

suites for a suffering world

format: 16:9, 4K, colour, b/w (animations), stereo tone, Dolby 5.1 | **utilization:** TV, cinema (festivals), web

The project will be accompanied from the very start by an interactive website.

the concept

suites for a suffering world

APOLLOFILM

The German cellist **Tanja Tetzlaff** performs J.S. Bach's Cello Suites Nos. 4 to 6 amid natural surroundings devastated by climate change. Beauty confronts its own destruction. Do we really want to watch without lifting a finger?



synopsis

Melting glaciers, desertified landscapes, flooded communities: climate change is having an alarming impact even in Europe.

What are we humans doing to this wonderful planet?

Aghast at the depredation and destruction of our unique ecosystems, the renowned German cellist Tanja Tetzlaff wants to ask Nature for forgiveness. She will travel with her instrument to places in Europe where climate change has already become reality and visibly dealt severe wounds. Surrounded by sometimes bizarre scenery, she will perform Johann Sebastian Bach's Cello Suites Nos. 4 to 6, contrasting them with works specially composed for her by Thorsten Encke. She levels accusations, stokes resistance and touches us with her virtuoso playing. The beauty of the music stands in sharp contrast to the often-dramatic images of damaged Nature, combatting the finality of destruction. A moving musical and visual plea for greater care and humility toward the beauty of our planet – at once ravishing and disturbing.



intention

How can it be?

Human beings are capable of creating objects of timelessly moving beauty: paintings, sculpture, architecture, compositions, literature ... Yet, at the same time, we are recklessly imperilling and destroying our own world with all its natural and cultural treasures. Often it is sheer greed and heedlessness that drives the exploitation of the planet, annihilating entire ecosystems and allowing madcap climate change to spin out of control.

It makes me sad to witness how the destruction of Nature threatens not only the beauty of our world but our civilization and culture. Geopolitical crises and wars beckon as our human habitats shrink. We have to realize that the impact of climate change on our social and political culture will be vast.

And what losses do we face when cultural sites are no longer tended and the practice of art is no longer supported? When we are no longer strengthened and encouraged by the sublimity of great art? It is precisely during crises that we humans need the empowering forces of art to help us rise above ourselves in difficult times.

With this in mind, I want to humbly lower my eyes and apologize to Nature – in the midst of Nature herself. I will travel with my cello to various European landscapes already visibly damaged by climate change. There I want to play music to the endangered environment – and to ask for forgiveness. With the most magnificent music one can imagine: Johann Sebastian Bach's Cello Suites Nos. 4 to 6.

In its essence, I find Bach's music equivalent to intact Nature. No note is superfluous; each note is in its proper place; everything perfectly coheres. Just as in Nature, when left to itself rather than being exploited. Here, too, everything has its place – every landscape, every living being, every movement.

When I play Bach, I feel the dancing motions of water, wind and trees. I actually visualize them in my mind's eye. To me, his Cello Suites are Nature metamorphosed into sound. That is why I have chosen these pieces – in order to perform them in our damaged natural surroundings, using them to ask for forgiveness and to give comfort.

My concert film is intended to touch and arouse people. Not least, I want it to be a concert experience that allows us to perceive Bach's Cello Suites in a wholly new light.

Tanja Tetzlaff



cinematic realization | 1

The concert film “Suites for a Suffering World” will be grand cinema – a moving audio-visual Gesamtkunstwerk consisting of three levels:

- > Bach’s Cello Suites, performed live by Tanja Tetzlaff in the midst of nature ...
- > the viewers’ perspective as they accompany her to these locations, and ...
- > her subjective view of the impressive landscapes, captured on camera.

On closer inspection these locations seem lost and disturbing: melting glaciers, desertified landscapes, burnt forests and coastlines gnawed by the sea show the viewer the true extent of ongoing climate change and the resultant destruction of the environment. Harrowing images.

