



JOHANN SEBASTIAN

**BACH**

DAS WOHLTEMPERIERTE KLAVIER  
VOLUME 1

**STEVEN DEVINE**

HARPSICHORD

# Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

## Das wohltemperierte Klavier Volume 1, BWV 846–869

Steven Devine *harpsichord*

*Double-manual harpsichord by Colin Booth (2000) after a single-manual  
by Johann Christof Fleischer (Hamburg, 1710). Tuning after Kimberger III.*

About Steven Devine:

*'[Devine] is authoritative, suave, technically dazzling and delivers immaculately  
manicured ornaments that lend brilliance and expressive introspection when required'*  
BBC Music Magazine

*'[The harpsichord's] sonorities are clear and penetrating yet never strident,  
and lend themselves both to the music and to Devine's meticulous technique'*  
Gramophone

### DISC ONE

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| 1. Prelude No. 1 in C major, BWV 846/1       | [2:11] |
| 2. Fugue No. 1 in C major, BWV 846/2         | [1:47] |
| 3. Prelude No. 2 in C minor, BWV 847/1       | [1:42] |
| 4. Fugue No. 2 in C minor, BWV 847/2         | [1:46] |
| 5. Prelude No. 3 in C-sharp major, BWV 848/1 | [1:37] |
| 6. Fugue No. 3 in C-sharp major, BWV 848/2   | [2:47] |
| 7. Prelude No. 4 in C-sharp minor, BWV 849/1 | [2:20] |
| 8. Fugue No. 4 in C-sharp minor, BWV 849/2   | [3:56] |
| 9. Prelude No. 5 in D major, BWV 850/1       | [1:36] |
| 10. Fugue No. 5 in D major, BWV 850/2        | [2:03] |
| 11. Prelude No. 6 in D minor, BWV 851/1      | [1:46] |
| 12. Fugue No. 6 in D minor, BWV 851/2        | [2:04] |
| 13. Prelude No. 7 in E-flat major, BWV 852/1 | [4:09] |
| 14. Fugue No. 7 in E-flat major, BWV 852/2   | [1:59] |
| 15. Prelude No. 8 in E-flat minor, BWV 853/1 | [2:54] |
| 16. Fugue No. 8 in E-flat minor, BWV 853/2   | [5:23] |
| 17. Prelude No. 9 in E major, BWV 854/1      | [1:23] |
| 18. Fugue No. 9 in E major, BWV 854/2        | [1:32] |
| 19. Prelude No. 10 in E minor, BWV 855/1     | [2:18] |
| 20. Fugue No. 10 in E minor, BWV 855/2       | [1:22] |
| 21. Prelude No. 11 in F major, BWV 856/1     | [1:30] |
| 22. Fugue No. 11 in F major, BWV 856/2       | [1:32] |
| 23. Prelude No. 12 in F minor, BWV 857/1     | [1:32] |
| 24. Fugue No. 12 in F minor, BWV 857/2       | [3:42] |

Total playing time

[55:06]

### DISC TWO

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| 1. Prelude No. 13 in F-sharp major, BWV 858/1  | [1:15] |
| 2. Fugue No. 13 in F-sharp major, BWV 858/2    | [1:56] |
| 3. Prelude No. 14 in F-sharp minor, BWV 859/1  | [1:18] |
| 4. Fugue No. 14 in F-sharp minor, BWV 859/2    | [2:13] |
| 5. Prelude No. 15 in G major, BWV 860/1        | [0:59] |
| 6. Fugue No. 15 in G major, BWV 860/2          | [2:59] |
| 7. Prelude No. 16 in G minor, BWV 861/1        | [1:41] |
| 8. Fugue No. 16 in G minor, BWV 861/2          | [2:26] |
| 9. Prelude No. 17 in A-flat major, BWV 862/1   | [1:25] |
| 10. Fugue No. 17 in A-flat major, BWV 862/2    | [1:48] |
| 11. Prelude No. 18 in G-sharp minor, BWV 863/1 | [1:36] |
| 12. Fugue No. 18 in G-sharp minor, BWV 863/2   | [2:56] |
| 13. Prelude No. 19 in A major, BWV 864/1       | [1:33] |
| 14. Fugue No. 19 in A major, BWV 864/2         | [2:44] |
| 15. Prelude No. 20 in A minor, BWV 865/1       | [1:13] |
| 16. Fugue No. 20 in A minor, BWV 865/2         | [4:52] |
| 17. Prelude No. 21 in B-flat major, BWV 866/1  | [1:32] |
| 18. Fugue No. 21 in B-flat major, BWV 866/2    | [1:51] |
| 19. Prelude No. 22 in B-flat minor, BWV 867/1  | [2:02] |
| 20. Fugue No. 22 in B-flat minor, BWV 867/2    | [2:35] |
| 21. Prelude No. 23 in B major, BWV 868/1       | [1:05] |
| 22. Fugue No. 23 in B major, BWV 868/2         | [2:00] |
| 23. Prelude No. 24 in B minor, BWV 869/1       | [5:35] |
| 24. Fugue No. 24 in B minor, BWV 869/2         | [6:24] |

Total playing time

[56:13]



### Johann Sebastian Bach: Das wohltemperierte Klavier, Volume 1

Das Wohltemperirte Clavier oder Præludia, und Fugen durch alle Tone und Semitonia, so wohl tertiam majorem oder Ut Re Mi anlangend, als auch tertiam minorem oder Re Mi Fa betreffend. Zum Nutzen und Gebrauch der Lehrbegierigen Musicalischen Jugend, als auch derer in diesem studio schon habil seyenden besonderem Zeitvertreib aufgesetzt und verfertiget von Johann Sebastian Bach. p. t: Hochfürstlich Anhalt-Cöthenischen Capel-Meistern und Directore derer Camer Musiquen. Anno 1722.

