

Meridian

Johann Sebastian Bach - Sonatas & Partitas
for Solo Violin BWV 1001 - 1006 - Ruth Waterman

CDE 84595/6-2

Meridian

CDE 84595/6-2

CD1 60'11" CD2 78'05"



LC 13637



MCPS

K

Recording producer: Jörg Moser
Venue: Barocksaal, Benediktbeuern,
Germany 2000-2003

Recording engineers:
Anton Billmayer, Otto Schreyer,
Thomas Schinko, Peter Zelnhofer,
Klemens Kamp

Cover photo: © Ruth Waterman

p & m Meridian Records 2010
www.meridian-records.co.uk
P.O. Box 317, Eltham, London, SE9 4SF

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)

Sonatas & Partitas for Solo Violin

BWV 1001 - 1006

Ruth Waterman - Violin

Disc 1

Sonata no.1 in G minor BWV1001

1 Adagio	3:34
2 Fugue: allegro	6:22
3 Siciliana	2:58
4 Presto	3:53

Partita no.1 in B minor BWV1002

5 Allemanda & double	9:19
6 Corrente & double (presto)	6:49
7 Sarabande & double	9:23
8 Tempo di Borea & double	6:50

Sonata no.2 in A minor BWV1003

9 Grave	3:51
10 Fugue	8:21
11 Andante	7:10
12 Allegro	5:36

Disc 2

Partita no.2 in D minor BWV1004

1 Allemanda	5:11
2 Corrente	3:09
3 Sarabanda	5:45
4 Giga	4:00
5 Ciaconna	14:16

Sonata no.2 in C major BWV1005

6 Adagio	5:53
7 Fugue	12:18
8 Largo	3:51
9 Allegro assai	5:28

Partita no.3 in E major BWV1006

10 Preludio	3:07
11 Loure	3:18
12 Gavotte en Rondeau	3:16
13 Minuets 1 & 2	5:14
14 Bourree	1:38
15 Gigue	1:49

KOOPERATION MIT

Meridian

Johann Sebastian Bach - Sonatas & Partitas
for Solo Violin BWV 1001 - 1006 - Ruth Waterman

CDE 84595/6-2

available from
www.meridian-records.co.uk

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)



CDE84354
BACH
Sonatas for Violin & Keyboard Volume 1
Obligato Sonatas:
No. 1 in B Minor BWV 1014
No. 2 in A major BWV 1015
No. 3 in E major BWV 1016
No. 4 in C minor BWV 1017

Ruth Waterman - Violin
Morey Ritt - Piano



CDE84420
BACH
Sonatas for Violin & Keyboard Volume 2
Obligato Sonatas:
Sonata No. 5 in F minor, BWV 1018
Sonata No. 6 in G major, BWV 1019
movt. 3 of sonata no. 6, first version; Adagio, BWV 1019a;
movt. 4 of sonata no. 6, first version;
Continuo Sonatas:
Sonata in G major, BWV 1021
Sonata in E minor, BWV 1023
Ruth Waterman - Violin
Morey Ritt - Piano (BWV 1018, 1019)
Carole Presland - Piano (BWV 1019a, 1021, 1023)

Meridian

Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685 - 1750)

Sonatas and Partitas for
Solo Violin BWV 1001-1006

Ruth Waterman

**Johann Sebastian Bach
Sonatas & Partitas for Solo Violin
BWV 1001-1006**

The music of Johann Sebastian Bach expresses what it is to be human as eloquently as anyone ever has. His extraordinary range of emotion is more than most of us could dream of: his gift to us is that he expands us and opens us to our deepest feelings.

This set of solo Sonatas and Partitas has been my constant underlying passion for over forty years. It has been a personal journey: to enter into this music, without knowing what I'd find, and to persist when I found pain; and to keep travelling to those painful places of unbearable beauty that I would rather have avoided, time and time again; and finally to visit them in the presence of my producer and of the microphones in the beautiful Barocksaal in Benediktbeuern.

Over the years, my responses have formed and reformed through periods of immersion and periods of maturation, with all their exhilaration and frustration, dead-ends and discoveries. While puzzling over the implications of original sources and instruments and the intricacies of baroque dance-steps, there was always another fundamental difficulty: how to empty my mind of preconceptions, to look with fresh eyes at the music and search for the uniqueness of each movement. And each movement has its own issues of notation, rhythmic pulse, harmonic direction, phrasing, balances, pacing, chords, articulation, intensity, colour, dynamics – a never-ending procession of detail that needs attention in the service of reaching an emotional truth. And in the end, these recordings are only a staging post – there is, and always will be, further to go.

In this cycle, Bach chose the violin as his instrument to express what he needed to express; it is the instrument of the soul, it sings with a human voice. And he treasured these works: it was said that later in life, when he wanted to play music for his own enjoyment, he would often sit at the clavichord and play these compositions.

