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West Cork Chamber Music Festival 2021

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Bantry and Beyond

Festival Echoes

26. Partitas Old and New

Filmed at the Ganz Hall, Roosevelt University, Chicago

Vadim Gluzman

Lera Auerbach

par.ti.ta

J.S. Bach

Partita No.2 in D minor BWV 1004

Lera Auerbach [b.1973]

par.ti.ta

I. Prelude: Adagio

II. Moderato

III. Andantino scherzando

IV. Serioso

V. Adagio

VI. Vivo scuro

VII. Adagio tragico

VIII. Grave

IX. Allegro ossessivo

X. Postlude: Adagio

Vadim Gluzman describes this piece as "*an incredible work, projecting Lera's lifelong fascination with Bach... We hear traces and echoes of Brandenburg Concerti, Concerto for two violins, Sonatas and Partitas for violin solo. No particular work is being quoted, yet I can't help the feeling of being drawn to an incredible world of shades, echoes – are these shades of ourselves?*"

Auerbach is known for her Post-modern style, yet the 'fascination with Bach' is evident and the title appropriate, as like Bach, she explores what a solo instrument can do and challenges the virtuosic skill of the musician. These ten short movements vary in tempo, style and in the use of technique, very much in the Baroque solo tradition. When Gluzman recorded *par.ti.ta* with the Bach Partita that is also part of this programme, he described it as a "*humble attempt to build a metaphysical time bridge.*" In many ways, Auerbach is doing the same thing. The Baroque melodies and styles are clearly felt throughout the different movements – the rich counterpoint in the second movement, or the sequences in the sixth – are no pure throwback, but are infused with the Post-modern style of the composer. She challenges the musician and the listener, the skill needed to play the high register movements, such as the Grave, and the astonishing seventh movement – Adagio tragico – is not for the faint-hearted.

Helen Dawson

Johann Sebastian Bach [1685-1750]

Partita No.2 in D minor BWV 1004 [c.1717-1720]

1. *Allemanda*
2. *Corrente*
3. *Sarabanda*
4. *Giga*
5. *Ciaccona*

Bach's maturity can be conveniently divided into his three appointments; as organist from 1708-17 at Duke Wilhelm's Court at Weimar; as Kapellmeister at Cöthen from 1717-23 and finally as Kantor at Leipzig for the remainder of his life. His Leipzig period is often divided into three, the time before 1730 when he undertook the prodigious task of composing a well-regulated church music, that is a cantata for every Sunday and Feast Day in the church calendar over a period of five years. This is followed by the period from 1730-42 when he wrote his extraordinary keyboard exercises, culminating with the Goldberg Variations. And lastly there is the final phase when he tried to put his publications in some sort of order and indulged his late obsession with canons and counterpoint, as in the Musical Offering and the Art of Fugue.

The Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin *without bass accompaniment* date from his time at Cöthen, where his employer was a music loving Prince, who went to immense trouble and expense to build up an orchestra of 18 top-class players. During this time he had no duties as an organist or church musician, so turned to instrumental music, composing many of his most famous collections - the Brandenburg Concertos, the first volume of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the six *French Suites*, the two-part and three-part *Inventions*, six sonatas for violin and harpsichord, three sonatas for viola da gamba and harpsichord, the six suites for solo cello and the six works for solo violin.

Each collection comprehensively explores the possibilities of its genre. Bach explains that his purpose is not only to write good music but also to provide good material for performers to develop their art and for aspiring composers to learn the many ways a musical idea (or *Invention*) can be developed into a piece of music. The six solo violin pieces make up one of these comprehensive collections.

There was a tradition of unaccompanied violin music in southern Germany with Biber as its most famous exponent, but it cannot be said that Bach obtained anything more than the general idea from this tradition. What was remarkable was a polyphonic composer like Bach writing music for a single string instrument including both a chaconne and fugues requiring extravagant multi-stopping. He also creates a continuous melodic line by constructing it from motifs, which suggest or outline chords, so that the music sounds harmonic. And when he wants to give the impression of several melodic strands, he moves from different, sometimes remarkably widely apart, registers within the phrase. Between these techniques he builds a magnificent body of sound. The intensity for both player and listener is renowned; the lack of distraction from other instruments or melodies gives no rest and allows for no lapses of concentration.

The Chaconne is the most wonderful, unfathomable piece of music. On one stave, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings. If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind.
Johannes Brahms

Bach's time at Cöthen was marred by the sudden death of his first wife, Maria Barbara, in 1720. Bach's autograph manuscript of the sonatas and partitas is also dated 1720 and the extraordinary nature of the famous Chaconne has led to conjecture that it was written in memory of his wife.

The D minor Partita presents the dances in their traditional sequence of Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. The Chaconne is placed last and the perhaps unintentional effect is to make the preceding dances as a whole appear as a prelude. The Chaconne is a special type of continuous theme and 31 variations where a somewhat short subject is relentlessly repeated and varied. The variations are built on a descending ground bass to the rhythm of a slow dance similar to the Sarabande in simple triple time and often in a minor key. All of Bach's genius and musical mastery are found in the Chaconne and it inspires all manner of superlatives. Certainly when listening to this music it is sometimes hard to believe what you are hearing, your mind keeps saying that this cannot be possible. Philipp Spitta, the great Bach scholar summed it up quite simply as *a triumph of spirit over matter*.

Francis Humphrys

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