



BACH WEEKEND 2021

Fri 25 Jun | 7.30pm
Kings Place Hall One

Rachel Podger
Solo Bach

Programme

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Sonata No. 2 in A minor for solo violin, BWV 1003
Grave – Fuga – Andante – Allegro

Cello Suite No. 3 in C, BWV 1009
(Transposed into G major for violin)

Prelude – Allemande – Courante – Sarabande –
Bourrée I – Bourrée II – Bourrée I – Gigue

Partita No. 2 in D minor for solo violin, BWV 1004
Allemanda – Corrente – Sarabanda – Giga – Ciaccona

Rachel Podger baroque violin

This performance will last approx. 75 mins with no interval.

Programme Notes

As a performer, Bach has long been pigeon-holed as an organist, but it seems he had a second string to his bow – his friends and family also rated him as a violinist. His first job was as a string player at the court of Weimar and his son Emanuel tells us that 'until the approach of old age, my father played the violin cleanly and penetratingly and understood to perfection the possibilities of all stringed instruments'. Emanuel was especially fond of his father's six sonatas for violin and harpsichord (BWV1014–19). 'They still sound excellent', he wrote in 1774, 'even though they're now over fifty years old'. Two-and-a-half centuries later, though, they've proved less popular than Bach's solo violin Sonatas and Partitas (BWV1001–6) which wear their virtuosity much more openly.

Bach probably completed his solo sonatas and partitas some time before 1720 – the date on his handsomely-copied autograph score. They explore the two most important instrumental forms of his time: the dance-based French suite, and the Italian sonata, with its emphasis on fantasy and fugue. Bach's contemporary, the theorist and composer Johann Mattheson, particularly admired the fugue of Sonata No. 2. Writing in 1737, he quoted the eight notes of the fugue's subject in support of his view that just as the finest sermons 'can be made on three or four words of text' so the best worked-out fugues are often based on the fewest notes. 'Who would believe', he asked, 'that these eight short notes would be so fruitful as to bring forth a Counterpoint of more than a whole sheet of music paper, without unusual extension, and quite naturally?'

Each of the three partitas approaches the traditions of the suite from a different angle. In Partita No. 2 Bach saves his fire for the end of the work. After the four movements which make up the traditional suite (allemande, courante, sarabande and gigue) Bach concludes with an unexpected, additional movement. This is no mere coda. In length, virtuosity and gravitas this great Ciaccona in D minor surpasses everything that has gone before.

It is perhaps Bach's ability to create a dense polyphonic texture through the use of multiple stopping and sleight of hand which excites most admiration in listeners today. For players, though, there are more subtle rewards. The violin Sonatas and Partitas are amongst the small group of Bach's instrumental works which have survived in the composer's own hand, and they contain priceless details of his original phrasing and articulation markings, dynamics and ornaments – the kind of things which were usually left out of printed editions. Here, then, we are one step closer to Bach.

Bach's cello suites have been less fortunate. The autograph score has not survived, and had an old pupil not requested a copy of his master's original then the music might have disappeared altogether. This invaluable copy was made by Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena, sometime between 1727 and 1731. But when we compare it with later manuscripts of the suites (made by Bach's pupils), we find quite a few differences, as if later generations of players felt free to make their own changes to the music. Rachel Podger joins this noble tradition, if only to transpose the music to a key better suited to the violin.

The six suites were written quite early in Bach's career, during his time as Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold at Cöthen (1717-23). Originally, Bach seems to have conceived them as a group of three, ending with the C major suite we hear tonight. They all follow a similar plan. To the classical suite – allemande, courante,

sarabande and gigue – Bach added an introductory prelude and tucked in a pair of fashionable modern dances (minuets or bourrées) before the final gigue. The least predictable movement was always the opening preludes, where, unconstrained by dance rhythms, Bach was free to challenge the player with free-flowing, almost improvisatory flights of fancy. The prelude to Suite No. 3 is based on a succession of changing harmonies which are dramatically spun-out with a variety of sequential patterns and scales ... which sound suspiciously like a teaching exercise – albeit an inspired one.

Simon Heighes 2021

Biography

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

Following an exciting and innovative collaboration, *A Guardian Angel*, with the 'impeccable' (*Gramophone*) vocal ensemble VOCES8, Rachel was thrilled to be one of the Artists in Residence at the Wigmore Hall in 2019/2020. Alongside this, Rachel and Christopher Glynn recorded the world premiere of three previously unfinished Mozart sonatas which were completed by RAM Professor Timothy Jones for release in March 2021. Rachel featured in The VOCES8 Foundation's LIVE From London festival in a new advent version of *A Guardian Angel*, 'a sensitive accompanist when called for and displayed nimble fingers in her virtuosic solos' (*Wall Street Journal*).

**TOMORROW AT
BACH
WEEKEND
2021**

Steven Devine
The Goldberg Variations
A lecture-recital

Sat 26 Jun | 11.30am

kingsplace.co.uk/bach





Rachel performed solo Bach for *Gramophone Magazine's* Winners' Digital Gala, appeared in Bitesize Proms, BOZAR at Home, Living Room Live, Baroque at the Edge, and a collaborative disc by Musicians For Musicians, *Many Voices on a Theme of Isolation*. She presented BBC Radio 3's *Inside Music* and directed a new arrangement by Chad Kelly, *The Goldberg Variations Reimagined*. 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 Academy of Ancient Music, and further performances of Bach Cello Suites, *The Goldberg Variations Reimagined*, and *A Guardian Angel*.

As a director and soloist, Rachel has enjoyed countless collaborations including with Robert Levin, Jordi Savall, Masaaki Suzuki, Kristian Bezuidenhout, VOCES8, Robert Hollingworth & I Fagiolini, Christopher Glynn,

European Union Baroque Orchestra, English Concert, Armonico Consort, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Academy of Ancient Music, Holland Baroque Society, Tafelmusik (Toronto), the Handel and Haydn Society, San Francisco Early Music, Philharmonia Baroque, and Oregon Bach Festival.

Rachel has won numerous awards including two Baroque Instrumental Gramophone Awards for *La Stravaganza* (2003) and Biber Rosary Sonatas (2016), the Diapason d'Or de l'année in the Baroque Ensemble category for her recording of the La Cetra Vivaldi concertos (2012), two *BBC Music Magazine* awards in the instrumental category for *Guardian Angel* (2014) and the concerto category for the complete Vivaldi *L'Estro Armonico* concertos (2016). Rachel and Brecon Baroque released the highly anticipated album, Vivaldi *Le Quattro Stagioni*, on Channel Classics in 2018. 'It's colourful, vivid and dramatic ... with a fluidity of phrasing and ease of spontaneity and ornamentation' (*Record Review*). Bach Cello Suites transposed for the violin was released in April 2019. According to *BBC Music Magazine*, the five-star album is '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, she holds the Micaela Comberti Chair for Baroque Violin (founded in 2008) at the RAM 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, NY, where she visits regularly. She is managed worldwide by Percius.

KINGS PLACE LONDON UNWRAPPED

The 'London' Bach
Feinstein Ensemble
with Christopher Suckling

JC Bach | Abel | Handel | Haydn

Also part of Bach Weekend 2021

Sun 27 Jun | 7pm

kingsplace.co.uk/london

