

BACH *Reimagines* BACH

LUTE WORKS BWV 1001, 1006a & 995 | WILLIAM CARTER





BACH *Reimagines* BACH

MENU

TRACKLIST



CREDITS



PROGRAMME NOTE



BIOGRAPHY



BACH *Reimagines* BACH

WILLIAM CARTER | LUTE

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

Sonata in G minor, BWV 1001

- ① Adagio 3:43
- ② Fuga 5:50
- ③ Siciliana 3:15
- ④ Presto 4:51


Suite in E major, BWV 1006a

- ⑤ Prélude 5:30
- ⑥ Loure 4:01
- ⑦ Gavotte en Rondeau 3:47
- ⑧ Menuett I & II 4:57
- ⑨ Bourrée 2:18
- ⑩ Gigue 2:46

Suite in G minor, BWV 995

- ⑪ Prélude 6:24
- ⑫ Allemande 5:47
- ⑬ Courante 2:18
- ⑭ Sarabande 2:59
- ⑮ Gavotte I & II 4:47
- ⑯ Gigue 2:56

Total Running Time: 66 minutes



RECORDED AT

St Martin's Church, East Woodhay, Berkshire, UK
25 – 27 August 2014

PRODUCED AND RECORDED BY

Philip Hobbs

POST-PRODUCTION BY

Julia Thomas

LUTE

After Frei by Martin Haycock (2003)
Rebuilt as a Baroque 'Swan Neck' lute by Klaus Jacobsen (2008)

COVER IMAGE

Still Life with Chessboard by Lubin Baugin
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DESIGN BY

toucarilive

BACH *Reimagines* BACH

‘There is, of course, nothing definitive about an author’s intention. Most significant works of art can be read in various ways; that openness is, indeed, what helps make them significant.’

DAVID REYNOLDS

I think it was the winter of 1988 when I had a couple of lessons on the theorbo with Paul O’Dette. I had been travelling to Manhattan about once a month to play for Pat O’Brien as I got ready to move to London to study with Nigel North. Pat, with typical generosity, said, ‘You should have a few lessons with Paul before you go – I’ll give him a call and arrange it.’ And so, just like that, I was able to drive up to Rochester, where Paul very kindly taught me at his home during some of his rare free time. He was generous with musical advice, technical information and practical tips. No one else had suggested packing socks and underwear around the pegbox of the theorbo in case I couldn’t afford an instrument seat (I couldn’t). He was also generous with his time and wound up making me coffee and chatting about all sorts of things after the lesson had officially finished. His interests are wide-ranging and I remember discussing computer software (in its infancy), South Indian music and Italian vintages, among other things. One of the most thought-provoking insights he offered me, though, came during the lesson itself. I had learned three pieces by Bellerofonte Castaldi, an eccentric contemporary of Monteverdi, and Paul remarked, ‘You know, I think I was the first person to play these pieces since the seventeenth century, but Jakob [Lindberg] beat me into the studio with them. I got him back though’, he grinned: ‘I did

a couple of Scottish pieces for the lute he found before he managed to set them down.’ This was such a fascinating remark to me, not just because it illustrated the friendly rivalry between two virtuosos (and put me in mind of the great Victorian naturalists rushing to classify the flora and fauna of the remote jungles of the world), but because of the implicit assumption that a piece of music might merit scrupulous preparation and performance, but only the one recording. I was coming to the theorbo from the world of the classical guitar where, with a few honourable exceptions, the exact opposite assumption held sway. The goal there was to record all of the well-known solos and concertos recorded by other guitarists, but hopefully one decibel louder or one metronome notch faster.

I’m still thinking about the implications of Paul’s remark and I’ve found myself so far working within his premise: choosing to record music which I felt had received little attention, like Corbetta or Murcia, or well-known works, such as those of Sor, but performed in a different way (without fingernails). It seems to me that while the literature for the lute is fascinating, vast, and delightful to play and hear, only a relatively small proportion merits repeated recordings. Each lutenist will have his own list, but we would probably only find a general consensus in regard to the works of S. L. Weiss, Dowland and the remarkable lutenist composers of the Italian Renaissance, and at the very top of this list, of course, the lute works of J. S. Bach. Certainly only a fragment of a larger body of work, those that remain contain examples written from his youth in Weimar

to his final decade in Leipzig, and all of the highest quality. As such, they not only merit, but demand repeated recordings, although the musician must labour in the knowledge that a 'definitive' performance is impossible. Music of this quality contains more possibilities than can be revealed in any one performance, no matter how good. And it's in light of this thought that I opened these notes with the lines from David Reynolds. It seems that, just as I have rejected the notion of a 'definitive' performance, Bach rejected the concept of a definitive version of his own music. If Bach found a work interesting, he cast and recast it throughout his career, sometimes elaborately, and sometimes rather shockingly. Bach's first biographer Forkel tells us that later in his life he found the beautiful repeated phrases of the C major Prelude from Book 1 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* redundant, so he removed them, 'thereby rendering it shorter by one half'. Fortunately there is no such severe remodelling in the lute music. Rather than a chronological presentation, I've decided to focus in this recording on three works that were originally conceived for bowed instruments and then reimagined as works for the lute.



