

Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685-1750)

Das Wohltemperierte Klavier, Book 1 (1722)

Andrew Rangell, piano

Disc A (53:24)

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| 1 | Prelude No. 1 in C major, BWV 846i | (1:47) |
| 2 | Fugue No. 1 in C major (a 4), BWV 846ii | (1:58) |
| 3 | Prelude No. 2 in C minor, BWV 847i | (1:44) |
| 4 | Fugue No. 2 in C minor, (a 3), BWV 847ii | (1:58) |
| 5 | Prelude No. 3 in C# major, BWV 848i | (1:10) |
| 6 | Fugue No. 3 in C# major (a 3), BWV 848ii | (2:16) |
| 7 | Prelude No. 4 in C# minor, BWV 849i | (2:36) |
| 8 | Fugue No. 4 in C# minor (a 5), BWV 849ii | (4:03) |
| 9 | Prelude No. 5 in D major, BWV 850i | (1:15) |
| 10 | Fugue No. 5 in D major (a 4), BWV 850ii | (1:46) |
| 11 | Prelude No. 6 in D minor, BWV 851i | (1:22) |
| 12 | Fugue No. 6 in D minor (a 3), BWV 851ii | (2:17) |
| 13 | Prelude No. 7 in E-flat major, BWV 852i | (3:50) |
| 14 | Fugue No. 7 in E-flat major (a 3), BWV 852ii | (1:49) |
| 15 | Prelude No. 8 in E-flat minor, BWV 853i | (3:03) |
| 16 | Fugue No. 8 in D# minor (a 3), BWV 853ii | (5:41) |
| 17 | Prelude No. 9 in E major, BWV 854i | (1:25) |
| 18 | Fugue No. 9 in E major (a 3), BWV 854ii | (1:11) |
| 19 | Prelude No. 10 in E minor, BWV 855i | (2:27) |
| 20 | Fugue No. 10 in E minor, (a 2), BWV 855ii | (1:16) |
| 21 | Prelude No. 11 in F major, BWV 856i | (1:07) |
| 22 | Fugue No. 11 in F major (a 3), BWV 856ii | (1:14) |
| 23 | Prelude No. 12 in F minor, BWV 857i | (1:47) |
| 24 | Fugue No. 12 in F minor (a 4), BWV 857ii | (4:11) |

Disc B (52:06)

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| 1 | Prelude No. 13 in F# major, BWV 858i | (1:42) |
| 2 | Fugue No. 13 in F# major (a 3), BWV 858ii | (2:09) |
| 3 | Prelude No. 14 in F# minor, BWV 859i | (1:10) |
| 4 | Fugue No. 14 in F# minor (a 4), BWV 859ii | (2:56) |
| 5 | Prelude No. 15 in G major, BWV 860i | (0:58) |
| 6 | Fugue No. 15 in G major (a 3), BWV 860ii | (2:42) |
| 7 | Prelude No. 16 in G minor, BWV 861i | (1:52) |
| 8 | Fugue No. 16 in G minor (a 4), BWV 861ii | (2:01) |
| 9 | Prelude No. 17 in A-flat major, BWV 862i | (1:19) |
| 10 | Fugue No. 17 in A-flat major (a 4), BWV 862ii | (2:04) |
| 11 | Prelude No. 18 in G# minor, BWV 863i | (1:37) |
| 12 | Fugue No. 18 in G# minor (a 4), BWV 863ii | (2:28) |
| 13 | Prelude No. 19 in A major, BWV 864i | (1:05) |
| 14 | Fugue No. 19 in A major (a 3), BWV 864ii | (2:15) |
| 15 | Prelude No. 20 in A minor, BWV 865i | (1:11) |
| 16 | Fugue No. 20 in A minor (a 4), BWV 865ii | (3:59) |
| 17 | Prelude No. 21 in B-flat major, BWV 866i | (1:17) |
| 18 | Fugue No. 21 in B-flat major (a 3), BWV 866ii | (1:58) |
| 19 | Prelude No. 22 in B-flat minor, BWV 867i | (2:37) |
| 20 | Fugue No. 22 in B-flat minor (a 5), BWV 867ii | (2:47) |
| 21 | Prelude No. 23 in B major, BWV 868i | (1:04) |
| 22 | Fugue No. 23 in B major (a 4), BWV 868ii | (1:54) |
| 23 | Prelude No. 24 in B minor, BWV 869i | (3:05) |
| 24 | Fugue No. 24 in B minor (a 4), BWV 869ii | (5:43) |

