

MIDORI
violin

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

Sonata No. 1 for Solo Violin in G minor BWV 1001

Adagio

Fuga. Allegro

Siciliana

Presto

(approx. 14 minutes)

JESSIE MONTGOMERY (b. 1981)

Rhapsody No. 1 (2014)

(approx. 8 minutes)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

Violin Partita No. 1 in B minor BWV 1002

Allemanda – Double

Corrente – Double. Presto

Sarabanda – Double

Tempo di Borea - Double

(approx. 20 minutes)

INTERMISSION

JOHN ZORN (b. 1953)

Passagen (2011)

(approx. 13 minutes)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

Violin Partita No. 3 in E major BWV 1006

Preludio

Loure

Gavotte en rondeau

Minuet I

Minuet II

Bourée

Gigue

(approx. 18 minutes)

Johann Sebastian Bach

Sonatas & Partitas

If polyphonic music was not meant to be played on the violin, Johann Sebastian Bach didn't get the e-mail. His *Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin* BWV 1001-1006 of 1720 reveal clearly the scope of his ambition in this regard. The six works in the collection – three sonatas and three partitas – are admired today not just for their ingenious exploitation of the multi-voice capabilities of the instrument, but also for their skillfully constructed melodic lines that sit idiomatically on the fingerboard.

Keeping the listener from nodding off meant writing musical lines that constantly engaged the ear in new ways, mixing it up with scale figures that alternate with broken chords, passages on the lowest strings trading off with melodic climaxes high up on the fingerboard, and above all with salty dissonances finding resolution in satisfying cadences.

The *partita*, in late Baroque parlance, was just another name for a dance suite, a multi-movement work made up of the four canonical dance forms—allemande, courante, sarabande & gigue—with the occasional addition of a prelude at the beginning and optional fancier dances called *galanteries* (minuets, bourrées, gavottes) sandwiched in the middle, right before the zinger finale, the gigue.

The dances would be two parts, each repeated, with ornamentation added at the player's discretion the second time round. Needless to say, these are not pieces meant to accompany actual dancing. They are imaginative stylized recreations of dance genres that reproduce the general character and identifying rhythmic signature of each.

Bach's *sonatas* for solo violin are structured in the four-movement slow-fast-slow-fast format of the Baroque "church" sonata. More serious in tone than the dance-oriented partita, the *sonata da chiesa* featured a slow introduction, a movement in fugal style, a lyrical expressive slow movement and a lively finale. Bach adds a degree of tonal variety to this structure by putting the third movement of his sonatas in this set in a contrasting key.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Sonata No. 1 for Solo Violin in G minor BWV 1001

Bach's first sonata for solo violin is a work of serious but not grave character, featuring as it does in its fast movements, a degree of rhythmic vitality that might easily be taken for merriment. Its sonic grandeur is enhanced by Bach's choice of key, G minor, which benefits from the resonating warmth emanating from the violin's two lowest strings, G and D. These two open strings are often used to great effect as pedal tones to anchor the work's harmonic textures. They also serve as the foundational acoustic elements of the arresting quadruple-stop G minor chord that both opens the work as the first sound that strikes the ear in bar 1, and ends it as the concluding sonority of the final movement. And this same quadruple-stop chord also links its internal movements together as the final exclamation point of its first and second movements as well.

The first two movements form a familiar pair in Baroque music: a prelude and fugue.

Adagio.



The opening *Adagio* prelude is freely improvisatory in character and richly ornamented, with a host of written-out embellishments decorating its wide-ranging stop-and-start wanderings through the harmonic terrain of G minor and its neighbouring tonalities.

Allegro.



The *Allegro* three-voice fugue that follows is a punchy little affair with a persistent shoulder-poking pattern of repeated notes that defines its rhythmic pacing throughout. Mid-stride through this fugue Bach exploits the violin's open D string to create a sound-swelling pedal point *and* an augmentation of the fugue subject's principal repeated-note motive – at the same time.



The gently swaying *Siciliana* third movement brings a bit of major-mode relief from all the preceding minor-mode drama.

Siciliano.



Its principal melody, marked by the *siciliana*'s characteristic dotted rhythm, occupies the lowest register while increasingly plaintive sigh-filled responses up above add a wistful note of sadness to the innocent demeanour of this dance.

