

The music

Johann Sebastian Bach	<i>Cello Suite no3 in C major BWV1009 (transposed for violin)</i>
Giuseppe Tartini	<i>Sonata in B minor</i>
Heinrich Biber	<i>Passacaglia in G minor</i> <i>'The Guardian Angel'</i>
Bach	<i>Partita no2 in D minor BWV1004</i> or <i>Sonata no2 in A minor BWV1003</i>

(the Partita will be played at the 8pm performance and the Sonata at 5pm)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) *Suite for Cello no3 in C major BWV1009 transposed to G major for violin*

1 *Prelude* ~ 2 *Allemande* ~ 3 *Courante* ~ 4 *Sarabande*
~ 5 *Bourrée* ~ 6 *Gigue*

Bach spent 1717-23 as Hofkapellmeister in Köthen in the service of the German Prince Leopold von Anhalt-Köthen. During his tenure, Bach wrote mainly secular instrumental music and in 1720 composed six *Cello Suites* for the celebrated gamba player and cellist Ferdinand Christian Abel. These were the first important compositions for solo violoncello in the repertoire.

The development of the Suite as an instrumental genre combining various dance forms into a cycle took place predominantly in Germany in the 17th century. By 1720, the sarabande (a Spanish dance), the English gigue, the German allemande and the French courante had become fully integrated within the Suite, though by then only the form of the original pieces remained. Their character as dances had largely disappeared.

Bach's Suites all had the same basic structure: *Prelude*, *Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, *Gigue*. He would then add a further movement between the slow *Sarabande* and the fast *Gigue* in order to lessen the abruptness of the tempo change – in the case of Suite BWV1009, a *Bourrée*.

Rachel has this to say about the transposition of these masterpieces for cello to her own use on the violin.

“Lucky enough to grow up with Bach's music around me, the *Cello Suites* became part of my regular listening diet as the ‘other’ Bach solo pieces ‘not written for the violin’. I secretly coveted these works quite early on, not least because I found many

established cello performances – however celebrated the players – to be performed in a style and tempo which reduced the dance character to being something almost incidental... Gradually, I could feel these pieces joining the *violin partitas* and *sonatas* as another kind of ‘daily bread’; I started catching myself playing some of the movements I particularly loved while warming up, and realising that it was actually possible to play them on the violin, and to find a special expressive vocabulary at the higher pitch.

How could one possibly justify it, especially with works that have peppered the recording catalogue with some of the most iconic and adored string performances of all time, the Casals, Fourniers, Torteliers or Starkers? But what I was doing also seemed very much in keeping with Bach's own habit of recycling his own compositions for different instruments and different uses. The examples are endless but I immediately think of the concertos appearing as sinfonias in cantatas, or concertos for violins turned into harpsichord concertos.

Playing these six suites on the violin is, of course, quite a different proposition. With its smaller resonating body, the violin speaks more quickly and the immediacy of sound enables it to be more flexible, flighty and agile than the more circumspect and gravitational cello. The dances therefore feel especially idiomatic for the violin when they're played a little faster than you might be accustomed to on the cello. At first, I missed the resonance in the slower movements, but then I started to relish delving into the gut strings to cajole as much resonance as I could from the chords of those slow dances. Discovering the *preludes* on the violin was, perhaps, the purest of the joys. It felt like a luxury to have the chance to reconstitute them.”

Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) *Sonata in B minor* (c.1750)

1 *Andante* ~ 2 *Allegro assai* ~ 3 *Giga. Allegro affettuoso*

Music for unaccompanied violin (*senza basso*) had a distinguished history before Bach. A large repertoire of very high quality had in fact developed over the course of the later 17th century, driven by the spread of a new taste in music which prized the ability of instrumental music to imitate what was seen to be the ideal of vocal expression.

Violinistic virtuosity became extraordinarily experimental in this period, with novelties in the tuning of the strings (*scordatura*); bowing techniques; the development of sophisticated double-, triple- and quadruple-stopping techniques; and playing in high positions. But this performative dimension of the music was not merely acrobatic; it was designed to serve the widest possible

range of rhetorical possibilities. The power to move listeners was the trump card of the virtuoso.

