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CCS 12198



Sonatas & Partitas vol. 1

Rachel Podger

baroque violin

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

*Partitas and Sonatas for Violin Solo, vol. 1*

*Rachel Podger*, baroque violin



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*Sonate nr.1 in G minor BWV 1001*

1	Adagio	03.40
2	Fuga	05.35
3	Siciliano	03.02
4	Presto	03.46

*Partita nr.1 in B minor BWV 1002*

5	Allemanda	05.47
6	Double	03.31
7	Corrente	03.25
8	Double	03.42
9	Sarabande	03.47
10	Double	02.32
11	Tempo di Bourrée	03.40
12	Double	03.56

*Partita nr.2 in D Minor BWV 1004*

13	Allemanda	04.28
14	Corrente	02.39
15	Sarabanda	04.26
16	Giga	03.57
17	Ciaccona	13.36

Total Time 76.17

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Production & Distribution

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*Rachel Podger*, BAROQUE VIOLIN

Rachel Podger was born in England and was educated in Germany at a Rudolf Steiner School. She returned to England to continue her violin studies, first with Perry Hart and then at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Michaela Combetti and David Takeno. During her five years there she developed a keen interest in baroque performance practice and found herself increasingly in demand with established period instrument ensembles in London such as the New London Consort, the Gabrieli Consort, Florilegium of whom she was a founder member and London Baroque. However, much of her time now is spent playing 17th and 18th century music with The Palladium Ensemble which she also help to found.

In 1997 Rachel was invited by Trevor Pinnock to join the English Consort with whom she now enjoys a busy schedule as leader of the orchestra and concerto soloist.

*This cd is dedicated to David Takeno.*

STAMMBUCHBLATT

FOUR POOR STRINGS! -IT SOUNDS LIKE A JOKE -  
FOR ALL WONDER OF SOUND!  
DOES NOT MANKIND HAVE JUST ONE HEART,  
WHICH SURELY SUFFICES FOR EVERYTHING!

*(Franz Grillparzer)*

A poem about the poverty and riches of the violin. A bit of wood, a few strings and a bow, yet unbelievable what it can be made to produce. The last three lines are about mankind's enormous power of perception - about all that his heart is able to follow and understand. Grillparzer is confident about man's capabilities in this respect. He does not speak about what is beyond him. It is highly debatable whether Grillparzer (a contemporary of Beethoven and Schubert) knew Bach's six works for solo violin. Nevertheless he manages in this poem, without actually intending to do so, to go right to their core. It seems as if Bach demands the extremes from the violin, even more than it is capable of. A great deal is not actually performable as written, such as much of the chordal writing. Violinists and musicologists have devoted gallons of ink and hundreds of pages to this and numerous other aspects of the performance practice of Bach's solo violin writing: much more than Bach himself needed to write down his six sonatas and partitas. All these writers, from the first Bach biographer Forkel, to Albert Schweitzer and the great contemporary Bach expert Christoph Wolf, are children of their time and attest over and over to their 'understanding', their 'truth'. In doing so, these

authors raise more questions about Bach's enigmatic works for unaccompanied violin than they can provide answers for. And then they give answers preceded by 'perhaps', 'possibly', or on occasion, 'probably'.

Since the publication of Forkel's biography of Bach in 1802, it has been assumed that the compositions were played during communion at Lutheran church services. "Zu seiner Zeit wurde in der Kirche während der Communion gewöhnlich ein Concert oder ein Solo auf irgend einem Instrument gespielt." ["In his time, a sonata or concerto for one or another instrument was played in church during communion."] This presumably applies only to the three sonatas, which are church sonatas à la Corelli (slow-fast, fast-slow), and not to the three suites, which can be classified as baroque chamber music.

One small number, one tiny figure three, in Bach's own handwriting in the year 1720 (itself a work of calligraphic art) is the final 'proof' that Bach himself played these works. Added to this is the evidence of the long tradition of violin playing in the Bach family, Bach's appointments as a violinist (at the age of eighteen!) at the Weimar court in 1703, and later as violinist and harpsichordist between 1708 and 1717. With all the attention given to Bach the composer, organist and harpsichordist, the fact of Bach the violinist was forgotten. In addition to playing his own magnificent organ solos, his Fifth Brandenburg Concerto and the Well-tempered Clavier, Bach was also the soloist in his violin concertos and works for unaccompanied violin. The demands of the latter are such that it is questionable which, if any, violinist during Bach's lifetime was capable of playing them. Johann Georg Pisendel, the leading German violinist of his time, has been suggested. Concertmaster of the court chapel in Dresden during the reign of August

the Strong as well as a pupil and friend of Vivaldi, he was renowned for his technical mastery of complicated chords and figurations. Great composers, including Vivaldi, Albinoni and Telemann, dedicated compositions to him. Had Bach perhaps had Pisendel in mind? Or had he intended his solo works for none other than himself? Is it possible, as was so often the case, that he took account of no-one, whether performer or audience, in composing them? It would certainly seem so. After all, in his surroundings, where was the performer and where the audience who were equal to the mental, artistic and technical demands of these works?

Much has been written about Bach's possible models. The polyphonic and harmonic treatment of the violin was certainly not new in Bach's time. The composers Biber, Westhoff and Walther preceded him in this respect. Nevertheless in terms of quality and artistic achievement, these composers, with the possible exception of Biber, pale by comparison. Bach set a standard which has never been equalled, either before or since. Composers such as Reger, Ysaÿe and Hindemith felt him breathing down their necks in creating their own works for solo violin. Bach inspired them, although he frustrated them too. Even Bach fanatics like Mendelssohn and Schumann believed that Bach's musical outpourings were more than could be channelled into the tiny violin: both composed piano accompaniments. Schumann went as far as to do so for every one of the six works for solo violin, as well as for the six cello suites.

In Bach's autograph, the six works are arranged so that sonatas and partitas alternate with each other. The sonatas are in four movements, which are linked

in pairs. Sonata no.1 in g minor opens with a majestic and richly ornamented introductory movement, followed by a quick three voiced fugue. The third movement is a swaying Siciliano, quietly idyllic in tone. The whirling last movement, presto, is a striking example of Bach's 'illusory polyphony'. Melodic lines are suggested by Bach and perceived as such by the listener, but they are not in fact literally present on paper.

In the first Partita in B minor, every dance is succeeded by a contrasting double. The Gigue, customarily the fourth dance, is substituted by a Bourrée, which is better suited to variation treatment than a gigue. The Partita no. 2 in D minor is particularly renowned for its unusually long Chaconne which, with its 257 measures, is about as long as all the preceding movements together! The unbridled fantasy of this movement creates a dizzying climax to the entire cycle.

*Clemens Romijn, translation David Shapero*

## ON PLAYING BACH...

By listening to Bach first thing in the morning I'm very likely to start the day in good spirits; the clarity of the music both having an invigorating and calming effect on me. Every note and expression has its rightful place and nothing ever seems too elaborate or deprived of something or too intense. The music flows with a confidence that balances our intellectual, emotional and spiritual interests.

PLAYING Bach - especially his solo violin music - intensifies this experience. I now have the chance to get to know the music from inside itself. I have to be prepared to immerse myself in the language of it, understand its complexity, search for the meaning in every phrase....and finally come out the other end with something clear and beautiful...a recipe which works well for me and which developed during the past years of playing and practising these masterworks. There are lots of clues along the way helping you identify yourself with the music - structure, counterpoint, harmony, voicing, line, emphasis, articulation, texture, polyphony, elegance, character, colour - all these necessities, qualities and ideals influence the direction you are taking with your interpretation. During this learning process you realize that you are not only searching for an expressive interpretation but you are also in effect working out a balance between three parts you encounter every time you pick up your instrument to play a piece of music - the written music, the instrument and yourself. Finding this balance is exciting! It's a stimulating challenge which fuels heart, mind, soul and spirit.

Having "arrived" at some interpretative decisions (although in a sense you never



really arrive anywhere since a human being never feels the same way on two given days and there is ALWAYS more to discover, especially in Bach....) you perform, and believe you are carrying and delivering a sincere message inspired by the depth of this music.

Recording these important works was challenging and fulfilling at the same time. Daunting to have to settle on just one way of playing for the sake of making a record and having to choose takes that limit the listener to just one way of playing - but then also completely inspiring as I had the freedom to play and play and play (thanks to Channel Classics!), and had time to experiment, improve, change my mind, get impatient, be delighted, relieved and then at the end so very happy and grateful to Bach for writing this uplifting and heartwarming music.

*Rachel Podger*

# COLOPHON

## **Production**

Producers

Recording engineer, editing

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Cover design

Liner notes

## **Technical information**

Microphones

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Recording location

Recording dates

Channel Classics Records bv

C. Jared Sacks (b-minor), Jonathan

Freeman-Attwood (d-minor, g-minor)

C. Jared Sacks

Marco Borggreve

Ram Vormgeving, Asperen

Clemens Romijn, Rachel Podger

Bruel & Kjaer 4003

24 Bit Prism / Genex Recorder

Audiolab & AKG K1000 Headphones

Doopsgezinde Kerk Deventer,

The Netherlands

Dec. '97/April '98