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BWV = Wolfgang Schmieder; Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis, Wiesbaden 1990

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München, Herbst 2000
Egon Voss

Zur Neuauflage 2007

Angeregt durch Erkenntnisse und Hinweise von Herbert Lindsberger, dem besonderer Dank gilt, unterzog der Herausgeber seine Ausgabe einer erneuten kritischen Durchsicht. Sie führte zu einer Reihe von Änderungen im Notentext.

München, Herbst 2007
Egon Voss

Preface

Bach's six suites for unaccompanied cello, BWV 1007–1012, are generally thought to have originated in or around 1720 during his tenure as court chapelmaster in Cöthen. It is fairly certain that he intended them to form the second part of a larger collection or complex of which the first was to be made up of the works for unaccompanied violin, BWV 1001–1006. All that can be said for certain, however, is that the latter pieces have come down to us in an autograph fair copy dated 1720 in Bach's own hand. Several Bach scholars, including Hans Eppstein, who edited the cello suites for the New Bach Edition (see below), regard the style and design of the suites as evidence for their date of composition relative to the solo violin pieces. Drawing on the fact that the violin pieces consist of

three sonatas and three partitas, the critical report to the NBA volume claims: "In the question of priority, precedence must be given to the [cello] suites for stylistic reasons, since they do not stretch and burst the bonds of their form as do the violin sonatas through their paired combination with the partitas" (Neue Bach-Ausgabe [NBA], VI/1, Kassel, 1958, pp. 62 f.). Viewed in this light, the cello suites were the earlier of these works. All the same, experience teaches us that stylistic arguments require corroboration from paper and handwriting analysis before they can be considered air-tight. This analysis has yet to be forthcoming. Nor do we know whether the suites were planned as a cycle all along, or whether they arose individually and were only later gathered into a collection. One item of evidence for the latter hypothesis might be the contrasting spelling of the title for the first movement of Suite 4 in source A (see below), where it is referred to as a "Präludium" rather than the otherwise customary "Prélude." Even the occasion that gave rise to these works is shrouded in obscurity. In 1873 Philipp Spitta, Bach's celebrated biographer, wrote in the first volume of his biography: "At all events, for the violoncello he possessed a friend in the gamba-player Abel, who could be at hand to give him advice on technical points, and for whom the suites were probably written" (London, 1889, II, p. 100). The correctness of Spitta's conjecture still awaits proof. On the other hand, the assumption of some sort of link between the cello suites and the viola da gamba does offer a possible explanation for the *scordatura* in Suite 5.

Ever since the days of Pablo Casals, Bach's cello suites have enjoyed a permanent place in the repertoire of every cellist. Yet, however familiar they may be today, their manuscript tradition is fraught with difficulties. The crux of the matter is that Bach's autograph manuscript has not survived. In its stead, we have four copyist's manuscripts and a printed edition, of which the latter, however, may be disregarded (see NBA VI/2, Critical Report, p. 17). These four manuscripts are:

A: a copy prepared by Bach's wife Anna Magdalena some time between 1727 and 1731.

B: a copy prepared by Johann Peter Kellner in 1726.

C: a copy prepared by two anonymous scribes in the early second half of the eighteenth century.

D: an anonymous copy dating from the end of the eighteenth century.

With regard to the "primary parameters" of the musical text (i. e. the pitch and duration of the notes), these four manuscripts are largely identical. However, they differ markedly in their signs and instructions regarding dynamics and, especially, articulation. In other words, we have a fairly secure and uniform text as far as the compositional substance is concerned, but such glaring differences in the expression marks, both in number and in kind, that it is impossible to assume that the copies were prepared from the same master and the discrepancies are the result of scribal errors or alternative readings. Rather, in view of the secondary parameters, we must posit the existence of conflicting arrangements marked for musical performance, assuming that we hesitate to speak of conflicting versions. The discrepancies are found in all four sources, although there is no denying that sources C and D are very closely related.

In sum, given the differences in their secondary parameters, we cannot conclude that these sources were copied from a common master, much less Bach's autograph manuscript, and any attempt to combine their readings can only lead us astray. The result would be an artificial construct beyond the pale of historical fidelity or even probability. The consequence of this appraisal is that we are forced to choose in favor of one of the surviving arrangements (or versions). It need hardly be mentioned that precedence must be given to the performance arrangement handed down in that source whose qualitative and historical features reveal it to be closest to Bach's original.

If we regard all four copyist's manuscripts as authentic, as Bach scholars have generally felt compelled to do, we must necessarily assume that Bach re-

Suite 1

Prélude

BWV 1007

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Ver:
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