With these Sonatas and Partitas, Bach has drawn me into a world that is beautiful, intense, tumultuous, and full of life. I hope these recordings will draw many others into this world.

Ruth Waterman

Sonata no.1 in G minor BWV1001

Adagio

Fugue: allegro

Siciliana

Presto

Despite the extreme limitations of the violin as a solo, unaccompanied instrument, this first sonata has four movements of great contrast, both in style and character. Not that Bach is displaying his compositional skills, but rather he is revelling in what a solitary violin can do, and in the process, plunging us into one new thing after another.

For me, the Adagio is music as speech. It is narrative rather than poetry – a prologue: stating, explaining, describing. The important words are bolstered by chords, the minor words running between them.

Knowing how composers contemporary with Bach usually wrote this kind of movement – as simply a progression of chords, to be connected by the performer with improvised garlands of notes – I realise how extraordinarily lucky we are that Bach included his own garlands. At the same time, it impresses on me the need to make these tiny notes sound unwritten, as if I, the performer, were plucking from the air an imaginative line that curls to and from each chord.

Bach's line is surprisingly elaborate, and this poses a problem for the tempo. The speed must be fast enough for the ear to keep hold of the fast-moving bass line and the harmonic progress (a basic 4-in-a-bar): yet slow enough for the running notes to retain a minimum clarity and rhythmic accuracy.

Over the years, I have played the opening in a variety of ways – distressed, weary, pensive, lyrical – and all these emotions do seem to exist in the music. As the movement unfolds, a mosaic of feelings touch on the contemplative, wondrous, painful, indignant, resigned, but never happy. The intensity grows towards the end, and at the final cadence, there is a cluster of very fast notes, which serves to preclude a settled ending: as a true prologue, it subtly arouses interest in what is to come.

My understanding of the Fugue has changed radically over the years. Its structure is standard, consisting of fugal passages alternating with running-note episodes. The theme itself, with its four repeated notes, is very short, and its compactness and four-square rhythm seem to point to a straightforward, confident character. But this concept starts to evaporate in the face of other considerations, especially Bach's play with dissonance.

At the very first harmonisation, he unexpectedly places a discord on the last note, leaving the theme suspended on a painful major 7th like an unfinished sentence. It posits a moment of disturbance - questioning? sadness? anger? - and most importantly, an unresolved tension. The discord resolves itself once the next statement of the theme begins. This harmonic dovetailing of the theme statements smoothes over the joins, setting up a delicious opposition between the short theme and the continuous thread that binds them together. This also explains the brevity of the theme, in that it is a component of a much longer thought.



The version Bach has written for organ confirms that he is exploring the dynamism between the long and the short, the vertical and the horizontal, discords and concords, uncertainty and certainty. The subtle adjustments he makes for this instrument-of-many-voices achieve the opposite of what one might expect. He inserts horizontal lines into the fugal sections, and vertical supports into the running-note episodes, thereby giving the whole fugue more depth – a sense of three dimensions.

I now feel the opening to be somewhat subdued, and I had to find a gentler, and more varied, way of negotiating the chords so that they can play their part in the line, instead of punctuating it. In response to the dovetailing harmonies, I had to let the theme statements enter by stealth instead of sallying forth as my instinct had formerly told me. And I had to choose a scheme of dynamics and rhythmic energy that reflects the cohesion, as well as the forward momentum, of the writing.

The central climax is preceded by an episode that introduces a smooth texture. In the passage where Bach goes into shorthand, expecting the performer to find patterns for the chords, I retain this smooth texture by using slurs throughout, somewhat simulating the sustained notes of the organ version. I also retain the initial chordal pattern, which sets up inexorably the glorious cycle of bass notes on open strings that support the arching arpeggios.

This new confidence spills over into the following theme statement which has now

abandoned its discord. Bach even plays with the shape of the theme, turning round the last two notes to make them rise exultantly. At this point, it feels as if certainty has triumphed over uncertainty, but it is only temporary. The discords reappear in the next fugal section, indicating that uncertainty and disturbance are part and parcel of the scheme of things ...

At the end, Bach emphasises the arrival into the home key of G minor by keeping the bass firmly on G, in contrast to the parallel passage earlier. But he can't resist sliding down the chromatic scale (the accompanying quavers in the organ version imposing a control to the slide) on his way to the brilliant cadential flourishes.

After the density and emotional ferment of the fugue, the *Siciliana* is a breath of fresh air. The gentle lilt of the *siciliana* rhythm, plus the clarity of texture and thought, provide a straightforward walk from the beginning to the end. And it does feel as if the two lines are walking hand in hand – with the odd skip or two. The lower voice has the tell-tale dotted rhythm which bounces upwards before falling back in a graceful 4-note slur; while the upper voice replies with two sighs in an echo of the falling slur (Bach is so clever about unifying his ideas). The upper line is actually two voices that act as one, being always coupled together like twins. This device reminds me very much of the cantata movements where he writes for two flutes, or two oboes.

