

A close-up, profile view of a woman with long, dark, curly hair, looking upwards and to the left. Her hands are gently resting on her shoulders. The background is dark and out of focus.

Liza Ferschtman violin
BIBER | BARTÓK | BERIO | BACH

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HEINRICH IGNAZ FRANZ BIBER (1644 - 1704)

[1] Passaglia "Guardian angel" C.105 **8:05**

BÉLA VIKTÓR JÁNOS BARTÓK (1881 - 1945)

Sonata for solo violin Sz.117

[2] Tempo di ciaccona **9:10**

[3] Fuga **4:53**

[4] Melodia **7:25**

[5] Presto **5:29**

LUCIANO BERIO (1925 - 2003)

[6] Sequenza VIII for violin **13:49**

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685 - 1750)

Partita no.2 in d minor BWV 1004

[7] Allemanda **4:38**

[8] Corrente **2:46**

[9] Sarabanda **3:44**

[10] Giga **4:09**

[11] Ciaccona **13:25**

total time 77:38

Introduction

This is an invitation: an invitation to join me in an adventure. It would normally take place in the concert hall, because the combination of pieces I'm presenting to you here is not a typical programme for a CD. It's an overwhelming recital that demands a great deal not only from me as the musician, but also from you as the audience. When I play this recital in a concert setting, which I've done on many occasions, I always find it to be a battle, where I'm reaching for my own limits and for the audience's limits. But this is a constructive battle. The battle is the pathway and at the end of it we're in a better place.

From the stage, I can take the audience by the hand as stunning beauty alternates with uncomfortable and what can even be almost ugly sounds. But all of this is much harder on a CD, where it's so easy to press the 'forward' button on the CD player...

However, these are exactly the pieces I wanted to record and I'm grateful to Challenge Records for offering me the opportunity. This is a highly personal programme, and not just because I'm entirely on my own, with no pianist or orchestra. That was also the case on my previous disc, presenting violin solo music by Ysaÿe and Bach, but here the feeling is even stronger. It's a programme of contradictions: the ostensible simplicity of Biber and Bach contrasting with the complexity of Bartók and Berio. It's emotional but at the same time highly cerebral. In these contradictions I recognize myself. I don't consider myself to be a violinist for whom virtuosity is the greatest aim; that is

not why I became a violinist. But yet I've chosen a solo programme here. That is contradictory, but what we're dealing with is greater music and not just greater virtuosity. This is my musical autograph.

Bach's Chaconne is the focal point, to which the works of Bartok and Berio make strong references, making it the core of this programme. Biber's Passacaglia provides focus, with its persistent repeated cadence of the four falling notes. This pulse underpins the entire recital: sometimes hidden and barely audible, like a sort of primeval pulse (as in the Berio), and sometimes quite clear.

I've known Bartók's Sonata since I was a youngster, when my teacher Philippe Hirschhorn used to play it at our home. It's a piece that has always stayed with me. I even used to have Dénes Zsigmondy's recording of the fugue as the welcoming music on my answering machine. It is a real masterpiece, with perfect form, and Bartók occasionally gives us a glimpse of a cosmos that he can see and hear even though we can't quite yet. It's the pinnacle of what is possible on the violin, without having virtuosity as its objective.

The consonance – or actually the battle – between two notes lies at the heart of Berio's Sequenza VIII. This also presents us with a degree of ugliness. But after the powerful confrontations, as the music gradually subsides in volume – firstly with an ordinary mute and then with the even quieter practice mute – these two notes end up forming a brotherly union. The battle has led to some good after all. This is a really emotional moment.

When the programma concludes with the Bach Partita and the Chaconne, we, the listener and myself, will hopefully experience the complete catharsis all this music can bring.

Liza Ferschtman



The four musical items on this CD span three centuries of the history of music: the oldest composition dates from around 1676 while the most recent was completed in 1976. At first glance, it might seem that there could scarcely be any more marked difference than that between Berio's avant-garde style and Bartók's well-wrought mature modernism on the one hand and the baroque world of Biber and Bach on the other hand. But a closer examination quickly confirms that we can perceive similarities among the works, which are perhaps greater than the ostensible differences.

