

Bach-Stokowski, *Siciliano*, BWV 1017



Johann Sebastian Bach (31 March 1685 – 28 July 1750) was a German composer, organist, violist, and violinist whose ecclesiastical and secular works for choir, orchestra, and solo instruments drew together the strands of the Baroque period and brought it to its ultimate maturity. Although he did not introduce new forms, he enriched the prevailing German style with a robust contrapuntal technique, an unrivalled control of harmonic and motivic organization, and the adaptation of rhythms, forms and textures from abroad, particularly from Italy and France. Revered for their intellectual depth, technical command and artistic beauty, Bach's works include

the Brandenburg concertos, the Goldberg Variations, the Partitas, The Well-Tempered Clavier, the Mass in B Minor, the St Matthew Passion, the St John Passion, the Magnificat, The Musical Offering, The Art of Fugue, the English and French Suites, the Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, the Cello Suites, more than 200 surviving cantatas, and a similar number of organ works, including the celebrated Toccata and Fugue in D minor and Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor. Bach's abilities as an organist were highly respected throughout Europe during his lifetime, although he was not widely recognized as a great composer until a revival of interest and performances of his music in the first half of the 19th century. He is now regarded as the supreme composer of the Baroque, and as one of the greatest of all time.

Siciliano is the first movement of Bach's Sonata for Violin and Harpsichord No. 4 in C minor. As part of Bach's six authentic sonatas (BWV 1014 - 1019), the fourth one is unquestionably progressive, not least for the inclusion of fully realized harpsichord parts (as opposed to *continuo* parts with figured bass). Stylistically speaking, this sonata is the most unusual and forward-looking: while its four movements are plainly of the traditional church sonata lineage, two of them especially would have turned early eighteenth-century heads. Opening a four-movement sonata with a *Siciliano*, as Bach does here, is certainly unusual, if not necessarily groundbreaking.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, one of the most influential conductors of his generation, Leopold Stokowski, arranged nearly 40 works by Bach for the modern symphony orchestra. Stokowski had progressive views, lurid presence on the concert stage, and innovative approach to music-making. Stokowski embraced everything modern, and synthesized music, art, and dance in ways that were new to the American audiences. His interest in sound reproduction and transmission resulted in pioneering recordings utilizing the latest technological developments. In his pursuit of the perfect balance and blends of color in the concert hall, he often experimented with the placement of players' seating by moving sections of the orchestra to different parts of the stage. Stokowski's unorthodoxy is perhaps his greatest legacy, for it was his willingness to take risks and challenge convention that occasioned his most significant triumphs.

The *Siciliano* is scored for strings and it is approximately 5 minutes long.