Matt Haimovitz  
Cello

Saturday, February 18, 2017 at 8:00 p.m.

**Overture*** ............................................................................................ PHILIP GLASS
Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major, BVW 1007  ............................................................ JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

**Run*** ............................................................................................ VIJAY IYER
Cello Suite No. 3 in C Major, BVW 1009 ......................................................... J.S. BACH

-INTERMISSION-

**Es War*** .......................................................... DAVID SANFORD
Cello Suite No. 5 in C Minor, BVW 1011 ......................................................... J.S. BACH

Sunday, February 19, 2017 at 3:00 p.m.

**The Veronica*** .......................................................... DU YUN
Cello Suite No. 2 in D Minor, BVW 1008 ......................................................... J.S. BACH

**La memoria*** .......................................................... ROBERTO SIERRA
Cello Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major, BVW 1010 ................................................. J.S. BACH

-INTERMISSION-

**Lili’uokalani** for solo cello piccolo* ................................ LUNA PEARL WOOLF
Cello Suite No. 6 in D Major, BVW 1012 ......................................................... J.S. BACH

*Each of these new works is an Overtures to Bach commission*

This event is presented, in part, through a generous donation from the Parnassus Society, and Dr. and Mrs. Kenneth Tokita.

Matt Haimovitz’s recordings can be found on Deutsche Grammophon, Oxingale Records and the PENTATONE Oxingale Series.

The use of cameras and recording devices of any type is prohibited. Please silence all cell phones and paging devices. Please refrain from text messaging during the performance.
For more than three decades, I have been absorbed in reflecting and playing J.S. Bach’s six suites for solo cello. The six suites were composed around 1720 in Cöthen, Germany while Bach was under the patronage of Prince Leopold. This was a rare time in Bach’s life during which he was not directly working under the auspices of the church. In the six suites we experience a breathtaking summation of the vernaculars and dance forms Bach absorbed from France, Italy, Spain, Germany, and beyond.

In 2015 I made a new recording of the six suites, on baroque cello and the five-string cello piccolo. In the fifteen years since my first recording of these works in 2000, my perspective had evolved so far that I no longer recognized the older document. For the 2015 edition I closely investigated the manuscript of the six suites by Anna Magdalena, Bach’s second wife who made what we consider the best copy of Bach’s original, which has unfortunately been lost to us.

Along with looking back at the performance practice of the suites and imagining the state of mind of an eighteenth century cellist encountering this groundbreaking music for the first time, I wanted to look forward, to create a bridge to our time. With Overtures to Bach, I have commissioned six composers—Philip Glass, Du Yun, Vijay Iyer, Roberto Sierra, David Sanford, and Luna Pearl Woolf—to engage, respond to, and create a preludial movement that seamlessly transitions into the centuries-old six-movement suite architecture. Had Bach encountered Caribbean salsa, Hawaiian chant, Serbian ganga, jazz, and more, I have no doubt that he would have incorporated these styles into his own work. In this way, we broaden the cultural palette available to Bach while traveling a musical path spanning three centuries. In the end, perhaps the most startling insight offered by the six living composers is that Bach’s music is every bit as alive and contemporary as music written today.

The Bach Suites: A Moveable Feast – Overtures to Bach

Years ago, on a visit to the Big Island of Hawaii, Luna Pearl Woolf and I attended an outdoor Passover seder. Held on a large lanai, under an open sky, with the sound of waves marking the time, the Rabbi remarked at this ancient Jewish tradition being celebrated on a Polynesian island, so new its lava was still cooling in the sea. His sermon brought out similarities between the Hawaiian and Hebrew languages. The word “Pele,” Hawaiian god of the volcano, means “miracle” in Hebrew. Aloha is close to ahava or “love;” havera is Hebrew for friend, hoaloha in Hawaiian. Many more linguistic connections were made. The Chomsky’s theory of universality was alive and well and I wondered at the flow of language and culture that could spread to the most remote locales, long before technology shrank our world.
Bach’s appetite for new forms of music was voracious. I like to think that if he had come across Hawaiian Chant, or Caribbean Salsa, or, for that matter, the jazz of Charles Mingus or John Coltrane, these influences would have made their way into the Suites.

And the influence goes both ways. It would be difficult for Bach’s six suites not to inform any composer writing music for solo cello today. With these overtures to Bach, contemporary composers reach both forward and backward in time, to bring their own cultural and musical experience into a conversation with the master himself.

