



JOHANN JOSEPH
VILSMÄYR

Six Partitas for
Solo Violin (1715)*

JOHANN GEORG
PISENDEL
Sonata in A minor

HEINRICH IGNAZ FRANZ
BIBER
Passacaglia in G minor

VAUGHAN JONES *violin*

first recording of complete, original set *

VILSMAÏR • PISENDEL • BIBER

Works for Solo Violin

Little is known about **Johann Joseph Vilsmaÿr** (1663-1722), but it is clear from his *Six Partitas for Solo Violin* that he was a violinist of accomplishment as well as a composer of great resourcefulness. His neglect is due in part to the lack of surviving works handed down to us. The only existing works seem to be a *Violin Sonata* with continuo in five movements and these *Six Partitas*.

Vilsmaÿr worked as a violinist in the Hofkapelle allied to the Court in Salzburg and it was there that he became acquainted with, and learned from Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644-1704). Another distinguished contemporary was Georg Muffat (1653 -1704), a Frenchman of Scottish descent who was at the Hofkapelle in Salzburg between 1677 and 1690 and who was a pupil of Jean Baptiste Lully. Muffat also studied in Rome and there met one of the most influential figures in all Baroque music, Arcangelo Corelli. As the court in Salzburg was a small one, it is likely that these French and Italian influences had an effect on the young composer. Vilsmaÿr held his position at the Salzburg Court from 1689 until his death in 1722 and it seems (based on regular increases in salary during that period) that his reputation grew considerably over this time. The frontispiece of the 1715 *Partitas* also reveals that Vilsmaÿr was also doubling his musical duties with

that of chamberlain to Francisco Antonio, the Archbishop of Salzburg.

The *Artificiosus Concentus Pro Camera, Distributos In Sex Partes, seu Partias à Violino Solo Con Basso bellè imitante* [sic] appeared in Salzburg in 1715 and the sole surviving copy now resides in the British Museum (although not in the composer's own hand). The title is dedicated to '...the Most High and Most Reverend Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, Lord of Lords Francisco Antonio, Archbishop of Salzburg, Apostolic Legate of the Holy See, Primate of Germany, Prince of Harrach [in Bohemia] of the Holy Roman Empire etc etc... and dedicated to his most Clement Lord by Johann Joseph Vilsmaÿr, Chamberlain to His Highness and Court Musician. 1715 A.D.'

It was long thought that the '*Con Basso bellè imitante*' part of the title referred to a lost bass part. This erroneous appraisal has however been found wanting as the polyphonic style of violin writing often implies a bass line in the lower regions of the instrument. It is clear when listening to these works that the *Partitas* are complete and stand up without the need of a bass or continuo part.

Vilsmaÿr makes extensive use of double and triple stopping throughout the *Six Partitas*, requiring great agility on the

part of the performer. He also favours the arpeggiation of three and four-voiced chords, often creating a hypnotic feel. The use of *scordatura* (the retuning of the four strings in order to create different harmonic or resonant timbres) also points to the influence of Biber, who used this technique extensively in his *Mystery Sonatas* to great expressive advantage (the open string tunings for all six works are listed as part of the titles at the end of this booklet). It is also worth pointing out the influence of Austrian folk-music on these works, with its characteristic harmonic structure and melodic ease.

The *Partitas* are individually made up of several short movements in binary form. Each of the two sections is repeated, many ending with a 'petite reprise', a Baroque convention that teases the listener with a mini-coda, often consisting of a repeat of the final two measures. Although each movement is often less than two minutes in duration, the density of material contained within a single short movement often hints at a larger scale. This is also true of the instrumentation, as the music often sounds orchestral and one can easily imagine many of the movements forming the basis of orchestral suites or even concerti grossi.

Although Vilsmaÿr's *Partitas* predate those of Bach by at least five years, it is difficult to detect an influence on the great master in any way; however, they reveal that Bach was not a lonely, towering figure producing masterworks in a cultural vacuum. Moreover, composers such as the three

on this disc demonstrate a level of invention and ambition that the great master would surely have approved of.

