



Miriam Fried

J S BACH

Sonatas & Partitas



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JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin



Recorded at The Jerusalem Music Center December 2016

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Photographs of Miriam Fried by Benoit Rolland, 2017

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Miriam Fried has been recognized for many years as one of the world's preeminent violinists. A consummate musician - equally accomplished as recitalist, concerto soloist or chamber musician - she has been heralded for her 'fiery intensity and emotional depth' (Musical America) as well as for her technical mastery. Her supreme blend of artistry and musicianship continues to inspire audiences worldwide.

Miriam Fried has played with virtually every major orchestra in the United States and Europe and has been a frequent guest with the principal orchestras of Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, as well as with the Israel Philharmonic, the London Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic and the Vienna Symphony. Recital tours have taken her to all of the major music centers in North America and to Brussels, London, Milan, Munich, Rome, Paris, Salzburg, Stockholm and Zurich.

Chamber music plays an important role in Ms. Fried's musical life. She was the first violinist of the Mendelssohn String Quartet for ten years and collaborates regularly with her son, pianist Jonathan Biss.

Miriam Fried plays a particularly noteworthy violin, a 1718 Stradivarius that is said to have been the favorite of its 18th-century owner, the composer-conductor Louis Spohr. It was also owned by Regina Strinasacchi who, it is thought, used the instrument to play with Mozart the Sonata in B-flat, K. 454, which had been written for her.

A noted pedagogue, Miriam Fried is a professor at New England Conservatory and is invited to give master classes throughout the world.

Since 1994 she has been program Director of the Ravinia Steans Music Institute, one of the country's leading summer programs for young musicians. During this time she performed regularly at the Ravinia Festival as soloist with the Chicago Symphony, in recital and in chamber concerts.

During the 2015-16 season, Ms. Fried returned to the Bach solo Sonatas and Partitas. She recorded a series of lectures addressing performance questions relating to these works. The lectures are now available on iclassical-academy.com.

The imitative texture, the rhythms and the gentle lilt evoke the imagery of a graceful *pas-de-deux*. The subject of the *Gavotte en Rondeau* that follows is very lively. The two sets of sevenths, appearing in bars 2-3 and 5-6, make it playfully naughty. The two elegant, graceful *Menuets* are followed by the *Bourée* and *Gigue* which complete this Partita. They are both very short and buoyant. And so the Partita concludes just as it began, on a highly energetic note. It is the perfect mix of exuberance and gentleness, energy and grace that makes this work so incredibly attractive and great fun to play.

Miriam Fried © 2017

Disc 1	Playing time 65.14	Disc 2	Playing time 72.08
Sonata in G minor BWV 1001	16.14	Partita in D minor BWV 1004	29.21
1 Adagio	4.00	1 Allemanda	4.50
2 Fuga: Allegro	5.27	2 Corrente	2.36
3 Siciliana	3.07	3 Sarabanda	3.54
4 Presto	3.40	4 Giga	3.58
		5 Ciaccona	14.03
Partita in B minor BWV 1002	25.10	Sonata in C major BWV 1005	24.02
5 Allemanda	6.13	6 Adagio	4.43
6 Double	3.09	7 Fuga	10.40
7 Corrente	2.37	8 Largo	3.40
8 Double	2.45	9 Allegro assai	4.59
9 Sarabande	3.38		
10 Double	2.14	Partita in E major BWV 1006	18.45
11 Tempo di borea	2.20	10 Preludio	3.23
12 Double	2.14	11 Loure	4.33
Sonata in A minor BWV 1003	23.50	12 Gavotte en rondeau	2.56
13 Grave	4.29	13 Menuet I	1.47
14 Fuga	7.39	14 Menuet II	2.36
15 Andante	5.20	15 Bourée	1.40
16 Allegro	6.22	16 Gigue	1.50

I have had a love affair with the Bach Sonatas and Partitas since long before I knew much about either Bach or love. These magnificent works have caused me the greatest happiness, most excruciating frustration and endless fascination over a lifetime of playing and studying them.

I dedicated much of the past two years to preparing a series of performances of the Sonatas and Partitas, living and breathing this music. This recording is a composite of a performance that took place in the Jerusalem Music Center on 20 December, 2016 and recording sessions on the following days. The idea was to retain as much of the special atmosphere of a live performance as possible, and do as little editing as possible. It is my hope that this magnificent music brings you as much joy as it has given me.

