



A²SO PRESENTS:
NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

J.S. Bach Cello Suite No. 3

Geon-Yong Lee Song in the Dusk II

Notes by Benajmin Tisherman & Caroline Kim

Online Performance

Available 8.28.20

Caroline Kim, cello



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Johann Sebastian Bach - Cello Suite No. 3 in C Major

Bach's Six Cello Suites are some of the best known and frequently recorded pieces of music ever composed for the cello. Bach wrote them during an extremely prolific period while he was employed as *Kapellmeister* in the court of Cöthen. Prince Leopold, a musician himself, appreciated Bach's talents as a composer. However, Leopold was also a Calvinist, meaning he had to forbid elaborate music from being played in the church. Consequently, most of Bach's output from this time is secular, including the six Brandenburg concertos, a great many pieces for keyboard, and, of course, the cello suites. Each suite follows a similar structure, loosely based around movements of the dance suite.

An integral part of the cello repertoire, the suites have a fascinating history of publication and performance. Although Bach's autograph manuscript of them is lost, we do have two surviving copies in Anna Magdalena Bach's hand. These editions bear few indications of tempo or articulation, meaning that many musical details—including notes, rhythms, slurs, and other markings—are up for debate. Today, over 100 printed editions of the cello suites exist, each reflecting a performer or editor's attempt to solve these issues of interpretation.

Fortunately for listeners, the lack of consensus in musical minutiae has resulted in a diverse array of recordings by celebrated cellists. These varied interpretations range from Janós Starker's straightforward 1962 recording to Yo-Yo Ma's 1998 project *Inspired by Bach*, in which the cellist performs the six suites in a series of films, each showing a collaboration with artists of various disciplines.

Bach's Cello Suite No. 3 in C Major remains one of the most frequently performed in the set. The descending C-major scale in the opening of the Prelude is both a prominent motive of this movement and a unifying feature of the suite as a whole. Listen for the consistent pedal note "G" in the middle of the movement, a nod to Bach's organist background. The melody meanders in stepwise motion in a flowing stream of sixteenth notes, leading to a harmonically satisfying resolution.

The Allemande again features that descending C-major scale, this time in a snappy rhythm that gives the movement a noble, stately character. The third movement Courante, from the French “to run,” achieves a sense of perpetual motion with constant eighth notes moving throughout. Then, a slower, almost ceremonious Sarabande follows, showcasing the natural warmth and resonance of the cello’s range. In contrast to the first and second suite, the third suite features a fifth movement bourrée rather than a minuet. The entire suite concludes with a jaunty, vivacious Gigue. It is filled with conversational elements--melodic figures that bounce between the upper and lower registers--building in excitement to one final, joyous C-major chord.

--Benjamin Tisherman

Geon-Yong Lee — Song in the Dusk II

Korean composer and founder of the group *The Third Generation*, Geon-Yong Lee is devoted to creating music that represents the unique identities of Third World countries. Although present day South Korea is not considered a Third World country, after the Japanese Forced Occupation (1910-1945), and the Korean War (1950-1953), the country was constantly struggling to recover. *The Third Generation* was founded in the early 80s and Lee’s generation was directly influenced by after-war effects during this time. Lee rejected the modernist aesthetic that was becoming popular in Korea in the 80s, feeling that contemporary trends were confining his musicality. He focused on the beauty of lyricism and creating emotional music rather than sound effects. As a living composer, his goal is always to share stories of life through his music.

Song in the Dusk II is the second in a series of two works, the first written for the clarinet a few months earlier. Both pieces aim to speak to the hearts of Korean people by expressing an emotion called *Han*. The meaning of this word is a complex combination of sorrow, loneliness, and anguish. It can be described as the anger and pain of being falsely accused but having to remain silent. Lee illustrates this emotion in his music by imitating the sound of traditional Korean instruments.

He explains that this piece is an image of “an old Korean scholar searching for the meaning of life at dusk.” The music starts with a low held “G” which continues to be a drone and tonal center throughout the piece. Lee creates oriental sounds by using free meter, grace notes, trills, repeated notes, and unexpected intervals such as minor 2nds and augmented 3rds. The many long rests that separate sections of this through-composed piece can be interpreted as the silence or pause while one is lost in thought, “searching for the meaning of life.” The piece concludes with a coda-like harmonic passage, which is thought to reflect enlightenment.

--Caroline Kim