It is the dialogue between these two lines that keeps the interest in this movement. The lines



start to interrupt each other, though always with due courtesy, and the low voice even loses its first note in its eagerness to rebut or confirm the previous thought. Eventually, after some wistful, almost arbitrary ramblings, the bass line takes itself into the treble, silencing the upper voices in a moment of heartache. But all's well in the end, as the two lines walk off together into the distance.

The Presto thrusts us into a completely different world. Here there is no melody, no chords, and no rhythmic variety – just a single stream of notes. But this stream sparkles, with lots of eddies and bubbles and opposing currents.

The movement is divided into two equal parts, and each part is repeated. But this is where conformity ends. A tone of playfulness is immediately set by the first descending arpeggio which seems to tumble down in groups of threes. As the music settles down into groups of twos, this initial confusion is easily forgotten, but we are taken off guard many more times by a constantly changing inner beat. The singularity of the line soon takes on the illusion of more dimensions, as patterns appear and reappear in blocks of sequences. Just when we are getting used to a particular sequence, Bach shortens it or modifies it or starts a new one. Nothing is predictable.

He also uses slurs as foils to the constant separate notes, and some of these are decidedly slippery. Their placement affects the inner rhythm, adding off-beat flashes and creating unexpected groupings. And they aid and abet the darting line in delivering some of the most

wonderful moments of cross-rhythms in Baroque music, to vie with the best compositions of the jazz age!

Partita no.1 in B minor BWV 1002

Allemanda & Double

Corrente & Double (Presto)

Sarabande & Double

Tempo di Borea & Double

Our reverence for Bach and his enormous output of religious music can lead us to forget that he delighted in writing dance music – not exactly music for the dance-hall, but almost. The supreme technical difficulties of the solo partitas can easily distract us from the nature of the partita itself, as a collection of dances. Although they were intended for listening rather than dancing, as were Chopin's Mazurkas, for instance, one has only to compare them to the actual dances that he would have heard and seen at the court in Cöthen, to recognise Bach's intimate knowledge of the genre. He embraces the character of each dance with obvious relish, handling the traditional rhythmic patterns and structures with wit and subtlety.

Learning how to dance Baroque dances when I was young has greatly affected how I eventually came to understand, and perform, the partitas. For instance, the basic step almost always places the dancer onto one leg, and half-toe, the body moving upwards rather than downwards. This demands a degree of balance and poise and lightness that forced me to reconsider the underlying rhythmic quality, as well as my bowing style. And knowing the



relative tempos of the various dances allowed me to gauge the pacing of each partita as a whole.

In this first Partita, the dances are considerably stylised, the originals acting more as jumping-off points than as strict models. They are composed in binary form, arriving on the dominant at the midpoint, and the two halves are always repeated. But less conventionally, each dance is followed by a Double, in which a single line faithfully treads in the same harmonic footsteps. An even bigger surprise is the elimination of all rhythmic interest, as the notes simply follow on evenly and predictably. It is as if Bach is searching for two-dimensional twins that go hand in hand with each dance, yet are its opposite. And this is what transforms this Partita into a work of inspiration – the juxtaposition of activity and commentary, extroversion and introversion, dance and anti-dance.

The Allemande is immediately striking with its huge chords and dissonances and spiky rhythm. It has the buoyancy that permeates all the four dance movements, but its initial statement is more dramatic than one would expect, the bass notes being far beneath the top voice, causing the ear to perform great leaps. The persistent dotted rhythm is suggestive of the French overture, and poses the same challenges to the performer, who must find a way of encouraging the phrases to retain their shape and motion through all the little silences. Often the notes of the chords simply fan out into arpeggios, so the music needs a four-in-a-bar tempo for the inner ear to be able to reconstitute

the chords and to make sense of the harmonic progression.

The forthright opening quickly settles into the relative key of D major and triplets are introduced which soothe the energy with their smooth texture and graceful lines. Like the French overture, this movement feels as if it is introducing the Partita, telling a story in much the same way as the Adagio of the first Sonata, with its statements and wanderings, questions and replies; and the constant interweaving of the two contrasting lines produces a strange melding of speech and dance.

It is not difficult to recognise the initial harmony of the first Double, but soon I find the single line starts to mesmerise with its apparent meanderings. It is written mainly in legato pairs and, with very few exceptions, each pair encompasses two strings. The special sound that comes from constantly crossing strings creates an unusual resonance as the tones blend and waft together. The mono-rhythm and lack of contrast in this movement, as in the other Doubles, can feel like a severe restriction in its range of expression. But a performer needs to stay with Bach's constancy and resist the temptation to paste an emotional veneer over it. After many years, I realised that there is a world of expression to be found within the dynamics of piano and pianissimo.

