



JENNIFER KOH

BACH & BEYOND
PART 3

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BACH
—
HARBISON
—
BERIO



JENNIFER KOH BACH & BEYOND PART 3

DISC 1 JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

Sonata No. 2 in A minor, BWV 1003 (24:48)

- 1 I. Grave (4:13)
- 2 II. Fuga (7:59)
- 3 III. Andante (6:00)
- 4 IV. Allegro (6:20)

LUCIANO BERIO (1925–2003)

- 5 Sequenza VIII for solo violin (15:40)

DISC 2 JOHN HARBISON (b. 1938)

*For Violin Alone** (20:48)

- 1 I. Ground (3:40)
- 2 II. Dance 1 (3:10)
- 3 III. Air (3:12)
- 4 IV. March (2:32)
- 5 V. Dance 2 (4:14)
- 6 VI. Duet (1:59)
- 7 VII. Epilogue (1:40)

J.S. BACH

Sonata No. 3 in C major, BWV 1005 (24:43)

- 8 I. Adagio (5:25)
- 9 II. Fuga (10:30)
- 10 III. Largo (3:29)
- 11 IV. Allegro assai (5:02)

TT: (86:23)

*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

PROGRAM NOTES

by Patrick Castillo

The final installment of Jennifer Koh's *Bach & Beyond* series of albums featuring music for solo violin was produced at a time of intensified solitude. As COVID-19 continues to ravage our global community, we remain isolated, staying home to ensure the health and safety of our neighbors, our loved ones, and ourselves.

"Sei solo," proclaims the title page of Bach's autograph manuscript to his *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin*: "Six solos" — or, perhaps, "You are alone." This poignant wordplay, largely dismissed by Bach scholars but intriguing nevertheless, is thought to refer to the composer's solitude following the death of his wife, Maria Barbara. Bach dated the title page 1720, the year of her death. It may seem far-fetched to surmise that the *Sonatas and Partitas* are the widowed composer's tombeau for his deceased wife; but consider, too, that the correct Italian for "six solos" is "sei soli." Such an error in grammar would be a rare slip for an intellect as exacting as Bach's.

Whatever his intention, Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas* constitute a majestic monument to solitude. From a single melodic instrument, Bach fashions exquisite counterpoint and polyphony and conjures a kaleidoscopic array of instrumental textures and expressive characters. Each of the three *Sonatas* features a fugue, the form that, in refracting a modest fragment into a brilliant mosaic, most gloriously manifests Bach's guiding compositional principle of "all from one and all in one."

The Grave that begins the *Sonata No. 2 in A minor, BWV 1003*, despite its sobriety, nevertheless glorifies the

instrument with its florid, fanciful writing. A terse nine-note subject drives the stern Fuga, the Sonata's center of gravity; Bach develops this figure in short order, with an urgency befitting the fugue's austere character. A lovely Andante follows, offering the listener tender solace in the fugue's wake. Here Bach spins music of beguiling sincerity, pacing the tuneful melody with a pulsing heartbeat of repeated notes. That pulse is transfigured in a motoric flow of 16th and 32nd notes in the Allegro finale.

A gently rocking, dotted-rhythm gesture blossoms, in wondrous fashion, into the opening Adagio of the Sonata No. 3 in C major, BWV 1005. This movement is one of those quiet miracles in Bach's oeuvre (think of the C-major Prelude of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* or the opening of the First Cello Suite) in which a whole world comes into being from the most unassuming musical idea. The Adagio spawns one of the colossal accomplishments to be found among the six Sonatas and Partitas: the second movement Fuga stands nearly shoulder-to-shoulder with the D-minor Partita's immortal Ciaccona. The fugue is, at first glance, a seemingly affable thing, but slowly overwhelms the listener with its immense expressive power (and the violinist with its demands on both virtuosity and sheer stamina). It is the most complex of the fugues among the three Sonatas, displaying the full gamut of contrapuntal

techniques; halfway through, Bach restarts the engine with the subject in inversion. A bewitching Largo and fetchingly rustic Allegro assai finale complete the Sonata.

Bach's homage to solitude finds a distant echo in John Harbison's *For Violin Alone*, composed in 2015 for Jennifer Koh. For Harbison, Bach has been a vital spiritual forebear since his youth. In a lecture to Tanglewood students, Harbison described the assemblage of his musical cosmos:

Here is how it went for me: in adolescence Mozart string quintets and Bach cantatas, Stravinsky *Symphony of Psalms*, Bartók Concerto for Orchestra... Kern and Gershwin... Oscar Peterson, later Horace Silver... During college: more Stravinsky, some Hindemith and Dallapiccola. Bach and Mozart even more preponderant. Discovery of Monk and Parker.... After college:... Bach still central, due to my performances of over forty of his cantatas...

