

Living Sculpture: Multiple Dimensions in the
Six Suites for Solo Cello by J.S. Bach

by
Brian Mix

Biography of Brian Mix

Cellist Brian Mix has been active as a freelance musician in Vancouver since 1992. He has performed with every major professional ensemble in Vancouver, including the Vancouver Symphony, the CBC Radio Orchestra, Vancouver Opera, Turning Point Ensemble, and the Pacific Baroque Orchestra. He is also the cellist of the Pacific Rim String Quartet. Alongside performing, Brian writes and gives talks about music, conducts, and teaches. Brian studied at the University of British Columbia with Eric Wilson (receiving B.Mus. and M.Mus. degrees), the National Arts Centre in Ottawa with Donald Whitton, the University of Cincinnati with Hans Jensen, and at the Banff Centre. Other musicians with whom Brian has studied include cellists Antonio Meneses and Antonio Lysy, and on baroque cello, Phoebe Carrai and Jaap ter Linden. Brian is married to a pianist, Brenda Campbell, and has two young children.

“Sculpture is music in plastic space.
Music is sculpture in elastic space.”¹
–Jeffrey Rubinoff

This paper on Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Six Suites for Solo Cello* serves two functions. First, it forms a contribution to the Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park Company of Ideas Forum of May 22-24, 2009. Second, it sits as a companion piece to a series of three concerts to be held during the summer of 2009 at the Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park, featuring the complete set of Bach’s *Cello Suites* as well as three of his works for unaccompanied violin. A brief history of the *Six Suites for Solo Cello*, including an overview of their significance, provenance, and musical structure, will be followed by an exploration of larger themes presented by both the works themselves and the act of their performance, both from the perspective of the cellist and the listener. It is hoped that the scope of this paper will resonate both with concert-goers and individuals interested in the inter-disciplinary project of the JRSP Company of Ideas.

Bach’s *Six Suites for Solo Cello* have, in recent years, become enormously popular. These works are in the repertoire of every major cellist, and have been recorded dozens, if not hundreds of times since the groundbreaking recording made by Pablo Casals in the 1930s. They have been performed in major concert halls and at moments of international significance. Casals, a stalwart Catalan and defender of human rights, refused to perform the *Cello Suites* in any country that recognized the Franco regime in Spain. The great Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich appeared unannounced at the breach of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and performed movements of the *Cello Suites* for the assembled citizenry spontaneously celebrating the reunification of the German State. Clearly the *Cello Suites* have significance in our culture that seems to far outstrip the inherent importance of the works themselves. (One might argue that the cello itself has become a symbol of unity and brotherhood in our modern age, whether that is from the stature of those greats who have played it, or from some integral element of the instrument itself is beyond the scope of this paper, but well worth pondering.)

Despite the twentieth and twenty-first century profile of the *Cello Suites*, very little is really known about their provenance. It seems indisputable that Bach was their author (although even that has come under recent, but not widely accepted attack). What is less certain is when the works were written, or even why they were composed. The *Cello Suites* have virtually no ancestry nor progeny. A few scattered examples of solo cello works exist from before Bach’s time, most notably the seven *Ricercare* for solo cello composed in Bologna in the late 1680s by the cellist Domenico Gabrielli. Examples of solo violin works are somewhat more prevalent, both from 17th Century Italy and the Southern German States,

¹ Jeffrey Rubinoff, unpublished statement

which goes a long way more towards explaining the existence of Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin*. Perhaps the best view is that Bach conceived of the *Cello Suites* as companion pieces to the violin works; indeed, a title page (not in Bach's hand) indicates as much. But the fact remains that we know neither when Bach wrote the *Cello Suites* nor why.

