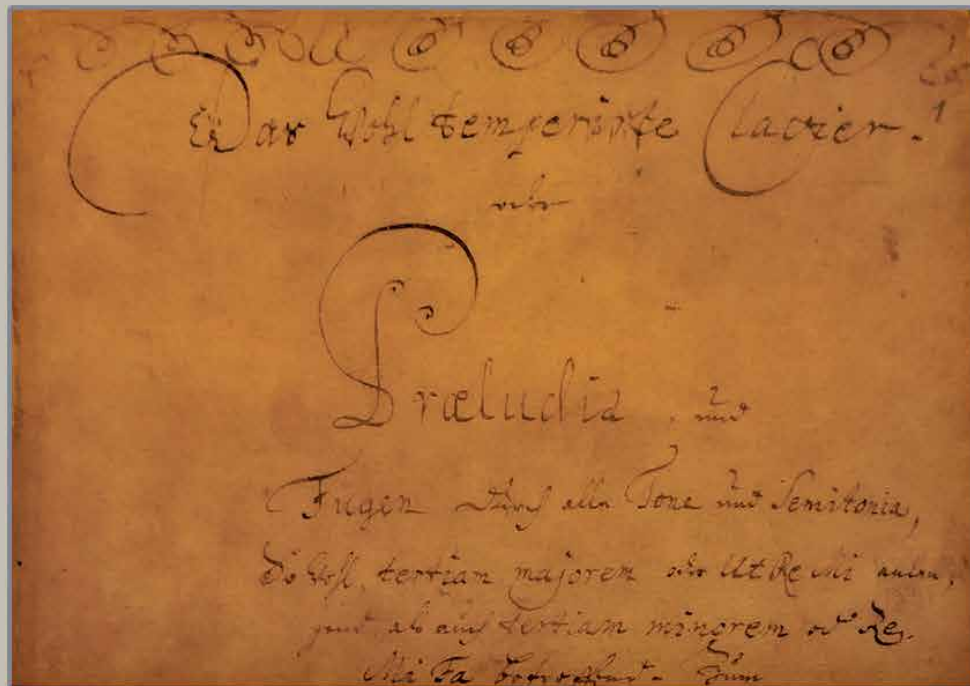


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BACH'S TONAL SOUNDSCAPE

The complete Well-Tempered Clavier recorded by key

Ian Holtham, Piano



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BACH'S TONAL SOUNDSCAPE

The complete Well-Tempered Clavier recorded by key

Ian Holtham, Piano

DISC 1

1-8 Keynote C 9-16 Keynote C sharp 17-24 Keynote D

DISC 2

1-8 Keynote E flat / D sharp 9-16 Keynote E 17-24 Keynote F

DISC 3

1-8 Keynote F sharp 9-16 Keynote G 17-24 Keynote A flat / G sharp

DISC 4

1-8 Keynote A 9-16 Keynote B flat 17-24 Keynote B

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DISC I

Keynote C

- 1** Prelude in C major Book I 1'34
- 2** Fugue in C major Book I 1'56
- 3** Prelude in C major Book II 2'03
- 4** Fugue in C major, Book II 1'45
- 5** Prelude in C minor Book I 1'37
- 6** Fugue in C minor Book I 1'26
- 7** Prelude in C minor Book II 2'12
- 8** Fugue in C minor Book II 2'24

Keynote C sharp

- 9** Prelude in C sharp major Book I 1'11
- 10** Fugue in C sharp major Book I 2'23
- 11** Prelude in C sharp major, Book II 1'38
- 12** Fugue in C sharp major Book II 1'46
- 13** Prelude in C sharp minor Book I 2'34
- 14** Fugue in C sharp minor Book I 4'24
- 15** Prelude in C sharp minor Book II 4'35
- 16** Fugue in C sharp minor Book II 2'12

Keynote D

- 17** Prelude in D major Book I 1'17
- 18** Fugue in D major Book I 2'05
- 19** Prelude in D major Book II 5'18
- 20** Fugue in D major Book II 3'53
- 21** Prelude in D minor Book I 1'18
- 22** Fugue in D minor Book I 2'11
- 23** Prelude D minor Book II 1'54
- 24** Fugue in D minor Book II 1'53

Total time disc I – 57'15

DISC 2

Keynote E flat/ D sharp

- 1** Prelude in E flat major Book I 4'20
- 2** Fugue in E flat major Book I 1'50
- 3** Prelude in E flat major Book II 2'20
- 4** Fugue in E flat major Book II 2'04
- 5** Prelude in E flat minor Book I 3'24
- 6** Fugue in D sharp minor Book I 3'46
- 7** Prelude in D sharp minor Book II 3'29
- 8** Fugue in D sharp minor Book II 4'52

Keynote E

- 9** Prelude in E major Book I 1'25
- 10** Fugue in E major Book I 1'24
- 11** Prelude in E major Book II 4'33
- 12** Fugue in E major Book II 3'36
- 13** Prelude in E minor Book I 2'38
- 14** Fugue in E minor Book I 1'20
- 15** Prelude in E minor Book II 4'16
- 16** Fugue in E minor Book II 2'44

Keynote F

- 17** Prelude in F major Book I 1'10
- 18** Fugue in F major Book I 1'55
- 19** Prelude in F major Book II 2'36
- 20** Fugue in F major Book II 2'17
- 21** Prelude in F minor Book II 3'47
- 22** Fugue in F minor Book II 2'32
- 23** Prelude in F minor Book I 2'27
- 24** Fugue in F minor Book I 4'05

Total time disc 2 – 70'37

DISC 3

Keynote F sharp

- 1** Prelude in F sharp major Book I 1'32
- 2** Fugue in F sharp major Book I 2'12
- 3** Prelude in F sharp major Book II 2'42
- 4** Fugue in F sharp major Book II 2'10
- 5** Prelude in F sharp minor Book I 1'12
- 6** Fugue in F sharp minor Book I 5'40
- 7** Prelude in F sharp minor Book II 2'46
- 8** Fugue in F sharp minor Book II 3'30

