

Programme Notes – Well-Tempered Clavier Book 2

The year after Johann Sebastian Bach wrote the date 1722 on the title page of his first set of twenty-four preludes and fugues, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, he left the court of Anhalt-Cöthen to take up his duties as Kantor of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. During the next twenty-seven years until his death in 1750, he wrote a breathtaking amount of music—mostly sacred and secular cantatas, motets, Masses, Passions, and oratorios. Also from this time date the six keyboard Partitas, the completion of the French Suites, the *Clavierübung* II and III, the ‘Goldberg’ Variations, another set of twenty-four preludes and fugues and, in the last few years, *The Musical Offering* and *The Art of the Fugue*. It is therefore not surprising that he left us with no fair copy of what is now known as Book II of the ‘48’. Time must have been scarce! He also had to direct the Collegium Musicum, train and discipline unruly choirboys, play at weddings and funerals, and deal with the town authorities who were a constant source of annoyance. On top of all that, he and his wife Anna Magdalena added thirteen more children to their family—only six of whom survived infancy.

Bach did, however, leave us a composite manuscript, probably built up between 1739 and 1742. Each prelude and fugue is written out separately on a folded sheet of paper (prelude on one side, fugue on the other to avoid page turns), and several are copied out in Anna Magdalena’s hand. There is no title page, and three of them have been lost. Many corrections and revisions are visible, done at different times. After Bach’s death, this autograph probably went into the hands of his eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, and we know that Muzio Clementi owned it in the nineteenth century. In 1896 it was acquired by the British Museum, where it remains today. It would be easy if the story ended there. It does not.

Bach continued to make revisions in copies belonging to his pupils right up until 1748—perhaps never giving us his final thoughts on the subject. The most important of these sources is the complete manuscript in the hand of Johann Christoph Altnickol (1719–1759) who became Bach’s son-in-law in 1749. It is dated 1744 and bears the title page:

The Well-Tempered Clavier, Second Part,
consisting of Preludes and Fugues
through all the Tones and Semitones,
written by Johann Sebastian Bach,
Royal Polish and Electoral Saxon Court Composer,
Capellmeister and Directore Chori Musici in Leipzig.

After Bach’s death, individual preludes and fugues were published in various theoretical treatises, but it wasn’t until 1801/2 that not one but three complete editions of the ‘48’ appeared. In the case of Book II, however, none was based on the British Library autograph which was then unknown. We have had to wait until the 1990s for editions to appear that take into account all of the available sources (the new Associated Board edited by Richard Jones, and the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* edited by Alfred Dürr). The first English edition (a copy of which was passed down to me through my father’s family) was done by Samuel Wesley and C F Horn, and published in instalments between 1810 and 1813 (with a different price for subscribers and non-subscribers). In their introduction, Wesley and Horn make the following claim:

The 48 Preludes and Fugues, the first 12 of which are here presented to the Musical World (in a more correct manner than they have ever yet appeared, even in the Country where they were constructed)

have always been regarded by the most scientific among scientific Musicians, (the Germans) as matchless Productions.

They give detailed recommendations on how to study them (slow practise, beginning with the less complicated ones), even advising the avoidance at first of those in C sharp major, E flat minor, and F minor 'because they are set in Keys less in Use in England than upon the Continent, and therefore are at first puzzling'. Myriad signs are used in the text to mark each entry of the subject, its inversions, augmentations, and diminutions.

This complex history of Book II is the reason why so many variants appear in the editions we now have. In the end, of course, that is not the most important thing (bringing Bach's music alive should be uppermost in the mind of the interpreter) but it is fascinating to see how his musical imagination was constantly seeking to embellish and improve. Indeed, several of the pieces survive in early versions probably dating from the 1720s and '30s. For their inclusion in The Well-Tempered Clavier II they underwent extensive revisions, enlargements, and often transpositions.

