

J.S. BACH

SONATAS FOR VIOLIN AND HARPSICHORD

LUCY RUSSELL

JOHN BUTT



SONATAS FOR VIOLIN & HARPSICHORD

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

DISC 1

Sonata No. 1 in B minor, BWV 1014

1. Adagio	3:10
2. Allegro	2:45
3. Andante	2:55
4. Allegro	3:04

Sonata No. 2 in A major, BWV 1015

5. Dolce	2:40
6. Allegro	3:00
7. Andante un poco	2:43
8. Presto	4:03

Sonata No. 3 in E major, BWV 1016

9. Adagio	3:53
10. Allegro	2:44
11. Adagio ma non tanto	4:17
12. Allegro	3:49

Total Running Time: 39 minutes

DISC 2

Sonata No. 4 in C minor, BWV 1017

1. Largo	3:29
2. Allegro	4:17
3. Adagio	3:05
4. Allegro	4:30

Sonata No. 5 in F minor, BWV 1018

5. Largo	5:39
6. Allegro	4:12
7. Adagio	3:06
8. Vivace	2:19

Sonata No. 6 in G major, BWV 1019

9. Allegro	3:30
10. Largo	1:36
11. Allegro	4:04
12. Adagio	2:50
13. Allegro	3:11

Total Running Time: 46 minutes

Recorded at

St Martin's, East Woodhay,
Hampshire, UK
2–4 July 2012 and 8–11 July 2013

Produced and recorded by

Philip Hobbs

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Post-production by

Julia Thomas

Cover image

Young woman with a violin
by Orazio Gentileschi,
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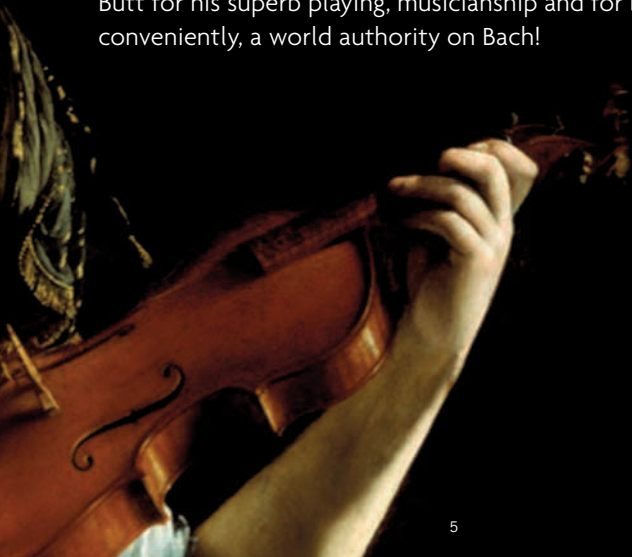
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THANKS FROM LUCY RUSSELL

Grateful thanks must be extended to Don and Phil Beaver for ensuring that the beautiful St Martin's Church in East Woodhay was available to us for the recording sessions, and especially to Edmund Pickering for his legendary harpsichord-tuning techniques! Also to Philip Hobbs for his razor-sharp ears and for enabling this 'dream' to come to fruition; and not least to John Butt for his superb playing, musicianship and for being, rather conveniently, a world authority on Bach!



SIX SONATAS FOR VIOLIN AND OBLIGATO HARPSICHORD

It is quite likely that J.S. Bach never considered himself to be an innovator as such. The sparse number of surviving anecdotes (along the lines of: ‘...many could be as good a composer as I if they merely worked as hard...’) suggest that he viewed composition not so much as a personal matter but rather as something that perceptively realized existing potentialities. In other words, he may well have adhered to the ‘ancient’, pre-Enlightenment view that God is the only true creator, and all the artist can do is reveal his genius. Yet despite this, Bach somehow became one of the key innovators in the western classical-music tradition. He was the first composer to write substantial pieces in every key of the tonal system and his exploration of tonal relationships within larger spans was second to none. There is also his tendency to see polyphonic potential in the most casual musical gestures and to saturate musical textures with mutually inflecting motivic relationships. In all these respects he would become a model for composers for two centuries to come.

The same might be said of Bach’s experiments with relating standard textures or instrumental combinations to unaccustomed genres. His use of instrumental and vocal forms and textures in the organ music is an obvious instance. Even more significant from a historical point of view was his virtual invention of the keyboard concerto, where he took a genre normally associated with a monodic solo instrument and adapted it for an instrument that traditionally only played a chordal-continuo role in ensemble music. Indeed, it is possible to see a direct line of influence stretching from Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 to Mozart’s piano

concertos via the keyboard concertos of Bach's sons C.P.E. and J.C. Almost exactly the same point can be made about the 'accompanied' or 'duo' sonata, in which the keyboard exceeds its traditional supporting role by participating directly in the melodic argument as an equal partner with the solo (or, more correctly, non-keyboard) instrument.

