

The background of the cover features a series of curved, light-brown wooden strips that fan out from the top left towards the bottom right. Interspersed among these strips are several small, colorful, textured spheres in shades of blue, green, yellow, and red. The overall composition is dynamic and artistic.

**J.S. BACH**  
**CHORALE PARTITAS**  
BWV 766-768 & 770  
**STEPHEN FARR**

# Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

## Chorale Partitas, BWV 766–768 & 770

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Stephen Farr *organ*

Organ by Bernard Aubertin (2015)

### About Stephen Farr:

*'[...] rock steady rhythmic playing, crisp articulation and commanding overview. His approach is refreshingly unfussy and quirk free, and he draws on an unfailingly interesting palette of tonal colours'*

Gramophone

*'[...] Farr's playing needs no musicological justification; it sparkles and seduces in equal measure'*

Classical Ear

### Ach, was soll ich Sünder machen, BWV 770

1. Partita I [Chorale]	[0:59]
2. Partita II	[0:52]
3. Partita III	[0:57]
4. Partita IV	[0:58]
5. Partita V	[0:39]
6. Partita VI	[0:39]
7. Partita VII	[0:47]
8. Partita VIII	[0:45]
9. Partita IX	[3:32]
10. Partita X	[3:57]

### Christ, der du bist der helle Tag, BWV 766

11. Partita I [Chorale]	[0:49]
12. Partita II	[1:52]
13. Partita III	[1:03]
14. Partita IV	[0:46]
15. Partita V	[1:10]
16. Partita VI	[1:03]
17. Partita VII	[1:29]

### O Gott, du frommer Gott, BWV 767

18. Partita I [Chorale]	[1:09]
19. Partita II	[2:19]
20. Partita III	[0:59]
21. Partita IV	[0:46]
22. Partita V	[1:20]
23. Partita VI	[0:56]
24. Partita VII	[2:00]
25. Partita VIII	[1:55]
26. Partita IX	[3:42]

### Sei begrüßet, Jesu gütig, BWV 768

27. Choral	[1:13]
28. Variation I	[2:30]
29. Variation II	[0:55]
30. Variation III	[0:45]
31. Variation IV	[0:52]
32. Variation V	[1:04]
33. Variation VI	[1:21]
34. Variation VII	[1:22]
35. Variation VIII	[0:57]
36. Variation IX	[1:14]
37. Variation X	[4:32]
38. Variation XI	[1:16]

Total playing time [55:46]



**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750):  
Chorale Partitas, BWV 766–768 & 770**

With their consecutive catalogue numbers in the *Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis* (BWV 766–8 & 770), Bach's four Chorale Partitas are frequently regarded as constituting a set. However, in terms of their provenance, their strongest unifying feature is perhaps the collective mystery regarding their respective origins. None exists in an autograph source, and it is difficult to identify conclusively when they were composed. While the extant sources – particularly D-B Mus.ms. Bach P 802, the so-called Walther-Krebs manuscript – suggest they date from Bach's second period in Weimar (1708–1717), their musical style would seem to imply that they may be from an earlier period. Johann Nikolaus Forkel (1749–1818), who based much of his Bach biography on information from the composer's eldest son, Carl Philipp Emmanuel (1714–1788), lends some support to this hypothesis, describing how 'Bach began already when he was at Arnstadt to compose such pieces, with variations, under the title of Partite diverse.' Furthermore, it is not clear either for what purpose they were intended, whether they were to be performed on the organ for liturgical use,

or on the harpsichord or clavichord at home. Nonetheless, as some of the extant sources clearly indicate the use of pedals at various points, it is entirely appropriate to perform them on the organ.

The label 'partita' is also somewhat ambiguous. In the eighteenth century, it came to be employed by composers (including Bach) simply to denote a multi-movement suite. However, the chorale partita was a specific genre rooted in the seventeenth century. A set of successive variations on a chorale melody, with each individual movement given the title 'partita' or *variatio*, it was a product of the symbiosis between the Sweelinck-influenced North German organ school and the Central German tradition, whose composers normally adhered to a stricter contrapuntal style in their chorale-based compositions. The form reached its culmination in the hands of Georg Böhm (1661–1733), organist of the Johanniskirche in Lüneburg, the town where Bach completed his schooling. Although there is no firm evidence Bach ever actually studied with Böhm, it seems likely the two would have become acquainted. In any case, each of the four partitas demonstrates Böhm's influence on the younger composer, from their harmonisation of the chorale melodies to the approaches in the subsequent variations.

Recent scholarship has tended to avoid the naïve interpretations made by nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century commentators such as Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), who attempted to trace specific textual tropes in the partitas. However, the relationship between the music and text remains essential to consider on some level. The thematic links that bind the chorale partitas, with emphases on Lent, the falling of night, and Christ's promise of eternal life, might provide some insight to Bach's adoption of the genre. Together, they allude to two of the central themes that would come to define Bach's aesthetic approach: his sense of contrapuntal invention, and his reverence for the music of the Lutheran generations that preceded him.

