

# Nigel North

## *Bach on the Lute*

February 2021

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### Cello Suite No. 4 in Eb-Major, BWV 1010

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

*transcribed for the lute in A-Major by Nigel North*

Prelude  
Allemande  
Courante  
Sarabande  
Bourée I  
Bourée II  
Gigue

### Partita in E-Major for solo violin, BWV 1006a

*transcribed for the lute in A-Major by Nigel North*

Prelude  
Loure  
Gavotte en Rondeau  
Menuet I  
Menuet II  
Bourée  
Gigue

### Sonata in A minor for solo violin, BWV 1003

*transcribed for the lute by Nigel North*

Grave  
Fuga  
Andante  
Allegro

## Program Notes

One may ask, “Why play Bach on the lute?” The lute in question is the one played in Bach’s life time; either the 11-course lute (with 11 courses and 20 strings), or the 13-course lute (with 13 courses and 24 strings, as in today’s concert). Both usually tuned in a d-minor chord with an added scale of bass diapasons strung in octaves. These were the standard lutes in Germany during Bach’s lifetime—however, in today’s program, I am using an alternative tuning of A-minor/A-major which requires retuning only four of the top six courses.

In 1903, in the last years of the Bach-Gesellschaft Ausgabe, a German musicologist, Wilhelm Tappert, decreed that a certain collection of pieces was Bach’s lute works. These were labeled BWV 995-1000 and 1006a. BWV 995 is, in fact, Bach’s own arrangement for lute, in his hand, of his 5<sup>th</sup> cello suite.

The autograph is in normal notation with two staves, rather than the usual tablature used by lutenists. It is also for a lute with one more course than normal and is mostly playable on a normal 18<sup>th</sup>-century lute with a few modifications. This suite is the only clear “Lute Work,” the remainder being mostly meant for a keyboard instrument known as the “Lautenwerk,” a gut strung harpsichord which imitated the sound and range of the lute. In Bach’s house, at his death, there was at least one lute and one Lautenwerk, but it does seem clear that Bach never actually played the lute. In my own search for idiomatic lute music by Bach, I first chose to make transcriptions of the cello and violin works before the “lute works.” This recital consists of one work from each category: lute, violin and cello.



*BWV 995: J.S. Bach's lute arrangement of Cello Suite No. 5*

We can read from contemporary sources that Bach liked to take the works for solo violin and solo cello and play them on the keyboard, adding as much as was needed to make them sound idiomatic. We have the 2<sup>nd</sup> sonata for violin, BWV 1003, in a beautiful keyboard arrangement (BWV 964); not an autograph but thought to be Bach’s work. Similarly, the C-major violin Adagio from BWV 1005. Like many musicians in his time, Bach liked to rearrange existing compositions and make new creations from old material. His interest in the lute and in lutenists even lead him to take a Sonata by the contemporary lutenist, Sylvius Weiss, arrange it for harpsichord, and add a new violin part. This work became known as BWV 1025. We also have three lute tablatures of BWV 995, 997 and 1000 written out by lutenists contemporary with Bach. We don’t know if Bach knew of these or approved of them. I hope so, and I hope that he might also approve of and like what you will hear in this recital—truly wonderful music played on a noble and expressive instrument that was part of Bach’s musical world.

**BWV 1010** is the 4<sup>th</sup> cello suite, originally in E-flat major. It is here transcribed into A-major. The Prelude is very much in the broken arpeggiated style so suitable to the lute, and it is hard to imagine that Bach didn’t first conceive this movement for lute. **BWV 1006a** is a so-called lute

suite, which also works well in this A-major scordatura. The original model for this Partita was the final Partita in the *Sei Solo* (Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, 1720). We have an autograph copy of the arrangement, but Bach didn't clarify the instrumentation. Its texture and tessitura suit the lute well and the French style and ornamentation of many of the dance movements pays homage to the lute's French inheritance. The final work, **BWV 1003**, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the solo violin sonatas, with the Fugue dominating as the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 4 movements. While we have a harpsichord version of this whole sonata, BWV 964, we cannot play that on the lute. It is real keyboard music, with added ornamentation and counterpoint. The lute version is mostly inspired from the violin original with a few tips from the keyboard transcription. In 1737, Johann Mattheson wrote about the theme from the fugue, "Who would believe that these eight short notes would be so fruitful as to bring forth a counterpoint of more than a whole sheet of music paper, without unusual extension and quite naturally?"

Nigel North, February 2021

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## Biography

Nigel North was initially inspired into music, at age 7, by the early 60's instrumental pop group "The Shadows." Nigel studied classical music through the violin and guitar, eventually discovering his real path in life, the lute, when he was 15. Essentially self-taught on the lute, he has developed a unique musical life which embraces activities as a teacher, accompanist, soloist, director, and writer.

Some milestones along the way have included the publication of a continuo tutor (Faber 1987) representing his work and passion for this subject. The music of J.S. Bach has been another passion, and the 4 Volume CD collection, "Bach on the Lute," was recorded on the Linn Records label (1994-1997), now available as a 4-disc box set.

Nigel, together with Andrew Manze (violin) and John Toll (harpsichord & organ) formed the ensemble Romanesca; for ten years (1988-1998) they explored, performed, and recorded 17<sup>th</sup>-century chamber music winning several international awards for their recordings.

Nigel North enjoys accompanying singers and is also an enthusiastic teacher. For over 20 years he was Professor of Lute at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, in London; from 1993-1999 he was Professor at the Hochschule der Künste, Berlin; 2005-2007 he was Lute Professor at the Royal Conservatory in Den Haag, Netherlands, and since January 1999, Nigel North has been Professor of Lute at the Early Music Institute, Indiana University.

Recent recording projects have included, Robert Dowland's "A Musical Banquet" with soprano, Monika Mauch, for ECM (2008), Lute Songs with tenor Charles Daniels for ATMA (2007) and the Lute Music of Robert Johnson for Naxos (2010).

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