

NI 6331



Johann Sebastian Bach  
Sonatas and Partitas  
for Solo Violin  
BWV 1001-1006

Recorded between December 2001 & June 2002 at the Faculty of Divinity,  
Charles University in Prague (Dejvice compound).

Recording Director: Jaroslav Rybář • Sound Engineer: Václav Roubal

Technical collaboration: Karel Soukenik • Produced by: Karel Vágner

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Leoš Čepický violin

## Johann Sebastian Bach

### Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin BWV 1001-1006

#### Leoš Čepický *violin*

##### CD 1

###### **Sonata No. 1 in G minor, BWV 1001 18:10**

1. Adagio 5:17
2. Fuga (Allegro) 5:49
3. Siciliana 3:55
4. Presto 2:59

###### **Partita No. 1 in B minor, BWV 1002 22:41**

5. Allemanda 5:11
6. *Double* 2:28
7. Corrente 2:33
8. *Double (Presto)* 2:56
9. Sarabande 2:27
10. *Double* 1:53
11. Tempo di Borea 2:39
12. *Double* 2:22

###### **Sonata No. 2 in A minor, BWV 1003 22:38**

13. Grave 5:11
14. Fuga 8:35
15. Andante 4:19
16. Allegro 4:24

**Total playing time:**

**63:41**

##### CD 2

###### **Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004 29:57**

1. Allemanda 4:11
2. Corrente 2:14
3. Sarabanda 3:15
4. Giga 3:34
5. Ciaccona 16:34

###### **Sonata No. 3 in C major, BWV 1005 23:36**

6. Adagio 5:05
7. Fuga 11:21
8. Largo 3:14
9. Allegro assai 3:48

###### **Partita No. 3 in E major, BWV 1006 17:09**

10. Preludio 3:57
11. Loure 3:41
12. Gavotte en rondeau 3:10
13. Menuet I - Menuet II 3:33
14. Bourrée 1:11
15. Gigue 1:26

**Total playing time:**

**70:58**

## Leoš Čepický

Leoš Čepický graduated from the East-Bohemian Conservatoire in Pardubice in 1985 under Professor Ivan Štraus. At the Prague Academy of Performing Arts, he studied violin with Jiří Novák and Chamber Music with Antonín Kohout – both of these musicians were members of the world-renowned Smetana Quartet.

He started his promising career in his early teens, when he won the first prize and Laureate title at the Jaroslav Kocian International Violin Competition. Other prizes followed at the Gorizia Competition and the Václav Hummel Competition in Zagreb. In 1994 he was the outright winner of the Ludwig van Beethoven International Violin Competition in Hradec nad Moravicí. Since that time, he has given many recitals as well as solo concerto performances with various orchestras. In J.S.Bach's 250th Jubilee Year in 2000, he performed in concert Bach's complete Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin and two years later he released this present recording.

Leos was a founding member of the Wihan Quartet, formed in 1985 at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts. In 1988 the Quartet won the first prize at the prestigious Prague Spring Competition and three years later they won the London International String Quartet Competition, whose chairman was Yehudi Menuhin. After this success, the door to the whole world, from the USA to New Zealand, was wide open to the Wihan. During their career, they have released over 40 CDs, including the complete set of Beethoven's 16 Quartets, which were recorded live for Nimbus Alliance between October 2008 and March 2009. A unique recording of Paganini's 24 Caprices, arranged for string quartet by William Zinn, was also released in 2009 on the same label.

Leoš Čepický was appointed Head of Strings at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts in 2010, having taught violin there for several years.

He plays on a copy of Guarneri del Gesu 1741, 'Vieuxtemps', made in 1990 by Jan Baptista Spidlen.

chorale, *Komm, beiliger Geist, Herr Gott*. The final *Allegro assai* represents one of Bach's most explicitly jubilant movements.

