JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

BACH *Das wohltemperirte clavier* THE '48'

COLIN TILNEY clavichord and harpsichord

Johann Sebastian
BACH
(1685-1750)

Das wohltemperírte clavier

The Well-Tempered Clavier

48 Preludes and Fugues

Book I BWV846-869 and Book II BWV870-893

COLIN TILNEY

clavichord by J A Hass, Hamburg, 1767 (Book I)
harpsichord by J A Hass, Hamburg, 1764 (Book II)
by kind permission of The Russell Collection, Edinburgh University (Book II)

Recorded in The London College of Music on 26-31 August 1988 (Book I)
and St Cecilia's Hall, Edinburgh, on 1-6 May 1989 (Book II)
Recording Engineer TRYGG TRYGGVASON
Recording Producers BEN TURNER (BOOK I), TRYGG TRYGGVASON (BOOK II)
Design TERRY SHANNON
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Illustrations: BOX FRONT *Morning* (1785), BOOKLET *Evening* (1785), both by Jacob More (1740-1793),
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COMPACT DISC 1 [77'17]

NOTE The clavichord is a very quiet instrument. Turning the volume control to a setting considerably *lower* than normal will give a truer reproduction of the clavichord's dynamic range.

BOOK I

PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 1 IN C MAJOR, BWV846
[1] Prelude [2'51] [2] Fugue [2'38]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 2 IN C MINOR, BWV847
[3] Prelude [2'08] [4] Fugue [2'27]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 15 IN G MAJOR, BWV860
[5] Prelude [1'07] [6] Fugue [3'23]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 16 IN G MINOR, BWV861
[7] Prelude [2'10] [8] Fugue [2'54]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 5 IN D MAJOR, BWV850
[9] Prelude [1'46] [10] Fugue [2'14]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 6 IN D MINOR, BWV851
[11] Prelude [2'03] [12] Fugue [2'18]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 19 IN A MAJOR, BWV864
[13] Prelude [2'15] [14] Fugue [2'39]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 20 IN A MINOR, BWV865
[15] Prelude [1'19] [16] Fugue [6'11]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 9 IN E MAJOR, BWV854
[17] Prelude [2'01] [18] Fugue [1'44]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 10 IN E MINOR, BWV855
[19] Prelude [2'54] [20] Fugue [1'28]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 23 IN B MAJOR, BWV868
[21] Prelude [1'36] [22] Fugue [2'39]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 24 IN B MINOR, BWV869
[23] Prelude [3'32] [24] Fugue [7'16]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 13 IN F SHARP MAJOR, BWV858
[25] Prelude [1'13] [26] Fugue [2'37]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 14 IN F SHARP MINOR, BWV859
[27] Prelude [1'28] [28] Fugue [3'18]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 3 IN C SHARP MAJOR, BWV848
[29] Prelude [1'43] [30] Fugue [2'59]

COMPACT DISC 2 [73'58]

PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 4 IN C SHARP MINOR, BWV849
[1] Prelude [2'33] [2] Fugue [4'33]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 17 IN A FLAT MAJOR, BWV862
[3] Prelude [1'24] [4] Fugue [2'58]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 18 IN G SHARP MINOR, BWV863
[5] Prelude [1'55] [6] Fugue [3'10]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 7 IN E FLAT MAJOR, BWV852
[7] Prelude [4'53] [8] Fugue [2'08]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 8 IN E FLAT MINOR / D SHARP MINOR, BWV853
[9] Prelude [4'09] [10] Fugue [6'06]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 21 IN B FLAT MAJOR, BWV866
[11] Prelude [1'36] [12] Fugue [2'13]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 22 IN B FLAT MINOR, BWV867
[13] Prelude [2'50] [14] Fugue [4'08]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 11 IN F MAJOR, BWV856
[15] Prelude [1'21] [16] Fugue [1'38]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 12 IN F MINOR, BWV857
[17] Prelude [2'28] [18] Fugue [4'41]

[19] PRELUDE IN C MAJOR, BWV846a [2'20]

NOTE There is a 50-second silent pause between the end of Book I and the beginning of Book II

BOOK II

PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 1 IN C MAJOR, BWV870
[20] Prelude [3'12] [21] Fugue [2'14]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 2 IN C MINOR, BWV871
[22] Prelude [3'29] [23] Fugue 2'24]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 11 IN F MAJOR, BWV880
[24] Prelude [3'16] [25] Fugue 2'13]

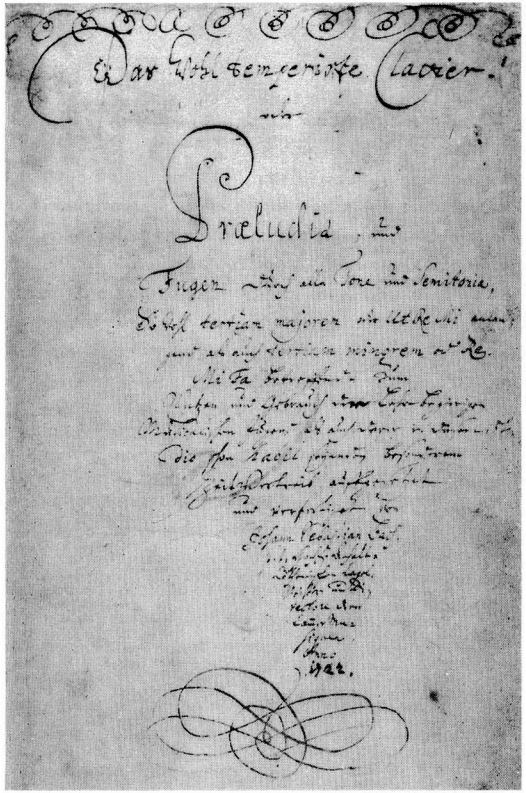
COMPACT DISC 3 [79'34]

PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 12 IN F MINOR, BWV881
[1] Prelude [5'08] [2] Fugue [2'25]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 21 IN B FLAT MAJOR, BWV890
[3] Prelude [8'05] [4] Fugue [3'05]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 22 IN B FLAT MINOR, BWV891
[5] Prelude [3'35] [6] Fugue [6'14]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 7 IN E FLAT MAJOR, BWV876
[7] Prelude [2'49] [8] Fugue [2'48]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 8 IN D SHARP MINOR, BWV877
[9] Prelude [4'56] [10] Fugue [4'07]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 17 IN A FLAT MAJOR, BWV886
[11] Prelude [4'34] [12] Fugue [3'42]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 18 IN G SHARP MINOR, BWV887
[13] Prelude [3'32] [14] Fugue [4'53]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 3 IN C SHARP MAJOR, BWV872
[15] Prelude [2'36] [16] Fugue [2'21]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 4 IN C SHARP MINOR, BWV873
[17] Prelude [4'07] [18] Fugue [3'12]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 13 IN F SHARP MAJOR, BWV882
[19] Prelude [3'51] [20] Fugue [3'06]

COMPACT DISC 4 [73'36]

PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 14 IN F SHARP MINOR, BWV883
[1] Prelude [3'14] [2] Fugue [4'53]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 23 IN B MAJOR, BWV892
[3] Prelude 2'20] [4] Fugue [4'11]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 24 IN B MINOR, BWV893
[5] Prelude [3'05] [6] Fugue [2'30]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 9 IN E MAJOR, BWV878
[7] Prelude [5'51] [8] Fugue [3'16]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 10 IN E MINOR, BWV879
[9] Prelude [2'39] [10] Fugue [3'44]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 19 IN A MAJOR, BWV888
[11] Prelude [2'06] [12] Fugue [1'39]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 20 IN A MINOR, BWV889
[13] Prelude [2'54] [14] Fugue [2'12]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 5 IN D MAJOR, BWV874
[15] Prelude [6'05] [16] Fugue [3'30]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 6 IN D MINOR, BWV875
[17] Prelude [1'57] [18] Fugue [2'11]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 15 IN G MAJOR, BWV884
[19] Prelude [4'00] [20] Fugue [1'40]
PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 16 IN G MINOR, BWV885
[21] Prelude [2'26] [22] Fugue [3'57]

BOOK I [23] PRELUDE NO 1 IN C MAJOR, BWV846 [2'40]



'The Well-Tempered Clavier, or Preludes and Fugues through all the Tones and Semitones, both as regards the tertia major or Ut Re Mi, and the tertia minor or Re Mi Fa. For the use and profit of musical young people desirous of learning, as well as for the pastime of those already skilled in this study, drawn up and written by Johann Sebastian Bach, Capellmeister to His Serene Highness the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen and Director of His Chamber Music. Anno 1722.'

The main source for the twenty-four preludes and fugues that make up Book I of the '48' is an autograph revision of 1722, now catalogued as P415 in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Berlin. Book II, another set of preludes and fugues in all the major and minor keys, was complete by about 1742, although some pieces in it can be found as early as 1726. An authoritative reading is given by the British Library's Add. Ms. 35021, which contains twenty-one preludes and fugues in the hands of Bach and of his second wife, Anna Magdalena. In addition to the several autographs, both books (and fragments of them) exist in numerous copies, of which the most reliable are those by Bach's pupils, Kirnberger and Altnikol. Simpler versions of eleven preludes from Book I appear in the notebook that Bach started in 1720 for his eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, and it seems clear that the initial project was conceived around 1720, reached a definitive form in 1722, and was later revised again more than once. Book II's genesis is harder to chart, but its text was surely finalised in the manuscript of both parts that Altnikol copied out after Bach's death. Kirnberger and Altnikol studied with Bach in the 1740s, and Altnikol in particular, who had married one of Bach's daughters and was a member of the family, may fairly be considered to have written down Bach's final thoughts on the '48'.

After Bach's death in 1750, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* continued to be known and copied in Germany, but publication had to wait until 1801, when the work was printed almost simultaneously by Simrock in Bonn, Nägeli in Zürich, and Hoffmeister & Kühnel in Leipzig. Other editions followed sporadically until about 1830. After that date the rise of the virtuoso pianist and the growing Romantic veneration for Bach's masterpiece, whose emphasis and aims were usually totally misunderstood, called forth one uncritical text after the other. Czerny's reconstruction of Beethoven's dramatic piano playing may perhaps be the best known of the type, but there were many other such 'interpretative' editions. With the work of Kroll for the Bach-Gesellschaft (1864) and Bischoff for Steingräber (1883) we reach the standards of modern scholarship: sources are compared and preferred readings given. In more recent times several excellent critical editions have become available, although the *Neue Bach Ausgabe* has not yet issued the '48' as part of its complete Bach series. A facsimile of the main Book I autograph was put on the market in 1962, and the British Library published the Book II autograph in 1980.

As its title shows, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is at bottom a didactic work. By 1720 Wilhelm Friedemann was ten years old; both he and his younger brother, Carl Philipp Emanuel, had shown a marked musical talent, and Bach naturally wished to train their minds and fingers in keyboard playing. He accordingly set about compiling a graded course of teaching material, much as Bartók did in the six volumes of *Mikrokosmos*: first some easy preludes, then the two-part Inventions, next the three-part. How the course went from there we know from an article by Ernst Ludwig Gerber in his *Lexicon* of 1791. Writing about his father, H N Gerber, who had been a pupil of Bach's in Leipzig between 1724 and 1727, he says: *"Bach promised to give him the instruction he desired and asked at once whether he had industriously played fugues. At the first lesson he set his Inventions before him. When Gerber had studied these to Bach's satisfaction, there followed a series of suites (probably first the French Suites, then the English), and finally* The Well Tempered Clavier. *This latter work Bach played*

through altogether three times for him with his matchless art, and my father counted these among his happiest hours, when Bach, under the pretext of not feeling in the mood to teach, sat himself at one of his fine instruments and thus turned hours into minutes."

By the time Gerber left Leipzig, some of the Partitas had been written and published, but the Italian Concerto, the French Overture and the Goldberg Variations lay some way in the future: mastery of the first part of the '48' was obviously at that date the final achievement for a Bach pupil. Bach probably attached equal importance to clarity of part-playing and to the singing style ('cantable Art') expressly mentioned on the title page of the Inventions. Fugue he certainly regarded as the highest branch of musical study. Little Friedemann, a gifted beginner, was set a number of quite difficult preludes but only one short fugue, and that neither hard nor particularly interesting. The use of remote keys, on the other hand, is taken for granted: numbers 21 - 23 in the Notebook are in C sharp major, C sharp minor and E flat minor, all extremely rare keys for the period.

Key was to have the utmost fascination for Bach all his life, and many of his compositions are grouped by key-pattern. In the keyboard music alone, the Partitas move outwards by increasing intervals (B flat, C minor, A minor, D, G, E minor); the English Suites descend through a fifth (A, A minor, G minor, F, E minor, D minor); and, for the Inventions, Bach tried two different systems: first, up and down (the Friedemann notebook), and then, in the later version, rising through the commoner keys from C major to B minor. It cannot be just chance, either, that the Concerto and 'Ouverture' that were to demonstrate Bach's familiarity with the Italian and French styles are in the most violently contrasted keys possible: F major and B minor. From the 15 Inventions to the 24 Preludes and Fugues is only a short step (although a vitally important one, in view of the nine keys missing from the Inventions); Bach must have thought it the ideal extension for structuring a larger collection of teaching pieces. He was not the first to use such a scheme. In 1715 Johann Caspar Fischer had published his *Ariadne Musica*, a 'labyrinth' of twenty preludes and fugues, and four years later the Hamburg composer, Johann Mattheson, faced the issue squarely with a set that took the young organist through all twenty-four major and minor keys. Modulation and tuning systems had been for centuries the subject of long and urgent discussion in all the great musical centres of Europe, but the end of the seventeenth century saw a fever of speculation about musical matters in Germany, and general dissatisfaction with the limitations of meantone tuning had led Werckmeister, Neidhardt and other practical musicians to examine and publish a number of possible alternative temperaments.

