

NAXOS

**J. S. BACH**

2 CDs

**The Well-Tempered Clavier  
Book I  
(24 Preludes and Fugues)**

**Luc Beauséjour, Harpsichord**



# Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

## The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I (24 Preludes and Fugues, BWV 846–869)

### CD 1

1	Prelude No. 1 in C major	1:58
2	Fugue No. 1 in C major	1:46
3	Prelude No. 2 in C minor	1:39
4	Fugue No. 2 in C minor	1:38
5	Prelude No. 3 in C sharp major	1:20
6	Fugue No. 3 in C sharp major	2:42
7	Prelude No. 4 in C sharp minor	2:36
8	Fugue No. 4 in C sharp minor	3:45
9	Prelude No. 5 in D major	1:24
10	Fugue No. 5 in D major	1:57
11	Prelude No. 6 in D minor	1:31
12	Fugue No. 6 in D minor	2:07
13	Prelude No. 7 in E flat major	4:04
14	Fugue No. 7 in E flat major	2:02
15	Prelude No. 8 in E flat minor	3:25
16	Fugue No. 8 in E flat minor	5:34
17	Prelude No. 9 in E major	1:27
18	Fugue No. 9 in E major	1:18
19	Prelude No. 10 in E minor	2:25
20	Fugue No. 10 in E minor	1:28
21	Prelude No. 11 in F major	1:13
22	Fugue No. 11 in F major	1:29
23	Prelude No. 12 in F minor	1:55
24	Fugue No. 12 in F minor	3:43
25	Prelude No. 13 in F sharp major	1:46
26	Fugue No. 13 in F sharp major	2:15
27	Prelude No. 14 in F sharp minor	1:20
28	Fugue No. 14 in F sharp minor	3:33

### CD 2

1	Prelude No. 15 in G major	0:59
2	Fugue No. 15 in G major	2:56
3	Prelude No. 16 in G minor	1:52
4	Fugue No. 16 in G minor	2:19
5	Prelude No. 17 in A flat major	1:27
6	Fugue No. 17 in A flat major	2:09
7	Prelude No. 18 in G sharp minor	1:39
8	Fugue No. 18 in G sharp minor	2:42
9	Prelude No. 19 in A major	1:21
10	Fugue No. 19 in A major	2:30
11	Prelude No. 20 in A minor	1:17
12	Fugue No. 20 in A minor	4:32
13	Prelude No. 21 in B flat major	1:31
14	Fugue No. 21 in B flat major	1:53
15	Prelude No. 22 in B flat minor	2:51
16	Fugue No. 22 in B flat minor	2:50
17	Prelude No. 23 in B major	1:15
18	Fugue No. 23 in B major	2:20
19	Prelude No. 24 in B minor	2:55
20	Fugue No. 24 in B minor	6:32

Johann Sebastian Bach was a member of a family that had for generations been occupied in music. His sons were to continue the tradition, providing the foundation of a new style of music that prevailed in the later part of the eighteenth century. Johann Sebastian Bach himself represented the end of an age, the culmination of the Baroque in a magnificent synthesis of Italian melodic invention, French rhythmic dance forms and German contrapuntal mastery.

Born in Eisenach in 1685, Bach was educated largely by his eldest brother, after the early death of his parents.

At the age of eighteen he embarked on his career as a musician, serving first as a court musician at Weimar, before appointment as organist at Arnstadt. Four years later he moved to Mühlhausen as organist and the following year became organist and chamber musician to Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Weimar. Securing his release with difficulty, in 1717 he was appointed Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen and remained at Cöthen until 1723, when he moved to Leipzig as Cantor at the School of St Thomas, with responsibility for the music of the five principal city churches. Bach was to remain at Leipzig until his death in 1750.

As a craftsman, obliged to fulfil the terms of his employment, Bach provided music suited to his various appointments. It was natural that his earlier work as an organist and something of an expert on the construction of organs, should result in music for that instrument. At Cöthen, where the Pietist leanings of the court made church music unnecessary, he provided a quantity of instrumental music for the court orchestra and its players. In Leipzig he began by composing a series of cantatas for the church year, later turning his attention to instrumental music for the Collegium musicum of the University, and to the collection and ordering of his own compositions. Throughout his life he continued to write music for the harpsichord or clavicord, some of which served a pedagogical purpose in his own family or with other pupils.

