Bernard Roberts

Bernard Roberts has long been acknowledged as one of Britain's finest pianists. A particularly profound interpreter of Beethoven, his recording of the complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas for Nimbus has been given the highest praise in Europe and America as well as in Britain. He made history by recording the first 'direct-to-disc' Beethoven cycle for Nimbus in the late 1970s and then went on to record the first CD cycle (available on NI 1774).

He has performed at all the major British festivals and has been associated with the Dartington International Summer School for many years. His international career takes him throughout Europe, America and the Far East and he has given masterclasses at many leading festivals including the Van Cliburn Piano Institute in Fort Worth, Texas. Teaching and performing commitments take him on regular visits to Denmark and Germany. Masterclass weekends in his home setting of the mountains of Snowdonia are also proving very popular.

In addition to his recital work Bernard Roberts often appears as concerto soloist with the leading orchestras at home and abroad. He is well known to Radio 3 listeners and he has been the subject of a 40-minute television documentary made for BBC2 by the director Mischa Scorer. Time is set aside each year for chamber music and he particularly enjoys performing the piano trio repertoire with his sons Andrew and Nicholas.

Recorded at Wyastone Leys, Monmouth. Partitas 1 & 2 recorded 12th & 13th July 2000;
3 & 4 recorded 26th & 27th August 2000; 5 & 6 recorded 19th & 20th September 2000
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DISC ONE

Partita No.1 in B flat major, BWV 825

1	Praeludium	1.40
2	Allemande	3.54
3	Corrente	3.13
4	Sarabande	4.03
5	Menuet 1 & 2	2.58
6	Giga	2.31

Partita No.2 in C minor, BWV 826

7	Sinfonia, Grave adagio – andante – allegro	4.31
8	Allemande	4.36
9	Courante	2.44
10	Sarabande	2.56
11	Rondeaux	1.54
12	Capriccio	4.00

Partita No.4 in D major, BWV 828

13	Ouverture	6.41
14	Allemande	8.17
15	Courante	4.15
16	Aria	2.23
17	Sarabande	5.08
18	Menuet	1.49
19	Gigue	4.10

Total Playing Time **71.54**

major) becoming a complex double-fugue in its second section. The D major Gigue (partita 4) is much simpler, but in the second half, its counterpoint juxtaposes with the opening theme. In the remainder of the Gigues, the theme of the second section mirrors the first, although in the e minor one, rather than being in the dominant, it is retained, inverted, and in the tonic.

The remaining movements are not standardised. The Minuets follow discrete stylistic conventions: those of the B-flat major are distinctly Italian in texture; the D major is French whilst the G major has little in common with its designation, *Tempo di menuetto*, since its rhythmic structure alternates freely between 3/4 and 6/8. The other dance-movements included are the more conforming *Passepied* and *Tempo di gavotta*, as well as movements of a more virtuose nature, the *Burlesca*, *Scherzo*, *Rondeau* and *Cappriccio*.

On another level, the partitas provide stimulus on an intellectual level through their proportions and design, in which Bach cleverly employs numerology: the first two movements of the B-flat major partita have 21 and 38 bars, the ciphered numbers of B-A-C-H, where B (the German label for B-flat) = 2, A = 1, C = 3, H (B-natural) = 8. Another important number (one which appears constantly in the cantatas), is 14, the sum of the four letters of his name. Thus, the Sarabande of the first partita contains 28 bars (2 x 14) and the important cadence in the Sinfonia of Partita 2, also lies at bar 28. The D major *Ouverture* contains 112 bars (8 x 14) and the G major Praeambulum, in which the important fermata occurs at bar 86 (8 + 6 + 14), has 95 bars (9 + 5 = 14). Other numerological references are as follows: Rondeau in c = 112 bars; Courante in a = 56 bars; Sarabande in e = 28; Allemande in D = 28; Minuet in D = 28; Allemande in G = 28. Multiplications also occur since the product of BACH is 48 and corresponds to the Gigue in B-flat and the Passepied in G (48), the Capriccio in c and the Gigue in D (96).

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partita yields to the D major *Ouverture* of the fourth, in which Bach's assimilation of a style made famous by Lully manifests itself in a slow, dotted introduction that is followed by a quick, three-part fugue. The opening of the sixth partita also displays the same discretion, where we have an Italianate toccata in which four decorated and arpeggiated chords give way to a *Corrente*-like figure that is finally capped with a three-part fugue.

A similar variety is also found in the other movements. Although the Allemandes are written always as a serene movement in duple time, they demonstrate differentiated rhythmic and metrical structures: despite their conformity to a standard binary structure, no two Allemandes are alike. Each contains a subtle variety through its changing rhythmic and contrapuntal structure, and, in a departure from standard practice, Bach also varies their length and *affekt*. Since its original inception was as a piece for the keyboard (in contrast to the other movements of the standard suite), the structure of the Allemande is afforded a much larger freedom of movement. Comment has already occurred concerning the Italian nature of some of the Courantes. In fact, only two of the partitas (c minor and D major) contain movements that conform to the French practices of alternating metres between 3/2 and 6/4, their style chosen to suit the French pretensions of their opening movements. The remainder incline towards the *Corrente*, a more rapid movement in 3/8 or 3/4, especially in partitas 1 and 5 (B-flat and G major), where they reflect the distinctly Italianate nature of their introductions. Those of the a and e minor partitas suggest mixed forms, the first an interplay between dotted rhythms and invention-like *bicinium* counterpoint, the second a play on syncopations in quavers. A similar discretion to that used in the Allemandes is also to be found in the Sarabandes. Finally, the Gigues, distinctly diverse in metre from one partita to the next, employ the time signatures of C, 12/8, 9/16, 6/8 and 4/2. The last is unusual, since Bach used an old-fashioned metrical designation that was once reserved for triple time: a split circle. The Gigue in the first partita, distinctly modelled on the Italian Giga, is non-polyphonic in nature and consists of flowing triplets that outline the movement's harmonic progressions: four are treated fugally, with that of partita 5 (G

