

Johann Sebastian Bach

The Six Suites

The practise of transcribing a work for an instrument different from the original was widely diffused throughout the centuries, and it is well known that Bach often transcribed his own compositions for other instruments. A perfect example is his autograph version of the *Suite no. 5* transcribed for the lute.

Even though the affinities between instruments must also be taken into account, the complex subject of diversity and affinity between the viola da gamba and the cello goes beyond the scope of the preface of a recording such as this. Any allusion to the subject would merely be superficial and insufficient, since these instruments are as

apparently similar as they are substantially different from one another, whether it be organologically or on the broader and more complex level of musical vocabulary.

It is precisely on this latter level where we find the most important justification for the elaboration of the *Six Suites* for the viola. The form of the suite, itself, as well as the type of notation used by Bach (with the continuous alternation of monody and polyphony) are aspects that undoubtedly pertain to the very nature of the viola da gamba and its history. Moreover, we could also state that these elements are more proper to the viola rather than the cello, whose repertory finds in Bach's *Suites* perhaps its only example, since the genre is more intimately associated with the history of the viola da gamba during the second half of the 17th and the first decades of the 18th centuries.

During the process of elaboration, I have tried to let the instrument suggest the solutions suitable for each moment. In other words, I have tried to follow it and listen to it more than guide it toward preestablished aims. This attitude has determined some rather important variations, particularly in reference

to tonality (only two of the six suites maintain their original keys). Nevertheless, other perhaps less obvious variations are just as significant. Thus, new voices appear embellished, even though they did not exist or were merely implied. Much more infrequent, however, is the case where a voice has disappeared, to give way to suggestion or imagination. In one case, besides changing the key of the suite, I have resorted to the artifice of *scordatura*. Finally, in order to preserve the effect of the bass string, I sometimes had to transport the notes an octave.

In general, I have let the innumerable suites to which the viola has lent its voice during the span of its long life resound silently, a voice that, though it speaks in an ancient language, can still move us in the present...

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