Whereas the famous **C major** Prelude of Book I unfolds with the greatest calm and simplicity, its counter-part in Book II begins on a grand scale with an octave pedal point in the bass. This is an earlier work (BWV870, probably dating from the 1720s) that Bach doubled in length and greatly embellished to suit his purpose. The beauty of its rich four-part texture is best brought out by carefully distinguishing the different voices, giving special attention to the ties and suspensions. The flow is unhurried, the phrases long. In bar 20 we have an extensive recapitulation beginning in the subdominant key (F major). A short coda is built over a return to the initial pedal point. The three-part Fugue is simple but playful, with its insistence on a mordent. It appears in three different guises in the subject alone: as the opening three notes; decorating the crotchet after the leap (which should be added wherever possible); and finally giving shape to the running semiquavers. The latter can easily sound like a finger exercise by Hanon if not careful! Had Bach left this piece as he originally conceived it, the end would have come in bar 68, depriving us of the wonderful coda with the left-hand leaps. Thank goodness he had second thoughts!

The Prelude and Fugue No 2 in **C minor** begins with a two-part invention similar to those of Book I, but in binary form. The dialogue constantly shifts between the parts—the most expressive measures having a chromatic line. It is a fairly innocent partner to the more serious Fugue. The latter's quiet, solemn subject holds back for the first half of the piece before closing in the dominant in bar 14 (note the entrance in the lower voice in bar 13 which is a partial inversion). Then it is presented in augmentation against both original and inverted subjects. A very tight series of stretti follow with five entrances in only three bars. Up until now this has been a three-voice fugue, but ten bars before the end, Bach introduces a fourth, bass voice singing the augmented subject with great drama and intensity. Another close stretto passage leads, with a cadenza-like flourish, to the final cadence. Some editions show a major chord ending (called tierce de Picardie), but I find that inappropriate to its unrepentant mood.

The Prelude No 3 in **C sharp major** is the only one in Book II to use a persistent, broken-chord pattern so common in the earlier set. Originally it was composed in C major (as was the Fugue), and written out as a progression of five-part chords whose figuration was left up to the performer. For placement in the

Well-Tempered Clavier II, Bach transposed it up a semitone to fill the C sharp major slot, and wrote out his preferred treatment of the chords. There exist two different versions of the tenor voice: one in the London autograph, one in the Altnickol copy—the latter being more melodic and expressive. Bach surprises us by tacking on a three-part fughetto marked 'Allegro', thus breaking the feeling of serenity. It's a good move, however, and prepares us in spirit for the Fugue proper. This is a rather cocky piece in its refusal to follow the rules. The second voice enters before the first has even finished the statement of the subject, and the third comes in already inverted. Indeed, a lot of the time Bach uses only the first four notes, also in diminution beginning in bar 5. The two appearances of the subject in augmentation in bars 25 to 27 should really stand out. The running figure introduced in bar 8 gradually becomes more and more important, finally taking over in the great flourishes before the coda.

Prelude and Fugue No 4 in **C sharp minor** opens with one of the loveliest preludes of the Well-Tempered Clavier. It is a cantabile trio somewhat along the lines of my favourite three-part Sinfonia (No 5 in E flat major), but with the bass playing a much more important role. The ornaments—those written in by Bach, as well as the ones the interpreter should add—are there to emphasize the tender melancholy of the piece. Bach's autograph of this Prelude and Fugue is lost, perhaps depriving us of information concerning the length of the appoggiaturas. It seems that they cannot all be of equal length, but should rather vary according to the required emphasis and the harmonic implications. The Fugue is difficult and ambitious. Its swirling subject in 12/16 gives us a virtuoso gigue of great energy which comes to a sudden, triumphant climax on the last chord. In bar 20 appears a second subject, contrasting in expression with its slower chromatic descent. Most of the technical difficulty of this fugue lies in the execution of the middle voice which jumps about between the hands—hopefully without any noticeable bumps!

We are in ceremonial, festive mood for the Prelude and Fugue No 5 in **D major**. The Prelude is definitely a trumpets-and-drums piece, full of joy and brilliance (reminding us of the Overture of the Partita No 4, also in D major). The first problem to consider is the one posed by the double time-signature—both 2/2 and 12/8. Does Bach intend the quavers in the second bar to remain in triple time as some interpreters play, or does he mean strictly what he writes? I opt for the clarity and contrast of the latter. Then there is the question of the length of the dot beginning in bar 5. This can also be done in a number of different ways, and who is to know what Bach really intended? I hear this figure as drumbeats, and bring it out as such, making it as short and sharp as possible. When, beginning in bar 12, it is merely a part of the melodic line, then the rhythm should definitely be assimilated as part of a triplet. The recapitulation is triumphantly heralded by a descending scale in bar 40. The texture of the four-part Fugue is extremely dense, with the constant appearance of the last four notes of the subject (Tovey has counted between 80 and 90 times besides the 23 full-subject appearances in its short duration). The opening four notes also appear by themselves intermittently. I like to think of the sound of brass instruments in this fugue—hanging over from the Prelude. There are some very closely-knit strettos which are hard but not impossible to distinguish on the piano. It is important to take note of the alla breve time signature, denoting a quicker flow and fewer strong beats than if it were written in 4/4.

