

PIETER WISPELWEY, CELLO CAROLINE ALMONTE, PIANO

BEETHOVEN

WEDNESDAY 16 AUGUST

7pm Elisabeth Murdoch Hall
with Caroline Almonte, piano
6.15pm free pre-concert talk with Zoe Knighton

DURATION:

Three hours with one 20-minute interval and a second 15-minute interval

BACH

THURSDAY 17 AUGUST

7pm Elisabeth Murdoch Hall
6.15pm free pre-concert talk with Zoe Knighton

DURATION:

Three hours with one 20-minute interval and a second 10-minute interval

BRAHMS

FRIDAY 18 AUGUST

7pm Elisabeth Murdoch Hall
with Caroline Almonte, piano
6.15pm free pre-concert talk with Zoe Knighton

DURATION:

One hour & 35-minutes with one 20-minute interval

These concerts are being recorded by ABC Classic FM as part of a live-to-air broadcast. *Melbourne Recital Centre acknowledges the people of the Kulin nation on whose land this concert is being presented.*



ELISABETH MURDOCH HALL
Photo: John Gollings

WELCOME



EUAN MURDOCH, CEO

Wominjeka, welcome to this extraordinary trio of concerts by one of the world's greatest cellists, Pieter Wispelwey. He's simply one of the most interesting musicians on the scene, with a curiosity and wit to match his formidable technical facility.

Over three nights we'll hear the complete cello and piano works of Beethoven and Brahms, with Melbourne-based pianist Caroline Almonte at the Steinway. These duos are a vital part of cello repertoire, and some of the most eloquent utterances of those two great Bs. The music of the third B – Bach – is, aptly, the central panel of this triptych. Pieter is a renowned interpreter of Bach's six suites for unaccompanied cello, both on the Baroque cello and, as we'll hear, on the modern cello (in this case his 1760 Guadagnini). Playing just one or two of these almost spiritually powerful works in concert is challenging enough. Pieter is performing all six in one evening, a rare and epic undertaking.

On behalf of everyone gathered in Elisabeth Murdoch Hall tonight, I extend our appreciation to Pieter and Caroline for sharing this wonderful music with us. Thank you to the Legal Friends of Melbourne Recital Centre for their generous support of these concerts as the Great Performers Series Partner, thanks also to members of the Great Performers Leadership Circle and The Langham, a longterm partner of the program. Our donors enable the Centre to make great performance accessible to more Victorians.

Most of all, thank you for joining us this evening. It is a delight to be able to enjoy these concerts with you in such a sublime setting.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Euan Murdoch'.

Euan Murdoch,
CEO, Melbourne Recital Centre

PIETER WISPELWEY IN PROFILE



PIETER WISPELWEY, CELLO
Photo: Mark Chew

'A concert never works like a well-fitting shoe,' cellist Pieter Wispelwey once said in an interview with *Gramophone*. 'There's always something disappointing or which doesn't work. On the other hand, while performing you're always trying to be on the edge, things happen which you hadn't thought of - that could go beyond certain expressions and you find new meanings; a greater intensity behind the elements'.

Danger and discovery are baked into the core of this mini-festival. On three successive nights, the Dutch cellist will perform the complete works for cello and piano by Beethoven and Brahms, and the solo cello suites by Bach. This is a project of truly epic scope, 'a milestone week', says Wispelwey, who finds the Melbourne Recital centre to be his perfect home, 'a stunningly beautiful place to perform and listen to music'.

Wispelwey is that rarity in the classical music world, a truly openhearted, regenerative musician. Musicians 'must work as creative artists', he has said in a past interview, handling existing material with imagination, addressing traditions with a dose of skepticism, and encouraging 'alternative approaches' in order 'to keep your mind fresh.'

One way that Wispelwey sees these evergreen works with new eyes is to tour and record them on instruments of the period. These experiences push him 'to evoke the explosivity, the freshness of early instruments', even when playing on modern instruments (as in these Melbourne Recital Centre concerts), to capture 'the excitement of how the first performance must have felt'.

At heart, Wispelwey is a passionate communicator. Central to his approach is to 'reach out' to the listener with his playing, and not to 'shy away from making things larger than life'. In a video for *Strad* magazine, Wispelwey says that 'music can be about anything, about individual emotion, about traumas, elation. About panoramas, landscapes. Lake and ocean, or forest, or mountain. It is rock, it is fire'.

Brimming with enthusiasm, Wispelwey uses Brahms' F major sonata as an example. 'It is a rocky piece, awesome, powerful, great, heroic, fierce', he says in the video, struggling to find superlatives, full of 'storm, foam'. Contrasting it with the E minor sonata, 'easy to play for both cello and piano', the F major is 'challenging, uncompromising, revolutionary'.

An essential part of Wispelwey's approach is to understand each work's character. He talks of Bach's Cello Suites as if each were a distinct

human being, and internal movements were different aspects of a personality. 'When you present a shy character, say the *Allemande* of the First Suite, that shy persona can go through certain experiences and react in certain ways, and that will be different in each performance.'

Wispelwey's playing balances elements he admires in his teachers. Dutch cellist Anner Bylisma was 'more of a Lied singer', playing with the sort of 'inflection and words' that is essential for Bach, where 'speech and rhetoric' are central. And English cellist William Pleeth 'could display a raw, sensual, burning passion', believing 'that music has a larger message that we must unearth and convey with every fiber of our being'.