The crux of the matter comes down to the unfortunate historical circumstance that Bach's original score (the "Autograph" manuscript) is lost. Several secondary sources exist for the *Cello Suites*, the earliest of which is a copy in the hand of Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena. This circumstance is not as unusual as it may at first appear: in an era of hand-copying, assistants were continually employed in ensuring the survival of compositions by making additional copies of them (in fact, many of Bach's works have survived only in copies by Anna Magdalena). A handful of other early *Cello Suites* copies exist, most seemingly having been made as a way of adding the works to the private libraries of musicians in Bach's circle. In addition, not all of the early copies appear to be copies of the Anna Magdalena manuscript; discrepancies indicate a rather complicated genealogical tree from Bach's presumed original to the few early copies that have come down to us. Despite this circumstance, the *Cello Suites* themselves maintain a remarkable integrity – in some 2000 measures of music, only a few instances of conflicting notation occur. What is far less certain are Bach's preferred articulations and dynamics (indications which are of enormous significance to the performer): of the former, the AM manuscript does not excel in clarity (others are clearer but less idiomatic), while of the latter, only a few measures of the final *Prelude* contain any dynamic markings at all. This particular circumstance has had a mixed blessing: on the one hand, "authentic" performances of the *Cello Suites* are almost by definition impossible; on the other hand, generations of great cellists have made the works their own, lending an intensely personal edge to any performance of the *Cello Suites* which has probably in no small measure added to their popularity.

Notwithstanding the lack of an autograph source, it is generally assumed that Bach wrote the *Cello Suites* sometime around 1720, during the period that he worked as *Capellmeister* for the secular court of Cöthen, a small city midway between Frankfurt and Leipzig. This was one of the few times in Bach's life that he was not employed to write music for the Church. Many of his instrumental works (the lack of religious texts lending them an air of 'absolute' music, though for Bach the distinction was likely moot) are presumed to have come from this time and place, including the *French* and *English Suites* for keyboard, the *Brandenburg Concertos*, many of the *Inventions*, the first book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and the solo works for violin, to name a few.

Several issues crop up to mitigate the presumed time-frame of composition of the *Cello Suites*. First, the works themselves seem to indicate a development of Bach's technique. It is generally accepted amongst cellists that the works get harder as they go. Second, Bach seems to have experimented more freely with these works in terms of instrumentation than was typical for him; it was usual for Bach to write in collections of six (the *Brandenburg*

Concertos, the *Violin Sonatas and Partitas*) but not usual for him to change the parameters of a set as he went. In the case of the *Cello Suites*, the Fifth Suite has an alternate tuning (a practice called *scordatura* which was common in the early Baroque, but rare by Bach's time), and also exists in a version for lute, though this seems to be a later adaptation by Bach. The Sixth Suite calls for a cello with an extra, higher string—a mystery instrument for which little historical confirmation exists. Several theories abound: the instrument was invented by Bach (unlikely), was a small cello called a *violoncello piccolo* (more likely, though very few examples of such instruments have survived), or was perhaps a form of small basso viola called a *viola da spalla* (which is mostly conjecture from period iconography, but does have the added advantage that Bach played the viola and thus could have played the *Cello Suites* himself). Much has been made of this issue—some even going so far as to wonder whether the *Cello Suites* were written for the cello at all. Be that as it may, the weight of performance practice has firmly set the *Cello Suites* into the repertoire for the eponymous instrument.

