

The music

Johann Sebastian Bach	<i>Suite no1 in G major BWV1007</i>
Tanja Orning	<i>Allegro Flageo</i>
JS Bach	<i>Suite no3 in C major BWV1009</i>

It's generally accepted that the six *Cello Suites* we're hearing today were written early in Bach's career, at some time between 1717 and 1723 when he was in the service of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen. It was a fruitful time for composition: the Prince's only formal requirement was for simple church music, which left Bach ample scope to write the *Brandenburg Concertos*, *Orchestral Suites* and *Violin Sonatas and Partitas* as well as these masterpieces for solo cello. The court was full of skilled musicians and such a cornucopia of new works would have provided a marvellous addition to their existing repertoire. For the renowned viola da gamba player, Christian Ferdinand Abel, the *Cello Suites* would have been a special treat.

The *Suites* were probably not first conceived as a set of six. It's noticeable that nos 4-6 are on a considerably higher plane of difficulty and musical invention than nos 1-3 and it's now presumed that the additional three were written a bit later when Bach started organising some of his instrumental works into neat groups of six.

Unlike the six *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin*, no manuscript in Bach's own hand exists, giving endless scope for debate about exactly how he intended them to be performed. It was only because one of his pupils asked Bach for a copy of the score that we have a contemporary manuscript at all — one written out by Anna Magdalena but without any significant notation, leaving our insight into performance practice at the time singularly opaque. There are a few later manuscripts, but whether these in any way reflected Bach's own further thoughts or his corrections of his wife's text can't be known: the changes may simply have been made by other performers.

The first published edition came out in 1824, a full century after their composition. And it took another hundred years until they slowly started to become more widely known, aided by Casals' ground-breaking recordings in the 1930s. The arrival of the LP then eventually led to a flourishing. Given the lack of any definitive performance practice to bind them, every cellist could come to their own conclusions. And indeed they still are, as we are having the pleasure of confirming in our three recitals today.

The works all follow the standard format of the baroque suite. First comes a prelude, often with the character of an improvisation, allowing the composer, and performer, considerable freedom. This is followed by a sequence of movements based on dance forms from the major musical centres of Europe. All the dances are in binary form with repeated A and then B sections (AABB).

The allemande probably originated in Germany in the 16th century and was subsequently adopted in the French court. Usually in duple time, with two beats to the bar, it was thought of as a rather serious, courtly affair. The composer Johann Gottfried Walther wrote that the allemande "must be composed and likewise danced in a grave and ceremonious manner." In contrast, the courante is a lighter dance in triple time, with three beats to the bar, its name derived from the French for "running". There are two main types, the Italian and the French — the former livelier than its more elegant Gallic counterpart. Bach employs both types in the cello suites.

Next comes the sarabande, slow and reflective, again in triple time and often the emotional centre of the suite. This, originally Spanish, dance is often coupled with a gigue (jig). From Britain via France, it is generally the liveliest movement and the most likely to betray its dance origins. To smooth the transition from the slow sarabande to the fast gigue, Bach inserts a *galanterie* in each of the suites, an optional, lighter section usually consisting of a pair of fashionable dances, the first of which is repeated after the second. In the first two suites these are stately minuets, in the next two, lively bourrées and, in the final two, gavottes, derived from a French folk dance in moderate tempo.

Tanja Orning performs this evening on a rare Hardanger cello, only invented as such recently but closely related to the Hardanger fiddle that was first heard around Bach's own time. The cello has five lower strings that pick up the sympathetic resonance of the four bowed strings — just as Bach's music resonates sympathetically in our own time. During the course of tonight's concert, Tanja will introduce the instrument in more detail.

JS Bach (1685-1750) *Cello Suite no1 in G major BWV1007*

I Prelude ~ II Allemande ~ III Courante ~ IV Sarabande ~ V Menuets 1 and 2 ~ VI Gigue

The first suite, in the joyful and resonant key of G major, is perhaps the most well-known of the set and the *Prelude* its most famous and loved movement. Its broken chords outline a memorable melody while making the most of the resonance of the cello's open strings, an effect that should be enhanced by the additional sympathetic strings of the Hardanger cello. Save for one pause in the middle, the movement proceeds in unbroken semiquavers. These are however very much open to individual interpretation from moment to moment and even the basic speed of the movement can vary from adagio to allegro. Towards the end of the movement the cello repeats a pedal note, A, then outlines an ascending chromatic phrase leading to a cadenza which culminates, very satisfyingly, in the home key of G.

A stately *Allemande* follows, the longest movement in the suite, its sinuous lines enhanced by occasional trills. The next three dances are all in triple time, but are very different. A jaunty, folk dance-like *Courante*, in the Italian style, is succeeded by a serious, reflective *Sarabande*. In each of the *Menuets* the opening (A) section is short and simple: that of the first has a rustic air, while in the second, more harmonically adventurous, movement it is almost compacted to a four-bar phrase played twice over. The suite is rounded off in joyous style with an exuberant *Gigue* which subsequently inspired the Swingle Singers in one of their liveliest tracks.