How does Wispelwey think his playing changed over the years? 'I now approach with more freedom', he has said in a past interview, giving 'more expression, more personal interpretation, and maybe also more personal involvement'. His playing now has 'more spice, also pepper and salt, and also herbs. A more sophisticated cocktail', he adds with a laugh.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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 J.S. Bach to Schnittke, Elliott Carter and works composed for him.

Highlights of the 2016 – 2017 season have included a play-direct project with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, a performance of the complete Bach suites at Auditorium de Lyon and the City Recital Hall in Sydney, performances of Tavener's *Svyati* with the Flanders Radio Choir and two recitals at King's Place in London as part of their 'Cello Unwrapped' season. Pieter will also give this series of extraordinary recitals here at Melbourne Recital Centre as part of the *Great Performers Series*, performing the complete Bach Suites, Beethoven's complete works for cello and piano, and the two cello sonatas by Brahms over the course of three consecutive evenings.

Pieter Wispelwey enjoys chamber music collaborations and regular duo partners include pianists Cédric

Tiberghien and Alasdair Beatson and he appears as a guest artist with a number of string quartets including the Australian String Quartet.

Wispelwey's career spans five continents and he has appeared as soloist with many of the world's leading orchestras including the Boston Symphony, Dallas Symphony, St Paul's Chamber Orchestra, NHK Symphony, Yomiuri Nippon, Tokyo Philharmonic, Sapporo Symphony, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Hallé Orchestra, BBC Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Academy of Ancient Music, Gewandhaus Orchester Leipzig, Danish National Radio Symphony, Budapest Festival Orchestra and Camerata Salzburg. Conductor collaborations include Ivan Fischer, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Herbert Blomstedt, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Jeffrey Tate, Kent Nagano, Sir Neville Marriner, Philippe Herreweghe, Vassily Sinaisky, Vladimir Jurowski, Louis Langrée, Marc Minkowski, Ton Koopman and Sir Roger Norrington.

With regular recital appearances in London (Wigmore Hall), Paris (Châtelet, Louvre), Amsterdam (Concertgebouw,

‘Intelligent, penetrating musicianship and lyrical commitment.’

THE GUARDIAN (U.K.)

Muziekgebouw), Brussels (Bozar), Berlin (Konzerthaus), Milan (Societta del Quartetto), Buenos Aires (Teatro Colón), Sydney (Sydney Opera House), Los Angeles (Walt Disney Hall) and New York (Lincoln Center), Wispelwey has established a reputation as one of the most charismatic recitalists on the circuit.

In 2012 Wispelwey celebrated his 50th birthday by embarking on a project showcasing the Bach Cello Suites. He recorded the complete Suites for the third time, released on the label ‘Evil Penguin Classics’. The box set also includes a DVD featuring illustrated debates on the interpretation of the Bach Suites with eminent Bach scholars Laurence Dreyfus and John Butt. A major strand of his recital performances is his performances of the complete suites during the course of one evening, an accomplishment that has attracted major critical acclaim throughout Europe and the U.S. ‘On paper it is a feat requiring brilliance, stamina and perhaps a bit of hubris. In practice Mr. Wispelwey proved himself impressively up to the challenge, offering performances as eloquent as they were provocative’ (*New York Times*).

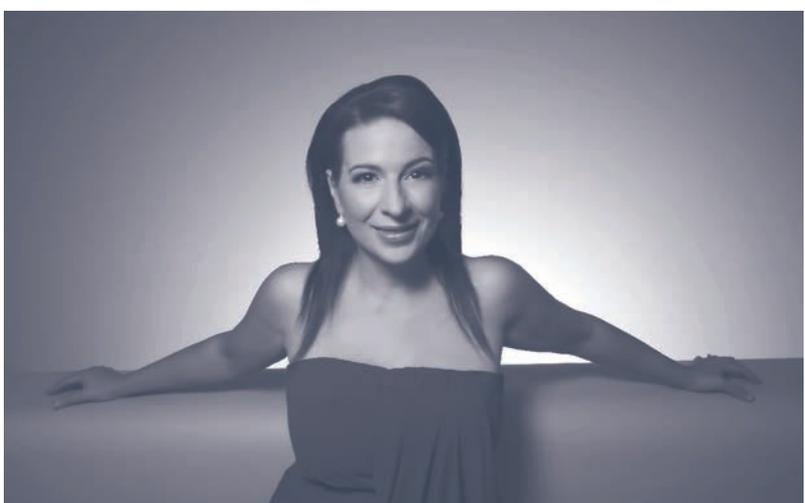
Pieter Wispelwey’s impressive discography of over 20 albums, available on Channel Classic, Onyx and Evil Penguin Classics, has attracted major international awards. His most recent concerto release features the C.P.E. Bach Cello Concerto in A major with the Musikkollegium Winterthur, whilst he is also midway through an imaginative project to record the complete duo repertoire of Schubert and Brahms. Other recent releases include Lalo’s Cello Concerto, Saint-Saen’s Concerto No.2 and the Britten Cello Symphony with Seikyo Kim and the Flanders Symphony Orchestra, Walton’s Cello Concerto (Sydney Symphony Orchestra/Jeffrey Tate) and Prokofiev’s Symphonie Concertante (Rotterdam Philharmonic/Vassily Sinaisky).

