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Hey there! Welcome to the 30th episode of Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music loving families. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm delighted that you're joining me. Today's episode is brought you by my Busy Kids Do Music History course, which is my all inclusive music appreciation course especially for homeschooling families. You can learn more about that course at [busykidsdopiano.com/musichistory](https://busykidsdopiano.com/musichistory). Again learn more about the course at [busykidsdopiano.com/musichistory](https://busykidsdopiano.com/musichistory)

We've been doing a series on the podcast all about composer Johann Sebastian Bach. In episode 28, we learned a little bit about his life, his family, and his career. In our last episode -- episode 29 -- we discussed one of his most famous works -- St. Matthew Passion. Now I'll link to both of those episodes in the show notes of course, in case you haven't had a chance to listen to them. Today, we're going to finish up our series on Bach by taking a closer look at his six cello suites.

The piece you're listening to now is one of the most famous cello pieces of all-time, and it's the prelude for first of Bach's six solo cello suites. In fact, we did a little bit of listening to this piece way back in Episode 7 of Busy Kids Love Music, where we learned about the cello. This collection of cello suites are solos, which means that no other instruments accompany the cello -- the cello alone plays. This piece has been featured in ballets, theatre productions, films and commercials -- which might be why you are familiar with the melody a bit already.

As far as we know, Bach did not actually play the cello. He spent his first 3 decades of life composing music for instruments that he did play -- mainly the harpsichord and the organ.

But things changed a bit when he became the Capellmeister -- meaning he was in charge of the music -- in the court of Prince Leopold. During this time, he composed two sets of pieces for

solo string instruments -- one set for violin and another for cello. This was actually a bold project to take on, as no one before him had composed successful solo music for a cello before. The cello was seen as an instrument that accompanied other instruments and gave other stringed instruments a depth and richness. The few solo cello compositions that preceded Bach's solo cello suites were...interesting. But they weren't memorable. They weren't elegant and beautiful.

When Bach did set out to compose his solo cello works, he followed the structure of a suite. A suite is a musical term that refers to a series of dance movements that are in the same or related keys. Each of the six suites begins with a prelude. Here is a bit of the prelude from Bach's Cello Suite Number 4.

The prelude is an introductory music. It sets the stage for the music to come and is often the longest movement. There are no tempo markings for any of the movements to tell the cellist how fast or slow to play the music. For that reason, you'll often hear Bach's pieces performed at different tempos -- or speeds -- based on the musicians interpretation of the music.

We've talked in the past two episodes about how Bach wasn't really appreciated in the years following his death until a revival of *St. Matthew Passion* conducted by Felix Mendelssohn took place. But it took even longer for the world to take notice of Bach's cello suites - - about 200 years, actually.

Bach's suites were discovered and published in 1825, but cellists reviewed them more as technique exercises -- not as anything special. Not much solo cello music was written or performed at the time, so no one thought much of Bach's suites.

In the 20th century, other composers began to recognize that the unaccompanied cello made for a beautiful solo instrument.

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A recording was made in 1936 of the cello suites, and suddenly -- there was the expectation that every cellist should learn to play the suites. Many artists began to record performances of the suites, and they gained popularity. Listeners and musicians recognized that this collection of suites is emotionally deep and expressive.

Famous cellist Yo-Yo Ma said of Bach's cello suites:

*They have been my constant musical companions. For almost six decades, they have given me sustenance, comfort and joy during times of stress, celebration and loss. Over the years, I came to believe that, in creating these works, Bach played the part of a musician-scientist, expressing precise observations about nature and human nature.*

Head over to my website at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/30](https://busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/30) where you'll find the link for this episode's curated playlist on YouTube. The playlist includes all different performances and interpretations of Bach's famous cello suites. Again you'll find the link to that playlist at [busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/30](https://busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/30) as well as the show notes, a transcript of the show, and links to other episodes of the podcast.

Thanks so much for joining me for this episode, as we finish up our series on the Baroque composer J.S. Bach. I hope you've enjoyed learning more about him and about some of his most iconic works in these past 3 episodes. I look forward to connecting with you again in 2 weeks for the next episode of Busy Kids Love Music. Take care!