Partita No. 1 uses the standard tuning for a violin and is in the key of A major. A strident *Prelude* incorporates quixotic changes of tempi to give an improvisatory feel. A spritely *Aria* (or *Air*) ensues with downward slurred staccatos giving the distinct impression of laughter! The following *Saraband* has a dignified, deeply felt character. Next comes a light-hearted *Gavott* with variation and is an example of the 'basso imitante' notes in the bottom register of the violin. The *Menuett* gives a glimpse into Vilsmaÿr's natural melodic gift, whereas the *Aria* has a spontaneous feel, with many changes of tempi. A contemplative beginning soon gives way to a conversational figure between the highest and lowest strings of the instrument. The next movement is a simple yet tender *Menuett* which calms the listener before the more energetic *Aria* that follows. This movement is full of double stopping, with interjections which imply a conversation between two players. The next *Menuett* has a jaunty feel akin to a French overture, but without the double dots. The *Partita* ends with a marvellously invigorating *Guiqß* (Jig) which leads into a flowing *Finale*.

Partita No. 2 requires the E string of the violin to be tuned down a whole tone to become a D, softening the higher register and creating a resonance on the middle note of the Bb major triad. An impressively improvisatory *Prelude* is followed by an exuberant *Aria* whose main theme

consists of a descending sequence with characterful triplets. The ensuing *Saraband* has an affecting melody, with a questioning second half that utilises the softer timbre of the detuned violin. Next is a resolute *Fantasia* which utilises a highly effective 'skipping' figure between the G and A strings, only resolved by a brief adagio section that brings the frolics to a close. The following *Menuett* is a more simple affair and Handelian in character. Next comes a short *Aria* with a determined feel and a second *Menuett* which has a distinct swing. The *Gavott* is another movement that gives an impression of a larger, more orchestral feel, whereas the *Passpied* that follows has a lighter, more playful character with unexpected melodic twists and turns. The work ends with a serious-minded *Ciaccona*, which through its variations, explores the moods and shades of the alternative violin tuning.

Partita No. 3 requires the E string to be tuned down a major third, affecting the resonance of all four strings and giving a subdued, almost viola-like effect. A restless *Prelude* starts with a searching adagio, giving way to energetic slurred arpeggios across three strings which dramatically end with a *tierce de Picardie*. The ensuing *Courrant* (meaning 'running') suggests the influence of Corelli, whereas the ensuing *Aria* consists of a dignified melody abruptly halted by a jerky presto section. The following *Aria* and *Canario* (the canary dance) are both simple, chirpy movements, leading into a more substantial *Aria lamentevole*. It is complemented by the *Menuett*, which, despite its easy-going theme, also

provides us with an expressive dimension missing from most dance movements. The *Partita* concludes with an energetic *Guiß*, melodically reminiscent of the previous menuett.

Partita No. 4 requires the two lowest strings (the G and D) to be tuned upwards by a whole tone, with the highest E string lowered by a tone to the note D. The effect, in contrast to *Partita No. 3* is incredibly bright. The opening *Prelude* follows the same format of rapidly alternating tempi, virtuosic passagework and surprising melodic effects. This is followed by an *Aria* that is positively bursting with cheerful self-confidence. The following *Menuett* carries on this exuberance and is characterised by brisk dotted scales. The next movement is called a *Brunada* and is full of merry syncopations and trills. It leads to a *Saraband*, which is quite different from our preconceptions of this dance. There is nothing sombre here in the same way that there is nothing air-like about the ensuing *Aria*, with its graceful triplets. A stolid *Menuett* and fanciful *Canario* lead into the final movement of the work, a *Passaglia*. Its main theme, which is reprised at the middle and end of the movement, has a *pesante* (heavy) quality to it, and soon leads to a short set of inventive variations. Within these, Vilsmaÿr uses the lower register of the violin most effectively to give the piece a sense of grounding in the bass.

Partita No. 5 uses the identical tuning to *Partita No. 2*, with just the E string being detuned by a whole tone, but this

allegro

Aria
Variata

The image shows a handwritten musical score for an 'Aria Variata'. It consists of five staves of music. The first staff is marked 'Aria' and 'allegro'. The second staff is marked 'Variata'. The music is written in a style characteristic of the 17th or 18th century, with various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as 't.' (tutti) and 't.' (tutti). The notation includes many slurs, ties, and accidentals. The paper is aged and shows some staining.

Aria from Partita No. 6 by Johann Joseph Vilsmaÿr

© The British Library Board. Shelfmark: b.48. Vilsmaÿr, Johann Joseph.

Artificiosus Concentus pro Camera (Salisburg : Barbara Theresia de Lespier sc, 1715.)

time is in the relative minor of that *Partita*, G minor (a key whose mournful qualities are exploited in this work). An hypnotic and highly effective *Prelude* exploits the violin's capacity for unusual harmonic effects through slurred arpeggiation. Next comes a *Gavott* which has a yearning, restless beauty, slurred in groups of twos. The following *Saraband* is likewise gentle yet sorrowful and through its downward sequences beguiles the listener with its plaintive quality. A lively, determined *Rigodon* ensues and a brief *Guiqß* with a merry, swinging three-in-a-bar feel is followed by a heavier *Menuett* and a busy *Bouré* making use of downward sequences and surprising suspensions. The *Retirada* which concludes the *Partita* is based on two short and contrasting themes, one soft and the other loud. The final section resonates with D major and G minor chords and ends in resplendent G major.

Partita No. 6 mirrors *No. 1* in returning to A major with all four strings back to their traditional G-D-A-E tuning. The fanfare-like *Prelude* hops from A to D to E major before settling back into the home key of A major. A bold and memorable *Aria* and a Dowland-like *Saraband* follow. We then have an allegro *Aria* with a wonderfully buoyant rhythmical turn and a *Variatio* which remains faithful to the original tune. The subsequent *Menuett* is a graceful and attractive movement without being in the least bit harmonically ambitious. We then have an attractive *Aria* (but this time an adagio) which is a good example of Vilsmaÿr's use of the '*Basso bellè imitante*'. A *Menuett* with a descending theme leads into another

Aria, this one with a seductive theme made up of a triplet figure. Next we have a skipping *Guiqß* which is followed by a tongue-in-cheek *Eccho* movement. Vilsmaÿr ends with a memorable *Aria variata*. The harmonic progression is the same as the *Saraband* movement from Corelli's *Violin Sonata No. 10 in F major*, but many Baroque composers copied others, helping to spread compositional conventions that developed the range of the art form as a whole. The theme forms the basis for an inventive and virtuosic set of variations. The final one ends with Vilsmaÿr's much-loved arpeggios, ending the *Partita* with a flourish.

Johann Georg Pisendel (1687-1755) was born a generation later than Vilsmaÿr and yet his talents blossomed early, with the *Sonata à Violino Solo Senza Basso in A minor* believed to be from around the year 1716, making it contemporaneous with the Vilsmaÿr *Partitas*. Pisendel was universally admired for his violin playing and the fact that Vivaldi, Telemann and Tomaso Albinoni all dedicated concertos to him is testament to this.

Pisendel was born in Cadelsburg, where his father was Cantor. He was educated at the Kapelknabe in Ansbach and at sixteen studied with the celebrated Italian violinist and composer Giuseppe Torelli (who was *maestro di concerto* at the court of Georg Friedrich II, Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach). In 1709 he left Ansbach for Leipzig. On his way to Leipzig he stopped off at Weimar, where he befriended JS Bach; and on arriving at Leipzig he also

made the acquaintance of Georg Philip Telemann. Both friendships proved to be enduring ones. In 1712 Pisendel joined the Dresden Hofkapelle as a violinist (becoming acting Concert Master in 1728). His role in the Hofkapelle included accompanying the Crown Prince Friedrich August I on his Grand Tour, visiting Venice in 1716 to 1717. Whilst in Venice he studied with Antonio Vivaldi and collected together an impressive collection of manuscripts containing recent works from the Venetian master (some of which were presented to him by the composer himself). He also championed works by Marcello, Albinoni, Tartini and Zelenka and his musical influence in Dresden was significant from 1728 onwards. Due to his performing activities, Pisendel was not a prolific composer, but the quality of his compositions is undoubtedly high and include *Ten Violin Concertos*, *Seven Sonatas for Violin*, and a *Sinfonia*.

