

## **Program notes**

**The Six Sonatas and Partitas by J.S. Bach** are the pinnacle of the violin repertoire because of their complexity and their beauty. Emotionally powerful and passionately involving, these pieces challenge the performer to the limit of his or her technique and musical integrity. Many violinists feel that a lifetime is not long enough to master these great works. They are a source of endless fascination, wonder and discovery.

**J.S. Bach. Sonata No. 2 in A minor** begins solemnly with the Grave movement. In this somber opening, the melodic lines are lyrical yet highly ornamented, and contain unusually large intervals for Baroque music—certainly the widest leaps of the first movements of the three sonatas. The last two and a half bars serve as a bridge to the next movement, the Fuga. The first nine notes of the four-voice fugue are the rhythmic basis for the entire movement, each voice in turn taking a leadership role. There is no noticeable break in this long movement; the music continually heightens in intensity until the climax at the very end.

The third movement, Andante, resembles a procession. The two voices take distinct roles, which they maintain through the entire movement: one is an aria-like melody; the other is strict, ostinato-like eighth-notes. The quiet sound of the final broken chord fades away into the abandon of the fast Allegro final movement. Here, the composer specifically indicates the dynamics forte and piano, as well as bowings that enhance the legato and articulated execution of the notes. The 32nd notes throughout add direction and flair, manipulating the momentum of flow with pleasing surprises.

## **Midori Goto**

**Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004** begins by presenting the classic or most nearly standard group of dances, an allemande (fairly leisurely 4/4 time with almost continuous movement in sixteenth notes), a Courante (in three and relatively quick—this is an Italian Corrente without the rhythmic implications of a real French Courante), a Sarabande (grave, in three, with a strong division between the first and second beats), and a Gigue (quick, with metrical divisions in multiples of three—this one in 12/8). Then, however, Bach gives us something in addition that turns out indeed to equal in length the rest of the partita put together and far to outdo it in magnificence and weight of utterance. This is the famous Chaconne, a set of variations on an eight-bar chord sequence. Midway Bach runs a group of variations in D major—our first, and wonderful, encounter with that key in the piece—and then returns to the original D minor. The whole piece is an extraordinary conjunction of architectural majesty with fanciful bravura display of the instrument.

**James M. Keller, Michael Steinberg, and Steven Ziegler**

**Zachary Wadsworth *Fixation I for solo violin (2021) World Premiere***

Long after I finish listening to any piece of music by Bach, I find myself haunted by his gestures. Even if the specific melodies and harmonies have left my memory, the rhythmic patterns and broad shapes of his music stay behind. So when Joanna Kurkowicz asked me to write a companion piece to Bach's Violin Sonata no. 2, BWV 1003, I began to fixate on the particular gestures in that piece, from its opening A minor triad to its staggering fugue and elegant, pulsing Andante.

This piece, *Fixation I*, is at once a conjuring and an exorcism of these musical gestures. The violinist begins with violent outbursts, spilling Bach's ideas out into the air one after another. Then, she finds unexpected paths between them, allows them to grow and change, and finally moves beyond them.

**Zachary Wadsworth**

**Ileana Perez Velazquez *Birds View for solo violin (2021) World Premiere***

As I was watching birds flying in the sky I was wondering about their visual perception of different regions while they travel through different areas. In my approximately 5 minutes long violin piece I pretend I am a bird flying through different areas in time and space. Although these areas are inspired by different musical periods from different times and space, they are all connected by my own journey and through my own perception. This piece was written for and dedicated to Joanna Kurkowicz.

**Ileana Perez Velazquez**

**John McDonald *Subcutaneous, Op. 670 for solo violin (2020) World Premiere***

To Joanna Kurkowicz, commissioned for Project Bach And Beyond  
(with Bach and Froberger "under the skin")

Composed in several days at the end of June 2020 in response to violinist Joanna Kurkowicz's invitation to fashion a short solo work inspired by stylistic features of Bach's solo violin partitas, *Subcutaneous* is injected with specific strains re-interpreted from J.S. Bach's *Sinfonia 9* and J.J. Froberger's *Ricercare 13*.

Seeking respite in piano practice at home while trying to “compose myself” through the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, I turned to Froberger’s keyboard works (a collection of organ toccatas, fantasias, canzonas, capriccios, and ricercares), playing through the entire volume and gaining encouragement from the ingenious chromaticisms and unexpected collapses of the lines and harmonies in this formidable 17<sup>th</sup>-century repertory. One could say that, before moving recently into the considerable oeuvres of J. P. Sweelinck and S. Scheidt (two further Bach predecessors, along with Buxtehude and Pachelbel), Froberger’s language got significantly “under my skin” during a time of comparative musical—and necessary social—isolation.

*Subcutaneous* thus fashions motives that spell B.A.C.H. and F.R.O.B.E.R.G.E.R. from the sinfonia and ricercare respectively, building from their common chromatic fiber a violin soliloquy that proceeds from hesitancy and reflection to the physical energy of a middle section that makes use of 20<sup>th</sup>-century composer Boris Blacher’s variable meter (in this case, a repeating 5/8, 3/8, 2/8 pattern).

Bach and Froberger have left clear traces of their influence coursing under the surface of *Subcutaneous*. The piece is dedicated to Joanna Kurkowicz, with thanks for and in anticipation of her ambitious Project Bach And Beyond.

**John McDonald**

**July 2020**