Bach seems to have entertained three different instruments as partners for concerted harpsichord: violin, viola da gamba and flute. It may be that he wrote similar works for other instruments besides, but – a few pre-Bach works with organ or harpsichord obbligato aside – no other composer seems to have had the idea of writing fully fledged instrumental sonatas of this kind. The present sonatas appear in several versions and in several manuscript sources individually: they were widely used and sometimes re-adapted for other combinations. The 'Six sonatas for concerted harpsichord and violin solo' (as they are named in one early source) represent Bach's largest single collection in the genre of the sonata with keyboard obbligato and are analogous to other collections of solo instrumental works grouped in sixes (such as those for violin and for cello, the sonatas for organ, and several keyboard collections). While there is no necessary virtue in playing the sonatas in the order that presumably the composer devised (no autograph manuscript of the complete set survives), the key scheme has a certain symmetry: the b–A–E sequence of the first three sonatas is mirrored by the c–f–G of the remainder, both in terms of interval (down a tone then up a 5th, mirrored by down a 5th then up a tone) and of modality (minor–major–major, minor–minor–major).

It has historically been assumed that the present collection was first compiled during the Cöthen years (1717–23); that is, after all, the period that Bach's first

biographer, J.N. Forkel, assigned to them, albeit some 50 years after the composer's death. While it cannot be doubted that many of the individual movements, and even complete sonatas, may already have been written by the end of Bach's time at Cöthen, it is nonetheless important to note that the earliest surviving source for the set as a whole dates from c.1725, and thus from around Bach's third year at Leipzig. The fact that the greater part of the manuscript is in the hand of Bach's nephew Johann Heinrich proves an earlier date of actual composition, but the sudden appearance of Bach's own hand in the harpsichord part of the last three movements of the sixth sonata suggests that the collection as a whole may actually have been finished only at this juncture. That immediately brings up the question of the function of such works at a time when Bach was apparently still engaged in the weekly composition of cantatas. It may well be that they were simply played domestically, but they could also have been heard in more public contexts, for instance at coffee-house concerts. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that Bach became involved with this broader performing environment in Leipzig before he began his tenure as director of the Collegium Musicum in 1729.

The first five sonatas are roughly identical in all three of the surviving versions of the set (each of the first five sonatas is cast in the generic slow-fast-slow-fast form): minor developments include the fast, snappy rhythm in bar 4 of the final Allegro of Sonata No. 1 and the more elaborate harpsichord part to the third movement of the fifth sonata. It is in the sixth sonata that the most revision and experimentation seems to have taken place. As a five- (or six-) movement piece that begins with an Allegro (marked 'Presto' or 'Vivace' in some sources) it represents, in all its versions, a quite different conception of the sonata. Bach seems to have treated it as an experimental work, one that effectively challenges the bounds of

the emergent sonata genre. The earliest surviving version, from c.1725, contained two movements that were later to find their way into the sixth keyboard partita (BWV 830), even though one of them seems to have had a violin part, a fact that demonstrates the traffic of nearly identical music between instrumental and keyboard genres. An even more striking example of that process occurs in the second version, in which what was originally a vocal aria with obbligato violin is adapted for harpsichord and violin. The third and final version, that performed here, dates from the very end of the composer's life; it is preserved in a manuscript by Bach's son-in-law, J.C. Altnickol. Here the last three movements are newly composed: the third, for harpsichord solo in binary form, is followed by a deliciously chromatic Adagio and an Allegro finale.

Whether adapting existing movements or composing afresh, Bach generally adopts the traditional texture of the trio sonata (i.e. two solo instruments and continuo) by assigning the second solo line to the right hand of the harpsichord part. The third movement of Sonata No. 2 demonstrates most clearly the equality of the two upper lines, since they are in very obvious canon; and here, as elsewhere, the left hand of the harpsichord very much sustains its own character, in a way analogous to the role of a bowed-bass instrument. However, a number of movements do not conform so strictly to the trio texture. The opening Adagio of Sonata No. 3 is basically an expansive violin melody with a motivic harpsichord accompaniment that seems to become progressively important as the movement unfolds. In the third movement of the same sonata the harpsichord opens with a fully notated accompaniment of repeated chords. Before long, however, roles are reversed: the violin has the 'accompaniment' (double stops and all) while the harpsichord has the 'melody'. The two instruments are suddenly accorded equal