The Corrente starts gently, hopping shyly up a B-minor arpeggio before gracefully falling through a slurred chord outline. This idea repeats itself twice more, climbing higher each time, until it reaches a curious chromatic figure that creeps downwards dislocating both the line



and the beat and ending in a haemiola - all this in the first six bars! The signs are unmistakable that Bach is about to take us for a ride, and indeed the hops become more and more outrageous and the slurred notes go off in the opposite direction and the chromatic figure extends to ridiculous lengths. By the end, the line has lost all reticence and with two bars of delicious syncopation, finishes with glee on a high B, leading straight into the fiery Double.

The clue to this Double lies in a new tempo marking: Presto. The line seems to race in a whirlwind of rising and tumbling scales, its feet hardly touching the ground. Twisting figures cause fiendishly difficult string-crossings but this writing is clearly virtuoso and will brook no objections.

If the Corrente's Double is the Partita's peak of energy, the Sarabande is its emotional centre of gravity. Formerly a dance of some momentum, it was even considered lascivious in certain quarters; but by Bach's time, it had settled back into a sedate dance that, in his suites and partitas, has the slowest tempo and bears his most profound thoughts. This one is based on a simple melody of short phrases, joined by three-note conjunctions. The expected poise is tinged with a dignified sadness, caused by the discreet use of appoggiaturas and diminished-chord harmonies. The few examples that we have of Bach's ornamentation for the repeats of his keyboard sarabandes show the extent of his elaboration, and these have inspired me to write my own ornamentation in the same comprehensive manner. As the movement

progresses, a weariness seems to overlay the sorrow, until the final cadence gives way to its companion Double.

Moving in continuous triplets, this Double seems to exist in a dream-world. With a sense of wonder, the line wends its way over large and small intervals, all the while holding its breath. The palette may be as restricted as a Monet painting of waterlilies, but it knows how to speak volumes without raising its voice.

The bourree was not often chosen as a concluding dance, and here Bach's treatment is rather larger-than-life. The title, Tempo di Borea, indicates a bourree with a difference, and this becomes apparent when the music suddenly pauses on a held note before gliding down in a long slur to the double bar. This is only one example of how Bach injects a moment of wit into the jovial atmosphere. The theme with its customary upbeat is well fleshed out with chords, and it contains a little three-note figure that goes on to play a much larger role than its brevity would imply. By placing it sometimes as an upbeat, sometimes on the downbeat, and sometimes as an afterthought, Bach unifies the movement and keeps us guessing at the same time.

The bourree's playfulness expands into robustness as its Double confidently proceeds to mirror its journey. At the double bar, there are some unexpected double-stops but apart from that, and a smattering of slurs, Bach confines his exuberance to a single line of detached notes which gambol all over the instrument, ending the Partita on a note of rare triumph.



Sonata no.2 in A minor BWV 1003**Grave****Fugue****Andante****Allegro**

This second sonata is full of adventure, the centre of gravity being the fugue, with its groundbreaking idiosyncrasies. The whole sonata appears in a keyboard version in D minor, but unlike the G minor fugue, there are very few surprising alterations.

An initial A minor chord is followed by a low G and a huge leap of almost two octaves to an F natural, a bold move that must have been extraordinarily startling in Bach's time. Even in these post-Schönbergian days, the line is incomprehensible until a few moments later, when we can hear that there are in fact two lines. So it is only in hindsight (or the auditory equivalent) that the zigzag readjusts itself in our brain into two separate voices. Each voice moves stepwise, but since the low G is the lowest note the violin can play, Bach hits bottom on the second note of his descending scale, and has to jump up an octave to continue. He could have saved himself this trouble by starting the bass line an octave higher, but the fact that he chose not to, confirms his intention to shock.

The style of this movement is the same as the first movement of the G minor Sonata: a series of chords threaded through with garlands of tiny notes, creating a free improvisatory line that approaches speech. Although the character touches on many emotions, it speaks more of sorrow than the first sonata, and there are a couple of unexpectedly painful cadences.

The keyboard version is almost identical, with the bass line reinforced by thicker chords. However, the ending is a little different and I found it helpful in pondering the puzzle of the penultimate bar. The violin writing carries the strange notation of two wavy lines plus a trill, which has exercised many a performer. The keyboard substitutes a rather creepy chromatic scale for the wavy line, so my current solution is to interpret it as a bow vibrato, creating a shuddering sound that ends the movement on a fragile note.

