

Bach's Cello Suites
Analysis and Explorations

By Allen Winold
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Reviewed by Jeffrey Solow

The first two categories of the author's target audience—cellists and other performers, teachers and students—are unambiguous; for the last—informed general readers and listeners—the operative word is “informed.” Winold illuminates many historical and general aspects of these works but a comprehensive understanding of music theory is necessary to follow most of his discussion. He is on the mark in observing that his book is for the active reader. Winold “has not sought to present a single ‘correct’ interpretation”, but to encourage “readers to consider these works from several analytical points of view and to develop their own individual insights for performance and perception.” He does, however, offer comfort to those who are unsure if their own approach is valid, whether that be a general approach or vis-à-vis a specific movement, by observing that cellists follow various tracks of interpretation and performance style. Regarding slurring, for example, he recognizes players who insist on following Anna Magdalena’s text “with great fidelity,” those who base their slurring on general principles or “on comparable passages from other Bach instrumental works,” and those who “say that slurring should be based on the performer’s conception of the composer’s intention rather than on historical authorities.” These days, he accurately recognizes, an increasing number of players seek a middle ground between historical study and personal choice.

The first of Volume I’s eight chapters, “Historical Background,” addresses the historical setting of the suites, baroque suites in general and textual sources and is followed by a chapter devoted to each movement category (i.e. The Preludes, The Allemandes, etc.) in which Winold discusses that movement of every suite. (With so much erudition, I was surprised that he states that the Sixth Suite was written for the Viola Pomposa, a long-discarded theory.) “Summaries and Conclusions” contains “salient aspects of unification” in the performance of each suite and brief discussions of performance practice, musical meaning and emotion, the implications that analysis holds for performance and suggestions for further study. Volume II includes the musical texts of

all six suites with the movements organized according to the chapters in Volume I. Each movement has several analyses—harmonic reduction, functional harmonic analysis, form analysis, etc.—plus additional specialized analyses of selected movements.

Winold's analyses are not dry and theoretical though, he relates them to interpretive options. Using functional analysis according to Reimann's system, he notes, "indicates the role each chord plays in the structural dynamics of the music—stability, preparation, tension, and release or return of stability." He points out how varying analytic points of view imply varying possibilities in performance. He cautions players that the division of a movement into sections does not mean that there should be interruptions in the flow. He also rewards readers with interesting etymological nuggets (e.g. *bariolage* comes from French "multi-colored" and the *Neapolitan* chord probably derives its name from its use in Neapolitan baroque operas). All in all, if you are a cellist looking to be stimulated rather than to be spoon-fed answers, you have come to the right place.