J. S. BACH – The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1

In 1722, at age 37, and at the end of a richly productive tenure as Kappelmeister at the court of Cöthen, Bach completed a massive, ordered collection of keyboard pieces. It was to become an indispensable cornerstone of the literature, an enduring object of study, performance, and veneration. “Das Wohltemperierte Klavier” (translated as “The Well-Tempered Clavier”), a set of paired preludes and fugues in each of the 12 major and 12 minor keys, appeared that year in Bach’s own beautiful calligraphic manuscript, following as many as 6 years of preliminary work and thoroughgoing revisions made in 1721. (Some 20 years later, in 1744, Bach would deliver a second such collection – a parallel universe of sorts – now referred to as “book two” of the original work.) The clear antecedent, although more in symbol than substance, was J. F. C. Fischer’s “Ariadne Musica” – 20 short preludes and fugues in as many keys, published in 1702, but probably noticed by Bach after its re-issue in 1715. At a time when new systems of tuning were beginning to allow keyboard composers the unfettered use of previously inaccessible key-areas, it would have been an irresistible challenge for a composer of Bach’s prodigious harmonic skills to demonstrate his mastery in all 24 keys. The adjective “well-tempered” in Bach’s title is taken to mean a method of tuning whereby all keys would sound well. Whether this method was equal temperament, soon to become the norm, or a closely related system, is not known for certain. Bach’s subtitle explains that the work is intended for the instruction of the young student and the pleasure of the advanced performer. But a large unstated aim of this project, it seems, was nothing less than a new and comprehensive re-imagining of the long-familiar forms of prelude and fugue – and the bond between them.

Bach’s earlier, and abundant, preludes and fugues are inseparable from the multi-sectional organ works in which they are embedded: extroverted, often unruly, rhetorically extravagant vehicles for Bach the organ virtuoso. In this native (North German, Buxtehudian) soil, it took years of cultivation, and the eventual study of Italian concerto forms and French dance movements, for

Bach’s preludes and fugues to gain increasing concision, concentration, freedom from formula, contrapuntal sophistication, and individual cohesion. For pedagogic purposes, Bach also created miniature self-standing specimens of both forms: little preludes and simple abridged fugues (fughettas) appear in the 1720 notebook for Wilhelm Friedemann, his eldest son. But the 24 preludes and fugues of the “Well-Tempered,” Book 1, – both separately and in their pairings – establish new paradigms of design, form, and substance. These pieces (with a handful of important exceptions) are of modest proportions. Of them we can assert that not one is trivial, many are profound, and in every case, whether prelude or fugue, the subject matter undergoes a unique journey of development and resolution. The Friedemann notebook happens to contain early versions of a number of the preludes, and it is fascinating to observe the ways Bach modified and enlarged (in effect, upgraded) these pieces, for them to gain the necessary stature for inclusion in the large masterwork! The process of improving his compositions, of course, never ceased for Bach – his manuscript copy of the WTC comes to us filled with corrections, revisions, and added ornaments – made over many years of use.

Let us briefly characterize both the preludes and fugues found in this epic work. The preludes are not merely introductory, but self-sufficient, and distinctively so. Some are patterned, or figurational, pieces. Some are two and three-part inventions. Some suggest dance forms. Some draw from the trio sonata or from the concerto grosso. Diverse in design and affect, the preludes share this general trait: their primary and/or polyphonic features, once established, are consistently held. Often described as “free,” in contradistinction to the “strict” fugues they precede, the preludes are in fact quite rigorous in their own terms.

As a rule the fugues are somewhat longer and intrinsically more complicated than the preludes. Here again we encounter a characteristically encyclopedic range of fugal styles, contrapuntal techniques, and emotional terrains. The liturgical style of sixteenth century polyphony is reflected in the two five-voice fugues of the set. Others also suggest vocal derivation. In fugues of

instrumental character, dance and concerto grosso styles can be found. Others are more ambiguous or abstract. The fugue subjects themselves vary greatly in character, and range in length from 4 notes (C sharp minor) to 31 (A minor)! Finally, such contrapuntal techniques as stretto, double and triple counterpoint, inversion, and augmentation are found here, employed at the highest level of compositional mastery and expressive purpose. Many of the fugues achieve an unprecedented intimacy and interiority. A few, owing to their breadth of architecture, their use of time and memory, are able to add the dimension of profound drama. These are the great among the great.