As for the works themselves, it is apparent on any casual study that each of the Suites follows a very specific and nearly unchanging pattern. The 'Dance Suite' was a common instrumental form in the high Baroque, and several elements were considered indispensable to the genre. First, every suite begins with a *Prelude*. This is the freest movement of the Dance Suite, and can take almost any form. The purpose of the *Prelude* is to set the tone (mood) of the Suite, a tone that most consider is maintained throughout the following dances. In the case of the *Cello Suites*, this element is readily apparent. Casals gave emotions to each *Prelude*; he described the first as optimistic, the second as tragic, the third as heroic, etc. Certainly elements of mood are present in each *prelude*, but one can also sense that Bach is exploring purely instrumental and musical concepts as well. The first *Prelude*, for example, is based on broken triads across the strings of the cello—a process that leads to an exceptional string-crossing episode near the two-thirds mark of the movement. (This early in the process one can already see that Bach is thinking both of the technical possibilities of the instrument and simultaneously stretching those possibilities). The second *Prelude* is the unfolding of a minor triad; the third the expansion of a simple scale. The fourth *Prelude* is based upon the expansion of harmonic movement, both in register and direction. The fifth and sixth *Preludes* are larger again in scope: the fifth takes the form of a French Overture, a common orchestral form from the time; a slow introduction with solemn, dotted-note rhythms gives way to a fugue—a multi-voiced composition—here written for a single-voice instrument. The sixth *Prelude*, with the advantages of an extra string, is reminiscent of the first *Prelude* but with expanded range and activity. This movement is truly virtuosic, with driving motives and cascading scales. One gets the sense of a very long journey from the start of the cycle nearing its eventual conclusion.

The dances that follow the *Preludes* do not deviate from the typical dance-suite structure of the time. Each dance comes from a different national (or cultural) source. The first dance movement, the *Allemande*, was a dance of German origin that tends toward seriousness of purpose and solemnity of tone. Elements of *style brisé* are apparent in

Bach's Allemandes, in which the forward motion of otherwise straightforward harmonic progressions are interrupted by irregular and unexpected phrase endings, register shifts, or dotted rhythms. Examples of this in the *Cello Suites* include the second and fifth Allemandes. Others are less dramatic in style: the first Allemande is more lyrical than jagged, while the sixth Allemande spins out a long, highly ornamented melodic contour. Elements of Rhetoric are strong in Allemandes—either of a propositional or dialectical form.

The second dance of the suites is always a Courante. This was a dance of either French or Italian origin—the style of the piece being the determining factor of which one is which. French Courantes tend toward slower movement, Italian Correntes toward quicker, flowing motion. Bach's Courantes in the *Cello Suites* tend to fall into the Italian camp, notwithstanding the use of French spelling; these movements are often the most virtuosos of each suite, with quick scalar direction and motivic clarity. An exception could be claimed for the fourth Allemande, which has certain elements of the French style. The third Courante is perhaps the best example of the Italianate style. Once again, the sixth suite Courante and the first suite Courante bear some resemblance to each other.

The third dance of each suite, the Sarabande, is Spanish or perhaps even Latin American in origin. In the 16th Century this dance was known for its rather racy tendencies—modern listeners might best relate it to the manner of a tango but by the 18th Century Sarabandes had become slow and solemn; their most distinguishing feature is an equal emphasis on both beat one and two in a three-beat time signature. In the *Cello Suites* the Sarabandes are the spiritual and emotional heart of each suite. Many employ sustained harmonies and multiple-chord textures (technically referred to as double-stops in string playing). Polyphonic textures unfold slowly in Bach's Sarabandes, giving a strong sense of melody with harmonic accompaniment. A notable exception is the fifth Sarabande; this movement has no double-stops whatsoever. Instead, Bach has written a stark unfolding of broken harmonies which is utterly heart-wrenching in its simplicity. Many commentators have remarked on the timelessness of this Sarabande, with its proto-minimalist texture.

The dances that occupy the next spot in the *Cello Suites* are the only instances of deviation from suite to suite. Occasionally grouped together under the term 'Gallanteries', these dances are either Minuets (Suites One and Two), Bourrées (Suites Three and Four) or Gavottes (Suites Five and Six). They are always paired in a *da capo* structure, with contrasts of mode between the two dances. In the major-key suites, the first dance is major, the second minor, while the situation is reversed in the minor-key suites. These dances were the only ones still danced in social settings by the time Bach wrote the *Cello Suites*; all the other dances were considered obsolete and had become stylized and mannered. The Gallanteries function in the manner of intermezzi—lighter movements that relieve the intensity built up through the preceding dances, culminating in the Sarabandes.