Keynote G

- 9** Prelude in G major Book I 0'48
- 10** Fugue in G major Book I 2'48
- 11** Prelude in G major Book II 2'38
- 12** Fugue in G major Book II 1'15
- 13** Prelude in G minor Book I 1'46
- 14** Fugue in G minor Book I 2'21
- 15** Prelude in G minor Book II 2'17
- 16** Fugue in G minor Book II 2'53

Keynote A flat/ G sharp

- 17** Prelude in A flat major Book I 1'25
- 18** Fugue in A flat major Book I 2'33
- 19** Prelude in A flat major Book II 3'03
- 20** Fugue in A flat major Book II 2'29
- 21** Prelude in G sharp minor Book I 2'13
- 22** Fugue in G sharp minor Book I 3'15
- 23** Prelude in G sharp minor Book II 4'12
- 24** Fugue in G sharp minor Book II 4'45

Total time disc 3 – 64'11

DISC 4

Keynote A

- 1** Prelude in A major Book I 1'14
- 2** Fugue in A major Book I 2'18
- 3** Prelude in A major Book II 1'58
- 4** Fugue in A major Book II 1'26
- 5** Prelude in A minor Book I 1'14
- 6** Fugue in A minor Book I 4'09
- 7** Prelude in A minor Book II 3'45
- 8** Fugue in A minor Book II 1'52

Keynote B flat

- 9** Prelude in B flat major Book I 1'14
- 10** Fugue in B flat major Book I 2'05
- 11** Prelude in B flat major Book II 7'57
- 12** Fugue in B flat major Book II 2'31
- 13** Prelude in B flat minor Book I 2'20
- 14** Fugue in B flat minor Book I 2'44
- 15** Prelude in B flat minor Book II 2'52
- 16** Fugue in B flat minor Book II 4'22

Keynote B

- 17** Prelude in B major Book I 1'09
- 18** Fugue in B major Book I 2'16
- 19** Prelude in B major Book II 2'07
- 20** Fugue in B major Book II 3'35
- 21** Prelude in B minor Book II 2'16
- 22** Fugue in B minor Book II 2'15
- 23** Prelude in B minor Book I 4'14
- 24** Fugue in B minor Book I 9'26

Total time disc 4 – 73'02

Bach's Tonal Soundscape

The two books of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* come from two distinctly different periods in Bach's life. The first book was collected together in 1722 during Bach's appointment as Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen; a period in his life when the composition of secular music was the chief requirement of his employment. The second book followed two decades later, completed in 1742 in Leipzig when the ageing and increasingly fragile master was imbued with the relationship between his music and the divine. Despite the span of years that separates the two volumes, Bach's remarkable contrapuntal musical architecture can be clearly discerned in various artistic relationships between the two books. Not only are there fascinating correspondences and mutual reflections, but also an overall sense of cumulative artistic totality. It is easy to imagine that the first book sat on Bach's composing desk open at the appropriate key as he was writing Book 2.

These vital musical connections cannot be fully seen unless *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is viewed through the aural prism of key rather than the historical artefact of each book. It is in this way that 'the 48' are ordered in this recording, with preludes and fugues of the same key presented together – the C majors, the C minors, the C-sharp majors, and so on. Generally Book 1 is followed by Book 2, although

an inversion of the books does occur at the caesura points of F minor and B minor – the halfway and concluding points of the tonal gamut. In these two keys the utterances of Book 1 seem at a more sublime level in comparison to the lighter, more wistful views of Book 2.

Throughout *The Well-Tempered Clavier* Bach seems to have a message about the core attributes of a tonal centre. Each keynote is musically sculpted, revealing a myriad of attributes. Proceeding by key gives a view of Bach's musical position on each keynote, in addition to his way of crafting the overall structure of this unique collection of ninety-six individual pieces. Such a presentation of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* offers a means of distilling Bach's view on tonality in a way not perceived in the standard progression by book alone.

Disc 1: C to D

The key of **C major** offers an opening window into Bach's magisterial understanding of tonality and tonal centres. This is achieved in the two C major preludes through absolute contrast. In the prelude of Book 1, the aural continuity of motif and key design offers a concept of C major as purity and infinity. By almost cataclysmic contrast, the prelude of Book 2 uses C major as a background to all other tonal possibilities, a canvas over which chromaticism and tonal richness come into play. The prelude

of Book 1 is crafted by means of a simple technical construction, while prelude of Book 2 is a rare example of a four-part invention, woven with harmonic richness and complexity. Indeed, from this first encounter we shall see that the preludes all have their own identity – etude, siciliano, French overture, gigue, or often an invention – and are always something more than simply a prelude to a fugue.

The C major fugues have the same concept of contrast as the preludes, though in a different framework – a tonal and emotional standpoint of complete inversion. The four-voice fugue of Book 1 is pure, religious, aspirational, dignified, and intricate in its use of strettis, the overlapping of the vocal entries. By contrast, the three-voice fugue of Book 2 abounds in almost limitless rhythmic generation and exuberance. It is interesting to compare the number of voices in the corresponding fugues in each book. On some occasions, Bach will swap the number of voices between the books, while other times he will mirror them. The C major fugues demonstrate the opposition of four and three voices, the latter being most common number of voices in a Bach fugue.

The C major preludes and fugues create a kind of C major universe, establishing the tonality as prime and universal: our musical origin and starting point. **C minor** serves as a minor modality extension of its major, personalising the tonal centre with emotion. For Bach,

C minor seems to be something more personal and unlike the later notion of the key as the harbinger of dramatic tragedy. From C major onwards, *The Well Tempered Clavier* as a whole establishes central concepts of continuity and contrast in the world of each tonal centre. In this respect, structure and genre in C minor mirrors C major though with contrasting musical outcomes. The prelude of Book 1 continues the study-like technical patterning of the first C major prelude but simpler with mostly two voices yet with greater musical energy and drive. The four-part invention of the C major prelude in Book 2 becomes a two-part invention in the C minor prelude of Book 2, written with almost gallant elegance. One also feels, in some respects, an older and simpler compositional voice. The great swirl of Book 1 is distilled down in Book 2, with repeated halves but all within the sea of one texture.

