into a philosopher (no. 4) or melancholic (no. 5), while the crown prince returns as an enlightened monarch.

The introduction and portrayal of these personages are found in the preludes. The dances then go on to describe how these characters behave in company and formal situations, where they must adapt to conventions of elegance and ceremony. At least, that is one way of looking at it. There is also of course the rhetorical dimension, the continuous use of gesture and ongoing interaction, dialogue and conversation between the voices in the 'style brisé' texture. Furthermore, the use of four strings in itself keeps conveying the feeling of four persons involved in an endless question-and-answer play.

The preludes and their keys

And now back to the music, which thank heaven is less pompous than the words it can tempt us to use. The key of the first is G major - amiable, intimate and cheerful. The beginning is affable, although its serenity proves somewhat deceptive: after twenty-one measures it comes to a sudden cadenza, like a gust of wind that blows away the semblance of conventionality. An almost disproportionate, chromatic climax follows, after which the prelude ends with a complete

metamorphosis of the introvert opening measures. The double-sided visiting card has already been proffered. The final chord bears a fermata (the only other ending that has one is that of the sixth prelude), as though the listener is given time for brief contemplation. And if a split second might be enough to see your whole life flash by, then a final note like this is an eternity. D minor for the second suite - introvert, introspective. Passion is there, but it has to be unlocked. No natural predilection for cheerfulness, though not without a longing for it. A youthful blend of tristesse and noblesse. Just as the first suite is a miniature version of the sixth, the pensive element of the second links it to the fourth, and its loneliness to the fifth, though without the mature dignity, rage and muscled mournfulness of that suite. The third suite is in C major. Openness, riches and magnanimity. It is worth noting here the remarkable 'presto' indication in Kellner's copy, as a warning not to make it too heavy-weighted. The prelude has an amusing element of surprise and intimidation, though lacking in malice, more like a hearty embrace. An interesting feature is the

explosively short final chord, as though time is needed for all the disturbed material to settle during the ensuing rests, after which we are able to prepare for the allemande. E-flat major is full of implications and references. The 'C' in the time signature is cut through with a vertical line, indicating a more fleeting quadruple time. Whereas the opening of the third prelude uses an entire measure to span two octaves, in this suite the distance already is covered in the first two eighth-notes. There is a hidden long-short-short metre that, together with the intervallic structure within the measure, remains constant for some time. Meanwhile, the bass roams around, the tension creeping in as the first digressions arise - intervals of a second appear, sequences stall ominously, and the single-measure unity is extended to two measures, followed at a given moment by the apparent inversion of the stave itself. It becomes completely enigmatic in the modulating second half, where we enter dark tonal caverns. The final chord (again short) tries in a manner of speaking to banish sinister memories - reasonably

successfully too, given the following movements.

The fifth, in C minor. De profundis, neither plaintive nor grieving, rather accusing, full of resistance to a tragic fate. The rhythm is that of a French overture, abounding in discipline and stringent elegance. In the dancing quasi-fugue protest emerges with whimsical fantasy. And finally, D major. In excelsis. Unearthly and in the light, translated instrumentally. (It does not seem necessary to speculate about alternative instruments like the viola pomposa: the title page is unambiguous in naming the collection Six Suites for cello solo. The sixth is simply for a five-string cello). The celebration is sublime and effervescent from the first note. Out of the dancing Ds, the F#, the A and the octave D leap forth as sparks. The same symbolism of ascent is involved in the modulation from D to A major to E minor in the opening passages. How simple and at the same time effective the delaying of the introduction of the new highest string, the radiant E string!

The Allemandes

Of the three faster allemandes, the first and fourth are flowing and lyrical, while the fifth is almost martial. The first is decidedly courteous and its details quite charming. In the fourth, a more profound piece, it is heart-warming to see how Bach entertains himself with a pattern of four sixteenth-notes and two eighths, all the while playing with the direction and placing of the sixteenth-note runs and the leaping intervals of the eighths. Emotions and moods contend with each other in the formidable music of the fifth allemande. Inner peace is an unattainable ideal. The other allemande in a minor key, in straightforward quadruple time, shows a relationship with the fifth. Interval leaps and diminished chords betray its inner turbulence.

The C-major allemande is stately, elegant and spiritual, like a generous host and an entertaining conversationalist. The sixth is completely distinct, hardly an allemande at all ('molto adagio', Kellner suggests) - an aria and prayer of dumbfounding beauty.