An overview of book one furnishes a few enlivening anomalies, blurrings of the presumed boundaries separating prelude and fugue. Here is a fugue in two voices! Here is a fugue decked out as a French overture (a fancy species of prelude)! Here is a prelude containing a sizeable double fugue! Bach, never averse to some high-minded fun, was a great practitioner of hybridization throughout his life. (Look at the delightful "Italian Concerto": a brilliant solo keyboard work in concerto grosso style.) His comprehensive grasp of styles and forms led Bach inevitably to questions of boundaries and intersections. A closely related question is connected to the very conception of the "Well-Tempered": that of creating a series of balanced unities, each consisting of two complementary pieces sharing a key signature. Bach provided 24 answers to the question – all uniquely different. The wonderful range of these relationships is a matter of endless speculation and contention. After all, each separate piece has its own range – surprisingly wide in some cases – of viable interpretations. Despite such ambiguities, which I think are to be cherished, it seems unarguable that each of these 24 pairs remains greater (by which I mean yet more interesting!) than the sum of its parts. I append here a brief comment on each pair and each part. The opinions are my own.

1 Prelude and Fugue in C major. Good natured, graceful, and restrained, this best-known prelude provides an inviting portal into the universe of the Well-Tempered Clavier. The four-voice stretto fugue, with its overlapping subjects, quickly creates a level of saturation for its (charmingly bland) theme – quite the opposite of the prelude's light, airy texture. This concentrated polyphony is beautifully dissipated in a floating and fragile conclusion, at the extreme high register of Bach's keyboard.

2 C minor. Like the first, this prelude is pattern-driven, but this figuration has hard edges and internal tension. The excitement increases (at m-25) with a rapid sequence of changing textures and tempi. I find a hint of melancholy in the fugue's subject and a hint of the mystical in the subtle chromatic clashes within scale-passage episodes (mm 5-6 and 17-20).

3 C sharp major. Proud of its invertible counterpoint, this scintillating prelude, the most brilliant thus far, ends with an extended coda and sweeping flourish. High spirits also prevail in the fugue, whose buoyant leaping subject is propelled throughout by a variety of lively sequences. Truly a triumphant dance of the mind, this fugue.

4 C sharp minor. This is the first pairing of two deeply probing works. The prelude, whose slow sweep suggests the rhythm of a siciliano, is elaborate in its polyphony (four voices) and particularly masterful in its harmonic sequences. The five-voice fugue has three distinct subjects and three distinct sections, providing a dramatic unfolding unique to the entire set. In the final section the second subject (in running eighth notes) absents itself, the intensified conclusion becoming an astonishing example of addition by subtraction.

5 D major. Rarely does one encounter in Bach the transparent texture found in this sparkling prelude: a perpetuo moto right-hand figure against a staccato pointillistic bass. Balancing this display of speed is a unique four-voice fugue in festive French overture style, a supremely witty and satisfying complement.

6 D minor. Again a figurational *perpetuo moto* – but with this twist: in the right hand the moving voice is located often at the end of each triplet – creating a sly, jazzy counterpoint with left-hand eighth notes. The fugue – somber, slightly formal, rhythmically restrained – is nonetheless deeply affecting. Beautiful detail lies in the chromaticism of its episodic material.

7 E flat major. This exceptional prelude and fugue places most of its weight in the broadly ambitious prelude – a three-part fantasy which is, in its own right, a species of toccata and double fugue! The style is deliberately archaic, the design spacious. It is a creation also of wonderful fluidity and poetry. The fugue – dancing, effervescent, and quite compact – is an apt and charming opposite number. Prelude and fugue share a common pedal-point conclusion.

