



# Joseph GIBBS

8 Sonatas for Violin  
and Basso Continuo, Op. 1

## **8 Sonatas for Violin and Basso Continuo, Op. 1 (c. 1746)**

### **Sonata No. 1 in D minor [12:19]**

- 1** I. Adagio [3:10]
- 2** II. Allmanda [3:08]
- 3** III. Largo [0:42]
- 4** IV. Aria Andante [5:19]

### **Sonata No. 2 in A major [9:55]**

- 5** I. Adagio [3:08]
- 6** II. Allegro assai [3:07]
- 7** III. Grave e piano [1:17]
- 8** IV. Minuet [2:24]

### **Sonata No. 3 in G major [9:36]**

- 9** I. Largo [2:35]
- 10** II. Allegro [2:43]
- 11** III. Grave [0:52]
- 12** IV. Minuetto [3:27]

### **Sonata No. 4 in B flat major [11:40]**

- 13** I. Largo [4:13]
- 14** II. Allegro [2:56]
- 15** III. Affettuoso [2:52]
- 16** IV. Minuet [1:38]

	<b>Sonata No. 5 in E major</b>	<b>[9:04]</b>
17	I. Adagio	[3:49]
18	II. Vivace	[2:20]
19	III. Saraband	[1:24]
20	IV. Giga Allegro	[1:31]
	<b>Sonata No. 6 in F major</b>	<b>[8:58]</b>
21	I. Vivace	[3:05]
22	II. Allegro – Adagio	[2:31]
23	III. Largo e piano	[2:05]
24	IV. Gavotta Allegro	[1:17]
	<b>Sonata No. 7 in A minor</b>	<b>[11:40]</b>
25	I. Andante	[4:23]
26	II. Allegro	[2:41]
27	III. Affettuoso	[4:36]
	<b>Sonata No. 8 in E flat major</b>	<b>[10:19]</b>
28	I. Grave	[1:46]
29	II. Siciliana	[2:41]
30	III. Fuga	[2:40]
31	IV. Corno	[3:12]
	<b>Total Timing:</b>	<b>[83:44]</b>

## **The Brook Street Band**

**Rachel Harris** *violin*

Violin, anonymous 18th-century Italian • Bow by Ina Keller

**Tatty Theo** *cello*

Cello by Joseph Hill, London, c. 1741 • Bow by Ina Keller

**Carolyn Gibley** *harpsichord*

Harpsichord by Alan Gotto, Norwich, 2003, after Pierre Donzelague, Lyon 1711

Pitch: a' = 415 Hz • Temperament: Valotti

Special thanks to Alan Gotto for supplying and tuning the harpsichord

Recorded at The Great Barn, Oxnead Hall, Norfolk, UK, 7–10 February 2025 by kind permission of David and Beverley Aspinall.

Produced, recorded and edited by **Robin Bigwood**

Photos/images:

Album cover image by **Jo Ogilvie** ([sharppencil.design.co.uk](http://sharppencil.design.co.uk))

Page 6 of Joseph Gibbs by **Thomas Gainsborough**, c. 1755, © National Portrait Gallery, London

Page 10: first publication of Gibbs *Eight Solos for a Violin with a Thorough Bass* (facsimile is the property of the British Library)

Page 10 by **Amy Ryan**

Page 13 by **Robin Bigwood**

Artwork **David Murphy** (FHR)

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FHR thanks Peter Bromley

## Joseph GIBBS (1698–1788)

### 8 Sonatas for Violin and Basso Continuo, Op. 1

Had Thomas Gainsborough not painted his friend, fellow musician and Ipswich resident, Joseph Gibbs, around the year 1755 it is likely that Gibbs's music would largely be forgotten today. The portrait remained within the Gibbs family and their descendants, only re-surfacing in the early years of the 20th century, when it appeared for sale at auction.

The re-emergence of this striking portrait must have been enough to spark renewed interest in the composer, although there are occasional mentions of Gibbs and his music from the late 19th century onwards, specifically A. H. Mann's *Notebooks on East Anglian music and musicians*.<sup>1</sup> These notebooks, plus research from the mid-20th century onwards (including Stanley Sadie's encyclopaedic 1958 dissertation *British Chamber Music, 1720–1799*) and some surviving 18th -century concert programmes and newspaper concert listings in East Anglian newspapers have enabled us to build a biographical picture of this seemingly modest and unassuming man. Gibbs's *Gentleman's Magazine* obituary stated that 'in his profession he was eminently distinguished, both as a composer and a performer. In private life, the

mildness, simplicity, and integrity of his manners rendered him universally beloved and respected.'

Joseph Gibbs was born in Colchester on 12 December 1698 into a musical family; his father John was a City Wait, a musician associated with the town and probably gave him his early musical education. It is thought that Gibbs studied in London, possibly with the violinist Thomas Roseingrave (c. 1690/91–1766)<sup>2</sup>, although if this was the case he was back in East Anglia by the early 1730s, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Gibbs held the position of organist at St Nicholas's Church in Harwich from 1734, and from 1744 was organist in Dedham, Essex. From 1748 he was organist at St Mary-le-Tower in Ipswich, remaining in this position until his death. Gibbs was a member of the Ipswich Musical Society, where he presumably met fellow-member Gainsborough, who also lived in Ipswich between 1752–1758/9. The Musical Society met regularly at Mr Sparrowe's house, now known as the Ancient House, and located on Buttermarket, where the building still stands today.