The Prelude and Fugue No 6 in **D minor** is a popular one, no doubt due to its show-off Prelude. As in the finale of his keyboard concerto in the same key, Bach begins the Prelude with a descending scale—soon taken up by both hands. Much of the figuration reminds us of Vivaldi, especially the attractive passage, which returns in the final bars, where the two hands play on top of each other (much easier, of course, on a two-manual harpsichord). Bach heavily revised this Prelude—one of the earliest compositions of

the Well-Tempered Clavier II— extending it from 43 to 61 bars. The Fugue subject winds its way upwards in triplets, then to descend in an expressive chromatic scale. There is some beautiful dialogue between the three voices, notably in the first episode which uses material from the countersubject, and the third which playfully repeats the opening of the inverted subject. The end is calm.

The delicacy of the Prelude No 7 in **E flat major** reminds us of a lute piece. Its pastoral character includes some wide but elegant leaps in the left hand, giving it a dance-like flavour. The opening interval of the Fugue subject—a rising fifth—was, according to Wilfrid Mellers, ‘traditionally a synonym for God, since it’s the most absolute consonance after the octave, which is hardly an interval at all’. The key of E flat major, with its three flats, was used by Bach ‘to symbolize the peace of mind that flows from the Trinity’. This four-part alla breve Fugue is certainly affirmative, especially when we get to the final cadence. There is no countersubject, but rather two stretto passages, the first involving tenor and bass, the second soprano and alto. A change of colour in bar 53 brings out the lovely tenor entrance of the subject in the subdominant key.

The difficult key signature of No 8 in **D sharp minor** will deter many people from learning this Prelude and Fugue—a shame, as it is very much worth the extra trouble. The Prelude is a two-part invention in binary form, using an ascending motive in broken thirds followed by a descending scale. The addition of demi- semiquavers in the second half makes it quite a bit busier, but should not cause it to hurry or become heavy. The Fugue is the most deeply expressive of Book II, and is described by Tovey as an ‘Aeschylean chorus’ (Aeschylus was a Greek tragic poet whose references to music were almost always of a mournful, sorrowful character). The countersubject plays an important role, as does the easily-overlooked motive in the right hand of bars 5 to 6 which is the basis of several episodes. There is a gradual build- up in intensity with successive entries of the subject, brought to a close in F sharp major. The next entrance— in B major in the alto voice—is very luminous and leads to another cadence in the dominant key of A sharp minor. The upper three voices then drift up and down in an episode leading to the strong bass entrance in bar 40. Now we expect the final cadence, but instead Bach miraculously adds a coda in which the soprano and tenor both state the subject in mirror image. The Fugue is resolved in the major key, releasing the tension in a most beautiful way.

The Well-Tempered Clavier is certainly not a work meant for sheer display, and there are times when that seems the farthest thing from Bach’s mind. The Prelude No 9 in E major could not be more gentle and unassuming with its rocking octaves in the left hand. Clear part-playing is essential throughout. Modelled on the E major Fugue of Fischer’s *Ariadne Musica*, Bach then brings us his own wonderful example of the *stile antico* (the Baroque adaptation of Renaissance polyphony in four or more parts). The time signature of 4/2 is typical of this, as is the purely vocal style. Hubert Parry called it ‘one of the most perfectly beautiful and the most perfect as a work of art, whether judged from the point of view of texture, closeness and coherence of treatment of the sub- jects, or of form’. There is no room for a detailed analysis here—a very worthwhile exercise which can be found outlined elsewhere. The beautiful, soaring entrance of the soprano at the end of bar 37 where the descending notes of the subject continue to fall (then repeated by the bass) is wondrous. To play the final two bars in the spirit of ‘Rule, Britannia’, which they definitely echo, would be, in my opinion, a terrible mistake! (The latter was written in 1740—at the time when Bach was compiling the Well- Tempered Clavier II.)