Philip Glass will freely acknowledge how deeply inspired he is by Bach’s sense of polyphony on an essentially single-voiced instrument. In the Bach Prélude from Suite I in G, the composer clearly lays out three voices in the opening bars—a bass pedal, a stepwise moving middle line, and the three-note lower-neighbor figure in the top voice. In his overture, Philip lets the triad unfold similarly, albeit in the darker key of E minor suggested in the Bach a few bars after the opening G pedal. However, Philip introduces double-stops right after the linear triad, two voices entangled, breathing as one. To compose his overture, Philip took a break from reworking his opera Appomattox, writing the solo piece on the back of an opera score page. As he says, “it was like writing a letter.”

When I first received the score of Vijay Iyer’s Run, it looked like a challenge, a showpiece of moto-perpetuo bow strokes and string crossings. For three days I worked to realize exactly what was on the page, to no avail. Then I began to add my own articulations, a variety of slurring solutions, as well as more distinctive dynamics. It was a breakthrough, and the piece began to take shape. When I trepidatiously approached Vijay about what I was doing with his piece, he immediately gave his blessing. He had assumed I would find my own way though. After studying the Anna Magdalena manuscript of the Bach suites, and observing how sparse are the interpretive instructions, Vijay was inspired by the freedom given to the performer. We spent an intensive afternoon in Iyers’s Harlem studio fine-tuning all of these expressive choices. It was enlightening to enter a world of rhythm-as-kinesthesia. As Vijay pointed out, “sometimes if you just think the rhythm or pulse, it is enough.” The opening bar of the Bach Prélude from Suite III in C major is a perfect musical illumination of gravity, the scale and arpeggio descending from middle C to the low open string like an apple falling from a tree. Vijay amplifies the overtones laid out in Bach’s suite. There is an infectious energy, and electrical current that runs through it, all rising from and celebrating the lowest note of the instrument, the C.

David Sanford and I have collaborated on a number of occasions: his concerto for cello and twenty-piece big band, Scherzo Grosso, our album Meeting of
the Spirits with Uccello, treating the cello ensemble as jazz big band, and now the second of two pieces for solo cello. The first, Seventh Avenue Kaddish, a response to 9/11, was recently re-released on the Pentatone Oxingale Series album, Orbit.

I had to unearth an inner Charles Mingus to tackle David’s Es War. A tour de force of pizzicato, the opening demands a two-finger plucking technique more idiomatic to the jazz upright bass than to the cello. Later, Es War wrestles with Bach’s epic fugue, the wail of the saxophone navigating its way through palindromes and atonal rows obscuring the emerging reference to a Bach Cantata. Bach, in Suite V, calls for the cello’s A-string to be tuned down to a G. David takes this scordatura tuning one step further, also asking for the low C-string to be brought down to a B. The effect allows the stormy waves of chords at the coda, with a low B pedal on the open string, to lead into the Bach Prélude with the force of a tsunami.

Du Yun was struck by my belief that Suite II in D minor may be an epitaph for the loss of Bach’s infant child and his first wife Maria Barbara in 1720, the same year he composed the six suites. Building on the sarabande—the slow lascivious Spanish dance at the heart of each of the Suites—Du Yun deconstructs the dance and introduces the kontakion, a prayer for the dead from the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as Serbian chant and central European gypsy fiddle to create a heartbreaking quilt of nostalgic prayer and cries. The polyphonic roots of Bach emerge, even as gossamer shrouds of notes obscure them. The title of the piece is taken from a Catholic legend: the image of Jesus, revealed on the Veil of Veronica.

Hearing The Veronica, do not be fooled by the spontaneity of the gestures and the emotions they evoke. The majority of the work is meticulously notated—pitch, microtonal coloring, timbral variety detailed in the left and right hands, voicing priorities, and more. And yet the piece was not fully realized until we worked on it together. As Du Yun sang her vision, phrase by phrase, we sculpted the articulations, rubatos, tempi, and timbres even more closely. At the coda, Du Yun asks that the A-string be tuned up microtonally to create a drone, alienating in its foreignness to the original pitch center. The beats of the final near-unison reveal the memory of an infant’s beating heart.

In La memoria, Roberto Sierra juxtaposes “my own childhood memories of Pablo Casals on one side and the street music of Puerto Rico on the other.” La memoria plays on our memory of Bach Suite IV, referencing motivic fragments, a kaleidoscopic mirage that transports us through the exotic flavors of a syncopated Caribbean bass lines and salsa rhythms. What fascinates me about La memoria is how the collective consciousness of folk rhythms and the Bach is woven together so seamlessly and dramatically that the division between memory and the present is completely blurred. And it
is not until the Bach Prélude of Suite IV begins that we realize where we have been heading the whole time.