The most important similarity – apart from the obvious fact that all four of the works were written for solo violin – is the chaconne, which permeates this CD like a beacon. The chaconne was a popular form in the baroque period. The repetitive harmonic progression or bass line, offering endless possibilities for variations above it, proved to be highly attractive to a large number of composers. The chaconne is in fact virtually identical to the passacaglia; any differences there may be between these two forms are fairly academic. Even more specifically than the chaconne as a general form, "The Chaconne" – the fifth movement of the Johann Sebastian Bach's Partita in D minor – occupies a central position on this CD. It was a source of inspiration for both Berio and Bartók.

As well as being a composer, **Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber** (1644-1704) was a great violinist and a champion of 'scordatura', a method of re-tuning the open strings on the violin that is little used nowadays, but which was designed to change the instrument's tonal colour.

Each and every one of Biber's Rosenkranz Sonatas, or Mystery Sonatas (+/- 1676) is a little gem from the baroque literature for violin, and the closing passacaglia for solo violin is perhaps the pinnacle of music for solo violin prior to Bach's Sonatas and Partitas.

Biber sets the mysteries of the Roseate Cross, dealing with the life and death of Christ, in three groups of five sonatas for violin and continuo.

Biber illustrates this with a harmonic journey through a mystical world of prayer and meditation on Christ's birth, life and death. Each Sonata has its own particular scordatura, generating a different tonal spectrum each time, appropriate to the story and to its emotional impact. The Sonatas conclude with the monumental Passacaglia in G minor for violin solo, written without scordatura. This passacaglia, often performed as a self-contained composition, has enormous expressive force, even though the material is so minimal. The same falling tetrachord (G, F, E-flat, D) is repeated for minutes on end (64 times over!), while the melody spun above it, which forms the basis for the variations, is also very simple. Yet Biber consistently manages to conjure up a different world, and it is also worth remembering that these simple sounds demand an unerring level of technique from the violinist.

The original score of the Passacaglia is surmounted by a depiction of a guardian angel appearing before a child. The falling bass line may well be a reference to the German hymn *Einen Engel Gott mir geben* [May God send me an angel] from 1666, which was well known in Biber's day, and which explains the fact that the Passacaglia is known by the nickname "Guardian Angel".

Béla Bartók (1881-1945) was a revolutionary, a non-conformist in many areas, from social mores (there was no prior announcement of his wedding, for which he hauled two ordinary working folk from the street to act as witnesses) to his music. Zoltán Kodály had this to say of his friend and colleague: "Bartók was one of those men who, driven by a continual dissatisfaction, wanted to change everything, wanted to make everything he encountered in the world finer and better. He wanted to change everything, but he only succeeded in music."

He not only showed what a great innovator he was through his own music, but also revisited the existing image of folk music from his native Hungary and other eastern European countries. Through his ethno-musicological research into the original folk music of his own country, he proved that the genuine Hungarian folk music was not what people imagined it to be, namely Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies and Brahms's Hungarian dances. Liszt, Brahms and so many others had produced rampantly romanticised versions of surviving, simplistic folk tunes. Their pieces reflected a mere shadow of the complex rhythms and rich harmonies of the original folk music that Bartók transcribed, described and published.

Bartók incorporated elements of this folk music that he had 'discovered' in virtually all of his works, not by vulgar borrowing of snippets of tune or rhythm, but by tracking down the essence of that music and using it as a cornerstone for his own. In the most successful instances, the result was a comprehensive synthesis between folk music and modern, composed music, with its own unique signature.

In the final two years of his life, Bartók was far from home, destitute and wracked by illness, and was not merely looking forwards. Face to face with death, he took stock of his own position in the history of music and immersed himself in the work of two composers whom he regarded as his own predecessors; Beethoven and Bach.

Despite his condition at the time, this effort resulted in two masterpieces, the Concerto for Orchestra, SZ116/BB127, a hybrid between concerto and symphony in the footsteps of Beethoven and the Sonata for Solo Violin, SZ117/BB124.

Bartók composed the Sonata in response to a commission from Yehudi Menuhin, 35 years the composer's junior, whom he had recently heard playing Bach's music for solo violin.