**Ach, was soll ich Sünder machen** (BWV 770) is based on Johann Flittner's (1618–1678) seven-verse chorale, which was first published 1661. Peter Williams (1937–2016) suggested this partita may be the earliest of the four, observing that its textures are so overtly similar to the seventeenth-century variations sets by composers such as Böhm. After the initial statement of the chorale, Partita II introduces the two-part *bicinium* customarily expected as the first variation, with the right hand presenting

a decorated version of the chorale melody over a steady walking bass. Partita III sees the melody broken down into semiquavers, and is largely made up of sequential figures, while Partita IV returns to a more harpsichord-like texture, with the chorale melody superimposed over arpeggiated chords spread between the hands. Partita V showcases the left hand, with rapid descending scales under a chordal accompaniment in the right hand, before the right-hand writing in Partita VI evokes a solo instrument such as the violin, in its athletic leaps. Partita VII takes the form of an understated *gigue*, before Partita VIII injects some real energy, as the two hands seem to question and answer one another in turn. P 802 contains forte and piano markings for Partita IX, suggesting alternation between manuals. However, it is likely these were added by a later hand. Partita X is the most extrovert of the set, redolent of the violin concertos of Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) and the German *stylus phantasticus*, with the chorale theme being heard in a series of increasingly dramatic configurations.

The seven partitas of **Christ, du bist der helle Tag** (BWV 766) are based on the 1568 melody for the sixteenth-century reformer Erasmus Alberus's (c. 1500–1553) German translation of the evening hymn

*Christe qui lux es et dies*. Set in F minor, the opening chorale harmonisation is richly chromatic, before the subtle *bicinium*, which is built on hypnotic repetitive rhythmic figures. Partita III echoes Johann Pachelbel's (1653–1706) variations style, interpolating short decorative motives between the phrases of the chorale, before Partita IV introduces *perpetuum mobile* semiquavers in the style developed by Böhm. Partita V moves the chorale melody to the centre of the texture, between elaborate semiquaver figurations. Partita VI introduces another *gigue*, disguising the melody in the tenor, while the outer parts engage in the audible process of motivic development. Interestingly, this variation was omitted in some of the later sources, raising the question of whether it may have been considered outmoded by later copyists. The final partita has the melody at the very bottom of the texture, with one source (the Hauser manuscript) including the marking *con pedale se piace*, suggesting that at least in later practice, the part was expected to be played by the feet.

The text of Johann Heermann's (1585–1647) chorale, the model for **O Gott, du frommer Gott** (BWV 767), invokes God as the protector from all danger

and death. Bach's opening statement of the melody makes reference to the chorale's poetic metre, retaining its strong upbeat in a five-part harmonisation in C minor. While Schweitzer's suggestion that its eight variations correspond directly to the eight verses of the chorale is entirely suppositional, each of the partitas is based on the exploration of a singular musical idea. Partita II introduces a fragmented version of the melody in the right hand, accompanied by a repeated dactylic motive in the left. Partita III introduces the *suspirans*, a stock rhetorical figure echoing a sigh, originally employed in vocal music by seventeenth-century composers including Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643), consisting of three semiquavers ascending by step preceded by a semiquaver rest. Partita IV is another Böhman *moto perpetuo*, before Partita V hears the return of the *suspirans* – this time in longer, more fully developed passages built on full scales. Partita VI is essentially a bass aria, with a right-hand accompaniment that makes creative use of the chorale melody. Schweitzer identified the final three partitas as being particularly close to the text, with the descending melodic line of the seventh echoing a sense of impending death ('Laß mich an meinem End/Auf Christi Tod abscheiden'. 'Let me at my end/depend on Christ's death'), and the plangent

chromaticism of the eighth depicting 'the sad wait for the signal of resurrection.' The final partita is highly idiosyncratic, in its unusual fantasia-like treatment of the theme.

Comprising ten variations (as opposed to partite), **Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig** (BWV 768) is the largest of Bach's chorale partitas, and demonstrates to the greatest extent the synthesis between the techniques developed by his predecessors and the composer's own nascent artistry. P 802 manuscript contains an early version, containing just four of the variations (1, 2, 4 and 10), with the others appearing in later sources. The opening chorale statement is in four parts, before the first variation introduces a *bicinium* that would seem to have more in common with the ritornello aria form than those in the other chorale partitas. The second variation alternates between three and four-part writing, introducing some adventurous harmonic contexts. Variations III and IV largely present similar processes to Bach's other partitas, before Variations V and VI begin to hint towards Bach's increasingly ambitious sense of invention. Variation VII also deploys the *suspirans* figure, in conjunction with a pedal part supporting the imitative writing heard in the hands. With its unusual 24/16

time signature, Variation VIII introduces the *circulatio* figure, incorporating it into the chorale melody. Variation IX has the melody in the tenor, between two outer parts that closely imitate one another. The different sources of Variation X present multiple possibilities for the division of the parts between the hands and feet, with the repeated figure in the bass being heard some forty times over the course of the movement. Finally, with its *organo pleno* marking, the last variation sets the chorale melody within a sonorous, five-voiced texture. More than any other contained within the chorale partitas, this concluding movement seems to highlight Bach's increasing awareness of the sheer physical opportunity presented by the organ, and hints at the expressive explorations he would undertake in his later works for the instrument.