Like an auditory bridge, the final notes are corralled into the opening of the Fugue, but now they are transformed by a perky rhythm. This theme is much more lively than the fugue theme of the first sonata: though it is just as short, there's an initial mordent, an octave leap, and a hopping rising figure. The first time it is harmonised, Bach again throws in an unexpected harmony on the very last note, but this time, it is in the theme itself: instead of staying in the minor key, he thrusts it into the major. The effect is one of surprise, and a pleasant one at that, but it is only fleeting, as the major is snatched away by the next note in a falling chromatic line. These two contrasting ideas, the rhythmic theme and the chromatic line, are the material out of which the whole fugue is built. I doubt that Bach is here invoking the usual sadness of his falling chromatic lines, but rather is suggesting that light and shade pass quickly from one to the other. Fluidity and duality seem to be the focus of his exploration.

The extended sequences show Bach's ingenuity in weaving these lines together. The

theme is compressed to fit in with the chromatic scale, each phrase falling as the sequence rises. Playing music that simultaneously rises and falls, and is jaunty and sad, feels somewhat paradoxical, and the relative weight of the two lines is not always stable as the fugue progresses.

The running-note episodes provide a welcome relief, with their string-crossings and echoes and patterns. The second one ends on a tantalising major third, which dissolves into a minor third as the theme shyly reappears, this time upside-down. The major/minor dichotomy seems to be resolved for it never appears again; but slurs have emerged at the end of the theme, giving it a gentler shape.

Since the theme is now inverted, Bach also inverts the chromatic line, and starts to have fun juxtaposing the two directions. In an artful sequence, the chromatic line rises determinedly through the texture, overtakes the theme, and blossoms into a series of figures in 6ths, losing its chromaticisms and producing the central climax of the movement.

As in the G minor fugue, the intensity calms before starting to build towards the final climax. Bach uses the sequence combining the two ideas in its inverted form, and when the theme returns, it too is inverted. As the last cadence is reached with its brilliant downward sweep, it is astonishing to realise that the final triumphant statements of the theme are both inverted and that the slurs have given way to sturdy separate notes. Not allowing the theme to reappear in its original form is extraordinary and leaves me wondering whether Bach started

this daring fugue with his theme upside-down to begin with! Or is he proposing that, like the magnetic poles, essential things can change direction and life still goes on?

The Andante that follows is a gently flowing melody over a pulsating accompaniment. The simplicity of the texture belies the treacherous technical conundrum posed by having to play two independent lines at the same time with only one bow.

The throbbing bass line lays down a comforting cushion for the melody, which rides upon it like an aria. Although this movement is in C major, Bach manages to create a wistful mood – poignant even – especially in the second half, when the harmony becomes more disturbed and the melody is strewn with suspensions like sighs. As the end is approached, even the melodic line becomes contorted and dissonant, and it is only at the very last moment that it melts into the reassuring key of C major.


I have again ornamented the repeats in this movement, as would have been customary. Those at the cadences are taken from the keyboard version, but the main ornamental line is my own.

The opening of the final Allegro signals a movement of fun and games. A single line bounces back and forth between A and E in a series of patterns, which are each repeated as echoes. In the keyboard version, the tonic is reinforced and lengthened, but the violin can make good use of the open strings to create a bold and rustic character. Each pattern is more energised than the last, as Bach inserts very fast



notes in short bursts, then doubles the phrase lengths, then expands the intervals, until the line bursts out of its repetitive obsession and falls into a series of sequences.

Some of the tiny fast notes are contained within slurs and some are not. The style of the keyboard version confirms that this is not a printing error or shorthand, and the line does indeed benefit from the excitement of the changing articulation. By grouping notes together, the slurs point out rhythmic patterns and often outline a moving bass that tries in vain to anchor the scampering flurry of notes. The high spirits prevail until, after a cheeky aborted ending, the line comes to a halt by leaping almost two octaves onto a low A.



Partita no.2 in D minor BWV 1004
Allemanda
Corrente
Sarabanda
Giga
Ciaconna

In this Partita, Bach embarks on a journey of increasing intensity, from the first note of the Allemande to the last of the Chaconne. By the end of it, he has taken us into another world, beyond music, a realm of pure emotion, as if the music is not expressing emotion, but being it.

He is true to convention in that he presents the traditional four dances: allemande, corrente, sarabande and gigue. Equally conventionally, each dance consists of two parts that are repeated, though the style of the music is far more sophisticated than its ballroom equivalent. The Chaconne is a set of variations that is not

only unexpected but it seems to expand organically and alarmingly until it reaches gigantic proportions.

The first sounds of the Allemanda are of a single row of notes outlining a D-minor scale, the most simple way of setting the key; the equivalent of “once upon a time”. In fact the whole movement feels like an introduction, the single line gently exploring various shapes and harmonies in the first light of dawn. Sometimes the line trips along more eagerly with the addition of faster notes, while at other times it slides under long slurs. The style is fluid like Bach’s allemandes for keyboard, and is worlds away from the German dance from which it originated.