All tuning systems are based on preference. Since perfect fifths are incompatible with perfect thirds (and with pure octaves), instruments with notes of a fixed pitch (organs, harpsichords, pianos) have to compromise. Of the many attempts that have been made to distribute the various discrepancies, equal temperament favours the interval of a fifth and meantone the interval of a major third. But whereas equal temperament makes each key bear its share of the error, basic meantone accords complete purity to major thirds in the commoner keys (C, G, F, D, B flat etc) and heaps together the accumulated error in three or four remote keys that are virtually unusable because of the wideness of their major thirds. In equal temperament, all keys are equally tolerable or equally intolerable; in meantone, a few outcasts pay for the well-being of the many. These two systems are the extremes. In between stand countless modifications that seek to allow unrestricted freedom of modulation, while at the same time diversifying, and often sweetening, the thirds of equal temperament. It seems at least possible that Bach used some such modified system for his own tuning.

The fundamental and persistent received idea about *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is that the work represents a

tract for equally tempered tuning. "Tune all the major thirds wide", said Bach to Kirnberger, in Marpurg's report, and transposed the prelude of II/3 from C to C sharp, as he was later to sink the French Overture from C minor to B minor. Evidently the specific 'colours' of the different keys were of little importance to him. Yet we are not told by how much Kirnberger was to widen the major thirds, nor whether they were to be widened equally, and Kirnberger himself afterwards made an impassioned attack on equal temperament. In his *Kunst des reinen Satzes* he writes: "Equal temperament robs the keys of their variety and allows them only two characters: major and minor. Thus not only do the twenty-four keys gain nothing at all; they actually lose a great deal". Kirnberger was obviously not arguing for meantone, whose remote keys were universally rejected, but for some form of intermediate tuning that respected the 'affect' of a key like F minor, sometimes described as 'raw, brutal, cutting', without overstepping the bounds of tolerance. Clues to Bach's own practice are disappointingly vague. A statement by the authors of his obituary (C P E Bach and J F Agricola) is typically tantalising: "In the tuning of harpsichords he achieved so correct and pure a temperament that all the keys sounded pure and agreeable. He knew no keys which, because of impure intonation, one must avoid". This description cannot of course apply to meantone, but neither is it very apt to equal temperament, where no key is pure, though all may be thought agreeable enough by the accustomed ear.

The promotion of equal temperament seems an unworthy cause for J S Bach. If every key is 'out of tune' in the same way and to the same extent, there seems little virtue in writing specially in C sharp major, when a simple transposition from C major would fit the bill, unless it is to test sight-reading and fingering or to provide pieces in unstocked keys. A counter-theory — that Bach wrote the '48' to show his compositional skill in avoiding or hiding the least good intervals — has been forcefully argued by John Barnes, who gives statistical examples and even offers his own modification of the most popular contemporary tuning. We shall probably never know for certain, but it somehow rings truer that Bach should have been campaigning against meantone and for something as recent and subtle as one of Werckmeister's varied temperaments, rather than for something as antiquaated and unsubtle as equal temperament. All this is not to say that Bach ever adopted the exact ratios of Werckmeister and the rest; undoubtedly his 'well tempered' clavier was the most finely adjusted of them all, but at least his tuning, or tunings, would have interested and stimulated his colleagues, not dismayed them by setting back the clock.

The tuning used in this recording is based on historical models of the early eighteenth century. Since a common feature of all such 'circular' temperaments is the gradual widening of the major thirds as the accidentals increase in the key signature, the preludes and fugues are played here according to the circle of fifths — Book I up and Book II down. Thus, in Book I, the sequence is C (nothing in the key signature, G (one sharp), D (two sharps) and so on, while in Book II, C precedes F (one flat) and B flat (two flats). (Major keys are of course immediately followed by the equivalent minor, as in the original order). Two advantages come from this arrangement: the awkward semitone rise at the end of each group disappears, and the traditional key-affects — from C major to C sharp major (and back) — can be clearly heard in a logical progression.

So much for 'well-tempered', but what does 'clavier' mean? To the nineteenth century the '48' was piano music; Liszt played the E flat minor Prelude from Book I "like moonlight – a shimmer hangs over my playing". By 1722 Bach had definitely not met a fortepiano, and by Liszt's day two of the instruments Bach played, the harpsichord and the clavichord, had become obsolete. Fischer and Mattheson wrote for the organ, and much of the 'Well-Tempered' sounds apt on that instrument. However, if we think of the work as an exercise in domestic tuning, as well as a fund of pieces for teaching or for performance within a restricted circle — the preludes and fugues were not published until 1801 — a small house organ may seem more suitable than a large church organ,

especially as many of the latter were tuned in meantone until well into the century. Harpsichord cannot be wrong — the inventory at Bach's death lists seven house instruments – and clavichord is very likely, even if Forkel's confident assertion that it was Bach's favourite instrument now seems speculative. All three instruments seem to claim certain movements as their own but, as with *The Art of Fugue* and some of the *Musical Offering* canons, Bach cannot have considered the question of instrument important enough not to be left to the choice of an intelligent performer. (And, of course, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* will rightly continue to delight the world's pianists, who are always with us.)

Since about 1800 Western music has been content to tune its major thirds equally. Bach's theoretical achievement was much admired by his contemporaries, but the whole question of how keyboard instruments were tuned in Germany in the early years of the eighteenth century held no interest for later generations; nor did any doubt about which instrument the preludes and fugues were written for enter their heads. For them *The Well-Tempered Clavier* was a precious document of the human spirit, timeless and never out of fashion, and they studied it, as we do, in wonder. Its ninety-six pieces are so deftly characterised that each one is memorable and quite distinctive: a moment's reflection will instantly separate the two D major preludes, for instance. We expect to be charmed by the preludes — the elaborated chord sequences (I/1, I/2, II/3) and the two-part inventions (I/3, II/2, II/24), the anticipations of Schumann and Chopin (I/8, I/22) and the virtuoso fireworks (I/21, II/5, II/6) — but it is in the fugues that the real delights await us. The word 'fugue' has to struggle against images of barrenness and pedantry, the legacy of later times whose music did not fall naturally into the form, but if we are not utterly surprised and enchanted by most of these 48 fugues, then we are just not listening. Fugues with more than one subject (I/4, II/14, II/18); fugues with five voices or two (I/4, I/22, I/10); fugues in the rhythm of a gigue or a passepied (II/11, I/11); fugues in the style of a French overture (I/5); not to mention all the refinements of inversion, diminution, augmentation, stretto, or the expositional fourth voice entry in a three-voice fugue. Bach knew no rules, though he knew them all. His pupils recount that he always taught by example, never by rote, and it is above all the refusal to stop making music that singles out Bach from the rest as a writer of fugues. His is always music "Composed for Music Lovers, to Refresh their Spirits".

BACH'S 48 PRELUDES AND FUGUES, BWV846-869 and BWV870-893

by Professor Peter Williams

We will never know for certain that, twenty years after *The Well-Tempered Clavier* Book I, J S Bach did mean to call the set of preludes and fugues compiled and composed over the intervening period *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book II, any more than we can be certain he meant a late collection of fugues and canons based on a theme in *tono primo* (i.e. D minor) to be called *The Art of Fugue*. That in both cases a good copyist and/or editor intimate in the Bach circle and a pupil of the composer, thought so — and took the liberty of adding the titles — is good evidence as far as it goes, but is clearly not decisive. After all, leaving albums or compilations of music without overall titles was rather a habit of Bach — the so-called B minor Mass and the *Eighteen Chorales* are other examples — and in one case, that of the *Orgelbüchlein*, one can not be sure that the composer's eventual

title, authentic of course but added only when his circumstances had changed, reflected his original intention. If his circumstances had changed, so might any intention one can imagine him to have had when he originally began the collection: in other words *its* circumstances too had very likely changed. Almost the only titles of Bach that can be entirely satisfactory from this point of view are *Clavierübung* and *The Musical Offering*, and both are broad and without musical focus. 'Clavierübung' meant nothing specific and had been used by several composers before Bach; it was an 'anonymous' term. 'Musical Offering' was a poetic title, in the style of other 'offerings' to royalty at the time.