The collections of *Preludes and Fugues* in all keys, major and minor, known as *The Well-Tempered Clavier* or,

from their number, as *The Forty-Eight*, explore the possibilities inherent in every possible key. Experiments in keyboard tuning in the later seventeenth century had resulted in differing systems that, nevertheless, made the use of remoter keys feasible. Earlier composers such as Pachelbel and closer contemporaries including Pepusch and Mattheson had already made use of some form of equal temperament tuning in collections of pieces in varying numbers of keys. While the precise nature of the tuning system used by Bach may not be clear, his well-tempered tuning at least made all keys possible, although in the system of equal temperament employed, some keys were probably more equal than others, an effect lost in modern democratic piano tuning, where all intervals on the keyboard are equal, if mathematically inaccurate.

While the second book of *Preludes and Fugues* was put together in Leipzig, for the most part during the years from 1738 to 1742, the first collection was made towards the end of Bach's time at Cöthen and is dated 1722, including earlier works in a compilation that eventually took on the purpose declared in its extended title as a collection of Preludes and Fugues in all the tones and semitones, for the use and practice of young musicians who want to learn, as well as those who are already skilled in this study. This circulated in various copies and was revised by Bach at various times, finally, it would seem, in 1740, when he was already concerned with the second set of 24. The first book includes some preludes from the *Clavierbüchlein* for Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, born to his first wife in 1710. While the Preludes vary in form and mood, the Fugues are bound by stricter rules of counterpoint, in which a subject is announced, to be answered in imitation by a second, third and fourth voice. The answer may be accompanied by a countersubject, a secondary theme that fits with the subject, but has its own characteristics. Intervening episodes appear between further entries of the subject in other keys from any of the voices or parts. Other devices used include *stretto*, the overlapping entry of voices with the subject. Further complementary subjects may appear,

again entering in imitation by one voice of the other, and may be combined with the original subject. The subject itself may appear in inversion, upside down, or in augmentation, with longer notes, or diminution, with shorter and quicker note-values. True art is to conceal art, and thus Bach, as always, achieves in music that is never merely subservient to technical requirements. The *Preludes and Fugues* were written for unspecified keyboard instruments, with some suggesting the gentler tones of the clavichord, others the louder harpsichord and some even the sustained notes of the organ.

### CD1

The opening *Prelude in C major* is among the best known of all, chiefly, it must be said, because of later arrangements, notably that by Charles Gounod, who added a melody, calling the work in this new form *Méditation*, to which another added the words of the *Ave Maria*. It is followed by a four-voice fugue in which the subject is announced first in the alto, answered in the soprano, followed by tenor and bass. The *Prelude in C minor* is characterized by busy semi-quaver motion leading to a final cadenza. The three-voice fugue has voices entering in the order alto, soprano, bass.

The *Prelude in C sharp major* has an alternation of figuration between the upper and lower register, with material derived from the simplest origins and leading to a final section of syncopation, as the right hand plays off-beat notes to the steady rhythm of the left. There is a three-voice fugue, its subject stated in the soprano, answered in the alto, followed by the bass and worked out at some length. The *Prelude in C sharp minor*, in 6/4 metre, allows the left hand to echo the right in its opening bars. It leads to an *alla breve* fugue, its solemn four-note subject stated first in the bass, answered by the other voices in ascending order. Here the full lower range of the keyboard is explored and the device of pedal-point, moving parts over a note sustained in one part, finds its place as the fugue comes to a close.

The *Prelude in D major* is in the style of a toccata, its continuous right-hand semiquaver movement

culminating in a brief and more rapid cadenza and impressive final chords. The four-voice fugue has a subject of varied rhythm, announced by the bass and answered by other voices in ascending order. There follows a *Prelude in D minor* of continuing semiquaver triplet rhythm in the right hand and a three-voice fugue, with the subject answered by voices in descending order.

The *Prelude in E flat major* starts with a toccata introduction, followed by the imitative counterpoint of a double fugue, a short subject first stated in the tenor, answered at once by the bass, and then by alto and soprano in order. The second fugal subject, which appears over a version of the first, is in shorter notes. This elaborate and extended Prelude is succeeded by a three-voice fugue, with the soprano subject answered by voices in descending order. The recitative style of the *Prelude in E flat minor*, with its key signature of six flats, leads to a three-voice fugue in the key of D sharp minor, with six sharps, an enharmonic change that makes no practical difference in the choice of notes to be struck by the player. The middle voice announces the subject, answered above, before entering below, in a movement that includes inversions of the subject and its augmentation, when it later appears at half speed.

Triple rhythms mark the 12/8 *Prelude in E major*, while its three-voice fugue, with a subject announced by the middle voice, to be answered above and then below, is marked by the idiosyncratic break in the rhythm of the subject itself, to be repeated at each re-appearance. The *Prelude in E minor* leads to a rapid final passage, with right and left hand often in parallel motion. There follows a two-voice fugue, an example of what can be achieved in a simpler fugal texture, with a subject of chromatic propensity.