Born in Haarlem, The Netherlands, Wispelwey studied with Dicky Boeke and Anner Bylsma in Amsterdam and later with Paul Katz in the U.S.A., and William Pleeth in the U.K.

Pieter Wispelwey plays on a 1760 Giovanni Battista Guadagnini cello and a 1710 Rombouts Baroque cello.

ABOUT
THE ARTISTS

CAROLINE ALMONTE,
PIANO



CAROLINE ALMONTE, PIANO
Photo: Greg Ford

Melbourne-born pianist Caroline Almonte has a reputation as a gifted, versatile and sensitive artist. She has won numerous awards, including the winner of the keyboard section of the ABC Young Performers Awards and first prize at the International Chamber Music competition in Italy, Premio Trio di Trieste.

Caroline Almonte studied with Stephen McIntyre at the Victorian College of the Arts before completing postgraduate studies in piano performance at the Juilliard School in New York with Oxana Yablonskaya. Caroline has recorded and produced for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), and teaches piano at the University of Melbourne.

Caroline has performed across Europe, the United States, China, Japan, Canada and South America, and appeared at the Edinburgh Festival, Teatro Colosseo series in Buenos Aires and major festivals in Australia.

She has performed piano concerti under conductors Nicholas Braithwaite, Oleg Caetani, Nicholas Carter, Reinhard Goebel, Hiroyuki Iwaki, Richard Mills, Benjamin Northey, Tadaaki Otaka, David Porcelijn and Markus Stenz.

The highlight is that this year she had several successful performances of *Yellow River* Piano Concerto in Xiamen and Shanghai, all were well received. Her many musical collaborations include performances with violinists Sarah Chang and Daniel Hope and cellist, Li-Wei Qin. She has also performed chamber music with Australia Ensemble, Flinders Quartet, Escher Quartet, Ralph Kirshbaum, Yvonne Kenny, Elise Milman, Ian Munro, Merlyn Quaife, Anneke Scott, Dimity Shepherd and Miki Tsunoda, her partner from Duo Sol.

Engagements have included Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Mozart piano concerti with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, and the Dunkeld Festival of Music with the Australian String Quartet. Other highlights include performances with the Escher Quartet at the Perth Festival and a live national broadcast of Bach's Goldberg Variations at the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville.

Caroline is a founding member of the Sutherland Trio, a piano trio with violinist Elizabeth Sellars and cellist Molly Kadarau.

PROGRAM I BEETHOVEN

Pieter Wispelwey cello
Caroline Almonte piano

WEDNESDAY 16 AUGUST

7pm Elisabeth Murdoch Hall
6.15pm free pre-concert talk with Zoe Knighton

DURATION:
Three hours with one 20-minute interval and a second 15-minute interval

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(b. Bonn, Germany 1770 – d. Vienna, Austria 1827)

Cello Sonata No.1 in F, Op.5, No.1
Adagio sostenuto – Allegro
Rondo: *Allegro vivace*

Variations on 'Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen' from Die Zauberflöte, Op.66

Cello Sonata No.2 in G minor, Op.5, No.2
Adagio sostenuto ed espressivo – Allegro molto più tosto presto
Rondo: *Allegro*

INTERVAL I

Cello Sonata No.4 in C, Op.102, No.1

Andante – Allegro vivace

Adagio – Tempo d'Andante – Allegro vivace

Variations on 'Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen', WoO.46

Cello Sonata No.5 in D, Op.102, No.2

Allegro con brio

Adagio con molto sentiment d'affetto

Allegro

13

INTERVAL II

Variations for Cello and Piano on 'See the conqu'ring hero comes'
from Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus*, WoO.45

Cello Sonata No.3 in A, Op.69

Allegro ma non tanto

Scherzo: *Allegro molto*

Adagio cantabile – Allegro Vivace

THE BEETHOVEN CELLO SONATAS

Although numbering only five works in all, Beethoven's sonatas for the cello and piano form a corpus of comparable significance to his sets of sonatas for piano and for violin, for the insight they give into his stylistic evolution, their contribution to the musical repertoire and for their quality. Unlike the solo piano sonata, or the sonata for violin and piano, for which distinguished models existed in the works of Haydn and Mozart, the cello sonata as Beethoven wrote it had no real precedents. In the 18th century, the cello had played an indispensable but subordinate (and, for the player, occasionally tedious) role as the carrier of the bass line.

Notwithstanding the light sonatas of Boccherini, no previous composer had attempted the substantive dialogue of equals that Beethoven created in these works. With respect to Beethoven's development, it is not only that the three style periods that biographers identify are represented in the cello sonatas with works of the highest quality, but also that the early cello sonatas Op.5 and the late sonatas, Op.102 also illustrate the complexity

of those stylistic transitions particularly well. Between these distinctive early and late works, lies the magnificent Sonata Op.69, regarded by some as the greatest sonata for cello and piano ever written.

The three sets of variations, by contrast, all date from his early period. There are no works for cello and piano comparable to the C minor variations or the Diabelli Variations, Op.120 for piano which show how Beethoven was to expand this genre. Rather, they exemplify the grace and boldness of his early style.



