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JENNIFER KOH BACH & BEYOND PART I



BACH
YSAÏE
SAARIAHO
MAZZOLI

CEDILLE

Producer and Engineer Judith Sherman

Editing Bill Maylone

Editing Assistance Jeanne Velonis

Recorded Bach D minor recorded November 13 and 16, 2011; Ysaÿe and Mazzoli recorded November 14, 2011; Saariaho recorded November 16, 2011; Bach E Major recorded January 4 and 5, 2012, at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City

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Saariaho *Nocturne* ©1994 Chester Music Ltd.

Mazzoli *Dissolve, O My Heart* ©2010 G. Schirmer, Inc.

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CEDILLE
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JENNIFER KOH BACH & BEYOND PART I

J.S. BACH (1685–1750)

Partita No. 3 in E major, BWV 1006
(21:16)

- 1 I. Prelude (4:03)
- 2 II. Loure (5:22)
- 3 III. Gavotte en Rondeau (3:05)
- 4 IV. Menuet I & II (5:15)
- 5 V. Bourrée (1:30)
- 6 VI. Gigue (1:59)

EUGÈNE YSAÏE (1858–1931)

Sonata No. 2, Op. 27 (12:59)

- 7 I. Obsession: Prelude (2:36)
- 8 II. Malinconia (2:58)
- 9 III. Danse des Ombres: Sarabande (3:59)
- 10 IV. Les furies (3:19)

11 **KAIJA SAARIAHO** (b. 1952)
Nocturne (4:48)

12 **MISSY MAZZOLI** (b. 1980)
Dissolve, O My Heart (8:13)

J.S. BACH

Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004
(30:57)

- 13 I. Allemanda (4:59)
- 14 II. Corrente (2:23)
- 15 III. Sarabanda (4:22)
- 16 IV. Giga (4:05)
- 17 V. Ciaccona (15:06)

TT: (78:35)

PERSONAL STATEMENT

I have always believed that music is a direct conversation and reflection of the world we live in. Having grown up in a time when many declared classical music a dead art form, I found it necessary to understand my commitment to this art form and why I believe classical music is relevant and meaningful to today's society. For me, contemporary music recreates the thread that connects us to past works of art and ultimately shapes how we listen to and perform music from all time periods.

Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin have long been considered the definitive works written for solo violin. When exploring solo works from Bach's time to the present day, I find direct and indirect connections to Bach's masterpieces in nearly every composition I have uncovered. Written nearly 300 years ago, the Sonatas and Partitas have proven both the basis from where composers and violinists begin, and the pinnacle we strive to reach.

The *Bach & Beyond* project presents the Bach works I have long loved in communion with contemporary music by composers I am dedicated to. I hope each program will strengthen the connection between the six Sonatas and Partitas and our present world through a historical journey from Bach to newly commissioned works.

Bach & Beyond comprises three programs, each including two of Bach's sonatas and partitas. The program on this first recording consists of works by Bach, Ysaÿe, Saariaho, and Mazzoli. It begins with Bach's Partita No. 3 in E major, his shortest and perhaps most exuberant work for solo violin. While the Ysaÿe quotes directly from the E-major Partita, the primary thematic material that follows is based on the *Dies irae*. From light, the program moves to darkness. Saariaho wrote her *Nocturne* as a musical memorial and tribute to fellow composer Witold Lutosławski. The work encapsulates the inner life of one who is always searching for light. Missy Mazzoli's *Dissolve, O My Heart* is inspired by Bach's D minor Chaconne for solo violin. Although the title comes from Bach's *St. John's Passion*, the opening chord and musical weight of the piece emanate from Bach's Chaconne. Missy takes the idea (and historical weight) of the opening D minor chord and spins it into a musical web all her own. To close the program, Bach's Partita in D minor, with its celebrated Chaconne, is a journey from darkness to light that epitomizes our struggle to achieve transcendence.

—Jennifer Koh

Bach & Beyond Part 1

In 2011, Jennifer Koh initiated a challenging and inventive three-part series of programs titled “Bach and Beyond,” of which this recording is the first document. Her goal is to emphasize the connections between Johann Sebastian Bach’s large-scale works for solo violin and compositions of more recent vintage. She plays and records works from the centuries since Bach that derive in some way from the Baroque master.

