

Humanities Seminar Program

J. S. Bach's *Six Suites for Solo Cello*

Fall 2022, Mondays from 6:00-8:00 PM

October 31, Nov. 7, 14, and 21

Instructor:

Theodore Buchholz, D.M.A.
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Course Summary:

This four-week course will explore the cello's magnum opus, J. S. Bach's *Six Suites for Solo Cello*. Through these six masterpieces we will discuss Bach's life in the 1720s, analyze the compositional ingenuity, examine Baroque musical forms, and delve into the fascinating lore that has emerged around the *Suites*. As we traverse this repertoire, we will also trace the broader trends that have shaped music and culture. These two-hour sessions will feature live performances by Theodore Buchholz and the outstanding cellists from the University of Arizona Cello Studio.

Suggested Reading and Listening:

Chapters and articles will be uploaded to the learning portal. Registered students will receive the link to that site to download the readings closer to the beginning of the course. While these readings are not necessary to enjoy or understand the course content, these sources will help to broaden the course's context.

Course Readings and Lecture Topics

Week 1: In the Beginning

Reading to be completed before Oct. 31:

Eric Soblin, Chapters 1-3 of *J. S. Bach, Pablo Casals, and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece*

The lecture will offer an overview of the entire four week course and will include:

- Bach's historical background;
- The cello's origins and early examples of Baroque literature;
- An examination of urtextual issues;
- The anatomy of the Baroque dance suite; and
- A live performance of Bach's *Suite I in G Major*.

Week 2: *Joys and Sorrows*

Reading to be completed before Nov. 7:

Steven Isserlis, Pages 69-88 of *The Bach Cello Suites: A Companion*

The lecture will include:

- Exploring Bach's life in 1720s Cöthen;
- Discussing the association of key signature as topos;
- Examining various performance styles and interpretive decisions; and
- Live performances of Bach's *Suite II and Suite III*.

Week 3: *Anomalies*

Reading to be completed before Nov. 7:

Douglas Hofstadter, Pages 1-17 of *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid*

This lecture will examine:

- The fundamental anomalies of *Suite IV and Suite V*;
- Further nuances in the Baroque dance suite;
- The importance of the fugue; and
- Live performances of Bach's *Suite IV and Suite V*.

Week 4: *It's Not the End*

The fourth lecture will offer a summation and conclusion of the four-week course and include:

- Comparisons and discussions of the eminent recordings and interpretations;
- Live performance of Bach's *Suite VI*; and
- The future of solo cello repertoire.

Instructor Biography

Theodore Buchholz is the cello professor at the University of Arizona. Described by critics as a "virtuosic cellist" with a "beautiful, warm sound," he has recorded for Centaur, Toccata, and Lorelt Records, and he performs internationally as soloist and chamber musician. Dr. Buchholz served as the Cello Forum Editor for the journal *American String Teacher*. A fervent believer in the power of music education to transform lives, he is the Director of the University of Arizona String Project.