

PREFACE

Johann Sebastian Bach's collection of Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin (1720) remains an unsurpassable compositional achievement, and a touchstone of legendary difficulty for generations of violinists. The challenge of writing for the unaccompanied violin inspired Bach's genius to the greatest heights. The unorthodox medium did not limit his inventiveness in writing complex contrapuntal music, nor his imagination in conceiving works of transcendent significance. A single violin, with its four strings and intrinsically treble voice, is called upon to command a vast expressive range, and to conquer hitherto new and unexpected territory in an unaccompanied role. The thirty-two individual movements provide a copious variety of Baroque instrumental and dance styles, combining Italian, German, and French currents. The celebrated *Ciaccona* is among the longest single movements in Bach's entire oeuvre, remarkable in its monumental structure and sustained emotional fervour.

The adaptation of music from one medium to another was as commonplace during the Baroque era, as presumably during any other period in history. The young Johann Sebastian, famed keyboard virtuoso, made harpsichord and organ arrangements of numerous violin works during his Weimar period, including concertos by Antonio Vivaldi and other Italian masters. These arrangements mark the beginning of a lifelong practice of transferring violin music to the keyboard, a practice that culminates in Bach's own keyboard concertos dating from his Leipzig period. Many of Bach's keyboard concertos are arrangements of his own violin concertos, and in some cases, the presumed original version has been lost, leaving only the keyboard version extant.

According to Carl Philip Emanuel Bach, his father, "in his youth, and until the approach of old age, played the violin with power and clarity." Although there are no contemporary accounts of Bach performing his Sonatas and Partitas on the violin, he reputedly did perform them at the keyboard. His pupil J. F. Agricola states: "Their author often played them on the clavichord, adding as much harmony as he deemed necessary. He recognized here the need for a resonant harmony that could not be completely realized in the original composition." Although Bach may have improvised some of these performances, surviving evidence includes his organ arrangement of the fugue from Sonata no. 1 and a manuscript from the private library of his son-in-law J. C. Altnickol containing harpsichord arrangements of Sonata no. 2 and the *Adagio* from Sonata no. 3. These arrangements, along with other authentic arrangements by Bach, have been incorporated into the present series (see Critical Commentary).

In arranging Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for keyboard, my aim has been to translate the music convincingly into a keyboard idiom, stylistically congruous with Bach's original and arranged works for harpsichord. I have used various techniques including, but not limited to: (1) the extrapolation of two or more voices from a single-voice texture, (2) the addition of a basso continuo line to support harmony and rhythm, (3) the creation of dialogue through imitative or free counterpoint, (4) the filling out of chords. All of these techniques, and others, are thoroughly demonstrated by Bach in his own arrangements.

As Bach commonly transposes keys in the process of arranging his music, I have not retained the keys of the violin originals. The transposed keys in the present series are chosen for both musical and practical considerations, and follow specific historical precedents. The arrangements are playable on harpsichords with a compass of GG-d3, equivalent to Bach's harpsichord works in the *Clavierübung*. There are some passages in the *Ciaccona* that require an instrument with a compass extending up to f3, but players without the highest notes may resort to an *ossia* (indicated by small note heads in my score). Performance is possible on either double or single-manual harpsichords, although in some of the movements, a double-manual instrument may be preferable.

All ornament signs, dynamic indications, and slur markings are from the historical sources (see Critical Commentary).

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