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JENNIFER KOH

BACH & BEYOND
PART 2

BACH | BARTOK | SAARIAHO

CEDILLE

Producer/Engineer Adam Abeshouse

Recorded

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Publishers

SAARIAHO *Frises* ©2011 Chester Music Ltd

BÉLA BARTÓK Sonata for Solo Violin Sz. 117, BB 124 ©1944 Boosey & Hawkes

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JENNIFER KOH

BACH & BEYOND PART 2

CD 1 (40:44)

J.S. BACH (1685–1750)

Sonata No. 1 in G minor, BWV 1001 (15:33)

① I. Adagio (3:52)

② II. Fuga (5:18)

③ III. Siciliana (2:58)

④ IV. Presto (3:24)

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881–1945)

Sonata for Solo Violin Sz. 117, BB 124 (25:02)

⑤ I. Tempo di ciaccona (8:24)

⑥ II. Fuga (4:21)

⑦ III. Melodia (7:05)

⑧ IV. Presto (5:10)

CD 2 (50:34)

KAIJA SAARIAHO (b. 1952)

Frises (21:15)

① I. Frise Jaune (3:56)

② II. Frise de Fleur (5:55)

③ III. Pavage (7:27)

④ IV. Frise Grise (3:55)

J.S. BACH

Partita No. 1 in B minor, BWV 1002 (29:11)

⑤ I. Allemanda (5:23)

⑥ II. Double (3:41)

⑦ III. Corrente (3:15)

⑧ IV. Double (3:22)

⑨ V. Sarabande (3:17)

⑩ VI. Double (3:06)

⑪ VII. Tempo di Borea (3:29)

⑫ VIII. Double (3:34)

TT: (91:18)

PERSONAL NOTE

Bach's six Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin have long been considered definitive works for solo violin. When exploring solo violin works written from Bach's time to the present day, I have found direct and indirect connections to Bach's Sonatas and Partitas in nearly every composition I have uncovered. Although written nearly 300 years ago, they have proven to be a summit for composers and violinists today and throughout Western classical history.

I have always believed that music is a direct conversation and reflection of the world in which we live. Having grown up in a time when people declared classical music to be a dead art form, I have found it necessary to understand why I am committed to this art form and why I believe classical music is relevant and meaningful to present society. I have found that contemporary music recreates the thread that connects us to past works of art and ultimately shapes how we listen to and perform music from all time periods.

My *Bach & Beyond* project presents the works of Bach that I have long loved, in communion with the music of contemporary composers whom I am dedicated to championing. I hope that each program will strengthen the connection between our past and present worlds through a historical journey of solo violin works from Bach's Sonatas and Partitas to contemporary and newly commissioned works.

Bach & Beyond consists of three programs, each with two of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas. The program on this recording consists of works by Bach, Bartók, and Saariaho and celebrates composers' first works for solo violin while capturing the evolution of writing for solo violin. It opens with Bach's Sonata in G minor, the very first work Bach wrote for solo violin, and is followed by Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin, his first work for the instrument. Bartók closely relates the structure of his sonata to Bach's solo violin writing from the opening movement Ciaccona to the second movement Fuga, while simultaneously expanding the violin's expressive capabilities with microtones and pizzicato, leading

the listener forward to new possibilities and developments in solo violin composition writing. Saariaho's *Frises* is her first large-scale work for solo violin and electronics. Each movement relates to pre-existing forms ranging from ground bass to the chaconne, although Saariaho metamorphosizes the color palette of the violin not only through expressive indications and writing for the violin but through the addition of electronics that transform the sound of the violin as it is being produced. The B-minor Partita by Bach closes this program, and although it is perhaps the least performed of all of his works for solo violin, I hold this work in particularly high regard not only because it's Bach's first exploration of the partita form, but also because of the great significance the key of B minor holds in Bach's work — his relationship to this key reaching its culmination in the Mass in B minor. So it's a portent of things to come.

In celebration of the spirit of this program, I would like to dedicate this recording to my first violin teacher, Jo Davis.

Jennifer Koh

JENNIFER KOH: BACH & BEYOND PART 2

Notes by Patrick Castillo

"Once he had heard a particular theme," read Johann Sebastian Bach's obituary, "he could grasp, as it were instantaneously, almost anything artistic that could be brought forth from it." This assessment of Bach's fugal writing, in which a brief melodic subject holds the key to a majestic musical creation, may equally well testify to the brilliant conception of the Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin. These works, as lyrical as they are virtuosic, demonstrate the same godlike powers of creation by which such fantastical musical realms as *The Art of Fugue* and *The Musical Offering* flourish from within extreme constraints. Fueled by what the obituary identified as his "desire to try every possible artistry," Bach defies the seeming limitations of writing for violin alone without harmonic accompaniment. From a single melodic instrument, he fashions polyphony and counterpoint, conjures a kaleidoscopic array of characters and textures, and honors numerous formal traditions (church sonatas, dance forms, and, yes, fugue), but reimagines them with such extraordinary vision that these works sound today irrepressibly fresh. Extrapolating Bach's

guiding principle of "all from one and all in one" to the broader historical plane — just as one instrument inspired such a wealth of musical ideas, and as an innocuous subject bequeaths a dizzying fugue — Bach's Sonatas and Partitas have continued to serve as a definitive point of reference for the violin's solo repertoire across more than two and a half centuries.