The final movement of each Suite is a Gigue. These dances are derived from 'jigs', which first appeared in 15th Century England. This dance was eventually transformed into

French and Italian variants, both of which are employed by Bach. The French Gigue tends toward 3/4 or 3/8 time, and is often imitative in structure. The Italian Giga was more often in 12/8 time and had a more homophonic, running texture. All of the Giges in the *Cello Suites* are in the French style, with the exception of the fourth (again, Bach employed the French spelling throughout the *Cello Suites* without consideration of the form). Giges are always fast regardless of type, and often include rapid string-crossing episodes and other virtuoso elements. They bring each suite to a exciting and satisfying close.

While the external structure of the *Cello Suites* is based upon the typical dance suite form, the internal musical structure of the *Cello Suites* —the language, if you will—is based upon the concept of counterpoint. Put in general terms, counterpoint is a compositional technique in which multiple melodic lines occur simultaneously. Vertical harmony is secondary to the interplay of parallel melodies. Of course, harmony is unavoidable whenever more than one note sounds, but in counterpoint the harmony serves not as an accompaniment to a melody but as an integral part of the overall musical texture and meaning. All the various lines—however many there may be—have musical direction and interest on their own. Sounded simultaneously as counterpoint, the whole becomes greater than the sum of the individual parts. In terms of rhetoric or dialectics, more than one thing is being said at the same time—a property that is perhaps strongest in music among all art forms, if not unique.

An exceedingly important concept to counterpoint is that dissonance creates tension and interest, especially in Baroque musical thought. Rather than to be avoided, dissonance is the very material upon which the argument of a composition depends. Dissonance generates musical material that is then carried through to its logical conclusion: resolution of the 'conflict' of dissonance is the final imperative; consonance is the relaxation or release from the impetus created by dissonance. In Baroque music, these events (dissonance/consonance) occur continually and in passing, moment by moment. Strict rules govern the ways in which counterpoint (and the resulting dissonances) is to be handled and resolved. The concept of dissonance should not be thought of as subjective or even invented; rather, what the ear perceives as consonant or dissonant is based upon mathematical relationships between pitches. The ancient Greeks were the first to discover the relationships between certain notes: intervals (the distance between two notes) of the octave, fifth, and fourth have closely related diminutions of wave forms that cause them to sound consonant; sixths and thirds less so, while seventh and seconds have wave-form relationships that interfere each with the other and cause them to sound dissonant. Notice, by the way, that the paired relationships listed above are also inversions of each other: fourths are inverted fifths; sixths are inverted thirds, etc. Inverted relationships extended to melodic material are integral to the construction of counterpoint. Contrapuntal material may be generated by inversion, retrograde (backwards) motion, retrograde inversion, and so on. Counterpoint becomes a layering of related yet distinct musical materials—the more complex the transformation, the less apparent the relationship. However, from the point of view of the composer in control of his material, the relationships are always both valid and present. At any given point in a contrapuntal composition the relationships

between individual lines of music can be expressed in terms of space: the intervallic distance between each of the notes sounding.

The result is musical material, governed by mathematical relationships that are 'natural' in the strictest sense (discovered properties of the natural world and not invented), being manipulated by the composer into sound which is perceived to be art; indeed, at its best, perceived to be among the highest forms of musical art. It is fascinating that mathematical relationships that seem so inflexible and even arbitrary can be manipulated into meaning that impacts upon human intellect and emotion. The key is in the relationships: dissonance versus consonance, contrary motion versus similar motion, closeness versus distance, conflict versus resolution, proposition versus dialogue. Counterpoint is profoundly relational.

