

Solo Cello Music: Through the Ages:

Program Notes

By

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A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Humanities.

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2021

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Abstract

This recital provides a brief introduction into the world of solo cello music. The recital program includes some better-known solo cello works, such as the Cello Suite No. 2 by Johann Sebastian Bach, and some lesser-known pieces, including a Jazz cello suite written in 2010 by the contemporary composer, Lucio Amanti. Through this varied program, the audience shall see the diversity that exists within the world of solo cello music. In addition, this recital exhibits the many capabilities of the cello, how manifold are the sounds that this instrument can produce. Further, the recital explores the evolution over the years with regards to the cello's anatomy and sound. As different as each of these pieces are from each other, each piece displays how profoundly the solo cello can fill a room with its incredible sound and musical power.

Acknowledgements

I would like to especially acknowledge my first reader, Anner Lerner-Wright, and my second reader, June Oh. Also, I would like to acknowledge Joan Baranow, for her wealth of knowledge and advice. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge all the professors that I had the honor to learn from during my time at Dominican: Dr. Judy Halebsky, Dr. Leslie Ross, Dr. Chase Clow, Dr. Perry Guevara, Sister Patricia Dougherty, and Robert Bradford.

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Seven Ricercari for Violoncello Solo: I and V

Domenico Gabrielli (1651-1690)

Domenico Gabrielli was an Italian Baroque composer and one of the earliest known virtuoso cello players. He was born in Bologna, Italy and played in Bologna's two elite instrumental groups, the Accademia Filarmonica and the orchestra of the Basilica San Petronio. Gabriellis' Seven *Ricercari* are among the oldest existing solo cello works. *Ricercare* means "to seek" or "search out" in Italian, and Gabrielli used his pieces to explore the capabilities of the violoncello.

The *Ricercare* were published in 1689 and thus fall within the Baroque time period. Baroque music is defined by its long melodic lines and use of elaborate ornamentation. During the Baroque era, Bologna was an important location in the development of stringed instruments; in around 1660 Bolognese string makers developed the first wire-wound gut strings to be used for the G and C strings. These strings produced a much clearer tone than their bare gut predecessors and allowed the violoncello itself to be smaller while still producing a large sound. Gabrielli often utilizes the high strings in his *Ricercari*, but there are also a lot of string crossings and quick notes, which are only possible because of the wire-wound strings. In addition, the quick passages and left hand shifting would have been very difficult on a larger instrument. Another consideration is that these pieces would have been played using a Baroque bow (Figure 1). This bow is not only a different shape than the modern day cello bow, it was also held differently. A Baroque bow has a convex shape and is shorter than a modern

day bow. It also was heavier at the frog and lighter at the tip, which made the first beat in a piece heavier and the second beat lighter.



Figure 1 An Example of a Baroque Bow

In this picture of a Baroque bow, the letters A through D denote the placement of the first through fourth fingers, and the E indicates where the thumb should be placed on the bow

I have chosen two of the seven *Ricercari* to play, I and V. The first *Ricercar* is written in G minor and has a mournful, yearning quality to it. The piece also has an improvisational feel as it is not written in any specific style or form. The fifth *Ricercar* is in C major, giving it a much happier and cheerful sound. This piece lives up to its name, with much string crossing, left hand shifting and a fast sixteenth note passage towards the end of the piece, one can hear that Gabrielli was really exploring the capabilities of the instrument in this movement. Because this movement contains so much in the way of technique, it was difficult at first to understand the composer's musical goal with this piece. But once I lent myself to the exploring quality of the piece, I found its twists and turns made much more sense. What I ultimately realized is that this piece is somewhat of a showcase of the different sounds that the cello can produce.

Suite II in D Minor, BWV 1008*Prelude**Allemande**Courante**Sarabande**Menuet I/II**Gigue***Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

Bach's Six Cello Suites for Solo Cello are at the very center of cello repertoire, and they are the standard to which all other solo cello music is held. Bach was a German composer and musician during the Baroque era. Born into a musical family, his father, Johann Ambrosius, taught his son the violin at a very young age. In 1717 Bach accepted a position composing for Prince Leopold in Cothen, during this time Bach composed many of his most famous works, including the Brandenburg Concertos and The Well-Tempered Clavier. It was also during this time period that Bach composed his Six Cello Suites. After the prince dissolved his orchestra in 1723, Bach became the cantor at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig. He held this position until his death in 1750.