The Courantes

Of the six courantes the second runs fastest, skitting along nervously. The third has no use for sixteenths: it is in one, balanced but full of energy. In the first, fourth and sixth we find combinations of eighth- and sixteenth-notes. The sixteenths are playful, lyrical and elegant in the first courante. They are bursting with temperament in the fourth, where the angularity of the straightforward eighths contrasts with the 'Schwung' of the triplet passages. Finally, in the sixth they are distinctly virtuosic, as well as spicing up the basic metre of the dance. The fifth courante is the only French one of the six. It is somewhat stately, though particularly masculine and vigorous, possessing a clenched power.

The Sarabandes

The first three sarabandes almost can be played in identical tempo. The dance form demands and receives a proud filling-out, and the formal, ritual character is complemented in each case by its own specific personality. The sarabandes of the fourth and fifth suites are the most intriguing. The

fourth is peculiarly aristocratic and a shade unconventional, with the quarter note on the third beat tied over the bar line. The unique fifth sarabande is enigmatic, harmonically desolate, its loneliness being emphasized by the complete lack of double stops. Almost as expected, the sixth surpasses everything, majestic and overwhelming and the only one in 3/2 time. Quite magnificent is the second half, where it seems as if the quarter note movement can never be stopped - a wheel of eternity.

The fourth dance

The menuets, bourrees and gavottes, each in their own way, fulfil a 'divertissement' function. The small-scale menuets are elegant, the bourrees plain-spoken and full of humorous aplomb and the gavottes dapper, enthusiastic and courtly at the same time. Only the second gavotte in the fifth suite departs from the prevailing mood, being almost ominously eery.

The Giges

Here again we find an enormous spectrum of expression, although the craving to celebrate holds sway. The

contrast between numbers one and sixth continues to be immense. The second is now brimming with enthusiasm, the fourth is in full flight without losing its narrative element, the fifth intense and brooding. For the third, the dance floor is almost too small. Things get completely out of control in the sixth however, where frenzy is driven to the limit in the orgiastically repeated sixteenth-note pairs towards the endings of the A and B sections. Here the domain of the cello suite is left behind forever.

WORD OF THANKS

Let us imagine once again how this domain was entered when the great Bach humbly began to write down our notes one by one. Let us also remember that it was a ca. 35-year-old Bach who concentrated his powers to channel his unbridled creativity and energy - a man whose brain functioned hundreds of times more quickly than his quill could write (although that must have been impressive too). His was a fantasy which covered an enormous spectrum, just as the suites encompass the entire spectrum of simplicity to sublimity (among others).

It is the stratification that makes the Suites so hypnotic, the endless evocativeness while using only a single cello. A fascinating paradox, this alchemy in dance form. It is not unfathomably profound music by a deeply religious composer advanced in years, nor is it biblical in the thoroughly serious sense. That would not be moving. Above all it is magical music and possibly biblical in the sense that it narrates stories in a comprehensible language, from the archaic to the refined, about the immeasurable dimensions and variations of the human experiment. For that reason we are grateful: grateful that these pieces exist, that they seem to be about everything, that we are moved without being able to grasp them or even know whether we are meant to grasp them, that we enjoy them *quia absurdum est*

Pieter Wispelwey

(Translation: Ian Gaukroger)

ZES SUITES VOOR CELLO?

Sterk is de behoefte zich deze stukken voor te stellen als net geschreven. Als verse muziek, nog zonder de last van interpretaties, connotaties en obligate associaties. Muziek slechts referend aan oudere muziek. Nieuwe, moderne, intrigerende muziek, kortom. Muziek voor een enkele cello, maar geschreven door een componist met een geweldige aanleg voor de rijke polyfone baroktaal. Hoezo, waarom, wat wilde Bach hiermee? Een experiment, een opmaat voor vioololostukken? Het moet hem in ieder geval geamuseerd hebben. Wellicht ging het hem ook makkelijk af en ging het lekker vlug. Zonder twijfel was de opdracht, al dan niet zelf gegeven, suites voor cello solo te schrijven, erg uitdagend en ongewoon. Het idee moet hem een geweldige grijns ontlokt hebben. Waarschijnlijk zag hij het direct voor zich: eenvoudig beginnen en dan de cello ontstijgen, geleidelijk via een complexe toonsoort, misschien Es-groot, en een scordatura suite die de cello nog verder verkleurt, hem donker, dreigend en onvriendelijk maakt om uiteindelijk de gewone cello

te verlaten door er een snaar aan toe te voegen en ongeremd stralende muziek te schrijven, de zwaartekracht ontkenkend (als dansen dan tenminste mogelijk zou zijn).