The *Prelude* of the last *Partita in E major* brings a sort of invitation to dance after the previous trials and tribulations. Its individual movements are the whole cycle's most dance-like, without a single minor key cloud emerging anywhere to spoil this music's evident dynamic zest. This music also demonstrates that Bach himself must have been a highly proficient violin player, as he centred the gloss of its brilliance around the device of the three-stringed arpeggio, which was invented by violin-composers. Bach's qualities as a violinist were also attested to by the testimonies of his sons, as well as by his initial engagement at Weimar as orchestra leader. Importantly, nowhere in the *Sei solo*, despite many complex spots, is there a single bowing or fingering that is beyond human powers. In Bach's time chords would mostly be played as arpeggios rather than with one stroke of the bow, which helped the playing of some of the most difficult passages.

Every modern-day interpreter of this monument of violin literature is confronted by the dilemma of choosing an ideal approach to its performance, one that includes the results of studies of authentic interpretation, whilst at the same time drawing on the potential offered by modern instruments and also taking into account the perspective of contemporary audiences, who may sometimes be inclined to listen to Bach's music independently of its historical and spiritual connotations. The main criterion to follow has been invariably the music's sonic qualities: it allows for the full deployment of the violin's dynamic range, as well as performing polyphonic chords softly, yet with one stroke of the bow. This makes it possible to lay additional emphasis on the rhythmic element where it prevails in fugues and some dances, without detriment to the quality of sound. All of these options are open to debate and each new recording brings a fresh contribution to the general aspiration to reveal the true essence of the immense wealth of Bach's music.

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*In the process of writing music,  
the composer is semi-inscrutable even to himself.*

Arthur Honegger

Between the years 1717 and 1723, Johann Sebastian Bach held the post of Kapellmeister at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen. It was the only engagement in Bach's career that was not linked with church music obligations and this allowed him to devote himself predominantly to instrumental music.

Whilst at Köthen he produced much chamber music as well as both of his violin concertos, the D minor Double Concerto, Brandenburg Concertos, English and French Suites for harpsichord and the first set of the Well-Tempered Clavier. Pride of place among these compositions belongs to the six-part cycles for solo violin (Sonatas and Partitas) and solo cello (Suites), which have earned great respect and reverence from professional musicians; each generation discovering something new within them.

The individual Sonatas and Partitas are explicitly associated with the Bible through quotations of chorales related to festivals in the church calendar. The works also include the Baroque era's penchant for hidden meanings and numbers, transcending the boundaries of musical notation and elevating these 'sonic mathematics' onto a philosophical and spiritual plane.

The numerical symbolism of the date of Bach's birth alone is quite amazing: the substitution of the individual letters of his name B-A-C-H with numbers yields  $2+1+3+8 = 14$ .  $J. S. BACH = 9+18+2+1+3+8=41$  (5) which forms the date of his birth: 21/3/85.

The Sonatas and Partitas of the solo violin cycle were not all written at the same time. Bach started composing these works around 1703, and the set was completed by 1720.

The *Ciaccona*, from Partita No 2 in D minor, is unique in violin literature. It was originally intended to be a musical epitaph to Bach's first wife, Maria Barbara. Bach learned about her sudden death only after his return from a three-month stay in *Karlsbad* (Karlovy Vary) in his role as Kapellmeister

at the court of Prince Leopold. The unexpected loss of Maria Barbara, after thirteen years of happy marriage, must have been a huge blow, especially as she had seemed to be in very good health when he departed for *Karlsbad*.

The *Ciaccona* quotes from several chorales (*Christ lag in Todesbanden; Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt; Wo soll ich fliechen hin; and Befehl Du Deine Wege*), which occasionally interact with each other contrapuntally. Clearly discernable in the upper part of the *Ciaccona*'s first section is the melody of the chorale *Jesu, meine Freude*. Then follows an imitation of the drums and trumpets of the celestial realm alongside quotes from *Drauf kann ich fröhlich sein* and *Dem Höchsten sei Lob und Preis*. Present throughout the movement is *affectus tristitiae*, a six-tone chromatic ascent or descent based on the pattern of D - C# - C - H (B) - B (Bb) - A, which displays the state of grief.