The only manuscript that we have of the Bach Cello Suites was written by Bach's wife, Anna Magdalena. However, this edition is devoid of any slurs, bowings, dynamics, or other articulation markings. Which, leaves most of the phrasing and dynamic choices up to the

musician. As was common in a Baroque suite, each of Bach's suites begins with a Prelude while the other movements are based on different Baroque dances.

The Second Bach Cello Suite is written in D minor, a key of seriousness and sadness. From just the first three notes in the Prelude, one can feel the melancholy quality that pervades the entire suite. Allemande literally means "German" in French since it was a Baroque dance that originated in Germany but was made popular in France. The Allemande is intense and stately throughout, starting with the heavy chord on the first downbeat in the opening of the piece. It is interesting and funny to note that the Allemande is a German's take (that is, Bach's take) on a French dance derived from a German dance! Courante is translated from French as "running," and this movement truly lives up to its name as it is characterized by running sixteenth note passages. With no rests and only a few longer notes, the movement has a bit of a breathless quality. The cellist is grateful for the much slower Sarabande which follows the Courante; this movement is, I believe, the most emotional of all the movements in the suite. Its use of the deep rich tones of the cello gives it a mournful and somber quality and the double-stops and chords are deeply moving. Menuets I/II bring us into a quicker tempo and both menuets have a traditional dance-like feel. Menuet II is the only movement not in D minor...it is written in D major, giving it a much happier and uplifting quality. The order in which the Menuets are played is interesting. In the score, at the end of Menuet II, is written "Menuet I Da Capo" which literally translates to, "Menuet I from the head," meaning after playing through both of the Menuets in order, the performer returns to Menuet I and plays it through once more, thus ending the movement on Menuet I. Lastly, the Gigue is lively and quick. Full of vim and vigor, this energetic movement helps to round off the emotional journey of this suite.

Flamenco from Suite Espagnole No.1

Rogelio Huguet y Tagell (1882-1956)

Very little is known about Rogelio Huguet y Tagell besides that he was born in Spain and the dates he lived. Huguet y Tagell's life falls into the end of the Romantic period and the dawn of the Modern era.

Flamenco was discovered by Maria Kliegel, who is a German cellist, in a little music shop in Moscow. She fell in love with the piece and discovered that it was originally intended to be a piano trio but was ultimately written for solo cello. During her study of the piece, she made some minor practical changes to the score in order to, as she writes in the opening notes of the edition, "help the player achieve a convincing musical performance" (*Flamenco*).

This is a very passionate piece and it opens with a fast, vivacious theme. As mentioned above, the piece was originally composed for piano trio, with the absence of the piano and violin being reconciled by the use of many double-stops and chords in the solo cello version. There are many pizzicato sections in the piece which give the flavor of the Spanish guitar. *Flamenco* vacillates between fast, expressive passages and slower, wistful, mournful moments, it is easy to visualize a flamenco dancer with her castanets dancing along to this passionate piece.

Jazz Suite

Prelude

Lucio Amanti (1977-)

Lucio Amanti is an Italian cellist and composer. Born in Montreal, he began his studies of the cello in Naples, then France, and then in the United States with the renowned cellist Janos Starker. He chose to add to his classical training and went on to gain his masters degree in jazz studies under the tutelage of Doctor David Baker, the famous American jazz composer, conductor, and performer. Amanti's work incorporates both classical tradition and jazz elements. His work has been well received, with his album "Jazzcello" even topping the iTunes chart in the jazz category.

Jazz Suite came about when Amanti imagined what it would be like if one of the Baroque composers (such as Gabrielli or Bach) were alive now and wanted to write a series of dances. Amanti proposed that some aspects of these dances would probably remain traditionally classical but there would be more variety in the harmonies as well as more use of non-tonal elements. Also, Amanti writes in the Preface to the Jazz Suite, "the popular dance used as a workbench for the suite would have been not gigue or bouree, but perhaps latin american or Jazz standards" (Amanti).

This piece has a traditional jazzy feel while also alluding to the first Bach cello suite. Due to it being in the jazz style, there is a certain feel of improvisation and flowing melody. The piece leaves us with a classic jazz ending, sailing away on a light harmonic note.

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