

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

6 SONATAS FOR
VIOLIN & HARPSICHORD
BWV 1014-1019

RODOLFO RICHTER
VIOLIN

JAMES JOHNSTONE
HARPSICHORD



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Violin
Harpsichord
Executive Producer
Recording Producer, Engineer & Editor
Harpsichord tuning
Cover image & drone shots
Photograph adjacent
Recording venue
Recording dates

Andrea Guarneri, Cremona, 1674
Stephan Geiger, 1995, after Johann Christoph Österlein, Berlin, 1792
Tim Smithies
Ken Yoshida
Edmund Pickering and Keith McGowan
James Johnstone
James Rodrigues
St. John the Baptist, Loughton, Essex
September 16-18 and November 26-28 2021



Sonata No. 1 in B minor, BWV 1014

Adagio

Allegro

Andante

Allegro

Sonata No. 2 in A major, BWV 1015

Dolce

Allegro

Andante un poco

Presto

Sonata No. 3 in E major, BWV 1016

Adagio

Allegro

Adagio ma non tanto

Allegro

Sonata No. 4 in C minor, BWV 1017

Largo

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro

Sonata No. 5 in F minor, BWV 1018

[Largo]

Allegro

Adagio

Vivace

Sonata No. 6 in G major, BWV 1019

Allegro

Largo

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro

While we associate Bach with his mastery of keyboard instruments, he also played the violin to such a high level that his initial employment at the court at Weimar was as an ensemble violinist and later as its concertmaster. The testimony of his sons refers to Bach playing the violin 'purely and powerfully' into his old age, and, according to his will, three violins—one of which was from the atelier of the renowned Tyrolean maker Jakob Stainer—were among his chattels. The sonatas recorded here demonstrate how intimately Bach was associated with both instruments by presenting an armature of technical and expressive possibilities. It is reported by Bach's biographer, J. N. Forkel, that the Six sonatas for violin and obbligato harpsichord (BWV 1014–1019) were written during his Cöthen years. However, more recent research has suggested c. 1725 since this is the date of the earliest surviving source. Bach scholar Malcolm Boyd proposes that the first two and possibly the last movements of the Sonata in G major (BWV 1019) date from the Cöthen period, with the remainder composed in 1725 during Bach's Leipzig years. Hans Eppstein speculates that these movements were initially transcribed from a lost trio for flute, violin and basso continuo. The remaining five sonatas follow the Corellian *da Chiesa* scheme of four movements alternating slower and quicker tempi, a paradigm Bach adheres to with surprising discipline.

Available sources suggest Bach revised the sonatas twice in Leipzig. While the modifications to the first five were minor, those made to the Sonata in G major were more radical on both occasions. The first version has six movements: *Vivace*, *Largo*, harpsichord solo, *Adagio*, and violin solo with continuo. After, the first movement is repeated. Of these, the third and fifth were later recast as the *courante* and *gavotte* in the keyboard *Partita 6* in E minor (BWV 830) but omitted from the second revision of the sonata in favour of a 'Cantabile ma un poco *Adagio*', itself an apparent adaptation of 'Heil und Segen' from Cantata 120, *Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille*. The final revision has the new

harpsichord solo in place of the *cantabile*. Its *Adagio* was replaced with the 6/8 *Allegro*; it also appears to be related to a cantata movement, 'Phoebus eilt' from the Wedding Cantata *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten* (BWV 202).

Combining a solo instrumental line with a 'concertante' harpsichord part and placing each on the same footing finds no similar German precedents, though *en concert* suites, where the harpsichordist played a realised accompaniment in ensembles were published in France in the first years of the century and are found in several German manuscripts. Theorists and composers advocated the trio's medium to such a level that it almost assumed the role of an independent compositional ideal. Johann Mattheson, for example, described the genre as one where 'each of the three voices must unfold a fine melody of its own; and yet, as far as is possible, they must affirm the three-part harmony as if it came about only by chance'. Bach's trio compositions precisely adhere to this description, and while they remain some of his most notable works, it is odd that they are so few in number. Apart from a handful of isolated examples in cantatas, all that remains are the six sonatas recorded here, three others for flute (BWV 1030–1032), three for viola da gamba (BWV 1027–1029) and the six organ sonatas (BWV 525–530). Their instrumentation suggests that Bach's approach to trio writing was not tied to any particular scoring. Indeed, we might go so far as to describe it as an abstract compositional genre that allows for its reincarnation in any number of instrumental combinations while maintaining its structural and musical content. Writing in 1774, C. P. E. Bach acknowledged his father's violin sonatas as 'among the best works of my dear departed father. They still sound excellent and give me much joy, although they date back more than fifty years. They contain some *Adagios* that could not be written in a more singable manner today'. His remark demonstrates how the sonatas transcend any bias towards the Enlightenment's tastes by establishing an easily

assimilated genre. This is particularly prevalent in the highly rhetorical opening of the B minor sonata, for example, or the elegance of the slow movement of the E major. However, this does not mean that Bach's contrapuntal and structural instincts are compromised. The trios allude to concerto techniques, which are governed by an interaction of *ritornello* and episodic material. Take, for instance, the first *allegro* of the A major sonata or throughout the G major, where Bach calls on a panoply of instrumental techniques based on both foreign and indigenous paradigms. This is most evident in the idiomatic keyboard figuration of the F minor sonata. Its *bariolage*-like accompaniment is reminiscent of the *chaconne* from the unaccompanied violin sonatas. Similarly, the second movement of the A major sonata is a masterpiece of canonic invention that also serves its contemplative *andante* and its *tour-de-force* concluding *presto*.