Bach and the Lute

Before I introduce the individual pieces, I'd like to discuss briefly the whole question of Bach's relationship with the lute. So much has been written on this subject, and it seems to be one that many people find perplexing. Did Bach play the lute? Were the lute pieces even written for the lute at all? Many people are confident that he knew little about the lute and probably intended this music for some completely different instrument (the lute-harpsichord, the harp, and even oddities like the bowed keyboard and gallichon have all been proposed). I think part of the confusion stems from musicologists (who might be extremely knowledgeable about Bach but less confident about the lute) consulting lutenists (who can be extremely knowledgeable about the lute but less so about Bach). This can lead to a circular kind of reasoning in which scholars have suggested that Bach's lute music is not for the lute at all, because it is difficult and unidiomatic. Lute players tend to agree with relief, as the vast majority of the music they play was written idiomatically by professional lutenists. (An intriguing exception is presented by the contrapuntal works of Dowland. Anyone who has played the *Forlorn Hope Fancy* knows exactly the same feeling as someone struggling to play a Bach fugue, a heartfelt longing for a sixth finger on the left hand or a telescoping pinky. But strangely no one has yet asserted that Dowland wrote his pieces for some other instrument; they just grumble and keep practising.)

The problem is only aggravated by comparison with the music of Weiss, the one lutenist contemporary of Bach worthy of being regarded as a peer. When we have only one strong source of illumination it can cast

dark shadows as well and, while Bach and Weiss share the same musical language, they couldn't be more different as composers. Weiss is one of those extremely rare geniuses for whom true musical thought occurred through the medium of an instrument. He wrote with an unerring felicity for the lute and, while some of his music is extremely difficult, all of the effort that the player expends occurs in exactly the best part of the instrument to realize the musical thought as sound. We might compare him more justly with Rameau or Chopin. Bach, on the other hand, lets his musical thoughts develop however he likes and then expects the player (or singer) to work to express them. Forkel was very aware of this and emphasized just how free Bach was of worrying about the constraints of instruments. Apparently he dismissed people concerned with writing idiomatically for the harpsichord as 'Clavier hussars'. Bach's harpsichord music often seems 'instrument unspecific', which is why I think it succeeds so much better on the modern piano (for example) than Rameau does – or Chopin on the harpsichord. When we ask 'If Bach's lute music is really for the lute, why isn't more like Weiss?', we are asking fundamentally the wrong question. If we ask instead 'What is Bach's lute music like?', we find a ready answer: 'It's very much like Bach's music for solo violin, cello and flute'. So I think that if we take a hard but respectful look at the eighteenth-century sources of Bach's lute music (including the three beautiful autographs, two of them recorded here) and factor in what we know about his other music, then most of the mystery disappears. The music is difficult and unidiomatic because Bach often is.

There remains the question of the lute-harpsichord or 'Lautenwerk', a type of harpsichord strung with gut and whose sound evoked the lute. Sadly none survive today, but Bach owned two of them (as well as a lute) and contemporary reports attest to his fascination with the instrument. Of the surviving lute works, just one, BWV 996, survives in an eighteenth-century manuscript with the words 'Aufs Lautenwerk' written on the first page. This work, with its constricted range, low tessitura and active bass line, is completely believable as being for the lute-harpsichord. The music on this recording, on the other hand, is strikingly different, with a much expanded range, slower bass lines, and chords that are physically impossible to play on the keyboard, but not on the lute. When one reflects that these works, although often extremely awkward, can be played on the lute as written, when much simpler pieces such as the first prelude of the *Forty-Eight* would have to be substantially altered to make them fit, it's hard to resist the conclusion that, when Bach wrote 'Suite pour la Luth' on the autograph first page of BWV 995, that is exactly what he meant (even if he got the gender wrong²).

There are no known reports of Bach playing the lute, but he owned a fine one (worth almost three times as much as his most valuable violin) and it takes a lot of effort to believe that he couldn't play it at all. Maybe the world of musicology would be a better place if we agreed to consign all statements that begin 'Bach couldn't have known...' (along with ones starting 'Bach must have known...') to oblivion. I would suggest that he played the lute like an investigating composer, probably not to the standard of his violin or viola playing, but well enough to write music for it.

Certainly one can feel his hands on the instrument in BWV 995, even if the other works are full of near impossible moments which are more like the solo violin works. It's also telling that, while we know Bach played the violin well enough to lead an ensemble with it, the only mention we have of him playing the unaccompanied violin works says he played them 'at the clavichord'.

