

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
The Well-Tempered Clavier
ALBERT LANDA piano





JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH 1685-1750

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I

CD1

No. 1 in C major, BWV846

1	Prelude	2'19
2	Fugue	1'57

No. 2 in C minor, BWV847

3	Prelude	1'28
4	Fugue	1'27

No. 3 in C-sharp major, BWV848

5	Prelude	1'15
6	Fugue	2'14

No. 4 in C-sharp minor, BWV849

7	Prelude	2'30
8	Fugue	4'25

No. 5 in D major, BWV850

9	Prelude	1'09
10	Fugue	2'21

No. 6 in D minor, BWV851

11	Prelude	1'26
12	Fugue	2'15

No. 7 in E-flat major, BWV852

13	Prelude	4'03
14	Fugue	1'33

No. 8 in D-sharp minor, BWV853

15	Prelude	3'31
16	Fugue	6'13

No. 9 in E major, BWV854

17	Prelude	1'15
18	Fugue	1'05

No. 10 in E minor, BWV855

19	Prelude	2'17
20	Fugue	1'03

No. 11 in F major, BWV856

21	Prelude	0'58
22	Fugue	1'07

No. 12 in F minor, BWV857

23	Prelude	1'53
24	Fugue	4'32

CD2

No. 13 in F-sharp major, BWV858

1	Prelude	1'23
2	Fugue	2'11

No. 14 in F-sharp minor, BWV859

3	Prelude	1'01
4	Fugue	2'30

No. 15 in G major, BWV860

5	Prelude	0'51
6	Fugue	2'34

No. 16 in G minor, BWV861

7	Prelude	1'42
8	Fugue	2'01

No. 17 in A-flat major, BWV862

9	Prelude	1'13
10	Fugue	2'27

No. 18 in G-sharp minor, BWV863

11	Prelude	1'19
12	Fugue	2'38

No. 19 in A major, BWV864

13	Prelude	1'30
14	Fugue	2'14

No. 20 in A minor, BWV865

15	Prelude	1'01
16	Fugue	5'28

No. 21 in B-flat major, BWV666

17	Prelude	1'25
18	Fugue	1'55

No. 22 in B-flat minor, BWV867

19	Prelude	2'57
20	Fugue	2'48

No. 23 in B major, BWV868

21	Prelude	1'08
22	Fugue	2'16

No. 24 in B minor, BWV869

23	Prelude	5'26
24	Fugue	6'48

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II**CD3****No. 1 in C major, BWV870**

1	Prelude	2'28
2	Fugue	1'26

No. 2 in C minor, BWV871

3	Prelude	2'04
4	Fugue	2'03

No. 3 in C-sharp major, BWV872

5	Prelude	1'38
6	Fugue	1'48

No. 4 in C-sharp minor, BWV873

7	Prelude	4'00
8	Fugue	2'01

No. 5 in D major, BWV874

9	Prelude	4'59
10	Fugue	3'36

No. 6 in D minor, BWV875

11	Prelude	1'30
12	Fugue	1'53

No. 7 in E-flat major, BWV876

13	Prelude	2'15
14	Fugue	1'52

No. 8 in E-flat / D-sharp minor, BWV877

15	Prelude	3'10
16	Fugue	3'25

No. 9 in E major, BWV878

17	Prelude	4'32
18	Fugue	3'41

No. 10 in E minor, BWV879

19	Prelude	3'12
20	Fugue	2'42

No. 11 in F major, BWV880

21	Prelude	3'28
22	Fugue	1'33

No. 12 in F minor, BWV881

23	Prelude	4'44
24	Fugue	1'42

CD4**No. 13 in F-sharp major, BWV882**

1	Prelude	3'10
2	Fugue	2'52

No. 14 in F-sharp minor, BWV883

3	Prelude	2'48
4	Fugue	4'56

No. 15 in G major, BWV884

5	Prelude	2'18
6	Fugue	1'05

No. 16 in G minor, BWV885

7	Prelude	3'29
8	Fugue	3'35

No. 17 in A-flat major, BWV886

9	Prelude	3'33
10	Fugue	2'49

No. 18 in G-sharp minor, BWV887

11	Prelude	3'31
12	Fugue	5'06

No. 19 in A major, BWV888

13	Prelude	1'35
14	Fugue	1'29

No. 20 in A minor, BWV889

15	Prelude	4'08
16	Fugue	1'49

No. 21 in B-flat major, BWV890

17	Prelude	6'07
18	Fugue	1'59

No. 22 in B-flat minor, BWV891

19	Prelude	2'44
20	Fugue	4'26

No. 23 in B major, BWV892

21	Prelude	2'02
22	Fugue	3'20

No. 24 in B minor, BWV893

23	Prelude	2'12
24	Fugue	1'35

When, in 1720, his beloved first-born son Friedemann was no more than nine years old, Sebastian Bach began a little miscellany of pieces for him to play and learn from, calling it 'little keyboard album'. Some two or three years later he then compiled another volume, this time much larger and consisting of 48 pieces, some old but mostly new, arranged systematically as a set of 24 preludes and fugues, starting at C major and going up by step on the keyboard, major then minor. Some pieces composed earlier had to be transposed to meet this schedule, and many of the preludes were already there in Friedemann's little album. The volume of music resulting from the enlarged plan, though drawing throughout on musical conventions of the day, and for all we know serving Friedemann merely as study-music, is one of unparalleled accomplishment, totally original. Still today, for both players and composers, it stands as nothing less than a musical Counsel of Perfection.

