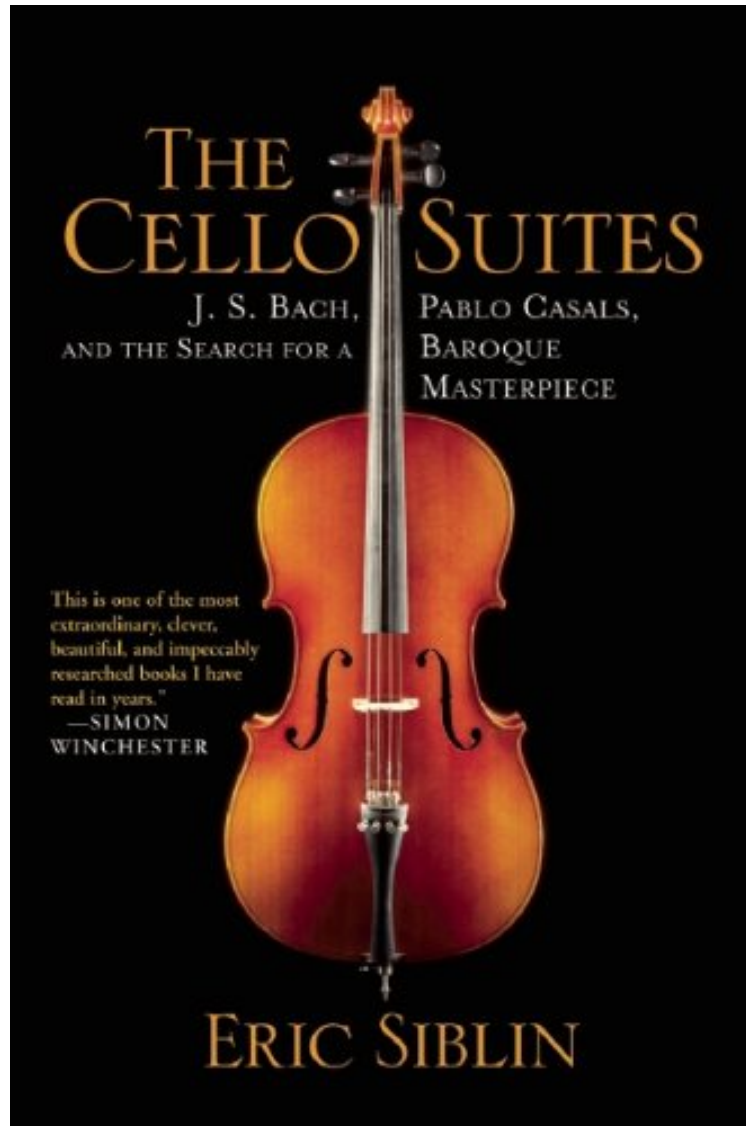


## The Cello Suites: J. S. Bach, Pablo Casals, and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece

*Eric Siblin*

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**Eric Siblin : The Cello Suites: J. S. Bach, Pablo Casals, and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Cello Suites: J. S. Bach, Pablo Casals, and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Kiss for the Cinderella of InstrumentsBy Song BirdThis book was so entertaining that I read it in one sitting. Eric Siblin, a former popular music critic, really rocked it on the cello and

wove together the stories of Bach and Pablo Casals and The Cello Suites in a very clever and informative book for the general reader. It is fun to read and I really enjoyed it. If you love the cello, you must read it. The book is a light read, but not lacking in research and thought. Musicologists might pick up some errors in it, but his exploration into the world of classical music and approach to the subject is original. Since this is the author's journey into a new musical world, we walk along with him, learning as he learns. The details of Bach's life are not well known because he did not leave much behind beside his music. At one point early in the book, the author describes a meeting of musicologists who mention that they know what Bach drank but not what he ate. I am not that obsessive even about Beethoven. Sheesh. I am more interested in key or relevant biographical details, the context, and how it relates to the music of the creator or performer. This is not an exhaustive examination of a subject, which are often exhausting anyway. The number of recordings of The Cello Suites by fine cellists is staggering, and though the music has been heard so often in the mainstream, it is not part of it because it is stuck in the stuffy world of classical music. Eric Soblin points out quite correctly that classical music was not always so stuffy, and a more relaxed presentation might attract more people to concerts today. I agree.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A fantastic read!

