

J. S. Bach: Six Suites à Violoncello Solo
André Laurent O'Neil

Presented by Bennington Baroque

St. Peter's Episcopal Church
Bennington, Vermont

1:00 PM
Saturday, 10 January 2015

Program

Suite 1 in G Major

Prélude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Menuet I and II -- Gigue

Suite 4 in E-flat Major

Prélude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Bourée I and II -- Gigue

Intermission

Suite 2 in D Minor

Prélude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Menuet I and II -- Gigue

Suite 6 in D Major

Prélude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Gavotte I and II -- Gigue

Intermission

Suite 5 in C Minor

Prélude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Gavotte I and II -- Gigue

Suite 3 in C Major

Prélude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Bourée I and II -- Gigue

This concert is presented in support of future projects planned by Bennington Baroque. We are grateful to St. Peter's Episcopal Church and to Music Minister, John Terauds, for hosting this event. Please refrain from applauding between the suites in each pair; then applaud heartily and join us for refreshments during the intermissions.

Instruments used in today's performance

- Suites 1-4** Cello by John Morrison, London, 1800
Suite 5 Cello made in Mirecourt for shop of T.J. Holder, Paris 1914
Suite 6 7-string bass viola da gamba made in workshop of Wang Zhi Ming, Beijing 2006, temporarily converted to 5-string violoncello piccolo with assistance from Nicholas Frirsz, Greenfield Center, NY
- Bow** Copy extrapolated from an original English violin bow (1700), by Harry Grabenstein, Burlington, Vermont

André Laurent O'Neil grew up and currently lives in Albany, NY, while his performances often take him up and down the East Coast and across the Atlantic. Locally he plays cello, fortepiano and viola da gamba with Capitol Chamber Artists, who have also premiered his compositions. Primarily a cellist, André is a featured soloist with Atlanta-based New Trinity Baroque on their Vivaldi Concertos CD, and has performed with them annually at the Piccolo Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC, and the Belgrade Early Music Festival in Serbia. He has also performed frequently in Boston's Symphony Hall with the Handel and Haydn Society. André teaches private cello and gamba students in Clifton Park and Albany. He has collaborated with Bennington Baroque since its inception a few years ago.

Notes

Johann Sebastian Bach's monumental and fascinating Six Suites for unaccompanied cello are probably the driving reason why I, after eleven years as a professional orchestral cellist, decided to change paths and commit to specializing in baroque music and performance practice. For three intense years I immersed myself in the world of baroque cello, taking lessons with Jaap ter Linden while completing a Certificate in Early Music and Historical Performance at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, Netherlands. On returning to my native Albany in 2002, where I live once more, I offered up my first performances of the complete set of six suites at the University of Albany.

Dad was my first cello teacher and the first piece he taught me to perform in public was the Bourrée I from Bach's Third (C major) Suite, which I remember playing in fifth grade at an elementary school concert. Fortunately he didn't make me read it from the manuscript (as I do today)!

I was still in high school when I first heard all of Bach's Suites performed live by the dynamic Dutch baroque cellist Anner Bylsma, in two concerts on consecutive days at Union College's Memorial Chapel. Bylsma, probably the first modern baroque cellist to perform all six suites internationally, introduced the audience to the five-string violoncello piccolo, which he argued was the instrument Bach intended to be used to play the sixth suite. At that time, many people believed that Bach had written the sixth suite for the viola pomposa. Bylsma's assertion continues to be generally accepted by period performers to the present day.

As a student at Yale I used to read through the Suites in my dorm room. My teacher, Aldo Parisot, however, appeared not to share my enthusiasm for them, suggesting that only after learning first all of the Preludes to the Suites -- at the time the Preludes to the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Suites were quite forbidding to me -- could one then choose one Suite to work on in its entirety.

After graduating Yale College with honors I took my first job as principal cellist of the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra. Subsequently I moved to Spain to work fulltime with the Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León in Valladolid. While playing in the orchestra I programmed a mini-series of three concerts, each one featuring one of the first three Suites juxtaposed against twentieth century compositions for unaccompanied cello. I performed these both in Valladolid and in my hometown of Guilderland. Around the same time I visited Russian cellist Dmitry Markevitch in Switzerland. Markevitch, a published expert on the solo cello repertoire, introduced me to other unaccompanied cello works from the baroque era (around the time of Bach) and

let me try his baroque cello, encouraging me to explore the instrument further as a way of deepening my understanding of the suites.

That chance came when I left the orchestra. Continuing to live in Spain, I discovered a whole different approach to learning music and playing the cello through continuing education seminars in early music offered by the University of Salamanca. At my first such course, I observed intently cellist Norbert Zaubermann teaching the Fifth (C minor) Suite to a fellow student who was learning the piece with the special scordatura tuning that Bach specifies, but which my teachers at Yale had shunned. I didn't want to miss or forget a single fingering. Today I continue to remember that student's lessons vividly, while recalling nothing that took place in my own lessons! Just over a year later, I was admitted for formal study to the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, along with five Spanish colleagues whom I had come to know from these Salamanca University courses (including that other cello student).

In 2002-2003 I performed the Six Suites over two concerts, one in the fall and one in late winter. After moving to New York City in 2005 I performed the cycle again, this time outdoors, two suites at a time, over the course of three summers (2007-2009) at the West Side Community Gardens as part of their Music In A Garden concert series. This concert will be my third undertaking of the complete set, the first time I perform them all in one day, and also the first time I perform them all from memory.

André Laurent O'Neil

Special Thanks

Mom & Dad, for supporting me always, back then, and now.

Dad, for remembering from the Boy Scouts how to tie knots when I needed the super thin E string to stay on (twice!)

Kevin & Sandra, for dreaming up and supporting this venture, patronizing, publicizing, pampering, etc.!

Russian cellist and researcher **Dmitry Markevitch**, for inspiring (one of the first cellists to perform all 6 suites in one concert), for “re-discovering” two important Bach Suites manuscripts in Eastern Bloc libraries, and for sharing the results of his years of experience and research, including access to his personal music collection.

Luthier **Nicholas Frirsz**, for creating overnight a beautiful bridge for the 5-string cello out of a so-so bridge for my 7-string gamba.

Founder Director **David Janower** of Albany Pro Musica, for offering me my first opportunity to perform all six suites at the University at Albany. May his musical legacy be forever remembered in the Capital Region of upstate New York.

Producer **Randa Kirshbaum**, for offering me my second opportunity, though neither of us knew it at the time, to perform all six suites at the West Side Community Gardens in New York.

Janet Nepkie, my private cello teacher in high school, for insisting that I attend, and sit in the front row with her, Anner Bylsma's two-day Bach Suite marathon at Union College in 1982.

Eminent cellists **Robert Ripley**, **Irene Sharp**, **Aldo Parisot**, **Norbert Zaubermann**, **Rainer Zipperling**, and **Jaap ter Linden**, all of whom taught me portions of the Suites over the years.