

Richard
Lester
Harpsichord

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Nimbus Records

J S Bach Volume 3
Richard Lester, harpsichord

Disc 1

Partita in B minor (French Overture) BWV 831

1	(Ouverture)	8.47
2	Courante	3.10
3	Gavottes	3.32
4	Passepieds	2.51
5	Sarabande	3.45
6	Bourées	2.47
7	Gigue	2.55
8	Echo	3.16
9-10	Prelude and Fugue in E major Book I No 9 BWV 854	1.43 : 1.59
11-12	Prelude and Fugue in A major Book I No 19 BWV 864	1.39 : 2.43
13-14	Prelude and Fugue in D major Book I No 5 BWV 850	1.34 : 2.20
15-16	Prelude and Fugue in F major Book I No 11 BWV 856	1.21 : 1.54
17	Sinfonia No 3 in D major BWV 789	1.40
18	Sinfonia No 11 in G minor BWV 797	2.48
	Partita No 2 in C minor BWV 826	
19	Sinfonia	5.06
20	Allemande	6.08
21	Courante	3.04
22	Sarabande	3.55
23	Rondeaux	1.50
24	Capriccio	4.35

Total playing time 75.36

Disc 2

English Suite No 2 in A minor BWV 807

1	Prelude	5.42
2	Allemande	4.33
3	Courante	2.47
4	Sarabande	3.47
5	Bourrées I & II	5.06
6	Gigue	2.53
7-8	Prelude and Fugue in D minor Book I No 6 BWV 851	2.10 : 2.13
9-10	Prelude and Fugue in B flat major Book I No 21 BWV 866	1.34 : 2.19
11	Two Part Invention No 1 in C major BWV 772	1.35
12-13	Prelude and Fugue in B major Book I No 23 BWV 868	1.24 : 2.25
14-15	Prelude and Fugue in G sharp minor Book I No 18 BWV 863	1.41 : 2.57
16	Two Part Invention No 13 in A minor BWV 784	1.43
17-18	Prelude and Fugue in C sharp minor Book I No 4 BWV 849	2.47 : 4.11
19-20	Prelude and Fugue in A minor Book I No 20 BWV 865	1.22 : 6.34

French Suite No 4 in E flat major BWV 815

21	Allemande	2.59
22	Courante	2.09
23	Sarabande	3.34
24	Gavotte	1.39
25	Menuet	0.53
26	Air	2.35
27	Gigue	2.57

Total playing time 76.44

This recital of keyboard music by Johann Sebastian Bach, includes works written approximately between 1715 and 1735 when Bach held a number of posts in Weimar, Köthen, and Leipzig.

In January 1703, at the age of 18, he was appointed court musician in the chapel of Duke Johann Ernst III, in Weimar, a post which did not particularly stretch his talents, but nevertheless proved to be a prestigious post for one so young. His prowess as a keyboard player at that time had spread widely, and after a request to give the opening recital on a new organ in Neue Kirche, Arnstadt, he was invited to become their organist, - a post which he accepted. However, it brought many frustrations and in 1706 he applied for another post as organist at the Blasius Church in Mülhausen. This not only included a financial boost, but also improved conditions, including an excellent choir. It was in that city that he married Maria Bach, his second cousin. In 1708, he left, returning to Weimar, this time as organist, and from 1714, as *Konzertmeister* at the ducal court, where, after improvements to the musical establishment he now had the opportunity to work with a large, well-funded contingent of professional musicians. This was the beginning of a fruitful period of composing keyboard music and orchestral works and it was there that he allegedly wrote the so called six English Suites, around 1715. In 1717 he was passed over in favour of another musician for the post of Cappelmeister there, and following a request for release to accept another post at the court of Leopold, Prince of Anhalt-Köthen, he was promptly jailed for a month for daring to resign, - something that was simply unacceptable at a Royal Court. Bach was subsequently released on December 2nd and joined the court at Köthen in 1718.

