





J.S. BACH
Cello Suites
(Complete)
Maria Kliegel

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685 - 1750)
Suites for solo cello, BWV 1007 - 1012 (1720) [148.52]
● Maria Kliegel, violoncello
Stradivarius 1693, "ex-Gendron"
Recorded in Phoenix Studio, Budapest, Hungary, May 2003
Notes in English and Deutsch. Photo of artist
double jewel-case
● NAXOS 8.557280-81 [71.56] [76.56].

Comparison Recordings:

Yo-Yo Ma CBS Masterworks M2K 37867

Janos Starker [mono ADD] EMI 7243 4 89183-2, -4-2

Galbraith, 8-string guitar. Bach, Lute Suite BWV 995 Delos DE 3258

Robert Cohen. Brilliant Classics Volume 16, 99375/3/4

These magnificent works have been recorded many times, most notably by Casals. The requirements for a successful performance are 1) maintaining attractive tone throughout while 2) mastering and concealing the difficulties so that there is no sense of struggling either with the instrument or the music and 3) generating interest in the music by projecting the rhythm and finding a variety of textures and phrasings to reveal the pieces as individual works worthy of interest. These cellist Kliegel accomplishes in exemplary manner, and this performance is one of the best I've heard. The recorded sound is close, realistic and atmospheric. These are presented as the suites of Baroque dances they truly are and not as an arpeggio drill or meditation exercise.

Kliegel gets all the notes right, without any of the clicks and scrapes by which some cellists reveal their struggle, as merely the first step in her musicianly shaping of these works. Her tone is always fresh and imaginative, her phrasing expressive but never arch or forced, the forward musical motion maintained with discretely applied expressive vibrato, rubato, and *fermate*. She convincingly differentiates between melody lines, cadenzas, arpeggiated chords and vertical chords, something most cellists do not accomplish. The brilliance of her cadenza playing in the *Preludes* to Suites Numbers 2 and 6 will amaze you. In sum this performance remains interesting, nay, engrossing, and is over before you realise it, leaving you wanting more; praise rarely to be merited by a performance of these works to which we have all at one time or another listened out of duty.

Paul Galbraith's guitar versions of Bach's solo violin sonatas and the lute works — including BWV 995, Bach's own arrangement for the plucked string of BWV 1011 — have proven to be astonishing, illuminating, enriching and also immensely entertaining. He has, unaccountably, not recorded anyone's arrangements of the remaining five of the solo cello works. May he remedy this omission soon.

The best modern set of these works for a long time in the 1960s was by Janos Starker, not surprisingly, a teacher of Kliegel's. The Ma set, choice of many critics recently, the best we had for a long time, frequently suffers, as many do, from a sense of aimless, barless *longeurs*, with too many notes at the same value and texture, perhaps an excess of soul. Only occasionally does he get moving and observe the bar lines. Amazingly, Kliegel's timings are sometimes longer than his. Reportedly Ma's remake, with ingenuous video track, is truly awful; I've not seen or heard it.

The Robert Cohen recording was originally issued on the much lamented Collins Classics label, and is now available on the Regis label as RRC2001; Cohen plays with energy, grace, drama, and intelligence, can attain exquisite poetry in the slow movements, and receives very clear and close recording. His Bourrée in Suite No. 4 is especially remarkable, his prelude to No. 6 very robust, if a little ragged. Now and then he has a bit of a struggle, and his tone is just occasionally a little nasal, but most of the time his playing is clean and gritty. One could be quite satisfied with this version in one's collection. If you can find it, the **Brilliant** set of the complete Bach chamber music is an unbelievable bargain, as usual.

But if you want just the cello suites Kliegel is one of the very best and some will prefer her version to all others regardless of price.

Paul Shoemaker