The Music

SONATA IN G MINOR, BWV 1001

This is an arrangement of the First Sonata for unaccompanied violin and no autograph survives. What we do have is a setting of the *Fuga* in tablature made by Bach's friend J. C. Weyrauch. Weyrauch studied law in Leipzig and must have played for Bach in the Collegium Musicum there, as Bach wrote a letter of reference for Weyrauch praising his proficiency on a variety of (unnamed) instruments, as well as vocally. Weyrauch settled down in Leipzig as a notary and his friendship with the composer continued. Bach was godfather to the aptly named infant Johann Sebastian Weyrauch. It seems that Bach gave Weyrauch access to a number of lute scores from which he was able to put his favourites in tablature. So we have this *Fuga* in Weyrauch's hand as well as three movements of BWV 997, and I wonder if both of these bespoke arrangements were drawn from the set of lute pieces by Bach tantalizingly advertised for sale in the 1761 Breitkopf Music Catalogue as '3 Partitas for solo lute, volume 1', but which are now lost. I have made my own version of the three remaining movements and have not really wanted to add much more than the occasional bass note to the surviving solo violin version, which seems so complete as it stands. I was mindful in this process of Bach's student Agricola's report of the composer playing the violin solos 'often himself on the clavichord, adding as much harmony as he found necessary'. The opening *Adagio* seems to evoke the grandeur of the organ and leads into an obstinate *Fuga* and a much more intimate *Siciliano*. The Sonata ends with a relentless slithering *Presto* full of wayward cross accents and ambiguous hemiolas.

SUITE IN E MAJOR, BWV 1006a

A beautiful Bach autograph survives of the entire suite (now in the Musashino Academia Musicae, Tokyo). This is an arrangement of the Partita (Bach called it a 'Partia', but no one has followed his example) for solo violin, BWV 1006. The *Preludio* seems to have been a favourite of Bach's and he recast it not just here, but also, in a version for organ with accompanying strings, trumpets and timpani, as the opening *Sinfonia* to both Cantatas BWV 29 and 120a. It's astonishing to hear how the same work can have such a different effect in its varied scorings, with the restless brilliance of the solo violin in contrast to the jubilation of the version for organ and orchestra.

I've opted for a more relaxed and intimate approach on the lute, which seems in keeping with the Bach autograph, which changes the Italian *Preludio* to the French *Prélude* and adds an abundance of French ornamentation. This work (as well as BWV 995 which follows) has a large-scale structure that occurs often in Bach and is worth pointing out. The main compositional weight is all in the first half of the piece. Accustomed as we are to the Classical and Romantic repertory (with endings obviously designed to elicit applause from concert-goers), this can take some getting used to. It seems to happen most often in Bach when he is evoking a French style. So, for example, the previous Sonata (in Bach's 'Italian' style) concludes with a very substantial and satisfying *Presto*, but this work begins with the very elaborate *Prélude* and *Loure*, and then trails off into a series of elegant, charming dances. The same applies to

BWV 995, which follows, as well as other Bach works in a French style (such as the Second Orchestral Suite, BWV 1067, whose opening movement is longer than the entire rest of the suite). Think of these works as a meal that begins with the main course and then finishes with a series of delicious starters and bonbons and everything starts to fall into place.

Another thing I want to mention in this suite is the tuning of the lute. The lute that Bach knew was tuned to a D minor chord (unlike the Renaissance lute tuned in fourths). This gives it a characteristic sound as well as facilitating ease of playing in both sharp and flat keys up to 3 sharps or flats. But it means that the more remote keys become tricky, and lutenists employ various scordaturas to make these keys more graceful. The one in use for E major involves tuning most of the strings down a half step (the top string of the lute is F), and here I have a confession to make. Although I have played the suite and enjoyed it in the E major tuning, the thought of tuning down 20 or so strings a semitone each in the middle of a recording session in a cold church gave me pause and in the end I decided to play the suite in the regular tuning in E major, but in E major at $a' = 440$ Hz (in other words in F at $a' = 415$ Hz)! This is, of course, a bit of sophistry, and if in my heart of hearts I suspect Bach may have thought it a bit lazy, on the other hand I know he was a practical musician (he put the orchestral version of this piece in D after all, because of the trumpets) and I earned the gratitude of my producer who is still speaking to me. And I actually prefer it at 440 Hz with the darker pieces on either side at the more usual 415 Hz.

SUITE IN G MINOR, BWV 995

Again we have an autograph by Bach (Bibliothèque royale, Brussels), this one with a beautiful title page which reads 'Pièces pour la Luth à Monsieur Schouster par J. S. Bach'. Jacob Schuster was a bookseller and publisher active in Leipzig, and Bach probably had his eye on commercial possibilities, as the lute was a very popular instrument with students at the university (much like the guitar today). Maybe Bach's masterpiece was a little too difficult for strumming in a dorm room, though, as no further collaboration with 'Monsieur Schouster' is known to have taken place.

