



**WASHINGTON BACH
CONSORT**
Dana Marsh, Artistic Director

**VIOLONCELLO DA SPALLA
FEATURING ANDREW GONZALEZ**

Friday, February 25, 2022

Live! at 10th & G

945 G Street NW, Washington, DC

Saturday, February 26, 2022

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

228 S Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA

VIOLONCELLO DA SPALLA

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2022 AT 7:00 P.M. | Live! at 10th & G, Washington, DC
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2022 AT 7:00 P.M. | St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Alexandria, VA

PROGRAM

Suite no. 1 in G Major, BWV 1007

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Menuet I & II
Gigue

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Suite no. 6 in D Major, BWV 1012

Prélude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavotte I & II
Gigue

Andrew Gonzalez, violoncello da spalla

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Hailed by *Strad Magazine* for his “warm hearted playing,” violist and violoncello da spallist **Andrew Gonzalez** lives a fulfilling career as both a soloist and chamber musician, performing in prestigious venues throughout the United States and halls all over Asia and Europe. As a sought-after chamber musician, his playing has allowed him to collaborate with respected ensembles such as the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Sejong Soloists, as well as members of the Guarneri, Juilliard, Tokyo, Orion, Borromeo, and Vermeer quartets. Also an accomplished teacher, Andrew served as a fellow of Carnegie Hall’s Ensemble Connect from 2016–2018 and teaches chamber music in the Heifetz Institute’s Program for the Exceptionally Gifted. In the fall of 2020, Andrew became the new violist of the Jasper String Quartet.

Andrew is one of the few people in the world who plays the violoncello da spalla, a five stringed mini cello that is played on the shoulder. In 2018, Andrew gave the New York City premiere of Bach’s entire Sixth Cello Suite at Barge Music. A student of Cynthia Roberts from the Juilliard 415 program, Andrew has performed in festivals and series such as the Valley of the Moon Music Festival, American Bach Soloists, the Boston Early Music Festival, Helicon, and many others.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

What's a cello?

Many of us grow up with a simple and useful division of the instruments of a Western orchestra. From Benjamin Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* to the organization of departments in a conservatory, the familiar categories of woodwinds, brass, strings, and percussion provide a good starting point in sorting out the kinds of instruments there are in the concert world.

But these simple categories hide a lot of complexity. The woodwind family, for example, includes instruments with distinct and independent histories: cross-blown (transverse) flutes that date back to the Renaissance; double-reed oboes that originated in the so-called loud bands of the same period; single-reed clarinets that first came into use in the eighteenth century; and bassoons, also double-reeds but with a heritage distinct from oboes. And that is not the extent of the variety: modern orchestras sometime include saxophones, which are single-reed instruments made of metal; and there are other types like the end-blown recorder (itself a large and ancient family), and the cornetto (with a buzzed mouthpiece like a trumpet). "Woodwinds" are a surprisingly diverse group.

The same is true for brass. Trumpets, horns, trombones, and tubas are all distinct types with distinct histories and origins, and with different acoustical properties that stem from their constructions. And these instruments bring distinct associations and meanings. In the eighteenth century, for example, trumpets invoked royalty and military topics; horns could be associated with the hunt; and trombones often signified the ecclesiastical, the supernatural, and the ancient. These meanings stemmed ultimately from the origins of the instruments—the different contexts in which they were cultivated—and the different ways in which they were absorbed into ensemble music-making. (Tubas, incidentally, were developed in the nineteenth century as bass instruments for bands and eventually orchestral brass sections.)

The variety of percussion instruments and their origins—from military drums to borrowings, such as gongs, from other musical cultures—is even more vivid.

In this regard, strings would appear to be simpler: instruments in increasing sizes (violins, violas, cellos, and basses). But there is actually a great deal of variety lurking there, too. Violins, violas, and cellos have a lot in common—in fact they represent three sizes of the same sort of instrument, with the cello originating as the bass member of the violin family. But the orchestral double bass is (in its construction) usually a derivative of the distinct viol family—though some basses are now built along the lines of violins—and both kinds of basses are tuned differently from the members of violin family.