There is a hint of a dance feeling in the Corrente. It consists of two contrasting ideas: a gently skipping figure that mostly describes arpeggios, and smooth running triplets that sweep up and down scales. The rhythmic alternation, and the large distances covered by the running line, give this movement more confidence and energy than the Allemanda. The music gets warmer as it proceeds, but it is surprisingly not the skipping line that provides the heat, but the triplet line becoming more and more contorted and broken up. In the end, it completely out-manoeuvres the jumpy rhythm, even taking over its arpeggios in the final bars. At the close, Bach gives us a delicious false ending that sounds almost rude, followed by a two-octave leap at the cadence.

Although the Sarabande is the slowest movement, the intensity is once more increased. A melody of sighs and yearnings and large

chromatic gestures is underpinned by a procession of rich chords. As in most of Bach's sarabandes, this composition is much more complex than the dance music itself and therefore needs a slower tempo, yet the feeling of three-in-a-bar persists. Again I have followed Bach's example in his keyboard suites by ornamenting the repeats with a similarly elaborate line. And once more, the ending is unexpected in that it extends itself in a series of afterthoughts that become increasingly painful in their chromaticisms, as if reluctant to let the sorrow die away into silence.

A typical gigue rhythm announces a complete change of mood. But the jaunty rising arpeggio immediately spills into the moto perpetuo style of the Italian giga, a merry whirling and swirling of running notes that form patterns and sequences and echoes. Bach's sense of delight in creating unexpected twists and turns is infectious, especially when he throws in syncopations, or teeters on a held note before allowing the line to flow away naturally.

Audiences conversant with the traditional partitas would have expected to be putting on their coats after hearing the gigue. So it would have been quite a surprise to be presented with yet another movement, and the sudden entry of thick chords must have been startling. But even on first hearing, there would have been two familiar features to this opening: the dotted rhythm starting on the second beat; and the bass line, a common 4-bar pattern. The rhythm is typical of the ciaccona dance, or chaconne; and the bass line is a favourite of many Baroque composers writing sets of variations, (and even

popular composers of the 1950s and 1960s!).

This chaconne consists of no fewer than 65 repetitions of the bass pattern, with only the occasional slight variation. Since the bass pattern always ends on the tonic D, it is a tremendous challenge to compose a unified and coherent and moving piece of music that nevertheless reverts to D every four bars. Not only did Bach meet this challenge, but he has created out of these extreme limitations one of the towering movements of the classical music repertoire.

The listener is not aware of the 4-bar building blocks because Bach often disguises the joins by sustaining a melodic or rhythmic characteristic. For instance, the initial jumpy rhythm persists for six repetitions, and these repetitions fall neatly into pairs; a line of equal semiquavers covers five repetitions; an arpeggiated figure covers eight repetitions. He also contrives to modify his levels of intensity over long stretches of time. He intensifies by squeezing faster and faster notes into the bars, or by adding more and more chords, or by working the harmonies into a frenzy. And the whole movement is divided into three large sections. Since there are no performing instructions, it is the task of the performer to find ways of pacing and shaping the music by following the thread.

There are two passages where Bach writes only chords, instructing the performer to arpeggiate. In the first passage, he helpfully gives an initial bar as an example, but it is up to the player to decide whether to retain this pattern throughout, for the sake of unity; or



whether to use several different patterns, for the sake of variety. I feel that by keeping the same pattern, one can hear how the slurs enclose more and more notes, increasing their speed in an inexorable drive. It is at the end of this passage, with its tremendous climax, that the original theme returns, but instead of rounding off the work, it takes us suddenly into a new world of D-major.

Rarely does a change of key have such a profound effect. Although the original rhythm and the original bass pattern are there, the low tones and simple line float almost without motion on the radiance of the major key. It is as if a sense of grace has descended and the music slowly proceeds wide-eyed to explore this new heaven. Eventually, a repeated-note motif finds its way into the line, gradually becoming more prominent and expanding into a swell of rich chords. Now the original chaconne rhythm returns and the chords rise exultantly before spreading out into the second arpeggiated passage. Just as the work seems to be ending in joy, Bach dashes our expectations yet again.

He thrusts the music back into the original key of D-minor, a jolt that feels devastating. In one move, he snatches away the heaven he has conjured, replacing it with a terrible anguish. The writing becomes more and more chromatic as the music plunges into deep despair, and a series of sighing couplets seems to get weaker and weaker. Just when it feels as if it can go on no longer, the music starts recovering, as in a sudden realisation of its inner strength. The original theme is heard again, most definitely for the final time, now a statement of maturity and

utmost confidence forged in the flames of experience.