When I asked Luna Pearl Woolf, my better half, to compose an overture, she was immersed in writing her opera, *Better Gods*, and reluctant to add more to her plate. Then she heard me playing the Prélude to Suite VI in D major on my new instrumental love, the cello piccolo, a five-string cello that Bach likely intended for that suite. She agreed to the commission on the condition that the overture to Suite VI would fall to her. Initially inspired by the connections, both sonically and harmonically, to the Hawaiian chant featured in *Better Gods*, Luna went on to take full advantage of the virtuosic properties of the instrument, treating it operatically, in various registers from the low bass to the soprano stratosphere. Chant and drumming techniques are developed through the course of the piece, which memorializes the regal Queen Lili‘uokalani. Bach embraces the future in Suite VI, with no limit on the human imagination. Luna too explores the new possibilities afforded by the cello piccolo, yet always returning to the song of the human voice.

In this series, I play both the Woolf and the Bach Suite VI Prélude on a beautiful baroque cello piccolo made by Georg Nicol. Köllmer, on generous loan from Rebecca Humphrey. For the remaining works, I play on my Matteo Goffriller cello made in 1710. For the cello piccolo and all the Bach, my bow is a baroque replica crafted by David Hawthorne of Cambridge, Massachusetts. For the remaining overtures, my modern bow is made by François Malo of Montréal, Quebec.

I am beyond thrilled with each and every one of these new overture commissions. Each composer has engaged his or her suite with a depth and insight that makes me hear the Bach in a new light. Each work may also live on its own as a standalone piece, and I hope generations of cellists will enjoy the challenges and rewards that each presents. The works are thorny enough to say: “do not try this at home!” However, I truly hope just the opposite. It has been a fascinating experience to commission a wide slate of new works at the same time. With each piece, I was forced to develop new techniques; new approaches to the instrument which would allow me to realize the vision of each composer.

My hope is that you, the listener, will enjoy traveling this musical bridge between the centuries as much as I have. It spans more than time, linking us to far-flung corners of our musical world and offering an entrée into six distinct and diverse compositional voices, each humbly making the overture to Bach.

- Matt Haimovitz
Overture
an overture to J.S. Bach’s Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major, BWV 1007
PHILIP GLASS

“Of all the many blessings in this life.
Music gives up its place only to love.
Yet even love’s a melody.”
Dedicated to my beloved wife Nadia Moretto, from David Sela

The Overture for the Bach G major cello suite is meant to prepare the audience, not by anticipating Bach’s music, but through encouraging a frame of mind that will be open and calm—free from the stress and delights of one’s ordinary day.

Composing the proper melody, harmony, and rhythm for the overture was not so complicated. My own training with Mme. Boulanger was heavily steeped in analysis and performing the great Master’s work and I was already familiar with what was needed.

For me it was really as if I were saying to the audience:
“For now put aside your ordinary thoughts—the struggles and joys of your daily life. The music will soon begin. And, in fact, the Master is already in the concert hall waiting for you. But, not to worry. You’re not too late either — for Bach and his music now reside in a pure eternity, free from any plans or expectations.

“Encounters with his music are meant only to inspire and enlighten ourselves—as if there never was an act of special creation, but as if it has always been there. Even before the Beginning.

“A deep breath or two won’t hurt. But apart from that there’s nothing to do. Just let Bach’s music begin. It’s there for the listening.”

- Philip Glass

Run
an overture to J.S. Bach’s Cello Suite No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1009
VIJAY IYER

Bach’s solo string music sounds oddly futuristic even today. I first heard the cello suites when I was a child, and I remember noticing the mystical hush that this music could bring over listeners—a strange, beautiful reminder of melody’s power.

When Matt approached me last year, I was daunted at first: how could I create an overture for something already so complete, so familiar? Eventually the C major suite offered some answers of its own. The instrument itself is already essentially “in C” its open strings ringing out in that tonality, so I decided to follow up on Bach’s own use of the
instrument’s inherent resonances. I was influenced by how he would vault the listener through the music, using vibrant dance impulses to sustain a sometimes majestically slow harmonic rhythm. Studying Bach’s original manuscripts, I saw how under specifying timbre and articulation would allow the performer to find a more personal interpretation.

It dawned on me that this overture should herald the whole work without revealing too much of it. In this way, my piece became compact, active, resonant, and continuous—a brisk, eventful run through the woods. Thank you for listening.