For Violin Alone bears a closer kinship to Bach's Partitas than to the Sonatas. It comprises six movements and an Epilogue,

resembling the Baroque dance suite rather than the four-movement *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata) model of the three Sonatas. The opening movement, the assertive Ground — a series of five successive recurrences of a central theme, continuously varied — gives way to the first of the two Dance movements. At the work's center are the featherweight Air, its sinewy melodic lines marked alternately *semplice* and *grazioso, cantabile*, and a contrasting March: a brash thing punctuated by *misterioso, timido*, and *ansioso* utterances.

Luciano Berio's *Sequenza VIII* (1976) for solo violin is the eighth in the composer's signature series of 14 works for different solo instruments (including voice). The *Sequenzas*, writes Berio scholar David Osmond-Smith, "[make] explicit Berio's fascination with virtuosity, understood not merely as technical dexterity, but as a manifestation of an agile musical intelligence that relishes the challenge of complexity."

Berio likened the composition of *Sequenza VIII* to "paying a personal debt to the violin, which to me is one of the most subtle and complex of instruments.... While almost all of the other *Sequenzas* develop to an extreme degree a very limited choice of instrumental possibilities, *Sequenza VIII* deals with a larger and more global view of the violin and can be listened to as a development of instrumental gestures."

Berio's paeon to the violin likewise pays a debt to Bach. The composer writes:

Sequenza VIII is built around two notes (A and B), which — as in a chaconne — act as a compass in the work's rather diversified and elaborate itinerary, where polyphony is no longer virtual but real, where the soloist must make the listener constantly aware of the history behind each instrumental gesture. *Sequenza VIII*, therefore, becomes inevitably a tribute to that musical apex that is the Ciaccona from Johann Sebastian Bach's Partita in D minor, where — historically — past, present, and future violin techniques coexist.

With its connection to the Ciaccona, Berio's *Sequenza VIII* makes for a fitting part of the ending to Jennifer Koh's *Bach & Beyond* recording cycle, whose first installment was anchored by the Partita in D minor.

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Patrick Castillo leads a multifaceted career as a composer, performer, writer, and educator.

JENNIFER KOH

Violinist Jennifer Koh is recognized for her intense, commanding performances, delivered with dazzling virtuosity and technical assurance. A forward-thinking artist, she is dedicated to exploring a broad and eclectic repertoire, while promoting equity and inclusivity in classical music. She has expanded the contemporary violin repertoire through a wide range of commissioning projects and has premiered more than 100 works written especially for her. Her quest for the new and unusual, sense of endless curiosity, and ability to lead and inspire a host of multidisciplinary collaborators truly set her apart.

Ms. Koh's series include *Alone Together*, an online commissioning project and performances series in support of composers during the COVID-19 crisis; *The New American Concerto*, which invites a diverse collective of composers to examine socio-cultural topics relevant to contemporary American life through the form of the violin concerto; *Limitless* (also released on Cedille Records) which explores the relationship between composer and performer through duo works played by Ms. Koh and the composers themselves; *Bach and Beyond*, which traces the history of the solo violin

repertoire from Bach's sonatas and partitas to pieces by 20th- and 21st-century composers; and *Shared Madness*, comprising short solo works that explore virtuosity in the 21st century, commissioned from over 30 composers.

Ms. Koh has appeared with orchestras worldwide, among them the New York, Los Angeles, and Helsinki Philharmonics; Cleveland, Mariinsky, Minnesota, Philadelphia, and Philharmonia (London) Orchestras; and Atlanta, Baltimore, BBC, Chicago, Cincinnati, National, New World, NHK, RAI (Torino), and Singapore Symphonies. Named *Musical America's* 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year, she has won the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, Concert Artists Guild Competition, and an Avery Fisher Career Grant. She has a BA in English literature from Oberlin College and studied at the Curtis Institute, where she worked extensively with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir. She is an active lecturer, teacher, and recording artist for Cedille Records and is the Artistic Director and Founder of the non-profit *ARCO Collaborative*.

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Bach: Sonata No. 3 in C major, BWV 1005

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Berio: Sequenza VIII

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Harbison: For Violin Alone

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