

## 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 constitute a rich variety of Baroque instrumental and dance forms, 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." Musicologist Jakob Adlung, writing in 1758, includes the Sonatas and Partitas in his survey of Bach's keyboard works as "very well-suited to performance at the keyboard." Although Bach may have improvised some keyboard performances, surviving manuscripts include an organ arrangement of the fugue from Sonata no. 1, and, from the private library of his son-in-law J. C. Altnickol, harpsichord arrangements of Sonata no. 2 and the *Adagio* from Sonata no. 3. These arrangements, together 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-voiced 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 arranging his own music, I have not retained the keys of the violin originals. The transposed keys in the present series follow historical precedents, and are chosen for various considerations, including keyboard range and the colour of well-tempered tunings. The arrangements are playable on harpsichords with a compass of GG-d3, equivalent to Bach's harpsichord works in the *Clavierübung*. Performance is possible on either double or single-manual harpsichords, although, in at least 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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