– Vijay Iyer

Es War
an overture to J.S. Bach’s Cello Suite No. 5 in C Minor, BWV 1011

DAVID SANFORD

Musicologist Robert Walser writes, “Like Bach, but at the other end of the Enlightenment, heavy metal musicians explore images of horror and madness in order to comprehend and critique the world as they see it.” Echoing this reading on at least one level, Matt Haimovitz’s more recent interpretation of Bach’s Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor, likely the darkest of the six, presents a response to contemporary violent conflict offering a reflection of that violence as well as a deploration. The idea of war—in a larger sense, between life and death—is literally stated in Bach’s Cantata No. 4 where the central movement begins with the chorus’s fugal “Es war ein wunderlicher Kreig.” That movement’s B-minor tonality, and its root, minor third and major seventh opening collection are strong influences on the overture, Es War, and inspired its title.

Notably, Bach’s fifth suite also features the scordatura A-string tuned at G, which can be interpreted as an early forebear of metal’s often-used “drop-D” tuning and similarly offers not only a somewhat more somber tone but also more resonant support for the cello’s lower two strings. Es War utilizes this tuning as well, but avoids the strong emphasis on C in which the suite will be immersed by also lowering the fourth string down to B. This further darkens the timbre of the instrument while, at the same time, laying the foundation for the overture’s slow but deliberate harmonic path leading to the suite’s opening C-minor announcement.

– David Sanford

The Veronica
an overture to J.S. Bach’s Cello Suite No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1008

DU YUN

Dedicated by Gordon Getty to the memory of Zheng Cao, a most formidable force of nature and dearly beloved friend.
“the ones who are gone are gone
but the ones who survived
begin to arrive”
– Rumi

I have known Matt for eight years now. Not only have I written pieces for him, we collaborated on a song together, and played together on his *Figment* tour. When Matt called me for this project, I was thrilled for his ambitious undertaking and honored to be part of a project that is this close to him.

Among the six Bach Cello Suites, I always feel the most connected to Cello Suite No. 2. In preparing for writing the overture for the D-minor, Matt and I talked about how J.S. Bach had been away from home, on tour for a year. When he came back, only then did he learn of his first wife’s passing; and a year prior, the two had lost a child. That was the year he wrote the D-minor cello suite.

I often wonder about bereavement. When and how it pauses, recharges, morphs, and restarts. When I read the story of the Veil of Veronica, it was less of the truth of the legend that intrigued me, but rather the image of a woman wiping sweat and blood away. And I’m also interested in the provenance of cultural intersections. Those pilgrimages throughout history remain a winding path, for immigrants, for émigrants, and for refugees in today’s world. *The Veronica* ends with a ganga style, a dissonant form of singing, using two clashing notes to project sound over long distances that is prominent in Serbian chant.

– Du Yun

*La memoria*

an overture to J.S. Bach’s Cello Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major, BWV 1010

ROBERTO SIERRA

The title, *La memoria*, denotes an intertextual play between musical memory and musical text. As the work progresses the Prélude to Cello Suite No. 4 by J.S. Bach is remembered and eventually recovered when the actual Bach Prélude is played after my overture. In this manner Bach’s piece becomes the inevitable consequence of *La memoria*. Every measure of this work reflects Bach’s prelude, either by excluding the notes contained in the arpeggios of the Prélude, or by including the notes in different transformations—some of them metamorphosed into latin rhythms. The title is also a reflection of my own childhood sonic memories. As I was writing the piece, I could not avoid remembering the binary contrast between Casals playing the Bach Suites in Puerto Rico and the popular music that resonated everywhere.

– Roberto Sierra
Lili‘uokalani for solo cello piccolo
an overture to J.S. Bach’s Cello Suite No. 6 in D Major, BWV 1012
LUNA PEARL WOOLF

Dedicated to the memory and legacy of a man of great substance, heart and humor, Robert Commanday, by his friend, Gordon Getty.

Lili‘uokalani was the last monarch of Hawaii and that sovereign nation’s first queen. Worldly, educated, deeply Christian, and beloved by her people, Lili‘u was forced to abdicate her throne and dissolve the monarchy by descendants of the same missionaries who brought literacy, western music, and Christianity to the islands three generations earlier.

Bach wrote his Cello Suite No. 6 for a five-string cello, resulting in flights far above the traditional range of the conventional cello. Yet the opening of the Prélude seems to belie that extended range by exploiting two strings played in unison, with the bow moving between them to create a texture built on timbre rather than melody. It is in this progression from decorated unison to lofty heights, punctuated with storms of cascading sixteenth notes that I feel a deep a connection to Lili‘u. As the basis of the music and culture of her history, Hawaiian chant is largely monotone, but modulated by extraordinary vocal techniques of timbral vibrato and glottal trill. Her education in Western thought and music brought her to the heights of knowledge and into the company of the world’s royalty. But none of that was enough to save her from the tidal shift of trade and economic progress that eventually brought down her government.