BEETHOVEN

Sonata No. 1 in F, Op.5, No. 1

Adagio sostenuto – Allegro
Rondo: *Allegro vivace*

Beethoven's interest in exploring the cello's broader expressive possibilities may have arisen from his acquaintance with the Duport brothers, Jean-Louis and Jean-Pierre, on a trip to Berlin in 1796 on what was to be the only substantial concert tour he undertook in his life (unlike Mozart and Haydn he was not a frequent traveller). Jean-Pierre had gone to Berlin under the court of Frederick the Great and continued under his successor King Friedrich Wilhelm II to whom he had taught the cello. After the French Revolution in 1789, his brother, Jean-Louis whose cello studies are still played today, joined him and one of them (on stylistic grounds it was more likely to be Jean-Louis) gave the first performance of the two sonatas Op.5 in King Friedrich Wilhelm's presence. A keen musician and artistic patron, the King was overwhelmed and Beethoven was presented with a gold snuff box full of Louis d'Or and may have been offered a court position.

In both of the two sonatas, Op.5, Beethoven established a two-movement format in which the first movement is preceded by an expansive slow introduction coming to rest on the dominant chord. Starting with a slow movement in this way recalls the old Baroque trio sonata. It was a structural approach that Beethoven returned to with added sophistication nearly 20 years later in Op.102.

Beethoven liked to balance contrasting expressive types in his published collections. Opus 5, No.1 exemplifies the brilliant style with liveliness and wit. The opening *Adagio sostenuto* starts in unison, after which each instrument takes turns in presenting the main idea and then deferring to the other. The *Allegro* is extended and virtuosic with adventurous modulations in the development section (to A major and D-flat major) and the movement has a brief slow section and quasi-cadenza before the coda. The Rondo continues the brilliant tone with the parts chasing one another in contrapuntal imitation at the start. Beethoven matches each virtuosic flourish on the piano with an answering one on the cello, as though Jean-Louis were saying 'anything you can do, I can do better'.

Twelve Variations on 'Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen' from Die Zauberflöte, Op.66

The first of the two sets of variations that Beethoven wrote on themes from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* was published in 1798 by the Viennese firm Traeg, without the anomalous opus number, '66'. That confusing number, which would place the work a decade later, just before his Fifth Symphony, was added after the firm Artaria acquired rights to several Beethoven works in 1820.

The theme is Papageno's aria from Act II in which he longs for a partner before grudgingly promising himself to an old woman who turns out to be Papagena

in disguise. It may be purely coincidental that, in 1795, Beethoven himself had proposed to the singer Magdalena Willman, who rejected him 'because he was so ugly and crazy'. In keeping with the accompanying role of the cello in duo works before Beethoven, the piano part dominates the presentation of the theme and takes the first variation as a solo. The third and fourth variations introduce fluttering figuration in the piano perhaps suggestive of the bird-catcher. The tenth and eleventh variations are in slower tempos, before a gracious extended finale in triple time.

Sonata No.2 in G minor, Op.5, No. 2

*Adagio sostenuto e espressivo –
Allegro molto piu tosto presto*
Rondo: *Allegro*

After the brilliance of the first of the set, the G minor Sonata, Op.5, No.2, presents a first movement of weighty seriousness. The halting dotted rhythmic figure of the opening *Adagio sostenuto e espressivo* recalls the French overture tradition in dramatic almost funereal mood. The sharing of the theme between cello and piano, phrase by phrase in ensuing *Allegro molto piu tosto presto* ('Very fast, or rather, Presto') shows how integrated Beethoven's conception had become.

Despite the turbulent triplets of the piano part which contribute much to the propulsive energy,

this an apocalyptic ride of two equal riders. In complete contrast, the Rondo breaks into genial amiability, with the emphasis on the key of the subdominant, C major, at the opening and in the central episode lending a tone of relaxed ease.

Sonata No. 4 in C, Op.102, No.1

Andante – Allegro vivace
*Adagio – Tempo d'Andante –
Allegro vivace*

The year 1815 was a monumental turning point in Europe. While Beethoven's newly revised opera *Fidelio* was celebrated by the rulers gathered in Vienna to create post-Napoleonic Europe, Napoleon escaped from Elba and for 100 days held the world in awe until his defeat at Waterloo. A subtler change was also taking place in Beethoven's musical style with a turn away from the heroic style to the deeper introspection and concentrated expression of his late style and the two sonatas Op.102, written in that year, allow us to witness this change as it buds from the ground.

Both sonatas were written for Beethoven's friend Josef Linke, cellist in the quartet of Count Razumovsky. He suddenly found himself without a position when the Count's palace was destroyed by a catastrophic fire on New Year's Eve 1814. The first of this set, the Sonata No. 4 in C, Op.102, No.1 return's to a variant of the two-movement sonatas of Op.5, also

adding a slow introductory section to the second movement. An unusual feature is that the *Andante* and the *Allegro vivace* are in different keys (C major and A minor) thus undermining the tonal unity that usually exists between a slow introduction and a sonata *Allegro*. The *Adagio* which introduces the second movement begins like a fully-fledged slow movement before being interrupted by a return of the opening *Andante*. Such reminiscence of earlier music is a feature of several of Beethoven's late works (for example, the song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*, the Piano Sonata, Op.101 and the Ninth Symphony). In this case part of the intention is partly to draw a connection between the opening theme and the skittish theme of the finale.