The Prelude No 10 in **E minor** immediately reminds us of the opening of the Partita No 3 in A minor, sharing the same time signature and characteristics. As in the Two-part Invention in D minor, it requires a steady stream of semiquavers to be played under or above a very long trill. A good sense of direction is

needed to prevent monotony. If the Prelude lacks some excitement, the same cannot be said about the terrific Fugue with which it is paired. Beginning with the upbeat to the first bar, its subject has tremendous energy and drive, combining triplets, marked crotchets, semiquavers and dotted notes. Wanda Landowska justly described it as 'combative, vehement'. The tied notes in the tenor in bars 56 to 58 add some lightheartedness. In the London autograph, the end came at bar 70 (the first pause), but once again Bach changed his mind and continued with the powerful bass entrance in bar 71. A cadenza-like passage comes to a halt which is marked 'Adagio' in some copies (although not in Bach's hand). Should the final three bars return to the original tempo? I think they should come close, and not let the momentum flag.

Simply looking at the layout of the Prelude No 11 in **F major**, we get a feeling of great space. Its long sustained notes which build up the five-part texture make us think more of the organ than the harpsichord. The opening 'turn' motive and the descending groups of four notes and their inversions form the entire prelude. Clarity in the voice-leading will, as always, help the listener and provide interest. Before the recapitulation in bar 57, a cadence in A minor (with a sharpened third) leads us back to the tonic with only three quavers in the left hand. They must be sensitively handled to make sense of the rapid modulation. After such a spacious Prelude, Bach gives us a very lively gigue in 6/16. Without the score in front of us we probably wouldn't realize that the subject of the Fugue begins in the middle of the bar—at least not until we reach the high F in bar 4. An unusually long episode of 24 bars occupies the middle of the piece. The soprano entrance in bar 85 surprises us by being in the minor mode—switching to major halfway through. More humour is apparent in the way the last bass entrance in bar 89 is extended by additional repetitions of the opening motive. The demisemiquavers above it should be as brilliant as possible.

Bach places one of his most attractive pairs at the end of the first half of Book II. The Prelude No 12 in **F minor** is written in the 'empfindsamer Stil' ('sensitive style') that was made popular by Bach's son, Carl Philipp Emanuel. Parallel thirds and sixths and especially the 'sigh' motive (two slurred notes) are the most telling characteristics of what was also called the 'galant'. This Prelude looks easy on paper, but is very hard to bring off well. The most common error is to play the opening four bars very slowly, then speed up for the next four where not much is happening. A moderate tempo must be found that suits the simple tenderness of the whole piece but keeps a steady flow. Evenness of tone can be worked on here at an intermediate level, as well as part-playing (especially in the left hand in bars 21 to 28 and similar passages). The Fugue opens with another sigh beginning on the upbeat, but it's an energetic one. We can almost hear the footwork in this bourrée which shares the same spirit as the Capriccio of the Partita No 2 in C minor. The rising sixth motive in the episodes, derived from the subject, adds charm. There are no complicated fugal devices here, just pure pleasure in the subject itself, with special insistence on its repeated notes.

The last twelve Preludes and Fugues contain some of the most challenging music of the '48' to interpret. C P E Bach wrote: 'Interpretation is nothing else but the capacity to make musical thoughts clear—according to their true content and affection—whether one sings or plays.' Such a task is made even harder by the fact that this is the longest segment and requires a great deal of imagination to sustain the interest. A lively treatment of dotted notes enlivens the Prelude No 13 in **F sharp major**, otherwise it will die on the spot. Where there is a steady stream of semiquavers, the dotted note will have to fall with the last of these as written, but elsewhere it can be shortened in the French manner to add sprightliness. Once again we have a partial recapitulation at bar 57. The whole thing needs a sense

of freedom within bounds, culminating in the last three bars. It is unusual for a Fugue to begin with a trill on the leading note, but this one does. It is a gavotte in the galant style with the sighs appearing first in the countersubject and later featuring in two episodes. On closer examination we realize that they derive from the tail end of the subject. Some triple counterpoint in bars 12 to 20 and 44 to 52 is worth bringing out. This innocent-sounding Fugue is not as easy as it might seem and benefits from a clear articulation.