It is instantly apparent that the Sonata contains marked references to Bach, with movements entitled *Tempo di Ciaconna* and *Fuga*, and the opening measures leave this homage in no doubt. At the same time, it rapidly becomes clear that Bartók is performing the same ritual with Bach's music as he had been

doing with folk music for many years; not quoting from it, rather but assimilating the essence of Bach's music.

Despite the reference to Bach, the opening movement is in sonata form. The first theme is like a solemn chaconne, while the second is a lively dance and the third a melodious legato. After an extensive development and recapitulation, we come to the next movement, *Fuga: Risoluto, non troppo vivace*. A four-part fugue for solo violin is unprecedented. Bartók uses techniques in this movement to suggest a polyphony that is yet again derived from Bach. This movement generates enormous power, which seems to have its roots in folk music. The complexity of the fugue cannot conceal a certain deftness of touch, with the closing notes even suggesting a hint of irony.

The third movement, *Melodia: Adagio*, is a ternary, ABA structure, in which a spare melody is followed by a central section containing 'night music': magical harmonies suggesting a fairly animated nightlife.

The final *Presto* emerges as a whisper from the gentle flageolet tones that draw the *Melodia* to a close. This *Presto* movement interchanges a perpetual mobile with energetic dances. And as if Bartók is keen to prove that this is not a showpiece, despite its virtuosity, the ending arrives quite unexpectedly, with no bombastic conclusion.

Shortly after Bartók's death, the fresh – not to say chill – blast of a group of avant-garde composers blew through the world of music. They included Luciano

Berio (1925-2003), an outspokenly modernist composer who had no fear of experimentation. He set himself apart, however, with his predilection for the theatrical and his deep feeling for musical tradition. Berio's music often has a warmth that seems to be lacking in that of many of his contemporaries.

From the late 1950s until shortly before his death in 2003, he worked on what were ultimately to become his fourteen Sequenzas. Each Sequenza focuses on one single instrument. Out of all of these works, Sequenza VIII (1976) for violin is the one that looks back at musical history the most. Or, as Berio himself put it:

"Sequenza VIII is built around two notes (A and B), which - as in a chaconne - act as a compass in the work's rather diversified and elaborate itinerary, where polyphony is no longer virtual but real, and where the soloist must make the listener constantly aware of the history behind each instrumental gesture. Sequenza VIII, therefore, becomes inevitably a tribute to that musical apex which is the Ciaccona from Johann Sebastian Bach's Partita in D minor, where - historically - past, present and future violin techniques coexist."

From the very opening, we hear a cadence that remains subtly perceptible, like a kind of primeval pulse, throughout the entire work. The opening A is varied in its tonal colour, for instance by playing the note on one, two or even three strings at the same time. When the B is introduced, it provides the A with a context, forming a sort of tonal centre. The two notes jar against each other, seeming to be in continuous conflict. Following an exploration of different styles, atmospheres and techniques, the two notes have undergone a

transformation, so that when they coincide at the close of the work it no longer feels like dissonance but rather harmony.

Out of all the music written by **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750), perhaps the Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, along with the Suites for cello, remain the most enigmatic. Why did Bach write polyphonic music for an instrument that generally plays just a single line?

These Sonatas and Partitas are mysterious enough, certainly, but the Partita no. 2 in D minor, BWV 1006 is a very special case in point. The reason is that this Partita is written in the form of a suite of dances, ending not with the normal gigue, but with a chaconne that lasts as long as all of the other movements combined. The chaconne is therefore often performed on its own, as a self-contained work.

The suite opens with an Allemande that contains no double-stopping. This is followed by a lively Courante and a serious Sarabande. The ensuing Gigue comes closest to what we might regard as cheerfulness, although the melancholy undertones, so characteristic of this Partita, never disappear entirely from the dance.

From the very first notes, the Chaconne strikes like a bomb. Johannes Brahms, who transcribed the piece for piano (left hand) wrote to Clara Schumann: “On one stave, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings. If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind.”

The Chaconne consists of a musical ‘theme’ repeated 64 times, just as in Biber’s Passacaglia. These repetitions conjure up a wide range of colours, underpinned by a degree of melancholy, even in the more beatific central section, which is written in the major key. The piece remains a challenge to violinists even now: all of the techniques available in Bach’s time are used.

