

J.S. Bach - The Four Lute Suites on Guitar (1975)

Wpisany przez bluesever

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Suite No. 1 in E minor for Lute, BWV 996 1. *I. Passaggio - Presto* 2:36 2. *II. Allemande* 2:00
3. *III. Courante* 2:35 4. *IV. [Sarabande]* 3:03 5. *V. Bourrée* 1:13 6. *VI. [Gigue]* 2:47

Suite (Partita) in A minor, BWV 997 (originally in C minor)

7. *I. Preludio - Fuga* 9:24 8. *II. Sarabande* 3:48 9. *III. Gigue - Double* 3:53

Lute Suite No. 4 in E Major, BWV 1006a

10. *I. Prélude* 4:28 11. *II. Loure* 3:36 12. *III. Gavotte en Rondeau* 2:48 13. *IV. Menuetts I & II* 4:19 14. *V. Bourrée* 1:50 15. *VI. Gigue* 2:04

Suite in A minor for Lute, BWV 995

16. *I. Präludium - Presto* 5:19 17. *II. Allemande* 3:08 18. *III. Courante* 2:04 19. *IV. Sarabande* 3:54 20. *V. Gavotte I & II* 4:10 21. *VI. Gigue* 2:15

John Williams – guitar

Most relish the opportunity to visit and renew associations with old friends who, through prevailing circumstances, have become neglected.

Among this writer's long-time old friends are the four works by J.S. Bach collectively known as 'The Four Suites for Lute'. The review disc provided ample incentive to again listen to several favoured recordings of these works.

Much has changed, especially in the world of the classical guitar since 34 year-old John Williams, recorded this music in 1974-75. The 'king's throne' was permanently occupied by Andrés Segovia, then 82 years of age. Some years earlier Segovia had bestowed on Williams the epithet 'prince of the guitar' and the young prince was one of a few concert guitarists who were internationally renowned.

Three decades later there are now numerous concert guitarists who play to such high standards; had they been contemporary with John Williams the ebullience of Segovia may have been less effusive (see the DVD *Andrès Segovia in Portrait* previously reviewed here). In the notes accompanying this disc an excerpt from the magazine *Stereo Review* appears: 'There are many fine guitarists before the public today but I doubt very much that any of them can match the virtuosity John Williams displays...'

One must assume that this pertains to the original release of the disc (1975) when some would question its premise; if current it is ill-informed.

While the four works BWV 995, 996, 997 and 1006a are collectively referred to as 'The Lute Suites' only in one, BWV 995, is the instrument intended by the composer clear. Bach's autographed manuscript written between 1727 and 1731 bears the designation 'Pièces pour la Luth à Monsieur Schouster'. Unidiomatic elements are found in all the Suites and this does not assist in resolving the question of instrumentation for the remaining three, however this very characteristic lends them to adaptation, especially for the guitar.

Bach, a master of arrangement and adaptation, used the Fifth Suite for Unaccompanied Cello, BWV 1011, as the basis for BWV 995, and some would suggest is an improvement over the superb original. BWV 1006a is derived from the Partita for Unaccompanied Violin, BWV 1006.

These four Suites, played on both lute and classical guitar, are well represented in the recorded music catalogue. If one considers only the complete Suites the field narrows.

In addition to the review disc, better known versions for guitar include Göran Söllscher (DG 445 563-2 - 1981) and Sharon Isbin (Virgin Classics VC 7 90717-2 - 1989). Julian Bream has also recorded these Suites at various times, e.g. (EMI 5 55123 2 - 1992) which includes BWV 996 and 1006a. Paul Galbraith (Delos DE 3258 - 2000) recorded BWV 995, 996, and 997. BWV 1006a appears separately on Delos 3232. There are countless recordings of the various individual Suites including a very memorable one of BWV 1006a by Ana Vidovic (Naxos 8.554563 - 1999).

In his 1975 recording John Williams used a standard six-string guitar. No mention is made of the luthier who constructed the instrument but the accompanying photograph suggests Ignatio Fleta. Göran Söllscher used an eleven-string alto guitar by Georg Bolin and Paul Galbraith an eight-string instrument by David Rubio.

Segovia was never enthusiastic about additional strings on the guitar, however the enhanced bass register, particularly in the Söllscher recording is especially pleasing.

The recording quality of the review disc is excellent and the tonal colours and strength that Williams extracts from his instrument bear the hallmark of a master guitarist.

John Williams is a superb technician and justifiably deserves the accolades heaped on him during his long career. His rendition of these works is most authoritative and executed with admirable fluidity. Musically, dryness emerges in some of the movements; one's foot loses desire to respond and only then does the mind drift to alternative versions.

The musicianship of Julian Bream is hard to beat and a testimony of this can be quickly gained by comparing his rendition of the Allemande from BWV 996 with the aforementioned versions. Interestingly an earlier version by Bream (1965) and included in compilation RCA VD 60494 (1990) contains a different arrangement that employs higher registers in the second section (Bream arr. commencing measure 5). This is particularly beautiful and, in the opinion of this writer, unfortunately later abandoned.

Overall this writer's preferred version of the Four Suites is that by Göran Söllscher. The reading is excellent, execution faultless and instrumentation uniquely relevant. For an unparalleled experience in Lute Suite pyrotechnics no one matches Ana Vidovic. While the slow movements are most expressively executed the speed at which Vidovic performs the Prelude (BWV 1006a), albeit with magnificent clarity and precision, can be gauged from the following timings: Vidovic [3:22]; Williams [4:27]; Isbin [4:23]; Söllscher [5:08]. It would be quite an experience to hear her play the complete cycle and this may find its way to the head of the preferred list?

There is no one best recording of these works, but this version by John Williams has earned a well-deserved place among the favoured few. ---Zane Turner, musicweb-international.com

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