

ELEONOR BINDMAN

piano

BACH

PARTITAS

BWV 825-830



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BACH PARTITAS

ELEONOR BINDMAN, piano

Disc 1

Partita I in B-flat Major, BWV 825

Partita II in C Minor, BWV 826

Partita VI in E Minor, BWV 830

Disc 2

Partita III in A Minor, BWV 827

Partita IV in D Major, BWV 828

Partita V in G Major, BWV 829

Total Playing Time: Disc 1 — 79:18 • Disc 2 — 79:45

BACH PARTITAS

ELEONOR BINDMAN, piano

Disc 1 (79:18)

Partita I in B-flat Major, BWV 825 (20:27)

1. Praeludium (2:28)
2. Allemande (3:21)
3. Corrente (2:56)
4. Sarabande (5:58)
5. Menuets I and II (3:33)
6. Gigue (2:10)

Partita II in C Minor, BWV 826 (22:25)

7. Sinfonia (5:01)
8. Allemande (5:50)
9. Courante (2:31)
10. Sarabande (3:45)
11. Rondeaux (1:36)
12. Capriccio (3:42)

Partita VI in E Minor, BWV 830 (36:36)

13. Toccata (10:23)
14. Allemanda (3:57)
15. Corrente (4:56)
16. Air (1:56)
17. Sarabande (6:05)
18. Tempo di Gavotta (2:10)
19. Gigue (7:00)

Disc 2 (79:45)

Partita III in A Minor, BWV 827 (22:06)

1. Fantasia (2:32)
2. Allemande (3:11)
3. Corrente (3:18)
4. Sarabande (5:39)
5. Burlesca (2:23)
6. Scherzo (1:41)
7. Gigue (3:22)

Partita IV in D Major, BWV 828 (33:45)

8. Ouverture (6:21)
9. Allemande (9:56)
10. Courante (3:53)
11. Aria (2:52)
12. Sarabande (5:20)
13. Menuet (1:39)
14. Gigue (3:44)

Partita V in G Major, BWV 829 (23:54)

15. Praeludium (2:27)
16. Allemande (5:40)
17. Corrente (2:34)
18. Sarabande (4:26)
19. Tempo di Minuetta (2:43)
20. Passepied (1:57)
21. Gigue (4:07)

J.S. Bach is quoted to have said: "All you have to do is to strike the right keys at the right time and the music will play itself." This statement needs to be understood in historical context. Whoever was "striking the keys" 300 years ago was likely to be a professional, often born into a family of musicians like Bach himself and educated in the art of counterpoint and harmony – the meaning of music.

Nowadays, keyboards are played by all kinds of people. Telling the difference between the right and the wrong keys is usually not a problem but playing at the "right time" is more difficult, especially if we include the tempo in our definition of "time." Not only is individual perception of speed subjective and variable but our pace of living is exponentially faster now than it was in the 18th century. Can the details and layers of meaning in Bach's language be duly appreciated at this new pace? That is something for us to consider.

Bach published the six keyboard Partitas himself in 1731 as his "Opus 1," clearly indicating that he was satisfied with his work. And he probably had very high standards. Were they intended to be played as a set? Considering their difficulty and length, probably not. Besides, most of Bach's solo instrumental cycles were primarily intended as "practice pieces." Yet sometimes one encounters a performance

of all six Partitas in recital, despite the demand this places on the audience's attention span and keyboardist's powers of concentration alike. I have played as many as four of them together in recital myself and even that may have been too rich an offering for many in the audience.

Of course, the advent of music recording in the 20th century (would the Goldberg Variations be so immensely popular if Glenn Gould hadn't decided to record them twice?) and of digital music streaming in the 21st century has completely changed the way people perceive music. Wrong notes are eliminated in recorded music, a practice which engenders similar expectations at concerts, raising the stakes and the nervous strain for performers.

The pastime of listening to music no longer demands our exclusive attention. Current streaming trends "conveniently" split up Classical works and then assign sections to playlists for various designated lifestyle activities. We can now choose to hear just one Partita while working, two or three movements on the way to a grocery store or even stream the same dance over and over again while exercising. As technology advances, the compact disc recording format is well past its heyday, but its allotted play time still constrains our choices of grouping and interpreting longer cycles of music, as does our accepted "after dinner"

live recital length. When presented in its entirety, whether recorded or played live, Bach's "Opus 1" ends up cramped by our habitual listening mediums.

Having listened to many harpsichord and piano versions of the Partitas over the years, I found the pace of many movements too quick. Let's just take three movements of Partita No. 1 as examples. The Prelude is a prologue to the entire cycle. Bach introduces the majestic key of B-flat major, the first letter of his name in German notation. The theme goes up an octave: first to E-flat, the sub-dominant, then to the dominant F and then continues up all the way to the high B-flat. This ascent, in three stages, is repeated several more times from other notes, in different registers and is replicated exactly at the very end. This Prelude is clearly about reaching for something higher, a journey that takes time and effort. Yet on most recordings and in performances the tempo is brisk and the mood is casual, with trills rattled off like machine-gun discharges, interrupting the melodic line and obscuring the upward motion. What's the rush?

Following the Prelude, the Allemande of Partita No. 1 repeats the upward climb to B-flat, this time using the notes F, G, A and B-flat as landmarks. Each of those notes initiates a downward arpeggio cascade of two octaves, followed by more intricate

patterns of implied counterpoint while traveling through many key centers. Each half ends with dotted rhythms syncopated by surprising harmonies in two additional voices, naturally slowing down the pace. To do the piece justice, all of the changes in direction, twists, turns and quick modulations of the material need to be shown. They have emotional connotations and enrich the experience for both the player and the listener. If played too quickly, they get lost.

