



# Bach Cello Suites I – III

Geert Van Gele | *Solo Recorder*

# J.S. Bach: Cello Suites I-III

Geert Van Gele, recorders

## Cello Suite I, BWV 1007

*voice flute in D*

1	Prelude	(3:26)
2	Allemande	(4:27)
3	Courante	(3:02)
4	Sarabande	(2:41)
5	Menuet I	(1:22)
6	Menuet II - Menuet I	(1:37)
7	Gigue	(1:40)

## Cello Suite II, BWV 1008

*bass recorder in F*

8	Prelude	(4:03)
9	Allemande	(3:32)
10	Courante	(2:45)
11	Sarabande	(4:36)
12	Menuet I	(1:33)
13	Menuet II - Menuet I	(1:43)
14	Gigue	(3:01)

## Cello Suite III, BWV 1009

*alto recorder in F*

15	Prelude	(3:36)
16	Allemande	(4:37)
17	Courante	(3:10)
18	Sarabande	(3:51)
19	Bourree I	(1:32)
20	Bourree II - Bourree I	(1:46)
21	Gigue	(3:41)

(Total: 61:52)

# The Cello Suites of J.S. Bach

The *Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello* by Johann Sebastian Bach are among the world's most beloved pieces of music. Most likely composed during the period 1717–1723, when Bach served as a Kapellmeister in Cöthen, the suites all have a similar structure, composed of a *prelude*, followed by the baroque dance forms of *allemande*, *courante*, *sarabande*, *menuet I* and *II* (*bourree I* and *II* in suite 3) and *gigue*. They cover a wide range of emotions and allow for vastly different interpretations, from the deeply intimate to the joyously extroverted.

Since the time of Pablo Casals' first recording of them in the 1940's, they have been recorded by numerous cellists, and have been transcribed for numerous other instruments, including the recorder.

In his search for his own interpretation of the first three of these masterpieces, Geert Van Gele found that he was led to different instruments, to dozens of venues, and through years of evolving in his performance of the suites. For Geert, spending time with these suites feels like taking lessons from a great teacher; he always

leaves them feeling like a stronger, more focused musician.

Three different instruments were ultimately chosen to bring out the different characters of the individual suites:

The mild timbre of the “voice flute” (a tenor recorder in D) perfectly fits the calm maturity of Suite no. 1; the deep-sounding bass recorder embodies the melancholy drama of Suite no. 2; while the lively sound of the alto recorder sparkles with the youthful enthusiasm of Suite no. 3.

*Geert Van Gele tells in his own words about the process of recording the suites:*

## About the recording

“While a member of the Flanders' Recorder Quartet, I developed a strong conviction about how I wanted to pursue recordings -- namely as much as possible in one-take, complete performances. I wanted this in order to preserve the musical line and inspiration that

can be achieved in a live performance. These qualities so often get sacrificed in a recording that has note-perfect perfection as it's goal, particularly where this perfection is attained by cutting and pasting several recorded "takes" in order to eliminate mistakes, or by recording a piece in small sections and then pasting it together (both currently the standard practice in recording).

About the time I was leaving the quartet to pursue my solo projects, Florian Heyerick, owner of the small Flemish record label *Vox Temporis*, generously gave me the opportunity to record my first solo-CD with Flemish contemporary music. On my request, this became a live recording in one session, in the prestigious Steurbaut studio, attended by a small audience.

This positive experience made it clear to me that this was the way I wanted to pursue future recordings. I just loved the final result of having a recording made in one stretch, where I was able to build up a story, without interruption. Listening back to this recording, I could really sense the same emotion I had put into it during the recording. Very satisfying indeed!

In 2000, I acquired the Klemisch Bass from the

Flanders' Recorder Quartet. I always considered this instrument one of the richest sounding instruments I had ever come across, even though it was very tricky to play. This purchase triggered me to start looking for the right space to record the first three cello suites. Little did I know this wasn't going to be easy. The idea was very simple: a good sounding space that would be convenient and not too expensive. I still wanted to make the recording as a concert performance with an audience... one hour or so with maximum concentration, and wrap up. The hunt for the ideal recording space was on. Years of searching followed, and taught me that it was hard enough to find an inexpensive and good-sounding space -- to find an inexpensive and good-sounding space with no background noises of lights, heating/cooling systems, rain and wind, birds and dogs, cows and farmers, cars and airplanes, ... was a real nightmare.