His *Sonata à Violino Solo Senza Basso in A minor* is a work of great ambition and scope. It is believed to pre-date his visit to Venice in 1716, as thereafter his style of composition became more Italianate. On viewing the manuscript one can be left in little doubt as to the first movement's influence on the opening *Adagio* of Bach's own *G minor Solo Sonata*, with its slow, pendulum-like pulse and wide array of note values. Indeed Bach may well have had Pisendel in mind as a performer for his own *Sonatas and Partitas* of 1720, as he greatly admired him as a performer and it is clear that these works could only be fully realised by a player of stature. There is one major difference between Pisendel's

Adagio and that of his esteemed contemporary though: Bach's is meditative, organic and sure-footed whilst Pisendel's is unpredictable, tempestuous and capricious. He punctuates the movement with a dramatic dotted rhythm in diminished chords. These never fully resolve and in fact the lack of resolution is a hallmark of this particular movement.

The following *Allegro* has a more flowing demeanour, but is again characterised by an inverted dotted figure (often referred to as a Lombard rhythm) which unsettles the equanimity of the otherwise smooth lines and adds a hint of inner conflict to the music. The *Giga* is followed by a closely-related *Variatione*. In these movements Pisendel achieves a coherency and harmonic sophistication that surely acted as an inspiration and catalyst for Bach's great achievements in this genre. They offer immense demands for the performer, who must keep a light lilt whilst not distorting the rhythmic flow of the music. This is made more challenging by the regular double and triple stopping which needs to be incorporated into the melodic line without as much as a ripple. The *Giga* is based around a simple rhythmic pattern of a crotchet and four quavers in a 6/8 measure whilst the *Variatione* consists of a flowing series of semiquavers in the same metre.

Of the three composers that feature on this disc it is the name of **Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber** (1644-1704) that is most well known. Indeed Biber's star has been in the



St Mary Magdalene Church, Willen. Photo by David Murphy

ascendancy over the last thirty or so years, particularly with the interest shown in the *Mystery Sonatas* (also known by the titles of the *Rosary Sonatas* and the *Copper-Engraving Sonatas*) as well as a fascination with their historical background and purpose. Biber was born in the town of Wartenberg, which was previously in Bohemia but is now Stráž pod Ralskem on the northern border of the Czech Republic. Biber spent the majority of his working life in Salzburg however, and this is the place with which his name is most closely associated. In order to arrive there though, he illegally left the employ of the Prince-Bishop of Kremsier (now Kroměříž), Karl II von Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn. In 1670, Biber was sent to the celebrated violin maker Jacob Stainer at Innsbruck to purchase instruments for the Kapelle. Instead of returning, he became employed by Maximilian Gandolph von Kuenburg, Archbishop of Salzburg and only escaped severe punishment by the fact that the two employers knew each other. Here his career flourished and in 1684 he became the *Kapellmeister* at Salzburg, having already played for the Emperor Leopold I, who raised Biber to the status of noble in 1690. In addition, he married Maria Weiss (a daughter of a Salzburg merchant) in 1672 and together they raised a family of 11 children. Biber died in 1704 at the age of 59.

The *Mystery Sonatas* are now well-established in the canon of mid-Baroque violin repertoire and offer a challenge to even the most accomplished players, making extensive use of *scordatura*, higher positions on the fingerboard

and polyphonic writing, often employing double and triple stopping. There is much speculation as to their correct title as the frontispiece of the only existing manuscript is missing. It is thought, however, that the manuscript dates from 1676 and that they fit into a scheme suitable for accompanying the *Mysteries of the Rosary*. This custom dates back to the 13th century and involved the placement of fifteen images of the life of Christ in a church or other place of worship. These paintings or sculptures afforded the faithful an opportunity to reflect on different aspects of the saviour and it was common for followers to move from one image to another, accompanied by relevant prayers and readings. The procession could also be accompanied by singing or music of a meditative nature. The fifteen main sonatas (all of which are accompanied by a bass and an optional continuo part) represent the five *Joyful Mysteries*, the five *Sorrowful Mysteries* and the five *Glorious Mysteries*, and each of the sonatas is illustrated by an engraving relevant to its depiction.