Like the C major fugues, the fugues in C minor also match three voices with four, except in reverse. Musical character in the fugues is also reversed; the three-voice fugue of Book 1 is the ebullient one by nature, while the poised, more reflective one is the four-voice of Book 2. Of the four C fugues, it is notable that only one (C major Book 1) is a 'real' fugue where the second entry answer is an exact transposition of the first entry subject, the other three being modified 'tonal' fugues in subject-answer design. Through the tonality of C Bach establishes

the starting point of his great design: key centres which reveal definitive structural and emotional similarities and contrasts through the magical musical threads of Bach's incomparable contrapuntal and harmonic skill.

In some ways, the preludes of **C-sharp major** look very alike. They are both highly patterned and repetitive – excepting the allegro fugato at the end of the prelude in Book 2 – with a degree of virtuoso flow and fluidity. However, despite the impression of similarity, such is the hypnotic nature of the prelude in Book 1 that what sounds as tending towards virtuosity is brought back in Book 2 to a spiritual realm. The nature of the harmonic changes in Book 2 is deeply felt, acting as an inversion of the relationship between the C major preludes, displaying both the technical and deeper emotional attributes of repeated musical patterning.

The C-sharp major fugues, both in three voices, show more continuity than the C major fugues. In Book 1, the virtuoso quality and ebullience of the C-sharp major prelude is met by the fugue, with a quality of sustained geniality, up until the point of a beautiful fugal coda of quiet poignancy. The C-sharp major fugue of Book 2, however, is a miracle of Bach's enormous contrapuntal mastery. Beginning with almost deceptive casualness, Bach proceeds (in the space of 35 bars) to state the subject in inversion, diminution and augmentation, revelling in an astonishing array of motivic

manipulation before ending in virtuosic splendour. Although C-sharp major remains a sunny key, Bach demonstrates its capacity to take ebullience and make it sound spiritual and majestic.

C-sharp minor appears to displays a uniformity of view, until the fugue of Book 2. Between the preludes and fugue of Book 1, this homogeneity lies in deeply felt expression. Both preludes are richly modulatory (more so in Book 2) and always with a sense of melancholy spirituality. This seems to be the hallmark or chief attribute of C-sharp minor as a key of emotional poignancy. The prelude of Book 1, a kind of siciliano, is the first intensely personal piece in Book 1. The prelude of Book 2 is a three-part invention of great complexity, with extraordinary motivic adaptability and echoes of dance. The prelude of Book 2 seems on a still more elevated and personal plane than its companion in Book 1, and it is the longest work encountered so far.

The C-sharp minor fugue of Book 1 is the first of two five-voice fugues in the 48, with two countersubjects that add extraordinary depth to the tonal design. The subject here is as close as is possible within Bach's tonal scheme of a transposition of the composer's name – the B-A-C-H motif. The subject is also a paradigm of the strict fugal term *soggetto*: serious in character, beginning on the beat, and rhythmically concise. The fugue of Book 1 is the encapsulation of the emotional qualities of both preludes:

intense, deeply felt, dramatic, and harmonically strong and chromatically inflected. The fugue of Book 2, on the other hand, suddenly stands out as a moment of extraordinary contrast. In three voices, it is enormously energetic, bustling and complex, lending to C-sharp minor qualities of compulsive intensity only hinted by the preludes and first book fugue. The second book's fugue subject has the other kind of subject, the longer, more rhythmically discursive *andamento*, though not here beginning with a rest. This fugue recalls some of the attributes of the C-sharp major fugue of Book 2: inversion, extraordinary manipulation of the subject, and an occasional chromatic countersubject. The complexity of the C-sharp minor fugue from Book 2 is different from the great compositional structure of the fugue in Book 1; in the second fugue, there is a tinge of ebullience that is not entirely complete, containing some melancholy tinged with grandeur. C-sharp minor cumulatively typifies a personal and kinetic expressivity.

D major is the key of the opening of one of the most famous works of Bach's era – Monteverdi's fabulous *Toccatà* from *Orfeo*. The trumpet brass-like quality is heard in the D major prelude of Book 2, less so in the prelude of Book 1. The prelude of Book 1 tends to revert to the study model of the first, second and third preludes of the same book. Its technical difficulty prefigures Chopin's Étude Op. 10 No. 2 in its relentless and highly

demanding use of the third, fourth and fifth fingers in the right hand. The prelude of Book 2 is much more expansive, taking the repeated binary model already heard in the C minor prelude of the same book, though here with a very extensive second half. The second D major prelude is an orchestral *sinfonia*, almost with a kind of French overture quality.

In D major, there is a sense of musical progression between prelude and fugue that gives a sense of acoustic completeness. This is not just the fanfare key as we hear the study-like prelude of Book 1 moving into a four-voice fugue that is a pure French overture. The prelude of Book 2 is a next movement of sorts that follows the overture. And the fugue of Book 2, also in four voices, is the amen, or *envoi*. Remarkably, the second fugue does not begin in D major but its subdominant (G major), unfolding with an astounding yet quiet abundance of strettos that is almost incidental to the wonderful flow of motivic invention. Like the pattern of the C-sharp minors, Bach reserves in D major a special statement for the fugue in the second book about the further, more developed and complete nature of the key; in addition to D major's reputation of majesty and fanfare, Bach masterfully reveals its extreme spiritual beauty.

There is some sense in the **D minor** preludes and fugues of the poignancy, personal tragedy and emotional depth typically associated with the key. The prelude of Book 1 reverts to the study

pattern for the last time in the series. Once the prelude breaks away from sequences of arpeggios and broken chords, Bach makes little syncopated melodies out of the last note in a group of three. The prelude is active and chromatic, with a brow-furrowing intensity and a cadenza moment comparable to the C minor prelude of Book 1. The second D minor prelude is a two-part invention. Slowly Bach is revealing a clear choice for invention over étude in his preludes, and we shall see that inventions are distinctly predominant in Book 2.