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1. A.H. Mann: *Notebooks on East Anglian Music and Musicians* (MSS, GB-NWr) and material also available here: Mann: The Papers of Arthur Henry Mann, GBR/0272/AHM, AHM. Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.

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2. A manuscript survives in Gibb's hand, where he copied out violin sonatas including one by Handel and Roseingrave's *Eight Suits of Lessons*, published in London 1728.



Gibbs was involved in Benefit concerts in Dedham for many years, as well as appearing in other East Anglian concerts. He clearly enjoyed a busy and varied performing career aside from his regular church organ positions, directing performances from the harpsichord, and inaugurating church organs around the region, a prominent musical figure within his community.

Gibbs though was hardly a prolific composer; aside from a few organ pieces, we know of only two sets of music, the c. 1746 *Eight Solos for a Violin with a Thorough Bass, Op. 1* and a set of *Six Quartettos for Two Violins, Tenor and Violoncello or Harpsichord, Op. 2* from 1777. Both were published by subscription, and included notable musical names of the times indicating Gibbs's recognition and popularity extended far beyond East Anglia, even though we have no evidence for Gibbs leaving the area once established in his adult life.

The subscription list for the *Eight Solos for a Violin with a Thorough Bass, Op. 1* numbered a respectable c. 161 people or music societies, with the purchase of multiple copies not uncommon. There is a strong East Anglian flavour to the list, with copies going to several Cambridge colleges and the music societies of Ipswich and Dedham. The music spread its way widely through various musical communities, and was a popular choice amongst organists and the clergy. In London, Mr Peter Thompson at St Paul's Church Yard dealt with sales for Gibbs, ordering many copies for resale. The extended Gibbs

family appears on the list, several of whom are listed as organists. What gives a clear indication of the significance of the works, and Gibbs's standing within the musical community is the presence of several composers on the list; William Boyce and Maurice Greene were both subscribers, as well as tenor John Beard, closely associated with Handel.

Since interest has been re-awakened in his music, Gibbs's violin sonatas have been variously described as 'the finest English violin sonatas of the century'<sup>3</sup>, with musicologist Wilfred Mellers suggesting 'It is possible that detailed acquaintance with his music might modify the usually accepted view of the course of English musical history in the 18th century.'

Violin sonatas were popular in England particularly in the first half of the 18th century and Gibbs's *8 Sonatas for a Violin and Basso Continuo, Op. 1* are a vitally important piece in the jigsaw puzzle that starts with the sonata's emergence in Italy under the hands of Italian masters such as Corelli.

To understand this better we need to return to Gainsborough's portrait of Gibbs and examine it in close detail.

Gibbs is positioned centrally, pictured with a quill, a piece of music manuscript paper showing a page of notes and three bound volumes on a shelf behind him. Two of these are fully visible, and their spines display the words Corelli and Gem [Geminiani].

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3. H. Diack Johnstone: *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain – the 18th Century*

The importance of Corelli's and Geminiani's music in the development of violin writing is well-documented. Geminiani was present in England from 1714, and his violin sonatas, alongside those of Corelli and Handel are regarded as some of the best examples of the genre. Their influence no doubt contributed to the wealth of violin sonatas written by English composers in the first decades of the 18th century, with the 1730s and 1740s seeing a real boom in the genre.

At this point we need to take a closer look at the music on the page of manuscript paper in the Gainsborough portrait. It is a page of a violin sonata, and violinist Rachel Harris has identified it as the opening movement, *Overture Spiritoso*, of Michael Christian Festing's *Violin Sonata, Op. 7, No. 1 in B minor*, composed in 1744. Festing's violin sonatas, though widely neglected today are also a vital part of the jigsaw puzzle. He was held in high regard amongst fellow composers, with many of the names associated with composition in England at the time – including Boyce, Thomas Chilcot, Maurice Greene, William Hayes, Richard Jones, Andrea Caporale, and even Gibbs – appearing on his subscription lists. Festing bequeathed all his music to Sir Joseph Hankey, a noted banker and patron of the arts, and we find a further connection between Festing, Hankey and Joseph Gibbs, who dedicated these *Violin Sonatas, Op. 1* to Hankey.