8 E flat minor / D sharp minor. This pair is one of the pinnacles of the set. Both prelude and fugue, though profoundly different, have extraordinary breadth, gravity, inwardness. Combining a Sarabande-like framework with the expressive immediacy of an aria or recitative, the prelude features a dramatic opposition of registers. The elaborate fugue, utilizing inversions, augmentations, and no fewer than ten stretto sections, is a deeply focused meditation on its austere subject. It has been likened to great passion-music. Its final section, beginning with the appearance of a doubly-augmented theme in the bass, reaches an almost unearthly, hypnotic intensity of development – in tranquility.

9 E major. The prelude, an ingratiating *pastorale*, contains, at two cadence points, chromatic approaches which are shocking and delicious. Its gentle rhythms give way to the bursting energy of a fugue with an impulsive, asymmetrical theme.

10 E minor. The opening polyphony of this prelude combines heterogeneous elements: a complicated soprano melody, a running pattern in the bass, and regular but widely-spaced “placed” tones in the inner voices. To convincingly blend them in performance is a difficult task.

The presto second section, contrapuntally streamlined, continues to develop and to surprise. Reduced to two-part (but dense and jagged) counterpoint, the fugue is great fun! Chromatic, even jazzy, its sardonic wit is underlined in two flashes of “forbidden” parallel octaves!

11 F major. The counterpoint of the prelude is decorated, enlivened, and made more challenging by long trills in both hands. The final low F concludes a delicate flourish on the very last eighth note of the (12/8) bar. The fugue, too, is sportive and good natured – its zest resembles that of a passepied.

12 F minor. The prelude has the flow and feel and texture of an *allemande*, and features a fragment reminiscent of the *allemande* from Bach's G major French suite. The slow chromatic fugue subject, seemingly suspended in direction, is contrapuntally combined throughout with faster scalar fragments – a singular blend of elements. This is a most serious and searching pair of pieces – and it is not by chance that it concludes the first half of the composition.

13 F sharp major. Both prelude and fugue are quietly radiant. The prelude is an airy duet containing the gentlest of right-hand melodic syncopations. The fugue's texture is marvelously sustained by an inventively flowing figure introduced in the first episode (bar 7).

14 F sharp minor. This is a pairing of manifest opposites: driving purposeful energy (prelude) and veiled, fragmented lyricism (fugue). The fugue's predominant texture, a poignant web of lamentation, is permeated by stepwise motion, deriving from both theme and countersubject.

15 G major. High energy marks this pair. The arpeggiated prelude flits, barely tethered! The long-themed fugue – overtly ambitious in its contrapuntal procedures and overall architecture – packs a much larger punch.

16 G minor. The flowing, highly ornamented prelude has the texture and individuated parts of a trio sonata. The fugue, whose short two-part subject appears in several *strettos*, retains a certain ambiguity of character. Serious yet lyrical. Majestic yet animated. Concentrated yet playful. (Such is my view.)

17 A flat major. A cheerful and spirited dialogue between the hands (prelude) is followed by a warm and burnished meditation on a quite simple theme, surrounded throughout by flowing and enveloping counter-material (fugue).

18 G sharp minor. The prelude is a graceful and melancholy three-part invention. The fugue I find a more ambiguous mixture: solemn, square, slightly formal, old-fashioned, harmonically circumscribed. And still – a thing of special and delicate beauty. Tovey calls it “one of the profoundest in the whole 48.”

19 A major. Again the prelude is a three-part invention, pert and bouncy, with a cute initial descending bass line. The fugue – whose theme begins quirkily with an isolated attack followed by an ascending crab-wise continuation – is a complex, stretto-filled production, animated further by a second subject in running 16th notes. Altogether, a tour de force!

20 A minor. Here is a rare pairing which shows a clearly shared motivic link (the repeated mordent figure). The overall mood, too, is shared – a rather grimly obsessive one. The prelude is terse and acerbic, but the fugue’s long subject projects an ambitious and procedure-filled drama. (It is thought that this fugue – blocky and old-fashioned in style – is one of the earliest to be composed.) Both pieces end on a pedal-point.

21 B flat major. The prelude is a unique and wonderfully balanced distillation of toccata elements: patterned figuration, sweeping single-voice scales, chords in dotted rhythms – with a

nifty disappearing ending. The fugue is at once gentle, lyrical, and propulsive – energized by the second part of its longish theme and the repeated notes of the counter-material.