While the harpsichord had always been an essential element of an instrumental trio, its role was often secondary, the player filling out harmonies from a figured bass. However, the violin sonatas broke this mould because their realised part allows the distribution of the polyphony within a three-part framework. Thus, each hand of the harpsichord takes on the role of an independent instrument. (While no known gamba part exists, we should note that two sources have the designation 'col Basso per Viola da Gamba accompagnata'.) The musical language is the eclectic style Bach perfected in other mature works such as *Clavier-übung I* (1731), demonstrating a profound understanding of François Charles Dieupart's *Suittes de Clavessin* (Amsterdam, 1700) and François Couperin's publications after 1713. Manuscript sources indicate Bach's knowledge of each composer, whose work epitomises an all-important synthesis of Italian and French elements to make a cohesive and musical whole.

Sonata I in B minor (BWV 1014) is unusual since it begins with an expressive lamentation that, at first, focuses on the harpsichord. Its 'sighing' paired-note motif in sixths and thirds is accompanied by a relatively static violin

part that shifts between notes with a series of decorated arabesque bridges straight from the Corelli playbook. At about the midpoint, the violin takes up the falling motif in sixths and thirds. The increase in texture from three to as many as five parts makes this movement one of the most highly rhetorical pieces in Bach's instrumental canon. Philipp Spitta would refer to the falling pairs of notes as Bach's 'grief' motif; when allied to the key of B minor, which for Bach seems to have a significant meaning, little needs to be said of the *affekt* required. The fast movements, however, precisely fill the trio principle: all voices participate in realising their thematic material.

While serene and lyrical, Sonata II in A major (BWV 1015) hides a complex scheme: the first movement is a strict three-part canon, while the third maintains a canon in the treble voices above a *moto perpetuo staccato* bass. The quicker movements are effortless examples of fugal technique: the first is an extended concerto fugue, replete with *ripieno* and concertante passagework and a *da capo*-like coda; the second lively *alla breve* in which the violin and harpsichord partake of a vigorous dialogue.

Throughout Sonata III in E major (BWV 1016), we see an armoury of technical challenges for both performers. The opening *Adagio* is layered over a *ripieno* string-like accompaniment, and one could imagine its proud and balanced phraseology orchestrated as the first movement of a *sinfonia* or *cantata*. In the second, the *alla breve* time signature allows time for neither pause nor reflection, which only arrives in the third movement. The use of the relative minor is reminiscent of the second movement of the E major Violin Concerto (BWV 1042, also in the same key). It is a *chaconne* with a repeated four-bar bass line that is treated with some uncharacteristic liberty. Bach even allows it to touch remote keys without disturbing its basic mood and slow pace. The passagework of the final movement, a fugue, juxtaposes a vigorous first subject with a central episode of more gentle triplets.

Sonata IV in C minor (BWV 1017) opens with a broad binary siciliano. Its accompaniment is reminiscent of the alto aria 'Erbarme dich' from the *Matthäus-Passion*. Like the third movement, Bach assigns a discrete rhythm to the harpsichord's upper part. In the first, this takes the form of a regular semiquaver motif against a bass of broken triads; meanwhile, the violin unfolds its siciliano. The second movement—a concerted allegro—is an anthology of complex ideas that Bach somehow integrates into a unified whole: it is built on a ritornello that contains both the subject and its countersubject. New material is introduced a third of the way through, though this is a short-lived interlude, and the ritornello is repeated either in full or in part ten times before closing. Both the ritornello and interlude are developed in the episodes that follow. The final Allegro is a fugue in binary form. Like the last movements of the B minor sonata (BWV 1014) and the first organ trio sonata (BWV 525), it follows the same scheme of the fugal gignees of the keyboard partitas (BWV 825–830) by inverting the subject in the second strain.

The fifth Sonata in F minor (BWV 1018) is defined by an unusually long opening movement that gives the piece a somewhat restrained, abstract character. Nowhere in contemporary literature can anything akin to Bach's acute sensibility to string colour on the violin be found — the sustained entries on the lower three strings are a testament to this. Similar rhetoric is reiterated in the elegiac third movement, where the violin's almost continuous sequence of double-stopped quavers complements the *bariolage*-like harpsichord figuration reminiscent of the chaconne from the Partita for Solo Violin in D minor (BWV 1004). An earlier version of this movement exists with a less intricate harpsichord part in semiquavers. Tonally, the movement is in C minor; though it concludes with a brief coda that modulates to A-flat major as preparation for a fast Italianate *giga*-like chromatic fugue.