By Greg Smith

Eric Soblin has written an engaging book that weaves together three stories: a carefully researched portrait of J.S. Bach, the story of the great cellist Pablo Casals and his personal quest to determine the story of the original manuscript of Bach's six suites for solo cello. I enjoyed every page of this book and the personal, real stories of two of the most extraordinary musicians that ever lived. Eric's love of his topic is palpable and powerful. Beyond a passion for his topic, Eric also is a wonderful writer and researcher. As though the story itself were not enough, the endnotes, chapter notes, bibliography and index prove that this former rock music critic has major chops as a scholar of music. But, we're not talking a dull treatise but a labor of love. My hours spent with the cello suites have been deeply satisfying thanks to this fantastic book!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Two extraordinary biographies and an enlightening experience.

By Miguell

I have been running through this book with a true Bach's suites for a cello lover. The dedication of each chapter to one of each pieces is a great idea, for you can hear them while the poetry and the almost detectivesque searching for their "truth" is at last been completed with the last piece of the sixth. As myself being an amateur cello suites player and being able to understand all that the great performers have felt along their lives with them, I can say that the book has given new "wings" to my dedication, and replenished with imagination the hard and joyful task of trying to learn to play them. The book seems to bring space to the future of this great music, for it will change the opinion of many that rather overview them as "dull" or over power them. with a kind of fixation that says "well this must be good for it is Bach's" which is true but not the "Truth". It is much more than good, and the writer has been able to express it with his own determination of being himself being "soul touched" by it. I will get to this book many times, for it will accompany my fatigues and encourage my love for the suites.

Rosa Cobos

One evening, journalist Eric Soblin attended a recital of Johann Sebastian Bach's Cello Suites and began an epic quest that would unravel three centuries of intrigue, politics, and passion. Winner of the Mavis Gallant Prize for Nonfiction and the McAuslan First Book Prize, *The Cello Suites* weaves together three dramatic narratives: the disappearance of Bach's manuscript in the eighteenth century; Pablo Casals's discovery and popularization of the music in Spain in the late-nineteenth century; and Soblin's infatuation with the suites in the present day. The search led Soblin to Barcelona, where Casals, just thirteen and in possession of his first cello, roamed the backstreets with his father in search of sheet music and found Bach's lost suites tucked in a dark corner of a store. Casals played them every day for twelve years before finally performing them in public. Soblin pursues the mysteries that continue to haunt this music more than 250 years after its composer's death: Why did Bach compose the suites for the cello, then considered a lowly instrument? What happened to the original manuscript? A seamless blend of biography and music history, *The Cello Suites* is a true-life journey of discovery, fueled by the power of these musical masterpieces.

From Publishers Weekly

The ironies of artistic genius and public taste are subtly explored in this winding, entertaining tale of a musical masterpiece. Music critic Soblin parallels short, fluent biographies of composer Johann Sebastian Bach, whose six suites for solo cello were long disparaged as minor student exercises, and cello virtuoso Pablo Casals, whose landmark recording of the pieces catapulted them into the classical canon. Their lives are a study in contrasts: Bach is an obscure workaday musician who feels wasted being merely the cantor of a Lutheran boarding school; Casals, a musical superstar and anti-Fascist exile, is a romantic hero. Soblin intertwines his own story of trying to engage with the suites. He takes cello lessons, savors a rich variety of performances, including one on the marimbas, and embarks on a search for Bach's long-lost manuscript to discover clues to the enigmatic score. (Scholars aren't even certain the suites were written for cello.) Soblin is an insightful writer with an ability to convey the sound and emotional impact of music in words. (Jan.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist

\*Starred \* A former pop-music critic, Soblin was transported to the eighteenth century when his imagination was captured by a performance of Bach's Six Suites for Solo Cello. He embarked on a journey, part historical, part personal to discover for himself the music that has remained a pillar of the cello repertoire since Pablo Casals recorded the suites in 1936. Soblin traveled to Leipzig looking for traces of the German composer,

and to the Catalonian coast of Spain to trace the steps of the suites first modern master. Included in his thorough research are interviews with cellists such as Mischa Maisky and Anner Bylisma, who describe the complexities of the music and the challenges it presents to the soloist. In Siblin's history of the composer, Bach is far from the stuffy image often applied to classical music; he appears restless, brash, and proud, occasionally landing in jail for upsetting a patron. Siblin's writing is most inspired when describing the life of Casals, showing a genuine affection for the cellist, who, caught in the throes of the Spanish civil war and World War II, used his instrument and the suites as weapons of protest and pleas for peace. --Elliot Mandel This is one of the most extraordinary, clever, beautiful, and impeccably researched books I have read in years. A fascinating story deftly told and, for me at least, ideally read with Bach's thirty-six movements playing softly in the background; a recipe for literary rapture. Simon Winchester, author of the New York Times best-seller *The Professor and the Madman* Vividly chronicles [Siblin's] international search for the original, and unfound, Bach score. Mr. Siblin's book is well researched, and filled with enough anecdotes to engage even the classical-music aficionado but the book is best distinguished by its writing. To vivify music in words is not easy. But Mr. Siblin rises to the task. Read *The Cello Suites* preferably with their melodious hum in the background and you will never look at a cello in quite the same way again. *The Economist* This is rich terrain, and Siblin's book is an engrossing combination of musical and political history spiced with generally vivid descriptions of the cello suites themselves. [Siblin] has given us a compelling portrait of a passionate, prickly Bach, of Casals, a musician who was also politically engaged, and an engrossing cast of secondary characters. Best of all, *The Cello Suites* makes us want to pop in a CD and really listen to those cello suites. Awesome. Wynne Delacoma, *Chicago Sun-Times* A work of ever-percolating interest. Mr. Siblin winds up mixing high and low musical forms, art and political histories, Bach's and Casals' individual stories and matters of arcane musicology into a single inquisitive volume. Janet Maslin, *The New York Times* The ironies of artistic genius and public taste are subtly explored in this winding, entertaining tale of a musical masterpiece. Siblin is an insightful writer with an ability to convey the sound and emotional impact of music in words. *Publishers Weekly* Engaging and imaginative a charming narrative. Melinda Bargreen, *The Seattle Times* The author has done a wealth of research in pursuit of his new passion, and he writes engagingly. This intrepid writer has worked hard to interest readers in his musical obsession, and there is a great deal to chew on here. Priscilla S. Taylor, *The Washington Times* It's not often that one begins reading a book with mild interest and then can't put it down, which happened to me with this beautiful book. Diana Athill, author of *Stet* and *Somewhere Towards the End* pitch-perfect. *The Cello Suites* is, on all counts, a superior book. --QWF McAuslan First Book Prize Jury citation an ambitious, carefully researched, and inventively constructed book written with clarity and verve. Mavis Gallant Prize for Nonfiction Jury Citation A delightfully quirky quest. Eric Siblin seamlessly weaves together the tale of how Bach's lost and mostly forgotten manuscript came to be discovered a century later by Pablo Casals, and finally became Siblin's personal passion. Governor General's Literary Award Jury Citation A book of extraordinary charm, insight, and widespread literary appeal. BC National Award for Canadian Nonfiction Jury Citation Siblin firmly believes Bach is what you make of him and his book represents just that. No matter what the great composer means to readers, they will surely enjoy Siblin's fun, fast-paced journey from pop-music scribbler to Bach aficionado. *Christian Science Monitor* A book that will fascinate anyone who loves Bach's music. . . engaging. . . Many of the facts woven into textual fabric glitter like metal threads as Siblin shifts the reader's focus from one protagonist to the other. The result are rich depictions of Bach in his 18th-century milieu and Casals in his 20th-century sphere. . . The author's colorful prose conveys substantial charm, and reveals a first-rate travel writer's sense of place. . . sets biographical and musicological details neatly in context. David Lander, *Stereophile*