Bach is universally considered to be the greatest master of counterpoint in musical history. Counterpoint is both a technique and an approach to composition; Bach was unique in his surpassing ability to fuse both these aims into integrated, musical creations. Counterpoint is often linked with the Baroque as an identifying feature of the era, but the technique has been used by many composers in many eras. Even in the Baroque, not all music could be considered to be composed with counterpoint as the main structural component. For Bach, however, counterpoint was both his underlying technique and his artistic cornerstone. Bach was perhaps the last great composer to employ counterpoint as a pervading, encompassing principle; in fact, by the end of his life, Bach was considered to compose in an old-fashioned, overly complicated and even obscure style. Clarity of melodic line and hierarchy of musical materials had become the focus, leading directly into the 'purity' of music of the Classical Era.

Bach's world view and his sense of place in the natural order of things may be the key to his dependence (perhaps insistence is a better term) on counterpoint. Bach was a child of Medieval thought, living at a time of great change in human philosophy, the beginning of the Age of the Enlightenment. Bach was not highly educated in the strictest sense, though he was a voracious learner and reader. But he lived in a milieu that was accommodating to philosophical and theological thought (a pairing that today we often view as opposing each other, though in Bach's time theology was considered to be of equal status, if not in fact the actual aim, of philosophy). He even attended the same school in Eisenach that the great religious reformer Martin Luther had attended, albeit some two centuries later. He spent his life in service to authority (both the secular Court of Coth en and the Church in Leipzig) and knew his place in the order of things. He also knew his own worth: he was most certainly a genius, at least in the realm of music. And he was without a doubt profoundly religious. Upon his death, his library contained some 80 volumes of theology. In short, Bach was probably as deep an intellectual, as rational a thinker, and as devout a believer as one could be in 18th Century Germany without actually being a professional philosopher or theologian. And Bach was also likely a supremely serious thinker, in that he probably viewed the life of the mind and the exercise of the human intellect to be critical to human endeavor, integral to what it means to be a person. Above all this, Bach

was supremely religious, and viewed all of his work as offerings to his Creator. What he offered was the best of his rational mind combined with the properties of the natural world, the relationship of natural laws (musical intervalic relationships) organized into meaningful and coherent, though inherently complex, structures. His music is ultimately *relational*; to its structure guided by natural musical laws, to his intellectual perception and control of his material, to his place in the cosmos. Counterpoint exists in the context of relationships, and Bach was the greatest master of counterpoint.

An interesting quandary occurs when we apply the concept of counterpoint (more specifically, Bach's concept of counterpoint) to the *Cello Suites*. Counterpoint requires the sounding of simultaneous musical lines; the cello is a single-voice instrument. Bach's musical imagination was necessarily restricted by the medium in which he chose to work. We should not make the mistake of thinking that this restriction was a negative for Bach; on the contrary, it is more likely that Bach welcomed the restrictions inherent in writing for the cello even while attempting to expand its possibilities. Restrictions—boundaries, in other words—are often catalysts to artistic expression. The restrictions posed by the cello became the mould into which Bach poured his musical material.

It seems certain that Bach first heard a new musical composition in his imagination and then transcribed it later. Thus, essentially everything he wrote had to be distilled to fit the possibilities of his medium (whatever it may have been in the circumstance). In the case of the *Cello Suites*, it seems certain that Bach heard multiple voices—complete counterpoint—while composing the suites. The process of composition for him then was a process of paring down, of leaving out much of what he heard in his head. At the same time, Bach had to supply enough material to maintain the musical integrity of the work. For Bach, everything is relational; all of his musical ideas exist in context. Singular melody is almost an oxymoron in Bach's musical language and conception. Yet, with the *Cello Suites* (and also the solo violin works) Bach has chosen to work with a singularity, a single cello with severe, inherent restrictions in regard to polyphonic, contrapuntal composition.

Bach's solution to this problem was to include just enough material to give the impression of counterpoint. He accomplished this in two ways: *inferred* counterpoint and *deferred* counterpoint. Through double-stops, broken chords, and imitative motives, Bach supplied enough notes to suggest a complete second or even third voice in the texture. Many of the sudden shifts of register and the leaps across strings that occur continually throughout the *Cello Suites* are written specifically to supply an ongoing outline of simultaneous voices. In many places, the gaps between notes can be significant, but Bach is uncanny in his ability to never leave a line dangling for too long. The remainder of the notes—the completion of the second or third voices—was no doubt present in Bach's imagination.