Béla Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin, one of the composer's final works, pays explicit homage to the Baroque master. Bartók composed the Sonata in 1944 for Yehudi Menuhin, after hearing Menuhin perform Bach's Sonata No. 3 in C major. Bach's specter haunts Bartók's Sonata throughout its four movements, beginning in *Tempo di ciaccona* — a nod to the monumental Chaconne from Bach's Partita No. 2 in D minor (heard on *Bach & Beyond Part 1*). A rigorous four-voiced fugue follows; Bartók's craftsmanship channels the complexity of Bach's counterpoint in a modern voice, as when the fugue's theme and its inversion appear simultaneously.

The Sonata demonstrates an intense focus on melody — appropriate, after all, to the medium of solo violin, and moreover placing it alongside the Concerto for Orchestra and Third Piano Concerto, both completed in the year following the Sonata and likewise distinguished by

their melodic immediacy. This sensibility is especially distilled in the Sonata's third movement *Melodia*: a poignant, lyrical utterance, as nuanced in timbre and character as it is plainly spoken. Bartók expands the Sonata's expressive palette further in the Presto finale, utilizing quarter-tone writing for extended passages. (The composer's semitone alternatives appeared in Menuhin's posthumous edition; Jennifer Koh performs Bartók's original version on this recording.)

Johannes Brahms regarded the aforementioned Bach Chaconne as "one of the most wonderful, incomprehensible works of music. On one staff, for one small instrument, this man has written a whole world of profoundest thought and deepest feelings." Indeed, Bartók aspires to no less in his wide-ranging Sonata.

Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho's *Frises* likewise acknowledges Bach's Chaconne: she composed it in 2011 at the request of violinist Richard Schmoucler for a work to follow the Chaconne. As with Bartók's Sonata, we encounter the timeless resonance of Bach's art, now in a distinctly modern context. Using the Chaconne's final D as its point of departure, *Frises* launches the listener into an otherworldly soundscape of violin harmonics, electronic bells, and other aural fascinations.

Bach biographer Martin Geck groups the Sonatas and Partitas with the Inventions, Sinfonias, and *Well-Tempered Clavier* as the Cöthen demonstration cycles: works composed during Bach's time in that city (where he served as Kapellmeister from 1717 to 1723), designed as explications of compositional — specifically, contrapuntal — technique.

The Sonatas and Partitas are arguably the most miraculous of these, dressed in such modest garb and yet accomplishing so much. The aspirations of these works are far-reaching. They encompass academic (fugal, variation, etc.) and popular (dance) forms; the Partitas, moreover, are multicultural dance suites, featuring the German *allemande*, the French *courante*, the Spanish *sarabande*, etc. But more importantly, in their purely musical qualities, the Sonatas and Partitas reflect a particular worldview, as shaped by Bach's Lutheran faith: that as the fulfillment of his vocation, his musical creation must reflect the splendor and complexity of God's creation. "Melody and harmony in one," writes Geck — "that is the message of the six solos, which constitute as well an encyclopedia of the violin: prelude, fugue, concerto, aria, variation, dance — all are performable on it."

Here we have music of startling expressive power. The Sonata No. 1 in G minor, the most frequently performed of the six violin solos, is perhaps also the most immediately gripping among them, with its impassioned Adagio introduction prefacing the incisive Fuga. The Siciliana introduces a contrasting humor, all delicacy and grace, answered by the exclamatory *moto perpetuo* of the Presto finale.

Although an assemblage of dance forms, the Partita No. 1 is a work given more to intellectual stimulation than to kinetic. Its key, B minor, lends the Partita a brooding, contemplative air. Its structure, distinct from the other Partitas, comprises four pairs of movements, each a dance form and its *double* (Bach uses the French term, indicating a variation by means of melodic ornamentation). These four pairs together resemble the four-movement plan of the Sonatas, which are based on the slow-fast-slow-fast *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata) model. For the player, the Partita's technical challenges are many, from the series of double-stops at the outset of the Allemande through the devilish *Tempo di Borea* that concludes the work.

Despite such formal observations, the music contained in the Sonatas and Partitas ultimately defies analysis. Intended to demonstrate technical prowess, they do

so much more, transporting the listener to unexpected emotional depths and resonating throughout a rich repertoire tradition, tended by generations of composers. In their strength of character and spectacular imaginative breadth — and in that they appeal equally, and with considerable force, to mind and soul — these ostensibly pedagogical works reveal to us the fullness of Bach's genius.