Sonata no.3 in C major BWV 1005

Adagio

Fugue

Largo

Allegro assai

Like the D minor Partita, the C major Sonata touches the deepest places of the soul. But whereas the profundity of the Partita emerges gradually and is fully experienced only in the Chaconne, the C major Sonata plunges into the heart of things from the very first note. For me, it is the most inward-looking of all the Sonatas and Partitas, the four movements seeming to travel from the depths of grief to final acceptance.

The opening Adagio is one of the most despairing movements I know. In the keyboard version, Bach adds mordents and an even bass line that begs for a slow tempo; and a slow pace allows the violin time to swell on each drawn-out note as the rocking rhythm endlessly repeats. Each of the first four bars gains an additional voice, broadening out before falling back exhausted in the fifth bar. The next two phrases do not even have the strength to survive five bars; and just when the music is ready to settle at the first cadence, a stern Bb followed by the 'devil's interval' of the tritone reminds us that there is no rest for those who grieve.

The relentless moaning persists until a resolution feels imminent, but again Bach stays his hand with three anguished chords. If loss of hope leads to loss of faith, Bach is perilously close to the darkness, and only as the movement



closes does he have the will to ask for help. The asking is held in the last note.

The Fugue opens with a sense of awe, as Bach invokes the spirit of holiness with the first few notes of “Come, Holy Ghost”. The melody was taken from the old “Veni Sancte Spiritus”, a Catholic hymn that was appropriated by Luther, who preached that the Holy Ghost actually composed it. Whether Bach believed this or not, he would certainly have been aware of its aura of sanctity, and he used it on several occasions. But at this moment in this sonata, it almost seems as if the Holy Spirit itself were speaking. After only a few notes, Bach falters, pivoting on a G, the same note as the opening plea “Come”; and before the line of the hymn can rise, he writes his own ending, continuing the direction of descent. Perhaps in setting the divine and the human side by side in the two halves of his theme, Bach is finding a musical way of wrestling with his angel.

Like the A minor fugue, the counter-subject is a descending chromatic scale with its alternation of major and minor, adding a harmonic richness to the theme’s harmonic simplicity. And here it does carry the burden of sadness, yet it allows a glimpse of hope as the line curves upwards at the end to hold hands with the theme. This change of direction does not coincide with the pivotal midpoint of the theme, but overlaps it. The theme is twice as long as the other sonatas’ themes, and together with its counter-subject, offers an abundance of opposing tensions for Bach to explore - the divine and the human, hope and despair, grief and faith, issues of symmetry and endings and

continuity. And this he does, producing the longest fugue of all his compositions - and for the least suitable instrument!

As for its interpretation, I found myself puzzling over many aspects: articulations, voice-leading, balances, and dynamics, not to mention the overall shape, and I did not perform this sonata until I was about 40 years old. How to play the theme itself became clearer once I realised that the first note “Komm” stands by itself, separated by a comma from what follows; and the next word “Heiliger” spreads over six notes, inviting smooth connections.

The movement is divided into seven clear sections. In the first section, Bach works with his theme, often concentrating on the second half, and allowing a sense of confidence to grow towards a sweeping arpeggio that propels us into the first episode. For the first time in this sonata, a playful spirit is heard as the running notes ply their course. However the light-heartedness is short-lived as the music prepares for A minor and the theme reappears with its plea in the minor mode. Here Bach introduces the device of stretto, where one theme statement enters before another has finished, stepping on the toes of the previous entry and creating endless overlaps.

The next episode contains sequences of inordinate length, as if Bach were building a house of cards and testing how far he can go. And soon we realise that the theme has insinuated itself into a rich texture of open strings and double-stops.



This leads to a fugal section where the theme is confidently turned upside down. Bach makes two small adjustments that are significant. A slight rhythmic change produces a strong end; and the inverted chromatic line, which now rises and should fall at its end, continues its upward journey. With both lines rising and a more definite ending, the internal struggle seems to be won. At this point, the chromatic line, embedded in huge chords, climbs in a miraculous ascent through a whole octave to arrive on a gleaming C major chord.

The next episode echoes the previous one, with the added touch of beginning upside down; and the last section is a repeat of the first. But how different in character the theme appears now. In this long fugue, Bach has sustained his argument and fought his battles, and he completes his journey by settling on his first note – G – now wedded to the tonic C, perhaps a perfect synthesis of the divine and the human.

In the following Largo, Bach takes us as close to heaven as we are likely to get. It is the most tender love-song, its gently rising and falling phrases lightly accompanied by the occasional bass note. It feels so intimate that to try to describe it would be an intrusion. The only cloud comes in the penultimate bar, when an unexpected diminished chord seems to betray a pang of loss – perhaps a residual doubt – but this immediately dissolves as the movement closes in utter peace.