The *Presto* final movement lightens the texture even more with its continuous single line of *moto perpetuo* 16ths that alternate between chordal arpeggios and scalar runs.



Set in binary form like a dance movement it shows the influence of the gigue in the way its second half reverses the direction of motion of its opening volley of figuration:



Teasingly ambiguous for the ear throughout is whether this figuration implies two beats to the bar, or three.

Jessie Montgomery

Rhapsody No. 1

Jesse Montgomery is violinist-composer based in New York City whose works for solo instruments, for orchestra, and for chamber and choral ensembles have been performed around the world. She is the recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Award from the ASCAP Foundation and has worked closely with both the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic. Since 1999 she has been affiliated with The Sphinx Organization that promotes diversity in classical music by supporting young African-American and Latino string players in their careers.

Rhapsody No. 1 for solo violin is one of her most popular works, with almost 40 separate performances posted on YouTube, including a performance by Jesse Montgomery herself from her album *Strum: Music for Strings*. Of this piece she writes:

Rhapsody No. 1 is the first solo violin piece I wrote for myself. It draws on inspiration from the Eugène Ysaÿe solo violin works and is intended to serve as both an etude and a stand-alone work. This piece is intended to be part of a set of 6 solo violin works, each of which will be dedicated to a different contemporary violinist, and inspired by an historical composer.

The work is structured in three parts in a slow-fast-slow configuration, with each section based on rhapsodic explorations of the interval patterning of the work's first five notes. For example, in the opening bars we see these five notes in two-voice imitation in both quarter- and eighth-note values:



The faster middle section features extensive use of *bariolage*, a playing technique that mixes open and stopped strings to create a pattern of contrasting tone colours.

Violinists undoubtedly appreciate this work for its fine craftsmanship, particularly evident in the composer's attention to the resonance-creating potential of the instrument's open strings.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Violin Partita No. 1 in B minor BWV 1002

Bach's Partita No. 1 in B minor is comprised of four dances: the standard allemande, courante/corrente and sarabande, followed by a rollicking bourrée that takes the place of the traditional gigue. This partita stands unique amongst Bach's set of six works for solo violin in that each dance is paired with a particular kind of variation known in French as a *double*. The *double* circles round the same harmonies used in the preceding dance but in a continuous even stream of faster note values, like a scat singer riffing on a popular tune in contemporary jazz.

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The *Allemanda* opens the partita in a festive mood with a display of proud multiple-stop chords embellished with trills, almost in the manner of a French overture.



Pervasive dotted rhythms, interspersed with gracious triplet figures, give this movement its dancelike character. Its *double* imitates the effect of this rhythmic patterning by emphasizing little two-note groupings in its single melodic line.



The *Corrente* (a faster Italian variant of the French *courante*) ranges over a wide expanse of tonal space to imply a two-voice texture in a dialogue between high and low registers.



Its constant pattern of 8th-note motion, largely centering on arpeggiated chordal figuration, is transformed in its *double* into a whirlwind of runs.



The slow expressive *Sarabande* brings a halt to all this excitement in a dance movement marked by a solemn mood, the weight and gravity of which is reinforced by extensive use of multiple-stop chords.



Its *double*, although configured in faster note values, maintains this austere mood by speeding up only marginally to outline the dance's harmonies in triplets.

Double



The concluding *Borea* (Italian for *bourrée*) in no way backs away from the emphatic rhythmic patterning of the *sarabande* and if anything intensifies it with boot-stomping downbeats that betray this dance's origins in the French countryside.

Tempo di Borea



Its *double* outclasses it in elegance and rhythmic nuance, however, with chordal arpeggiations that challenge the ear to identify just where the downbeat actually is.

Double



John Zorn

Passagen

John Zorn is a New-York-based saxophonist, arranger, producer and avant-garde composer who has written for an extraordinarily wide range of instrumental ensembles, including rock bands, jazz groups, string quartets, orchestras, chamber ensembles as well as for solo instruments and for voice. Long recognized as a giant of the new music scene centred in Manhattan's Lower East Side, he received a MacArthur Foundation "genius" Grant in 2006 and his 60th birthday in 2013 was celebrated with performances at the Guggenheim Museum, Lincoln Center and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Zorn has been described by the online journal *Classical Music Geek* as "a composer who treads the line between experimental classical and experimental jazz," a musician whose music is "the most organized chaos you've ever heard."