22 B flat minor. This pairing has an aura of tragedy. The prelude, a lament in processional mode, is cast in closely written four-part polyphony, and could easily and beautifully be recast for small instrumental ensemble in cantata style. The five-voice stretto fugue, reminiscent of older vocal polyphony, is a perfect match in somber beauty, rhythmic austerity, and a deep feeling of leave-taking.

23 B major. These pieces share a relaxed openness and flow. Also a motivic link. The prelude, in three part polyphony, is elegant, concise, and contrapuntally ingenious. The four-voice fugue is permeated with scalar motion deriving from its subject and first countersubject. An inversion of the subject (bar 18) is heard once only and, though lovely, is easy to miss!

24 B minor. In every way this pair is exceptional, and a fitting conclusion to the whole set. The only one of its kind in book one, the prelude is in the binary structure found more commonly in the preludes of book two. The texture is that of a trio sonata, in this instance with a so-called “walking” bass-line underlying a duet in the upper voices. The special breadth of the movement, as well as its harmonic range and sophisticated use of suspensions and sequences, creates a realm apart from everyday experience. Thus we are, in some way, prepared for the great concluding fugue of this work – a similar but yet more complex creation than the F minor fugue found at the halfway point. The main similarity is the theme’s elaborate slow procession of half-steps. The fugal exposition, particularly weighty and anguished, introduces a concentrated wealth of material. Throughout the complex evolution of this fugue, simple sequential episodes (beginning at bar 17) provide relief (a “kindness” as a friend of mine described it) from the difficulties of the primary material. The end of this journey is truly a consummation also of the larger one of the entire work.



Born in Chicago and raised in Colorado, **Andrew Rangell** is a graduate of the Juilliard School, earning a doctoral degree in piano under Beveridge Webster. Mr. Rangell made his New York debut as winner of the Malraux Award of the Concert Artists Guild and has since performed throughout the United States, and in Europe and Israel. He has also lectured extensively, and taught on the faculties of Dartmouth, Middlebury, and Tufts University. His many New York recitals have included an unusually wide range of repertoire, from Gibbons, Sweelinck, and Froberger to Berio, Nielsen, Schoenberg, Enescu, and the two epic sonatas of Charles Ives. Mr. Rangell's gifts as an extraordinary interpreter of Beethoven received high acclaim during three successive seasons (1986-89) devoted to the performance, in a seven-concert sequence, of the thirty-two Beethoven piano sonatas. This period saw ten traversals of the complete cycle (including Boston presentations at both Sanders Theater and Jordan Hall, both Sanders Theater

and Jordan Hall, and at New York's 92nd Street Y) as well as a debut at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival and the award of an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Of Mr. Rangell's most recent New York recital, Charles Michener of the New York Observer wrote: "For me, the great discovery of the series has been Andrew Rangell . . . Mr. Rangell is an individualist. And such was his intensity—like the late Glenn Gould, he seemed to be propelled by an irresistible force—that the listener's attention was riveted to the music."

Andrew Rangell's extensive discography on the *Dorian* label includes Bach's Goldberg Variations, Beethoven's final five sonatas, two diverse collections entitled "A Recital of Intimate Works" (Vol. I & II), and a pairing of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* and Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*. A two-disc set of Bach's six *Partitas* released in November, 2001 was cited in both *The Boston Globe* and *Boston Phoenix* as one of the 'Best recordings of 2001.' Mr. Rangell's performances of the complete Chopin *Mazurkas* joined the *Dorian* catalogue in 2003 and were characterized, in *Gramophone*, as "taking the humble mazurka to new heights of variety and sophistication." 1998-99 marked Andrew Rangell's first active concert season following a long hiatus due to a serious hand injury. Since that time he has steadily reclaimed and expanded his performance and recording career. Mr. Rangell was honored to perform a solo recital in the 2003 Venice "Biennale," Italy's foremost contemporary music festival.



Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* waited until 1801 (some eighty years after the inception of book one!) to be published. C. P. E. Bach and many others took an active role in its dissemination, in manuscript form, after Bach's death in 1750. Thus it came to the attention of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven (who performed these pieces as a teenager). In the 19th century, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms – all studied the work deeply, and with important consequences. The 20th century, too, is replete with its own homages to this work. May the 21st follow suit.

Andrew Rangell 6/07

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This recording is for Jerri Witt.

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J. S. BACH

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Sonata No. 29
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