The Allegro Assai is a delight. Like the other sonatas' last movements, it consists of just one

single line, but its character feels much lighter and less virtuosic, though technically it is just as challenging to play. Bach is working with two main ideas: the simple five-note scale that opens the movement, and a swirling figure that shoots off little sparks. The precise placement of slurs helps to shape the line and delineate the rhythmic patterns. And it also produces a finely etched surface and a delicacy that resists becoming completely earthbound. In fact this movement brings to my mind the image of a single solitary angel dancing on the head of a pin.

Partita no.3 in E major BWV1006

Preludio

Loure

Gavotte en Rondeau

Minuets 1 & 2

Bourree

Gigue

The intense introversion of the C major Sonata is nowhere to be found in the E major Partita. Bach has emerged into the sunlight. This collection of dances does not even include a sarabande, so there is no slow movement. It is as if he were saying that in the end, in this last work of this turbulent and profoundly emotional set, there is only light and grace and dancing.

Many of his dance suites begin with an introduction, and this Preludio is one of the most exciting, being a *moto perpetuo* of tremendous drive and colour. Bach plays a joke on us with the very first note – or should I say,



the very first silence. For it sounds as if the movement begins with a trumpet call of five beats, and it is only when the fast notes are off and running in bars of three beats, that we supply the missing rest to our memory of the opening. In his transcription for organ solo and orchestra in Cantata no.29, the silent downbeat is replaced with a wallop from the timpani!

This is true virtuoso writing, the notes showering down in patterns and echoes and sequences. Often the single line divides into more than one voice as the bow alternates between strings; and in two famous passages, the unique resonance of the violin's open strings is exploited to the full as the bow weaves dazzling and complex designs across three strings. Occasionally, Bach changes the texture by adding slurs, and although it is tempting to make life easier by adding a few more, I think that the contrast between the slurs and separate notes is worth preserving.

The transcription for organ and orchestra is illuminating in that it has a tempo marking – presto; the accompaniment is mainly rhythmic punctuation; and the chordal cadence at the end is supported by a strongly rhythmic figure, precluding any indulgent rubato.

After this attention-getting prelude, the dances take centre stage. If the essence of Baroque dance is elegance, here there is elegance in abundance. Bach follows fairly closely the style and structure of the actual dances; and on those few occasions where he takes the reins and leads us away from the expected route, we can easily follow his train of thought until he returns us safely to familiar territory.

The first dance, the loure, appears rarely in Bach's suites. My originally warm and languorous concept of it was shattered when I learnt the actual dance steps which need a faster tempo. Quantz's detailed instructions on how to play it, including the admonition to lift the bow frequently, produces an articulation that well matches the character of the tiny steps. So the loure emerges as a lilting dance of graceful femininity, sometimes wistful, sometimes even flirtatious.

The famous gavotte, with its obligatory two upbeats and comically outrageous discord on the downbeat, leads us on a merry romp. The rondo form means that the melody alternates with episodes, each having a different character. And each episode takes us to a different place, even as far afield as F# minor and G# minor. As a consequence, every time the theme returns, it appears in a new light, either of relief or triumph or diffidence.

The twinned minuets are simpler in character, reflecting the fact that it was always the minuet that was the first dance to be taught to a little count or countess. The main step lasts six beats, spanning two bars, and contains lovely subtle syncopations that Bach mirrors exactly. My ornaments for the repeats of the first minuet are not 'ornate', but rather naïve, much like Bach's writing for his own children. The second minuet imitates the sound of a musette, with its attempt at a drone.

The last two movements are very short, but they step up the energy. The bourree, with its single upbeat, its echoed phrases and its constant alternation between slurred and detached running notes, exudes joviality. And



the Italian-style gigue whirls into a mass of patterns and changes of direction. Dancing the gigue entails many jumps, necessitating a fast tempo which produces a fine brilliance. And Bach's extra "I told you so" phrases finish the partita, and the cycle, with a grin and a sparkle.

©Ruth Waterman 2010

Ruth Waterman's first performance of solo Bach came at the age of thirteen and was described by the Guardian as "an experience of great value". Since then her memorable concerts over many years have captivated audiences worldwide with her "total love and involvement from beginning to end" (Gramophone). Performing a broad repertoire, she is also known as a broadcaster, educator, conductor and writer, as well as for her work in post-war Bosnia, which prompted her book *When Swan Lake Comes to Sarajevo*. Born in Leeds, she studied in Manchester and then in New York, where she lived for many years before returning to the UK to settle in London.



Photo: © Anne Devlin

Waterman is an experience no Bach-lover should miss
Fanfare Record Review (USA), Bach Obbligato Sonatas