Miriam Fried

Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin represent one of the summits of the violin literature: no less a violinist and composer than Georges Enescu called them the 'Himalayas of violinists'. These works inspire universal awe, and musicians of all perspectives, performers, composers and biographers shared this sentiment. Johann Nikolaus Forkel, Bach's first biographer, said: Bach 'understood to perfection the possibilities of all stringed instruments. This was evidenced by his solos for the violin.' Johann Friedrich Reichard, in a review of the Sonatas and Partitas said that the fugues from the sonatas were 'perhaps the greatest example in any art form of a master's ability to move with freedom and assurance, even in chains.'

Johannes Brahms, in a letter to Clara Schumann in June 1877, said about the *Ciaccona* from the d minor Partita:

'On one stave, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings. If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that

The *Ciaccona* evolved from being a bawdy song-dance in the 15th century to a dignified French social dance, and ended up as a set of variations on a bass. The 3/4 meter and 'Sarabande' rhythm are central to its character. Bach took this template and created a monument. The theme is four measures long, and it is followed by no less than sixty-four variations. Bach uses all possible compositional techniques in these variations: transposition, inversion, and retrograde, are interspersed with diminution, augmentation, and fragmentation, to name but a few.

While the compositional feat is surely astounding, it is the deep emotional impact of this work that sets it apart. Whether Bach wrote it as a requiem for his first wife or not, it is one of the most deeply felt expressions of love. It traverses the gamut of the emotional landscape from tenderness and joy, through despair and loss to ecstasy and exuberance.

Playing it is not unlike having a profound religious experience: highly spiritual, awe-inspiring and deeply moving.

The **Partita in E Major** offers a stark contrast to the other two. This buoyant work is aptly described by John Eliot Gardiner as music that is impregnated with 'festive joy and zest of dance'. Its exuberance is infectious.

While the b minor partita consists of four units of approximately equal length and importance, and the d minor partita is heavily weighted toward its last movement, the first movement of the E major partita is its grandest. This work is also by far the shortest of the three partitas, and it shares only two dance types with the others. The fact that it is in E major gives the E string a pivotal role in determining its color, making it the brightest.

The virtuosic *Praeludio* is a lively way to introduce the set of dances. It moves at dizzying speed, the notes running up and down the violin, very playful and full of fun. The dances that follow are perfectly balanced, each introducing new steps, varying levels of energy and contrasting moods. The *Louré*, is a stylized, aristocratic dance.

dance, but is stripped of rhythmic interest (it contains one single note value throughout), and is written in a single voice. And so the Partita becomes substantial both in content and length. Amazingly, even though the piece consists of eight movements, all in b minor, all in binary form, and all harmonically quite similar to one another, each pair seems unique in character, and the way it unfolds is perfectly balanced.

The *Allemanda* is elegant, the rhythms defining its dance-like character, and the *double* is its melodic counterpart, emphasizing the sheer beauty of the harmonic progressions. It is extraordinary how the exact same harmonies can be transformed from an optimistic, courtly dance into a melancholy, introspective meditation. No such contrast exists between the *Corrente* and its *double*. The lively dance becomes a merry romp, running up and down the violin. After the stylized, stately *Sarabanda* comes the spirited *Tempo di Borea*. The first part of the movement modulates to D major, a much brighter sounding key, and by doing so it injects some sunshine into a piece that is otherwise quite sober sounding. The Partita ends on a highly exuberant note.

The second, **Partita in d minor**, adheres to the traditional dance sequence of *Allemanda*, *Corrente*, *Sarabanda* and *Giga*, except here Bach adds that *Ciaccona*, possibly the most famous work ever written for the violin, and more than fourteen minutes in length. By doing so he practically doubles the length of the work, and shifts its focus to the second half.

It is amazing how the *Allemanda* manages not only to suggest the complete harmonic structure of the piece with a single linear voice, but also to delineate a noble, rhythmically interesting and deeply moving melody. The highly energetic *Corrente* is followed by a beautiful *Sarabanda*. In spite of its obvious and elegant dance characteristics, it is almost melancholy in character. The coda assumes a conversational style, expressing resignation or even despair. The lively, and highly energetic *Giga* is the perfect conclusion to this dance set.

the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind.’

And Yehudi Menuhin simply called it ‘the greatest structure for solo violin that exists’.

Bach was a master violinist, who understood perfectly the capabilities of the instrument, and was interested in pushing them to their limits. But Bach was also a devout Lutheran, and his concerns transcended the technical: this music explores the loftier questions of life, death, beauty and nature, all in the service of God. It is able to do so on account of Bach’s genius of invention, astounding knowledge of harmony, and an endless imagination. He used the violin as his tool of choice, never compromising any of his musical goals, and paying little heed to the difficulties this created for the performer. The puzzle of putting these pieces together with coherence and clarity, while simultaneously communicating their incredible power and beauty continues to challenge violinists 300 years after they were written.