Gainsborough places Gibbs centrally in the portrait, firmly

'surrounded' by Corelli, Geminiani and Festing. Handel's absence is notable, although this makes sense when we consider that by the 1740s, Handel was primarily associated with larger-scaled vocal works, rather than instrumental sonatas, the latter more the preserve of the domestic music-making market. Handel's style, which Gibbs knew well (having performed many of his works on the organ and transcribed a violin sonata) was beginning to be considered old-fashioned, and Gibbs's musical style in the violin sonatas of c. 1746 very much owes its musical influences to the three composers referenced in the portrait. We should also add Veracini to this list, as suggested by Stanley Sadie.<sup>4</sup>

Gibbs's music very much anticipates a new direction of musical travel into the second half of the century. It is highly chromatic, a curious mixture of the older 'Handelian' (and essentially Corellian) style fused with more modern gallant elements, incorporating advanced chordal string writing, which is technically difficult to execute. Gibbs shows a fondness for variation form, featuring this in four of the sonatas. The extensive presence of so-called Scottish elements, 'Scotch snaps', prominent in the fourth and sixth sonatas reflects popular taste of the time but is also no doubt a nod to the fact that Ipswich was a Garrison town, home to the Scots Greys. Gibbs would have known these musicians, some of whom took part in his funeral service, the scale and scope of the event (including musicians performing

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4. S. J. Sadie: *British Chamber Music, 1720–1799* (diss, U. of Cambridge, 1958)

a Dead March with their instruments draped in black crepe) indicating the warmth felt towards Joseph Gibbs, when he died on his 90th birthday.

Look again at Gainsborough's portrait of Gibbs. What do you see? A modest, unassuming, and kindly man, held in high

esteem and widely respected by his musical colleagues, looks out at us, his eyes conveying a hint of a twinkle, which we hope we have captured in our interpretation of his magnificent violin sonatas.

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# SONATA

## I

*Adagio*

First system of musical notation, consisting of a treble and bass staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with various note values and accidentals. The bass staff contains a bass line with similar note values and accidentals. Fingering numbers (6, #, 6, 8, 6, 6, 4#3, 6, 7) are written below the bass staff.

Second system of musical notation, consisting of a treble and bass staff. The treble staff features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The bass staff contains a bass line with slurs and accents. Fingering numbers (6, #, 6, 4#3, 6, 7) are written below the bass staff. The word *pia.* is written above the bass staff.

Third system of musical notation, consisting of a treble and bass staff. The treble staff features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The bass staff contains a bass line with slurs and accents. Fingering numbers (4#2, 6, #, 6, 6, #, 7, 6, #, 6, 5) are written below the bass staff. The word *for.* is written above the bass staff.

Fourth system of musical notation, consisting of a treble and bass staff. The treble staff features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The bass staff contains a bass line with slurs and accents. Fingering numbers (6, #, 6, 5, 7, 5, 4#, 6, 5, #, #, 6, 6, #, 6, 5) are written below the bass staff. The word *pia.* is written above the bass staff, and *for.* is written above the treble staff.

Fifth system of musical notation, consisting of a treble and bass staff. The treble staff features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The bass staff contains a bass line with slurs and accents. Fingering numbers (3, 3) are written below the bass staff.



## The Brook Street Band

*'ensemble so pin-sharp it merits a safety warning'* (BBC Music Magazine)

The Brook Street Band is named after the London street where George Frideric Handel lived. Formed in 1996–97 by Baroque cellist Tatty Theo, it rapidly established itself as leading Handel specialists, winning grants, awards and broadcasting opportunities from organisations including BBC Radio 3 and the Handel Institute. The Band has enjoyed an unusually stable core-membership, its players working together for over 20 years; this longevity has enabled it to develop a style of music-making that is precise and spontaneous, its musicians able to react instinctively to each other and play as one.

Whilst 18th-century chamber repertoire has always been the The Brook Street Band's driving passion, it also relishes collaborations with conductors, choirs and venues on larger-scaled works by Handel and his contemporaries, such as its 'Dragon of Wantley' project, which won the 2023 *BBC Music Magazine* award in the Opera category. It also savours the chance to explore earlier 17th-century repertoire, with programmes exploring the music of composers including Corelli, Salamone Rossi, Monteverdi, Schütz, Biber and Buxtehude, and an entire festival dedicated to Muffat's music and influence devised for London's St John's Smith Square.

The Band performs and teaches throughout the UK and Europe at renowned venues such as Wigmore Hall, Kings Place, London and Snape Maltings, and has projects in development for the United States over the next few years. It has established **love: Handel**, its own critically acclaimed biennial music festival, incorporating wide-ranging educational work supported through its charitable trust. Thanks to the regular support of donors and organisations including the Continuo Foundation, the Band is able to develop innovative new programmes and events.

The Band regularly broadcasts for BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM and its extensive discography has been singled out for critical acclaim; accolades include *Gramophone* Editor's Choice and inclusion in the chamber music/small ensemble selection category at the GRAMMY Awards.

The Brook Street Band played a central role in the world's first ever 'Handeliades', immersive four-day events of concerts, masterclasses and talks given by world-renowned Handel experts in 2021 and 2023.

**brookstreetband.co.uk**



**David de Winter *tenor***

**The Brook Street Band**

**Rachel Harris, Kathryn Parry *violin***

**Tatty Theo *cello* • Carolyn Gibley *harpsichord, organ* • Lynda Sayce *lute, theorbo***

**Lisete da Silva Bull, Emily Bannister *recorder***

*'This is a very fine disc indeed'* **(Gramophone)**

*'The clearly defined and lively articulation of the Brook Street Band Band  
inform the music with irresistible allure...'* **(\*\*\*\*\* BBC Music Magazine)**

*'The playing and singing are excellent'* **(American Record Guide)**