Here we come to an interesting aspect of the *Cello Suites*. The *inferred* notes, those notes that Bach was obliged to leave out due to instrumental restrictions, not only exist in Bach's imagination; they also exist in the mind of the listener (it is remarkable that *unwritten* notes have survived nearly 300 years to be heard again internally, in the inner ear of the

listener). The *deferred* notes have to be re-aligned in the listener's imagination as the music unfolds. Essentially, Bach is dependent on the listener to enter into a relationship with the text (the music) in order to complete it. In this way the listener becomes an active participant in the realization of Bach's music. Predicated to this is the expectation that the listener has the ability to comprehend Bach's intentions. Bach has relinquished to the listener control over his or her perception of his work, but the listener must be up to the task.

The first, or primary listener, is the player. The cellist who plays the suites must strive to enter into a relationship with the written text in order to not only understand what is there, but also what is implied to be there. Printed music in general can be regarded as analogous to blueprints or instructions; no music exists as it is intended to exist until it is realized in time and sound (a sort of 'if a tree falls in the forest' situation). In the case of the *Cello Suites* there is an interesting interplay between the text, the realization of the text, and the inner realization of that which is *not* in the text. This is true in many other instances, and could even be argued that it is always present in the performance of music, since not every dimension of music can be objectively represented by the written text; but, in the case of the *Cello Suites* it is an integral part of understanding the works themselves.

Thus, the cellist enters into a relationship with the text. Above that, the cellist gives life to the text in the realization of what it (the notes) represent in time and sound. It is not a large leap to expand that relationship into a realization in time and *space*. The physical act of playing the notes—the expenditure of energy, the movements across and around the cello that give voice to the counterpoint, even the occupation of physical space by cello and cellist becomes itself a three-dimensional counterpoint in time and space. Of course, sound waves exist in three dimensional time and space, but they are not generally perceived that way by the listener; rather, sound is perceived as an inner experience in the brain. The physical motions of the cellist add a three-dimensionality that Bach himself was unable to provide without a player. The result is a work of art now functioning on several levels of relationship, or put another way, on several dimensions: natural materials (mathematical counterpoint), compositional control of that material, the 'missing' (or deferred) counterpoint translated from Bach's imagination to that of the primary listener (the cellist), and the realization in time, sound, and space of all these aspects by the cello and the cellist.

The next level of relationship is the secondary listener, the audience. At the lowest level, the secondary listener experiences the sound of Bach's notes as a perception in the brain. This can be a passive experience such as if one hears music (or any sound) simply because one is near enough to the sound source to perceive it. This becomes an active experience if the secondary listener chooses to listen. It is more active again if the secondary listener also chooses (or is in a position) to watch the player play. Even at this point, this remains a lower-level perception of the music; understanding the intent of the notes may or not be present. Nonetheless, perception is taking place. It is analogous to looking at a piece of sculpture: the secondary listener perceives something in time and

space—a cello and a cellist as a ‘living sculpture’ causing notes written by Bach to be heard in the present. A certain level of relationship has been entered into already.

If the secondary listener then chooses to engage with the ‘living sculpture’ of the cellist performing, and begins to actively engage with the notes being perceived in the brain—internalizing and organizing Bach’s text into a personal inner experience—then two more dimensions have been added: the missing notes of counterpoint are now being supplied by the secondary listener’s imagination (the text has been ‘completed’), and the connection between perceived sound and physical action, realized in time and space, are bound together into a single instance of the apprehension of a work of art. Natural materials, human intellect, inner imagination, and physical space and movement have all combined to create a singular human experience: a living sculpture that occupies the dimensions of time, space (both mathematical and physical), sound, and action.

Three perspectives can then be identified as coming to bear on the *Cello Suites*. First, Bach’s perspective: he had the experience of manipulating the natural materials from which the music is formed, and could also probably be said to have had the most complete experience of the text (both written and unwritten), although it can be argued that a cellist who has made a long and careful study of the text has likely come very close to matching Bach’s intimate knowledge of the text. Bach also had (through his worldview) the perception of his own creation set into his comprehension of the natural world and the relationships (dimensions) that the music represented both physically and spiritually.

Second, the performer’s perspective: the cellist experiences the text in a manner approaching Bach’s own, but without the primary privilege of manipulating the actual musical materials that comprise the text; the cellist is obliged to keep to the notes as written by Bach. But the cellist does have the proprietary privilege of interpreting those notes – presenting them in a manner which (hopefully) is as authentic to the implied expectations of the text as possible. As well, the cellist experiences the physical actions required to realize Bach’s creation in time and space; in a way, the cellist *embodies* the music through the act of playing it.

Third, the secondary listener’s perspective: with enough attention, understanding, and knowledge of the notes, the secondary listener also approaches the level of understanding of the text shared by both Bach and the cellist, including the inner manifestation of the ‘unwritten’ counterpoint. As well, the secondary listener experiences the perception of the physical embodiment of the text into a moment of time and space. The secondary listener, in fact, is in the most privileged position to experience the *Cello Suites* as ‘living sculpture’.

These perspectives can (and do) change. The cellist who has played the suites may find himself or herself a secondary listener at another’s performance, while the secondary listener may be (or become) a cellist who plays the suites. Bach himself may have had all three experiences: he manipulated the natural materials in the act of composing; he

almost certainly heard cellists play the works; and, he may even have played them himself (most likely on the viola or perhaps the viola da spalla). In all instances, a triangular relationship of composer, performer, and listener combine to complete the many dimensions imbedded in the *Cello Suites*.

One last line of inquiry remains: why have the *Cello Suites* come to occupy such an exalted position in the musical canon of Western art, 300 years after their composition? What is it about the *Suites* that resonates so deeply with modern listeners? Is it something inherent in the works themselves, or their manner of realization, or in their creator? The answer, I propose, is a combination of all three.

First, the restrictions placed on Bach in the manner and medium of composition have resulted in works that transcend time and place to speak clearly in the modern world. Since Bach was obliged to pare away material from his inner conception of the works into a result that was both playable on a cello and 'complete' in counterpoint, the *Cello Suites* have a purity and simplicity of construction rare even among Bach's works, which, while complex, are never superfluous. This is music reduced to the most elemental; 'sculpture' which has been refined and polished to the most fundamental aspects of its meaning. Considerations of style and era give way to the purest expression of counterpoint—the tracings of natural relationships that have not and will not change.

Second, the choice of a single cello for the physical realization of this music has had a profound impact on the popularity of the *Cello Suites*. The cello is sculptural, human-scaled, made of natural materials, played with an apparent simplicity of result. The bow and fingers are readily observed; the actions of the cellist impact directly on the instrument to produce the sound; the sound itself is vocal, human, grounded, powerful, and elemental. The singularity of one player on one object is personal. The symbiotic relationship of player and instrument, held in a position that creates a human-scaled, solid physical presence, is both approachable and austere: chair, cello, cellist. Perhaps it is no surprise that great humanitarians such as Casals and Rostropovich have been able to employ the symbolism of the cello to awaken others to the fundamental humanity of mankind.

Finally, there is something about Bach himself that speaks to our modern world. Bach used the most rational, intellectual system in art—counterpoint—to produce some of the most significant artistic creations of Western culture. In Bach, the human, the rational, and the transcendent meet to produce monuments that pay homage to the natural world, the heights of human reason, the depths of human imagination, and the relationships that connect all things. Bach was, and remains, a Modern man.