



**JS BACH**

**Cello Suites Nos 1-6, BWV 1007-1012**

Viola de Hoog (cello)

Vivat VIVAT107 134:08 mins (2 discs)

**BBC Music Direct** £13.99

Dutch period-instrument musician Viola de Hoog has played at the highest level for three decades before undertaking the cellist's 'rite of passage': recording JS Bach's six Cello Suites. The CD liner notes comprise a scholarly and informative essay by Greta Haenen on the later 17th-century emergence of the cello, and de Hoog's own musings on the Suites. But the most tantalising questions – the improvisatory 'Stylus Fantasticus' of the Preludes; the dances' distant echoes of their functional origins; the sheer technical challenge of this summit of the cellist's repertoire – all these are magnificently answered in de Hoog's playing.

The Prelude of the First Suite is unusually spacious, its arpeggiated harmony building up unhurriedly. The Fourth's Prelude is almost suffocated by its lack of open-string resonance as it plunges into extreme keys. In the Fifth, which is really a French Overture in disguise, the fugal second section flows with nonchalant ease.

But it's in the dances that de Hoog is outstanding. They retain their essential character – the paired Minuets (Suites Nos 1 & 2), Bourrées (3 & 4) and Gavottes (5 & 6) sustain their common tempos, for instance – but they're full of nuances in rhythm and phrasing. Allemandes vary from lively and light-footed (No. 5) to deeply pensive, almost timeless (in the Sixth Suite, incidentally the longest of all 36 movements).

The playing is full of understated imaginative detail. And de Hoog stands virtually alone in playing the final Gigue (for five-string cello) without any significant distortion of the lively 6/8 pulse as she negotiates multiple-stopped chords with consummate ease.

Fine original period instruments – a Guadagnini from 1750 for Suites Nos 1-5, and a Bohemian five-string cello from c1780 for Suite No. 6 – and bows, and first-class recording, put this among the very best of the 42 versions I find I've accumulated over the years. *George Pratt*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★