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J.S. BACH

Six Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Alone

Edited by
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Foreword

The Six Sonatas and Partitas by Johann Sebastian Bach are the culmination of an almost-century-old tradition of multiple-voice writing for unaccompanied violin in Germany. Works by Thomas Baltzar (Preludes, Allemande, etc.), Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (Passacaglia), Johann Paul von Westhoff (Suites), and Johann Georg Pisendel (Sonata) serve as significant prior examples of this improvisatory and compositional practice with which Bach was intimately familiar.

Bach's autograph manuscript from Cöthen, titled "Sei Solo a Violino senza Basso Accompagnato," is dated 1720, though some scholars believe he may have begun writing the Sonatas and Partitas as early as 1717. The title page includes the designation "Part 1," with Part 2 being the Six Suites for unaccompanied 'cello (probably the "da spalla" type of violoncello played by himself).

The Sonatas and Partitas are full of technical challenges that must be overcome in order to bring out the harmonies and polyphonies. They require a highly refined technique of both the left and right hands. Clearly Bach was not only a genius composer and master keyboard player, but also a violin virtuoso of the first rank. The violin was most likely the first instrument he studied with his violinist father, Johann Ambrosius. Bach's first professional jobs in Lüneberg and Weimar included significant duties as a violin player, and he continued to play the instrument for all of his life. Perhaps his esteem for the violin is reflected in the fact that the longest fugue he ever wrote was not for organ, harpsichord, or ensemble, but for unaccompanied violin (the Fuga of BWV 1005).

The internal symmetry of the six violin works points to his conception of them as a cycle, rather than merely a collection. Each Fuga is increasingly longer and more complex. In contrast, the third movements of the Sonatas become ever sparer, from three voices to two to primarily one. The Partitas increase in size from four movements to five to six. Their stylistic language follows a forward path, from the proto-seventeenth century of the B Minor to the High Baroque Italian of the D Minor to the new modern French style of the E Major.

Bach's three sonatas are in sonata da chiesa (church sonata) form: slow-fast-slow-fast. Each pair of opening movements is an adagio and fugue, joined by an unresolved chord in the A Minor and C Major. The first movements of the G Minor and A Minor are covered in highly elaborate ornaments. The simpler ABA form of the G Minor Adagio gives us a wonderful opportunity to compare the different ornaments of the parallel first and last sections. The C Major Adagio is an entirely different concept, almost not a movement in its own right but rather an extended introduction, with a beginning that opens like a sunrise followed by a gradual unfolding of the music.

The subjects of the G Minor and A Minor Fugas are equally brief, but the G Minor is much more compact in structure. The organ with its variety of stops is often evoked, particularly in the pedal points of the coda. The more complex A Minor Fuga features a countersubject in a descending chromatic line and both themes in inversion. The C Major Fuga is a stunning masterpiece. The subject is taken from the chorale tune *Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herr Gott* ("Come, Holy Ghost, Lord and God"). Bach's inventive treatment of this theme includes major and minor, double fugue, stretto, inversion, and even burying it in single-voice eighth notes. The density of his polyphony uses as many as four voices, one per string. This is an unparalleled academic achievement, yet the result is a feeling of transcendence and ecstasy.

Each third movement is in a key that contrasts with the rest of the sonata. The lilting Siciliana (from BWV 1001) conjures up a trio sonata, with a melodic bass line and two treble voices in duet. The two voices of the Andante (from BWV 1003) have distinct roles, melody and accompaniment. The delicate Largo (from BWV 1005) includes only the barest addition of a few harmony notes here and there. All of the last movements are single-voiced and in binary form, though with complex multiple-voiced writing buried within, and numerous cross-rhythms. The A Minor Allegro has the most frequent use of written dynamics in Bach's cycle, with various echoes and a *subito piano* near the end. The brilliance of the C Major Allegro assai seems to suggest the E Major Preludio that follows.