It has been mentioned that the Sonata VI in G major (BWV 1019) underwent significant

changes, and several discrete versions exist. The sonata stands apart from the others in not only its five movements but also in the distinctive integration of concertante elements. Thus, the first movement, an exuberant Corellian allegro, is symmetrically structured and written in a strict *da capo* form with a quasi-continuo bass. Both upper voices in the ritornello are written in invertible counterpoint, and musical material alternates every two bars. The following Largo is an intermediary between the first movement's G major tonality and the E minor harpsichord solo that follows. The second complete statement of the theme is given to the harpsichord, while the violin counterpoints the keyboard's melody in canon. This gives way to a series of violin suspensions while the harpsichord introduces a third voice. The keystone of the sonata is a binary harpsichord solo. Unlike the movements it replaced—the corrente and gavotte from the sixth keyboard partita—it appears not to be modelled on a specific dance. However, the writing is reminiscent of the binary preludes of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and some movements of the *Overture in the French Style* (BWV 831). The fourth movement again intermediates between the preceding harpsichord solo and the tonic key of the final movement. It is just 21 bars long, and the exchange of contrapuntal material between all three parts is reminiscent of Bach's treatment of the canons in *The Art of Fugue*.

It has been mentioned that the final *da capo giga* has similarities with 'Phoebus eilt' from the *Wedding Cantata* (BWV 202, *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten*). The fugue is a hybrid and incorporates a *tutti* fugue with concerto elements: the opening ritornello lasts 30 bars, after which the 58-bar B section begins with a decorated one-bar subject in the harpsichord. Bach uses this to halt the perpetuum mobile semiquaver movement of the first section. However, this is a temporary measure: the flow soon resumes with sequences of cascading scales that guide the music to the dominant in preparation for the *da capo* section.

RODOLFO RICHTER



A never-ending curiosity combined with a deep passion for music led British/Brazilian violinist Rodolfo Richter to pursue a diverse career as director, soloist, chamber and orchestral musician, concertmaster, teacher and composer.

Richter is a frequent guest director and soloist around the world, including regular engagements with Tafelmusik (Toronto), Arion (Montréal), Portland Baroque Orchestra, Tesseræ (Los Angeles), Seville Baroque Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Academy of Ancient Music and B'Rock.

In great demand as a guest concertmaster, Rodolfo has led The English Concert, Concerto Köln, Capella Mediterranea, Pygmalion, Ex Cathedra, La Nuova Musica and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. He is a former concertmaster of the Academy of Ancient Music (2005-2015) and B'Rock (2009-2018).

Richter's extensive discography includes Bach's Brandenburg Concertos with AAM (Harmonia Mundi USA) and Vivaldi's 4 Seasons with B'Rock (Etcetera) as well as the first recording of the complete sonatas by Erlebach (Linn Records) and Guretzky's violin concerto (Chandos). Currently he has embarked with the Richter Ensemble in a project of recording the complete Second Viennese School string quartets on gut strings.

Richter started his musical education studying counterpoint, harmony and free composition with Hans Joachim Koellreutter. On Koellreutter's recommendation, he further developed his knowledge of composition by taking private lessons with Pierre Boulez and participating in master classes with Hans Joachim Hespos, Luigi Nono and Elliot Carter. His works have been performed in concert halls and festivals of new music worldwide.

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JAMES JOHNSTONE



James Johnstone has forged a career as a recitalist, continuo player and teacher. As a principal keyboard player for the Gabrieli Consort and Players for 17 years, he took part in some 22 landmark recordings for Deutsche Grammophon. A member of the chamber ensemble Florilegium, for 10 years he performed throughout Europe and North and South America (and was the first European to record on an 18th century organ built by the indigenous Indians in Santa Ana, Bolivia). He has worked with most major London-based period instrument ensembles as well Harmonie Universelle (Köln), Tafelmusik (Toronto), and, at the request of Bernard Haitink, with Boston SO, Chicago SO and the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks. Since 2008 he has been principal keyboardist with Sir John Eliot Gardiner's Monteverdi Choir.

He has recorded eight solo discs of works by Blow, Gibbons, E Pasquini, Cornet, Elizabethan Virginalists and a Bach recital (on the Waalse Kerk organ, Amsterdam). In 2016 he embarked a series of critically acclaimed Bach recordings for Metronome Recordings: Clavierübung Part III (1739 Wagner organ, Trondheim), Fantasias and Fugues (Raphaelis organ, Roskilde) which received a Diapason d'Or, the 18 Chorales and Canonic Variations (Treutmann organ, Grauhof). The complete organ works of François Couperin and d'Anglebert (Tribuot organ, Seurre) was released in 2020. Future releases in the Bach series include Volume 4 - Partitas & free works (Bader organ, Zutphen), and Volume 5 - Six Trio Sonatas (Cahman organ, Lövvstabrik).

James studied in London and The Hague with Jill Severs and Ton Koopman respectively. He teaches early keyboards in London at the Royal Academy of Music, the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and Trinity Laban.

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