But this frustrating time did have a positive side: I learned a lot about recording, mike placements and acoustics, and I sharpened my concentration. Another plus: I found myself able to record now without having to have an audience, as I had in the past. It was after coming home from the umpteenth disappointing recording session on location, that I noticed the remarkable quietness of the backrooms in our house, since roadworks

had transformed our street, Kattenberg, into a one-way street. I needed very little motivation to start experimenting with recording in our guest room. The thought of having a possible recording studio under my own roof was thrilling! After having performed some initial experiments in 2005, I was able to convince harpist Bill Taylor to schedule a recording session. This recording is now released as Kattenberg Recordings KA001.

But one is never satisfied. After having done further recordings in 2006 (e.g. with Jurgen De bruyn on lute), I started dreaming of recording our ensembles in our little guestroom-turned-recording studio. A year of further stubborn experimenting with soundboards, panels, insulated ceilings and so-forth resulted in a workable environment, able to cope with the wide dynamics of the human voice. Mission completed...

## Recording procedure

Because I am passionate about the merits of live one-take recording, I try to recreate this in my 4x4-meter studio as much as possible. After having practiced the program for as long as necessary, I schedule a week in which I plan to

record on a couple of evenings (normally 3 to 4). If I find on a given evening that I'm not able to reach my maximum level of concentration, I will give up, and try again the next day or so. I may resort to choosing a track from a previous day, if this clearly sounds more convincing, but in general I like to stick to the whole take from a certain day. For minor mistakes, I use the following technique: I quickly repeat the measure or so before, making sure that my train of thought is being kept on track. Every interruption in the flow is an interruption too many, so I try to minimize these as much as possible. The result is that some minor imperfections can still be heard on the CD, but similar imperfections occur when I play a live concert, so nothing abnormal there. Moreover, I think you will appreciate the benefits of a one-take recording, which I explained before.

## About the instruments

To me, a good recorder has to have a strong personality. I want it to be my teacher, directing me to the richness of its color pallet, instructing me even about the music I play. I strongly believe in builders who make close copies of historic instruments, trying to capture the spirit

of the time, and giving the instrument a soul through which its player can channel his or her emotions in order to communicate in the most direct way possible with the listener. Such an instrument becomes unique, as it matures in the hands of a good player, but it doesn't freely give away its secrets. One has to be totally dedicated, willing to change his or her technique, and willing to search for the direction that the instrument wants to lead you in. Whenever I encounter 'interesting' sounding instruments, which to me have more affinity with the original instruments, they often seem to have 'issues': some notes may easily crack, other notes will need to be played with different fingerings, even in combination with a different approach in blowing. If a player is willing to devote extra time to overcome such issues, one will soon find the merits of such instruments. Many builders argue that the old instruments are not good enough, and they need to be 'improved'. However, if improving playability takes away character in the sound, I find it a bad bargain."

*The instruments used on this recording are:*

*Voice flute in D by Guido Klemisch,  
The Netherlands, 1980's*

*Bass recorder in F by Guido Klemisch, 1970's*

*Alto recorder in F by Rob Turner, USA, 1992*

## Biography

After finishing his studies at several conservatories in Flanders with honours, **Geert Van Gele** went on to co-found the Flanders' Recorder Quartet. For ten years he performed and recorded with the Quartet in Europe and both North- and South America, winning along the way several important international competitions. Since then he has pursued a solo-career, collaborating intensely with harpsichordist Guy Penson, lutenist Jurgen De bruyn and harpist Bill Taylor. He is a founding member of Sospiri Ardenti, an ensemble focusing on staged chamber music performances from the Baroque era, as well as Quadrivium, ensemble for Medieval music. He is regularly invited to give masterclasses. As a soloist he is admired as much for his interpretations of Bach and his performances of early Italian baroque music as for his mastery of contemporary recorder literature – all of which repertoires he has recorded on CD. In 2009 he founded the record label, Kattenberg Recordings. He considers himself a recorder player first of all, but also frequently performs on harpsichord (Sospiri Ardenti), organetto (Quadrivium), and bass guitar (Oedipus).

**Recording:** *Kattenberg, Borgerhout (BE),  
June 17, 2008 (June 15 for track 4)*  
**Production, editing, & mastering:** *Geert Van Gele*  
**Design:** *Hans De Cock*

*This recording is issued by Kattenberg Recordings, Kattenberg 43, 2140 Borgerhout, Belgium  
View our catalogue at [www.kattenberg.net](http://www.kattenberg.net)*

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