The eleventh of the set has a *Prelude in F major* in 12/8 metre in a general toccata style of rapid notes and continuing rhythm. The three-voice fugue, its subject again stated in a middle voice, to be answered above and then below, has a particularly clear texture. The *Prelude in F minor* forms a stately introduction to a four-voice fugue, its chromatic subject appearing first in the tenor,

followed by alto, bass and, eventually, soprano, with an elaboration of countersubjects in contrapuntal intricacy.

*Prelude No. 13 in F sharp major* is particularly attractive in its melodic treatment, whatever reluctance a student may have to confront a key with six sharps. The key brings more complexity in the three-voice fugue, the subject answered here by voices in descending order, since fugues inevitably bring modulations, as the subject returns in different keys. The *Prelude in F sharp minor* brings the player some relief, with a generally two-voice texture in which one part imitates the other in the manner of a two-part invention. The four-voice fugue, in 6/4, has a relatively extended subject, announced first by the tenor, followed by alto, bass and, finally, soprano.

## CD2

A degree of relative simplicity comes with the *Prelude in G major*, a movement in two-voice texture, with a three-voice fugue, its subject answered by voices in descending order. The *Prelude in G minor* opens with a prolonged right-hand trill, as the movement moves forward, leading to a cadenza-like ending. There is a four-voice fugue, with the subject appearing in the alto, soprano, bass and tenor, in that order.

*Prelude No. 17 in A flat major* makes much of its opening figure, answered by the left hand and the subject of continued dialogue. There is a four-voice fugue, with voices entering now in the order tenor, bass, soprano, alto, with a characteristic countersubject. This is followed by a *Prelude in G sharp minor*, making use of the keyboard identity of G sharp and A flat. The three-voice texture of the prelude is followed by a four-voice fugue, with a subject entering in the order tenor, alto, soprano and bass.

The *Prelude in A major* is marked by the re-appearance of its opening figure in the manner of a fugue, with two other subjects added and treated accordingly. It leads to a three-voice fugue in 9/8 metre, with voices

entering in descending order. A pleasing *Prelude in A minor* is coupled with a four-voice fugue with an extended subject. This appears first in the alto, followed by soprano, bass and tenor and brings a movement of some length, finding a place for the sustained notes required by the device of pedal-point and seeming to call for the use of a pedal harpsichord or organ with pedal-board to enable the player to hold a lower note, while the fingers of a hand of normal size are occupied elsewhere on the keyboard.

The *Prelude in B flat major* allows the right hand to offer a delicate accompaniment to the left and includes cadenza-like passages. It leads to a three-voice fugue with a long subject treated by voices in descending order, on its first appearance. *Prelude No. 22 in B flat minor* is characteristically Baroque in its form and texture, a true prelude to an *alla breve* fugue with five voices entering in descending order and suggesting the sustained notes of the organ.

The *Prelude in B major* offers a three-part texture and is paired with a four-voice fugue, with voices entering in the order tenor, alto, soprano, bass, bringing a subject marked by a trill on its penultimate note, although the limitations of the human hand prevent its re-appearance with every statement of the subject. The book ends with the *Prelude and Fugue in B minor*, the prelude making use of initial fugal counterpoint over a moving bass. The last fugue, marked *Largo* and with four voices, which enter in the order alto, tenor, bass, soprano, has an extended chromatic theme that uses all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. This provides a solid conclusion to the first volume of a most remarkable collection, the keyboard-player's Old Testament to the new world offered by Beethoven in an increasingly contrapuntal mood in his 32 sonatas, to which more recent composers have provided a startling Apocalypse.

**Keith Anderson**

## The Harpsichord

To date, no one has really solved the mystery surrounding the harpsichords for which Bach conceived his music. Having played this music on harpsichords of all kinds and being always somewhat dissatisfied with the results, we undertook to construct an instrument on the basis of the sound ideal which we sought, an approach contrary to the widely spread practice of copying this or that likely model. Our first preoccupation was to strive for the greatest clarity within polyphony, since most harpsichords better lend themselves to a harmonic role than to a contrapuntal one. The general character of the sound had to be strong, in proportion to the musical content. The result has many similarities to harpsichords of the Saxon school, with a Flemish tinge. The instrument is equipped with two manuals, two sets of 8' strings, one set of 4' strings, and has a range of four and-a-half octaves, from *GG* to *d'''*; the manuals are fitted with a device which allows double transposition ranging from *A 392* to *415* to *440* Hz; the voicing is achieved with crow quills. We built this instrument in 1985 in close collaboration with Montreal instrument maker Yves Beaupré. François Papineau-Couture also made an important contribution by manufacturing the mechanical parts.