A feeling of sad tenderness pervades the beautiful Prelude No 14 in **F sharp minor**, beginning with the opening two notes of the melody. Bach makes that falling fourth the most expressive feature of the piece, especially noticeable in bar 34 where the 'Neapolitan sixth' (the first inversion of the major triad built on the flattened second degree of the scale—in this case G major) is used to magical effect. The long, singing phrases are similar to those in Variation 13 of the 'Goldberg', and should be free within a steady pulse. The Fugue is the only real triple fugue (one with three subjects) in the whole Well-Tempered Clavier. Perhaps for this reason it is often compared to the monumental C sharp minor Fugue of Book I (some analysts also consider it a triple fugue— others a fugue with two very important countersubjects). In my opinion the similarities end there. True, the third subject here is similar to the first countersubject of the C sharp minor, but the mood is completely different. The fugue subject itself is well suited to a lively articulation as is the second subject introduced in bar 20 (although the whole piece is often played with no articulation whatsoever). The big danger is to speed up when the third subject slithers in at bar 36. It adds momentum and propels us to the final unison F sharp, but should not hurry. Beginning in bar 55, Bach combines the three subjects in three different permutations.

The Prelude and Fugue No 15 in **G major** is easier to sight-read than most, and has lots of gaiety and charm. Be careful not to reduce the Prelude to a finger exercise—it is worth more than that! Think of it being played by stringed instruments which it does indeed characterize. The mordents in the left hand in bars 15 to 16 and 47 to 48 do not have time to speak in too fast a tempo. There is an interesting variant in bar 7: most editions stick with the C natural of the autograph; I prefer the C sharp that is found in some subsequent copies. For sheer brilliance, go rather for the Fugue (or Fughetta as it is so brief), and give your technique a chance to show off! This piece exists in a much earlier, simplified version, without the wave of demisemiquavers that precede the final entrance of the subject. Not for the first time, Bach has a twinkle in his eye at the close.

We return to solemnity with the Prelude and Fugue No 16 in **G minor**. The Prelude is an obvious case for double-dotting and for adding ornaments in places similar to those where Bach has already done so himself. It begins and ends with a pedal point, forming one long arc—the last two bars of which are especially beautiful. The great strength of the Fugue is built upon the rhythm of the subject, punctuated by rests, and its insistent repeated notes. Make sure we know already in bar 2 where the first beat lies. The countersubject, which adds even more emphasis, is constantly present, and breaks forth in full glory at bar 59 where we have two sets of paired entries (one of the subject, one of the countersubject), both in thirds. The last, most powerful entrance of the subject in the bass in bar 79 goes as far as adopting its first three semiquavers to add excitement. The abrupt ending is surely intentional, and would be spoiled by any big ritardando. This is definitely one of Bach's best!

The Prelude and Fugue No 17 in **A flat major** is a large-scale work in which the two pieces are perfectly matched. It is therefore surprising to learn that although the Prelude was composed expressly for the Well-Tempered Clavier II in 1741, the Fugue dates from a much earlier time (probably the 1720s). The gently-flowing Prelude with its swinging bass motive is like a concerto movement, despite the fact that

so much of it is only in two voices. It can easily begin to wander if the harmonic outline isn't followed. Bach always has a plan: in this case, building up to the dominant key in bar 17, calming down to the relative minor in bar 34, triumphant in D flat major in bar 50, and beginning his approach to the end in bar 64. Just before he reaches his final destination he darkens the harmony with the Neapolitan sixth in bar 74—then a final sigh, and we finish on a very elegant cadence. In its earlier version (BWV901), the four-part Fugue was in F major, and ended in bar 24. It grows from the first, gentle entrance of the subject to the strong and expansive coda. The chromatic descent of the first countersubject adds extra beauty, and the semiquavers of the second keep things moving. Bar 32 sees a sombre entrance in E flat minor, after which light reappears, especially in bar 41. An imitation of an improvised pedal solo in bars 45 to 46 ends with a pause. The last utterance of the subject is accompanied by a fifth voice, making things a little crowded. A broadening of the tempo, however, is certainly permissible.