The two D minor fugues are both real fugues, three-voiced, and lyrical by nature. Importantly, both fugues fulfil a contrasting function with the preludes. For the first time, there is a sense of symmetry – rather than acoustic contrasts – in the preludes and fugues of a given key. D minor is the first tonal centre where Bach bestows a holistic sense of tonal characterisation. It is fitting, and clearly quite deliberate that the first occurrence of symmetry is at the first half-caesura point – a quarter of the way through the twelve keys.

Disc 2: E-flat to F

A striking disjuncture is apparent in the preludes in **E-flat major**. In Book 1, it is noticeable that Bach suddenly introduces this fugue-prelude after having basically explored étude-like forms in the first six preludes of Book

1. The E-flat major prelude of Book 1 is one of the most extended, glorious in its contrapuntal coruscations and demonstrating an incredible display of motivic movement that spans the range of the instrument. The prelude of Book 2, however, is reflective and imbued with a sense of semi-pastoral calm, following the free forms that characterise the first six preludes of Book 2. That the prelude in Book 1 is the most grand thus far and the prelude in Book 2 is one of the least grand says something about the comprehensiveness of E-flat major.

The fugues in E-flat major show the juxtaposition of three and four voices. The three-voice fugue of Book 1 is very compressed, almost jerky and frivolous. The nature of the subject and its tonal answer make this a kind of super-tonal fugue, with the three academic conditions of fugal tonality fulfilled – the subject begins on, stresses and modulates to the dominant. The four-part fugue of Book 2 is quite old-fashioned and textbook in its construction, looking back to Froberger. More than any key yet, Bach presents E-flat major with studies in complete contrast. Unlike the sense of completion that is clear in C major, E-flat major is revealed as a kind of musical Hegelian dialectic – thesis and antithesis.

As if to undercut the comprehensiveness of E-flat major, the **E-flat minor** prelude of Book 1 is an astonishing event. An absolute gem of expressive depth, this prelude

features a pliant and incredibly beautiful melodic line supported with a lute-like accompaniment. The fugue is also astonishing but for different reason – of all the preludes and fugues, this prelude and fugue are strictly speaking in different keys. The performer must create the remarkable effect of lifting from the E-flat ending of the prelude into **D-sharp minor** for the fugue, which proves to be one of the most harmonically difficult keys to grasp. This three-voice fugue is Renaissance-like, with a rhythmic riddle that creates the effect of the subject beginning again after the half bar. The fugue continues to unfurl until a series of inversions, rhythmic displacements with dotted notes, and most astonishingly augmentation – the first example in Book 1.

The prelude of Book 2, also knottily in D-sharp minor, completely discards both the key signature and aesthetic of E-flat minor, as well as the earlier liturgical style that is resonant in the fugue of Book 1. In contrast with the simplicity of the prelude in Book 1, the prelude of Book 2 is a two-part invention of great elaboration. Here the two-part invention is elevated to an august level. Its expressive personality – unlike the subjective introspective qualities of Book 1 – is outward, cerebral and architectural. The fugue of Book 2 continues in D-sharp minor, an extraordinarily learned and deeply spiritual four-voice fugue with some superb but almost unreadable

harmonic turns. It is noticeable that the fugues of D-sharp minor are both liturgical by nature – the fugue in Book 2 is like a solemn Requiem Mass. In these preludes and fugues, Bach gives an extraordinary compendium of E-flat/D-sharp, which is shown to be continuously mutable with many dimensions and colours.

After the complexity of E-flat/D-sharp, it comes almost as relief to find ourselves in the genial world of E. The **E major** prelude of Book 1 is captivatingly pastoral. Despite being quite chromatic in nature, it is never chromatic in character; its chromatic movement is subservient to the tonal richness of E, which rings out. The prelude of Book 2 shows a firm tonic-dominant polarity, despite little chromaticisms. This prelude expands the pastoral concept with a more complex musical language, but without a loss of fundamental clarity – E remains the abiding foundation with a kind of firmament quality exemplified by the frequent pedal-point function in the prelude's structure.

The E major fugues again match three voices with four. The three-voice fugue of Book 1 has charm and grace, and has an engaging clarity of construction. The four-voice fugue of Book 2 is one of the most beautiful of the 48, imbued with prayerful stillness. Almost like watching the very beginning of creation, this fugue brings us back to the core of E as the solid concept of tonal firmament.

To some extent, the **E minor** prelude of Book 1 begins in the same vein, with disguised tonic E pedals. In that it is expressive, this prelude is also cosmic and hypnotic, before an explosion of compressed virtuosity. The fugue of Book 1 takes up this virtuosity in the only two-voiced fugue of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. This fugue is one of the most stunning examples of strict double counterpoint; after a central unison point, the configuration of the two voices is inverted exactly all the way until the last four bars.

The prelude of Book 2 is another of the huge binary repetitive structures. There are huge amounts of imitation, complex ornamentation and refined rhythmic patterns, but still with the very driven sound of the Book 1 fugue. This is followed by a three-voice fugue that is the one of the genuinely virtuoso fugues, with a sustained display of dazzling keyboard facility that includes elements of the keyboard concerto. This is always centred around E, with the firmament quality of E minor remaining prevalent throughout.

The move to the tonality of F marks the end of the first tetrachord, the halfway point of Bach's tonal schema. In **F major** Bach seems to conjure his great contemporary Handel. The prelude of Book 1 though clearly Bach's voice is something of a Handelian portrait in its rollicking design. Following this is a warm and equally genial three-part fugue, whose tonic-avoiding subject and tonal nuances are again suggestive of Handel.

The same can be said for the prelude of Book 2, although this is more embellished and developed. This prelude is the second of the great four-part inventions in the collection and looks back to the C major prelude of Book 2. Thus there is a sense in Book 2 of framing the first tetrachord with the intricacy and majesty of two splendid four-part inventions. The F major fugue of Book 2 is full of unexpected utterances of the subject, which are the marks of a Handel fugue, unlike Bach's subject references, which are generally structurally expected. The Handelian spirit is still alive in this fugue and F major remains a means of paying homage to Handel, but this is richer and Bach's presence is more pronounced, most evident in the ebullient coda.