Lili‘uokalani for solo cello piccolo paints a portrait of the queen at this heart-wrenching moment in her reign. Drawn from the cello piccolo’s five strings we hear elements of traditional Hawaiian chant, transformed into ever-expanding harmonies: intimations of pre-western musical implements and the plucked strings of the queen’s own guitar. We also hear lyrical moments that find their origin in Better Gods, a one-hour opera on the fall of the Hawaiian monarchy, commissioned by the Washington National Opera, which premiered shortly after this work was written. The solo voice of the cello piccolo, itself now all but obsolete, develops all these aspects farther than the human voice can go and offers a glimpse of the strength and inner turmoil of this remarkable woman.

– Luna Pearl Woolf
MATT HAIMOVITZ
Renowned as a musical pioneer, Grammy-nominated cellist Matt Haimovitz is acclaimed for his visionary approach, groundbreaking collaborations, and innovative recording projects, which he combines with a tireless touring schedule and mentoring an award-winning studio at McGill University’s Schulich School of Music in Montréal. Born in Israel, Haimovitz made his debut in 1984, at the age of thirteen, as a soloist with Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic, and at seventeen he made his first recording for Deutsche Grammophon with James Levine and the Chicago Symphony. Haimovitz’s recording career encompasses more than twenty years of award-winning work on Deutsche Grammophon (Universal) and Oxingale Records, now in collaboration with Pentatone. His honors include the Trailblazer Award from the American Music Center, the Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Grand Prix du Disque, and the Premio Internazionale Accademia Musicale Chigiana. He studied with Leonard Rose at the Juilliard School and graduated with highest honors from Harvard University. Haimovitz plays a Venetian cello, made in 1710 by Matteo Gofriller.

PHILIP GLASS
Through his operas, his symphonies, his compositions for his own ensemble, and his wide-ranging collaborations with artists ranging from Twyla Tharp to Allen Ginsberg, Woody Allen to David Bowie, Philip Glass has had an extraordinary and unprecedented impact upon the musical and intellectual life of his times. Indeed, Glass is the first composer to win a wide, multi-generational audience in the opera house, the concert hall, the dance world, film, and popular music—simultaneously.

VIJAY IYER
Grammy nominee Vijay Iyer was named DownBeat magazine’s 2015 Artist of the Year, a 2013 MacArthur Fellow, and a 2012 Doris Duke Performing Artist. The New York Times observes, “There’s probably no frame wide enough to encompass the creative output of the pianist Vijay Iyer.” In 2017, Iyer, a professor of music at Harvard University, is Artist-in-Residence at SF Jazz and Wigmore Hall in London, as well as Music Director of the Ojai Festival.

DAVID SANFORD
David Sanford’s compositions have been performed by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Speculum Musicae, the Meridian Arts Ensemble, and orchestras led by Marin Alsop, Kent Nagano, and Gil Rose, among many others. His honors include Radcliffe and Guggenheim fellowships, and the Rome Prize. He is the Elizabeth T. Kennan Professor of Music at Mount Holyoke College and the director of the contemporary big band, Pittsburgh Collective.
DU YUN
Du Yun, born and raised in Shanghai, China, currently based in New York, is a composer, performer and performance artist, and curator, working at the intersection of orchestral, opera, chamber music, theatre, cabaret, pop music, oral tradition, visual arts, electronics, and noise. Du Yun is on the composition faculty at SUNY Purchase College. She was a founding member of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), and currently serves as the Artistic Director of Music at the Anthology (MATA), a pioneering organization dedicated to commissioning and presenting young composers from around the world.

ROBERTO SIERRA
For more than three decades the works of American composer Roberto Sierra have been part of the repertoire of many of the leading orchestras, ensembles, and festivals in the United States and Europe. Many of the major American and European orchestras and international ensembles have commissioned and performed his works. In 2003 he was awarded the Academy Award in Music by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His music may be heard on CDs by Naxos, EMI Records, EmArcy, New World Records, Albany Records, Koch, New Albion, Koss Classics, Fleur de Son, and other labels.

LUNA PEARL WOOLF
The music of composer Luna Pearl Woolf has been praised for its “psychological nuances and emotional depth,” by the New York Times. Her dramatic and lyrical works have been commissioned by Carnegie Hall and the Washington National Opera, among others, collaborating with such artists as Joyce DiDonato, Frederica von Stade, Daniel Taylor, Lisa Delan, Christopher O’Riley, Academy Award-winner Jeremy Irons, and author Cornelia Funke. Woolf has been featured on NPR, BBC, CBC, and in the New York Times, Associated Press, Wall Street Journal, Boston Globe, Opera News, and New Music Box, among others.

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