Now such reaches of musicological exploration may appear somewhat arcane, yet a little reflection will show that we all assume titles and title pages to be of crucial importance in our bid to understand what a great composer (or poet or philosopher) is doing in the work at hand. Hence the very familiarity of the strange name 'Well-tempered Clavier': we all use it and know it is meant to allude to some kind of 'programme' or 'agenda' of the work. It is Bach's title for Book I and on the basis of its less than unambiguous terminology ('well-tempered' = ?, 'clavier' = ?) much has been thought, written and claimed ever since. And indeed it is virtually a household phrase, at least in musical households. And yet one might think it is not the most telling phrase in the title as a whole, for though it certainly gives a clue as to where the album fits in with contemporary interests in versatility of key*, it implies nothing about the broader intentions of the music.

But other phrases in the title page might:

Das Wohltemperirte Clavier. oder	*The well-tempered clavier, or*
Praeludia, und Fugen durch alle	*Preludes and Fugues through [=in] all*
Tone und Semitonia ...	*tones and semitones [=keys, sharp or flat]*
Zum Nutzen und Gebrauch der	*for the profit and use of the*
Lehr-begierigen Musicalischen	*desirous-of-learning Musical*
Jugend, als auch derer in diesem	*Youth, as well as for those in this*
studio schon habil seyenden	*study being already practised*
besonderem Zeit Vertreib	*a special pastime*
auffgesetzet und verfertiget von	*drawn up [= composed] and prepared by*
Johann Sebastian Bach...	*Johann Sebastian Bach*

(I have kept the word-order to identify the phrases that come with a portmanteau of significances — 'zum Nutzen und Gebrauch', 'Lehr-begierigen', 'studio habil', 'auffgesetzet'.) Now it is the phrase 'Lehr-begierigen' ('curious' or 'desirous' of learning) that holds the most interest, because for a strict Lutheran, brought up with specific pieties and well-defined obligations, this phrase has a spiritual dimension. To be 'desirous of learning' is itself a gift, a talent not to be buried but to be allowed to increase and multiply; it is your duty to increase aptitudes, which were given you *ex gratia Dei*. Note that it is not for 'beginners' as such: perhaps that is an indirect reference to the fairly recent title page of the *Orgelbüchlein*, 'in which instruction is given to a beginning organist' ('anfahenden Organisten' — a rather archaic, scriptural phrase).

Part of the contextualization necessary before we develop ideas on the *Well-Tempered Clavier* lies in the precise implication to a Lutheran student of the words 'desirous of learning'. It says both more than it seems and less than it might, for a natural question to follow is, 'desirous of learning what?'. Is it to learn how to tune twenty-four tolerable keys? Perhaps, but one does not need forty-eight astonishingly well-conceived pieces to do that, much less ninety-six (two books). Is it how to read the notation of all those keys, something then new?

Perhaps, though a similar objection might apply. Is it how to play, to get the fingers on the right notes of all those keys? This is distinctly possible, though in that case one needs to be reminded that the collection needs its players to be *schon habil* ('already practised' or 'experienced'): this is no beginner's tutor, with carefully graded pieces for progressive lessons. Or is it how to compose in specific styles and with wide understanding of both contrapuntal and more figurative ideas? Now this seems to me much nearer the centre of this composer's conception of music, one that he is constantly demonstrating, whatever else he is doing. For example, whatever else *The Art of Fugue* might be shown to be doing, it provides an object lesson in how to harmonize a minor scale, which as we all know is different going up from coming down (why is that, exactly?). Only in this sense is it correct to describe Bach as an academic composer, I believe: that he is showing 'how music works', or 'this is what a composer might do with profit in this situation', or 'this is one way of achieving good results'. It belongs to a craft-conception of music, the idea that music is an art or language with its own vocabulary, grammar, logic and rhetoric, and all of us with our different degrees of talent can try to understand 'what it does and how it does it'. Of course, no such composer has only one aim, and no doubt all the answers above play their part in our understanding of *The Well-tempered Clavier*. Furthermore, no young musician at that period was only a player or a composer or a theorist or a scholar, and as is clear from, for example, the testimonials that Bach wrote for his own students, the trained musician was meant to be at home in many of these areas, playing several instruments (keyboard, brass, strings) and composing within the traditions of music as a craft. The title page of the album of *Inventions* (1723) carefully specifies that it, too, is intended for those 'desirous of learning' both how to play with good cantabile and how to compose with good themes and musical ideas (to 'obtain and develop good inventions', according to the title page). The very similarity between certain Inventions and certain pieces in *The Well-tempered Clavier* Book I (e.g. the A major Prelude) would make this dual aim commom to both collections. Accordingly, in the remarks that follow, I would like to suggest some of the compositional aims — the demonstrations of compositional genres or styles — that Bach may have had in individual pieces. Many follow quite strictly certain conventional styles of the day, many appear to be totally original, the results of free fancy, and while it is possible that some of the latter also follow conventional styles not yet identified, one can easily imagine that indeed he was deliberately mixing the known and the unknown. Learning composers would surely want that.

* In the same year the fair copy of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* Book I was dated (1722), another organist of Saxony, Friedrich Suppig in Dresden, fair-copied a keyboard work of his that modulated through all the keys – with what artistic success may be guessed.

COMPACT DISC 1

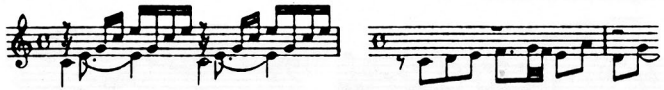
NOTE

The clavichord is a very quiet instrument. Turning the volume control to a setting considerably *lower* than normal will givew a truer reproduction of the clavichord's dynamic range.

BOOK I

1 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 1 IN C MAJOR, BWV846

The C major Prelude's identity is already clear in the version the composer wrote in the *Little Keyboard Album* (*Clavierbüchlein*) for his beloved son Wilhelm Friedemann: a beautiful progression of basic harmonies is 'opened up' in an arpeggio pattern such as many Germans keyboardists worked in their preludes. The mystery is: how can such basic harmonies be so beautiful? The beauty of logic? The Fugue, too, uses a kind of theme familiar in the period, but its working out in stretto (the theme stepping 'on the tail' of itself) is no good model, being quite beyond anyone else. Or perhaps one takes it as a unique demonstration: 'this is how stretto works: observe and learn'.