We are fortunate to have the manuscript in Bach's hand, and we know it was completed in 1720. Little else is known about the circumstances of their writing, although there is some evidence to suggest that Bach started working on them sometime around 1713. The title of the collection is *Six Solos for violin without an accompanying bass*, consisting of three Sonatas and three Partitas. Rather than group them by form Bach alternates between them. He also numbered them in pairs: Sonata No. 1 followed by Partita No. 1.

The three Sonatas are in the form of the *Sonata da Chiesa*, or church sonata, a piece usually referring to a four movement baroque instrumental work, which was suitable to be performed in church. The Partitas are modeled on the *Sonata da Camera*, or chamber sonata: usually a four movement dance suite.

In the Sonatas Bach conforms to the traditional form, and each has four movements: slow, fugue, slow and fast. The fugue is undoubtedly the central movement of them all.

The **g minor Sonata** is the first, and shortest of the three. From the opening chord, the *Adagio* leads us in a sure-footed, stately procession toward the fugue. The short and lively subject of the fugue begins a journey alternating between expository sections and simple episodic material, full of unexpected twists and turns and grand climaxes. It explores countless possibilities the theme suggests; it is brief in form yet comprehensive in scope. Only the coda is surprisingly elaborate: a thrilling, grand finale.

Upon a cursory glance, one could easily be tempted to declare the second **Sonata, in a minor**, the obvious companion of the first. And yet as soon as we hear the first measure of the *Grave* it becomes evident that we are embarking here on a far more complex quest, full of uncertainty and angst, harmonically unusual if not odd, but also supremely beautiful and noble. Bach cannot even bring himself to come to a final stop and proceeds directly to the fugue, which is twice as long as the one in g minor. The short dance like subject, and a descending four note chromatic line introduced in the first few measures of the piece, are the two main building blocks of this fugue. Bach's ability to create an astounding, extensive work out of this simple material is awe-inspiring. One can palpably sense his delight dissecting the theme, transforming it, and reinventing it. The result is a work that is at times cerebrally challenging, at others almost childishly playful, certainly grand and dramatic but also touching. Bach is at his inventive best here.

It is hard to imagine a more beautiful, melodic movement than the *Andante* in C major. It expresses the most intimate secrets of the soul with the utmost calm and serenity. It is sheer perfection.

The first two Sonatas are wonderful works indeed, each impressive in its own way. But it is in the **Sonata in C Major** that Bach achieves the unimaginable: a perfect piece, monumental in scope, extraordinary in quality, and all of this on a lone violin. Also, amazingly, the fugue of this sonata is the longest he *ever* wrote. This is especially notable because the violin is hardly the most suitable instrument for

playing polyphonic music.

The *Adagio* of the C Major Sonata is completely different from its predecessors. Its closest relative is the 'pattern piece' preludes found in *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*. (Here the pattern is a continuous dotted rhythm.) The character of the movement is defined by the tension created between the lulling, almost hypnotic effect of the repetitive dotted rhythm and the increasingly intense harmonies. It ends on the dominant, as though posing a question.

The fugue follows without a break. Its subject is based on the 15th century chorale *Komm Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott* (Come, Holy Spirit, lord God). From the moment the subject and countersubject are introduced one can sense the weightiness of what is to come. Since everything about the fugue is monumental in scale, it seems fitting that it is divided into no fewer than seven large sections, the last one an exact repetition of the first. In them Bach scales the heights of ecstasy, and debates life's central questions. It is only when he reaches the seventh, and final section, that we feel he finally reaffirms his belief in the glory of creation and the good of man.

The fugue is dramatic, noble and grand, but also playful, melodic and beautiful. It is an extraordinary *tour-de-force*. One would not think that a simple melody, slow, and relatively short, followed by a highly energetic *Allegro*, would be the best way to follow the fugue, and yet that is exactly what happens, and it actually is the perfect way to conclude this larger- than-life experience.

Unlike the Sonatas, which all conform to the traditional four movement form, the Partitas are very different from one another not only in the number of movements, but also in length and overall character. Bach up-ends all traditions and presents us with three unique gems.

The first, **Partita in b minor**, would have been the traditional, four movement dance suite, had it not been for the fact that each movement is paired with a *double*: a variation movement which retains the length and harmonic template of its companion



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Disc 1		Playing time 65.14
1-4	Sonata in G minor	BWV 1001
5-12	Partita in B minor	BWV 1002
13-16	Sonata in A minor	BWV 1003
Disc 2		Playing time 72.08
1-5	Partita in D minor	BWV 1004
6-9	Sonata in C major	BWV 1005
10-16	Partita in E major	BWV 1006

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