This is the first of the two books now called 'The Well-Tempered Clavier' or, particularly in Britain, 'The 48'. Not only were fanciful titles common in Germany, but other composers too had attempted more modest sets of preludes and fugues, with up to 15 pairs, always much shorter. In one case an exactly contemporary composer, Friedrich Suppig, even wrote a fantasia going through all 24 keys: a truly dire piece but one showing what was in the air, so to speak. Yet Bach's title is less straightforward than it appears. For one thing, he is not known ever to have given a name to the second book, so calling it 'Well-Tempered Clavier Book II' is speculative. Even the first book's title might have been an addition, made with publication in mind. What the original title page had said, and had said twice, was much more specific: that in the book are all major and minor keys. One has only to hear the first two preludes, in C major and C minor, to realise that Bach's chief interest must have been the difference – basic for any musician – between major and minor, what can be done with them both, what they can express of music's vast emotional range, even how preconceptions of 'happy major' and 'unhappy minor' are only part of the story.

The term 'Well-Tempered Clavier' has a history of misleading many who have played and admired the pieces ever since. 'Clavier' (a word already used in the title of Friedemann's little album) meant any keyboard instrument other than large church organ, and was not meant to be exclusive. It did not specifically mean clavichord or even harpsichord. 'Well-tempered' was a phrase already used widely in central Germany for a way of tuning keyboards and other fixed-

note instruments so as to make all keys playable, which they had not been in the days when composers used fewer of them. It is not the same as 'equal tempered', as in the equal semitones of today's electronic instruments, where all keys are the same, up or down a bit. In theory this is the case too with modern pianos, though some key characteristics do remain: Schubert's Impromptu in G-flat major will be different in G major.

Although Bach never published either of the two books, he allowed his pupils to copy them, or parts of them, apparently using them to teach both keyboard playing (including such still rare keys as E-flat minor or C-sharp major) and the arts of composition. These arts were mainly two: how to play with patterns of notes and harmony to create preludes, a necessary art in the days when performers made a point of improvising; and how to structure fugues, combine themes, and derive each bar from something that has gone before. Both indeed offered a Counsel of Perfection, and no student, not even Friedemann, ever created a fugue as exquisite and clever (both!) as the first in C major, or a prelude as catchy and effortlessly organised as the F minor, Book II.

What prompted Bach, 20 years after the first book, to compile the second is unknown, but it would surely say a lot about him. Most of the new pieces are more up-to-date in style than those of Book I, and several of them – in G major, E-flat, F minor, B major – might even have been written for the special characteristics of that elegant new invention, the fortepiano. Throughout Book II, the scope is generally bigger and even more demanding than in Book I, and one can only suppose that Bach had his usual three motives for such massive undertakings: firstly, to master for himself a genre of music in contemporary styles, in that spirit of irrepressible creativity one sees in all his work; secondly, to provide his students (including his sons and daughters) with pieces developing both their playing and their intellectual grasp of music; thirdly, to collect, compile, revise, organise and complete another creditable offering to his Maker. For he was not only creator, teacher and player but a practising Believer. Even had he hoped to publish and sell the book, that would not have interfered with his duty as an ardent Lutheran aware that his talents were God-given, to be given back with interest.

Since neither in 1722/23 (Book I) nor in 1742 (Book II) did public recitals yet exist, except occasionally for organists or violin virtuosi, the length and shape of each book has no regard for modern concert convention. It may not even have been necessary to have a tuning that allowed

every key, for players would not think of playing them all, either in sequence or publicly. And yet if performances today, whatever the instrument, tell us so little about how this music was heard by Bach, its mystery only deepens: for how is it that these preludes and fugues are so expressive, their power unaffected? Such a recording as this leaves one baffled to think that Bach never heard its kind of sound in his life – and yet who would guess that from its perfection? (One could make similar points about Shakespeare's plays, hugely versatile through the ages.)

There are other questions arising from these transcendental pieces. From the very first prelude on we may well ask: how is it that such harmonies, moving logically and as if inevitably from one to the other, can bring with them such beauty? A bigger question still: how is it that we are so very affected by musical sound, mere vibrations in thin air? Such questions make it impossible to believe that these two books are all about demonstrating some tuning method.

Peter Williams © 2005

Albert Landa

Pianist, composer, conductor and teacher Albert Landa is one of Australia's most celebrated and acclaimed concert pianists. He made his debut as a child prodigy at Sydney Town Hall at age 10, and completed his AMusA at 11. From 1966 he studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Clifford Curzon. In 1967 he appeared on British television in the Daniel Barenboim Master Class series and for six months he was solo pianist with the Royal Ballet Company as well as with London's Festival Ballet, conducting it on several occasions.

After his return to Australia in 1971, where his inaugural recital at the then NSW State Conservatorium of Music was received with 'rave' reviews in the press, he soon found himself in high demand as a concerto soloist, performing a total of 13 piano concertos with all the major Australian orchestras as well as local amateur orchestras. One of the highlights was to partner violinist Pinchas Zuckerman in a performance of the Alban Berg Concerto for Piano, Violin and 13 Wind Instruments with the Sydney Symphony under Willem van Otterloo. Albert Landa also gave the world premiere of Australian composer Raymond Hanson's Piano Concerto. Around this time he also released several recordings of Popular Piano Classics on the EMI label – these were the most commercially successful albums of classical piano music recorded by an Australian pianist up to that date.

Albert Landa also made a mark as a chamber musician, performing with all the leading Australian artists, and in 1972 undertook a tour of South East Asia under the auspices of the Department of Foreign Affairs. He has given numerous broadcasts both on radio and television, including a recital with commentary on the life of Frédéric Chopin.

Teaching came to take precedence over his performing career with his appointment to the position of Lecturer in Piano at the Sydney Conservatorium (1971-1995). This recording marks his return to the studio after some years of relative retirement.

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Piano Technician: Ara Vartoukian, Theme and Variations

ABC Classics thanks Jonathan Villanueva.

www.abcclassics.com

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