Seven Variations on 'Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen' from Die Zauberflöte, WoO 46

Beethoven's second set of variations from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* also draws on the longings for love of the forlorn Papageno, this time, the duet with Tamina in Act 1. The impetus may have come from a production of *The Magic Flute* at the Hoftheater in the year of its composition, 1801. The set exemplifies the equal treatment of cello and piano that Beethoven had developed in the Op.5 Sonatas and contains the customary penultimate variation in a slow tempo before a lively finale. However, this more equal

treatment did not please all. One writer in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* criticised a chromatic passage in the final variation as 'trite ... and remain so the more pretentious and ostentatious they become.'

Sonata No. 5 in D, Op.102, No.2

Allegro con brio

Adagio con molto sentiment d'affetto

Allegro

Like the first sonata of the set, the compact Sonata Op.102, No.2 adumbrates elements that were to be key features of Beethoven's music during the final decade of his life – compact contrapuntal expression, imitative textures and the incorporation of a full-fledged fugue into a sonata finale. Beethoven's counterpoint typically fragments the balanced phrase structure that listeners had become used to in the Classical era, giving the first movement an assertive, almost gnarled quality. One listener commented after the first performance, 'It is so original that no one can understand it on first hearing.' The *slow movement*, in a simple ternary form in D minor with a reposeful central section in D major, shows the subtle concentration Beethoven achieved through varied ornamentation while the *finale* is the first in a series of late works (including the Piano Sonatas Op.101, 106, 110, 111 and the *Grosse Fuge*, Op.133) that made ambitious innovative use of fugue.

Twelve Variations on 'See the Conqu'ring hero comes' from Judas Maccabaeus, WoO 45

Published in 1797, this set of 12 variations is in a comparable format to the Twelve Variations on 'Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen' with the piano taking the dominant role in the theme and first variation. The style pleased some of his critics more than his more adventurous music. One writer, having chastised Beethoven for being 'incomprehensible, disconnected, and obscure', singled out this set as an example of what Beethoven could achieve whenever he 'made his goal beauty and not strangeness.'

Cello Sonata No.3 in A, Op.69

Allegro ma non tanto
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Adagio cantabile –
Allegro vivace

Sketches for this sonata appear alongside work on Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and his Violin Concerto in 1807. It was published in 1809 the year of the second Napoleonic invasion

of Vienna whose cannons caused Beethoven such distress, after which the heroic style in his music starts to temper. This work, however, retains the breadth of that style right from the noble **opening cello theme**. Both instruments are given an opportunity for expansiveness and a short cadenza before the music is dramatically jolted into A minor, followed by an exhilarating return to the major key for the second theme. After a substantial syncopated **Scherzo** in A minor, Beethoven truncates the **slow movement** to lead straight into the sunny finale. This is comparable to the decision he made to curtail the slow movement of the 'Waldstein' Sonata (in C major, Op.53) for piano, to allow the overall architecture to rest more firmly on the pillars of the outer movements. Like the 'Waldstein', the work was heavily revised. The autograph score showing that allocation of music between instruments was completely recast in the late stages of composition to magisterial effect.

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Peter McCallum is a Sydney-based music journalist, critic and academic.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

A crucial figure in the transition between Classical and Romantic style, Beethoven displayed his musical talents from a young age publishing his first composition at the age of 12. To further his musical development, he was sent to Vienna in 1787, studying piano with Haydn, vocal composition with Antonio Salieri and counterpoint with Johann Albrechtsberger. Beethoven's Symphony No.1 in C premiered at the beginning of the 19th century and this marked the beginning of a prolific period of composition including his opera *Fidelio* and the *Eroica* Symphony. Despite succumbing to complete deafness towards the end of his life, Beethoven continued to compose some of his greatest works in his final years; the mass *Missa Solemnis* and his final symphony with the famous choral finale 'Ode to Joy'.

PROGRAM II

BACH

Pieter Wispelwey cello

THURSDAY 17 AUGUST

7pm Elisabeth Murdoch Hall

6.15pm free pre-concert talk with Zoe Knighton

DURATION:

Three hours with one 20-minute interval and a second 10-minute interval

J.S. BACH

(b. Eisenach, Germany 1685 – d. Leipzig, Germany 1750)

