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**CELLOS AND THE BACH SUITES:
AN EXPLORATION BY JOSEPHINE VAN LIER**

Josephine van Lier (cello)

Vanlier 2010-01 [4 CDs]



Josephine van Lier's new recording of the Bach cello suites offers a rare insight into the influence of the instrument on the

music by using baroque four- and five-string cellos, a contemporary instrument, and an ultra-modern carbon-fibre cello.

With a background in baroque cello playing, she describes herself as not changing her approach as she changes instruments, but of letting the instrument shape the interpretation. That's a very Bach-like approach and reveals startling differences. It's all the more interesting because there's no attempt to portray one instrument as better than another.

There's often a slight sense of inflexibility in the sound of the modern bow. This is present in the recording, though the compensation is a Romantic-sounding richness. There's a marked contrast with the aliveness of its baroque relative. Curiously, the modern bow draws a similar aliveness from the carbon-fibre cello: van Lier attributes this to the high responsiveness of the instrument.

The fifth suite appears three times, played on baroque, contemporary and carbon-fibre cellos. The opening prelude and fugue give a snapshot of the differences. On the contemporary cello, the prelude has slightly melancholy wistfulness, and the fugue works, but has a heaviness which suggests this is on the limit of what the instrument can do. On the carbon fibre cello the prelude is far richer, and the fugue seems to fly by with a sense of ease and bounce. On the baroque instrument the prelude has a rich but intimate sound, and the slight raspiness of the gut strings gives the fugue a wonderful vividness.

In writing suites, Bach wasn't consciously laying down one of the cornerstones of the cello repertoire, but he was exploring the potential of what was then a new instrument. There's a strong sense of this in the magic drawn from the seeming roughness of the strings in the sixth suite, but it's also in the attitude of exploration van Lier brings to the carbon-fibre cello. Instead of asking which is the best cello for Bach, this recording asks the more helpful question of what each instrument brings to our exploration of Bach. **MA**

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