



Bach's Works for Solo Violin: Style, Structure, Performance

Joel Lester

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J. S. Bach's sonatas and partitas for solo violin have been central to the violin repertoire since the mid-eighteenth century. This engaging volume is the first comprehensive exploration of the place of these works within Bach's music: it focuses on their structural and stylistic features as they have been perceived since their creation. Joel Lester, a highly regarded scholar, teacher, violinist, and administrator, combines an analytical study, a full historical guide, and an insightful introduction to Bach's style. Individual movements are related to comparable movements by Bach in other media and are differentiated from superficially similar works from later eras.

Lester employs descriptions of historical and contemporary recordings, as well as accounts of nineteenth-century performances and commentaries on historical editions, to explore these works as they evolved through the centuries. Wherever possible, he uses analytic tools culled from eighteenth-century ideas, key notions originally developed for the specific purpose of describing the repertoire under consideration. Beginning with an overview of the solo violin music's place within Bach's oeuvre, this study takes the Sonata No. 1 in G minor as the paradigm of Bach's compositional strategy, examining each movement in detail before enlarging the discussion to cover parallel and contrasting features of the A-minor and C-minor sonatas. Next, a chapter is devoted to the three partitas and their roots in various dance-music traditions. The book concludes with a summary of form, style, and rhetoric in Bach's music, in which Lester muses on these masterpieces with an overall command of the music, criticism, and history of the 1700s that is quite rare among scholars.

A novel and unprecedented investigation of a particular portion of Bach's accomplishment and a particular aspect of his universal appeal, *Bach's Works for Solo Violin* will help violinists, students, scholars, and other listeners develop a deeper personal involvement with these wonderful pieces.

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