Cello Suite No.1 in G, BWV 1007

Prélude

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Menuett I

Menuett II

Gigue

Cello Suite No.2 in D minor, BWV 1008

Prélude

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Menuett I

Menuett II

Gigue

Cello Suite No.3 in C, BWV 1009

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Bourrée I
Bourrée II
Gigue

INTERVAL I**Cello Suite No.4 E-flat, BWV 1010**

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Bourrée I
Bourrée II
Gigue

21

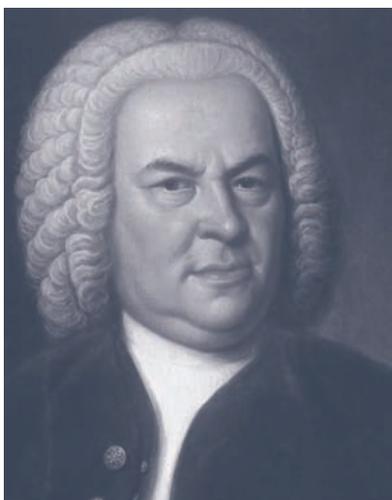
Cello Suite No.5 in C minor, BWV 1011

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavotte I
Gavotte II
Gigue

INTERVAL II**Cello Suite No.6 in D, BWV 1012**

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavotte I
Gavotte II
Gigue

THE BACH CELLO SUITES



Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Considered amongst the greatest composers of all time, Bach was better known for his highly respected organist abilities during his lifetime leading to a significant body of work for the organ, keyboard and harpsichord. Amongst his large body of compositions are the Brandenburg Concertos, the Mass in B minor, St Matthew Passion and St John Passion as well as over 300 cantatas. Towards the end of his life, his reputation started to decline as his work was considered old fashioned compared to the emerging Classical style. It wasn't until the first half of the 19th century that his compositions began to gain widespread recognition after Felix Mendelssohn conducted the St Matthew Passion in 1829, almost 80 years after his death, creating a revival of Bach's music.

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.

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.

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).

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 Anhalt-Cöthen are likely suspects – but there remains a question: why the cello, 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 harpsichordist-composers 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 dance-derived movements found in the suites are 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 well-established 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 second-hand 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:

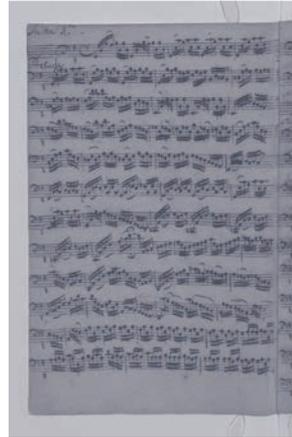
As a second solo Casals played something very uncommon. Just fancy one single 'cello playing solo without accompaniment in the large concert hall! It looked odd at first sight, but when one heard him play the C major Suite for 'Cello by J.S. Bach, one was really charmed.

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 10 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



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.

three times. Earlier this year, Sydney Symphony Orchestra 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.

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 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

Prélude

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. Virtuoso 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'.

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

ANNER BYLSMA, CELLIST

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.

29

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 the late 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

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

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

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.

No.6 in D

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

David Garrett is a Sydney-based music journalist.

Further reading:

Canadian enthusiast Peter Soblin'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.

SUITE V.

Discordant. Accord: 

Prélude.



²⁾ Über die, hier genau nach der Berliner Originalvorlage wiedergegebene Notierungsweise dieser Suite enthält das Vorwort nähere Mittheilung.
B. W. XXVII, (1)

THE BRAHMS CELLO SONATAS

As a person, Brahms was a solitary figure. Incapable of social niceties, the taciturn North German had few close friends, and frequently found himself socially alienated. He adopted for himself the motto 'Frei Aber Einsam' ('Free but lonely').

As a composer, Brahms was gregarious. Ever the musical conversationalist, his instruments speak candidly, whether in contented chat, jovial discussion or heated argument. Particularly personal are the duo sonatas, since Brahms, a busy touring pianist, sat squarely on his stool and carried on one-on-one musical conversations in living rooms, parlors and concert halls across Europe.

With these cello and piano works we might imagine ourselves eavesdropping on a heart-to-heart. At one moment the cellist whispers musical secrets that Brahms at the piano strains to hear. At another, the cigar-puffing pianist issues a gruff report, to which the cellist responds with laughter. Sometimes the two muse contentedly, side by side, whiskeys in hand, watching the bustle of Vienna slip past.

Brahms is a composer of the gloaming. He shades the darkening skies of the bass clef with infinite subtlety, painting his music complex shades of deep indigo and rich azure. It is appropriate, then, that the partner for Brahms' first published duo sonata should be the rich, dusky sound of the cello.

Transcription...translation?

Brahms' G major Violin Sonata is often performed, as tonight, in a transcription for cello. The keyboard part slips down a perfect fourth, lending it darkness, challenging the pianist to keep a light touch. The cello alternates between flying high to match the original, and diving low to exploit greater resonance.

As it ascends the violin thins, but the cello soars. Plucked notes on the cello carry greater sonorosity than the percussive violin pizzicato, and the instruments' bow speeds are different, changing the shape of phrases. Brahms' G major Violin Sonata lies within a comfortable range, but Wispelwey's hand-stretching version tests even the most accomplished cellist.

In this way, musical transcription can resemble literary translation. Squeezing source material into a new, unusual shape requires compromise, as sentence structure is overhauled, the sound or rhythm of the language is rejigged, the meaning of the original inescapably altered.

But perhaps, just perhaps, a deeper register allows us access to something more personal, to the voice of the composer, who favoured lower musical regions, who himself had a speaking voice in the tenor range.

Sonata for cello and piano in D, Op.78

Transcription of Sonata No.1 in G for violin and piano, Op.78

Vivace ma non troppo
Adagio – Più andante – Adagio
Allegro molto moderato

Our view of Brahms is obscured. The reticent North German shredded sketches, burned letters, and obscured intimate details behind ambiguous song texts and abstract titles. Yet cracks in the wall remain. Unearthed sketches show torn edges and scribbled reworkings. Anecdotes and ciphers hint at a composer bursting at the seams, pouring joys and struggles into music.

