



Tuesday | December 6 | 8pm | Longy's Pickman Hall

Martin Helmchen piano

J.S. Bach Partita No. 1 in B-flat Major, BWV 825
Prelude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Menuett I
Menuett II
Gigue

Bach Partita No. 2 in C minor, BWV 826
Sinfonia
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Rondeau
Capriccio

INTERMISSION

Bach Partita No. 5 in G Major, BWV 829
Preambulum
Allemande
Corrente
Sarabande
Tempo di Minuetto
Passepied
Gigue

Bach Partita No. 6 in E minor, BWV 830
Tocatta
Allemande
Corrente
Air
Sarabande
Tempo di Gavotta
Gigue

Today's program will run approximately two hours, including intermission.

2022/23 Debut Series Sponsors

Harriet & David Griesinger and the **Longy School of Music of Bard College**

2022/23 Season Sponsors **Amy & Joshua Boger**

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Selected Partitas, BWV 825, 826, 829, 830

Many composers have written keyboard compositions intended, at least in part, as teaching pieces—works employed in the musical education of their pupils. But no composer has written so many works of this kind that are also magnificent examples of the art of the keyboard as J.S. Bach. Much of his harpsichord music was intended for the family circle—which means that it was also “educational” music, since his second wife, Anna Magdalena, and his many children studied with him, and many of his outside pupils lived for a time as members of the family.

Of the three major sets of Bach keyboard suites, each containing six works, the set known as the Partitas (BWV 825-830) have traditionally been thought to date from the composer’s years at Cöthen (1717-1722), and to have been preceded by the so-called “English suites” (BWV 806-811), which took shape at Weimar as early as 1715, and followed by the “French suites” (BWV 812-817), the first five of which he composed for Anna Magdalena in 1722.

But it seems more likely that Bach wrote the Partitas especially for his first publication. He engraved and published them himself (and by issuing them one at a time, he could minimize his risk while spreading out the cost of production; when it was clear that the works were welcomed by musicians, Bach brought them out as a complete set of six, his “Opus 1,” in 1731, under the generic title *Clavier-Übung* (“Keyboard Exercise”), a title he later used for three other important volumes of keyboard music.

Bach’s early biographer Forkel noted that the publication “made in its time a great noise in the musical world,” which can hardly be surprising, since keyboard music of such stylistic range, expressive richness, and virtuosic challenge to the performer had surely never been published before. Along with his later keyboard publications, these partitas played the major role in Bach’s posthumous reputation until 1827, when Mendelssohn’s revival of the *St. Matthew Passion* also drew attention once again to the large body of liturgical vocal music.

The standard keyboard suite of the time consisted of four stylized dances, almost always in the same key and appearing in the same order: allemande, courante (sometimes called by the Italian equivalent, corrente), sarabande, gigue. The allemande, usually in 4/4 time, was a dance of moderate tempo. The next two dances were in some form of triple meter, with the sarabande as a slow and often contemplative movement whose harmonic stress usually fell on the second beat, while the gigue (the name is derived from the English “jig”) offers a lively close, usually in 6/8 or 12/8 time.

But for the six partitas in *Clavier-Übung I*, Bach expanded the suite through the addition of “other gallantries,” as he put it on the title page—dances not normally part of the suite, and he opened each work with a substantial introductory movement—all of different types—so as to provide an individual character to each partita.

The partitas represent Bach’s most “modern” view of the keyboard suite, possibly in part through a familiarity with the keyboard works of his near-contemporary Rameau, because they offer freer treatment of the basic dance forms that they contain, and they make greater use of *galant* elements, the fashionable tone of the new musical style that was soon to make much of his own music seem dated and old-fashioned to many.

© Steve Ledbetter

Give the gift of live performance



Visit our website to learn about the best ways to share **Celebrity Series** with your friends and loved ones this holiday.



celebrityseries.org

ABOUT THE ARTIST

With his highly imaginative, virtuosic, unpretentious style, **MARTIN HELMCHEN** has taken his place among the great pianists of his generation. Born in Berlin, he has made a series of sensational U.S. orchestral debuts, beginning a decade ago at Tanglewood, performing the Schumann Concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Christoph von Dohnányi. Following this were his debut performances with the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony at Symphony Hall and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Highlights of the current U.S. season include his debut with the Pittsburgh Symphony, Manfred Honeck conducting, today's Celebrity Series recital, as well as his third appearance with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Abroad he will appear with the DSO/Berlin and the WDR/Cologne, in addition to a tour of Japan. Interrupted by the pandemic, he will now complete his tour with violinist Frank Peter Zimmerman in venues throughout Europe, performing all ten of the Beethoven Violin Sonatas. Other notable appearances in the U.S. include the symphonies of San Francisco, Saint Louis, Houston, Dallas, San Diego, and Oregon (Portland). Internationally, Mr. Helmchen has performed with the philharmonic orchestras of Berlin, Dresden, and Vienna, Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Danish National Symphony, Orchestre de Paris, Prague Symphony, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, BBC London, NDR/Hamburg, SWR/Stuttgart, and the NHK Symphony in Japan, among many others. An avid chamber musician and recitalist, Mr. Helmchen has performed at the Frick Collection/New York, Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall (with cellist Marie-Elisabeth Hecker), San Francisco Performances, and the Wigmore Hall in London. He has also appeared at literally every major festival in Europe. Martin Helmchen won the 2001 Clara Haskil International Piano Competition at age nineteen, and as winner of the 2006 Credit Suisse Young Artist Award, he made his debut with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra under Valery Gergiev at the Lucerne Festival. His principal teachers include Galina Iwanzowa, Arie Vardie, and William Grant Naboré.

Did you enjoy the
performance?
Let us know your thoughts
Scan for our survey