significance and the concept of dialogue has gone well beyond merely swapping similar lines. In the third movement of the fifth sonata, both harpsichord and violin seem to have accompanimental figures (in a manner highly reminiscent of the arioso movements in Bach's Passions), yet no soloist ever appears: what we first perceive as accompaniment is in fact the entire substance of the music. Again, in the opening Adagio of the first sonata (as in the opening movements of Sonatas Nos. 3 and 5) the right hand of the harpsichord has at least two voices. Furthermore, while the harpsichord part seems initially to accompany the lyrical violin line, the latter increasingly takes over figures derived from the accompaniment, and often works in direct dialogue with the harpsichord. In all these examples, there is a blurring of the customary distinctions between melody and accompaniment, between the significant and the marginal: the processes are typical of the subtle ecology of Bach's music.

Bach likewise combines several contemporary forms to make movements that are essentially individual in structure. The opening movement of the sixth sonata has something of the extrovert rhetoric of a concerto and also a sense of the ritornello structure of Bach's own concertos. But with this comes an overall da capo form (a common device in opening sonata-movements) and two fugal expositions that function as episodes; here fugue occupies a subservient place, as so to speak the 'filling' at a point in the form where we would normally expect the lightest, most inconsequential music.

Perhaps the most encyclopaedic aspect of these sonatas is the wide range of character and affect they possess: virtually every musical mood found in Bach's textured music is evident to some extent here, from the supremely expressive violin

'voice' at the opening of the first sonata (partnered by the 'sighing' figuration of the harpsichord, in turn reminiscent of string or woodwind phrasing in expressive arias) to the playful rhythmic tricks in the last movement of Sonata No. 4. Individual movements also often display an astonishing diversity of gestures: the second movement of the same sonata is a mammoth compendium of musical ideas all somehow integrated into one of the most intensive fugal movements Bach ever wrote. In the Adagio that follows, the violin and the two hands of the harpsichord have completely differing lines, and those lines are not synchronized until the very closing bars. In all, these sonatas continually exhibit levels and forms of music-making – and of musical experience – that surely far transcended the general chamber practices of the time. And simultaneously, they introduce many of the fundamental features of an essentially new genre, one that would offer an increased depth of musical intimacy while also creating a medium for the most energetic of dialogues.

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A NOTE FROM LUCY RUSSELL ON PERFORMING THESE SONATAS

One might question whether there is any need for yet another recording of the violin sonatas by Bach. There are already many to choose from, to compare and contrast, and much has been said and written about them over the years.

It is perhaps a peculiarity of Bach's more intimate chamber-music genres that elicit such a profound response from interpreters and a desire to find a personal connection. One has to wonder at the power of such music, and how its performance and realization can be so open-ended and laden with possibility. One never feels that one's work is 'complete' or 'finished' when playing Bach, and this is both a glorious and a challenging process.

My own journey with these works started when I was a student and a newcomer to the Baroque violin. Rather than devouring the more obviously virtuosic Baroque repertoire – much of which was at that stage still awaiting exploration – I felt myself drawn to these sonatas, and to the music of Bach, in a way that appeared to nourish my temperament at that particular time in my life. As with so many other violinists who also cherish these pieces, I have sought – together with John – to bring to them a personal response based on years of accumulated experience as a musician and, more importantly, as a human being.

Bach's genius and sheer cleverness can sometimes result in an interpretation that betrays a certain deference and restraint, partly through a disproportionate sense of awe for the music. My own aspirations have been to search for Bach the Man, the Father, the Husband, the chap who enjoyed a good drink at the Bierkeller with his chums. I've sought, where appropriate, to abandon reverence, to explore 'colour', and to burrow deeply into the emotional nature of the music as well as to find and highlight Bach's good humour and quirkiness. And so the instruments we use and the stylistic approach we have arrived at, while informed by many years of study (as one would expect with John's eminent scholarship on board), have been determined to a great extent by those aspirations. At the end of the day, it has been a privilege to fulfil a life-long ambition to record these works and, hopefully, to have communicated a profound love and respect for them.

I'd like to dedicate this recording to the memory of two important women in my life: my adoptive mother, Dorothy Russell, and my birth mother, Joan Batty.



Photograph by David Barbour

JOHN BUTT is Gardiner Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow and musical director of Edinburgh's Dunedin Consort.