*The Well-Tempered Keyboard, or Preludes and Fugues through all the tones and semitones, including those with a major third or Ut-Re-Mi as well as those with a minor third or Re-Mi-Fa. For the profit and use of musical youth desiring instruction, and for the particular delight of those who are already skilled in this discipline, composed and prepared by Johann Sebastian Bach, for the time being Capellmeister and Director of the Chamber-music of the Prince of Anhalt-Cothen. In the year 1722.*

This introduction on the front of the autograph

offers a surprising amount of information with regards to the expected audience and reception of this remarkable set of pieces. It is worth examining this wording in order to better understand why these pieces were written, who they were for, what Bach would have expected as performance conditions and what the very likely reception would have been.

The concept of a 'Well-Tempered' keyboard describes a tuning system which is distinct from an older meantone or Pythagorean system which leaves some intervals (and therefore keys) unusable – certainly very discordant to the ear. Bach's description for the collection implies a circulating temperament where all keys are playable and there are many such tuning systems described in contemporaneous writings. It is hard to know exactly how Bach tuned his own keyboards. We have a few imprecise mentions of Bach's preferences, for example:

'Mr. Kirnberger [a student of Bach] has more than once told me as well as others about how the famous Joh. Seb. Bach, during the time when the former was enjoying musical instruction at the hands of the latter, confided to him the tuning of his clavier, and how the master expressly required of him that he tune all the

thirds sharp.'

Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, 1776.  
Quoted in David, Hans T.; Mendel,  
Arthur, eds. *The Bach Reader*  
(Revised, with a Supplement), W. W.  
Norton & Company, 1966, p. 261.

However, 'tune all the thirds sharp' does not constitute a plausible basis from which to reconstruct Bach's own tuning method.

Other theorists of the time represent a huge variety of tuning methods which give equally varied results. This is summed up in the writings of Johann Georg Neidhardt from 1724 and 1732. He describes a number of differing temperaments with the titles Dorf (village), Kleine Stadt (small town), Grosse Stadt (big town) and Hof (court). The Hof temperament is in fact equal temperament, whereas Dorf in the 1724 favours basic keys (C, D, G, F) and the more extreme keys are more discordant; presumably this reflected the sophistication of the music expected to be performed. Interestingly, while equal temperament was clearly regarded by Neidhardt as the most sophisticated tuning, it was clearly not to many people's taste as we have many descriptions of musicians finding the equal temperament thirds too wide to tolerate. There are even very plausible (and conflicting)

interpretations of a series of loops and swirls that appears on the top of the title page as a memory-aid for a temperament. We are left with an understanding of how taste played an important factor in the choosing of keyboard temperament.

It is eminently possible that the title 'The well-tempered keyboard' does not imply a fixed, rigid tuning but merely a light-hearted comment that playing through the whole book would require such a thing. Of course, the actual performance of all of the book in one sitting is another discussion altogether!

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach left tuning instructions to make all tonalities playable:

*Beyde Arten von Instrumenten müssen gut temperirt seyn, indem man durch die Stimmung der Quinten, Quarten, Probirung der kleinen und grossen Tertien und gantzer Accorde, den meisten Quinten besonders so viel von ihrer größten Reinigkeit abnimmt, daß es das Gehör kaum mercket und man alle vier und zwanzig Ton=Arten gut brachuhen kan. Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen, Berlin, 1753.*

*Both types of instrument [i.e. harpsichord and clavichord] must be*





*Das Wohltemperirte Clavier.*

*Praeludis, 2.*

*Fugem Invol alla Tona und Semitonia,  
Es seyl tertiam majorem als 4te Re Mi anhen;  
quint, als auch tertiam minorem ut Re  
Mi Fa überhöhet. Dem  
Nurgen im Gebrauch eines Claverginns  
Musicalischen Figuren, als auch stören in stufen Weis,  
Die für Habit gewohnt besterem  
Zweckdennmal auffgeholet  
und verfertigt von  
Johann Sebastian Bach.  
p. b. Buchh. bey  
L. B. Schuler, Leipzig.  
M. D. C. C. LXXII.  
rectore urbis  
C. G. M. B.  
figura.  
1722.*



Bach's title page for *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier* (1722)

*tempered as follows: In tuning the fifths and fourths, testing minor and major thirds and chords, take away from most of the fifths a barely noticeable amount of their absolute purity. All twenty-four tonalities will thus become usable.*

(trans William J Mitchell, New York, 1949)

To the modern eye, this is impossibly vague, but the fluidity it allows is surely the key to what a practical keyboard player would have done in the eighteenth century; instead of a fixed, theoretically accurate model, musicians would have probably had a basic system, quick to tune and modified as required. I have followed this example, basing the tuning on a system described in 1779 by Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1721–1783), now known as Kirnberger III, and gently modified so as to retain the key colours that make the harpsichord sing so much better, but eliminating any extreme dissonances.

