

**CMP Teaching Plan for the
Prelude to Suite No. 1 in G Major, BWV 1007
by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Prepared by Cornelia Watkins**



Instrumentation Solo Cello

Publisher A vast number of editions are available, but Barenreiter is recommended for its scholarship, readability, and spare edits, leaving room for analysis and individual interpretation.

ANALYSIS

Broad Description This Prelude is the first of six movements of the first of six cello suites – the introduction to the entire set composed for cello solo. It is accessible and memorable at first hearing as it is complex on multiple levels – the more you hear it the more you want to hear it again; the more you explore, the more you find.

Type/Genre In all the Suites, Bach begins with a through-composed, almost fantasia-like Prelude that establishes the key and the overall mood of the five dance movements that follow. The music is complete without accompaniment, as the cello “accompanies” itself with embedded voices and harmonies, created with double-stop writing, chords, and linear outlines of the harmonies through scales, triads, and distinct leaps to the bass notes.

Background Information The Cello Suites are believed to have been composed 1717-1723 (as were the Partitas and Sonatas for Solo Violin) when Bach was in his 30's while employed by Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. The set of six suites seem to have been fully conceived (if not composed) in progressive order, as the keys create an overall emotional contour (G Major, D Minor, C Major/ Eb Major, C minor, D Major) and composed with increasing technical challenges and expressive sophistication. Bach's first wife Maria Barbara died during this time (in 1720), his grief perhaps influencing the dark and deeply melancholy fifth suite.

Additional Information No autograph manuscripts have been found to date and are assumed forever lost; the primary manuscripts are those copied by Bach's acquaintance and admirer Johann Peter Kellner (dated 1726) and by his second wife, Anna Magdalena (approximately 1727-1731).

Elements of Music (see full analysis chart next page)

- *Form* Through-composed, although clearly divided into two sections by a fermata, and rolling chords of first section used in last phrase, giving a sense of return to the first section.
- *Rhythm* Primarily running sixteenth notes, with a few notable exceptions at the fermata in m. 22 and the eighth note low D in m.29.
- *Melody* While not inherently melodic, there are snippets of melodic shapes throughout, and the opening five measures offer a beautiful example of voice leading that can be found throughout the Suites.
- *Harmony* G Major regularly toying with D Major in the first half, and primarily D Major second section, suspending the return to G major that fully resolves only in the final chord.
- *Timbre* This Prelude primarily utilizes the cello's comfortable middle register, but even so, Bach utilizes the lowest register to darken the sound into the second half, and the upper pedals of A and D in the second section to vary the color from the initial “comfortable” pedal G.
- *Texture* Open rolling chords give way to scales, arpeggios and virtuosic *bariolage* in the second.
- *Expression* Bach included no dynamics or tempi in his Suites, therefore the performer must respond to the tension and release inherent in the harmonic progressions to enhance the expressive nature of the music. Bach also uses expanded intervals for added expression, and the regular use of the G pedal in the first section juxtaposed to its notable absence in the second makes the resolution of the movement decidedly satisfying. The performer, privy to this compositional “secret” can help enhance the effect.

Additional Considerations

- *Baroque articulations and bowing* Many editions call for pure legato bowing throughout most of the Prelude; however, even a brief education Baroque stringed instruments (including bows, gut strings, and lack of endpin) makes us aware that long sustained bow strokes were simply not possible, and that shorter slurs and lighter, freer, articulation are stylistically much more appropriate. Even if Baroque performance practice isn't of primary concern, long slurs tend to homogenize Bach's exquisite voicing, whereas articulations closer to those in the manuscript can enhance them.

ELEMENTS OF MUSIC | PRELUDE TO FIRST BACH SUITE IN G MAJOR

section	mm.	harmony	rhythm	melody	timbre	texture	expression	other
A	1-4	I-IV-vii-I over G Pedal	  	Continuous 16 th notes	Upper voice "melody" is neighbor tones: B-A-B; C-B-C, etc. Middle voice leading: D,E,F#,G,F#,E→	Low G on strong beats (1 or 3) occurs 15 times in A section	Rolling cross-string chords	Pedal G clearly establishes tonality and creates stability
	5	vi		→D, C#,D	Open A-string alternation foreshadows bariolage section in B			
	6-8	A ⁷ /DM/e min						
	9-10	A ⁷ /DM						
	11-14	G#°/a min D#°/e min						
	15-19	Dominant 7 chords (D7, G7) CM, F#°, GM over G pedal						
	20-21	A ⁶ ₅ (C# in Bass) D ² (C in Bass)						
	22	D7 (C in bass)—made ambiguous with leading tone C# to →		D fermata	2 octave + whole step span: low C natural to D above middle C stretches music—that plus tonal ambiguity creates high-tension set-up for cascade of notes that follows			
B <small>(Sometimes performed as cadenza)</small>	22-24	Scale/arpeggio sequence outlining D ⁹	Continuous 16 th notes	Scale/triad ascending pattern arches upward then falls	Then low G pedal goes missing, and does not occur again in root position G chord...	Sweeping scales, arpeggios and written-out turns replace cross-string rolling chords of first section, creating a distinctly different feel		
	25-28	D/G ⁶ ₄ /A/D Ending in D Major scale =	Upper note reaches C, then C#, finally arriving on D					
	29-31	Full cadence in D on downbeat; but immediate introduction of C second eighth note moves harmony forward	Eighth note downbeat arrival on D, then 16 th notes continue...					
	31-36	A pedal	D string melody "echos" 3 times, then climbs upward, falling back to low D twice but persevering to upper D, then gently descends again					
	37-38	Chromatic scale over D pedal	chromatic					
A ¹	39-41	G major: I ⁶ ₄ , susp. A, D ⁷			...until final bar!			Return of tonic and rolling cross-string chords like beginning, but still second inversion.
	42	GM root position						Satisfaction guaranteed.

