

A Tribute to Bach

Unaccompanied violin music was being performed well before the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, and several German composers had proposed their own answers to the challenge of expressing polyphony within the language of the solo violin. Among them were Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber, whose remarkable *Passacaglia* crowns the famous *Rosary Sonatas*; Johann Paul von Westhoff, Johann Jakob Walther, Thomas Baltzar, as well as the violinist-composers Nicola Matteis and his son.

Bach likely became familiar with the tradition of polyphonic writing for string instruments - and the technique of double stops - through his younger colleague Westhoff. Around the same time, through his cousin, the organist and composer Johann Gottfried Walther, he encountered Italian sonatas and concertos, whose influence would also shape his musical language. An accomplished violinist himself, Bach often directed his fellow musicians while playing the instrument.

During the six remarkably productive years he spent at the court of Leopold, Prince of Anhalt-Köthen between 1717 and 1723, Bach composed a series of masterpieces: the Brandenburg Concertos, the Orchestral Suites (Bach), The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I, the English Suites (Bach), the French Suites (Bach), the Cello Suites (Bach), and the monumental Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, BWV 1001-1006. Among these, the Chaconne from the Partita No. 2 in D minor stands alone as a work of extraordinary scope, lucid in its architecture, complex in its design, and of transcendent beauty.

Although Bach owed much to his predecessors, the influence of these three Sonatas and three Partitas, for which Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann later wrote piano accompaniments, has resonated across many centuries. Their legacy can even be felt in the works of composers such as Béla Bartók, Paul Hindemith, Luciano Berio (*Sequenza VIII*), and Pierre Boulez (*Anthèmes I & II*), all of whom explored the violin's capacity for polyphonic expression