

THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER, VOL. 1

The title page of this work, seen in the facsimile at the right in J. S. Bach's own graceful handwriting, reads as follows:

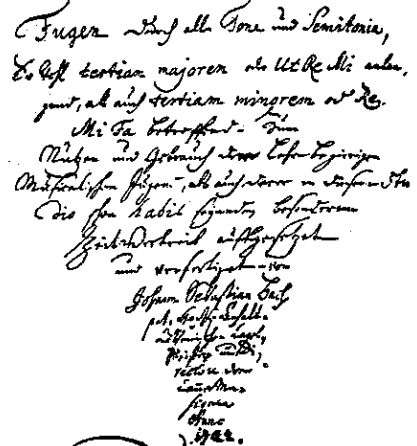
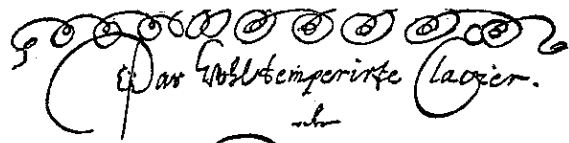
THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER

or

Preludes and fugues through all the tones and semitones both as regards the major third or Ut Re Mi and as concerns the minor third of Re Mi Fa. For the profit and use of the musical youth desirous of learning, as well as for the special pastime of those who are already skilled in this study. Composed and written down by Johann Sebastian Bach, p.t. [pro tempore] Capellmeister to His Serene Highness, the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen and Director of His Chamber Music. Anno 1722.

The term *Clavier*, as used by Bach, simply means "keyboard." In Bach's day the word was used as a general term that included clavichords, harpsichords and organs and did not exclude any of the other various keyboard instruments such as the ancient *regal* or the newly invented *fortepiano*.

The words *Well-Tempered* refer to a system of tempering (altering) the tuning of certain ones of the 12 semitones of each octave to allow the acceptable performance of music in each of the 12 major and 12 minor keys. *Meantone temperament*, the system in general used before the adoption of *well-temperament*, favored certain specific keys. A sharp could not function as a flat, and vice-versa. The use of the more remote key-signatures, or modulation to remote keys during the course of a composition, produced combinations of tones so out of tune as to be unacceptable to the ear. *Meantone temperament* is actually more in tune in the keys it favors than our present system is in any key. The *well-tempered* system preserved this feature as much as practical, compromising mainly in the tuning of the sharps and/or flats. Many modern dictionaries define *well-temperament* as *equal temperament* (an adjustment of tuning in which the octave is divided into 12 equidistant semitones). Even the late Hermann Keller, a highly respected Bach scholar, believed them to be the same. *Well-temperament*, however, is an *unequal temperament*. Its retention of the basic characteristics of the meantone system, while allowing the keys used as sharps to also serve as flats, preserves the individual tonal coloration of each of the 12 major and 12 minor keys. Most present-day listeners have only heard the preludes and fugues in this book played in *equal temperament*, since this is the standard system in use today. This system is successful in making it totally practical to play in any key, but the various keys are considerably robbed of any individuality. In *equal temperament*, all intervals except the octave are slightly out of tune. In *well-temperament* only three to five tones within the octave are tempered. For clarification of these and other points, Owen Jorgensen's excellent and ex-



Title page of J. S. Bach's Autograph Manuscript of *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Vol. 1*

haustive study, *Tuning the Historical Temperaments by Ear*, published by the Northern Michigan University Press, Marquette, 1977, is highly recommended.

As early as 1691, Andreas Werckmeister, a German organist and organ-builder, had published a work bearing the title, *Musicalische Temperatur, oder deutlicher und wahrer mathematischer Unterricht, wie man ein Clavier, sonderlich die Orgelwerke, Positive, Regale, Spinnetten und dergl. wohltemperiert stimmen könne*. . . "Musical Temperament, or clear and correct mathematical instruction on how one may tune a clavier, particularly organs, positives, regals, spinets and similar instruments in well-temperament." The discovery of this system of tuning opened new territories to composers. Pachelbel wrote keyboard suites using seventeen keys. In 1704 J. K. F. Fischer, in his *Ariadne musica*, presented preludes and fugues for organ in nineteen major and minor keys, plus the *Phrygian mode* on E. Johann Mattheson used all 24 keys in a series of figured bass studies for organ in 1719. But J. S. Bach, when he wrote the first volume of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in 1722, presented for the first time actual pieces for performance in all 24 major and minor keys.