Reasons to Perform this Composition:

By the time my students are in middle school, they have heard the Prelude to the first Suite and they want to play *that* piece, so when their teachers agree they are ready to learn it, it is a genuine rite of passage for young cellists. Teachers can capitalize on this “coming of age” moment to help students understand the Suites from the inside out, rather than simply offering them a superficial pass through the notes.

The Heart Statement: The cross-string undulations of sixteenth notes over a pedal welcome and comfort as they propel us forward, gradually shifting us away from that familiarity until we realize we’re nearly lost, then leads us along a winding and colorful path “so close yet so far” from home that our return satisfies not just our ears but our souls.

TEACHING PLAN

Introducing the Piece (as strategy) “Absence makes the heart grow fonder” – Think of a time you were denied something that you might have taken for granted – you assumed that it would always be there, and then when it wasn’t you realized how much it meant to you – or perhaps you didn’t realize how much you missed it until you got it back. How might a composer create this feeling in a piece of music?

Skill Outcome: Student will perform groups of notes with flow and direction.

1. Strategies
 - a. Listen to a G (or D) major scale played two different ways (each note unto itself/notes that flow together). Which sounds like the notes belong together? Why?
 - b. Using shapes and colors, create a variety of visual groupings. Have student clap, gesture, then play those groupings with a single pitch on cello.
 - c. Continue to explore a variety of ways to create a single shape with a group of notes in a scale: running one note into another (legato); making them sound the same (any articulation); creating dynamic shapes (crescendos, diminuendos); subtle adjustments to rhythm and timing (rubato)
 - d. Learn a chromatic scale (G to second octave G) and practice with similar sense of flow.
 - e. String crossings (broken chords) and Arpeggios – which utilize skips and therefore more string crossings. Since changing strings can create inadvertent gaps, practice rolling bow across the strings in one gesture, then same arpeggio with separate bow; also practice keeping bow close to adjacent string so that string crossings need minimal movement. Use visuals to show possibility of overlapping notes.
 - f. How does the left hand contribute to the flow of the notes? (Curved fingers over the string; extensions prepared in advance; chords prepared in advance of bow.)
2. Assessments
 - a. Student demonstrates a variety of possible dynamic and rubato choices in the scales and arpeggios in the Prelude.
 - b. Student demonstrates good left hand technique with hand shapes that are ready to play the upcoming notes and in chord preparation
 - c. Student demonstrates not only flow of individual groupings, but can connect one grouping to another without losing distinct qualities of each.

Knowledge Outcome: Student will learn the basics of score analysis, including harmonic function, form and compositional devices.

1. Strategies

- a. **Harmony and Function Worksheet:** Guide the student through these steps (this can be accomplished in one lesson, over a series of lessons, or as homework assignments, depending on student’s understanding and “absorption rate”) while creating a reference worksheet:
 - i. Write the **triads** over each note of a one-octave G Major scale (keep it simple: line/line/line or space/space/space).
 - ii. Label each with a Roman numeral. Then play each triad, and listen to whether each is **major**, **minor**, or **diminished**. Discover which **intervals** create the qualities of each type of chord, and then adjust the Roman numeral of minor/dim triads to lower case.
 - iii. Identify the Leading Tone (L.T.) of the seventh step.
 - iv. Add the concept of 7 chords (V⁷ and vii^{o7}) and explore the similarities between these chords.