Tartini was not only a composer, he was also the most influential violin teacher of the 18th century. But throughout his long life his composing went hand-in-hand with theoretical speculation. In his theoretical works Tartini emphasised Art's absolute reliance on Nature and insisted that the perfection of good taste in music is represented by the expressive capacity of the human voice.

As Rachel recalls: “The Tartini *Sonatas for solo violin* were unknown to me until David Takeno, my former teacher, gave me a copy of the manuscript a few years ago (the original is in Padua). Tartini's handwriting is pretty clear even if minute, and the pieces are consistently considerable and engaging. He sometimes writes a bass to go with the violin line, but states very clearly that his true intention was always to play these pieces without the bass where melodic freedom can reign. The *B minor Sonata* has a haunting feel to it and is achingly beautiful and transporting. It begins with an aria-like *Andante* with the motto ‘Quanto mai felici siete’ taken from Metastasio's libretto for *Ezio*. Its plaintive quality is not entirely banished by the following vigorous *Allegro assai*, nor by the unusually expressive concluding *Gigue*.”

Franz Ignaz Heinrich Biber (1644-1704) *Passacaglia in G minor for solo violin: 'The Guardian Angel' (from the 'Mystery Sonatas') (?1676)*

Biber was one of the most celebrated violinist-composers of the 17th century. His collection of sonatas published in 1681 contained unprecedented formal complexity and technical challenges for the performer.

But although responsible for some of the century's most technically challenging and flamboyantly virtuosic works, he was well able to turn this virtuosity to more inward devotional purposes. In 1670 Biber had entered the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg. The prelate was a strong supporter of Salzburg's Confraternity of the Rosary which held devotional services each October, and it is possible that Biber's '*Rosary*' or '*Mystery Sonatas*' – which remained unpublished in his lifetime – were written for these services in 1676. The collection of 15 sonatas is for solo violin and continuo, but it concludes with an unaccompanied *Passacaglia*. In the surviving manuscript this is accompanied by an engraving of a child and an angel and may therefore have been associated with the Feast of the Guardian Angel on 2nd October.

The remarkable range, expressive intensity and monumental architecture of this celebrated movement have been seen as prefiguring the *Chaconne* of Bach's *D minor Partita*, but there is no evidence that Bach had access to a copy of the score or ever heard the work.

JS Bach *Sonata no2 in A minor for solo violin BWV1003
1 Grave ~ 2 Fuga ~ 3 Andante ~ 4 Allegro

†Partita no2 in D minor for solo violin BWV1004
1 Allemanda ~ 2 Corrente ~ 3 Sarabanda ~
4 Giga ~ 5 Ciaconna

(*will be played at the 5pm performance; † at 8pm)

In Rachel's words: "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... 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."

Bach's *Six Sonatas & Partitas* for unaccompanied violin (three of each) represent the peak of Baroque polyphonic writing for a stringed instrument. Like the *Cello Suites*, they were written down at Köthen (the manuscript is dated 1720) though perhaps at least partly composed earlier in Weimar.

The technical demands on the violinist are formidable and single lines are made to suggest a fuller texture by constantly shifting between implied 'voices'. As John Eliot Gardiner puts it: "Their skeletal nature means that the music is festooned with little time-bombs of harmonic potential that tease the listener to speculate on how they might turn out – what chords are really implied, in other words. In order to grasp and 'realise' Bach's harmonic movement, both player and listener are drawn in and required to complete the creative act."

The three *Sonatas* have the form of *sonatas da chiesa* (church sonatas) in four movements, slow-fast-slow-fast. In the 17th century, the term had the obvious meaning – music played in church, either as part of the liturgy or for general entertainment. But by Bach's time, it was used simply to distinguish such pieces from *sonatas da camera* (music for the chamber, or smaller space), which were suite-like in structure.

The calm opening *Grave* movement of *Sonata no2 BWV1003* is rhetorical in style and heavily laden with written-out melodic

Festival Patron: David Matthews

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61st Little Missenden Festival



RACHEL PODGER

5pm and 8pm
Wednesday October 13th 2021
Little Missenden Church

Programme Notes

ornamentation. The expansive *Fuga* that follows is a drastic contrast. It's based on a rather dry two-measure theme, initially with a strikingly chromatic counter-subject. The tension slowly builds until the movement reaches its very firm and resolute conclusion.