F minor is the closing key of the first half of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in this progression by key rather than book. Unlike the preludes and fugues so far, in F minor the order of the books is reversed in order to present the more enduringly profound musical statement last. The prelude of Book 2 pushes its *affect*, a kind of *empfindsam Stil* sigh together with an answering Alberti gesture. This is not conventionally Baroque, and with hints of later eighteenth-century harmony there is the sense Bach cocking one eye towards a musical future he could not join but could clearly perceive. The coherent three-voice fugue of Book 2 follows in the lead of its prelude. For all its beauty and harmonic attractiveness, there is still

an impression that Bach is looking into the late eighteenth century. Partly in the design of the subject and countersubject, this fugue is not Renaissance or Baroque but early Classical in character and structural evolution. It is the grandfather of the counterpoint of Haydn and Mozart though still with the expressive power of F minor.

The prelude of Book 1 is something rather different than its companion in Book 2. This prelude is a tapestry of pure contrapuntal emotion, as well as the first four-part invention of Book 1. The four-voice fugue that follows is the first of the great chromatic fugues; in this it is the cousin of the B minor fugue that closes Book 1. In this fugue tonality and the concept of a tonal centre are stretched by the intervallic stretches that characterise the subject. There are little simple scales in the countersubject, but even these are often tonally inflected and almost bitonal in their construction. This chromaticism is contrasted with episodes of pure diatonic bliss in a series of unfolding episodes. We shall see this contrasting relationship between subject material of chromatic anguish and diatonic comfort of the episodes in the great B minor fugue in Book 1. These two fugues share a kinship of expressiveness and sense of tragedy, though where F minor looks to the future, B minor gazes at eternity.

Disc 3: F-sharp to A-flat/G-sharp

Like C-sharp major, **F-sharp major** is

one of the arcane keys historically not encountered in Bach's epoch. For Bach this is absolutely new territory. Book 1 gives a conventional prelude and fugue. The prelude is pastoral-like, if rhythmically a little unusual. The three-voice fugue is concise and cohesive. Its episodes add a level of spiritual transcendence that recalls the arch-defining episodes in the F minor and B minor fugues of Book 1.

The F-sharp major prelude and fugue of Book 2 is far more indecorous. The prelude is an astonishing two-part invention, which is raised here to great artistry. The fugue, again in three voices, is a gavotte, a relatively light dance form but elevated conceptually into something enormous and complex. Against this arcane key, Bach presents in F-sharp major remarkable acts of consolidation and innovation.

F-sharp minor takes this concept further. The prelude of Book 1 has extraordinary concision and conceptual depth, unfolding with a beautiful sense of expressive logic. The four-voice fugue is much deeper and its evolving contemplative mood supplies strong contrast to the F-sharp major fugues. Its subject is rhythmically complicated, but as the meter becomes clear this fugue develops into a wonderful composition with striking moments of subject inversion.

The F-sharp minor prelude and fugue of Book 2 is one of the absolute gems of the 48. The Italian cantilena-like

prelude is an extraordinary three-part invention. It is expressive, free-ranging and harmonically quite complex, with a striking use of the Neapolitan sixth chord. The magnificent three-voice fugue is the only true triple fugue in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, with three genuine subjects. The first is evocative of pre-Baroque music, almost Renaissance-like with a trace of plainchant. A final statement in the relative major announces the beginning of a second fugue, whose subject is a bumptious abbreviation of Baroque French overture rhythm. There is a complete enunciation of the second subject with hints of the first subject, followed by a complete statement of the first with a number of statements of the second. The galant third subject goes quite a long way into the kind of contrapuntal figuration seen throughout the later eighteenth century. So the three subjects seem to stand as historical reference points of Bach's compositional experience. In short expositions, the three subjects unfold: first almost meets third and third meets second. There is a sense of the three subjects becoming conjoined, although it is not until the final moments that the three full subjects fit against each other in a dazzling display of contrapuntal unification.

G major continues with this spirit of influence and direction though with greater geniality and less poignancy than the tonality of F-sharp minor. Book 1 is a tribute to Buxtehude, one of the

musicians that Bach most admired. The prelude is a short sharp toccata. The fugue (in three voices) is a complex kind of gigue, which becomes the vehicle for an extended development of a suite movement. The treatment of this dance subject is unexpected, with compositional gestures—inversion and stretti—usually reserved for more traditional fugue subjects. This fugue continually explores subject transformations, which in Bach's hands seem limitless.

The G major prelude of Book 2 looks forward to a compositional style that is almost Rococo. Its texture is as homophonic as polyphonic music can be. The fugue, again in three voices, is also harmonically conceived with a subject largely built on broken chords. It too has an element of virtuosity and great charm. G major is revealed as an open hearted tonality through which Bach pays homage to musical attributes of the past and the envisioned future.

The immediate sense of **G minor** is expressiveness tinged by tragedy. The prelude of Book 1 is pliantly personal. That quality is diffused, though not depersonalised, in the Book 2 prelude which is a French overture. The expressiveness of the Book 1 prelude is given a historical mould in the Book 2 prelude, with a Purcellian darkness despite the French overture's traditional status as *pomposo* and aristocratic.

The G minor fugues both have four voices. The Book 1 fugue is direct

expressivity, motivically framed by the minor second at a distance of the minor sixth. Its subject is constructed in two parts across two bars, which lends itself to stretto; the fugue turns into an emotional validation of strict fugal processes as the stretti cascade on each other. Constructional and motivic concision are discarded for expansiveness in the subject of the Book 2 fugue, which has the unique feature of an entire bar of repeated notes, imparting a tremendous kind of solidity. As the fugue evolves, the repetition becomes more a virtuosic feature between contrapuntal structure and the keyboardist's technical prowess. What strikes one as indecorous becomes part of the formative fabric, a celebratory quality that is unexpected in this key. G minor, then, is the key which displays the gamut from deep personal expression to overt virtuosity.

Bach's switching between E-flat/D-sharp is a parallel to his treatment of A-flat/G-sharp; nowhere else in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is this use of enharmonic identity found. Here the flat is associated with the major and the sharp is associated with the minor key. **A-flat major** is a key of human warmth. The A-flat major preludes of Books 1 and 2 are open with great geniality and a kind of humane grandeur. Both preludes are loquacious and compositionally their content is generated by extensive repetition of the opening motif: comfort through repetition and regeneration.

This is also reflected in the two A-flat major four-voice fugues. The fugue of Book 1 is characterised by openness, with a subject that is almost a quiet horn call. The fugue of Book 2 is Handelian, with tremendous ebullience, bounciness and charm. There is some quite intricate chromaticism, though this does not cloud the nature of A-flat major, which remains a warm sunny key imbued with musical geniality and occasionally just reaching humour.

G-sharp minor presents something quite different – a kind of Janus staring away from the geniality of A-flat major. This is a key of great seriousness, melodic flexibility and expressive pliancy. The prelude of Book 1 is highly contrapuntal, canonic and sequential. Its Book 1 companion is a modulating four-voice fugue. This fugue is almost translucent in texture yet contains some of the most complicated chromatic moments of the 48. Much like the G minor fugue of Book 2, the subject of this fugue is characterised by repeated notes but with very different effect, supplying cadential harmony in contrapuntal shorthand. The beginning of the subject is extremely beautiful, but there is something extraordinarily striking about the repeated notes, which become the principal generator of the fugue.

The G-sharp minor prelude of Book 2 is a stunning piece of music. It takes the expressive qualities of the key and distils them into a large-scale virtuosic binary event. The prelude is tonally adventurous

with a sense of energy that is expressive but driven. The three-voice G-sharp minor fugue of Book 2 is a reassertion of the expressive nature and sheer complexity of which the key is capable. The first subject of the fugue is lengthy and serpentine and there is a pull—subtle but relentless—of chromatic tension. Without preamble this fugue turns into a double fugue, with a second subject formed from the chromatic scale. Through all of the second fugue material, there is only a rhythmic hint of the first subject, before both subjects eventually fit against one another. There is a tension between one subject that does not have a single chromatic note and one in which almost every note is chromatic; the way they are interwoven is one of Bach's profound statements on the interrelationship between the diatonic and chromatic palettes of contrapuntal movement. In this fugue, there is inherently a harmonic organisation of the chromatic entities, a compositional procedure that Bach will only very rarely abandon.

Disc 4: A to B

There is a developing sense in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* that Bach equates completion with expansion. The preludes and fugues of the final three keynotes (A, B-flat and B) are closer, tighter-bound and generally more expansive as Bach addresses the character of each tonal centre in its major and minor modalities. This enlargement of musical thought and,

often, structure is the fundamental signal that both books approach their conclusion.

A major – Bach's display key – opens the final quarter. Both preludes are three-part inventions, or sinfonias. The prelude of Book 1 is a magnificently thread three-part invention; unfolding with a marvellous harmonic tapestry around the related keys. Its perfect triple-counterpoint construction has every possible combination of the three voices in which each of three vocal lines is used as top, middle or bottom voice in turn. The prelude of Book 2 is a pastoral sinfonia, although less strictly organised. With continuous interchange, Bach uses the three-part invention not so much as a contrapuntal display but in a pastoral environment that gives the key a completely different shape.

The two fugues in A major are both three-voice chatter fugues. With wonderful symmetry, the subjects of the fugues invert the rhythmic relationships of the preludes: the triplet quality of the second prelude is the core rhythm of the first fugue, while the semiquaver runs of the first prelude are transformed into the chatter of the second fugue.

This rhythmic symmetry is transferred into **A minor**. The A minor prelude of Book 1 continues the preceding A major fugue from the same book with a gigue-like event, which in the major was in repose but here in the minor is highly active with its subject of climbing fourths. The A minor prelude of Book

2 is the most overtly chromatic piece Bach would ever write – indeed its two motifs are the chromatic scale in different rhythmic arrangements. Like the first prelude, this second prelude is in two-part counterpoint, where the two core motifs are continually inverted in a magnificent display of double counterpoint across the repeated halves of the prelude. It is interesting to note that where the gigue-like first prelude is through-composed without defined sections, the second prelude takes the two-part binary form of a gigue.

The three-voice fugue in A minor of Book 2 continues the motivic angularity of its prelude, with the striking interval of a diminished seventh assertively present in its subject. There is a sense of unity between this prelude and fugue in the use of demisemiquavers and chromaticism, even if the fugue is more diatonically conceived than the prelude. The relation between prelude and fugue in Book 1 is not as clear: an unfolding though not terribly easy prelude is followed by perhaps the most overtly virtuosic fugue in the 48—the summit of fugal display. Where the second A minor fugue is concise and compressed, the first is the exact opposite: long and expansive. There are two complete expositions, one by inversion, and a development section that begins by canon followed by canons in inversion. Originally conceived for the pedal harpsichord, this is translated in the present recording with the *sostenuto* pedal

of the piano.

There is a joyfulness of spirit celebrated in **B-flat major**, where the tonality's emotional range is consistent and more holistically conceived. The first prelude is the second major inspiration of Buxtehude and Bach pays homage to his great influence with a compressed toccata, even more apparent in compositional influence than the G major prelude from the same book. The second prelude is mostly a large-scale three-part invention though much of it written in two parts. It is also the first of the three massive preludes which display a grandeur of scale for the final preludes of the second book – minus the last. The reverse sense of scale is also evident in the first book, where the preludes from B-flat major onwards are concise and compressed until the expansiveness of B minor.

The B-flat major fugues are characterised by warmth and sunniness, celebrating within different means a similar emotional register. Both fugues are three-voice and there are motivic similarities between their openings, even if this is not sustained. The second fugue in particular has an inkling of the impending musical century; a clarity of harmony and tonic-dominant polarity that becomes a guiding light to much of the contrapuntal movement.

The emotional environment of **B-flat minor** is also coherent: a lament, imbued with nostalgia, regret, great poise and deep seriousness. The prelude of Book 1 is

like a beautiful early classical symphony. This is followed by the second of the two five-voice fugues. Unlike the C-sharp minor fugue earlier in the same book, the B-flat minor fugue is more concise and harmonically ordered though very intense and emotionally unified.

Within the B-flat minor environment, the prelude of Book 2 contains one of the most remarkable three-part inventions written for two hands. There is a manipulability and malleability of the motivic counterpoint in the prelude that lends a sense of hypnotic charm. The four-voice fugue that follows is—like its prelude—one of the most remarkable of Bach's compositions for the keyboard. There is a kind of darkness to this fugue with an astonishing display of fugal compositional technique: two canonic episodes built around the subject, the subject in inversion, canonic episodes in inversion and two canonic episodes where the original version is placed against the inverted version. This B-flat minor fugue is the first fugue in Book 2 of this complexity since F-sharp minor and there remains no other fugue in the 48 of this complexity of design or sheer contrapuntal display.

Bach continues the inversion of prelude and fugue in **B major**: small prelude with a concise fugue in Book 1 and huge prelude with a stunningly complex fugue in Book 2. There is a spiritual quality in B as a keynote, with B major being calm and sunny. This is obvious in Book 1, where

there is a prayerful prelude followed by an exploratory four-voice fugue with a kind of religiosity.

This character is also true of Book 2 but more expansive and far more intricate. The prelude shows an awareness by Bach of the music of the future—the music of the eighteenth century, which he is hearing all around him. There are nods to Haydn and Mozart: gallant flourishes, Alberti bass patterns and a chromaticism that has lost its mathematical bite and is quite unessential harmonically. The four-voice fugue is a hymn of acceptance of what is set out in the prelude. There is not a single modulatory note in the subject and very little sense of harmonic movement, with the same kind of nonessential chromaticism. Within the B major spiritual world, Bach manages to fill this classical mid-eighteenth century harmonic construction with some magnificent counterpoint; we are hearing Bach's perception of the future of music delivered on his own terms.

In **B minor**, the dimensions that have been set up—the musical expectations of proportion and concept—are completely halted. Again within the domain of B as the spiritual key, what we get in Book 2 is an *envoi*: a farewell that almost dances away. B minor in Book 2 gives a concise prelude two-part invention that leads to a three-voice dance-like fugue, beautiful and well-contained. Within the tightly-constructed and compressed fugue—with superb part-sharing and clear structural

and harmonic underlay—the episodic material becomes more important. There are final references to the subject in canon before the fugue (and Book 2) concludes with a resemblance to the closing bars of the St Matthew Passion.

Book 2, however, is not where *The Well-Tempered Clavier* really ends, since the greatest, most absolutely conclusive part of Bach's tonal story had already been written. One of the reasons that Bach does not attempt to compete in his B minor—in the enlarging that is going on towards the end of Book 2—is because he has already done it. The prelude and fugue in B minor of Book 1 is the greatest spiritual exploration of the 48. B minor (like F minor) is reversed in this recording because of the greater artistic impact made at the halfway points of both books; the more elaborate statement sits in Book 1 and the more concise statement exists in Book 2.

The B minor prelude of Book 1 features ravishing three-part counterpoint above a travelling bass. The bass is mostly diatonic but with such chromatic flexibility, while the upper parts reveal dazzling rhythmic and motivic relationships. The second half of this beautifully balanced binary structure develops an extraordinary sense of chromatic freedom. The greater quaver movement in the upper parts automatically engages the bass and there are wonderful interactions between all three. In the last five bars, Bach makes use of the entire chromatic gamut; all twelve

tones are present, eleven of which are given in the bass.

The B minor fugue of Book 1 takes its leave from this revelation of the chromatic world in the closing moments of its prelude. Schoenberg observed that this fugue contains the first exploitation of a twelve-tone row in music. Out of the subject is distilled the most profound human expression with extraordinary musical invention: yearning, resignation, some sense of despair, but also hope for a better world. It is fascinating that, in such a radical subject, Bach responds with a correct tonal answer, although we can almost hear tonality being pulled apart. The strict countersubject, on the other hand, is simply a diatonic scale.