Music by J.S. Bach resonates throughout this first recording in the project, and not just because his matchless Second and Third Partitas for solo violin (ca. 1718–1723) bracket the program. The Eisenach giant’s spirit also hovers throughout the 1924 Sonata No. 2 by Eugène Ysaÿe, and his notes echo in both Kaija

Saariaho’s 1994 *Nocturne* and Missy Mazzoli’s *Dissolve, O My Heart*, composed in 2010. Ms. Mazzoli’s title comes from Bach’s *Saint John Passion* (“Zerfließe, mein Herze”) while Ms. Saariaho’s *Nocturne*, like the Ysaÿe, cites the time-honored *Dies Irae* chant almost more than Bach. The entire program itself is not unlike a very large-scale suite.

For violinists, there are probably few greater challenges than the Bach Sonatas and Partitas; they constitute a multi-cragged mountain, each of whose peaks must be conquered by every serious contestant. Originally intended as works for advanced students of the violin more than for performance, these suites have long since passed into concert programs, and also confront many composers interested in writing for solo violin, including the Belgian violinist

and composer Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931). Bach’s Partita No. 3 in E major, a seven-movement suite of dances, opens the program; although the dance steps themselves are unfamiliar to us today, their names are almost all recognizable from other forms of composition: Preludio, Loure, Gavotte en rondeau, Menuet I and II, Bourrée, and Gigue. The Second Partita, at the end of the recording, comprises Allemanda, Corrente, Sarabanda, Giga, and Ciaccona. (Note that the spellings of these dances might vary as much as the steps themselves.)

Eugène Ysaÿe’s recordings (a few are still available) prove contemporary claims that he was one of the great string players of his day. But in the early 20th century, when critical choice between gaiety and gravity in musical composition turned toward seriousness, frequently

to the exclusion of pure joy, Ysaÿe’s popularity began to wane. Nonetheless, students and virtuosos alike still enjoy performing Ysaÿe’s music because it is demanding, fun to play and, ultimately, delicious.

A busy violin virtuoso, Ysaÿe was often called the “king of the violin” by his followers (or “Tsar of the violin,” in the words of the Russian violinist Nathan Milstein). Ysaÿe turned out very little music for solo violin; indeed the Six Sonatas for Violin, Op. 27, published in 1924, total only about an hour in playing time. Belgian scholar José Quitin wrote in a 1938 biography:

Ysaÿe composed his sonatas in bed, in the evening, without an instrument at his side. He would play them the next day with barely a correction or minute change here or there. Each sonata was dedicated to — and

written for — a contemporary virtuoso. Ysaÿe studied the special masterly characteristics of each, and wrote with his specialties in mind, spotlighting the particular technical, rhythmic and artistic gifts of Jacques Thibaud, Fritz Kreisler, Georges Enesco, Manuel Quiroga, Mathieu Crickbloom, and Joseph Szigeti.

Ysaÿe's Second Sonata — an original and technical tour-de-force dedicated to Thibaud — quotes both Bach and the *Dies Irae*. Each of its four movements has a descriptive title: *Obsession*, *Malinconia*, *Dance of the Shades*, and *The Furies*. This virtuoso Sonata begins with the jaunty tune that launches the Preludio of Bach's Third Partita but soon goes its own fanciful way, quoting the *Dies Irae* almost immediately and dancing between the two tunes for the rest of the first movement. The second movement is meditative,

even yearning, with a final, drawn-out statement of the *Dies Irae*. Another chorale makes up the intricate pizzicato that opens the third movement, variations on which weave through the section's remainder. The final movement, after some initial drama, settles into the *Dies Irae* once more. Altogether, this sonata is a tribute to Ysaÿe's virtuosity: probably few of his contemporaries could have played it well. (The composer might have had trouble playing it later in his career, however, when his bow-arm developed a tremor that led to his early retirement from performing.)

Missy Mazzoli's *Dissolve*, *O My Heart* begins on a resonant and evocative D minor chord — the same one that opens the Chaconne of Bach's Partita No. 2 — but seems almost electronic as the sound is drawn out to a wisp. Within a few moments,

the instrument's full sonority is deployed. As notes begin to bend, an Eastern quality emerges — perhaps a recollection of the instrument's early ancestors — while Koh's delicacy reminds us that music making is not always muscular. A dancelike tune follows the introduction, sometimes bending and sliding on notes even as it continues to dance. The violin's lower notes are in greater evidence here than in most pieces as virtuosic as this one, which calls for significant control of the bow on the strings — sometimes heavy, sometimes *spiccato*. A few moments before the reluctant final notes, a single-string rumination begins to take us out before ending on a slide upward toward infinity. Commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, *Dissolve* received its first performance, by Jennifer Koh, on May 24, 2011.

