



Illustration by Peter Nappi

J.S. Bach

Prelude of Cello Suite #4 for Piano Solo
Transcription by Eleonor Bindman

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Notes on the transcription

Thank you for your interest in my work. This “bonus” edition of J.S. Bach’s Cello Suite #4 transcribed for piano solo has almost no editorial markings, in the spirit of an “urtext” edition. I believe that Bach’s music needs few indications because he speaks for himself like no other composer. These notes are intended to provide some context through observations of what is already in the text.

There are no dynamics in the score nor metronome markings. As I was learning the Suites, my interpretive choices evolved and they are likely to continue evolving. Of course, decisions had to be made before the recording from the performance standpoint: considering each Suite as a whole yet also as a part of a cycle. The prescribed Baroque character of the dance movements (the Preludes are essentially improvisatory) implies somewhat traditional tempi and energy levels. Yet Bach stretches the limits of dance forms here so most of these movements will sound good at any tempo/dynamic level and serve as great finger-building exercises, structural studies and satisfying musical experiences. I do give some speed indications in the notes below but feel free to pencil in your own as you get more intimate with the music. Dynamics often depend on one’s mood or can (and often should) change upon repeats, so experiment with those as well. The division of one melodic line between the two hands was guided by logistical ease and distinction of counterpoint but it isn’t written in stone. I strongly encourage embellishing repeats for developing your own taste and judgment; the best path is trial and error after listening to recordings. Rosalyn Tureck is a great source of wisdom on the subject. Lastly, since this music employs a lower register of the keyboard, do adjust your sitting position for proper alignment.



Cello Suite #4 marks the beginning of the second half of the 6-Suite cycle, the last 3 Suites being longer, more complex and more difficult to perform. While somewhat awkward for a string player, the key of E-flat gains idiomatic and expressive facility on a keyboard.

The Prelude of Suite 4 sounds almost “Romantic” on the piano and is best described by a somewhat overused adjective “beautiful.” What exactly makes it so? Hard to explain, but these arpeggios descending from far above, often traversing 2 octaves, feel like a gentle stream of kindness, of heavenly grace enveloping us all. The 16-note episodes are clouds passing through, only to return us back to equilibrium. This Prelude perfectly illustrates an important “trade secret” of J. S. Bach: starting a pattern on the second note of a measure, instead of on the first one. This compositional device, whether used intentionally or not, is the key to that singular “endless” quality of much of his music, shifting the emphasis from the downbeats of each measure.

Prelude

Piano transcription
by E. Bindman

from Cello Suite #4

J.S. Bach

6

11

16

21

26

Two staves of music in bass clef, key of B-flat major. The upper staff features a continuous eighth-note melody. The lower staff has a sparse accompaniment with rests and occasional eighth notes.

31

Two staves of music in bass clef, key of B-flat major. The upper staff continues the eighth-note melody. The lower staff has a sparse accompaniment with rests and occasional eighth notes.

36

Two staves of music in bass clef, key of B-flat major. The upper staff continues the eighth-note melody. The lower staff has a sparse accompaniment with rests and occasional eighth notes. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' and a '2' below it.

41

Two staves of music in bass clef, key of B-flat major. The upper staff continues the eighth-note melody. The lower staff has a sparse accompaniment with rests and occasional eighth notes.

46

Two staves of music in bass clef, key of B-flat major. The upper staff continues the eighth-note melody. The lower staff has a sparse accompaniment with rests and occasional eighth notes. A sharp sign is placed below the final note of the lower staff.

50

3 3 3

53

58

rit.

ad libitum, quasi improvvisando

1 4 1 3

3 1 3 4

61

tr.

meno mosso

66

ad libitum, quasi improvvisando

71

75

continuare quasi improvvisando

79

a tempo

83

88

tempo ad libitum al fine

tr