

# **CIACONNA**

## **BACH ON THE SOLO VIOLIN**

**Friday, March 3, 2023**

Live! at 10th & G

945 G Street NW, Washington, DC

**Saturday, March 4, 2023**

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

228 S. Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA

**WASHINGTON BACH  
CONSORT**  
*Dr. Dana T. Marsh, Artistic Director*



# CIACONNA

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### PROGRAM

Partita no. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

- I. Allemanda
- II. Corrente
- III. Sarabanda
- IV. Giga
- V. Ciaconna

Sonata no. 3 in C major, BWV 1005

- I. Adagio
- II. Fuga
- III. Largo
- IV. Allegro assai

**Rachell Ellen Wong**, violin

*Approximately 60 minutes*



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# A SONATA AND A PARTITA

By Daniel R. Melamed

When J.S. Bach prepared a wrapper and title page for his six works (the standard number in an opus or set in the early eighteenth century) for “violin without accompanying bass,” he chose the simple title *Sei Solo*—“six solos.” One reason for this brief and vague wording, which does not specify a genre or type of piece, is that the collection actually contains examples of two kinds of music for the chamber: three Italianate sonatas, and three partitas or suites, which emulated French music in consisting of a series of stylized dances. “*Sei Solo*” was meant to encompass both types while still stressing the significant number six and the status of the collection as a set.

The two works heard on this evening’s program represent one from each category: an Italianate sonata and a French partita. Bach himself might have been pleased that the selection includes one work in a major key (the sonata BWV 1005) and one in a minor key (the partita BWV 1004), given his tendency to be comprehensive and representative in assembling collections. The six solo violin works, for example, are in keys based on the pitches G-A-B-C-D-E (a six-note scale or hexachord), and there is a regular (if esoteric) pattern to their deployment in the order g-b-a-d-C-E (the same intervals between pitches going up and then down).

The sonata BWV 1005 is in the typical four movements organized as slow-fast-slow-fast. In this work, and indeed in all three sonatas in the collection, Bach reaches beyond the instrumental sonata and writes an opening pair of movements that also refers to the prelude and fugue. The first movement is constructed over a slow, pulsating bass line. (“Bass line” here is relative, of course—Bach manages to convince the listener that the solo violin is playing multiple musical lines at the same time: here a foundational line low in the instrument’s register and a higher, more melodic line above.) The same rhythmic figure appears throughout, at least until the rhapsodic ending phrases, emulating so-called pattern preludes that explore harmonies in a repeating figure.

The conclusion of the opening movement is less than strongly final, leading directly into the fast second movement, a fugue. Here, by the simultaneous sounding of two, three, or even all four strings of the violin, Bach creates the illusion of multiple “voices” on the instrument that enter in imitation of each other. As

in most of Bach’s fugues, passages in which the fugue subject (the melody heard at the opening) is present alternate with freer sections that take a musical idea from the subject as their loose starting point. This is a movement on a grand scale, with four fugal sections that thoroughly explore the subject.

The following slow movement consists mostly of a solo melody with wisps of accompaniment here and there. That melody is notable for its instrumental character—it is not the sort of tune you would want to sing. The final fast movement is a perpetual motion piece that includes the most virtuosic writing in the sonata. The techniques on display include rapid string crossing that suggests chords and harmony even though there are no simultaneous notes in the entire movement.

Genuine French dance suites came to include a widely varying number and combination of dances, but in the hands of German composers, they tended to be much more uniform. Bach’s partita BWV 1004 opens with the four that came to be standard in German suites: an *allemande*, a *corrente*, a *sarabande*, and a *gigue*. These are stylized versions of dances originally cultivated at the seventeenth-century French royal court both as social and theatrical pieces. The movements in Bach’s solo partita were never meant to be danced, but for him and for his listeners they probably retained their associations with movement, with sophistication, and with France.

Each is marked by characteristic rhythmic and metrical construction, resulting in a consistent sense of motion throughout a given dance. Every dance is organized in two parts. The first, which is repeated, gives a sense of departure and arrival somewhere new; the second, also played twice, provides a sense of return. They tend to fall in regular or at least balanced phrases, frequently with a clear sense of an antecedent statement answered by a consequent phrase. Longer phrases, especially the ones that drive towards the close of sections, often repeat the same figure or phrase at several different pitch levels, either building tension as they climb or relaxing it as they descend.

BWV 1004 does not end after the four typical dance movements. Famously—so famously that this very concert takes its title from it—a fifth movement follows in the form of another stylized dance, a *ciaccona*. This piece, whose rhythmic and metrical character closely

resembles the sarabande heard two movements earlier, is a set of variations on a four-measure phrase built over a bass line that moves down by step.

Instead of imitating artfully composed dances (like the first four), in this movement Bach invokes the kind of improvisation associated with dances based on a short repeating pattern. Every eight or twelve measures (two or three repetitions) he takes up a new kind of figuration, or violin technique, or ornamentation, or character, presenting an enormous collection of variations on the tune, bass line, and harmony of the first four measures.

By varying speed, complexity, and texture; by mixing in a section in a major key rather than the opening's minor key; by periodically returning to the opening statement; by invoking various virtuosic violin techniques; and by controlling the pacing of the whole, Bach takes the player and the listener on a journey that one would hardly suspect from the conventional four-measure phrase that opens the movement.

## Daniel R. Melamed

Dr. Daniel R. Melamed is professor of musicology at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. His book *Hearing Bach's Passions* (Oxford University Press), now in an updated paperback edition, is designed for general readers and discusses Bach's passions today against the background of their presentations in the eighteenth century. His most recent book, *Listening to Bach: the Mass in B Minor and the Christmas Oratorio* (Oxford), also for general readers, takes up issues of listening and is illustrated with many recorded examples.