Partita No. 1's closing Gigue uses just one note at a time; its implied counterpoint is divided between two hands. The sparse texture allows playing this movement at breakneck speed, a tempting prospect to many keyboardists who throw themselves into it with abandon and often use it as an encore. While audiences do enjoy pyrotechnic displays of "virtuosity," a super-fast tempo obscures the unusual distance between leaps, along with Bach's musical wit and clarity of structure. This Gigue should be an exercise in control and precision, not speed.

Additional problems of timing arise from the sheer length and complex texture of many other Opus 1 movements. The first three Partitas are much shorter than the last three and thus the set cannot be presented in order from 1 to 6, whether live or on a recording. Of the latter three, the Overture and Allemande of Partita No. 4 take up over

15 minutes and the Toccata, Sarabande and Gigue of Partita No. 6 are together over 23 minutes long. Thus, five out of the 21 movements in Partitas 4-6 already last nearly 40 minutes. Consequently, most artists are forced to speed things up, resulting in both the slow and the fast movements losing much of their gravitas, detail and layers of meaning. Glenn Gould did record the Partitas in numerical order but chose to forego the repeats. I have attempted to play each movement at the tempo I believe is appropriate but still ended up having to omit repeating the longer second halves of the Sarabandes in Partitas 4 and 6 in order not to exceed the maximum CD play time.

I find creative treatment of repeats particularly gratifying when studying Bach. Igor Kipnis' wonderful harpsichord recording inspired the "reductionist" approach I adopted for repeats in the Sarabandes of Partitas 3 and 5. Since the material of these Sarabandes is already richly embellished, it made sense to simplify the first iteration of each half and reveal more of the basic structure. On the other hand, the Sarabande from Partita No 1 offered an interesting possibility for a fuller accompaniment with alternating 8th-note octaves as used by Bach in the Sarabande from Partita No. 2, the Air from the Orchestral Suite in D

Major and in many other instrumental works. Drawing on existing material while improvising during a repeat is a useful tool in developing an understanding of Bach's music.

A few words about the beginning of the C minor Partita: I first learned this piece as a teenager, and the E-flats in the last beat of measure 2 always struck me as awkward. E-naturals seemed to fit much better, harmonically as well as dramatically. Just like in the other three diminished chords of this opening (beats 2 and 4 of measure 1, and beat 2 of measure 3), E-naturals would belong to the following harmony. Bach is starting a new statement after a rest here and holding over the E-flat from the previous phrase doesn't make sense structurally. Since there are plenty of instances of contradictory or omitted accidentals in various sources of Bach's scores, an early misprint can't be entirely ruled out as a possibility. I decided to play E-naturals on this recording, trusting that my choice will be met with the open minds of the listeners as a plausible version of this music.

— Eleonor Bindman

Praised for her “lively, clear-textured and urbane” Bach performances and her “impressive clarity of purpose and a full grasp of the music’s spirit,” New York-based pianist, chamber musician, arranger and teacher **Eleonor Bindman** was born in Riga, Latvia, and began studying the piano at the E. Darzins Special Music School at the age of five.

After her family immigrated to the United States, she attended the High School of Performing Arts in New York City while studying piano as a full scholarship student at the Elaine Kaufman Cultural Center. She received a BA in music from New York University and completed her MA in piano pedagogy at the State University of New York, New Paltz, under the guidance of Vladimir Feltsman.

Ms. Bindman’s recital appearances have included Carnegie Hall, The 92nd Street Y, Merkin Hall and Alice Tully Hall; concerto appearances have included engagements with the National Music Week Orchestra, the Staten Island Symphony, the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, the New York Youth Symphony, and the Moscow Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra.

Classical Archives declared: “Prepare to be surprised” when encountering Ms. Bindman’s vast range of activity. Known worldwide for “Bach playing of the highest order” (*Pianodao*) after releasing recordings of her original transcriptions of J.S. Bach, she combines her passions of teaching and performing to bring great new repertoire to piano lovers of all kinds through her transcriptions, scores and recordings.

Among Ms. Bindman’s many piano arrangements is Mussorgsky’s *A Night on Bald Mountain*; her original piano works include the children’s pieces *An American Calendar*, published by Carl Fischer. In the past few years, she has been focusing on Bach’s music, arranging many instrumental and choral excerpts into *Stepping Stones to Bach*, a multi-volume set for easy/intermediate solo piano. Her *Brandenburg Duets*, a new arrangement of the six Brandenburg Concertos for Piano-four-hands, and Cello Suites for Piano were best-selling releases for Grand Piano Records in 2018 and 2020. A recording of Ms. Bindman’s arrangement of Bach’s Orchestral Suites, also for Piano-four-hands, is forthcoming.

Her recording of the *Brandenburg Duets* with pianist Jenny Lin was declared

“breathtaking in its sheer precision and vitality” by *Pianist Magazine*. Scores of the work are available from Naxos Publishing and the printed versions are published by the Russian “Muzyka” Edition. The unprecedented Cello Suites for Piano, an accurate transcription of Bach’s iconic set, made its debut at #7 on the Billboard® Traditional Classical Charts.

This is Ms. Bindman’s first recording for Delos. Her discography includes *Tchai-*

kovsky: The Seasons on MSR Classics and her debut recording, *Three works by Modest Mussorgsky*. Both feature her own transcriptions. She also released *Out of the Blue* with pianist Susan Sobolewski under the name Duo Vivace; the album presents two-piano and four-hand works by Gustav Holst, Leonard Bernstein and George Gershwin.

For more information, please visit eleonorbindman.com

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OPUS I.
In Verlegung des Autoris.
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