The first two movements of the D major sonata (1878–79) might initially be heard as abstract compositions, unattached to the influence of external sources. The music arches with



Brahms the pianist

'There was always something of a fight or animosity about [Brahms' playing]. I do not believe that Brahms looked on the piano as a dear, trusted friend, as my mother did, but considered it a necessary evil.' (Eugenia Schumann, daughter of Clara)

'His piano playing was not that of a finished pianist, as of a composer who despised virtuosity... The short legs straight down to the pedals, which they seemed only just to reach, the head thrown back and slightly tilted as if listening to the band rather than to himself, the shoulders hunched up and the arms almost as straight as the legs and well above the keyboard.' (Charles Villiers Stanford, English composer)

'Brahms' whole appearance was steeped in force...[with] energetic movements as he played.' (Josef Victor Widmann, journalist)

lyricism, charm and drama, appearing to play by its own rules. But the opening notes of the finale pulls back the curtain.

Brahms' *Regenlied* ('Rain Song') Op.59 No.3, captures the pain of lost innocence. In the poem, by Klaus Groth, evening rain sparks a memory of the carefree splashing of a barefoot child in a downpour. Brahms sets the first words ('Drops of rain, forever falling/Wake for me those dreams again') to a doleful heartbeat-tap ('LONG-short-LONG'), the very same music that he revisits at the beginning of the D major sonata's finale.

Indeed, *Regenlied* forms the core of this sonata, which inhabits the song, reframing its music, rethinking its ideas, expanding its scope. This journey culminates in the sonata's finale, transforming the music of the song into a miniature tone poem, with the cello as central protagonist and solo 'vocalist'.

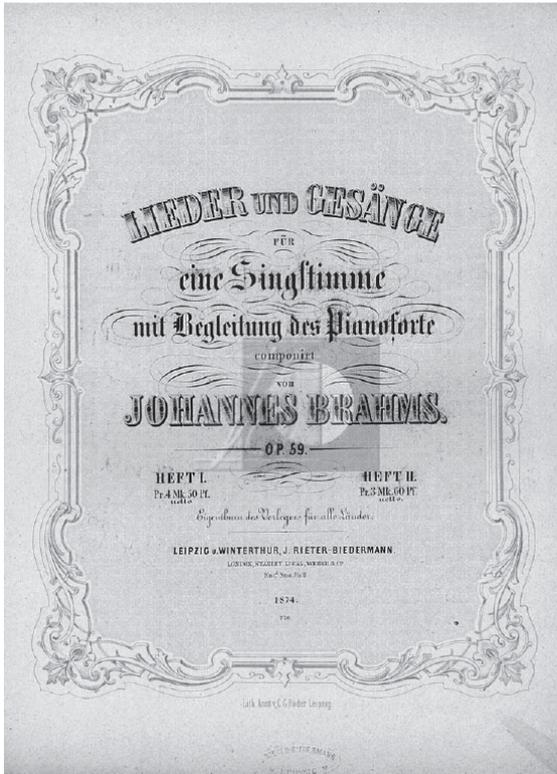
But a web of connections ties all three movements together. *Regenlied's* opening rhythm ('LONG-short-LONG') ticks like a clock throughout the sonata's first movement, at one moment carrying the grace of youth, at another burning with ardor. Music from the second movement, a hymn-like *Adagio*, reappears in the finale, where it takes on increasing importance and wears many cloaks,

those of agitation, triumph, passion, radiance and peace.

Brahms and Groth were good friends. Both North German artists of a similar age, they shared comparable upbringings. By referencing Groth's poem, Brahms is likely dealing with some of his own feelings of nostalgia, of lost youth, and we might hear the first two movements as a 'prologue' to the *Regenlied*-tied finale, or even as varied 'episodes' from the composer's own childhood.

These two movements could also act as wordless responses to the poem itself. For the *Vivace*: 'How blissful then it was to stand/With naked feet in the flow!/ Or to brush against the grass/Or grasp the foam in both hands'. For the *Adagio*: 'Like the dripping chalices/My breathing soul stood open/Like the flowers drunk with fragrance/ Drowned in heaven's dew'.

Brahms saves his most intimate connection for the final bars. As clouds part and momentum stalls, the LONG-short-LONG motive is transformed into a quotation from Robert Schumann's solo piano work *Davidsbündlertänze*. Schumann called the passage 'Clara Wieck's motto', after the woman who was soon to become Schumann's wife, and later Brahms' lifelong friend (and perhaps lover). Is this simple moment a sighing gesture to a loved one?



from *Regenlied*

Poem by Klaus Groth

*Drops of rain, forever falling
Wake for me those dreams again
That I dreamed in childhood,
When water foamed on the sand!*

*[...]How blissful then it was to stand
With naked feet in the flow!
Or to brush against the grass
Or grasp the foam in both hands,*

*[...]Like the dripping chalices,
My breathing soul stood open,
Like the flowers drunk with fragrance,
Drowned in heaven's dew.*

*[...]I'd love again to listen
To their sweet, moist murmuring,
And softly bedew my soul
With innocent childlike awe.*

Sonata No.1 for piano and cello in E minor, Op.38

Allegro non troppo
Allegretto quasi menuetto
Allegro

Brahms, aged 29, clung to his native city of Hamburg 'as to a mother'. Leaving the security of home for the vibrancy of Vienna was a prospect both thrilling and terrifying. But after a whirlwind first decade of maturity, a journey from autodidact to touring pianist to anointed genius to love-stifled youth, it seemed a natural step.