3 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 2 IN C MINOR, BWV847

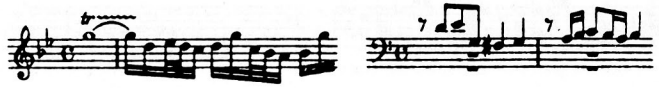
The C minor Prelude is very like the C major as to its parameters (figuration, harmonic rhythm, metre, pulse — and therefore tempo?) but to a staggeringly different effect, not least in being broken up at the end. Thus an object lesson in 'variety within similarity' or 'difference in sameness'. Its Fugue avoids stretto but plays with imitation and a very catchy tune.

5 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 15 IN G MAJOR, BWV860

The G major Prelude is very major-ish: more arpeggiation, now in triplets. Notice that the triplets are on the beat (compare D minor, below). The Fugue's jolly theme sounds rather like the 'decorated version' of a simpler theme, as if the third section of the kind of fugue in which German organists had been used to metamorphose their subjects. But its working out here is far more thorough. (Sheer length and sustained control were clearly of interest to Bach, as too to minor composers of central Germany with whose music he grew up.) Here the contrapuntal device for young composers to note was the inversus: the theme also appears upside down.

7 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 16 IN G MINOR, BWV861

The G minor Prelude is less like a prelude, more like a conventionalized dance (an allemande without upbeat) or a variation-type (its note-patterns are found in chorale-variations). Quite how is difficult to say but its Fugue seems to follow on very logically — is this mere familiarity, the preparitoriness of the Prelude, or the proportionalism of the Fugue (its tempo relates to the Prelude's?) it is a fugue full of invention and imaginative treatment of the segments of its theme.

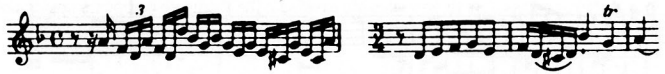


9 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 5 IN D MAJOR, BWV850

In the Prelude in D major, Bach is conspicuously achieving his dual aim: it is a very good exercise for the right hand (especially finger 4) and also for the melodious development of another catchy sequence of notes. The Fugue is amazing: I have no idea where such a theme comes from, other than unbridled fancy. As for the contrast between theme and episodes, one could find vague parallels with French, Italian or German-Italianate music, but the overall uniqueness is unquestionable.

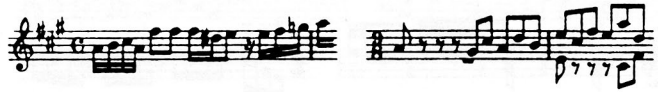
11 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 6 IN D MINOR, BWV851

Similar points might be made about the D minor Fugue: despite Bach's clear grasp of contemporary techniques (thematic fragmentation in the D major, inversus and stretto in the D minor), what he has created is a unique blend of contrapuntal invention, succinctness of form and melodic/harmonic interest. The Prelude is on paper more conventional — triplet broken chords, now off the beat (cf. G major above), familiar harmonies — but it too is a unique personal statement.



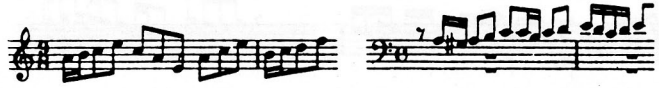
13 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 19 IN A MAJOR, BWV864

That the A major Prelude is very like the Three-part Inventions (Sinfonie) has already been remarked. The gesture of originality in the Fugue is all the more striking, therefore — who ever heard of a fugue beginning with a single note, other than by minor German organists mistaking oddity for originality? I wonder if Bach foresaw how this Fugue would end up when he began it, with its rushing off in semiquavers against the angular, rhetorical fugue theme. Pedagogically, it is a fine example of stretto, stretto inversus and contrasubjectum ornatum (themes treading on their own tail; doing so upside down; and countered with variedly ornate counter-themes).



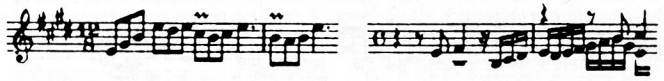
15 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 20 IN A MINOR, BWV865

A minor is perhaps the most original pairing in the book: the Prelude belongs to a general type of decorated chords (but a very original kind of 'decoration') and is succinct and tight, whereas the enormous Fugue is much more old-fashioned in theme, rhythms, square harmonies, upside-down themes, length of working-out and massive idealized coda (not playable literally by one person). Perhaps the Fugue was an older work, receiving this Prelude only when Book 1 was being compiled.



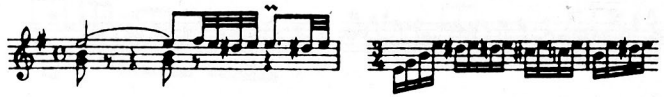
17 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 9 IN E MAJOR, BWV854

The charmingly melodious E major Prelude is an essay in melody, or 'how to extend a simple figure' (a tonic arpeggio) into a sweet melody, touchingly harmonized by itself. Compare the 'sad' version of the same technique, in the F minor. The Fugue starts with two notes (like the one note of the A major) but continues with a running pattern of notes from which the rest is constructed in a perpetuum mobile (unbroken fast movement).



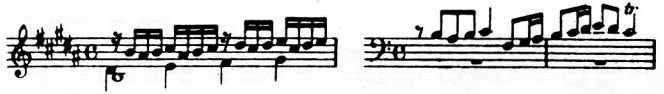
19 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 10 IN E MINOR, BWV855

The sheer scale of the E minor Prelude reminds one of the opening of several cantatas belonging to Bach's later years in Leipzig: one imagines an oboe playing the theme above the string accompaniment. Halfway through, this genre is abolished as keyboard figuration takes over and seems to run over into the Fugue. Here is another tour de force: a two-part Fugue. This is a kind of contradiction in terms, but it was one of interest to Bach (cf. the Sinfonia of the C minor Partita for harpsichord). Here it leads to the anomaly of a couple of passages in 'bare octaves', a quite extraordinary fugal gesture. Its perpetuum mobile is conceptually paired with that of the E major.



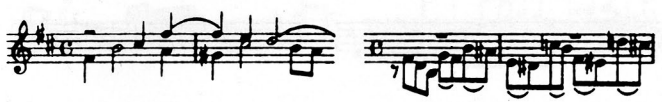
21 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 23 IN B MAJOR, BWV868

The B major is throughout light and undramatic. The Prelude melodiously develops a little pattern in principle very like the E major, while the Fugue works a subject in the rich, undramatic, classical four-part texture, the achievement of which must have been one of the aims of Book 1.



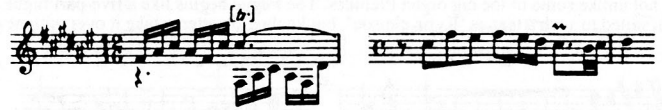
23 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 24 IN B MINOR, BWV869

The Prelude in B minor is more frankly allusive to other music: the trio style of Italian composers (Corelli in particular), now in binary form (two halves, repeated). The Fugue, despite contrast between subject and episodes worked out with 'German thoroughness', is also meant to be Italianate. Hence the tempo signs ('Andante' for the Prelude, 'Largo' for the Fugue) and that B minor plaintiveness Bach had learnt years earlier when he got to know some Albinoni and Legrenzi.



25 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 13 IN F SHARP MAJOR, BWV858

F sharp major returns to charming originality: melodiously developed patterns in the Prelude, a very pretty treatment of a 'standard *Well-Tempered Clavier* subject' in the Fugue. The playing with 3rds and 6ths surely requires — is made on the assumption of — a sweet tempering for remote keys.