The Partitas are suites of dance movements. Bach follows the standard Italianate sequence of Allemanda, Corrente, Sarabanda, Giga in his D Minor Partita, but deviates from it in the last movement of the B Minor, substituting an intriguingly titled Tempo di Borea. (Perhaps this was a nod to Pisendel whose earlier sonata had concluded with a Giga and Variation.) Despite the fact that none of these dances was meant to accompany actual dancing, Bach is often meticulous in his adherence to symmetrical phrases indicating regular step units.

Across the Partitas, Bach uses different spellings of the same movement titles to suggest stylistic differences (Sarabande versus Sarabanda, Giga versus Gigue, etc.). The B Minor has the feel of an older aesthetic. Seventeenth-century influences include a Sarabande which is flowing rather than lingering, and a variation of each movement in "division" style. Particularly in the outer movements, the affect is theatrical, evoking an orchestra accompanying dancers onstage rather than chamber music.

In contrast, the D Minor Partita has the more intimate feel of a single fiddler, or a few of them. The first four movements could form a suite of their own, but it turns

out that they are leading up to one of the pinnacles of all music. Much has been written about the Ciaccona as a monumental showpiece, or a journey through the deepest of emotions. The theory that Bach wrote it as a memorial to his first wife has been convincingly debunked, but we still continue to hope that perhaps it has some hidden, poignant extra-musical meaning such as the crucifixion. (Another theory suggests that the three sonata-partita pairs may represent birth, death, and resurrection.) Yet the music need not justify itself beyond its notes and the emotions they portray. These thirty-four imaginative variations in three sections are grand, playful, peaceful, uncertain, triumphant, tragic. Yet, somehow, Bach never loses the spirit of the dance.

The E Major Partita communicates sheer happiness, capturing the delight of the fashionable French style without the fussiness. The Gavotte, often played as a stand-alone like the Preludio, is a rare instance of a Rondo movement in Bach's output. The elegant Loure and Menuet 1 contrast with the rustic flavor of the Bourée and the musette-like Menuet 2. How wonderful that Bach concludes his entire cycle not with an emphatic statement but with a cute little Gigue that smiles and waves as it makes its lighthearted exit.

About this Edition

There is no one right way to play Bach. More than almost any repertoire, each individual's interpretation is as unique as their personality. Though I have spent decades studying Bach's music as well as that of his contemporaries and predecessors, my final rationale for artistic decisions is often taste and instinct. Every violinist who undertakes a lifetime's journey with this incredible repertoire is continually discovering new ideas. Thus, the opinions on the following pages may evolve over time. However, everything in the sheet music closely follows my 2016 recording "Testament: Complete Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin by J.S. Bach" (Avie 2360), which I truly feel represents the culmination of my exploration into these extraordinary works.

In choosing to present this edition, my hope is that you will find useful solutions to challenges of fingering, bowing, and polyphony, and helpful information about phrasing. I have also included additional dynamic suggestions with the hope that trying these ideas will help inspire you to discover your own. All of these markings are designed to work with a baroque violin and baroque bow, a modern violin and baroque bow, or a modern violin and modern bow. While the information in this edition is unusually dense, there is much that I did not include, such as lifts, breaths, articulations, whether to play on or off the string, metronome markings, details of timing, and emphases other than hemiolas.

I offer this book to you in the spirit of Bach: "Soli Deo Gloria."

Notes

The decision of whether to add the "missing" note of the fugal subject in the top voice of m. 53 of the Fuga of BWV 1001 is a controversial one, and I offer it as an option only. In m. 94 of the Ciaccona of BWV 1004, the lowest voice of the first note was originally written as an A. In m. 19 of the Preludio of BWV 1006, the second to last note was originally written as an A".

Bach's manuscript is followed precisely as regards the beaming of notes, but not the stem directions.

Accidentals

Accidentals conform to modern practice, where an accidental once written continues for the remainder of the measure. For ease of reading, certain accidentals have been added without comment to cancel out previous ones. Accidentals added to correct mistakes are in parentheses. In addition, I have added parenthetical accidentals in two cases where older editions have often made corrections that I believe are erroneous: m. 9 of the Siciliana of BWV 1001 and m. 22 of the Loure of BWV 1006.