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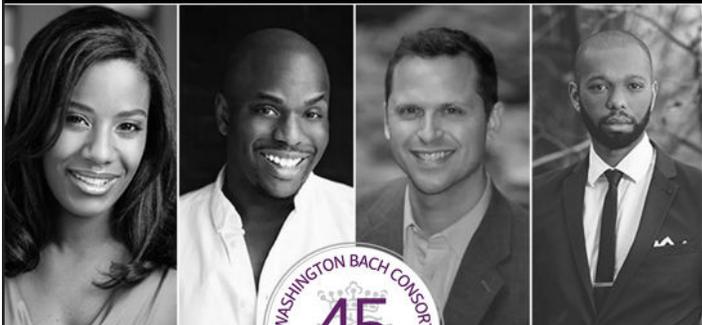
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# ABOUT THE ARTIST

Recipient of a prestigious 2020 Avery Fisher Career Grant—the only early music artist in the respected program’s history—and Grand Prize winner of the inaugural Lillian and Maurice Barbash J.S. Bach Competition, violinist **Rachell Ellen Wong** is a rising star on both the historical performance and modern violin stages. She has performed in numerous countries spanning five continents. Her growing reputation as one of the top historical performers of her generation has resulted in appearances with renowned ensembles such as the Academy of Ancient Music, American Bach Soloists, Jupiter Ensemble (led by lutenist Thomas Dunford), Bach Collegium Japan, Les Arts Florissants, and others. Equally accomplished on the modern violin, Rachell made her first public appearance with Philharmonia Northwest at age 11 and has since performed as a soloist with orchestras such as Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Panamá and the Seattle Symphony. Rachell made her conducting debut with the Seattle Symphony in 2020 when she directed Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* from the violin. She also serves as concertmaster of Seattle Baroque Orchestra.



Alongside acclaimed keyboardist David Belkovski, Rachell is co-founder of Twelfth Night, an ensemble structured to navigate all genres and instrumentation with ease, from the early baroque to the contemporary. Founded in 2021, Twelfth Night’s notable engagements include Music Before 1800, Reno’s Apex Concert Series, Arizona Early Music, and Chatham Baroque. Rachell is also a founding member of New Amsterdam Consort, a period-instrument string ensemble specializing in one-on-a-part performances of music from the Renaissance through the high Baroque.

Highlights of Rachell’s 2022–2023 season include Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with the Auburn Symphony (Washington), Beethoven Violin Concerto with the Richmond Symphony (Indiana), and recitals for UC Berkeley’s Cal Performances and Edinburgh Music Festival. Notable past concerts include performing the Sibelius Violin Concerto with the Orquesta Sinfónica in Costa Rica; Bottesini’s *Gran Duo Concertante* with the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Panama; recitals with world-renowned keyboardists Anton Nel, Byron Schenkman, and Alexander Weimann; and a sixteen-concert, four-city tour of New Zealand with the New Zealand String Quartet, which included the New Zealand premiere of Alexander Ekman’s *Cacti* for on-stage string quartet and ballet with the Royal New Zealand Ballet, and a recital in Wellington featuring works by Bartok, Schubert and Beethoven. Rachell also regularly performs as Artist-in-Residence with the Heifetz International Music Institute in Staunton, Virginia, and is on faculty at the Valley of the Moon Music Institute in Sonoma, California. Rachell is also an American Fellow of The English Concert.

Originally from Seattle, Washington, Rachell counts among her numerous awards and honors grand prizes in the 52nd Sorantin International String Competition, the International Crescendo Music Awards, the Heida Hermann’s International Competition, and Seattle’s Gallery Concert’s Next Generation Competition. She is the recipient of a 2021 Jeffrey Thomas Award; a Barbara and David Jacobs Fellowship Award and an Artist Excellence Award, both from Indiana University; and a Starling Distinguished Violinist Scholarship from University of Texas at Austin.

Rachell holds a Masters of Music degree in Historical Performance from the Juilliard School where she was a recipient of a Kovner Fellowship and a Benzaquen Career Advancement Grant. She also has a Master of Music degree from Indiana University and a Bachelors of Music from the University of Texas at Austin. Her primary teachers include Brian Lewis, Cynthia Roberts, Elizabeth Blumenstock, Kent Coleman, Mark Kaplan, Monica Huggett, Rachel Podger, Simon James, and Stanley Ritchie. Rachell performs on a baroque violin from the school of Joachim Tielke ca. 1700, and a violin made in 1953 by Carlo de March.

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#### Messiah

##### *The Greatest of Oratorios*

Sunday, March 19, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.  
Music Center at Strathmore

#### Mass in B Minor

##### *The Foundation*

Sunday, April 30, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.  
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Saturday, April 1, 2023 | St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Alexandria, VA) at 7:00 p.m.

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Mondays at St. Mark's Capitol Hill (DC) at 12:10 p.m.

Tuesdays at Church of the Epiphany (DC) at 12:10 p.m.

#### *Auf, schmetternden Töne, BWV 207a*

Tocatta, Adagio & Fugue in C major, BWV 564

March 6 & 7, 2023

#### *Jesu, meine Freude, BWV 227*

Prelude & Fugue in A minor, BWV 543  
and Tocatta in F major, BuxWV 157  
April 3 & 4, 2023

#### *Jauchzet Gott, in allen Landen, BWV 51*

Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV 548  
May 1 & 2, 2023

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Founded in 1977 by Dr. J. Reilly Lewis and now led by Artistic Director, Dr. Dana T. Marsh, the Washington Bach Consort shares the transformative power of music, with the works of J.S. Bach and other baroque composers at the core. Our professional artists inspire audiences with the highest levels of artistic excellence, enrich the cultural life through historically-informed performances, and provide educational programs in the Washington, DC, community and beyond.

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