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*With thanks to Paul and Joanna Griffiths  
for their generous assistance  
in making this recording.*





### Stephen Farr (organ)

Stephen Farr's career as a soloist and ensemble and continuo player has taken him throughout Europe, to North and South America, and to Australia. He has performed with some of the world's leading ensembles and conductors, and has appeared in venues including the Berlin Philharmonie (where he performed with the Berlin Philharmonic in the world premiere of Jonathan Harvey's *Weltethos* under Sir Simon Rattle), the Royal Festival Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Symphony Hall Birmingham, Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Notre Dame de Paris, and the Royal Albert Hall. He appears frequently at the BBC Proms: he gave a solo recital in the 2011 season, including the world premiere of Judith Bingham's *The Everlasting Crown*, and made a concerto appearance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo in the 2015 season. He is Director of Music at St Paul's Knightsbridge, and teaches organ at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In 2017 he succeeded Patrick Russill as Chief Examiner of the Royal College of Organists.

Stephen Farr was Organ Scholar of Clare College, Cambridge, graduating

with a double first in Music and an MPhil in musicology as a postgraduate student of John Butt's. He then held a number of cathedral appointments before embarking on a freelance career. In 2014 he completed a PhD on the organ works of Judith Bingham. A prize-winner at international competition level, he has an established reputation as one of the leading recitalists of his generation, with an impressive stylistic grasp of a broad range of repertoire and a particular commitment to contemporary music. His extensive and wide-ranging discography for Resonus encompasses music from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century – recent releases include the complete organ works of Kenneth Leighton and works by J.S. Bach and Judith Bingham – and has received unanimous critical acclaim.

[www.stephenfarr.co.uk](http://www.stephenfarr.co.uk)



Organ by Bernard Aubertin, 2015  
For a private residence in Fairwarp, East Sussex, UK

### Pedale

1. Bourdon	16
2. Octave	8
3. Bourdon	8
4. Prestant	4
5. Flute	4
6. Mixture	II/2
7. Buzène	16
8. Trompette	8

### Positif (I)

9. Bourdon	8
10. Montre	4
11. Nazard	3
12. Flageolet	2
13. Tierce	1 3/5
14. Mixture	II
15. Voix Humaine	8

### Grand Orgue (II)

16. Bourdon	16
17. Montre	8
18. Bourdon	8
19. Traversiere	8
20. Prestant	4
21. Flute	4
22. Doublette	2
23. Mixture	IV
24. Trompette	8

### Recit (III)

25. Flute	8
26. Suavial	8
27. Unda Maris	8
28. Flute	4
29. Quinte	1 1/3
30. Dulcimeau	8

### Couplers

Positif to Grand Orgue  
Recit to Grand Orgue  
Grand Orgue to Pedale

Tuning: Young 1800  
Pitch: A=440

### Registrations

#### Ach, was soll ich Sünder machen, BWV 770

1. 18
2. RH 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 / LH 16, 17, 18, 25, 28, 30 / III-II
3. 16, 25 / III-II (played up 8ve)
4. 9
5. RH 16 (played up 8ve) / LH 25, 28
6. RH 21 (played down 8ve) / LH 9
7. 25, 26
8. 9, 12
9. piano 9 / forte 9, 19 / I-II
10. 9, 10, 12 17, 20, 22, 23 / I-II

#### Christ, der du bist der helle Tag, BWV 766

11. 9, 10, 16, 17, 18 / I-II
12. RH 19 30 / III-II / LH 9
13. 21, 9 / I-II
14. 25
15. 9, 10
16. 21
17. 2, 4 / 9, 10, 11, 12 14, 24 / II-Ped

#### O Gott, du frommer Gott, BWV 767

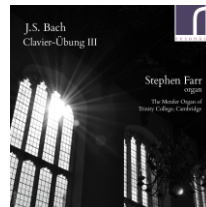
18. 9, 17, 18 / I-II
19. piano 18, 21 / forte 9, 10
20. 17, 20, 22, 29 / III-II
21. 16 (played up 8ve)
22. 17, 18
23. RH 17, 20 / LH 9, 10, 11, 15
24. 18, 21
25. 28
26. opening forte 17, 18, 20 / piano 9
  - b. 36 forte +10 / piano 25, 30
  - b. 45 +22, +23

#### Sei gegrüßet, Jesu gütig, BWV 768

27. 3, 9
28. RH 9, 10, 11 / LH 16, 17, 21
29. 18 (played up 8ve)
30. 25, 28
31. 9, 10
32. RH 18 / LH 25, 28, 30
33. 26
34. 3, 4 / 10 (played down 8ve)
35. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 / 9, 10, 14
36. RH 28, 29 (played down 8ve) / LH 17, 18 / Ped 4, 5 (played down 8ve)
37. RH 18, 19 – cantus firmus 25, 28, 30 / LH 9 / Ped 1, 3
38. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 16, 17, 20, 22, 23 / I-II



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Johann Sebastian Bach.