This work is a far reaching transformation of the Fifth Cello Suite into a lute work, and I think it goes well beyond BWV 1006a as a reimagining. In this setting it really becomes a new work and I would offer the opinion that in terms of understanding the essential nature and expressive qualities of the lute, BWV 995, and in particular its *Sarabande*, is the most perfect piece of lute music in existence. Much has been made of the fact that this work exceeds the normal range of the instrument by a tone (a low G_{III}), but if A_{III} and 13 courses was the norm at this time, there was still a wide variety of lutes with various ranges in use. Jacob Adlung's *Musica mechanica organoedi* (Berlin, 1768) makes this clear: 'Lutes are fitted with 10, 12 up to 14 courses, or sometimes 11, they are not all the same.' Bach's low G_{III} is unusual, but no more so than what we find in the Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542, in which he writes both bass and treble notes not commonly available on the organs of the time.

The opening *Prélude* has the character of a French overture; stately dotted rhythms are followed by an elaborate fugue marked 'très vite'. Bach underlines the difference in expressive intent by ending this movement in the minor instead of the cello's major. Then we have a grand and elaborate *Allemande* in which the cello's steady semiquavers are recast as sweeping tirades, a lovely *Courante*, and the mysterious, haiku-like *Sarabande*, surely one of the finest pages of Bach's (or anyone's) music. A pair of *Gavottes* lead to a dour, twitching *Gigue* and the piece evaporates into nothing.

So here are 3 degrees of reimagination for your consideration. My own minimalist effort, Bach's mild refashioning of BWV 1006 with a bass line and some ornaments, and then the wonderful transmutation that is BWV 995. I hope they all give pleasure!



I'd like to thank Phil Hobbs and Julia Thomas who between them did all the production, sound engineering and editing. Without them this recording wouldn't have been possible. But I want to dedicate this recording to the person who inspired me to play the lute in the first place, and that is my teacher Nigel North. The field of early music is filled with brilliant talents and the lute is such an arcane instrument (or instruments) that it's hard to actually convey the breadth of Nigel's achievement. Saying 'He's great' would just give you the idea that he does something well, like a talented singer

or violinist. The fact is that there are so many types of lute, with so many different tunings and used in so many ways, that it's quite a feat to play most of them with basic competence, much less artistry. Nigel plays so many fundamentally different things (and has been involved with the pioneering efforts to learn about these instruments from the very beginning of the early music revival) with such a degree of eloquence 'as though he played that instrument only' (as was said of William Lawes) that it's really difficult to give an idea of what's involved to a non-specialist. But if I suggested imagining that Christopher Columbus, after discovering the New World, instead of turning back to Spain, heads to the coast of Florida, builds Cape Canaveral and then flies to the moon, that might give you an idea.

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- 1 The 5th Brandenburg Concerto is a notable exception to this. A competent performance on even an indifferent harpsichord can succeed brilliantly and shows that Bach could easily beat the 'Clavier hussars' at their own game when he wanted to.
- 2 It should be 'le Luth', but Bach was likely thinking of the German 'Laute', which is feminine.



Photograph by Amit Lennon

'What most strikes you about
William Carter is the sheer force
of his musical imagination.'

GRAMOPHONE

William Carter

Born in Florida, William Carter received a rigorous but conventional training as a classical guitarist with Bruce Holzman at Florida State University before falling in love with the earlier plucked instruments and the world of historical performance. Following initial guidance from Pat O'Brien in New York City, he travelled to London as a Fulbright Scholar where he studied the lute with Nigel North and quickly established himself as one of the leading players on old instruments.

Concert tours and festival appearances followed, throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas, both as an orchestral player and as a chamber musician, and soloist with his own group, The Palladian Ensemble. Carter has an extensive discography (including ten albums with The Palladian Ensemble) and has featured on numerous recordings of the Academy of Ancient Music and The English Concert, for both of which he acts as the principal lutenist. He is also an enthusiastic teacher and is Professor of Baroque Studies and Lute at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

2005 saw Carter embark on a series of solo Baroque guitar recordings for Linn, the first, *La Guitarre Royale: The Music of Francesco Corbetta*, was named in *Gramophone's* 'Critics' Choice' end of year list. Carter has been awarded *Gramophone's* 'Editor's Choice' accolade twice: for *La Guitarra Española: The Music of Santiago de Murcia* and *Fernando Sor: Early Works*. His most recent recording in the series, *Le Calme: Fernando Sor Late Works*, was awarded an Opus d'Or and also topped *Gramophone's* 'Critics' Choice' list.

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