27 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 14 IN F SHARP MINOR, BWV859

F sharp minor recalls or anticipates the Inventions — perhaps it was on the basis of such pieces that Bach simplified or formulated his idea of the two-part Invention. The Fugue is conceptually paired with that in F minor in so far as they both play with ambiguities: F sharp minor begins ambiguous as to metre (what is the beat in the first three bars?), the F minor as to tonality (what is the key of the first three bars?). In each case, the rest of the four-part Fugue dispels the ambiguities, with clear swinging rhythms in the first, and with clear tonal variety between themes and episodes in the second.

29 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 3 IN C SHARP MAJOR, BWV848

The Prelude in C sharp major plays with broken chords in which no 'bad' temperament would be tolerable. This too requires very good finger control, as does the Fugue where, however, certain compositional tasks probably had priority — the handling of an angular theme (not easy) and the necessity for the contrapuntal lines to match or serve it.

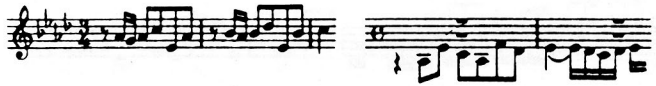
COMPACT DISC 2

1 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 4 IN C SHARP MINOR, BWV849

The Prelude of the C sharp minor is both a dance (gentle courante without upbeat) and a fantasia on a theme and a dotted rhythm, not unlike some of the big organ Preludes. The Fugue begins like a five-part fugue for voices (cf. B flat minor), suited to such a text as 'Kyrie eleison', but keyboard patterns take it over with new, restless countersubjects.

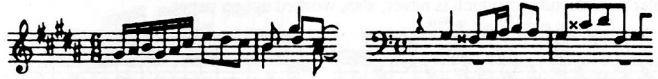
3 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 17 IN A FLAT MAJOR, BWV862

A flat major has another splendid Dance-Prelude, this time a kind of baroque polonaise. The Fugue's theme seems plain but leads to more rich four-part harmonies and another of those wandering semiquaver lines running continuously between the hands, a hallmark of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* in general.



5 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 18 IN G SHARP MINOR / A FLAT MINOR, BWV863

G sharp minor returns to the idea of 'the prelude of melodiously developed patterns', like B major. There is a melancholy here that passes into the Fugue, which also has resemblances to that in B major. Did Bach see this pair of relative keys as presenting conceptually similar music in perceptually different ways?

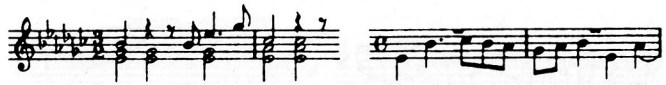


7 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 7 IN E FLAT MAJOR, BWV852

The massiveness of the E flat major Prelude, surely (one of) the most difficult pieces in all harpsichord music, is achieved in its shape: firstly a conventional prelude opening (as heard in any eighteenth-century German Catholic church), secondly a sedate Fugue on a stretto theme (also organ-like), thirdly a new Fugue combining the material from both sections 1 and 2. The following separate Fugue is lightness itself, far removed from the organ-loft, showing just how contrasted a Prelude and Fugue can be, and giving another model in continuity.

9 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 8 IN E FLAT MINOR / D SHARP MINOR, BWV853

The E flat minor Prelude is one of those rare pieces that makes good sense on all the keyboards — harpsichord, clavichord, organ, fortepiano. In genre, it may belong to the *Italian Concerto* slow movement. The D sharp minor Fugue originated, no doubt, in D minor: hence perhaps its different orthography (D sharp minor rather than E flat minor). Its mood is elusive but presumably melancholy, like certain mature organ chorales of Bach which it resembles also in its use of the theme *in augmentatione*, i.e. in double length notes that sing through the texture as they would in a chorale.

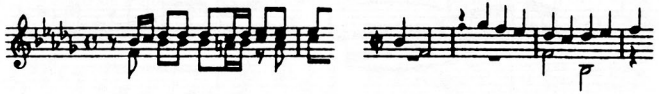


11 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 21 IN B FLAT MAJOR, BWV866

With the B flat major Prelude, the mood is not a bit elusive: a bright finger exercise, taxing but a great pleasure to play, another 'broken chord prelude' type. The Fugue confirms a suspicion one might have about Bach: that he deliberately created three-part textures that offer the player greater technical challenges that four-part. The theme is, to my knowledge, utterly original, unless we see it (cf. the G major above) as a kind of decorated variant of a simpler ricercar subject which is never, alas, worked out on paper.

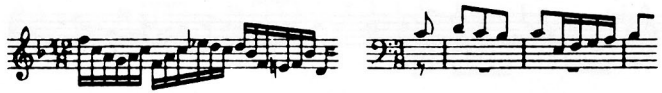
13 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 22 IN B FLAT MINOR, BWV867

B flat minor returns to the melancholy of E flat minor, though worked out here in richer and more active (less lyrical) textures. The Fugue is a straightforward five-part choral fugue, singable to a text like 'Gratias agimus' and yet, despite its roll-call of conventionally contrapuntal ideas, also with a very marked *Affect* or mood.



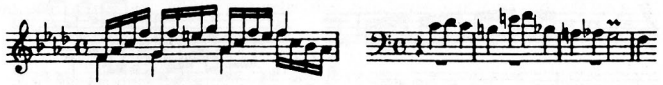
15 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 11 IN F MAJOR, BWV856

The F major Prelude is one of the Preludes 'melodiously developing a pattern', this time a dancing figure that offers the student a lesson in phraseology: sometimes the phrases are of four beats, sometimes two, sometimes one. The Fugue's subject resembles that of other German Fughetten or Versetten of the time, now worked out as a dance (passepied) with a characteristic ease that belies a clever counterpoint (stretti, decoration, constant thematic derivation).



17 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 12 IN F MINOR, BWV857

F minor too brings melancholy with it, as it would in, for example, an opera aria of the time. The Prelude is a four-part version of the preludes that 'melodiously develop a pattern', with a very pronounced character; for the equally strong Fugue, see F sharp minor above.



19 PRELUDE IN C MAJOR, BWV846a

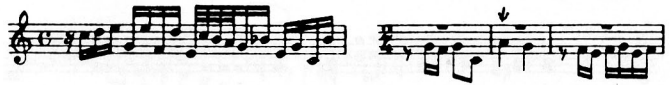
This is the earliest known version of the C major Prelude as it exists in the *Clavierbüchlein vor W F Bach*, a small manuscript book now at Yale University, USA. It is possible that in this version it represents a 'standard improvisatory harmonic device' of the time, but the fact that in the album Bach left the latter part in plain minim-harmonies (thus without the arpeggiation) suggests that he was not sure when he began it how it was to end.

NB There is a 50-second silent pause between the end of Book I and the beginning of Book II.

