

Cello Suite No. 1 - Prelude

Johann Sebastian Bach

Arranged For Solo Electric Bass By Cliff Engel

Cello Tuning: CGDA

1

T
A
B

4

T
A
B

7

T
A
B

10

T
A
B

13

Musical notation for measures 13-15. The system includes a bass staff and a guitar tablature staff. The tablature staff shows fret numbers for strings T, A, and B. Measure 13: T (13, 16, 16), A (12, 12), B (13, 16, 13, 16, 16). Measure 14: T (17, 16, 14, 12), A (12), B (17, 16, 14, 12). Measure 15: T (17, 17, 17, 17, 17, 17), A (12, 12, 12), B (17, 17, 17, 17, 17, 17).

16

Musical notation for measures 16-18. The system includes a bass staff and a guitar tablature staff. Measure 16: T (15, 14, 15, 15), A (12, 16), B (12, 16, 12, 16, 16). Measure 17: T (14, 12, 14, 14), A (12, 17), B (12, 17, 12, 17, 17). Measure 18: T (15, 14, 15, 15), A (16, 16, 16), B (12, 16, 12, 16, 16, 16).

19

Musical notation for measures 19-21. The system includes a bass staff and a guitar tablature staff. Measure 19: T (14, 12, 14), A (12), B (12, 17, 16, 14, 12). Measure 20: T (14, 16, 17, 14, 16, 17), A (13, 14), B (13, 14, 13, 14, 16, 17). Measure 21: T (12, 14, 16, 12, 14, 16), A (12, 14), B (12, 14, 12, 14, 16).

22

Musical notation for measures 22-24. The system includes a bass staff and a guitar tablature staff. Measure 22: T (12, 16, 17, 17), A (12, 14), B (12, 14, 16, 17). Measure 23: T (12, 12, 14, 15, 12), A (16, 17), B (12, 14, 16, 17, 16, 17). Measure 24: T (18, 17, 16, 17, 17, 15, 14, 15, 15, 12), A (16, 14, 12), B (18, 17, 16, 17, 17, 15, 14, 15, 15, 12).

25

Musical notation for measures 25-27. The system includes a bass staff and a guitar tablature staff. Measure 25: T (12, 14, 15, 12, 14), A (12, 17, 12), B (12, 14, 16, 17, 12, 14, 16). Measure 26: T (12, 14, 12, 16, 13, 12, 13, 12), A (12, 18), B (12, 14, 16, 17, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18). Measure 27: T (12, 16, 17, 16), A (14, 17), B (12, 14, 16, 17, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18).

Performance Notes

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750) is the most highly revered composer of the German baroque era. He is considered by most music historians to be among the greatest musical geniuses, improvisers, and prolific composers in the history of western-based music. Throughout his lifetime, Bach was more acknowledged as an organist than as a composer, and for many decades after his death, Bach's compositions were largely ignored. It wasn't until the 19th century that his real musical genius came to be recognized, particularly by romantic era composers such as Mendelssohn and Schumann. Since that time, Bach's popularity has steadily grown. Throughout his musical career, Bach maintained three significant posts: court organist and orchestral director in Weimar (1708-17), court orchestral director at Köthen (1717-23), and cantor (municipal composer) in Leipzig (1723-45). It was during his time spent as the orchestral director at Köthen that he composed some of his greatest secular instrumental works including the cello suites.

Practically every great cellist of the past century has recorded Bach's six suites for solo cello. Up to the early decades of the twentieth century, Bach's cello suites remained virtually undiscovered. Sometimes cellists used them as technical fingering exercises but never performed them in public. It wasn't until the 1930's that the legendary Spanish cellist Pablo Casals resurrected Bach's cello suites from obscurity with the first definitive recording of the suites. Since then, the cello suites have become among Bach's most favored works and required repertoire for all cellists.

After hearing world renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma's recording of Bach's six suites for solo cello, my first attempt at performing Bach's "Prelude in G Major" from the first suite on electric bass in standard tuning began in 1992. It wasn't long before I recognized that the cello suites just didn't sound as good as they did when performed on cello. In 1993, I began studying cello which I continued for the next two years. During that time, I realized the difference in resonance was due in large part to the tuning of the cello.

Cello Tuning:

As you know, a 4-string electric bass is tuned in fourths, and standard tuning for the open strings is E-A-D-G (low to high). Cellos are tuned in fifths, C-G-D-A (low to high). When analyzing recordings of Bach's cello suites, you will hear that the open strings play a significant factor in their overall sonority. The cello suites can be played on a 4-string electric bass in standard tuning, but to attain the often sustained resonance of the open strings, the cello suites should be played in cello tuning. Note the harmonic tension created by allowing the open G-string to ring extensively throughout the first 5 measures. In addition, the cello suites are much easier to play in cello tuning because in standard tuning on electric bass, they require many awkward fingerings which are virtually eliminated in cello tuning. Over the years, many attempts have been made at arranging the cello suites for various instruments, but the best interpretations are still performed and recorded on instruments utilizing cello tuning.

Cello tuning can be easily achieved using standard gauge bass strings without the worry of placing unnecessary tension on your instrument. In order to perform this arrangement, you will need to modify three of the four strings on a 4-string electric bass in standard tuning. First, raise the open G-string a whole step to A. The standard G-string will be the only string that you will need to raise in pitch. The D-string will remain the same. Next, lower the open A-string a whole step to G. Finally, detune the open E-string two whole steps to C. There are many advantages to tuning your bass in fifths, especially for playing solo bass. For a detailed analysis of the benefits of utilizing altered tunings, please refer to previous articles I have written regarding this subject.

Capo:

After you have tuned your bass to cello tuning, you will need to place a capo across all four strings at the 12th fret. By playing the "Prelude in G Major" in the second octave of the fingerboard (between the 12th and 24th frets), you will be performing this work in the same range as it is heard on cello. Whenever you see the 12th fret indicated in the tablature of this arrangement, you will play the open string which will now be stopped at the 12th fret by the capo.

Technique:

From a technical point of view, this arrangement is easy to play utilizing a fingerstyle picking method which includes your thumb, index, and middle fingers.

Interpretation:

Within the standard notation and tablature of this arrangement, I have only included the notes and indicated the positions where those notes should be played. The cello suites are among Bach's most adapted and recorded works, and each time they are performed, they are phrased slightly different. Usually, the same artist never plays a cello suite in the exact same fashion twice. Solo bassist Michael Manring plays a version of Bach's "Prelude In G Major" in live performances which is similar to this arrangement. I have also included a few of my favorite renditions of the cello suites below both in cello and standard tunings. When listening to these recordings, you will hear how each of these artists has interpreted these solo pieces.

Recommended Recordings:

Yo-Yo Ma - *Bach: The 6 Unaccompanied Cello Suites*

Pablo Casals - *Bach Cello Suites*

John Patitucci - *Heart Of The Bass*

Gary Karr - *J.S. Bach Solo Suites*

Edgar Meyer - *Unaccompanied Bach Cello Suites*