Much has been written about Bach transposing existing pieces to complete the collection, for example the d-sharp minor fugue being originally in d minor (it is interesting that this is coupled with the enharmonic, i.e. E-flat minor, prelude). Some have taken this to mean that Bach didn't perceive a particular colour as

provided by the tuning system and therefore an all-purpose equal temperament suffices. Yet an unequal temperament is not just about the colour it imparts on the music, it is also the effect it has on the instrument and this is surely an integral part of the interpretation.

Bach's rather laborious description of what constitutes all the tonalities highlight what a novel concept this collection would have been. There are few precedents: the most obvious is *Ariadne musica*, by Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer (1656–1746). This cycle of twenty preludes and four-part fugues avoids the very extreme keys (C-sharp and F-sharp major, for example) and each composition is on a much smaller scale than Bach's. An E major fugue subject by Fischer also finds use in the second book of *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*, possible evidence of knowledge of one by the other – though which way round is impossible to determine.

The final interesting point of the title page is Bach's focus for his compositions: 'For the profit and use of musical youth desiring instruction, and for the particular delight of those who are already skilled in this discipline'. As many of the compositions in this first book have earlier versions which appear in the *Klavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann Bach*, a collection of teaching

material compiled by Johann Sebastian for his eldest son, it is fair to assume that some of the pieces were designed as exercises for technical or perhaps compositional development. The aim to 'delight' those 'already skilled in this discipline' allows us to glimpse in the composer a certain amount of desire to impress the player. Time and again, Bach seeks to provide the last word in his own view of compositional perfection: preludes range from a simple broken chordal or harmonic basis, through elegant two- or three-part inventions to the elaborately contrapuntal. They are a wide-ranging and ingenious collection of forms. The Fugues range from two to five voices with an equally huge variety of *affetti*. Just about every fugal form is covered by this collection.

The Prelude and Fugue has become so ubiquitous, it is sobering to realise that there are very few other examples before this collection. The *praeludium* (sometimes designated fantasia and sometimes toccata) was often a multi-sectional work contrasting free improvisation-like passages with fugal-type sections, but a stand-alone Prelude and Fugue appears as a new style of composition and, in *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*, Bach appears to be experimenting

with the various means of creating a satisfying structure. There are certain motivic similarities between some preludes and fugues, sometimes an identical notation implies a link, and occasionally harmonic similarities also bind a prelude and fugue together.

The collection has inspired composers and performers virtually since composition, and with composers such as Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven studying (and sometimes transcribing) pieces in the collection, Chopin and Shostakovich inspired to similar collections and many generations of keyboard players brought up studying it, it is no surprise that a quasi-religious significance has been attached to the books. *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*, however, transcends such categorisation and offers a manual of such stylistic and contrapuntal variety that it is essential to approach the music with fresh eyes and ears in order to revel in the joy of a composer seeking to delight and impress listeners and players alike.

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## Steven Devine

Steven Devine enjoys a busy career as a music director and keyboard player working with some of the finest musicians.

He is the Co-Principal keyboard player with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and also the principal keyboard player for The Gonzaga Band, Apollo and Pan, The Classical Opera Company and performs regularly with many other groups around Europe. He has recorded over thirty discs with other artists and ensembles and made six solo recordings. His recording of Bach's Goldberg Variations (Chandos Records) has received critical acclaim – including *Gramophone* describing it as 'among the best'. Volumes 1 and 2 of the complete harpsichord works of Rameau (Resonus Classics) both received five-star reviews from *BBC Music Magazine* and Steven's latest recording of Bach's Italian Concerto has been voted *Classic FM's* 'Connoisseur's Choice'. Future recording plans for Resonus include the second volume of J.S. Bach's The Well-Tempered Clavier.

He made his London conducting debut in 2002 at the Royal Albert Hall and is now a regular performer there – including making his Proms directing debut in August 2007 with the Orchestra of the Age of

Enlightenment. He has conducted the Mozart Festival Orchestra in every major concert hall in the UK and also across Switzerland. Steven is Music Director for New Chamber Opera in Oxford and with them has performed repertoire from Cavalli to Rossini. For the Dartington Festival Opera he has conducted Handel's *Orlando* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*.

Steven works regularly with the Norwegian Wind Ensemble, Trondheim Barokk, the Victoria Baroque Players (BC, Canada) and Arion Baroque Ensemble (Montreal).

He teaches harpsichord and fortepiano at Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London and is Early Keyboard Consultant to the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and Royal Welsh Colleges.

[www.stevendevine.com](http://www.stevendevine.com)





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Recorded at 24-bit/96kHz resolution

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