Zorn's compositions not infrequently reference important figures in Western culture and the opening multiple-stop chords in his *Passagen* from 2011 allude to the first bars of the celebrated *Chaconne* from Bach's Partita in D minor BWV 1004. Moreover, we are assured that somewhere lurking in the dense textures and riotous musical gestures of this work is the famous musical motive B-A-C-H (in German B = B-flat, H = B natural).

Zorn has said that his score "encapsulates a brief history of solo violin music" and Steve Smith in the New York Times agrees, writing that in this work you hear "the entire solo violin repertory — Bach's stately chords, Paganini's fiery virtuosity, Bartok's rustic allusions, Berio's frenetic intensity — synthesized into a wholly original expression."

David Wright, reviewing Midori's recent performance at Carnegie Hall, goes further, writing in *New York Classical Review* that

"Zorn seemed to have created a catalogue of all the seemingly impossible things violinists have been asked to do over the centuries: blinding fast scales and string-crossing, of course, but also left-hand pizzicato, enormous smears of glissando, stratospheric harmonics, and bow tricks galore—basically, what happens when a rock sensibility gets hold of this ancient instrument. It's a stretch, but so it was also when Bach picked his violin up and wrote four-voice fugues on it."

Hold onto your seat. This piece is one exhilarating ride.

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Johann Sebastian Bach

Violin Partita No. 3 in E major BWV 1006

Bach's Partita No. 3 in the 'bright' key of E major – E being the top string on the violin – is an exceptionally cheery collection of dance pieces. In composing the line-up, Bach keeps the gigue finale but chucks out the traditional allemande, courante and sarabande and instead gives pride of place to the faster, more rhythmically buoyant *galanterie* dances.

But to capture our attention from the get-go he front-loads it with a glittering *Preludio* that opens with a festive fanfare on the E major triad tumbling down two octaves in rhythmic figuration. What follows is a *moto perpetuo* of continuous 16th-note motion bobbing and weaving through a succession of related keys, engaging the ear with unpredictable phrase lengths, perky syncopations and captivating violin idioms such as *bariolage*.



Bach obviously liked his handiwork in composing this piece, as he twice re-used it in fully harmonized settings for organ and chamber instruments, the version known as *Sinfonia to Cantata No. 29* later becoming Track 1 on the epoch-making Moog synthesizer album entitled *Switched-On Bach* (1968) by Walter (now Wendy) Carlos.



After this bouncy beginning comes a contrasting movement, the slow and majestic *Loure*, a dance form rarely seen in Bach, although the Fifth French Suite has one. This dance is characterized by a gentle lilt and heavy emphasis on the first beat of the bar, facilitated by a quarter-note-eighth-note upbeat. Often called a “slow gigue,” it kicks up its heels as if swimming through molasses.

Also rare is the form in which Bach presents the following *Gavotte*, namely *en rondeau*. The *rondo* pattern, consisting of an opening refrain theme alternating with intervening episodes, was later to become the standard format for sonata finales in the Classical era but here Bach uses it to structure his gavotte.



One of the 'lustier' dances in the suite, the gavotte was danced with a lifted step and a skipping forward motion, embodied musically in its characteristic half-bar upbeat. Both the *Preludio* and this *Gavotte en rondeau* have become crowd-pleasers and are often played as independent pieces.

Daintier and danced with a more delicate 'shuffling' gait is the *Minuet* and Bach gives us two in a matched pair.



When *galanteries* come in pairs like this, tradition says that the first will be repeated after playing the second, to round out the group into a nicely symmetrical A-B-A pattern.



And here, as often occurs, the second minuet is of a pastoral character, indicated by its drone figure.

The most boisterous member of the set is the *Bourée*, a dance that begins with a quarter-note upbeat and features a fair amount of syncopation, especially in the opening phrase – which makes the underlying rhythm a bit hard to parse on a non-percussive instrument like the violin.



This is soon compensated for in what follows, however, as symmetrical repeated phrases are sounded out first *forte* and then *piano*, in an echo pattern.

The Partita ends with *Gigue* in the Italian style, which is to say a hop-filled romp with plenty of harmonic and melodic sequences centred around chordal figuration.



The quasi-*moto-perpetuo* feel of this finale makes for a balanced ending to a suite that began in just the same way.