Leopold, a musician himself, greatly appreciated Bach's talents, but he was a Calvinist and the elaborate music of the Lutheran church as such was not required. Calvinists, founded by John Calvin, broke from the Catholic Church in the 16th century. This relative musical freedom from choral duties gave Bach the opportunity of writing more secular music and it was during this period that he wrote Book one of the Well-tempered Clavier (1722), the French suites (1722-1725) and the Inventions (1723). Other works include the Brandenburg concertos, the Orchestral suites, the 'cello suites, the solo partitas for violin, and some secular cantatas for the court.

His next musical post at Leipzig (1723-1750) afforded him much greater opportunities in that

respect as his appointment as *Thomaskantor*, Cantor of the *Thomasschule* at the *Thomaskirche* (St. Thomas Church) in Leipzig, provided music for four churches in the city, the *Thomaskirche*, the *Nikolaikirche* (St. Nicholas Church), and to a lesser extent the *Neue Kirche* (New Church) and the *Peterskirche* (St. Peter's Church). The importance of this post afforded Bach the opportunity to spread his musical wings, a post he was to hold for twenty-seven years.

CD 1 opens with the great Overture in the French style, originally written in C minor, it was later transposed into B minor, together with other alterations in the musical text. There is inconclusive evidence as to why Bach made these alterations and various ideas have been suggested mainly with regard to key relationships between the Partitas of the Clavier-Übung part I published between 1725 and 1731 during an extremely productive time in Leipzig. The B minor version of the French Overture forms the second part of the Clavier-Übung part II published in 1735 which also included the Concerto in the Italian Style. Mindful of the popularity in Germany of both Italian and French musical influences, Bach set about writing in both styles. The French Overture style was originally introduced by Jean Baptiste Lully, an Italian instrumentalist and dancer who achieved immense success at the court of King Louis XIV. It was probably his expertise as a dancer that first attracted him to court, as Louis himself was an accomplished dancer. The influence of Lully's music caused a major revolution in the style of courtly music and dances in particular with the introduction of lively ballets based on the popular dances of the day. But it is his innovative French Overture form, introduced in the 1650s, for which Lully is famously renowned, and a form used extensively in the Baroque era by Bach, Handel and other contemporaries. The overtures to Lully's operas generally follow a basic formal pattern of two complimentary sections; a slow stately opening with dotted rhythms (generally double dotted), followed by a fast middle section often fugal in character, and concluding with a reiteration, or modified version based on the opening section. Bach's ingenious simulation of this style fully absorbs Lully's dramatic contrasts of majestic dotted rhythms with agile fugal passages. Lully, we understand, conducted with a long staff, and by banging it on the floor, he kept strict time for his orchestra; a practice that may well provide a *raison d'être* for maintaining a constant *tactus*, throughout the whole of the Bach overture movement. Lully's unique style of conducting unfortunately led to his untimely death, as accidentally striking his foot during a performance of his *Te Deum*, it grew gangrenous, and refusing to have it amputated, he died two months later from septicaemia.

The remaining movements, as in other Bach Partitas, French Suites and English suites, typify the passion for dance, referred to in the booklet notes of volume two of this series. The courante, the second movement in the B minor French Overture, was one of the most popular dances at the French court in Louis XIV reign, and is followed in Bach's model by two stately gavottes, two fast passepieds, a slow and *grande* sarabande, two lively bourrées, a gigue and an Echo. Although not a dance as such, the Echo, together with the opening Overture, and the Concerto in the Italian style in the Clavier-Übung part II, is intended to explore the *forte* and *piano* dynamics of a two-manual harpsichord where the upper manual is either voiced softer, or is of a contrasting timbre to the lower. The upper manual is often coupled to the lower to achieve a contrast between *forte* and *piano*.