Bach's explanation, on the title page, of major and minor intervals in terms of the scale degrees *Ut, Re, Mi, & Fa*, was necessitated by the fact that the terms *major mode* and *minor mode* were not yet generally known.

When Bach composed his *INVENTIONS & SINFONIAS*, completed around 1720 and revised in 1723, he used 8 major and 7 minor keys; all that the older system of tuning could acceptably accommodate. These pieces may be said to summarize the possibilities of meantone temperament, while *THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER* looks forward to the greater possibilities of systems compatible to any

and all keys.

In the 19th century, with the increased use of chromaticism, the well-tempered system gave way to the presently standard system of equal temperament necessary for the performance of the music of Chopin, Liszt, Wagner, Schoenberg and most 20th century composers.

WHY A NEW EDITION?

The success of the Alfred Masterwork edition of J. S. Bach's *INVENTIONS & SINFONIAS*, first published in 1968, brought immediate requests for a similar edition of *THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER*. The research and preparation of this edition was begun almost immediately, and consumed a vast amount of time almost each day for about 10 years. Aside from the need for an edition showing a proper performance of each ornament, with all editorial suggestions clearly distinguished from the original text, the need for a more authentic text soon became apparent.

The popular belief that an "Urtext" edition is a flawless reproduction of the composer's original text is nowhere more false than in the case of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The only existing near-complete copy in Bach's own handwriting is dated 1732, ten years after the original version of 1722 was completed. The editors of the Wiener "Urtext" have suggested that this Autograph Manuscript may have been written in 1722 (the date on the title page) and amended by Bach in 1732, when the latter date was added at the end of the final fugue. Some scholars have regarded the 1722 Autograph as lost. The existing Autograph contains a number of erasures and alterations, and some of these seem to have been Bach's own improvements. Some early copies made by students and relatives of Bach apparently contain notes pre-dating these revisions. These versions, in many cases, may be dimly discerned under the erasures in the Autograph. Later manuscripts from the Bach circle agree, more or less, with the revisions. It is important, of course, to check each significant source to see if the authenticity of each of these alterations may be established.

It should be noted that the three most scholarly editions of the 19th century (Kroll's edition for C. F. Peters, the same editor's later edition for the Bach-Gesellschaft, and Bischoff's edition for Steingräber, now reprinted by Kalmus) were all in disagreement on many small but significant details. Also in disagreement with all of these are the Kreutz "Urtext" (Peters), the Irmer "Urtext" (Henle), and the Dehnard/Kraus or Wiener "Urtext." Moreover,

from the Kroll and Bischoff editions together with the supplementary findings of the Bach-Gesellschaft, does not agree 100% with any of the above. The reasons for such differences in the work of sincere and diligent scholars demand thorough investigation.

The need for the present edition is made more acute by the fact that the Czerny, Busoni, and Hughes editions are, at this writing, still used by more teachers and more performers than the vastly superior editions previously mentioned. Many still believe that the slurs, dynamic indications, etc., in these editions are Bach's own, and that they should all be meticulously observed. Therein lies the error of using editions that make no distinction between an editor's indications and those of the composer! Furthermore, many of the editorial additions contained in the three above-mentioned editions are totally contrary to correct baroque performance practices.

The preparation of the present edition includes a painstaking investigation of how the composer may have intended these works to be performed. The editorial suggestions in print lighter than Bach's own text are the results of such a careful study. While the editor makes no claim that these suggestions represent the only correct manner in which these works may be acceptably played, they do, in our opinion, present at least one acceptable way of performing them. They will serve, at least, as a point of departure for the kind of individual freedom that was expected of every performer during Bach's day, within the bounds of good taste and with respect for certain rules of performance practice. Additional suggestions in the footnotes and in the tables compiled from various recordings will point the way to alternate solutions regarding phrasing, articulation, etc.

The most important claim that can be made for this new edition is that the text in dark print is the most accurate and authentic representation of J. S. Bach's own Autograph Manuscript that has