After this, release comes in the peaceful *Andante*, with a welcome change of key to C major and a lyrical melody, gently supported by an unobtrusive but persistent bass line. The final *Allegro* is free-flowing, energetic and restless, generating a great sense of excitement as it hurtles towards its end. The movement's notable too for including a few rare dynamic markings – very unusual for Bach in these solo violin works.

Partita no2 BWV1004 is, with one very major exception, in standard baroque suite form. The opening *Allemanda* is unusually free of multiple-stopping – at times sweetly melodic and at others displaying its dance origins. By contrast, the ensuing *Corrente* has no time to linger and skips along briskly. The *Sarabanda* brings a richer texture – grave and solemn, with notes of melancholy longing – and leads into an energetic and jaunty *Giga*.

There then follows, however, what Menuhin called “the greatest structure for solo violin that exists” – the closing *Ciaconna* (or *Chaconne*), which is as long as the preceding four movements put together. It consists of 64 variations on a single four-bar phrase, assembled and unified by Bach into three distinct sections – two in the minor enclosing a central one in the major.

It's Bach's genius to take a modest subject and build such a great architectural structure upon it. The weighty opening statement makes clear its intent and the subsequent variations follow subtly and seamlessly before culminating in a grand rephrasing of the main thematic material – seemingly plain and unadorned but still introducing new harmonies.

The *Chaconne* is one of that very small number of musical experiences which words fail to describe. The music can only describe itself.

The Notes are largely taken from the Liner Notes to Channel Classic Records' CDs of Rachel Podger: 'JS Bach – Cello Suites' (CCSSA41119); 'Guardian Angel' (CCSSA35513); 'Bach Sonatas and Partitas Vol 2' (CCSS14498); and 'Bach Sonatas and Partitas Vol 1' (CCSS12198).

Additional material by Dick Ware

The artist

Rachel Podger violin

Rachel Podger, “the unsurpassed British glory of the Baroque violin” (*The Times*), has established herself as a leading interpreter of the Baroque and Classical music periods. She was the first woman to be awarded the prestigious Royal Academy of Music/Kohn Foundation Bach Prize in October 2015, was *Gramophone* Artist of the Year 2018, and Ambassador for REMA's Early Music Day 2020. A creative programmer, she is the founder and Artistic Director of Brecon Baroque Festival and her ensemble Brecon Baroque. Rachel is also Patron for the Continuo Foundation.

Following an exciting and innovative new collaboration, *A Guardian Angel*, with the ‘impeccable’ (*Gramophone*) vocal ensemble VOCES8, Rachel was thrilled to be one of the Artists in Residence at Wigmore Hall throughout the 2019/2020 season. The series featured Rachel in all-Bach performances as a soloist and with Brecon Baroque. Alongside this, Rachel and Christopher Glynn recorded the world premiere of three previously unfinished Mozart sonatas which were completed by Royal Academy of Music Professor Timothy Jones and released earlier this year.

Upcoming engagements include recording a selection of Beethoven sonatas and performances of Mozart and Beethoven with Christopher Glynn, a return to Philharmonia Baroque and San Francisco Early Music, a *Four Seasons* collaboration with the Academy of Ancient Music, and further performances of Bach's *Cello Suites*, *The Goldberg Variations Reimagined*, and *A Guardian Angel*.

Rachel's recording of the Bach *Cello Suites* transposed for the violin was released in April 2019. *BBC Music Magazine* called it “a spellbinding set that is arguably Podger's finest recorded achievement to date...one would naturally assume the suites were violin originals after experiencing her life-enhancing playing.”

A dedicated educator, Rachel holds the Micaela Comberti Chair for Baroque Violin (founded in 2008) at the Royal Academy of Music and the Jane Hodge Foundation International Chair in Baroque Violin at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Rachel has a relationship with The Juilliard School in New York where she visits regularly.

www.rachelpodger.com