The opening movement of the Partita in C minor is loosely in the form of a French overture, and divided into three sections, the first marked Grave adagio, the second Andante and a final fugal section which to quote Fernando Valenti is unjustifiably often taken at Olympic velocity. The Sinfonia is followed by an Allemande, unusually introduced by a three note up-beat instead of the customary one. The general form of the dance is referred to in *Musikalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1732), by Johann Gottfried Walther: "must be composed and likewise danced in a grave and ceremonious manner." In *Der Vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg, 1739) Johann Mattheson described the allemande as "a serious and well-composed harmoniousness in arpeggiated style, expressing satisfaction or amusement, and delighting in order and calm." The Courante that follows is of the sprightly Italian variety. Bach follows this movement with the customary Sarabande which by that time had become liberated from its quick and rather vulgar Moorish/Spanish origins; although when it reached the French court it had already become more refined in character. Charles Masson in 1699 described 'the Sarabande [is taken] gravely (gravement). Quantz in 1752 states that 'The Sarabande has the same tempo [as the Entre, the Loure and the Courante], but is played with a more flattering expression.' Bach abandons the typical dance labels for the final two movements, Rondeaux and Capriccio, but the dance element is never far from his thoughts. This work still holds a special place for me, as I well remember as a mature student at Dartington Summer School, studying the 'Goldbergs' and Partita No 2 in C minor with George Malcolm, and being chosen to take part in the student concert at the end of the week. Dartington then was headed by Sir William Glock and John Amis and enjoyed 'old school' charm and values.

In both books of *Das Wohltemperierte-Clavier*, Bach set himself the task of writing in all the keys rising chromatically from C major to B minor. The first set was compiled in 1722 during Bach's time in Köthen. The second book followed twenty years later in 1742 when he was in Leipzig. The Preludes and Fugues in this volume are all taken from Book one of *Das Wohltemperierte-Clavier*.

At this point I should like to dwell on the tuning of keyboard instruments as it has direct importance to *Das Wohltemperierte-Clavier*. Much has been written on what could be Bach's own method of keyboard tuning. One theory based on a series of rough, hand-drawn loops at the top of the first book of Preludes and Fugues probably doesn't have any factual significance and was most likely drawn when he was at a loose end one day; supposing of course he had time for any. Most tuners will tell you that it doesn't matter how careful you are, any temperament, including equal temperament will differ marginally even if an electronic device is used. The musician and theorist, Johann Georg Neidhardt, writing in 1724 and 1732, described a series of unequal and equal temperaments which can be successfully used to perform some of Bach's music. I have adopted a version of one of Neidhardt's temperaments consisting of four perfect fifths F - C, B flat - F, E flat - B flat and A flat - E flat, with the remaining fifths tempered. My own feeling regarding modern equal temperament is that theoretically all keys will sound the same. That doesn't quite work out in reality though, but my point is that with an un-equal temperament, there is a greater chance for individual keys to possess more of a particular identity and character.

The Inventions and Sinfonias were written as exercise material for Bach's son, Wilhelm Friedmann, the earliest version *Klavierbuchlein für W. Fr. Bach in 1720*. The sheer inventiveness of these pieces speak volumes and can be summed up in the words of Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1721-83) one of Bach's most gifted pupils and an eminent theorist who praised Bach's method of teaching as follows: 'he proceeds steadily, step by step, from the easiest to the most difficult, and as a result even the step to the fugue was only the difficulty of passing from one step to the text.'

In volume two, I wrote about the genre of dances from which Bach borrowed his ideas. The title 'French' Suites was appended by the composer, Frederick Wilhelm Marpeck in 1762. Bach

merely labelled them Suites pour le clavecin which suggests a French connection. It is interesting to note that the Courante of the fourth suite in this volume is Italian, and similarly those in suites 2, 5 and 6 of that set, and the Courante of the English suite is of the French variety and lends itself to the *inégalité* of that style. The beautifully opening gallivant Allemande of the fourth suite blossoms like a flower warming to the sun, which gives way to a true French Courante. This dance, popular at the court of Louis XIV lends itself to the *inégalité* of the French style where a lilting inequality (usually long, short, long, short) in the movement of equal length notes is desirable and creates a slightly ‘jazzy’ feel. I always feel that the actual degree of *inégalité* should be ascertained once the character of a particular dance is perceived. Some Courantes for example will only need a mere hint with a moderate lilt, whereas others may require a more robust elasticity. There are no hard and fast rules on this and relies on one’s individual understanding of a dance in what the French term *Le bon gout*.

Continuing on the subject and character of different dance forms, I included the Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gavotte in volume two. Other dance forms appear in various ways in the works on this volume.

The Passepied features in the French Overture in two contrasting versions; one in the minor and a partner in the tonic major.