- v. Label I “**Tonic**”; V “**Dominant**” – Play **roots** of chords I – V – I
- vi. Add IV “**Subdominant**” – Play roots of chords I – IV – V – I
- vii. Explore similarities between VI and ii, then add ii – Play I – ii – V – I
- viii. Explore similarities between I and vi, and add to progression – Play I – IV – V – iv – ii – V – I. Discuss what happens to the progression when the iv chord is included (it necessarily extends the progression), and the unexpected quality it lends to a phrase that seemed to be leading toward a resolution.
- b. **Harmony Worksheet Part II: chord inversions.** Have student choose a chord and reorder notes, play the revised spelling (on piano if available). Does the chord change its essential character and function when the notes are shuffled? Then restack the chords into triad form. Write inversions for student to be rearranged back into triads and identify chord; Give student a take-home worksheet of inverted chords for practice.
- c. **Respell first three notes of each of the first four measures.** Analyze first phrase of Prelude by identifying triads and functions. Introduce the concept of “**Dissonance**” and “**pedal point**.” Continue analysis through 5th measure to discover a **vi** chord.
- d. Look at the 3-part **voicing** in opening bars. Which voice is least active, and which is most active? How far can the voice leading be traced?
- e. **Leading tones and accidentals:** When composers want to establish another key, or draw to music toward a new chord, a new leading tone will be added that is often NOT in the key; this means we will likely see an accidental added to the music. Circle the accidentals, and predict what the next chord will be.
- f. **Expanded intervals** – Simple intervals or chord inversions can be expanded as widely as a composer wishes – Bach often uses this as a way of creating expressive energy. Student finds the measures that has the largest expanded intervals, and explores how each example creates musical tension.
- g. **Form:**
 - i. Where are the big sections in the Prelude? Where is the end of the first phrase? Are there other obvious phrase endings?
 - ii. Where is the only eighth note? What happens there?
 - iii. Count the low G’s (open string) that occur on a strong beat (beat one or beat three) How many happen before the fermata? How many after the hold? (Introducing the piece strategy)
- h. **Sequence:**
 - i. Define sequence as a series of note groupings that shifts upwards or downwards but retains a distinct intervallic pattern. (11□4, 10□3, 9□2, 8□)
 - ii. How many sequences can the student find? How does Bach use these sequences to make the music predictable and then unpredictable?

2. Assessment

- a. Over a series of lessons student uses a copy of the score to analyze harmonies and find examples of other elements.
- b. Student creates a list of terminology, including form, harmony, voice leading, sequence, leading tones, scale, arpeggio, tonic, major, minor, etc. Have student define or explain each, and find examples of each in repertoire besides the Prelude (either subsequent movements or pieces by other composers).

Affective Outcome: Students will discover the meaning of personal interpretation through a combination of compositional understanding and individual sensibilities.

1. Strategies

- a. Consider the prelude as a kind of “journey” with **I** (Tonic) as home, where you are most relaxed or resolved; **V⁷** (Dominant seventh) yearns for resolution; **IV** (subdominant) (or substituted **ii**) is one step farther away from resolution than the dominant, as it usually must move through **V⁷** to resolve to tonic; Explore these sensibilities with the first phrase, experimenting with possible dynamics and timings to create tension and resolution.
- b. Explore the experience of a **vi** (often a surprise, like an unexpected extension to our journey, or perhaps like thinking we’re home and then discovering we turned into the wrong driveway).

- c. How do you react to something unexpected? **Accidentals**, especially when first introduced, are often a surprise, like interesting and unexpected sights along a journey, to be specially noted or lingered over.
- d. Dissonance is like any “problems” in life, where people react differently at different times – angry, frightened, withdrawn, shocked, etc. – choose a different reaction for the dissonances.
- e. Explore the difference between **vii^{o7}** (Diminished seventh) and dominant seventh (minor thirds and resulting extra leading tone usually evokes more intense and/or mysterious responses).
- f. Large intervals create tension and energy, like stretching a rubber band or having a personal sense of “being stretched” understanding has crystalized or resolution is reached. Find the measures with the largest intervals, and experiment with musical approaches that enhance the experience.
- g. Play each sequence in the Prelude – what is the function of each, and the feeling that each evokes? How will you express these sensibilities in your performance? (timing/dynamics)
- h. After discovering how many low G's are in the first section, and how few in the second, have students consider their own responses to the introductory question about being denied something familiar and comforting, and how good it feels to get it back. Look again at the sequence in mm.29-31 – what is Bach doing here? Do you think he is toying with the listener? How will you handle that moment when he pulls out of the sequence just before the resolution to G?

2. Assessment

- a. Student’s interpretation of the piece demonstrates responsiveness to the harmonies, sequences, and form.
- b. Student can discuss reasons behind musical choices...OR
- c. Student creates a short story that reflects the journey experienced.

Music Selection – The first suite is the most technically accessible of all the suites, since it is in a comfortable key and utilizes notes in first through fourth positions only. Because these suites move progressively towards higher levels of technical and emotional sophistication, the first Suite provides a golden opportunity to introduce developing students to the language of Bach. In order to explore the music deeply, students should find the notes relatively easy to read and have the patience for guided analysis – the fluidity skills and resulting interpretation just make it more rewarding to play. Once this is achieved with the Prelude, we set a wonderful precedent of digging deeply into each subsequent movement, allowing our students to dance (both literally and figuratively) with one of the most brilliant composers who ever lived, and form a life-long appreciation of Bach and his music.