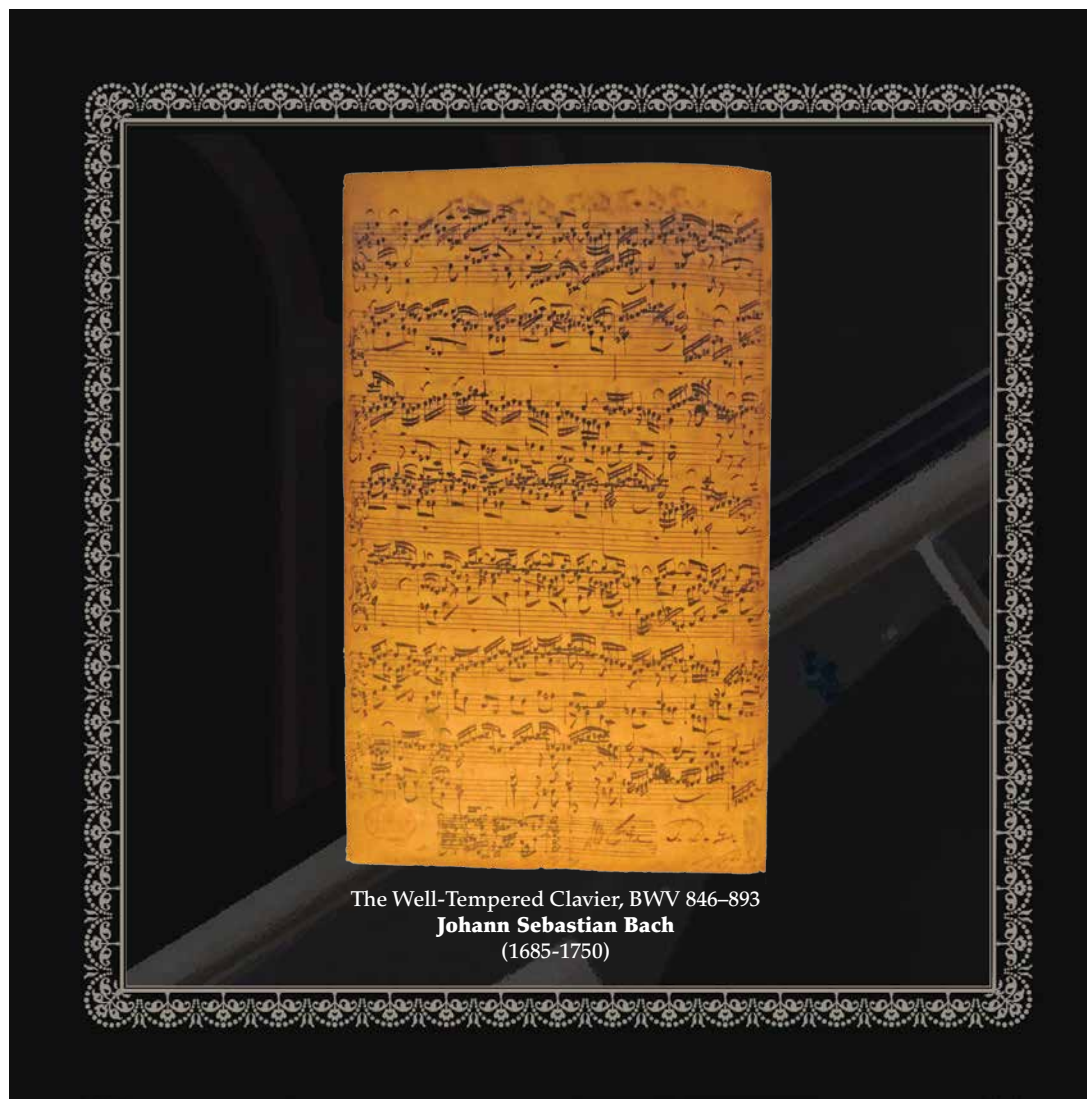
Into this environment of spiritual searching, Bach injects three episodic sections of the most sublime impact, not least because they are so absolutely and purely tonal: as if an aural manifestation of the eye of God—a fleeting vision of sublime peacefulness. In between this passage of triple counterpoint, there is a short reference to a tonalised version of the opening subject. In the midst of all the chromaticism that follows the second episode, strettos of the subject begin to celebrate the quality of key. But after this gloriousness of tonality, the return to B minor gives the sense that the music from this point becomes cramped; the voices are pushed together, becoming suffocated and claustrophobic. Just as the parts seem to stop, the eye of God motif —

not heard for a long time—reappears. The three episodic passages suggest the divine trinity, as if reflecting on the tribulation of the world.

In the printed *urtext* score, the absolute conclusion of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is not musical—it is verbal and religious.

Bach writes 'S.D.G.'. *Soli Deo Gloria* – for the glory of God alone. The mysteries of *The Well Tempered Clavier* are endless and it is the greatest testament in Western Art Music to the tonal acoustic foundation of our art.

Ian Holtham with David Tieri



IAN HOLTHAM

Ian Holtham is one of the most distinguished and highly regarded pianists and pedagogues in Australia and his performances of the great Classical and Romantic repertoire have played to packed houses and rave reviews for many years. He has led the Keyboard area at the University of Melbourne, where he is Professor of Music, since 1998. In 1999 he was invited to become the inaugural Head of Studies at the Australian National Academy of Music - a position he held for a year in addition to his position at the University of Melbourne.

Professor Holtham studied with Peter Feuchtwanger, Geza Anda, as well as with Geoffrey Parsons and Enrique Barenboim in Europe for over five years during the 1970s. He also studied Composition and Conducting at the Guildhall School of Music. He has performed throughout Europe, Asia and Australia and has broadcast regularly with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation since the late seventies appearing as a soloist with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, as well as with various orchestras and conductors over many years. He is one of Australia's most senior pianists and has performed and given Masterclasses throughout Australia, Europe and Asia over the last three decades. Ian Holtham is a Steinway artist and established the Melbourne Conservatorium as the first institution of higher musical training in the Southern Hemisphere which is a Steinway School. He was the Chair of the Australian Music Examinations Board in Victoria for

over a decade, is the Chair of the national AMEB piano syllabus and served five terms as the elected Federal Chair of the AMEB. He has judged and often chaired virtually all the major musical awards and scholarships within Australia.

Ian Holtham's CD output is particularly distinguished. His first, *Etudes*, released by Move in 1995 contained the complete Etudes of Chopin, Opus 10 and Opus 25. This and his subsequent CDs which cover an enormous range of repertoire have all been received with wide critical acclaim. Amongst his recent CDs released through ABC Classics are *Forest Scenes: the piano music of Robert Schumann* and *Beethoven: the last three Sonatas*. The Sonatas on this CD were recorded on each of the three Melba Hall Steinways. In 2010 he released the *Chopin Showcase* CD through Move which celebrated the 200th anniversary of the composer's birth. Ian Holtham's recorded output includes the complete Chopin Etudes, Preludes, Ballades, Scherzi and Impromptus, providing a discography unique in Australian pianism. He retains a strong commitment to Australian music and two of his CDs, *Inspirations* and *Giants in the Land* contain new piano compositions written specifically for him by Australian composers. His commitment to the music of J S Bach has been lifelong and these four CDs present a new way of listening to one of the most iconic works in the piano repertoire.

The Bach Tonality Project Team

Ian Holtham: Pianist

Thomas Grubb: Producer and Editor

Martin Wright: Move Records and CD design

David Tieri: Research Assistant and Interviewer of Professor Holtham for the liner notes

Photograph of Ian Holtham: Theodore Olariu

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Vladimir Chishkovsky: Piano tuner and technician

Alan Watkinson: Management

The four CDs which constitute the Project were recorded between October 2015 and August 2016 in Melba Hall at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne on Steinway D Concert Grand 596225.

This project was made possible through the support of the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music's Louise Hanson-Dyer and Joseph Hanson Bequests.

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