The Prelude No 18 in **G sharp minor** is yet another in the galant style with sighing thirds and sixths. The tempo is a lively one, though it must remain delicate, graceful and not heavy. G sharp minor is a difficult key to play in with its numerous sharps and double-sharps. Tovey wisely advises the player 'not to risk a toboggan run with his tempo'! The forte and piano markings are Bach's own. The E natural I play in the bass of bar 6 is one example of an accidental found in the British Library autograph that didn't make its way into the first editions (in the parallel passage in bar 22 it did). The Fugue is extremely difficult. Often it is played very slowly and solemnly, soon becoming very tedious. The subject of this three-part double fugue is smooth, but there are lots of opportunities elsewhere for a lively articulation. The second, very chromatic subject is introduced in bar 61, and by bar 97 Bach is combining the two. Don't miss how he uses the second half of the subject motive for the build-up in bars 128 to 131. The bass gets especially enthusiastic towards the end.

My choice of tempi in the '48' is often influenced by what immediately precedes or follows—something which is very important when performing or recording the complete cycle. If the G sharp minor Fugue were taken too slowly, it would then too closely resemble the pacing of the Prelude No 19 in A major. You could say, of course, that the tranquillity of this Prelude is enough of a contrast from the turbulence of the preceding fugue, but it doesn't hurt to emphasize this. I also don't believe that Bach's placement was random. As in Book I, the Preludes and Fugues seem to naturally fall into groups of four with a conclusive end to each and varied moods and styles in between. This is a pastorale, reminiscent of the one in his Christmas Oratorio. The recapitulation in bar 22 (now in D major) with the upper parts reversed is most beautiful. The Fugue is light and lively, not quite as chatty as the E major in Book I, but similarly playful. The springy dotted rhythms are played as written, but need to be clearly articulated.

The next Prelude, No 20 in **A minor**, is a strict two-part invention written in invertible counterpoint (constant swapping of the themes between the two voices) and mirror-inversion. In it, chromaticism (which for Bach signified grief or sorrow) is taken to the extreme, pushing the limits of tonality. Although it is intense, it retains an abstract quality, best expressed in a flowing tempo. If too slow, the listener's interest is lost in no time. In a way it speaks for itself, but benefits from good phrasing and an overall sense of direction. Another example of this kind of writing can be found in the first of the Vier Duette, BWV802. To accompany it, Bach places his wildest and most brilliant Fugue of the 48. The opening four notes of the subject, plunging to a diminished seventh, are used in many other works, among them Handel's Messiah ('And with his stripes') and Mozart's Requiem (Kyrie). The rest of the subject is simply these notes twice as fast, landing us back on the tonic. An advanced technique is needed to bring off the swirling countersubject and trills with bravura. The rests in bar 5 and elsewhere can be lengthened. A

real storm brings on the savage, furious ending. Some editions end this piece on a major chord, but again I see no relief here to justify that. As Mellers says: 'If there's a victory, it has not been easy ... [but rather] a matter of touch and go.'

There is nothing at all to ruffle us in the Prelude and Fugue No 21 in **B flat major**. The Prelude rolls gently along, engaging in some attractive hand-crossing and imitative dialogue between the parts. With both repeats it is also very long, but do we always need to be in a hurry? The Fugue is a minuet and has the courtesy and elegance of that dance. The slurs in bars 3 to 4 should be added throughout. There are different versions of the upper voices of the last six bars. Bach seems to have changed his mind about the voice-leading several times. The one I opt for is supposedly his last revision.

No 22 in **B flat minor** is a jewel of a prelude. The thematic material is rich, but tightly compressed into the first seven bars. Wanda Landowska points out the resemblance of the alto voice in bars 3 to 4 to the theme of the Prelude in the same key of Book I. Is it a coincidence? I like to think not. The time signature is alla breve, which should keep us from dragging. The ascent of the upper voices over a dominant pedal beginning in bar 74 reaches its high point in the major key to which Bach returns for the final chord. After the expressive restraint of the Prelude, Bach gives us one of his most severe, self-denying fugues. The articulation of the subject varies between editions: some have nothing written at all; others have dashes over the first three notes; one has dots. What is clear is that the first two notes should at least be separated and well marked, and the rests as expressive as the notes themselves. The same is true of the soprano in bar 13. The time signature of this five-page fugue is 3/2, and its relentless forward motion important to the overall structure. There are brief moments of softening expression (bars 33 to 41, bar 54), but otherwise there is little room for anything but the strictest discipline. The strettos are masterful, using both the inverted subject alone and combined in contrary motion with the original. The last of these uses paired entries moving away from each other to build to the very end.