DISC TWO

Partita No.3 in A minor, BWV 827

1	Fantasia	2.26
2	Allemande	3.06
3	Corrente	3.20
4	Sarabande	3.40
5	Burlesca	2.32
6	Scherzo	1.19
7	Gigue	3.36

Partita No.5 in G major, BWV 829

8	Praeambulum	2.25
9	Allemande	4.34
10	Corrente	2.02
11	Sarabande	3.53
12	Tempo di Minuetto	1.55
13	Passepied	1.58
14	Gigue	4.38

Partita No.6 in E minor, BWV 830

15	Toccata	6.00
16	Allemande	3.29
17	Corrente	5.57
18	Air	1.25
19	Sarabande	5.32
20	Tempo di Gavotta	2.17
21	Gigue	6.18

Total Playing Time **72.25**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

The Six Partitas BWV 825-830

Together, the six partitas form an exciting and, for the late Baroque, unique collection of keyboard pieces. Whilst many other composers were styling their works on more up-to-date fashions, Bach was adapting older formats, assimilating a variety of styles and synthesising these into a collection that is remarkable for its diversity and originality.

Despite being published separately between 1726 and 1730, it was not until 1731 that JS Bach published his six partitas as a collected edition under the now-familiar title of *Clavierübung* (Keyboard Practice). Apart from two early Mülhausen cantatas that were written for council elections, they partitas were to become his first printed works of keyboard music, their title consciously referring to the suites of Bach's Leipzig predecessor Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722), whose own *Clavierübung* was published some years previously. It was not for another four years before the second part of the *Clavierübung* was published, this time containing the *Italian Concerto* and the *French Ouverture*; each was an assimilation of the styles and tastes of their respective countries. A third part followed in 1739, which consisted of an organ setting of the Lutheran mass and its associated hymns, before the production of the fourth and final volume, in 1742, when Bach returned to the harpsichord for the publication of his monumental work, the *Goldberg Variations*.

Although Bach's later printed works were to be received somewhat coolly, the partitas achieved a considerable acceptance amongst his contemporaries. For example, the musical scholar Lorenz Christophe Mizler von Kolof (1711-1778) commented that 'Whoever does not know how to place his fingers better will only with difficulty learn to play at the keyboard passages of our celebrated Herr Bach of Leipzig'. Johann Nikolaus Forkel (1749-1818), Bach's first biographer, went further: 'Whoever learned to play well several pieces from this work could make his fortune in the world with them'. However, the importance of the collection lays not so much in their difficulty, but in a

distinctive musical content that ranges from the elegance of the French style to the more up-to-date *style galant*.

It appears that seven partitas were planned initially; again, Kuhnau set the precedence with his publications, each of which contained seven suites. Although six was Bach's preferred number for instrumental sets (for example, the Brandenburg Concertos or the Orchestral Suites), the prefatory material to the initial publication of the fifth partita in 1730 indicated that another two were to follow.

Their keys are arranged ingeniously. Spreading outwards from B-flat major in a zigzag to c minor, a minor, D major, G major and E minor, which corresponds to the notes of the Greek hexachord. Given this pattern, one can speculate the key of the planned seventh partita was to be F major, which is incidentally the key of the *Italian Concerto* that opens the second part of the *Clavierübung*.

The partitas' movements and sequencing are oriented towards the model of the French suite, which, following the examples of such composers as Jean-Henri d'Anglebert and Johann-Jakob Froberger, had become an established genre in Germany by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Bach had used a similar format in his so-called *French Suites* (BWV 812-817), the movements of which generally followed the following order: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. However, many dance styles had changed considerably from the early French models, favouring the more popular Italian style instead. Thus, we have more exciting Courantes and Gigues, where subtlety becomes a casualty in favour of quicker models, effused with sophisticated (and, in the words of some, retrospective) German counterpoint.

Each also contains a large-scale movement at its beginning. Again, the precedence is French but the execution quintessentially Bachian. The suites of the French masters generally opened with a *prélude non-mesuré*, the harmonies of which were indicated in a series of metrically free semibreves, without any formal rhythmic pattern. The opening movement of the first partita, a Praeludium, gives way to the short Sinfonia of the second, its heavily dotted rhythms recalling the French style. A more subtle *cantabile bicinium* follows, which in turn leads to a fugal two-part invention; the a minor Fantasia of the third

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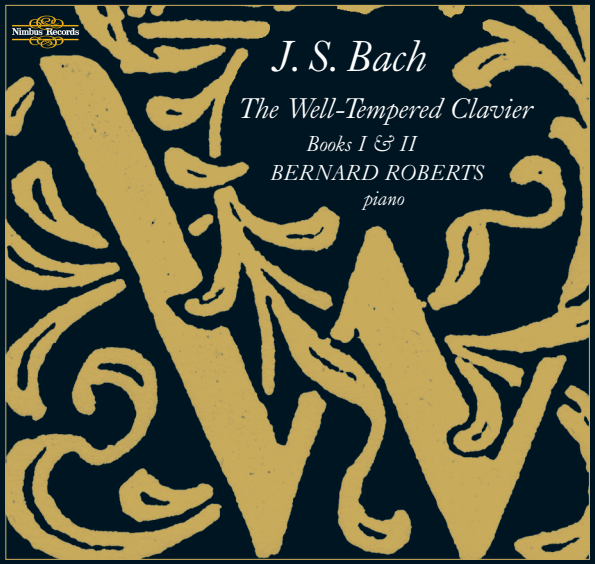

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