

STOUR MUSIC 2021



Bach to Bach

Rachel Podger

*Sponsored by
Martin & Caroline Goodier*

Saturday 19th June
10pm

BOUGHTON ALUPH CHURCH

Programme

Johann Sebastian Bach:

Sonata No.2 in A minor for solo violin, BWV 1003

Cello Suite 3 in C Major BWV 1009

(Transposed into G Major for violin)

Cello Suites on the violin?

I was lucky enough to grow up with Bach's music around me, and so the Cello Suites became part of my regular listening diet as the 'other' Bach solo pieces 'not written for the violin'. I secretly coveted these works quite early on, not least because I found many established cello performances – however celebrated the players – to be performed in a style and tempo which reduced the dance character to being something almost incidental. Then, later at music college, I heard a suite played on a baroque cello and the music suddenly made sense to me, and it came to life with the help of the lightness and bounce of the baroque bow playing on gut strings. It really was a revelation.

Since, I have spent a fair bit of time coaching cellists, both modern and baroque alike, and found myself playing along to demonstrate various points. Gradually, I could feel these pieces joining the violin partitas and sonatas as another kind of 'daily bread'; I started catching myself playing some of the movements I particularly loved while warming up, and realising that it was actually possible to play them on the violin, and to find a special expressive vocabulary at the higher pitch. How could one possibly justify it, especially with works that have peppered the recording catalogue with some of the most iconic and adored string performances of all time, the Casals, Fourniers, Torteliers or Starkers? But what I was doing also seemed very much in keeping with Bach's own habit of recycling his own compositions for different instruments and different uses. The examples are endless but I immediately think of the concertos appearing as sinfonias in cantatas, or concertos for violins turned into harpsichord concertos. The more I reflect, the less I feel the need to be defensive because Bach did far more outrageous things! Think of the Prelude of the E major Partita for violin turned into a full orchestral cantata movement with trumpets and drums...

Playing these six suites on the violin is, of course, quite a different proposition. With its smaller resonating body, the violin speaks more quickly and the immediacy of sound enables it to be more flexible, flighty and agile than the more circumspect and gravitational cello. The dances therefore feel especially idiomatic for the violin when they're played a little faster than you might be accustomed to on the cello. At first, I missed the resonance in the slower movements – for instance in the Sarabandes – but then I started to relish delving into the gut strings to cajole as much resonance as I could from the chords of those slow dances.

Rachel Podger

We are accustomed to classify Bach's six solo violin works as chamber music, music for a small number of instruments, a small space or concert hall. That is how they are generally performed today. But it is virtually certain that three of the six works, the three sonatas, were intended for use in the church. Bach's first biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, speaks of this very matter in his 1802 work on the composer. Examples of this include the Sonata in A minor, BWV 1003 which is laid out as a sonata 'da chiesa' (church sonatas) in four movements, slow-fast, slow-fast.

The opening movement, Grave, of Sonata 2 is rhetorical in style and heavily laden with written-out ornamentation. The world of the following Fugue is a drastic contrast. It is based on a rather dry two-measure theme, initially with a strikingly chromatic counter-subject. The 18th-century critic Johann Mattheson already called attention to the great diversity and naturalness of this Fugue. After an andante in the relative major, C, comes the energetic, almost restless Allegro with its Italianate echo passages.

Clemens Romiin

Biography

“*Rachel Podger, the unsurpassed British glory of the baroque violin,*” (The Times) has established herself as a leading interpreter of the Baroque and Classical. She was the first woman to be awarded the prestigious Royal Academy of Music/Kohn Foundation Bach Prize in October 2015, Gramophone Artist of the Year 2018, and the Ambassador for REMA’s Early Music Day 2020. A creative programmer, Rachel is the founder and Artistic Director of Brecon Baroque Festival and her ensemble Brecon Baroque. Rachel is Patron for The Continuo Foundation.

Following an exciting and innovative collaboration, *A Guardian Angel*, with the ‘*impeccable*’ (Gramophone) vocal ensemble VOCES8, Rachel was thrilled to be one of the Artists in Residence at the renowned Wigmore Hall in 2019/2020. Alongside this, Rachel and Christopher Glynn released the world premiere of three previously unfinished Mozart sonatas in March 2021 which were completed by Royal Academy of Music Professor Timothy Jones. Rachel featured in The VOCES8 Foundation’s *LIVE From London festivals* in a new advent version of *A Guardian Angel* and as guest leader for the Academy of Ancient Music in *Bach B Minor Mass*. Rachel presented BBC Radio 3’s *Inside Music* and directed a new arrangement by Chad Kelly, *The Goldberg Variations Reimagined*.

A dedicated educator, she holds the Micaela Comberti Chair for Baroque Violin (founded in 2008) at the Royal Academy of Music and the Jane Hodge Foundation International Chair in Baroque Violin at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Rachel has a relationship with The Juilliard School in New York where she visits regularly. Rachel Podger is managed worldwide by Percius. www.percius.co.uk