THE PASSEPIED

The Passepied was a fast country dance that is thought to have originated in 16th century France, and adapted to courtly prominence in the 18th century. In 1739, Johann Matheson described it as a fast dance, with a character approaching frivolity, for which reason it lacks the “the eagerness, anger, or heat of the gigue. Quantz recommends a crotchet or quaver equalling 180.

THE BOURRÉE

The Bourrée features prominently in the French Overture and the English suite in A minor and resembles the gavotte with a distinctive two in a bar. The Gavotte is usually in four. Quantz reminds us that the ‘Bourrée and Rigaudon played gayly and with a short and light bow-stroke. Each bar has one beat of the [human] pulse.’

THE HARPSICHORD

The harpsichord on this recording is a double-manual instrument built in 2011 by Colin Booth, and is derived from a single-manual harpsichord by the Hamburg builder, Johann Christoph Fleischer, and dated 1710. The original is housed in the Musikinstrumenten-Museum in Berlin. On the Booth instrument there are two eight-foot registers strung in iron and red brass, four-foot stop and a harp or buff stop. The temperament is based on Neidhardt and the pitch is 415hz. The painting on the inside of the lid, also by Colin Booth is a copy of John William Waterhouse's Echo and Narcissus from Ovid's Metamorphosis, in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, Merseyside. On a smaller lid is the Latin inscription MVSICA SICVT AMOR DONVM DEI (Music, like love is a gift from God).

Richard Lester's Bach project will be released on 7 two CD sets.
One release in each of the years 2017 - 2023.

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In an international solo career spanning over forty years on harpsichord and organ, Richard Lester, described by the *Daily Telegraph*, and *The Times* as 'one of our leading players', is now universally acclaimed as a prominent interpreter of early music on period and modern keyboard instruments. In 1982, Dame Janet Baker chose his recording of Scarlatti sonatas as her favourite on BBC Desert Island Discs. The English artist, David Gentleman and the sculptor, Sophie Ryder have also chosen his recordings on BBC Radio Three. He also enjoys the Romantic and Modern repertoire, especially music by Vierni, Reger and Messiaen, performing in many cathedrals and churches in the UK and on the continent. In 2013 his recital in St Mark's Basilica, Venice drew a capacity audience. He is now Associate organist at Buckfast Abbey.

His vast discography for Nimbus Records has received global recognition, and in 2006, Gramophone magazine printed a personal profile. His recordings of Frescobaldi gained an entry in the Penguin Guide to the 1000 Finest Classical Recordings, and he has twice received the 'outstanding accolade' in International Record Review, and Musicweb International's Recordings of the year. As a musicologist he regularly contributes articles on early Italian

keyboard fingering, organ registration and ornamentation; also demonstrated on a DVD for Nimbus.

As Master of the Choristers at Cirencester Parish Church in 1996 he directed courses for the Royal School of Church Music in Cirencester and at Bristol Cathedral.

