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The Art of Classical Guitar

Transcription

BACH
BARTÓK
BERG
GESUALDO

Christophe Dejour



The Art of Classical Guitar Transcription

BACH • BARTÓK • BERG • GESUALDO

The works on this album have been selected for several reasons: firstly, their common ability to challenge the listener (and the performer!) and stir the imagination. Secondly, in line with Christophe Dejour's love of making pioneering guitar transcriptions, several of the works have never been arranged for solo guitar before. We hope you will enjoy how the unique tonal colour of the guitar brings something fresh and exciting to these well-known works.

Carlo GESUALDO (1566–1613):

Canzon Francese del Principe (date unknown)

The music of Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa is forever linked to his gruesome, yet intriguing personal history. He was probably born on 8 March 1566 in Venosa, then part of the Kingdom of Naples and today the Province of Potenza. As his family had acquired the principality of Venosa a few years prior, Gesualdo was a prince by birth. His mother died when Gesualdo was a boy, and with his elder brother Luigi first in line to becoming the next Prince of Venosa, Carlo was destined to embark on a career within the Catholic church. Fate intervened when Luigi preceded Carlo in death, making him heir to the title of Prince of Venosa and Count of Conza. He succeeded his father in 1591.

At the age of about 20, Gesualdo married his first cousin, the noblewoman Donna Maria d'Avalos. She engaged in a two-year affair with the duke Fabrizio Carafa until Gesualdo found them in bed and brutally murdered both of them on the spot. Being a nobleman, Gesualdo was never charged with any crime.

His second marriage was unhappy, and one of his sons died. Living in self-imposed isolation at his castle in Avellino and suffering from depression, Gesualdo died in 1613. His music was largely forgotten until it was rediscovered in the 20th century.

Gesualdo became fascinated with music and poetry as a young man. For a nobleman, learning a musical instrument was considered mandatory, and Gesualdo not only became a virtuoso archlutenist, but also played the Baroque guitar and harpsichord.

As a composer of vocal works, Gesualdo is particularly famous for his many madrigals, many of which employed a monodic style (a single melody accompanied by harmonies, as opposed to the contrapuntal style, where multiple melodic lines intertwine with each other) and an air of melancholy. This is also characteristic of his only surviving work for harpsichord, the *Canzon Francese del Principe*. Much of Gesualdo's music uses an almost incredible amount of chromatic tonality and abrupt modulations; the chromaticism in particular was far ahead of its time and not really seen again for almost 300 years. Gesualdo also favoured using serene sections juxtaposed by almost ferocious, cadenza-like bursts of chromatic passages, and the *Canzon* is no exception. Christophe Dejour has made an expressive and highly idiomatic arrangement for solo guitar that makes the music shine and would have lifted even Gesualdo's spirits.

Christophe Dejour: 'Gesualdo's tonal language has fascinated me for ages. For many years I only knew of his choral music, whose bold harmonics and expressive melodies intrigued me immensely. That's why the first time I heard the *Canzon Francese* being played on a harpsichord it made such a profound impact on me. Hearing Gesualdo's instrumental music was incredibly inspiring, and from that moment on, there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to try to arrange this work for guitar.'

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685–1750):

Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, BWV 903 (before 1723)

J.S. Bach was born into a family of musicians and composers, and he learned the violin and harpsichord as well as music theory as a child. His parents died when he was only ten years old, and he was sent to live with his elder brother, where he continued to study music. Following two musically formative years at St Michael's School in Lunenburg, Bach was hired as a ducal court musician in Weimar and in 1714 became its director of music.

Bach likely composed his popular *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor* between 1717–23, when he served as director of music at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen. During this period, Bach mostly wrote secular music, including this work. Originally written for harpsichord, it was considered a masterpiece even in Bach's lifetime. An early version of the *Fantasia* was written in Weimar, but no definitive version of the work exists, as Bach revised it several times. 'Chromatic' means 'coloured', and in musical terms refers to notes foreign to the key. This can easily be heard in the *Fantasia*, to which the work arguably owes its fame. It has a spontaneous, improvisational feeling with fast arpeggios flowing back and forth in chromatic chord progressions. The 'improvisational' technique was commonly used as an opening sequence in Baroque works, as it also allowed musicians to check if the instrument was in tune. In contrast to the *Fantasia*, the *Fugue* seems more relaxed and composed, but its chromatic subject provides a certain uneasiness, and the *Fugue* itself feels somewhat improvised. In fact, Bach may originally have improvised it (a skill he was famous for) and then made it more stringent when writing it down.

Christophe Dejour: 'This work has been transcribed for the guitar before, but this is my modest attempt. It's notoriously difficult (but fun!) to play and not particularly idiomatic to the guitar, as the harpsichord has a wider tonal range, so a little tweaking compared to Bach's original score was necessary. I hope you enjoy listening to it!'

Alban BERG (1885–1935): **Piano Sonata, Op. 1**

(c. 1908–09, rev. 1926)

Born in musical Vienna in 1885, Berg began composing at a young age and studied under Arnold Schoenberg between 1904 and 1910. Berg was immensely influenced by Schoenberg's music, especially with regards to atonality and serialism. He adopted the twelve-note system, which was developed by Schoenberg in c. 1921, and uses the twelve notes of a chromatic scale in a particular order.

