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The Trombonist's Guide to the Unaccompanied Cello Suites of J.S. Bach

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The Six Unaccompanied Cello Suites - An Urtext Edition

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Historical Considerations

The *Unaccompanied Cello Suites* were composed in the years 1717 through 1720, during what many music historians refer to as Johann Sebastian Bach's "Second Period." This dissection of Bach's compositional career is based upon the various musical positions he held during his lifetime. The Second Period was characterized by the important instrumental works composed while Bach served as Capellmeister of Prince Leopold's court orchestra at Anhalt-Cöthen. It is suggested that Bach was inspired by the musical talents of cellists Christian Ferdinand Abel and Christian Bernhard Linigke. The cello had practically no repertoire to claim as its own in the early 1700's. The *Suites* represent the first major works for the cello as a solo instrument. Whether Bach's intention was pedagogical or performance oriented is uncertain.

While it is important to consider who Johann Sebastian Bach was and how these *Suites* came to exist, it is the essence of Bach's music that aspiring performers must try to comprehend. This can only be accomplished through careful study and listening. How does Bach incorporate his contrapuntal musical style into music written for a solo instrument? What are the characteristics of the individual dance types? How do the different interpretations of the allemandes, courantes, sarabandes, and gigues effect the music? What movements does Bach add to the traditional suite of dances and what questions are the type that trombonists need to ask and answer for themselves? The lack of historical perspective that this edition encourages, since investors must produce information that will be directly related to the music.

Theoretical Considerations

These *Suites* are primarily collections of dances, each with a structurally important harmonic movement. The key area, such as the dominant or the relative major, is emphasized. Decisions to perform the dances in a particular key, to embellish the repeated sections, are a consideration of the formal implications. The particular keys had emotional implications that should be considered. The improvisatory preludes are interesting characters, each with a deceptive cadence. The first prelude. The audience can



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Practicing the “Expressive Sixteenth Note”

The first important aspect of performing the *Suites* on the trombone is the understanding and the execution of the “expressive sixteenth note.” A careful analysis of Pablo Casals’ recordings will reveal an interpretation that includes an unevenness to the sixteenth notes. This romantic approach to the rhythmic element is crucial if a trombonist wants the *Suites* to breathe. An exercise follows that will help develop the concept of emphasizing various sixteenth notes within a flowing legato style and a steady rhythm:



Throughout the *Suites*, this type of rhythmic emphasis can be used to accent pitches of harmonic or melodic importance. This idea can also be applied to and flexibility exercises, such as the following:

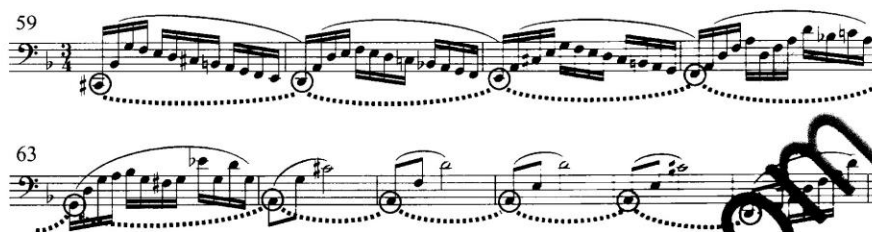


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Musical Elements Generated from the Bass Line

The bass line primarily generates the harmonic elements found in Baroque music. The ability to identify and emphasize this aspect of the music is very important. Bach used bass lines to create structure and direction to musical phrases. An example of this can be found in the climactic ending of the *Prelude* of the *Suite No. 2*:



The emphasis of bass lines, such as the one above, give the trombonist an opportunit phrase and create musical direction toward important cadential points.

The practice of this music can be greatly enhanced by the simplification based on solid musical analysis. For example, the following progression used to practice the opening phrase of the *Gigue* of the *Suite No. 4*:

a) original form, with primary bass line highlighted



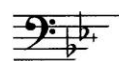
b) simplest form of the phrase



c) addition of selected notes



d) restoration of



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SUITE I

BWV. 1007

Johann Sebastian Bach

1. Prélude

1

4

7

10

13

16

19



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SUITE II

BWV. 1008

Johann Sebastian Bach

Edited by Mark L. Lusk

1. Prélude

5

9

13

17

21

24

27

30



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SUITE IV

BWV. 1010

Johann Sebastian Bach

1. Prélude

5

9

13

17

21

25



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SUITE VI

BWV. 1012

Johann Sebastian Bach

1. Prélude

4

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16

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22

25

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