

# Inspired by Bach: The Six Solos for Violin without Bass Accompaniment

Special thanks to Professor James Lyon and the PSU string area.

## **About *Inspired by Bach***

Inspired by Bach is a full-length presentation of the complete Six Solos for Violin without Bass Accompaniment (*Sei Solo a Violino senza Basso accompagnato*). However, these six solos are indeed accompanied here by original visual art inspired by each movement of Bach's music. The program is divided into three parts averaging about 45 minutes; the total experience including ten-minute intermissions between each part is just under three hours.

## **A note to the listener**

I remember waking early, around 5:30 am, rising to practice the Bach G Minor Adagio before school. I would have been in sixth or seventh grade. This was not my first solo Bach, but the memory endures. Time spent with this music is special. It beckons you to journey with it, whispering a musician's secret. "The journey is the reward." The process of spending time with the music, its prayers and its precepts, teaches you how to think, how to hear.

It's admittedly a strange thing to perform these six pieces in a single weekend, and certainly not a very "historically informed" thing to do. They are likely not meant for our modern concert stage, and definitely not meant for performance as we think of it in 2024. But they are the pieces that whispered to me, "become a baroque violinist." And they are also the pieces that have always asked me to make something—a story, a poem, a sketch. The A Minor Sonata reaches out and says, "make a poem about an old bard." The D Minor Partita, with its strange, wonderful, sprawling Ciaccona, is an enigmatic monument, rife with hidden cruciform messages of transfiguration. The G Minor Sonata demands to be heard as a fiery

mythical story. The B Minor Partita is a labyrinth. The E Major Partita looks forever into the future, inviting us to dance. And the C Major Sonata is truly a cathedral in the sky.

These pieces are Bach's way of showing a violinist what the violin can be. They are Bach's way of showing us how music behaves with a violin in his hand. How do we behave, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with such music in our hands, heads, and hearts?

Bach was criticized during his lifetime, by Scheibe for example, for musical notation that was too florid, too ornamented, too prescribed. The thorny complexity of musical thought in the polyphonic fugues, the unsettling harmonic forays of the adagios; all to say that Bach was indeed the third choice of the Leipzig Town Council for the position of Thomaskantor. Far from the urbane Telemann or the charming Graupner, Bach is writing for himself or God or nobody at all. So naturally the music whispers, "come, listen, take this journey."

I'm so grateful to all of my teachers, mentors, students, family, and friends, all of whom have helped, encouraged, challenged, and even whispered to me throughout my own lifelong travels with the solo violin works of J.S. Bach.

### **A note to the viewer**

Inspired by each of Bach's 27 movements, I have created 27 pastel paintings using a mixture of soft pastels, hard pastels, sanded paper, and alcohol. The pieces range in size from 16x12 to 16X48. During the performance, each piece is projected during its corresponding musical movement. Apart from the "Double" portions of the B Minor Partita (which are created by applying digital filters to existing pastel pieces), each of Bach's movements is "represented" by an original pastel painting.

Bach's musical motives, characters, key areas, compositional structures, and hidden messages all serve as generative sources in this series. I conceive of each work as an entry in a "musician's sketchbook," this exhibit serving as a way of sharing my musical interpretive process rather than asserting any professional identity as a visual artist.

*-Nicholas DiEugenio, January 2024*

### **About the instruments**

Violin: Karl Dennis, 2011, after Guarneri “del Gesu,” 1735 “The King”

Bow: David Hawthorne, 2010, snakewood, ca. 1725

I have chosen to use a “baroque violin” and “baroque bow” in interpreting these works. For me, these materials allow for a greater variety of nuance, color, and articulation in this music. Rather than prioritizing evenness across all registers, the gut strings of a baroque violin evoke the four distinct voices of “bass, tenor, alto, and soprano.” These materials inspire musical choices that appeal to me.

### **About the artist**

Violinist Nicholas DiEugenio has been heralded for his “excellent...evocative” playing (*The New York Times*), full of “rapturous poetry” (*American Record Guide*). Nicholas is in-demand as a soloist, chamber musician, and ensemble leader, creating powerful shared experiences in music ranging from early baroque to contemporary commissions.

A core member of the Sebastians, a period group hailed as “topnotch” by the *New Yorker* and “sharp-edged and engaging” by the *New York Times*, Nicholas also performs and records with pianist and wife Mimi Solomon. Their award-winning duo project “Unraveling Beethoven” comprises a full cycle of the Beethoven violin sonatas along with response works from composers Tonia Ko, Robert Honstein, Jesse Jones, Allen Anderson, and D.K. Garner.

His *Musica omnia* recording of the complete Schumann violin sonatas with Chi-Chen Wu on fortepiano was named one of the Top 10 albums of 2015 by *The Big City*. His August 2017 release on the New Focus label with Mimi Solomon, critically lauded as “a touching, committed tribute” (*I Care If You Listen*), is an homage to the late Pulitzer Prize-winner Steven Stucky. The disc features Stucky’s Sonata for violin and piano, two new works by Stucky’s students Jesse Jones and Tonia Ko, and the previously unrecorded Violin Sonata of Robert Palmer.

A two-time prize-winner at the prestigious Fischhoff competition, Nicholas is passionately committed to collaboration, and has performed chamber music with Laurie Smukler, Joel Krosnick, Joseph Lin, Peter Salaff, and Ani Kavafian, as well as members of the Meta4 Quartet. As a baroque and classical violinist, he has performed with violinists Ingrid Matthews and Aislinn Nosky, as well as members of Tafelmusik, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, Philharmonia Baroque, and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. He has also performed as guest Principal Second Violinist with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Nicholas is an alumnus of the

Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival, where he was deeply influenced by the musicianship of pianist Seymour Lipkin. At the same time, Nicholas also strives to incorporate musical elements from some of his favorite rock icons such as Jimi Hendrix, Anthony Kiedis, and Thom Yorke.

Rooted in a deeply compassionate approach to teaching, Nicholas is currently Associate Professor of Violin at UNC Chapel Hill, and is co-artistic director of MYCO, a non-profit chamber music organization for middle and high school students. Formerly Assistant Professor of Violin at the Ithaca College School of Music, Nicholas continues as a faculty member of the Kinhaven Music School in Vermont during the summers. Nicholas holds degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music (B.M, M.M) and the Yale School of Music (D.M.A., A.D.), and he performs on a baroque violin made by Karl Dennis in 2011, and also on an 1835 violin made by J.B. Vuillaume.

[www.nicholasdieugenio.com](http://www.nicholasdieugenio.com)

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