Kaija Saariaho's 1994 *Nocturne* opens with similar sounds, exploring stridency, double-stopping, trills, and pizzicato — sometimes almost all at once. Like the Mazzoli, it periodically approaches a full standstill before eking out a few more tones. The piece "...swirls and skitters around selected pitches, couched in a variety of tonal effects," (Art Lange, *Fanfare*, July 2000) but it starts with the familiar notes of Bach's Partita No. 3 in E major. *Nocturne* is dedicated to the memory of Witold Lutoslawski and is an "exploration of early ideas for [Saariaho's] violin concerto, *Graal Théâtre*." [Chester Music]

—Alison Ames

Alison Ames retired to her home in New York after thirty years in the music business, most of them at Deutsche Grammophon.

JENNIFER KOH

Jennifer Koh is recognized for her intense, commanding performances, delivered with dazzling virtuosity and technical assurance. With an impassioned musical curiosity, she is forging an artistic path of her devising, choosing works that inspire and challenge. She is dedicated to performing the violin repertoire of all eras from traditional to contemporary, believing that the past and present forms a continuum. A model example of how Ms. Koh is realizing her mission to present music without boundaries is her *Bach and Beyond* project, a series of three recitals that explore the history of the solo violin repertoire from Bach's six Sonatas and Partitas to modern day composers including newly commissioned works. Ms. Koh launched *Bach and Beyond* in 2009 in commemoration of the 325th anniversary of Bach's birth, and has since performed the recitals worldwide, including at the 92nd Street Y in New York and Herbst

Theatre in San Francisco. Commemorating the centennial of Lutoslawski's birth, in 2013 Ms. Koh will perform the composer's *Chain 2* with the New York Philharmonic led by Lorin Maazel and the Philharmonia Orchestra led by Esa-Pekka Salonen.

After performing Bach's Sonatas and Partitas as part of her *Bach and Beyond* series as well as separately in other concerts, Ms. Koh undertook the challenge of performing all six works in a single concert — a feat long considered the ultimate test of a violinist's command of her instrument. She has performed the complete cycle for Miller Theatre in New York, at the Castleton Festival in Virginia, and at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival in Massachusetts. Her interpretations of Bach's solo works both in marathon recitals and paired with contemporary pieces, have been praised as thoughtful, intense, energetic, and beautifully phrased.

Ms. Koh has been heard with leading orchestras around the world including the New York and Los

Angeles Philharmonics, Cleveland and Philadelphia Orchestras, and the Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Houston, New World, Montreal, and National Symphonies. Abroad she has appeared with the Czech Philharmonic, BBC London and Scottish Symphonies, Helsinki Philharmonic, Lahti Symphony, Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, and Orquestra Sinfonica do Estado de Sao Paulo in Brazil. A prolific recitalist, she frequently appears at major music centers and festivals.

Bach & Beyond Part 1 is Ms. Koh's seventh recording for Cedille Records. Other albums include *Rhapsodic Musings: 21st Century Works for Solo Violin*; the Grammy-nominated *String Poetic*, featuring the world premiere of Jennifer Higdon's eponymous work, performed with pianist Reiko Uchida; Schumann's complete violin sonatas (also with Uchida); *Portraits* with the Grant Park Orchestra under Carlos Kalmar, featuring concertos by Szymanowski, Martinů, and Bartók; *Violin Fantasies*: fantasies for violin

and piano by Schubert, Schumann, Schoenberg, and saxophonist Ornette Coleman (with Uchida); and her first Cedille album, from 2002, *Solo Chaconnes*, an earlier reading of Bach's Second Partita coupled with chaconnes by Richard Barth and Max Reger.

Born in Chicago of Korean parents, Ms. Koh began playing the violin by chance, choosing the instrument in a Suzuki-method program only because spaces for cello and piano had been filled. She made her debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at age 11 and went on to win the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, the Concert Artists Guild Competition, and an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Ms. Koh has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from Oberlin College and studied at the Curtis Institute, where she worked extensively with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir.

For more information please visit jenniferkoh.com