In Bach's time, the variety of string instruments was even greater. Musicians cultivated instruments of several types and in various sizes. The "normal" violin was joined, of course, by the viola, but also by smaller versions including the violino piccolo. Bach called for that instrument, typically tuned a minor third or perfect fourth higher than the regular violin and thus allowing easier access to high registers, in the first Brandenburg Concerto and the cantata *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140. He sometimes used members of the viol family: the viola da gamba as a solo or ensemble instrument, and larger instruments with four, five, or six strings as a member of the basso continuo group. A few compositions call for the viola d'amore, yet another distinct instrument that features non-bowed resonating strings in addition to the ones fingered and played. We can see from these examples that this variety stems from several different parameters: membership in the violin, viol, or other instrument families; size (and thus musical range) from the tiny to the very large; and number of strings (four, five, six, or seven).

There was also variety in playing position—how and where the instrument was held by the player. Normal violins were so-called arm instruments, held (loosely, in the eighteenth century!) under the chin. What we routinely now call a "viola" was really a "viola da braccio"—an arm viola, played in the same position. (This is the origin of the German-language term for the instrument, Bratsche.) String instruments could also be held between the legs; a viola da gamba is literally a "leg viol," distinguished by its playing position.

One lesson here is that a name—violin, viol, viola—didn't fully define an instrument. Names often also specified how it was held and played. That was

ABOUT THE PROGRAM (cont'd)

typically on the arm or on the leg, but there was an intermediate position as well: an instrument could be held across the chest, and bowed in front of the player, sometimes steadied with a strap. This position came to be known as “on the shoulder” and an instrument played that way as a viola (or viol or violoncello) da spalla, from the Italian word for that part of the body.

One of the big questions is which instrument Bach and other composers meant by “violoncello” or even “violoncello piccolo.” Current thinking has come to include the possibility that by these terms Bach intended a shoulder instrument at least some of the time. One piece of evidence in favor of the use of an instrument held crosswise when Bach called for the violoncello piccolo is that some of the solo lines for this instrument in Bach’s cantatas are found in violin parts, not the parts used by bass-range cellists and bassists. For movements with this instrument, violinists put down their arm instruments and took up ones played on the shoulder (da spalla).

To be a “cellist,” then, in Bach’s time, left a lot of leeway. And this brings us to Bach’s six famous suites for solo cello, which suddenly look a little different, open to a broader range of performance possibilities. This had long been recognized, at least in part, because the Sixth Suite in D major, BWV 1012, calls for an instrument with five strings rather than the typical four required for the others—some other member of the family. We can consider the option of playing the Bach cello suites on a smaller kind of cello—the sort held across the chest/on the shoulder. (In fact one early manuscript copy with close connections to the Bach circle says that these suites are for “le viola de basso.”)

This evening’s program presents two of Bach’s suites for solo cello—the first and last, as it happens, of the total of six that was customary for an opus or musical work. Each suite comprises a formally free prelude and a succession of stylized French courtly dances. Both suites present the typical Germanic selection—allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue—with an additional pair of matched dances (two minuets or two gavottes) interpolated just before the final gigue. Those pairs are meant to be performed *alternativement*: the first, then the second, then the first again. The two courantes are the Italianate type also known as a correntes, a characteristically

German cultivation of the so-called mixed taste that drew on both French and Italian music. Each of the movements in a suite is unified by a shared home pitch (key). Each dance features a regular and balanced phrase structure and a repetition scheme of AABB: one strain (repeated) that arrives somewhere, then a second (also repeated) that returns home. The preludes, which allude to improvisation rather than the planned regularity of dances, are of the pattern type, representing a composing-out of a harmonic scheme using the same musical figure in every measure.

In the preludes and dances alike, Bach writes idiomatically for a string instrument. These solos for cello are particularly rich in string-crossing, in a technique known as bariolage in which fingered notes rapidly alternate with an open (unstopped) string, and in chordal textures achieved by playing two, three, or even four strings simultaneously. The allemande of No. 6 and both sarabandes, for example, punctuate their leading melodic line with accompanimental chords. There are also suggestions of two independent musical lines from a single melodic instrument, for example in a melody-and-bass texture suggested in both gavottes of No. 6.

Generations of cellists have tackled the challenges represented by this music, and Bach’s suites for solo cello have played a role in defining modern playing technique on the instrument. With the recent renewed instrument in the violoncello da spalla there is a whole new world of challenges and possibilities opened for this familiar and beloved music.

Daniel R. Melamed is a professor of musicology at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, and serves as president of the American Bach Society and director of the Bloomington Bach Cantata Project. His books *Hearing Bach’s Passions* and *Listening to Bach: the Mass in B Minor and Christmas Oratorio*, for general readers, are available from Oxford University Press.



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