The change of key to **B major** comes as a welcome balm after such trials. The Prelude No 23 is in concerto style with some passages obviously imitating the soloist. The ascending scales that Bach divides between the hands should be seamless. Another abrupt ending may surprise us, but that is what he wanted. The noble subject of the Fugue crawls upwards in minims before its quick descent. The countersubject has this same geometric design but with quicker note-values and starting its ascent a bar behind. This is a good example of a fugue particularly suited to performance on the piano. The four voices creating its dense, tangled texture can more easily be distinguished by using different colours for each—not, however, without a great deal of work! A second subject of sinuous quavers appears in bar 28. Bach gets carried away in bar 68, adding some semiquavers to the bass. It's a good place to start when considering the overall tempo.

I find it very fitting that Bach ends the '48' with a dance. It is too often forgotten that his music is inspired by its rhythms and delights. The Prelude No 24 in B minor could not begin more simply. Two voices of equal importance are all that Bach needs to create his musical thoughts. It exists in two different time signatures: an early version in common time (4/4) with quicker note-values, and a later one in alla breve and marked 'Allegro' by Bach. The latter looks better on the page, is easier to read, and should sound more buoyant. The Fugue is a passepied (compare it with the one in the Fifth Partita and the F major Fugue from Book I). Although we are in a minor key, the octave leaps and brilliant trills make

us partakers in Bach's joy. The end of the cycle comes not with a feeling of finality, but rather leaves us astonished by his genius and fulfilled by his generous spirit and warmth of heart.

It is futile to even attempt to say which book of the '48' is the better. Both contain jewels of many colours. There are certainly differences, especially in the preludes which, in the second set, are on a much bigger scale (accounting for the extra half-hour playing time). Whereas in Book I only one prelude is in binary form (two sections both repeated), there are ten examples of this in Book II. The beginning of what was later called 'sonata form' is apparent in many of the preludes, with substantial amounts of thematic material being partially recapitulated—usually with a different distribution of parts and often in a key other than the tonic. There are no two- or five-part fugues in The Well-Tempered Clavier II, but some of the three-part ones are among his most ambitious. Certainly there are more pieces in Book I that are immediately familiar to us, making them more approachable to the listener and student, but undoubtedly Bach's maturity and mastery of the genre is nowhere more brilliantly displayed than in this final set.

What does playing a prelude and fugue mean to a pianist these days? For most piano students it is a necessary part of an exam or an international piano competition—to be got through as best one can and, hopefully, without going wrong! Often they are approached too soon—long before a good grounding is established in the easier pieces of Bach. It is impossible to play a four- or five-voice fugue if you cannot already play cleanly in two or three voices. For many teachers it is perplexing, as Bach never wrote any tempo or expression marks in the score, and edited versions give conflicting opinions. For professional performers it is a great test of their abilities (and nerves!). Many prefer to play Bach transcriptions (by Liszt or Busoni, for instance) where it is easier to hide behind more notes and add the sustaining pedal. Artur Schnabel, one of the great pianists of the twentieth century, preferred not to perform The Well-Tempered Clavier in concert halls because he considered it too intimate. To become familiar with the complete '48' is to discover the endless variety within them where no two preludes are alike, and every fugue is constructed in a different fashion.

The Well-Tempered Clavier has never ceased to be a source of inspiration, fascination and wonderment to professional musicians and music lovers. We have been told many times that, after his death, Bach's music fell out of favour and that it was only 'revived' by Mendelssohn. That is partly true, of course, but Mendelssohn was introduced to it by his teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter, who himself had been a pupil of Johann Kirnberger, who in turn was a pupil of Bach. Zelter, the director of the Berlin Singakademie, counted among his friends the poet Goethe who often heard the young Mendelssohn performing Bach's Fugues. Late in his life, Goethe made the following remark:

It was when my mind was in a state of perfect composure and free from external distractions, that I obtained the true impress of your grand master. I said to myself: it was as if the eternal harmony was conversing within itself, as it may have done in the bosom of God, just before the creation of the world.

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