

J.S. Bach

Suite No. 3 in C Major for Solo Cello, BWV 1009

Bach worked in the secular court of Cöthen from 1717-1723. Instrumentalists everywhere rejoice at this fortuitous collaboration because it was here that Bach wrote *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, six "Brandenburg Concertos," *Six Sonatas and Partitas* for violin, and the *Six Cello Suites*. Bach had an exquisite feel for instrumental capacity, and he redefined technical standards by exploiting their idiomatic characteristics.

All the *Cello Suites* have the same layout, a prelude followed by five dance movements: allmande, courante, sarabande, a pair of linked dances (bourrées in the third suite), and gigue. Virtuosity was expected but not sought for its own sake. Bach combined dense counterpoint and refined harmony in ways that exploited sonic possibilities. Standard cello tuning creates many opportunities to sympathetically vibrate open strings in the C-Major suite, enlarging the resonance of the instrument. Bach utilized this expanded potential to create music of warmth, tonal richness, and extroverted character.

The prelude, based on scales and chords, begins with both, a descending C-Major scale and outlined chord, landing on the most resonant of all strings, the low C. A steady stream of notes follows, leading through multiple harmonies, ebbing and flowing energy, and a dramatic conclusion with rock-solid chords and arresting silences, ending with the scale with which it began. The allemande is stately and proper, while the courante is athletic and jaunty. A sarabande sits at the heart of each suite. Here Bach stacks voices on top of each other, creating imposing pronouncements and thick texture. The bourrées compliment each other: the first bouncy and confident, the second sliding along *sotto voce*, in minor. The gigue is playful and brilliant, ending the suite with a rousing flourish.