

ger and I got smaller and smaller.”

In Renaissance repertoires, the lute elaborates on the written lines in ensemble music. During the Baroque period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it renders the *basso continuo*, a flexible system for creating harmonies from a notational shorthand. Smith preferred to focus on solo repertoire rather than these supporting roles. Today, his 30 recordings (www.hopkinsonsmith.com) range from the sixteenth-century publications of Pierre Attaignant, the first sources of French lute music, to the compositions of Bach's prolific contemporary, the lutenist Sylvius Leopold Weiss.

A master of musical ecology himself, Smith has followed in Bach's footsteps. With the exception of two pieces, what Smith presents in his most recent collection are his own renderings—for the 13-course Baroque lute and its lower-

pitched sibling, the theorbo—of Bach's compositions. His instruments were built by Joel van Lennep, incidentally an old Somerville, Massachusetts, neighbor.

Smith compares the sonatas and partitas, when played on the violin and cello, to “the sound of a storm raging against the coast.” The technical challenges of those works and the suites—among the most formidable a performer can face—foster their own sense of time and drama. “For example,” Smith explains, “if you look at the beginning of the Chaconne [from Partita no. 2 in D Minor], the violin has a three-voice chord—and it's impossible for the violin to play the three voices. But Bach wrote it as a three-voice chord. I'm sure what he's saying is that this is what you must hear inside. It points you in a direction. What you want is beauty and gesture.”

Yet with the lute, a stringed instru-

ment that is inherently chordal and plucked, not bowed, Smith can realize Bach's notations in a more literal fashion. As a result, his versions naturally feel more pastoral and at ease than their violin and cello counterparts. Rather than waves dashing against rocky shores, the variations of the Chaconne in D Minor sound more like gentle rain on a quiet pond. On cello, the Prelude from the Suite in C Major makes the heart race with its joyful striving, the bow pivoting boldly across the strings. On lute, it is all warmth and intimacy, the fingers showering precious dewdrops.

“With any instrument, what one wants to do is find perfect union of physical gesture with musical gesture,” Smith says. “This is the lifelong task of a musician.”



Visit harvardmag.com to hear selections from Smith's recordings of Bach.

Seeing Spring

Photographs that teem with life

In 2013, office-bound in a high-stress architecture job in Manhattan, Anna Agoston, M.Arch. II '04, then an occasional photographer, rarely ventured outside. “I was let go in March,” she recalls, “and it was as though I had never seen spring.” Once she saw, she couldn't stop looking. Camera in hand and flush with time, she began taking pictures of what grew in the sidewalk cracks on her street in Brooklyn, and in the nearby parks and botanic gardens. The result is a series, hundreds strong, that examines floral features in extreme close-up: the ridge along a stem; a thistle's spikes. Agoston attributes her delight in these details to her limited contact with nature while growing up in Paris. “I was stunned by the countryside,” she says, especially during family hiking trips to the nearby forest of Fontainebleau, with its huge formations of white rock. “Maybe now with my macro lens, looking at tiny things with a lens that makes them look much larger—maybe I'm looking for the boulders of my childhood.”

Even in close-up, her plants don't look like monuments of a distant geological age. But captured in black and white, against a plain background, a bulb is made sculptural, and the curve of a leaf, architectural. The intensity of Agoston's focus abstracts these forms, making them seem durable, almost timeless.

For an earlier series, Dorm, she knocked on dozens of her graduate-student neighbors' doors during finals week and asked to take their pictures. Where that class assignment documented



Photographs 152 (left) and 60, from Agoston's untitled series

the diversity within a local ecosystem, Agoston's current project removes life from the context of habitat. (And her current subjects—numbered, but unnamed—don't object to being studied so closely, from every angle.) A tendril curls, doubling back to coil around itself; two woody twigs reach to braid together. Her true subject seems to be the mysterious elegance of adaptation, finding pragmatic solutions to unseen problems.

When her ongoing series hits 300 images, she plans to publish a third book, and one day, a single collected volume. By late February, Agoston had taken photograph 245. “The winter,” she says, “is a little slow.”

—SOPHIA NGUYEN