Brahms' early Viennese chamber works, his first forays into established genres, took years to complete, perhaps evidence of post-move jitters. The E minor Sonata was among these inventive and multifaceted compositions, and Brahms took his time, balancing the long first and shorter third, rewriting the finale, and jettisoning the slow movement. The latter would appear years later as the *Adagio* of the F major Sonata.

The E minor Sonata is in dialogue with the past. Thirtysomething Brahms, eyes penetrating, seemed flushed with the confidence of youth, and yet he felt caught out of time. A Protestant among the godless, lower-class amid the bourgeoisie, a champion of a declining culture. For comfort the composer looked backwards, rifling through bygone toolboxes, piling dusty tomes in his library, rinsing with J.S. Bach each morning.

Indeed, the sonata's title nods to duo works of the past, giving the keyboard pride of place. The fugal finale bows to Bach, whirling around a theme recalled from Bach's *The Art of Fugue*, as well as to the dazzling fugal finales of Beethoven. And the sonata's second movement transports us to the era of the bewigged minuet, its daintiness tweaked by a cheeky spirit, later sinking into a sinuous yearning.

Epic in scope, the first movement is as long as the remaining two combined. Brahms gives himself the room to carve out space for both gravel-voiced depths and calm vistas. The music moves at a stately walking pace, reminding us that after the buzz of a hectic evening Brahms calmed himself with a slow stroll alone through the night, leaving the crowd to sleep alone in his tiny bed.

In between

Two decades separate Brahms' two cello sonatas. In that time grinding social shifts had moved Europe from a naive, pre-revolution economy to a rapidly industrialising world. Brahms' own adopted city of Vienna was fading into irrelevance, fast becoming a 'proving-ground for world destruction' (Karl Kraus).

But Brahms, living in material comfort, paid little attention to such matters. He had grown to embrace life in Vienna, its smells, sounds, tastes and many prostitutes. Business was booming, his publisher eagerly anticipating each work from his pen, ready to sell it to a prospering bourgeois market.



'Lucky for you, too'

When juicy stories stick, they stick hard: Bach's bassoonist-bashing, the *Rite of Spring* riot, Beethoven's 'immortal beloved'. True or not, they confirm prejudices, draw caricatures. One such story, about a performance of Brahms' E minor Sonata, is cited in almost every program note for the work. During a private hearing of the work, amateur cellist Josef Gänsbacher, dedicatee of the sonata, complained that he was being drowned out by Brahms' piano playing. 'Lucky for you, too', said Brahms, who, according to contemporary gossip, made no adjustment.



Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Brahms is often considered both a traditionalist and an innovator. Spending much of his professional life in Vienna, Austria, his music is firmly rooted in the structures and compositional techniques of the Baroque and Classical masters. Yet Brahms aimed to honour the 'purity' of these venerable musical structures while also advancing them into the Romantic period creating bold new approaches to harmony and melody. While some contemporaries found his music too academic, his popularity and influence on the time was considerable causing the composer to be grouped with J.S. Bach and Beethoven as one of the 'Three Bs' highlighting the primacy of these three composers to the musical field.

Sonata No.2 for piano and cello in F, Op.99

Allegro vivace
Adagio affetuoso
Allegro passionato
Allegro molto

The F major Sonata was a product of the unusually productive summer of chamber music composition in 1886. From a sunny desk on Switzerland's Lake Thun came two violin sonatas, a piano trio, and, incongruously, a cache of songs with death on their mind: 'A dead man lay in the flowers'...'on every grave froze the words 'deceased'...'it is wintertime, wintertime!'

These songs leached into the A major Violin Sonata, and echoes may also be detected in the cello sonata. The rainstorm of *Auf dem Kirchhofe* ('In the churchyard'), 'heavy with storms and rain', finds a parallel in the sonata's tempestuous third movement. The unruffled calm of *Wie melodien* ('Like melodies') permeates the fast yet serene finale (melodies 'like spring flowers', drifting 'away like fragrance'). And the second movement, like *Klage* ('Lament'), sets the pain of heartbreak in a major key.

The F major Sonata opens with swagger, paying homage to the playing and personality of its dedicatee, cellist Robert Hausmann. 'Whoever saw him was bound to trust him unconditionally', wrote Brahms'

biographer Max Kalbeck, 'and whoever heard him play fell completely under his spell'. The composer also gushed, writing to a friend, 'You will derive pleasure from the young man in every respect, even without his excellent cello [playing]'.

True to Brahms' late music, compression and intensification are watchwords throughout the work. Each movement seems over in the blink of an eye, yet contains multitudes. The cello performs a virtuoso one-man show, turning on a dime, now cranky father, now impish sweetheart, now lovelorn teenager. The composer amplifies each marking: *Allegro vivace* (fast and lively), *Adagio affetuoso* (slow and tender), *Allegro passionato* (fast and passionate), *Allegro molto* (very fast).

Brahms' material is in a constant state of transformation. Bluster is later reimagined as radiant hymn, later again as fragile wisp. Major keys and minor keys are close friends, trading thoughts, finishing each other's sentences. And each time a melody reappears, its harmony has shifted underfoot, acknowledging, as Brahms himself knew, that change is a complex but unavoidable part of life.

TIM MUNRO © 2017

Tim Munro is a Chicago-based, triple-Grammy-winning flutist, speaker, writer and teacher.

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