Polyphony

Eugène Ysaÿe completed his Six Sonatas for solo violin, op. 27, in 1923–24, more than 200 years after Bach's Six Sonatas and Partitas. I have adopted his use of the symbol ϕ to indicate every place where a voice should no longer be held. Nonetheless, the notes should be played in such a way that their written length is implied.

Rests

All rests are included, with additional rests indicated by parentheses. Bach's use of rests to suggest polyphonic voices is not always consistent; for example, compare the parallel first and last sections of the Fuga of BWV 1005.

Repeats

The tradition of repeating the first half, but not the second half of movements arose during the classical period with the invention of sonata-allegro form, where it makes sense to do two expositions and only one development-recapitulation. Bach's movements with two repeats are in typically baroque binary form, and the halves are often of equal length. Therefore, doing the first repeat only (AAB) makes the music unbalanced. It is more logical and musically satisfying to do both repeats (AABB) or neither (AB).

Ornaments

Parenthetical trills are added to cadences from which they are absent. No other suggested ornaments are included. Further decorations are not needed in the Sonatas and Partitas, though there are certainly occasions in which they may be added if you are inspired to do so. In seeking to bring the music to life, it is very important to explore the emotions, characters, and affects of each movement, and to experiment with details of timing, phrasing, and articulation.

Sonata Prima a Violino Solo senza Basso

in G Minor, BWV 1001

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

Edited by Rachel Barton Pine

I. Adagio

The musical score is for the first movement, Adagio, of the Sonata in G Minor for Violin Solo, BWV 1001, by Johann Sebastian Bach. The score is written for violin in G minor, 3/4 time. It consists of 10 measures. The notation includes various dynamics (f, mf, p), articulations (accents, slurs, trills), and fingerings. A large 'SAMPLE' watermark is visible across the score.

Measure 1: **f** (forte), starts with a half note G4, followed by a half note F#4. A trill is marked on the second measure.

Measure 2: **mf** (mezzo-forte), continues the trill from the previous measure.

Measure 3: **f** (forte), starts with a half note E4, followed by a half note D4. A trill is marked on the second measure.

Measure 4: **mf** (mezzo-forte), continues the trill from the previous measure.

Measure 5: **f** (forte), starts with a half note C4, followed by a half note B3. A trill is marked on the second measure.

Measure 6: **p** (piano), continues the trill from the previous measure.

Measure 7: **mf** (mezzo-forte), starts with a half note A3, followed by a half note G3. A trill is marked on the second measure.

Measure 8: **f** (forte), continues the trill from the previous measure.

Measure 9: **mf** (mezzo-forte), starts with a half note F#3, followed by a half note E3. A trill is marked on the second measure.

Measure 10: **mf** (mezzo-forte), continues the trill from the previous measure.

11 *p* *p*

13 *mf*

14 *f*

15 *mf* *f*

17 *mf*

18 *f* *p*

19 *mf* *p* *mf*

21 *f*

Detailed description: This musical score is for guitar, spanning measures 11 to 21. It is written in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The notation includes various guitar-specific techniques: slurs for phrasing, ties, and dynamic markings such as *p* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *f* (forte). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above the notes. Trills are marked with 'tr' and vibrato with a 'v' symbol. A large, faint watermark 'Guitar' is visible across the page. The score concludes with a final double bar line and a repeat sign.

II. Fuga

Allegro

mp *mf* *f*

4 *f* *f*

7 *f* *mf*

10 *f*

13 *f* *p*

16 *p* *cresc.*

19 *f*

22 *f* *mp*

25 *mf*

28 *f* *f*

31 *f* *mf* *f*

34 *p* (arpeggio)

37 *p* *cresc.*

41 *f* *mf*

44 *f* *dim.*

47 *p* *mp*

50 *mf* *f*

52 *f* *mp* *mf*

55 *p* *mp* *mf*

58 *f* *f*

61 *f* *f*