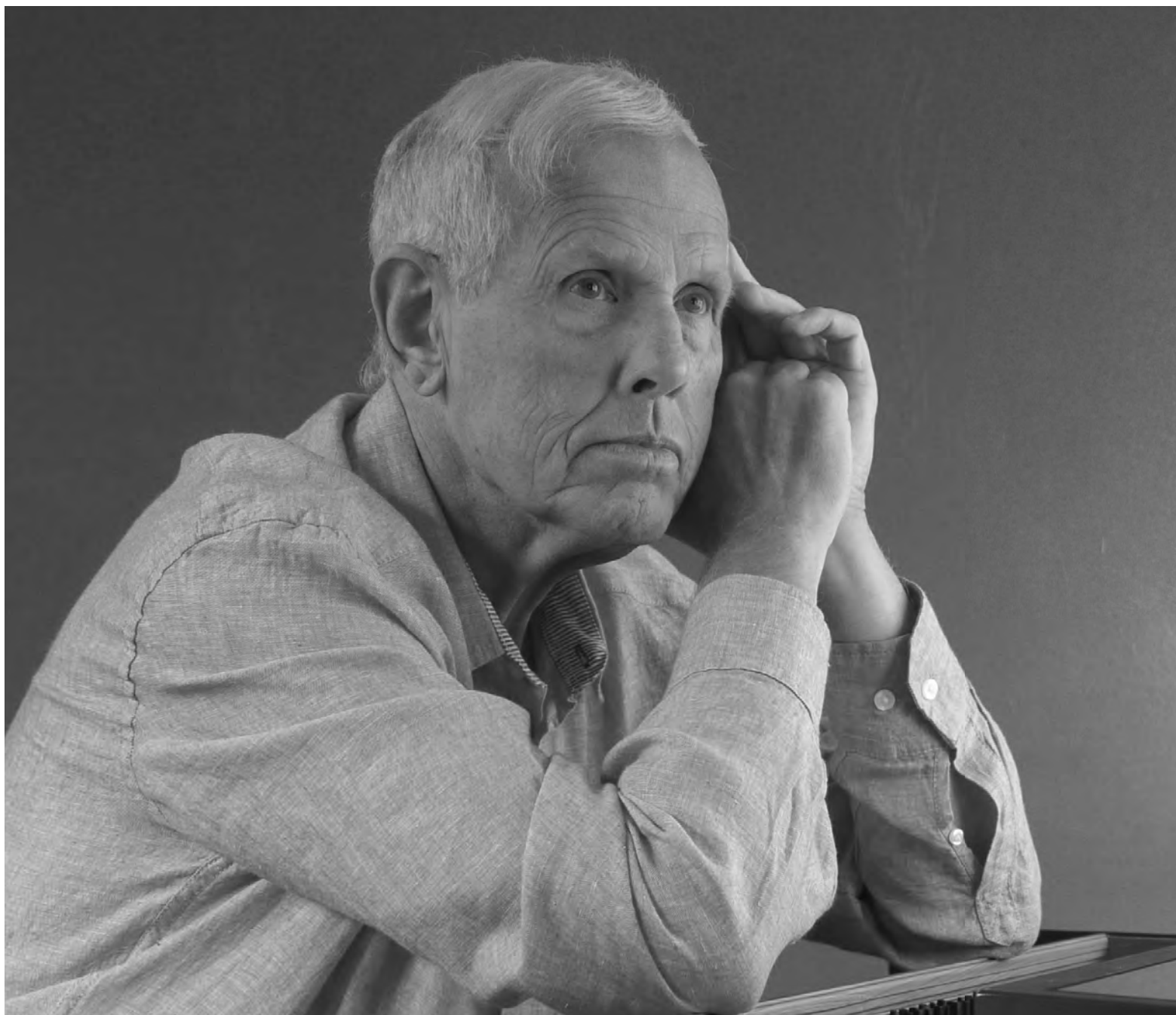
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J S BACH VOL 3
RICHARD LESTER, HARPSICHORD

NI 5950/1

J S Bach - Volume 3

Richard Lester, harpsichord

'In the end – with so many competitive recordings of Bach's keyboard output – it will be Lester's felicitous blend of originality with sureness of hand, and vitality with perception that allow this first instalment to be recommended without hesitation.' Mark Sealey, Classical Net, on Volume 1

Disc 1 75.36

- 1-8 **Partita in B minor (French Overture) BWV 831**
- 9-12 Preludes and Fugues E major Book I No 9 BWV 854; A major Book I No 19 BWV 864
- 13-16 Preludes and Fugues D major Book I No 5 BWV 850; F major Book I No 11 BWV 856
- 17-18 Sinfonias No 3 in D major BWV 789; No 11 in G minor BWV 797
- 19-24 **Partita No 2 in C minor BWV 826**

Disc 2 76.44

- 1-6 **English Suite No 2 in A minor BWV 807**
- 7-10 Preludes and Fugues D minor Book I No 6 BWV 851; B flat major Book I No 21 BWV 866
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- 12-15 Preludes and Fugues B major Book I No 23 BWV 868; G sharp minor Book I No 18 BWV 863
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- 17-20 Preludes and Fugues C sharp minor Book I No 4 BWV 849; A minor Book I No 20 BWV 865
- 21-27 **French Suite No 4 in E flat major BWV 815**

Total playing time 152 minutes



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J S BACH VOL 3
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