

Leyan Zhao Senior Recital Program notes

J.S. Bach, Cello Suite No. 6 in D major, BWV 1012

It is widely believed that Suite No. 6 was composed specifically for a five-stringed violoncello piccolo, a smaller cello, roughly $\frac{7}{8}$ normal cello size with a fifth upper string tuned to E, a perfect fifth above the otherwise top string. However, some say there is no substantial evidence to support this claim: whilst three of the sources inform the player that it is written for an instrument *à cinq cordes*, only Anna Magdalena Bach's manuscript indicates the tunings of the strings, and the other sources do not mention any intended instrument at all.

Other possible instruments for the suite include a cello da spalla, a version of the violoncello piccolo played on the shoulder like a viola, as well as a viola with a fifth string tuned to E, called a viola pomposa. As the range required in this piece is very large, the suite was probably intended for a larger instrument, although it is conceivable that Bach—who was fond of the viola—may have performed the work himself on an arm-held violoncello piccolo. However, it is equally likely that beyond hinting the number of strings, Bach did not intend any specific instrument at all as the construction of instruments in the early 18th century was highly variable.

Cellists playing this suite on a modern four-string cello encounter difficulties as they are forced to use very high positions to reach many of the notes. Performers specialising in early music and using authentic instruments generally use the five-string cello for this suite. The approach of Watson Forbes, in his transcription of this suite for viola, was to transpose the entire suite to G major, avoiding "a tone colour which is not very suitable for this type of music" and making most of the original chords playable on a four-stringed instrument.

This suite is written in much more free form than the others, containing more cadenza-like movements and virtuosic passages. It is also the only one of the suites that is partly notated in the alto and soprano clefs (modern editions use tenor and treble clefs), which are not needed for the others since they never go above the note G₄ (G above middle C).

Mstislav Rostropovich called Suite No. 6 "a symphony for solo cello" and characterised its D major tonality as evoking joy and triumph.

C. Debussy, Cello Sonata L.135

Debussy composed the cello sonata as the first in a project, Six sonatas for various instruments, to compose six sonatas for different instruments. It was prompted by a performance of the Septet by Saint-Saëns, inspiring Debussy to write chamber music again which he had neglected since his string quartet of 1893. Diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 1910, he had not composed at all. Debussy's publisher Durand encouraged the project, planned as an homage to 18th-century composers Couperin and Rameau. Throughout his career, he preferred the French keyboard music of the 18th century over German romanticism. Remaining in the French tradition was also a political statement during the World War. He described himself as a French musician on the title pages of project pieces.

Debussy planned three movements, as in French traditional sonatas. He had written many works in three movements such as *Pour le piano*, *En blanc et noir*, and *Iberia*.

Debussy composed the Cello Sonata as the first of the set within a few weeks in July at the Normandy seaside town of Pourville. He wrote to his publisher Durand on 5 August that he would send the manuscript of what he described as a sonata in "almost classical form in the best sense of the word". It was printed in December 1915.

Despite other information, the sonata was premiered in London's Aeolian Hall by cellist C. Warwick Evans and Ethel Hobday on 4 March 1916. It was played at the Casino Saint-Pierre in Geneva, performed by cellist Léonce Allard and Marie Panthès. It took until 24 March 1917 for the French premiere which was given in Paris by cellist Joseph Salmon and Debussy.

The cellist Louis Rosoor claimed in program notes that Debussy related the music to the character Pierrot of the commedia dell'arte, and wanted to name the sonata *Pierrot Angry at the Moon*. The cellist seems to have invented this, writing: "Pierrot wakes up with a start and shakes off his stupor. He rushes off to sing a serenade to his beloved [the moon] who, despite his supplications, remains unmoved. To comfort himself in his failure he sings a song of liberty." Debussy confirmed in a letter to Durand dated 16 October 1916 that the cellist had visited him the previous night, and seemed to have misunderstood him and the music.

Debussy dedicated the sonata, and actually the complete project, to his wife Emma, writing "Les Six Sonates pour divers instruments sont offertes en hommage à Emma-Claude Debussy (p.m.) Son mari Claude Debussy" (The six sonatas for various instruments are offered to honour Emma-Claude Debussy. Her husband.). He completed only three of the six planned sonatas, a second for viola, flute and harp in October 1915, and the third, a violin sonata, in the winter of 1916/17.

In 2008 Bärenreiter published a critical edition of the sonata, edited by Regina Back. She used Debussy's sketches from a private collection for the first time, dealing with the balance of the instruments and attempting to clarify ambiguities in the autograph and the first edition, many of which, unfortunately, remain unresolvable.

The cello sonata became a staple of the modern cello repertoire and is commonly regarded as one of the finest masterpieces written for the instrument.

D. Shostakovich, Cello Sonata in D minor, Op. 40

The Cello Sonata in D minor, Op. 40, was composed in 1934 by Dmitri Shostakovich. It was also a period of emotional turmoil in his life, as he had fallen in love with a young student at a Leningrad festival featuring his *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*. Their affair resulted in a brief separation from his wife Nina; he composed the Cello Sonata during this period. He completed it within a few weeks and gave its premiere in Moscow on 25 December with his close friend, the cellist Viktor Kubatsky, who was also the piece's dedicatee. By late 1934 Shostakovich and Nina reunited and she eventually became pregnant with their first-born daughter, who was born in 1936.

I — Allegro non troppo

The sonata form first movement contrasts a broad first theme in the cello, accompanied by flowing piano arpeggios, developed by the piano until reaching a climax. The second theme is first played by the piano, then followed by the cello. In the development a rhythmic motif goes through the flowing textures of the first theme. The recapitulation appears with the second theme rather than the first. Shostakovich repeats the first theme where all moves in slow motion, with staccato chords in the piano and sustained notes in the cello.

II — Allegro

The *moto perpetuo* outer sections of the second movement frame a minuet-like trio.

III — Largo

The movement begins with the solo cello, which is later joined by the piano. The manuscript indicates the cello is to play *con sordino*.

IV — Allegro

The finale's rondo theme appears five times, imitated by both instruments, interspersed by episodes of scalar runs. In the second of these, the piano unfurls a brief *cadenza*. The theme returns, to round off the movement.