

# Rachel Podger

**Start time:** 7.30pm

**Approximate end time:** 9.40pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

## Programme

**Johann Sebastian Bach** Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV565 (arr Chad Kelly in A minor)

**Nicola Matteis Jr** Fantasia in C minor, *Con Discretion*

**Johann Joseph Vilsmayr** *Artificiosus Conventus pro Camera*

1. Prelude
2. Aria
3. Saraband
4. Aria
5. Minuet
6. Aria
7. Minuet
8. Aria
9. Gigue
10. Aria variata

**A Suite of short movements from the Nogueira and Klagenfurt manuscripts**

**Johann Paul von Westhoff** Suite pour le violon seul sans basse

1. Prelude
2. Allemande
3. Courante
4. Sarabande
5. Gigue

**Giuseppe Tartini** Violin Sonata No 17 from *Piccole Sonate*

1. Andante cantabile di se senti
2. Allegro assai
3. Aria del tasso
4. Furlana
5. Minuet

**Chad Kelly** *Phantasia*

**Johann Sebastian Bach** Cello Suite No 6  
in G major, BWV1012

1. Prelude
2. Allemande
3. Courante
4. Sarabande
5. Gavotte I & II
6. Gigue

**Rachel Podger explores a road less travelled in an adventurous recital of solo violin music from pre-Bach to the present day.**

One name immediately springs to mind when you think about repertoire for solo violin: Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750). Certainly, his *Sei Solo a Violino senza Basso accompagnato* – more simply known as the Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin – continue to be the yardstick by which the repertoire is measured. But Bach was not the first composer to experiment *senza basso*, and he most certainly isn't the last (Chad Kelly's *Phantasia* being just the latest contribution to this genre). Rachel Podger continues to challenge the limits of what can be conjured by the solo Baroque violin, and in tonight's concert she traverses lesser-known landscapes.

The Klagenfurt Manuscript is a book of about 80 folio leaves which dates from the mid-1680s. It was found in the Convent of St Georgen am Längsee in Carinthia, which in the late 17th century was a community of around 50 nuns and lay sisters.

barbican

Could the manuscript have been penned by a nun? Most of the pieces in the manuscript are dances. Like Bach, the author explored how forms such as the Courante, Double, Sarabande and Gigue were not explicitly music *for* dancing, but rather, music *about* dance – or, in the words of Bach scholar and conductor John Butt, music that seems to ‘digest’ dance.

The virtuoso violinist was, of course, a much more common author of solo violin music. After all, he – historically speaking – would have travelled to earn his keep, and compositions that dazzled were his bread and butter. Johann Paul von Westhoff (1656–1705) was one such violinist. He worked at the Dresden court from 1674 to 1697, during which time he toured Europe extensively. Westhoff’s *Sechs Suiten für Violino Solo ohne Basso* (1696) is the most obvious precedent to Bach’s set – indeed, it is thought Bach’s encounter with Westhoff in 1703 in Weimar was the inspiration for his own solo Sonatas and Partitas. But Westhoff’s interest in music for solo violin began earlier. In 1683, his Suite pour le violon seul sans bass appeared in the French magazine, *Mercure galant*, and already we can see the synthesis of German and Italian styles that would be so fundamental to Bach’s writing.

Giuseppe Tartini (1692–1770) led a similarly roving lifestyle. Born in Pirano near Trieste, he worked in several Italian towns until 1721, when he was appointed leader of the orchestra at the Basilica of St Anthony in Padua. His contract allowed him to travel, and Tartini also spent some time in Prague. Tartini’s *Piccole Sonate*, even by modern standards, is huge. Throughout this ‘cycle’ of 30 sonatas, the influence of Arcangelo Corelli is coloured with the folk traces of Tartini’s Istrian homeland. As the composer wrote in 1767, each nation ‘has its own folk songs, many of which are hallowed by tradition, and many renewed and adapted by the popular genius’.

Johann Joseph Vilsmayr (1663–1722) was also a highly regarded violinist in his day. He worked at the Salzburg court from 1689 until his death (it was in Salzburg where Vilsmayr most likely studied with Biber). His only surviving music is a collection titled *Artificiosus Concertus pro Camera* (1715). The description on its title page – ‘à Violino Solo Con Basso bellè imitate’ – is thought to allude to its contrapuntal contents, rather than an accompanying basso continuo.

The function of solo violin music wasn’t just to dazzle. The three-volume Nogueira Manuscript, by the Portuguese violinist Pedro Lopes Nogueira (c1700–70), is an instructional treatise comprising 240 studies designed to practise shifting and playing in different positions. These historical fingerings tell us not just about the mechanics of violin playing in the early 18th century, but also about modes of expression.

What a solo violin is able to capture lies at the heart of the two Bach arrangements in tonight’s concert. The commission arose from Podger’s reading of an article by musicologist Peter Williams that explores the notion that Bach’s Toccata and Fugue for organ was an arrangement of a pre-existing solo violin work. Podger was initially worried about the limitations of the violin: ‘at first, I tried to sound like an organ – which is not actually possible on the violin. That epic sound on the organ that we all know so well: how can that beginning not be for organ?’ But she found that ‘the more I tried it out on the violin, the more it seemed to fit ... it just felt right’. The stylistic evidence presented by Williams in his article, in particular, the violinistic nature of the work’s bariolage patterns, came alive for Podger under her fingers.

Reconfiguring the supposed nature of a work was also at play with Bach’s Cello Suites. Podger recognised that there would have to be adaptations: ‘with its smaller resonating body, the violin speaks more quickly and the immediacy of sound enables it to be more flexible, flighty and agile than the more circumspect and gravitational cello’. Tempo was one way in which Podger got around this. Played a little faster than is usual on a cello, the suites took on a new expressive vocabulary that was more firmly rooted in dance. For Podger, the Sixth Suite is the ‘consummation and affirmation of belief: utterly radiant and life-affirming’.

© Mark Seow

## Performers

**Rachel Podger** violin

Produced by the Barbican



The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre