



**Suite No. 1 in G Major, BWV 1007 [18:08]**

(1 Prelude [2:47]; 2 Allemande [5:00]; 3 Courante [2:28]; 4 Sarabande [2:57]; 5 Minuet I and II [3:27]; 6 Gigue [1:30])

**Suite No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1008 [20:13]**

(7 Prelude [3:42]; 8 Allemande [3:43]; 9 Courante [2:01]; 10 Sarabande [4:55]; 11 Minuet I and II [3:18]; 12 Gigue [2:34])

**Suite No. 6 in D Major, BWV 1012 [33:35]**

(13 Prelude [5:27]; 14 Allemande [8:52]; 15 Courante [3:52]; 16 Sarabande [5:48]; 17 Gavotte I and II [5:00]; 18 Gigue [4:37])

**Suite No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1009 [22:50]**

(1 Prelude [3:58]; 2 Allemande [3:45]; 3 Courante [3:10]; 4 Sarabande [4:43]; 5 Bourrée [I and II 4:14]; 6 Gigue [2:59])

**Suite No. 4 in E flat major, BWV 1010 [26:04]**

(7 Prelude [5:20]; 8 Allemande [4:39]; 9 Courante [3:34]; 10 Sarabande [4:26]; 11 Bourrée I and II [5:24]; 12 Gigue [2:40])

**Suite No. 5 in C minor, BWV 1011 [28:08]**

(13 Prelude [6:30]; 14 Allemande [6:57]; 15 Courante [2:14]; 16 Sarabande [4:41]; 17 Gavotte I and II [5:08]; 19 Gigue [2:33])

"Nothing in the world is more precious to me than these suites". So commented the great Russian cellist Rostropovich as he reflected on a lifetime of association with these works although he did not record them as a complete cycle until he was 63.

This new release of the six suites by Maria Kliegel shares two ironies.

It is hard to conceive that music, written around 1720, of such creativity, grandeur and majesty was so sadly neglected for many years after the death of the composer. While the Cello Suites suffered this along with nearly all of his music, even when a general revival of Bach's music began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were regarded as unimportant. That generation prided itself on warm romanticism and the Suites were considered too dry and academic. It was Pablo Casals (1876-1973) who restored them to their rightful place in the repertoire.

Maria Kliegel is one of the most prolific recording cellists in the world, but her name is relatively unknown!

Despite a personal love and appreciation for the Cello Suites, this writer would not routinely sit down and listen to the entire cycle because they can have a propensity for inducing "aural fatigue". However here the cycle is presented as a live concert programme. On 10 June 2000 Peter Wispelwey performed the six Suites at a concert in Sydney, Australia. At another concert in that same city the cycle was again performed but with each suite played by a different cellist.

On the recorded music scene cellists have made up for lost time. There are more than fifty different recordings of the Suites and this does not include recordings of individual Suites or those who have made multiple recordings e.g. Paul Tortelier et. al. recorded them twice and Mischa Maisky has recorded them three times.

The listener has a choice of standard or Baroque cello and yet another type of cello appears on some recordings of the Sixth Suite, which Bach wrote for a five stringed instrument perhaps the *violoncello piccolo*. The fact that Bach required the bottom strings to have the same normal rich tones may discredit this assumption.

As is the general case, for most who have fallen in love with this specific music, a favourite version will invariably exist. Of the dozen or so versions in this writer's collection that of Mischa Maisky, conveying a strength, majesty and grandeur which reflect the intrinsic nature of the original compositions, holds special favour. Maisky has recorded the cycle three times and it is the second, DG 445 373-2, which holds special appeal. A close second is the recording on Baroque cello by Jaap Ter Linden - Harmonia Mundi 90721677 .

With this in mind we now refocus on the specific subject of this review - the latest recording by Maria Kliegel. Her long list of recordings for Naxos provides unequivocal evidence of both high technical competence as well as musical excellence, and in the Bach cello suites she does not "blot her copybook".

Particularly conspicuous from the first note of the First Suite's Prelude is the beauty of her cello - "ex-Gendron" made by Stradivarius in 1693. For more than thirty years this same cello was owned by Maurice Gendron and placed at the disposal of Ms. Kliegel by the Foundation for Arts and Culture, in North Rhine Westphalia. This fine instrument has a rich "chocolatey" bass with middle and upper registers of great clarity and definition.

It is within the Fifth Suite that we experience significant departure from the written and performed norm. *Per se* this suite is atypical requiring scordatura, in this instance a retuning of the A string down to G. Adaptation to exclude this is possible but some compromise in chordal spacing occurs

In the Kliegel version pizzicato, or plucking of the strings with the right hand fingers, occurs in the Sarabande movement. In none of the twelve or so versions reviewed is this present nor is it part of the original music appearing in the hand of Anna Magdalena. While "purists" will have apoplexy it is a most pleasing interpretative innovation. Given that within the entire cycle the Sarabande movement of the 5<sup>th</sup> Suite is exclusively without a hint of double-stopping, inclusion here has credibility.

Overall this recording is a very musical and enjoyable rendition. However in the demanding opening bars of Gavotte I from the 6<sup>th</sup> Suite I must admit preference for other versions which exhibit better legato e.g. Alexander Rudin (Naxos 8.555992-93) who plays a five string cello

for which the 6<sup>th</sup> Suite was especially written. Rostropovich and Maisky both manage smoother renditions on the standard cello.

One small grizzle - why can't Naxos record these suites sequentially on two discs? There is ample evidence from other companies that this is possible; not to mention more convenient for the listener.

Whether you are an insatiable Bach cello suite "nut" who cannot resist new quality additions to the catalogue or a neophyte embarking on a new musical odyssey, this recording holds something special for you.

*Zane Turner*