

PROGRAMME



Reg Charity 1118886

SALLE CHURCH ON JULY 31st 2010

BACH BY CANDLELIGHT

Agnes Langer, Violin and Igor Tsinman, Violin

Price: £1

Please note that this concert is being recorded. We appreciate your understanding.

The Music:

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Complete Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin

Sonata No.1 in G minor BWV 1001:

1. Adagio
2. Fuga (Allegro)
3. Siciliana
4. Presto

Agnes Langer, Violin

Partita No.1 in B minor BWV 1002:

1. Allemanda
2. Double
3. Corrente
4. Double (Presto)

5. Sarabande
6. Double
7. Tempo di Borea
8. Double

Agnes Langer, Violin

Sonata No.2 in A minor, BWV 1003

1. Grave
2. Fuga
3. Andante
4. Allegro

Agnes Langer, Violin

INTERVAL

Partita No.2 in D minor BWV 1004

1. Allemanda
2. Corrente

3. Sarabande
4. Giga
5. Ciaccona (Chaconne)

Agnes Langer, Violin

Sonata No.3 in C, BWV 1005

1. Adagio
2. Fuga
3. Largo
4. Allegro Assai

Igor Tsinman, Violin

Partita No.3 in E, BWV 1006

1. Preludio
2. Loure
3. Gavotte en Rondeau
4. Menuet I-II
5. Bourree
6. Gigue

Igor Tsinman, Violin

Salle Church and Bach:



There is an argument to be made that asserts that the Partitas and Sonatas for Solo Violin are the crowning achievement of Bach's entire output. There is also no doubt that if ever a Church were to be chosen in which to perform Bach then Salle must be at the top of the list. It has excellent acoustics, and a spiritual quality that defies any exact description but which is universally recognized. When you add candlelight to that environment we are taken back in time to 1720 when the works were completed, and Bach was just 35 years of age. He was still a relatively young man, and was to live for another 30 years, and at a time when life expectancy was quite low. There are those who strongly criticise young players for performing the Partitas and Sonatas in their youth, and advocate waiting until they are at least middle aged before attempting to climb the equivalent of K2. I do not think Bach would have shared that view, and while a young artists' interpretation and feelings will surely change as they obtain more experience, this in no way invalidates the hearing of a young artists presentation of this great music, especially if the artist (s) are not mere note players, but artists of genuine feelings who can tug at the heart strings.

Bach's style is regarded as keyboard orientated but in fact he was himself an accomplished violinist. What the keyboard brought to the Partitas and Sonatas for Solo Violin was textural clarity; and what the violin brought to the works was legato. There is nothing in the entire violin repertoire that begins to compare with the masterly cleverness of supreme writing that has nothing to do with conventional violin writing. The works are unique.

Recognition that other famous composers saw in the works the keyboard element is exemplified by such as Busoni and Rachmaninoff in famous transcriptions of the Chaconne and Third Partita. Indeed young students learning the works today often like to hear the works on a piano, because they can hear the colours more easily, and it enables them to then understand what to search for when returning to the violin.

So ingenious is the violin writing that the works' musical values were far from properly appreciated in the nineteenth century. The first known pedagogue to play the Partitas and Sonatas, in about 1802, was Ferdinand David, the famous virtuoso who was the dedicatee of

Mendelssohn's E minor violin concerto. However, David used the works as a teaching tool for his best students and not as supreme works requiring public performance. That was to wait until Joseph Joachim took the works into the concert hall at the end of the last century. Since then almost every major violinist has attempted the works, and if the list of those who have scaled the summit is few, with Grumiaux and Milstein arguably the greatest, many have made worthy attempts and delighted audiences around the world. The works are now beyond all question core repertoire, and equally one of the greatest challenges any violinist ever faces.

If one looks at Bach's original manuscript and the notations it appears as if the works are physically impossible to perform. The idea was that the baroque bridge was less curved than the modern one and the 'Bach bow' designed to enable the awkward figurations that Bach asked for in his notations. Today scholarship suggests that Bach wanted his 'held' notes to be interpreted and implied rather than actually played, and thus be presented as a 'spread' chord. Nonetheless the technical challenge is considerable.