**Réjean Poirier**

## Luc Beauséjour

The harpsichordist and organist Luc Beauséjour is renowned for the elegance, virtuosity, and expressiveness of his playing, which have won him an enthusiastic audience and the continuing praise of critics and music specialists. In the last few years he has won numerous awards in Canada, including 2003 Performer of the Year by the Conseil québécois de la musique and two prizes (Record of the Year) at the 2001 and 2006 ADISQ awards. He follows a very active performing schedule in Canada and abroad that has taken him to France, the United States, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Belgium, and Bermuda. He has performed in Paris, Boston, Washington D.C., Vienna, Munich, and Montreal, as well as at numerous festivals, including the Festival d'Uzès (France), the Lanaudière International Festival, Orford Festival, the Festival d'Ambronay, the festival *Un été à Bourges*, the Lamèque Early Music Festival (New Brunswick), and the Vancouver Early Music Festival. He was invited to perform the *Goldberg Variations* at the Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto for a CBC commemoration of the great pianist's birthday, testimony to the recognition he has earned as one of Canada's finest musicians. He is also heard regularly on both CBC and Radio Canada. For Naxos, Analekta, early-music.com et CBC Records/Les Disques SRC, he has recorded some twenty CDs, many of which have won awards and praise from music magazines. He has given concerts with eminent musicians such as sopranos Agnès Mellon, Donna Brown, Karina Gauvin and Shannon Mercer, the countertenor Philippe Jaroussky, the violinist James Ehnes, conductor and harpsichordist Hervé Niquet, trumpet player Paul Merkelo, oboist Louise Pellerin, and the flautists Claire Guimond and Marie-Céline Labbé, among others. In 1994, Luc Beauséjour founded Clavecin en concert, a concert series of harpsichord music and chamber music. His performances in this series have included the complete works for harpsichord of Rameau, J. S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, *The Art of Fugue*, and *Book I of The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Since 2001, the organization, whose mission is to promote the harpsichord repertoire, has enjoyed the support of various levels of government and has grown considerably in popularity. Born in Rawdon, Quebec, Luc Beauséjour holds a Doctorate from the Université de Montréal. He studied harpsichord with Mireille Lagacé and Réjean Poirier and organ with Bernard Lagacé. He also trained in Europe under Ton Koopman and Kenneth Gilbert. First Prize winner of the Erwin Bodky International Harpsichord Competition in Boston, he has also won prizes at several other competitions and received a number of grants from the Canada Council and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. He teaches harpsichord and organ in Montreal. [www.clavecinconcert.org](http://www.clavecinconcert.org)



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Playing Time  
111:21

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NAXOS

J.S. BACH: The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I

8.557625-26

Bach's monumental collection of Preludes and Fugues in all keys explored new systems of harpsichord tuning which made such an enterprise possible. Described as the pianist's Old Testament, complemented by the New Testament of Beethoven's Sonatas, the Preludes and Fugues are heard here played on the harpsichord, the keyboard instrument for which they were most likely written.

Johann Sebastian

**BACH**

(1685–1750)

## The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I

(24 Preludes and Fugues, BWV 846–869)

CD 1 (63:26)

1-2	No. 1 in C major	3:45
3-4	No. 2 in C minor	3:18
5-6	No. 3 in C sharp major	4:02
7-8	No. 4 in C sharp minor	6:22
9-10	No. 5 in D major	3:21
11-12	No. 6 in D minor	3:38
13-14	No. 7 in E flat major	5:06
15-16	No. 8 in E flat minor	9:00
17-18	No. 9 in E major	2:45
19-20	No. 10 in E minor	3:53
21-22	No. 11 in F major	2:43
23-24	No. 12 in F minor	5:39
25-26	No. 13 in F sharp major	4:01
27-28	No. 14 in F sharp minor	4:52

CD 2 (47:55)

1-2	No. 15 in G major	3:56
3-4	No. 16 in G minor	4:12
5-6	No. 17 in A flat major	3:37
7-8	No. 18 in G sharp minor	4:21
9-10	No. 19 in A major	3:52
11-12	No. 20 in A minor	5:49
13-14	No. 21 in B flat major	3:24
15-16	No. 22 in B flat minor	5:42
17-18	No. 23 in B major	3:36
19-20	No. 24 in B minor	9:26

**Luc Beauséjour, Harpsichord**

Recorded at St John Chrysostom Church, Newmarket, Ontario, Canada, 4–8 July & 28–31 October 2005

Producers: Bonnie Silver & Norbert Kraft • Engineer: Norbert Kraft • Editor: Bonnie Silver  
German harpsichord built by Poirier/Beaupré in 1985, Montreal • Cover image by Paolo Zeccara

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J.S. BACH: The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I

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