BOOK II

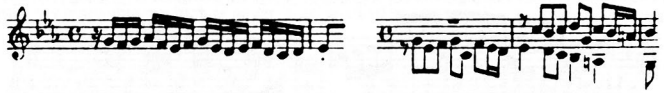
20 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 1 IN C MAJOR, BWV870

The C major Prelude announces a new world: assured, rich, mature, mysterious in its creative drive (no simple pattern-developing here). Yet it may have been composed already a mere six or seven years after Book 1 was complete, and one can only think that the sureness of it comes from a composer meanwhile extremely productive in cantatas as well as major organ works, one of which (C major, BWV545) this Prelude closely resembles. The Fugue is a chattering version of the 'continous, wandering-line countersubject' heard in Book 1.



22 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 2 IN C MINOR, BWV871

The C minor pair is more lyrical, both with a pervasive sad melos somehow not obvious from the notes on paper. Two technical devices were explored here: a very closely argued binary form in the Prelude, stretto *in augmentatione* (a theme overlapping with itself in double-length notes) in the Fugue.



24 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 11 IN F MAJOR, BWV880

The Prelude in F major is unusual in its amount of slurring: the composer clearly wanted a maximum sustained effect here (sostenuto, perhaps with the overlapping sound of notes kept down longer than notated). The pairing with this particular Fugue is also striking because both movements have a very decided swing: slow, like a big pendulum in the Prelude, perky and light in the Fugue. Thematically, the Fugue is more original than the powerful Prelude.

COMPACT DISC 3

1 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 12 IN F MINOR, BWV881

It is difficult to believe that either Prelude or Fugue in F minor were composed much before Book 2 was compiled, for this is up-to-date music, galant, with a very well developed character in both pieces. The Prelude has the gestures imitated by every German composer of the period (especially the 'sighing' figure of the opening), such as he would introduce into binary arias. The Fugue has a subject which again looks like a decorated variant on a standard Fugal theme (here C, F, D flat, E natural, F, G, A flat).

3 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 21 IN B FLAT MAJOR, BWV890

The huge Prelude in B flat major, on which the composer was still working as he fair-copied it, is equally galant but might not seem so: its long-breathed binary form tends to disguise the modernity of the little figures of which it is so full. The Fugue is another, very subtle gesture of modernity: it begins not on the tonic (B flat) but supertonic (C), and all the way through allows the subject to slip in unobserved. The style is very personal and beyond any student to imitate.

5 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 22 IN B FLAT MINOR, BWV891

Wonderfully rich and super-galant again is the B flat minor Prelude, far more contrapuntally textured than fashionable opera composers of the day were capable of, and yet holding within it a genuine melodiousness. The Fugue was a favourite of later teachers, presumably because of its contrapuntal treatment: stretto, inversus, both together, lots of parallel thirds (known as canon sine pausa — 'canons running together, not in imitation'). Like the big G minor Fugue, this one seems to have an epic quality: we have traversed much by the last bar.

7 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 7 IN E FLAT MAJOR, BWV876

'Maturity' shows itself in many forms in Book 2: in the E flat major Prelude it is a matter of lightness of touch, charm and not a note too many. It was no doubt written especially to couple with the Fugue, which is older and originated in D major. (By the way, any theories on Bach's temperament in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* have to deal with the transposition factor: some of the ninety-six pieces are known to have been composed in other keys than those here, and yet others are suspected.) The Fugue is rather vocal — in the so-called alla breve style — and characteristic of other Bach music, both in cantatas and the keyboard albums.

9 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 8 IN D SHARP MINOR, BWV877

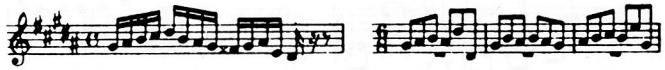
The D sharp minor pair is not known to have been transposed from D minor, but it is not unlikely. Perhaps the melancholy of both would be less distant, more forceful in D minor: such a question raises many difficult conceptual problems of pitch, temperament, association, player's subjectiveness, not to mention the LOOK of the notation. Like other mature binary movements of Bach, the Prelude is moving towards sonata form, while the Fugue serves as a fine example for any theory one might have that 'a Fugue is nothing but a series of harmonizations of a tune'.

11 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 17 IN A FLAT MAJOR, BWV886

Rather depending on its tempo, the A flat major Prelude leaves a rather massive impression behind; like the F major, it has an underlying slow swing to it, with the characteristic remoteness of key just before the end. Probably it was written specifically to accompany an older Fugue in F (now transposed to A flat) for the compilation of Book 2. This too has a tonal remoteness near the end, otherwise one might think it belonged to the same genre as those fugues in Book 1 that make a point of developing a wandering, continuous semiquaver line.

13 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 18 IN G SHARP MINOR, BWV887

One of the emotionally and technically gigantic pairs of the *Well-tempered Clavier* as a whole is that in G sharp minor. A strong, powerful binary Prelude — hard and unfriendly, or touching and sad, depending on the player — is followed by a strong, powerful Fugue in which an unrelenting, pressing-on drive is made even more pressing as chromatic countersubjects are introduced. It is difficult to believe that there are only three parts here, and not even that for all of the time.

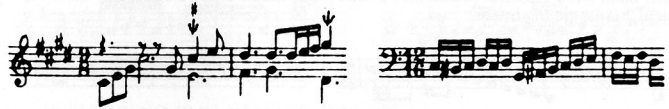


15 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 3 IN C SHARP MAJOR, BWV872

Both Prelude and Fugue in C sharp major were first notated in versions in C major: this does not necessarily mean that they 'originated in C major' or 'were meant to be in C major', since the composer's practices are not always well known, but such 'transposition' ('trans-notation'?) needs to be borne in mind. At first the Prelude sounds like one from Book 1, with its charming play of broken chords, but as it runs into its own Fugue (fughetta) written in a sublimated French manner, the player realizes that this is a more mature concept. Similarly the Fugue: it has a simple, short subject crying out for stretto treatment but here developed in a much more original, capricious, surprising way.

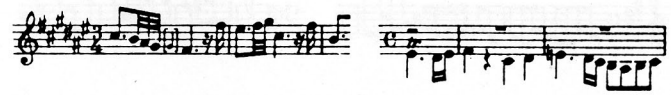
17 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 4 IN C SHARP MINOR, BWV873

Maturity in the C sharp minor Prelude is shown more by the richness of harmony implied by the three voices — implied, because three voices can not fully realize rich harmony of sevenths and ninths. The sad lyricism is very striking, but it is the modernity of the harmony — not fully realized by composers before Wagner — that gives the special quality. The Fugue, originally in C minor, is more straightforward, though it, too, develops chromatic countersubjects not unlike those of the G sharp minor.



19 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 13 IN F SHARP MAJOR, BWV882

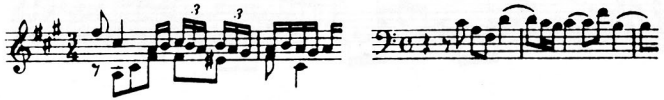
One of the most original pieces in Book 2 is the F sharp major Prelude: its rhythms appear on the surface to be French, but the thoroughness with which they are dealt is very un-French, as is the fact that it is in triple time. Notice how it ends with an ornament very like the one that begins the Fugue: this is the more striking in so far as a Fugue beginning with a trill on the leading note is very unusual (I would guess unique at this period). Having begun in this way, however, the Fugue proceeds in a very galant style, a model of modernity for a fugue composer in the 1740s (if there was such outside the organ loft).