© 2014 Patrick Castillo

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. With an impassioned musical curiosity, she forges an artistic path of her own devising, choosing works that both inspire and challenge. She is dedicated to performing the violin repertoire of all eras from traditional to contemporary, believing that the past and present form a continuum. A model example of how Ms. Koh realizes this is her Bach and Beyond project, a series of three recitals that explore the history of solo violin repertoire from Bach's complete Sonatas and Partitas to works by modern-day composers, including world premieres. The exploration of Bach's music and its influence in today's musical landscape has played an important role in Ms. Koh's artistic journey, and she is passionate in her efforts to expand the violin repertoire by establishing relationships with many of today's composers from whom she commissions works. Launched in 2009 in commemoration of the 325th anniversary of Bach's birth, Bach and Beyond recitals have since been performed by Ms. Koh worldwide. In 2015, she begins touring with the final recital program of her series, which includes Luciano Berio's *Sequenza*

VIII and the world premiere of *For Violin Alone* commissioned from John Harbison. Ms. Koh also frequently performs all six of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas in single concerts. Her interpretations of Bach's solo works, both in these marathon recitals and paired with contemporary pieces, have been praised as thoughtful, intense, energetic, and beautifully phrased.

In 2014, Ms. Koh launched Off Stage On Record, a video series that gives a behind-the-scenes look at the life and career of a concert artist. The first three documentary-style episodes, on creativity, collaboration, and the body, are available on her YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/jenniferkohviolin). Her forthcoming projects include Bridge to Beethoven, a recital series with pianist Shai Wosner pairing Beethoven's complete violin sonatas with new works by Anthony Cheung, Vijay Iyer, and Andrew Norman, to be launched in April 2015, and The Life and Death of J.S. Bach, a recital of Bach's complete Sonatas and Partitas staged by director Robert Wilson, to be premiered in 2016.

Ms. Koh has been heard with leading orchestras around the world including the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, Cleveland and Philadelphia Orchestras, and the Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati,

Detroit, Houston, New World, Montreal, and National Symphonies. Abroad she has appeared with the Czech Philharmonic, BBC London and Scottish Symphonies, Helsinki Philharmonic, Lahti Symphony, Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, and the Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo in Brazil. A prolific recitalist, she frequently appears at major music centers and festivals.

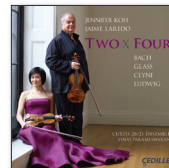
Bach & Beyond Part 2 is Ms. Koh's tenth recording for Cedille Records. Her other albums include *Two x Four*, featuring double violin concertos by Bach, Philip Glass, Anna Clyne, and David Ludwig performed with Jaime Laredo and the Curtis 20/21 Ensemble; *Signs, Games + Messages*, a recording of violin and piano works by Janáček, Bartók, and Kurtág with Mr. Wosner; *Rhapsodic Musings: 21st Century Works for Solo Violin*; the Grammy-nominated *String Poetic*, featuring the world premiere of Jennifer Higdon's eponymous work, performed with pianist Reiko Uchida; Schumann's complete violin sonatas, also with Ms. Uchida; *Portraits* with the Grant Park Orchestra under conductor Carlos Kalmar, featuring concertos by Szymanowski, Martinů, and Bartók; *Violin Fantasies*: fantasies for violin and piano by Schubert, Schumann, Schoenberg, and saxophonist

Ornette Coleman, again with Ms. Uchida; and Ms. Koh's first Cedille album, from 2002, *Solo Chaconnes*, an earlier reading of Bach's Second Partita coupled with chaconnes by Richard Barth and Max Reger.

The first *Bach & Beyond* recording, released in October 2012, comprises Bach's second and third Partitas, Kaija Saariaho's Nocturne for Violin, Eugène Ysaÿe's Sonata No. 2, and the world-premiere recording of Missy Mazzoli's *Dissolve, O My Heart*, and was named one of the Best Classical Music Recordings of 2012 by *The New York Times*.

Born in Chicago of Korean parents, Ms. Koh began playing the violin by chance, choosing the instrument in a Suzuki-method program only because spaces for cello and piano had been filled. She made her debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at age 11 and went on to win the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, the Concert Artists Guild Competition, and an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Ms. Koh has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from Oberlin College and studied at the Curtis Institute, where she worked extensively with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir.

Also by Jennifer Koh on Cedille



TWO X FOUR

Works by Bach, Clyne, Glass, and Ludwig

with Jaime Laredo, violin; Curtis 20/21 Ensemble
Vinay Parameswaran, conductor

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— THE NEW YORK TIMES



SIGNS, GAMES + MESSAGES

Works by Bartók, Janáček, and Kurtág

with Shai Wosner, piano

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— FANFARE



BACH & BEYOND PART 1

Works by Bach, Saariaho, Mazzoli, and Ysaÿe

"Koh has proved herself not only a virtuoso solo-violinist . . . but also as a master programmer, knowing what to choose and how to coherently, cohesively join the repertoire in order to engage rather than obligate listeners."

— CLASSICSTODAY.COM



RHAPSODIC MUSINGS

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All 10 of Jennifer Koh's Cedille recordings are available at CedilleRecords.org