

Bach: Six Suites, Six Echoes

Start times:

2pm, Part 1

3pm, Part 2

4.15pm, Part 3

This performance will finish at approximately 5.10pm. There will be an interval of at least 20 minutes between each part.

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

Programme

2pm, Part 1

Ivan Fedele *Arc-en-ciel*

Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No 1 in G Major, BWV 1007

Prelude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Minuet I/II – Gigue

Jonathan Harvey *Pre-echo for Jean-Guihen*

Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No 2 in D Minor, BWV 1008

Prelude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Minuet I/II – Gigue

3pm, Part 2

György Kurtág 'Az hit...' from *Jelek, játékok és üzenetek*

'Pilinszky János: Gérard de Nerval' from *Jelek, játékok és üzenetek*

'Árnyak' from *Jelek, játékok és üzenetek*

Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No 3 in C Major, BWV 1009

Prelude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Bourrée I/II – Gigue

Gilbert Amy *En-Suite* Prelude to Suite No 4 by Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No 4 in E flat Major, BWV 1010

Prelude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Bourrée I/II – Gigue

4.15pm, Part 3

Misato Mochizuki *Pré-écho* Prelude to Suite No 5 by Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No 5 in C Minor, BWV 1011

Prelude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Gavotte I/II – Gigue

Ichiro Nodaira *Enigma*

Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No 6 in D Major BWV 1012

Prelude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande – Gavotte I/II – Gigue

Leon Bosch interviews Jean-Guihen Queyras ahead of this afternoon's three-part concert.

Cellists worldwide have embraced Bach's six suites for solo cello with enthusiasm and reverence ever since the legendary Catalan cellist Pablo Casals reintroduced them to the concert platform early last century.

Marathon performances of the complete set of six suites are nowadays commonplace but preceding each suite with a piece of contemporary music, as Jean-Guihen Queyras does for his performance today, is still relatively novel.

Jean-Guihen freely admits that Bach's suites have been central to his own musical life, but that in addition to this lifelong immersion in the music of Bach, he also pursues a parallel passion for contemporary music. That passion, expressed through a long relationship as a member of Ensemble Intercontemporain, afforded him the benefit of regular interaction with composers. And it is that experience that provided Jean-Guihen with the foundation for his concept of 'returning to the classics afresh'.

Motivated by the desire to rediscover Bach's suites liberated from the strictures of convention, Jean-Guihen is convinced that the 'shock of a different aesthetic' has not only benefited his own approach to this music, but that it also possesses the power to transform the experience for his audience.

With the exception of György Kurtág's contributions, each new piece sharing the programme with Bach this afternoon was written specially for Jean-Guihen. Each of the composers embraced the challenge of capturing and illuminating the essence of the suite that their composition precedes, providing a new perspective on familiar music.

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Bach's six suites might at first glance appear similar, each with an introductory prelude followed by a succession of five dance movements, but some uniquely distinguishing characteristics are worth noting. Each suite assumes the character of its respective key – the popular first suite in G major is infinitely more joyous than the second in the brooding key of D minor. The third suite is in the happy key of C major, whilst the fourth is in the solemn key of E-flat major. Suite number five, with its especially poignant Sarabande, is in the penitential key of C minor. And the sixth and final suite, originally conceived for a mysterious five stringed instrument – possibly the violoncello piccolo, or viola pomposa – is in the rapturous key of D major, completing the set in a flurry of virtuosity.

It's also worth noting that in the first two suites the Sarabande is followed by a pair of Menuettos. However, in the third and fourth suites it is followed by a pair of Bourrées, and in the final 2 suites, by a pair of Gavottes. The fifth suite also unusually requires scordatura tuning, bringing the top A-string down to G.

Jean-Guihen looks upon the performances of Bach's suites as a 'grand operatic experience'. The inherent beauty and complexity of Bach's music notwithstanding, the contemporary music contributes an additional dimension through which to experience and understand Bach's contrapuntal masterpieces.

The composers of these dedicated new works are all friends with whom Jean-Guihen enjoys a special relationship, mostly forged during his years with the Ensemble Intercontemporain. And each of them set about composing a piece of music that would not only do justice to Bach, but also exploit the distinctive artistry of their friend.

The Italian composer Ivan Fedele's *Arc-en-ciel* opens the performance, and Jean-Guihen believes that this brief but beguiling piece encourages him to perform the Prelude to Bach's first suite in a more impressionistic manner. Although originally commissioned as a standalone piece, *Arc-en-ciel* has subsequently become the first movement of Fedele's *Suite Francese* for solo cello.

Jonathan Harvey is the only British composer represented in this grand project, and his aptly entitled *Pre-echo for Jean-Guihen* succinctly foreshadows the melancholy of the second suite in D minor: 'It's like an upbeat to the prelude, with some blurred suggestions of Bach's three note motif'.

György Kurtág is one of the most esteemed and widely performed contemporary composers, and although Jean-Guihen had been hoping for a new and original composition to precede Bach's third suite, he ultimately, in consultation with Kurtág, chose three pre-existing pieces from Kurtág's collection of pieces for solo cello *Jelek, játékok és üzenetek (Signs, Games & Messages)*: 'Az Hit...' 'Pilinszky János: Gérard de Nerval' and 'Árnyak' (Hungarian for 'Shadows'), each of which is characteristically brief and powerful. Jean Guihen believes that 'the descending scales of 'Árnyak' lead directly into the descending scale of the third suite'. And that 'with all due respect to other composers, for me Bach and Kurtág are the perfect musical combination'.

Gilbert Amy's *En-Suite* Prelude to Suite No 4 by Bach – with its subtle hints from the Courante and Bourrées – reveals the influences of Amy's own teachers, Messiaen, and Milhaud. Compared to all the other new works, there is in Jean-Guihen's opinion a more tangible relationship to Bach in Amy's work. The enduring personal and musical relationship that he enjoys with Amy has also inspired a cello concerto.

Misato Mochizuki's *Pré-écho* Prelude to Suite No 5 is inspired by the ornamentation that characterises the Prelude to Bach's fifth suite. This suite is, in Jean-Guihen's opinion, the 'most French' of all the suites, and Mochizuki's composition, with its 'crazy scales', is 'technically the most challenging' contemporary composition on the programme.

Ichiro Nodaira, whose *Enigma* precedes Bach's sixth and final suite, is, like Mochizuki, Japanese and lives in France, where he came to know Jean-Guihen at the Ensemble Intercontemporain. In contrast, however, to Mochizuki's atmospheric and ethereal, if seemingly aleatoric, style, Nodaira's music is unashamedly discordant and declamatory.

The enduring popularity of Bach's six suites for solo cello is assured, but it is Jean-Guihen Queyras's bold commitment to contemporary music, especially in the company and service of Bach, as it is this afternoon, that is particularly commendable.

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Performers

Jean-Guihen Queyras cello

Produced by the Barbican



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