

LSO St Luke's

CHAMBER MUSIC

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Friday 15 October 2021 6pm
Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's

J S Bach Cello Suites No 1, 2 & 3

Antoine Tamestit viola

Recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3

Johann Sebastian Bach almost certainly wrote his six Suites for solo cello between the years of 1717 and 1723, while he was employed at the princely court of Cöthen. His youthful employer, Prince Leopold, was a competent string and keyboard player and a good bass singer. Music was the prince's abiding passion, and from his teenage years he had set about building up a fine court ensemble, eventually numbering some 18 instrumentalists.

Bach slotted happily into this musical environment, and his output at Cöthen concentrated on solo instrumental and ensemble music. The six Cello Suites appear to have been conceived as a set, although Bach's autograph manuscript has disappeared, and the pieces survive in a copy written out several years later by Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena.

Today Antoine Tamestit performs three of the suites on viola. Each follows the typical baroque format, beginning with an improvisatory Prelude, followed by a fixed sequence of three dances – Allemande, Courante and Sarabande. The fifth movement is one of three French-style genres – Menuet, Bourrée or Gavotte – and the final movement is always a Gigue.

LSO Artist Portrait: Antoine Tamestit

28 & 31 October, Barbican

See Antoine Tamestit on-stage with the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican. He concludes his Artist Portrait series with performances of Walton's Viola Concerto (28 October) – which established Walton as a leading British composer – and the London premiere of Jörg Widmann's Viola Concerto, written for Tamestit in 2015.

Suite No 1 in G major

Johann Sebastian Bach

- 1 Prelude
- 2 Allemande
- 3 Courante
- 4 Sarabande
- 5 Minuet I / II
- 6 Gigue

Tamestit says that the opening G major Suite feels to him 'settled, peaceful, fluid and light', and that the well-known Prelude, built on a steady pattern, 'should flow like water'. The following Allemande showcases the player's virtuosity. After a fast-moving Courante, and a grave Sarabande comes a pair of minuets. The first is energetic, while the second, before the repeat of Minuet I, is more reflective in character. The Suite concludes with a Gigue, which according to Tamestit is full of vitality and joy.

Next BBC Radio 3 concert
Friday 29 October 1pm



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Suite No 2 in D minor

Johann Sebastian Bach

- 1 Prelude
- 2 Allemande
- 3 Courante
- 4 Sarabande
- 5 Minuet I / II
- 6 Gigue

The D minor Suite follows exactly the same format as the G major, but its overall ambience is dark-hued and sombre. The intense Prelude, focusing on the viola's lower range, divides into two sections - the first built on a compact theme, the second almost improvisatory. This mood continues into the Allemande, which is interrupted by short, cadenza-like passages, while the Courante, French for 'running', lives up to its translation. The first of the two Minuets requires complex string crossings and double stops (playing two notes at the same time); while its companion traces a single melodic line.

Suite No 3 in C major

Johann Sebastian Bach

- 1 Prelude
- 2 Allemande
- 3 Courante
- 4 Sarabande
- 5 Bourrée I / II
- 6 Gigue

This Suite's majestic Prelude opens with a dramatic downward plunge through an octave and a half. It continues in declamatory style, making use of chordal patterns and long notes and maintaining an intensity of expression throughout. After a dignified Allemande and a Courante which explores string crossings and occasionally slips into a minor key, comes the heart of the Suite, a slow, impassioned Sarabande which mines a rich vein of melancholy. It's followed by the well-known Bourrée I, and the Suite ends with a Gigue exploiting the string crossing technique known as 'bariolage', which, by creating a kind of drone with a lower note, gives the movement an almost gypsy feel.

Programme notes by Wendy Thompson

Antoine Tamestit

viola

Antoine Tamestit is recognised internationally as one of the great violists: as a soloist, recitalist and chamber musician. He is notable for his peerless technique and profound musicianship, and for the depth and beauty of his sound, with its rich, burnished quality. His repertoire ranges from the Baroque to the contemporary. He has performed and recorded several world premieres.

Among Tamestit's concerto commissions is the Viola Concerto by Jörg Widmann. Since he gave the world premiere performance in 2015 with the Orchestre de Paris and Paavo Järvi, Tamestit has performed the concerto with the co-commissioners - the Swedish Radio Symphony and Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, both under Daniel Harding - and with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre de Paris (again), the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Stavanger Symphony, and the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Tamestit's other world premiere performances and recordings include Thierry Escaich's *La nuit des chants* (2018), the Concerto for Two Violas by Bruno Mantovani (written for Tabea Zimmermann and Tamestit) and Olga Neuwirth's *Remnants of Songs*. Works composed for Tamestit also include Neuwirth's *Weariness Heals Wounds* and Gérard Tamestit's *Sakura*.

Tamestit is a founding member of Trio Zimmermann (with Frank Peter Zimmermann and Christian Poltéra). The Trio has recorded a number of acclaimed CDs for BIS Records (including Bach's Goldberg Variations, released in May 2019) and performed in Europe's most famous concert halls and series.

Tamestit was born in Paris, and studied with Jean Sulem, Jesse Levine and Tabea Zimmermann. He received several notable prizes, including First Prize at the ARD International Music Competition, the William Primrose Competition and the Young Concert Artists (YCA) International Auditions, won a Borletti-Buitoni Trust award and the Credit Suisse Award in 2008, and participated in BBC Radio 3's New Generation Artists Scheme. He plays on a viola made by Stradivarius in 1672, loaned by the Habisreutinger Foundation.

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