



(LEMS 8038)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
THE SIX PARTITAS
RICHARD TROEGER, CLAVICHORDIST

BACH ON CLAVICHORD, Vol. 1
Johann Sebastian Bach: Six Partitas (Clavierübung 1)
The first recording of these works on the clavichord

A TWO CD SET

CLAVIERUBUNG 1: THE SIX PARTITAS

The Partitas form Bach's final collection of suites, and in them he builds on (and occasionally departs from) the norms for each type of movement. Every dance style appears in an evolved or even ironic form: the dimensions are larger than in earlier suites; the slow movements are highly ornate; above all, we find different varieties of each type of movement. Whereas in the Art of Fugue Bach develops contrapuntal procedures to the highest degree, throughout the six Partitas he explores the styles possible for each type of movement. Thus we find a flowing, Italianate Allemande in No. 1, an aria-like Allemande in No. 4, and a "stile brisé" example (with overtones of a double) in No. 3. The rapid corrente of No. 1 and the wild ones of Nos. 3 and 6 are opposed to the slower, very French courantes of Nos. 2 and 4--and even these two vary in approach. (The grave courante of the C Minor Partita forms an interesting contrast with that of the D Major; they are in the same style but the D Major movement adds an energizing figura corta.) The aria-like sarabandes of Partitas 3 and 4 remind one of the style of the sarabande from the fifth French Suite. By contrast, we find the French chordal type in Nos. 1 and 6 as well as the unusual sarabande of No. 2, which uses a highly wrought double style for the

basic movement. The inversion of hemiola and normal meter (6/8 meter in the course of the phrase, 3/4 time for the cadences) in the Tempo di Minuetta of No. 5 is a wonderful joke based on the normal menuet. The gigue, too, show contrasts: one may compare the perpetual-motion gigue of No. 1 with the fugal gigue of Nos. 3, 4, 5, and 6—and the latter are all strongly contrasted as well. Among optional movements, a Capriccio takes the place of a gigue in No. 2; we find a Burlesca and Scherzo in No. 3 and a gavotte-like Air in No. 6, whose own “gavotte” becomes a Tempo di Gavotta. (As with the parodic menuet movement in No. 5, the Tempo di Gavotta in No. 6 takes such liberties with the norms of gavotte style that Bach apparently felt obliged to hedge in the title.) It is a commonplace to point out the variety among the opening movements: the Præludium like a three-part sinfonia in No. 1; the orchestral-style “Sinfonia” of No. 2, with a middle section suggesting a movement for flute and continuo from a Passion; the Fantasia (a large two-part invention) that opens No. 3; the French Overture of No. 4; the almost toccata-like Præambulum of No. 5, and the dark, again almost orchestral Toccata of No. 6. As was noted when these works were first published by the composer, the ornamentation and embellishments are fully written out. This would appear to be the case with the “English” Suites as well, but there Bach nonetheless surprises us with an occasional double. I have taken one of the doubles of the Courante of the English Suite in A Major as a basis for similar embellishment in the Courante of the Partita in C Minor, and added embellishments where they seemed appropriate to the repetitions of several other movements.

CLAVIERUBUNG I AND THE CLAVICHORD

Bach’s Partitas have been regarded as harpsichord music since the revival of early instruments began in the late 1800s. Only the “French” Suites have generally been deemed suitable for the clavichord; and a few modern commentators more or less dismiss the clavichord from serious consideration for the works of J.S. Bach. What is really the case for the clavichord in this repertory?

We simply do not know to what extent Bach utilized the clavichord, although his use of it is mentioned specifically by his pupil Agricola. No clavichords appear identified as such in the estate inventory prepared after his death, but the word “clavecin” used there may be intended generically for harpsichords and clavichords. It is likely that the famous clavichord by Gottfried Silbermann that belonged to C.P.E. Bach was the “clavier” given him (according to E.L. Gerber, son of one of Bach’s pupils) by his father in 1738, upon his departure for Berlin. Forkel’s famous statement that the clavichord was Bach’s favorite instrument has been dismissed in recent years, in view of Forkel’s relationship to his own musical environment and since he derived much of his information from that champion of the clavichord, C.P.E. Bach. But Forkel may only be exaggerating, rather than inventing. It is hard to imagine a composer and performer of Bach’s caliber ignoring the manifold resources of a fine clavichord. A good instrument has a wide dynamic range within its own terms. It combines the clarity and incisiveness of the harpsichord with the dynamic sensitivity of the fortepiano. The tone is beautiful in its own right and although the clavichord’s vibrato (Bebung) has often been overemphasized in twentieth-century commentaries, slight pitch inflections (even more than overt vibrato) can color the sound so that the clavichord can command a wide range of timbre.

It should be remembered that the clavichord was by far the most common of domestic keyboard instruments in Germany during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was certainly an instrument upon which Bach must have expected his music to be played. Indeed, whereas Parts 2 and 4 of the Clavierübung specify a two-manual harpsichord, the Partitas (Part 1) do not. Mattheson tells us that the clavichord is best suited for overtures, dances, and other “galanteries”—the same term Bach used in his title page to the published collection of the six Partitas. Perhaps the technical difficulties that Bach’s contemporaries encountered in these works (which are supremely complex galanteries!) resulted in part from playing them on the clavichord: they are demanding on the harpsichord, but a far greater technical challenge on the clavichord. However, the effort is worthwhile because the clavichord offers an enormous range of nuance—grand and robust as well as lyrical. In the course of playing these pieces for many years on both the clavichord and the harpsichord, I have been continually delighted by the new insights and effects that the clavichord provided. The textures often fill the instrument, but despite the many kinds of density, every passage is idiomatic to the clavichord (unlike the writing in the Italian Concerto, for instance). Playing Bach’s Partitas on the clavichord is perhaps the nearest a keyboard player can come to a violinist’s experience in playing the composer’s solo Sonatas and Partitas: rendering music that approaches the instrument’s limits but never quite exceeds its capabilities.

TEXT AND INSTRUMENT

The text is based on the composer’s own corrected and revised copy of the 1731 edition of Clavierübung 1, preserved in the British Library (Hirsch III.37).

The clavichord used for these recordings was built in 1979 by Ronald Haas, of Aptos, California. It is modelled on unfretted instruments by Johann Heinrich Silbermann. This design may well derive from clavichords by Gottfried Silbermann (the uncle and teacher of Johann Heinrich) that were known to Bach; unfortunately, no authenticated clavichord by Gottfried is known to be extant. Mr. Haas’ clavichord allows a fine dynamic balance across the entire range of the keyboard, and a sustaining power and variety of color that are responsive to both contrapuntal and homophonic textures.

—Richard Troeger

“Bach wrote for just such a player as Troeger, a musician of sterling technique and an ability to hone in on the character and content of the 30 ‘Goldberg’ Variations in all their diversely showy, intellectually complex and introspective nature. ...Troeger invested even the greatest technical challenges with an expressive intent, not a mechanical one, and did so with unerring taste and style.”

—Calgary Herald

THE CONTENTS OF CD I
TRACKS AND TIMES

Partita #1, B Flat Major

- 1 Praeludium 1:46
- 2 Allemande 3:07
- 3 Corrente 2:56
- 4 Sarabande 5:29
- 5 Menuet 1; Menuet 2; 2:34
- Menuet 1 (repeated)
- 6 Giga 2:31

Partita #2, C Minor

- 7 Sinfonia 4:41
- 8 Allemande 4:32
- 9 Courante 3:02
- 10 Sarabande 3:12
- 11 Rondeaux 1:39
- 12 Capriccio 3:48

Partita #4, D Major

- 13 Ouverture 6:24
- 14 Allemande 8:56
- 15 Courante 4:09
- 16 Aria 2:09
- 17 Sarabande 5:21
- 18 Menuet 1:26
- 19 Gigue 3:54

CONTENTS OF CD II

Partita #3, A Minor

- 1 Fantasia 2:07
- 2 Allemande 3:21
- 3 Corrente 2:55
- 4 Sarabande 3:33
- 5 Burlesca 2:17
- 6 Scherzo 1:13
- 7 Gigue 3:28

Partita #5, G Major

- 8 Praeambulum 2:36
- 9 Allemande 4:23
- 10 Corrente 1:55
- 11 Sarabande 4:10
- 12 Tempo di Minuetta 1:28
- 13 Passepied 1:51
- 14 Gigue 4:18

Partita #6, E Minor
15 Toccata 5:53
16 Allemande 3:34
17 Corrente 4:52
18 Air 1:28
19 Sarabande 6:03
20 Tempo di Gavotta 2:06
21 Gigue 5:51

RICHARD TROEGER, clavichordist, harpsichordist, and fortepianist, has been heard as a recitalist and lecturer throughout North America, and in numerous broadcasts on CBC Radio and other stations. His performances have consistently received high praise for their combination of warmth, virtuosity and scholarship. Mr. Troeger is the author of many articles on early performance practice, including several entries in the Garland Encyclopedia of Keyboard Instruments. His book *Technique and Interpretation on the Harpsichord and Clavichord* (Indiana University Press, 1987) has become a standard reference. Current projects include a manual on Bach performance and a book on instrumental articulation, for which he was awarded a Canada Research Fellowship. Richard Troeger has worked with early keyboard instruments and their literature since the age of twelve. His teachers have included Hugh McLean, Marie Zorn, Thomas Binkley, and Anthony Newman. He holds degrees in Performance and Musicology from Indiana University and completed his Doctorate in Early Music there. From 1989-1997 he taught at the University of Alberta, Edmonton. He is President of the Boston Clavichord Society and now lives and teaches in the Boston area.

CREDITS

Photos: Ed Wiseman
Recording Engineer: Garth Hobden
(Artkos Recordings)
Edmonton, Alberta
Editing: Richard Troeger and
Garth Hobden
Equalization and Post-production:
Vivian Stoll
Design: G.S. Cram-Drach



The Lyrichord Early Music Series

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291
email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

© and (P) Lyrichord Discs Inc. These texts (including images) are published under copyright by Lyrichord Discs Inc. All rights are reserved.
The texts, and the music associated, with them, may only be republished, duplicated or sold, with written permission from Lyrichord Discs Inc.