As an undergraduate at Cambridge University, he held the office of organ scholar at King's College. Continuing as a graduate student working on the music of Bach, he received his PhD in 1987. He was subsequently a lecturer at the University of Aberdeen and a Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge, before joining the faculty at UC Berkeley in 1989 as University Organist and Professor of Music. In autumn 1997 he returned to Cambridge as a University Lecturer and Fellow of King's College, and in October 2001 he took up his current post at Glasgow. His books have been published by Cambridge University Press: they include *Bach Interpretation* (1990), a handbook on Bach's Mass in B minor (1991), *Music Education and the Art of Performance in the German Baroque* (1994). Making a new tack, *Playing with History* (2002) examined the broad culture of historically informed performance and attempt to explain and justify it as a contemporary phenomenon. Butt is also editor or joint editor of both the Cambridge and Oxford Companions to Bach and of the *Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music* (2005). His book on Bach's Passions, *Bach's Dialogue with Modernity*, was published in 2010, and explores the ways in which Bach's Passion settings relate to some of the broader concepts of modernity, such as subjectivity and time consciousness.

Butt's conducting engagements with the Dunedin Consort have included major Baroque repertory and several new commissions. He has been guest conductor with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, English Concert, Irish Baroque Orchestra, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Royal Academy of Music Bach Cantata Series and Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Forthcoming engagements include the

Portland Baroque Orchestra and the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra. Butt also continues to be active as a solo organist and harpsichordist: eleven recordings on organ, harpsichord and clavichord have been released by Harmonia Mundi and most recently a solo harpsichord recording of Bach's *Das wohltemperierte Klavier* with Linn. As conductor or organist he has performed throughout the world, including recent trips to Germany, France, Poland, Israel, South Korea, Canada, Belgium, Holland and the Irish Republic.

In 2003 Butt was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and received the Dent Medal of the Royal Musical Association. That year his book *Playing with History* was shortlisted for the British Academy's annual Book Prize. In 2006 he was elected Fellow of the British Academy and began a two-year Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship for his research on Bach's Passions. He has recently served on the Council of the Arts and Humanities Research Council. In January 2011 he became the fifth recipient of the Royal Academy of Music/Kohn Foundation's Bach Prize, for his work on the performance and scholarship of Bach. In 2013 Butt was awarded the medal of the Royal College of Organists and appointed OBE for his services to music in Scotland.



LUCY RUSSELL is among the most distinguished of international violinists who have achieved eminence on both historical instruments and their 'modern' counterparts, performing and recording music from Monteverdi to the present day with equal distinction and authority. She became leader of the Fitzwilliam String Quartet in 1995, having first joined as second violinist following her graduation from York University seven years previously. With them she has performed all over Europe, North America, the Middle East and South Africa, as well as making recordings for Linn Records, Divine Art, the BBC and various foreign radio stations. As a Baroque and Classical player she has recorded for Channel Classics, Hyperion, DG and Decca. Russell has been leader of Florilegium, Dunedin Consort, Concerto Caledonia, Classical Opera Company, Retrospect Ensemble and the King's Consort, as well as a director of the Scottish Early Music Consort and a solo violinist in the New London Consort. When time allows she still leads such groups as the Yorkshire Baroque Soloists, and she has been invited to guest lead for the City of London Sinfonia. Russell has been associate leader of the Southern Sinfonia, and has also directed the Danish group Ensemble Zimmerman.

Russell has taught and given masterclasses all over the world, including the Czech Republic, the United States, Canada, South Africa and Russia. Closer to home, she has worked at the Royal Academy of Music with the Modern Instrument Baroque Orchestra, and at Trinity College of Music, Royal Holloway College, London; Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge; Birmingham Conservatoire, York University, the Royal Northern College of Music, St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh; Pro Corda, Dartington Summer School and Benslow Music. She is Professor of Baroque Violin at the Royal College of Music and Visiting Professor of Violin at the University of St Andrews.

Although born in Germany, of Scottish-Norwegian origin, Russell has lived mainly in London. Her studies began as a Junior Exhibitioner at the Royal Academy of Music, and she went on to take music degrees at York, where she gave the first British performance of the Norwegian composer Alfred Janson's violin concerto *Forspil*, based on Hardanger violin traditions. Her violin was made by Ferdinando Gagliano in Naples, c.1789.

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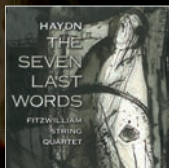
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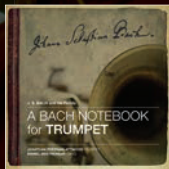
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