The *Sixteenth Sonata* (which appears on this disc) is distinct from the rest in being the only one written for solo violin, as well as being devoid of *scordatura*. This is significant in its depiction of the Guardian Angel, as expressed in the purity of the interval of the perfect fifth. The whole piece is a passacaglia, being a variation on a ground bass of four descending notes in the key of G minor, giving the piece a sombre bearing. Through changes in pace, texture and mood, Biber takes us on a journey not unlike the fifteen

images of the Rosary. Our imagination is opened up to a panoply of different scenes, each of which evokes a different sensation in the listener but all of which bring a feeling of elation and purification.

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Notes on the performance

The violin used on this recording is a modern, handmade instrument by luthier Martin McClean of Moneymore, Ireland, made in 2007. The strings are gut core with a synthetic winding, complementing a replica snakewood baroque bow, and as such, the setup could be said to be a hybrid, being a mixture of baroque and modern elements, tuned to A = 440 Hz. The location of the recording is the church of St Mary Magdalene in Willen, Buckinghamshire, built in 1680 to a design by the celebrated polymath and architect Robert Hooke.

Vaughan Jones was born in 1970 and started learning the violin at the age of 8. Between the ages of 10 and 16 he was guided by David Gregory before attaining a Music Scholarship at Charterhouse School. This led to studies at the Birmingham Conservatoire, the Royal College of Music and latterly, with the renowned Hungarian teacher Kató Havas OBE. In 2014 he released a recording on First Hand Records entitled 'The Hidden Violin' (FHR29) which included

première recordings of Benjamin Godard's two *Solo Violin Sonatas*. *The Strad* magazine wrote '...Vaughan Jones plays all these pieces with unflinching technical command and interpretative clear-sightedness.' Vaughan plays on two violins (one made in 2007 and the other in 2011) by the luthier Martin McClean.

Thanks to Peter Bromley, Leigh Haggerwood, David Jones and Rev. Paul A. Smith

Recorded at St Mary Magdalene Church, Willen, Milton Keynes, 20, 24, 27 March, 14, April & 6 August 2015
Produced & engineered by David Jones
24bit, 96kHz hi-resolution recording & mastering
Cover & rear inlay photo taken by Leigh Haggerwood at Bath Botanical Gardens
Artwork by David Murphy (FHR)

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St Mary Magdalene Church, Willen. Photo by David Murphy

CD1 (total time 69:57)

Johann Joseph Vilsmayr (1663-1722)

Six Partitas for Solo Violin 'Atificiosus Concentus Pro Camera, Distributos In Sex Partes, Seu Partitas à Violino Solo Con Basso bellè imitante' [sic]**Partita No. 1 in A major****13:33**

(open strings G-D-A-E)

1	I. Prelude (Adagio – Allegro – Adagio – Presto)	1:47
2	II. Aria (Allegro)	0:54
3	III. Saraband	1:29
4	IV. Gavott (Allegro)	1:28
5	V. Menuett	1:09
6	VI. Aria (Adagio – Allegro – Adagio – Allegro)	1:54
7	VII. Menuett	1:23
8	VIII. Aria (Allegro)	1:31
9	IX. Menuett	1:00
10	X. Guiqß (Presto – Finale)	0:53

Partita No. 2 in B flat major**15:47**

(open strings G-D-A-D)

11	I. Prelude (Adagio – Presto – Adagio)	1:16
12	II. Aria (Allegro)	1:05
13	III. Saraband (Adagio)	1:43
14	IV. Fantasia (Allegro – Adagio)	2:09
15	V. Menuett	0:57
16	VI. Aria	1:05
17	VII. Menuett	0:59
18	VIII. Gavott (Allegro)	1:15