The three Sonatas are seemingly quite similar, being in four movements, slow-fast-slow-fast, and with a slow third movement in a different key. The Partitas are more diverse and free in terms of overall structure, and they are very expressive. Bach's original manuscript sets out the sequence to be played, as is observed here tonight.

The G minor Sonata opens with an Adagio in the Italian style. This is followed by a Fugue; a lively dance. Then we have a calming Siciliana, before the whirl of the Finale and its semiquaver motion culminating in a breathless conclusion.

The B minor Partita is interspersed by doubles, which are variations. Conventional French manners are converted to an entirely novel interpretation. What we have here is in fact a four movement Partita with four sets of variations on the prior movement.

The A minor Sonata has a relationship to the G minor Sonata, both in the Grave and in the Fuga. This severity leads to arguably the most lyrical Andante in the entire set of works, with the melody suspended over a pulsating bass line. The finale is intense and has echo effects in the Italian style.

The second Partita is the most famous work in the set because of the Chaconne, a single movement that is the most singular example of the violin's expressive capabilities. Indeed it was Professor Anne Shih's playing of this movement in Salle, some years ago, that led to the invitation to Norfolk Concerts to present its concerts in the Church. Professor Shih has also now become famous around the world for her lectures on Bach. It is therefore most apt that Agnes Langer, who plays it tonight, is a pupil of Professor Shih in Mainz.

In the D minor Partita the balance of the work is assured by four other movements of force, emotion, and spirit. The Allemande is emotionally wide ranging; the Corrente dramatic; the Sarabande plaintive; and the Giga open and straightforward.

The C major Sonata is a remarkable example of compositional skill, and the funereal Adagio is followed by a fugue of epic proportions and invention. The Largo sets up a concluding finale of unstoppable momentum.

The set ends with the third Partita, a joyous and outgoing work of real brilliance. The starry Preludio, sometimes used as an encore, is followed by a gentle French dance, leading to a bright and airy Gavotte. Minuets, stately and courtly, give way to a sunlit Bouree, and then the work concludes with an exultant and joyous Gigue.

Note from the Executive Director:

Agnes Langer had prepared to play all six works, at 17 an enormous physical, intellectual, and emotional task that would daunt players twice her age. This challenge was also added to by our need to complete the recordings of her Bach that we began at Houghton Hall last year. After talking with Professor Shih we decided to ask Igor Tsinman, the outstanding Russian violinist who has also studied with Professor Shih to reduce the strain on Agnes by playing the last two works, themselves Everest sized if not K2 in utter difficulty, and very graciously he agreed. Agnes has already recorded these last two works, and also the A minor Sonata. We appreciate the audience consideration as to our recording.

The Artists:



Agnes Langer is a young Hungarian violinist who at 17 years of age has won numerous important international prizes and is now becoming recognised as a major international talent. She was invited to Prussia Cove IMS this year and she studies full time at the University of Mainz and its Hochschule, where she is a pupil of Professor Anne Shih. Agnes has been associated with Norfolk Concerts since she was 13 years old, and we arranged the loan to her of a fine Testore violin (circa 1780) last year in recognition of her growth, hard

work, and continuing promise. We also recorded her in concert last year, and that disc has won plaudits from critical ears. Now we are completing her recording of the solo Bach, and she will also come back to Salle later this year to play the Haydn C major violin concerto. She seems assured of a very bright future.



Igor Tsinman has played often with Norfolk Concerts, and will probably agree that he has continued to evolve in that time and is today a very remarkable young violinist. He now lives in Germany, and continues his advanced studies with Professor Shih in Mainz. Born in Moscow in 1984 from a musical family, Igor studied at the Tchaikovsky conservatory, and was a protégé of Spivakov. Now based in Germany with his pianist wife and young son, Igor has won many international prizes. He has played on violins from the Russian State collection, but today plays on a Sanctus Serafin violin of about 1740, which was awarded to him by the famed Villa Musica. (Serafin was a Venetian violin maker and a successor to Amati). There are only 30 Serafin violins in the world.

Programme Notes by Douglas Gowan (c) 2010

Web Site: www.norfolkconcerts.org

We are grateful to the wardens and PCC at Salle Church for their support, and being once again our host, and to the Columbia Foundation and CCF in London for critical grant support, and also to our Friends, many of whom went out of their way recently to gift us vital monies at a critical moment.