

J. S. Bach

Cello Suite 5, BWV 1011: Sarabande

Performing edition (September 2013) for trombone by

Douglas Yeo

Performance notes

The *Sarabande* from Bach's *Fifth Suite for Cello* is one of the most frequently asked pieces on bass trombone auditions and increasingly is found on tenor trombone auditions as well. In editing this movement for performance on trombone, I have tried to help trombonists understand and find their way through this great piece of music.

First, it is important to understand the *Sarabande* as a dance form. While Bach's *Suites* were not composed as accompaniment to dance, he used dance names for the titles of most of his movements (*Preludes* excepted). Bach wrote more *Sarabandes* than any other dance form, and Rémond de Saint-Mard described the *Sarabande* as, "always melancholy, and exudes a delicate yet serious tenderness." While the *Sarabande* probably originated in Spain and found flower in Italy, it is as modified by the French that we know the *Sarabande* today – and in Bach's time – as a noble, elegant dance with three beats to the bar.

The *Sarabande* often included an emphasis – or weight – on the second beat. While Bach's *Fifth Suite Sarabande* does not include that gesture explicitly, we do find that every second beat in the movement includes half- or whole-step movement from tension to release. Hence, a slight implied weight on the second beat makes good musical sense.

As to tempo, we are left to find a comfortable tempo that communicates the gravity of the music without becoming glacial and static. Many trombonists play the *Sarabande* as if it was in six rather than three – such weighting of each note results in a dull, ponderous performance that is impossible to sustain musically. A tempo of quarter note = 50 is typical of that taken by many of the world's great cello players and allows us to maintain forward motion without hurrying.

Keep in mind that every measure contains a five note theme; the sixth note in several bars serves simply as a reinforcement of the cadence, a melodic movement to the key of the downbeat of the next bar, or resolution of a fifth note passing tone.

Bars 16-19 require a decision by the performer: whether or not to phrase over the bar lines. Many players (including myself in my 2001 version of this movement that was first posted on my website) have phrased over the bar line, making the sixth note a pickup to the next bar. But over time, I have become persuaded – as the earliest manuscripts of the *Suites* support – that playing all six notes in those bars as a phrase rather than giving each bar a five note theme with a pickup to the next bar makes the most cogent musical sense.

It is difficult – by the use of slurs, dotted slurs and tenuto markings – to truly indicate preferred phrasing and weight. This is especially the case with the tenuti, which I use both to indicate slight weight on a note as well as added length. But I am hopeful that this edition – despite the ambiguity that is inherent in any musical notation – is a helpful starting point for trombonists and others who approach this great piece of music and bring to it their own expressive ideas.



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Sarabande

p

5

9 *poco cresc ...* *dim ...*

13 *pull back*

17 ** (Climax!)* *poco a poco dim to end* *rit.*