We know little about Bach, simply because there are few sources remaining from his time and place. But it is quite clear from the enormous amount of research that has been undertaken into him that he virtually never did anything ‘spontaneously’. A suite that ends with a chaconne in this form, instead of the much more common gigue? This must mean something, although we can but speculate at the significance, as many others have done. Some argue that Bach wrote the piece as a tombeau for his late wife Maria Barbara; others that it is intended as ‘musica sub communione’ – music to celebrate the Last Supper. The transition from minor to major, halfway through the work, signifies to them the unification with Christ following the passage of the Cross.

Whatever Bach was thinking about when writing the Chaconne, even if it turns out to be music with no underlying message, Yehudi Menuhin was certainly correct when he snapped at one of his masterclass students, after a technically flawless performance, “Keep in mind that the Chaconne is a really dramatic piece...”

Alexander Klapwijk

Translation: Bruce Gordon/Muse Translations



Liza Ferschtman, violin

The violinist Liza Ferschtman is regarded as one of the most interesting musical personalities of our times. She captivates audiences with her passionate playing and charismatic stage presence. In 2006 she was awarded the Netherlands Music Prize, the most prestigious award for Dutch musicians; an accolade underlining her prominent role in the music world both within the Netherlands and far beyond its borders.

In past seasons she has appeared with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Amsterdam Sinfonietta, Combattimento Consort Amsterdam, The Hague Philharmonic, the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra and the Dutch radio orchestras, as well as the National Orchestra of Belgium, Bremen Philharmoniker, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Malmo Symphony Orchestra, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Ulster Orchestra, Orchestre de Chambre d'Auvergne, Orchestra di Camera di Padova, Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra and the Budapest Festival Orchestra.

In recent years she has collaborated with conductors including Jaap van Zweden, Lev Markiz, Jun Maerkl, Frans Bruggen, Neeme Jarvi, Otto Tausk, Karl Heins Steffens, Stefan Blunier, Zdenek Macal, Dmitry Sitkovetsky, Thomas Sondergard and Ivan Fischer.

In early 2013 she appeared with the Budapest Festival Orchestra and Ivan Fischer, making her debut in Budapest, Montreal and the Avery Fischer Hall in New York, a concert that was described by the New York Times as 'nothing short of revelatory'. The review also praised the penetrating intensity, purity and refined beauty of her playing.

A passionate chamber music devotee, Liza performs with musicians such as Elisabeth Leonskaja, Jonathan Biss, Alisa Weilerstein, Christian Poltera, Julius Drake, Nobuko Imai, Lars Anders Tomter, Marie Luise Neunecker, Sharon Kam, Amihai Grosz and many others. She is a popular guest at festivals and venues throughout the world. Since 2007 Liza has been artistic director of the Delft Chamber Music Festival, an internationally renowned festival that invites world class musicians to present a compelling, strongly thematic programme each summer.

In 2006 Liza joined forces with Inon Barnatan to perform the complete cycle of Beethoven violin sonatas in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, a series that was highly acclaimed by press and public alike. Since then she has returned each year to perform in both the Main Hall and the Recital Hall of the Concertgebouw. In the coming seasons she will undertake various tours together with the pianist Enrico Pace.

Among her major musical activities are her solo recitals, featuring a range of works for the violin. During these concerts Liza talks in depth about the pieces and their significance. Her CD recording of solo works by Bach and Ysaÿe was

chosen as CD of the Month by The Strad. In May 2013 the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ invited Liza to perform Bach's complete works for solo violin: every violinist's musical Olympus.

During the upcoming season Liza will make her debut with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, London Philharmonic, Staatskapelle Weimar, Philharmonie Essen and the Flanders Symphony Orchestra, among others, as well as making return appearances with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, the National Orchestra of Belgium, Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, the Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra and elsewhere.

Other CD recordings under the Challenge label feature duos by Kodaly, Ravel and Schulhoff performed with her father, the cellist Dmitri Ferschtman, works by Beethoven and Schubert with Inon Barnatan and the Beethoven and Dvorak violin concertos, as well as the violin concertos by Julius Röntgen, issued by the CPO label.

The daughter of well-known Russian musicians, Liza Ferschtman took her first violin lessons from Philip Hirschhorn at the age of five. Her other, most significant teachers were Herman Krebbers, Ida Kavafian at the celebrated Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and David Takeno in London.

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This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



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