19	IX. Passpied	1:54
20	X. Ciaccona	3:19

Partita No. 3 in C minor

(open strings G-D-A-C)

21	I. Prelude (Adagio – Allegro – Presto – Adagio – Allegro – Presto)	1:57
22	II. Courrant (Allegro)	1:26
23	III. Aria	0:46
24	IV. Menuett	1:00
25	V. Aria (Allegro)	0:58
26	VI. Canario (Presto)	0:34
27	VII. Aria lamentevole (Adagio)	2:54
28	VIII. Menuett (Allegro)	1:17
29	IX. Guiqß (Presto – Adagio – Presto)	1:30

Partita No. 4 in D major**14:12**

(open strings A-E-A-D)

30	I. Prelude (Adagio – Allegro – Adagio – Allegro)	1:45
31	II. Aria	1:14
32	III. Menuett	1:06
33	IV. Brunada	0:57
34	V. Saraband (Adagio)	2:04
35	VI. Aria (Allegro)	0:42
36	VII. Menuett	1:31
37	VIII. Canario	1:04
38	IX. Passaglia	3:45

Partita No. 5 in G minor (open strings G-D-A-D)	13:56	Johann Georg Pisendel (1687-1755)	
[39] I. Prelude	1:06	[12] I. ? (possibly Adagio)	18:49
[40] II. Gavott (Allegro)	1:53	[13] II. Allegro	3:11
[41] III. Saraband (Adagio)	3:29	[14] III. Giga	5:27
[42] IV. Rigodon (Allegro)	1:38	[15] IV. Variatione	4:51
[43] V. Guiqß (Allegro)	0:41		5:17
[44] VI. Menuett	1:47	Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644-1704)	
[45] VII. Bouré	1:21	[16] Passacaglia in G minor for Solo Violin,	10:05
[46] VIII. Retirada (Allegro)	2:00	'The Guardian Angel'	
		(from <i>The Mystery Sonatas, No. 16</i>)	
CD2 (total time 48:12)			
Partita No. 6 in A major (open strings G-D-A-E)	19:16		
[1] I. Prelude (Allegro – Adagio – Allegro – Presto – Adagio – Allegro)	0:42		
[2] II. Aria (Allegro)	1:07		
[3] III. Saraband (Adagio)	1:30		
[4] IV. Aria con Variatio (Allegro)	1:31		
[5] V. Menuett	1:38		
[6] VI. Aria (Adagio)	2:54		
[7] VII. Menuett	1:19		
[8] VIII. Aria (Adagio)	2:30		
[9] IX. Guiqß (Allegro)	0:34		
[10] X. Eccho (Allegro)	0:47		
[11] XI. Aria variata (Allegro – Presto – Allegro)	4:43		

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“Vaughan Jones plays all these pieces with unfailing technical command and interpretative clear-sightedness” (The Strad)





FHR38

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CD 1

Johann Joseph VILSMAÏR (1663-1722)

Six Partitas *

(Artificiosus Concentus pro Camera, 1715)

- 1 - 10 Partita No. 1 in A major
- 11 - 20 Partita No. 2 in B flat major
- 21 - 29 Partita No. 3 in C minor
- 30 - 38 Partita No. 4 in D major
- 39 - 46 Partita No. 5 in G minor

CD 2

VILSMAÏR

Six Partitas *

- 1 - 11 Partita No. 6 in A major

Johann Georg PISENDEL (1663-1722)

- 12 - 15 Sonata in A minor

Heinrich Ignaz BIBER (1644-1704)

- 16 Passacaglia in G minor,
'The Guardian Angel'
(from *The Mystery Sonatas*, No. 16)

First recording of complete, original set • 300th anniversary edition *

VAUGHAN JONES *violin*

Recorded at St Mary Magdalene Church, Willen, Milton Keynes,
20, 24, 27 March, 14, April & 6 August 2015

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Artwork by David Murphy (FHR)

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TOTAL TIMING 63:52



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