The camera is Tanja Tetzlaff’s constant companion – hovering above, alongside or behind her using drones and calm steadycams. From handheld exposures to closeups and macros shot from a tripod, we see the interplay of her hands, her eyes and her feelings, bringing us extremely close to the events themselves both visually and emotionally.



cinematic realization | 2

Every bow stroke, every pizzicato and vibrato on the strings of her cello is meant to be almost viscerally palpable.

We will show Tanja Tetzlaff not only at her instrument, but also exploring the landscapes, searching for locations where she can perform on her cello. The viewer becomes a witness to her pensiveness, her contemplation, her empathy with the present moment. In these moments her thoughts and reflections – what takes place inside her, what she feels, what motivates her – are heard off-screen.

In parallel with the three thematic aspects of climate change (melting glaciers, desertification, endangered coastlines) we will seek suitable filming locations in three different regions of Europe. We will select landscapes capable of providing maximum scenic variety as a framework for Tanja Tetzlaff's cello playing. The goal is to capture the natural sites and the musical events in a wealth of facets and contrasts.



One example might be shots of forests gutted by fire, offering impressive fore- and backgrounds as well as the possibility of creating graphic images. Any archival films used to illustrate or deepen the subject (burning forests, flooded villages, storms of hurricane force) will be projected in twilight on a large screen behind the cellist, and thus integrated into the overall scenery.

Each suite, each movement, will receive its own visual language inspired by the musical character of the piece concerned – with individual camera techniques, image composition and *découpage*. For example, the expansive character of the Preludes will be given a visual correlative in one-shot sweeps without a single cut, or in long static sequences in which each camera setting functions on its own. In contrast, the “dance” numbers of the suites will be edited in lively montage with rapid series of cuts, e.g. from extreme long shots to extreme closeups, always in the rhythm established by Tanja Tetzlaff with her cello.

In the sound recordings, our primary concern is to retain their live character, including natural noises from the surroundings.

The microphones will thus be positioned so that they always record the best possible sound, even if this makes them visible in the frame, and thus part of the set.

The nature scenes will be filmed in colour. Using colour correction at the post-production stage, the impression of the colours will be adjusted as far as possible to match the original sites. The captured images will be neither distorted nor prettified.

The Bach suites, filmed out of doors, will contrast with the four compositions by Thomas Encke: Preparations, On thin ice, Clouds and Afterthoughts. These pieces translate the effects of environmental destruction through climate change into onomatopoeic sounds: crashing, screeching, menacing. With her cello, Tanja Tetzlaff creates noises that unmistakably recall such natural phenomena as cracking ice floes and slipping avalanches. Added to this are pre-recorded cello sequences and sound effects, such as the dripping water in Afterthoughts.

The recording of these sounds requires a special technology with six speakers positioned around Tanja Tetzlaff during the filming operations. For this reason we will choose, for our film location, a dilapidated building or a studio with a black backdrop on which her silhouette will stand out with her rapid, action-packed playing.

The film will be shot in black-and-white, or in white-and-black, as in a negative. The images will be far more graphic than representational and only partly perceivable owing to the rapid cuts. Only in their entirety will they form a unity. Another possibility is the use of (understated) animation to show the breakup of the ice in Thomas Encke's second piece, On thin ice (as in Film 4014, made for the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art). In our case, however, we will adopt a different and independent conception.

Our production will involve a seasoned team fully capable of meeting the project's special challenges. Members will include music video director Stéphan Aubé of Berlin, sound engineers Peter Hecker and Clémence Fabre as well as film editor Janine Dauterich, who won the German Camera Prize in 2020 for her editing of "Beethoven's Ninth: Symphony for the World" (ARTE and Deutsche Welle). The concert film will be mixed by studio engineer Cornelius Rapp, who, among other things, was responsible for the sound on the above-named Beethoven film and other outstanding and prize-winning music documentaries.



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APOLLOFILM

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