The *Ciaccona* was described by Brahms in 1877: 'To me the *Ciaccona* is one of the most miraculous and most incomprehensible musical forms. On a single staff of notes for one small instrument, this man managed to write out a whole world of unfathomably deep ideas and overpowering feelings.'

The six Sonatas and Partitas first appeared under the title of 'Sei solo a Violino senza Basso accompagnato. Libro primo da Joh. Seb. Bach ao 1720.' At the time a solo sonata for violin would naturally have the continuo players and parts implied, here Bach himself tells us that Basso Continuo does not apply. A possible earlier model for this work might be the Solo Sonatas of Johann Georg Pisendel, the Dresden-based virtuoso for whom Bach probably wrote these works. At that time the term 'Sonata' was still used in contrast to 'Cantata' as first defined by Andrea Gabrieli in 1578 (*suonare* = play; *cantare* = sing). Partita was synonymous with Suite, or a series of dance numbers.

The architecture of the cycle as a whole is just as remarkable as each of its parts. If the *Ciaccona* is taken as a central pillar (its lack of symmetry at the end of the standard four dances sets it apart from the usual Partita format) it is flanked on one side by the G minor Sonata, B minor Partita, A minor Sonata and four dances of the D minor Partita, all of them in minor keys, and on the other side by the C major Sonata with one of Bach's most extensive fugues, and the joyfully unbridled, almost homophonically dance-like E major Partita. This is another manifestation of the

proportional balance determined by the *Golden Section* (the ratio of 1 to 1.618), that can be found in so many instances of supreme art.

The first **Sonata in G minor** relates to Christmas. The concealed *cantus firmus* is the sacred chant by Bartholomeus Ringwald, *Herr Jesu Christ, Du höchster Gut, Du Brunnquell aller Gnaden*. The introductory *Adagio* displays an almost organ style, sweeping fantasia-like structure. The following *Fugue* was later reworked for the organ by Bach. The *Siciliana* ushers in a calming tone, with a charming atmosphere reminiscent of a Nativity scene, creating an appropriate bridge to the final *Presto*, a single voice, yet polyphonically structured.

All four dances of the **Partita in B minor** are mutually linked by similar harmonic structure, further reaffirmed by the ensuing *Doubles* (variations) which provide a form of commentary on the statement just made. With the exception of the *Allemanda*, whose *Double* actually features a double speed, the dances and doubles can be performed at the same tempo.

The **Sonata in A minor** contains, in the opening *Grave*, the first four lines of the Easter hymn, *O Haupt, voll Blut und Wunden*. The structure of the Sonata is identical with that of the *Sonata in G minor*, except for the *Fugue*, which is markedly more extensive with the theme spanning a whole octave (unlike the fourth in the *Fugue* in the *G minor Sonata*). The *Andante* is in a major key, but its feeling is more reminiscent of the Easter Passion, rather than the usual major key idyll. The final *Allegro* is enriched by echoes and is once again polyphonic in style.

The four dances of the **Partita in D minor** could be likened to the United Nations, where a German *Allemanda* is followed by a French *Corrente* which makes way for a Spanish *Sarabanda* after which comes a Scottish-English *Giga*. The *Ciaccona*, as the fifth part of the suite, defies the standard pattern, (even the chorale quotes differ from those in the other movements) towering high above everything else in terms of scale and import alike.

The *Adagio* of the third **Sonata in C major** is profoundly moving, and its four-voice setting is held together by a dotted rhythm suggesting an abstract dance-like character. Even though dramatic moments are present, the Sonata on the whole is imbued with the spirit of catharsis, determined by the evenly balanced nature of the principal theme. The *Fugue* is based upon Luther's Pentecostal

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The individual movements are designated here according to the historical-critical edition of J.S. Bach's complete works: *J.S. Bach: Neue Ausgabe sämtliche Werke, Leipzig 1958*

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