Toen hij aldus fantaseerde, terwijl het eerste plannetje voor de toonsoorten allang bij hem was opgekomen en hij dus in D-groot fantaseerde over de violoncello piccolo suite, misschien al de orkestrale opzet van de prelude hoorde, zich al opwond over de uitbundigheid van een onstuimige 12/8 maat en zich ook al bedacht had dat in plaats van een normale allemande hij er na die prelude dan een nodig had die veeleer als een gebed, als een dankzegging zou klinken, toen moet hij zich waarschijnlijk voor het eerst generaliseerd hebben hoe speciaal toch die andere 'gewone' suites zouden kunnen worden.

Hoe ongewoon en hoe sterk zou de introvertie van een onbegeleide 4-snarige cello kunnen werken. Hoe orkestraal, hoe persoonlijk, de stem van de cello als van een godvrezend individu, kwetsbaar, dapper en ontroerend.

Dus eenvoudig beginnen. Met een onpretentieuze toonsoort, G-groot bij-

voorbeeld. De cello kan zich dan introduceren met zijn meest natuurlijk geluid, de ontspannen resonans van de open G-snaar. Het prototypische cello-geluid, eerlijk, harmonieus, organisch en troostrijk. (Toegegeven, ondanks dat het een beetje een onhandig instrument is, heeft het toch een eigen schoonheid.)

Met de open D-snaar zou de tweede suite kunnen beginnen. Maar dan niet in D-groot want die toonsoort is gereserveerd voor de 6e suite. Ook deze opening kan dan een miniportret van de cello worden, de bovenste twee snaren gesmeed tot drieklank door de kleine terts F op de D-snaar, een noot die op de meeste cello's weerbarstig en vol protest klinkt.

Blijft over de C-snaar en hoe die beter te presenteren dan hem te laten voorafgaan door een daverende afdaling, waardoor zijn laagte het best tot zijn recht komt.

Behalve de cello als instrument zijn dan eigenlijk ook drie personages geïntroduceerd. Een onschuldige, een gekwetste en een zelfverzekerde. Dus bijvoorbeeld een kindprins, een bastaard en een kroonprins, die dan in de tweede helft van de cyclus opgroeien, de

bastaard zich ontwikkelend tot filosoof (nr. 4) of melancholicus (nr. 5), terwijl de prins terugkeert als verlicht monarch. Zo zijn het de preludes die de personages introduceren en portretteren. De dansen beschrijven vervolgens hoe deze karakters zich gedragen in gezelschap en formele situaties, wanneer ze zich moeten aanpassen aan conventies van elegantie en ceremonie.

Tenminste zo zou men er tegenaan kunnen kijken. Natuurlijk is er ook de retorische dimensie, de voortdurende gestiek en interactie, dialoog en conversatie tussen de stemmen in het 'style brisé' weefsel. Bovendien blijft het gebruik van vier snaren het gevoel geven van vier personen, verwickeld in een continu vraag-en antwoordspel.

Toonsoorten en preludes

Terug naar de muziek, die godzijdank minder hoogdravend is dan de woorden tot welke ze ons verleiden kan. G-groot dus voor de eerste suite. Aimabel, innig en opgewekt. Het begin is vriendelijk, hoewel de sereniteit enigszins bedrieglijk blijkt: na een 21-tal maten is daar ineens een cadens, als een windvlaag, die de schijn van conventionaliteit doet verwaaien, er is zelfs een bijna buiten-

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
6 Suites per violoncello solo senza basso
Pieter Wispelwey
baroque-cello (Barak Norman 1710) and
violoncello piccolo (anon. 18th century)

CCS 12298 I

Suite nr. 1 in G dur BWV 1007

1	prelude	2.18
2	allemande	4.49
3	courante	2.43
4	sarabande	3.00
5	menuet 1&2	3.21
6	gigue	1.32

Suite nr. 2 in d moll BWV 1008

7	prelude	3.20
8	allemande	4.05
9	courante	2.11
10	sarabande	5.04
11	menuet 1&2	3.07
12	gigue	2.40

Suite nr. 3 in C dur BWV 1009

13	prelude	3.02
14	allemande	4.21
15	courante	3.00
16	sarabande	4.19
17	bourrée 1&2	3.38
18	gigue	3.29

Total time 61.35

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Suite nr. 4 in Es dur BWV 1010

1	prelude	4.04
2	allemande	4.15
3	courante	2.57
4	sarabande	4.55
5	bourrée 1&2	4.41
6	gigue	2.49

Suite nr. 5 in c moll BWV 1011

7	prelude	5.39
8	allemande	4.47
9	courante	1.58
10	sarabande	3.35
11	gavotte 1&2	4.27
12	gigue	2.13

Suite nr. 6 in D dur BWV 1012

13	prelude	4.48
14	allemande	8.18
15	courante	3.41
16	sarabande	5.54
17	gavotte 1&2	4.08
18	gigue	4.04

Total time 78.28

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