Berg was very sensitive and arguably the most Romantic of Schoenberg's pupils. This is also evident in

his youthful *Sonata, Op. 1* for piano, often considered a milestone in early 20th-century music and probably written about 1909 and premiered in 1911. The *Sonata*'s roots are clearly founded in the Romantic period, but its modern harmonies and complex themes also build a solid bridge to the atonal music style Berg adopted from his master.

While a sonata structure traditionally has multiple movements, Berg's *Sonata* only consists of a single one with multiple themes – which, however, does use typical sonata techniques such as closely connected exposition, development and recapitulation sections. While rooted in B minor, it also employs chromatic and whole-tone scales. Berg did in fact originally intend to write more movements but found himself lacking ideas and ended up publishing the work as a single movement sonata in 1926. Perhaps Schoenberg formulated it best when he argued that in that one movement, Berg just might have said all that there was to say.

Christophe Dejour: 'When I realised the *Sonata* could be arranged for the guitar, it was like a dream come true. However, the transcription process proved to be a daunting challenge, and while working on it, I could not help but wonder if Berg also faced the same arduous amount of considerations, sketches and rewrites when composing the original work! I have strived to keep my guitar arrangement of the *Sonata* as close to the original score as possible in order to pay homage to its outstanding qualities and Alban Berg himself, while utilising the unique tonal qualities and effects of the guitar.'

The score is available from Universal Edition, Vienna (UE 36 674).

Béla BARTÓK (1881–1945):

Sonata for Solo Violin, BB 124 (1944)

Béla Bartók, one of the most significant composers of the 20th century, was born in Hungary and received his first piano lessons from his mother as a boy. By the age of ten he was already performing as a pianist as well as composing music. He went on to study composition and piano at the Royal Hungarian Academy of Music in Budapest, graduating in 1903 and only a few years later

became a piano professor at the Academy. It was during these years that Bartók became passionate about studying and collecting genuine Hungarian (as well as Romanian and Slovak) folk music, whose scales, harmonies and rhythms had a definitive impact on Bartók's compositional style, whereas his former influences were Romantics such as Brahms, Richard Strauss and Liszt.

An anti-fascist, Bartók emigrated to the United States in 1940 to avoid the Nazi domination of Europe and lived there until his death from leukaemia in 1945. The year before he died, the American violinist Yehudi Menuhin commissioned a sonata for solo violin. It has four movements, similar to a Baroque sonata: *Tempo di ciaccona*, *Fuga*, *Melodia* and *Presto*. This is no surprise, as Bartók was heavily inspired by Bach's suites and partitas for solo violin while composing the *Sonata*. Menuhin initially considered the piece to be virtually

unplayable, but eventually changed his mind, calling it a masterpiece and 'one of the most important works for violin alone since Bach'.

Christophe Dejour: 'It's no wonder Menuhin at first thought the *Sonata* was unplayable. It's certainly both complex and virtuosic, and I was worried it would be impossible to make a guitar arrangement. It was only after listening to many recordings of the work I decided that its structure was in fact logical and idiomatic to the guitar, particularly the chord progressions, contrapuntal motion and rhythmic sharpness. It's a difficult but incredibly rewarding piece to play!'

The score is available from Universal Edition, Vienna (UE 37 178).

Jeff Duckett

Christophe Dejour



Christophe Dejour was born in Copenhagen in 1968 and educated at The Royal Danish Academy of Music as well as the École Normale de Musique in Paris where he studied with Alberto Ponce. As a musician, Dejour has premiered works by Danish composers both in Denmark and abroad. He has appeared on radio and TV as well as recordings of new Danish music. He has also worked as a concert organiser on several occasions and arranged music for the theatre. In 1997 Dejour founded the guitar ensemble Trio Campanella, which received international acclaim. The trio's projects were based on Dejour's guitar arrangements of the Spanish piano masterpieces *Iberia* by Albéniz and *Goyescas* by Granados. Neither work had ever been arranged for the guitar in their entirety before Christophe Dejour took up the challenge, and both are available on Naxos (8.557064 and 8.557709). This album is Christophe Dejour's first solo recording.

Christophe Dejour's arrangements of music by Albéniz (8.557064) and Granados (8.557709) performed by Trio Campanella have won much acclaim. For this recording he has made three pioneering arrangements that further expand the instrument's repertoire and compass. Dejour's arrangement of Gesualdo's *Canzon Francese del Principe* is both expressive and idiomatic, and he explores two great 20th-century works in Berg's milestone *Piano Sonata, Op. 1* and Bartók's profound and complex *Sonata for Solo Violin* which was inspired by Bach.

THE ART OF CLASSICAL GUITAR TRANSCRIPTION

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|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | Carlo Gesualdo (1566–1613):
Canzon Francese del Principe (date unknown)* | 6:02 |
| | Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750): Chromatic Fantasia
and Fugue in D minor, BWV 903 (before 1723) | 15:22 |
| 2 | Fantasia | 7:32 |
| 3 | Fugue | 7:50 |
| 4 | Alban Berg (1885–1935): Piano Sonata, Op. 1
(c. 1908–09, rev. 1926)* | 14:03 |
| | Béla Bartók (1881–1945):
Sonata for Solo Violin, BB 124 (1944)* | 28:32 |
| 5 | I. Tempo di ciaccona | 9:51 |
| 6 | II. Fuga | 4:50 |
| 7 | III. Melodia | 7:08 |
| 8 | IV. Presto | 6:30 |

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Christophe Dejour, Guitar

All works arr. Christophe Dejour (b. 1968) for guitar 2014 4, 2015 5–8, 2016 2 3, 2017 1

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