Tanja Orning (b1967) *Allegro Flageo*

Allegro Flageo is originally a movement from the quartet *Law of Nature*, written in 2025, here presented in a version for solo cello. The piece explores the interplay between the sweeping registers of overtones and stopped notes, opening up a vast sonic space where shimmering, ethereal tones meet grounded, resonant ones. It also examines the tension between the microtonal nature of overtones and their need to conform to harmonic progressions and rhythmic structure in this context. Idiomatic to the cello and playful in character, the movement draws inspiration from the prelude of Bach's *Sixth Suite*.

JS Bach Cello Suite no3 in C major BWV1009

*I Prelude ~ II Allemande ~ III Courante ~ IV Sarabande ~
V Bourrées 1 and 2 ~ VI Gigue*

The key of C major allows Bach to take full advantage of the open string resonance of the cello's lowest note. Indeed, the *Prelude* commences with an expressive descent through two octaves to the open string on low C. This declamatory gesture may be taken as a statement of intent as the music grows in intensity towards a climax characterised by vigorous chordal interjections which culminate in one last voicing of C major spanning the same robust range.

The sprightly *Allemande* starts with a more florid version of the *Prelude*'s opening measure and then rings the changes on a couple of rhythmic shapes. It's followed by a rapid-fire *Courante* which proceeds in a single part until its final chord. In contrast, while venturing further harmonically, the restrained *Sarabande* fully integrates chordal writing with serene melody. Of the *Bourrées*, the second, in C minor, sets out from a variation of the first's well-known initial motif. The robust *Gigue* also flirts with C minor, but ultimately resolves back to the home key with a rich spread of four notes in C major. Along the way it enjoys a burst of folk-style playing over an insistent drone and runs into it again, at a different pitch, in the second half. It should be fascinating to hear how this effect is enhanced by the additional resonance of the Hardanger cello.

*Programme notes by Tanja Orning, Martin Cunningham
and Dick Ware.*

The artist

Tanja Orning cello

Tanja Orning is a Norwegian cellist, musicologist, educator and composer active primarily in the fields of contemporary and experimental music. After cello studies in Oslo, in London with William Pleeth and at Indiana University with János Starker (as a Fulbright Research Fellow), she held the position as a co-principal cellist in the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra for five years until she left for Oslo in 2000 to realise a number of projects as a performer, improviser and composer. Her growing interest in composition led her to take composition classes at The Norwegian Academy of Music, and she started composing music for interdisciplinary projects such as *Sound of Movement* with dancer Ellen Johannesen and the performance group Mobile Homes.

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Programme Notes

BACH SUITES FOR SOLO CELLO

4. The Nordic Cello – Tanja Orning



8.45pm, Saturday October 10th, 2026
Little Missenden Church

66th Little Missenden Festival

Tanja's solo project, *Cellotronics*, a body of solo works with electronics, resulted in a CD in 2005. Her passion for contemporary chamber music has resulted in several collaborations: asamisimasa (Norwegian Grammy 2012 and 2015), Boa trio (with Tora Augestad and Morten Barrikmo), Dr. Ox duo (with Natasha Barrett), Kyberia duo (with Victoria Johnson), Ametri string quartet, Christian Wallumrød Ensemble, Polygon and Plus Minus Ensemble. She performs regularly with Oslo Sinfonietta and Ensemble Ernst.

Tanja has premiered approx. 120 new works by composers in Norway and abroad, including Carola Bauckholt, Simon Steen-Andersen, Clemens Gadenstätter, Maja Ratkje, Øyvind Torvund, Johannes Kreidler, Therese Birkelund Ulvo, Trond Reinholdtsen, Bente Leiknes Thorsen, Kristine Tjøgersen and Mathias Spahlinger.

She has performed at festivals such as Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Ultima, Ultraschall, Wien Modern, Warsaw Autumn, Taktlos (Zürich), Kammer Klang, Rainy Days, ECLAT, Other Minds (San Francisco), Portland Jazz Festival, Borealis, ILIOS, Molde and Kongsberg Jazz Festival.

Tanja completed her PhD, *The Polyphonic Performer*, a study of performance practice in music for solo cello by Morton Feldman, Helmut Lachenmann, Klaus K. Hübler and Simon Steen-Andersen, at The Norwegian Academy of Music in 2014. She worked as a post-doctoral researcher and teacher at the Academy between 2015-2020, in the project: "Towards a new professional role. A study of the competence requirements of the portfolio musician in a globalized labour market".

Tanja now holds the position of Professor of Classical Music Improvisation at the University of Agder, as well as Assistant Professor in Performance practice at The Norwegian Academy of Music, besides being an active performer. She is a member of the Norwegian Society of Composers