COMPACT DISC 4

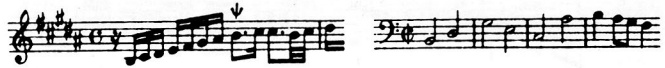
1 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 14 IN F SHARP MINOR, BWV883

F sharp minor confirms the conventional key associations of the period, or some of them (since they are never entirely consistent between one author and another): the Prelude belongs to the same family as that in C sharp minor, now with more of a solo right hand, a kind of 'harpsichord aria'. The Fugue is one long accumulation of musical tension, beginning gently, receiving new counterpoints and bringing all themes together at the end. A clear model of cumulative Fugue.



3 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 23 IN B MAJOR, BWV892

In the B major Prelude and Fugue, one sees a favourite idea of Bach's: the contrasting of complementary musical styles. The Prelude is one of the most galant pieces of keyboard music before 1750, full of details that suggest fortepiano (potential crescendi/diminuendi, melodies above accompaniment, very varied tessitura). I regard it as a masterly essay in the new styles, the kind of music some composers spent all their life trying to equal. The Fugue on the other hand has a classical theme (not unlike the C major organ Fugue, BWV547) and develops an up-to-date classical, harmonic treatment.

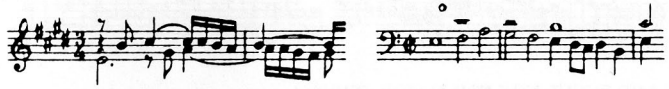


5 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 24 IN B MINOR, BWV893

The B minor also exposes certain galant ideas in the Prelude (slurred appoggiature) but more generally conforms to a long-traditional Bach genre, the two-part keyboard prelude. The Fugue has a subject of a kind learnt many years earlier by the young Bach as he got acquainted with some French organ music, but it too is up-to-date music of the 1740s, with a simple harmony driven by a highly detailed counterpoint.

7 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 9 IN E MAJOR, BWV878

It is not difficult to imagine that Bach intended the two pairs, in E major and E minor, as complements both to and within each other: each Prelude 'simpler' than the Fugue, the major pair restful and classical, the minor pair rather wild and strong, all of them confident. The E major begins like an improvisation but continues with patterns that even Bach, perhaps, would hardly improvise, while its Fugue begins exactly like several earlier works by other composers (e.g. J K F Fischer) before continuing in an extremely integrated manner. Of ALL Bach fugues, it is the most thoroughly worked-out in the sense that every note is derived from the opening theme and countersubject.

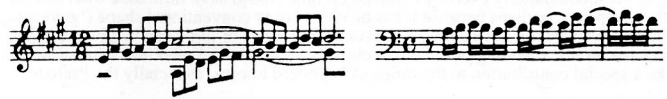


9 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 10 IN E MINOR, BWV879

The lively two-part invention style of the E minor Prelude, now developed into a large binary movement, does not prepare us for the striding, carefully articulated Fugue. It is hard to see what either could teach a young composer, except humility.

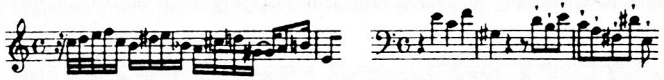
11 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 19 IN A MAJOR, BWV888

The charm of the gentler three-part invention returns with the A major Prelude, and indeed both it and its Fugue — succinct and continuous, like many in Book 1 — remind one of the earlier book.



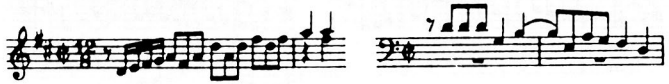
13 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 20 IN A MINOR, BWV889

On the other hand, the A minor Prelude has that extreme of character one sees elsewhere in Book 2, now in the form of a fixed, almost doctrinaire counterpoint (a chromatic theme and its countersubject) that rings the changes (upside down, contrary motion etc) but never softens its governing idea. The Fugue pretends to be old-fashioned, with a theme beginning like dozens of others, but shoots off with scales and other brilliant patterns carefully placed for the hands. Perhaps this kind of treatment of an old theme was what it was setting out to demonstrate?



15 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 5 IN D MAJOR, BWV874

If the remote minor keys are associated more often than not with melancholy, there is no doubt that D major is the glorious key of trumpets and drums, jubilation and warmth. The Prelude has the jubilation (one could imagine scoring it for a concerto ensemble, brass versus woodwind, strings running through), the Fugue the warmth. Surely one of the great pairs of both books. Technically the Prelude is interesting for its binary form (with a kind of 'development' and a kind of 'recapitulation'), the Fugue for its 'thematic metamorphoses' (the staid theme is subjected to Regerian alteration): but what are these to the excitement of the one and the immense beauty of the other?

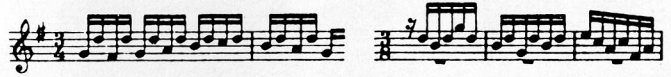


17 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 6 IN D MINOR, BWV875

Anyone listening to the incomparably exciting D minor Prelude would have little idea what trouble the movement cost the composer, perhaps because it has no clear-cut or conventional shape ('governing idea', as the Enlightenment philosophers would have called it) beyond what sense of logic can be given by sheer drive. The Fugue is another characteristic blending of the old (a chromatic subject-tail) and new (the wandering up and down). Both make a special contribution to the range of keyboard idioms, especially the Prelude.

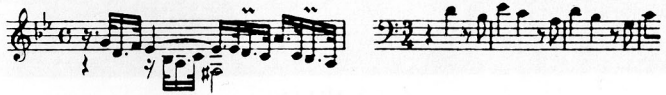
19 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 15 IN G MAJOR, BWV884

Finally, another two pairs of confident, mature works: G major and G minor. Both Prelude and Fugue in G major have what medievalists would have called 'the sweet cantilena', winsome on the clavichord, peaceful on the harpsichord or fortepiano. Both are totally original, although one might see (remote) similarities between the Prelude and other works in G major (organ or harpsichord). In the case of the Fugue, I cannot imagine where Bach got the idea of such a subject except indeed from an imagination determined to write a successful Fugue on an unlikely subject, something that sounds like a variation on a minuet for solo flute.



21 PRELUDE AND FUGUE NO 16 IN G MINOR, BWV885

The G minor has a dramatic finality in this particular performing sequence: the Prelude derived, but as remotely developed, from French rhythms as the F sharp major Prelude, the Fugue as strong, swinging and contrapuntally conceived as that in B flat minor. The idea of what a Prelude and Fugue is achieves effects unique to Bach here; no amount of instruction for talented students would lead to its becoming a standard form like the suite, for one needs a Promethean talent for it.



BOOK I

23 PRELUDE NO 1 IN C MAJOR, BWV846

COLIN TILNEY

COLIN TILNEY, one of the world's outstanding interpreters of keyboard music on original instruments — harpsichord, clavichord and fortepiano — worked in London as an accompanist and opera coach before deciding to specialise in early music. His recitals and broadcasts have been widely acclaimed, as have the many distinguished solo records he has made, each on the most appropriate period instrument available. The present recordings, Colin Tilney's first for Hyperion, continue this tradition with the magnificent clavichord and harpsichord by the eighteenth-century Hamburg builder, Johann Adolph Hass.

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