

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

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The Well-Tempered Clavier, Volume I

Edited by Willard A. Palmer

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This picture, the work of Johann Ernst Rentsch, the elder, is housed at the Town Museum at Erfurt. Although its authenticity has been questioned, many believe that it is a portrait of the young Johann Sebastian Bach.

About *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Volume I*

Title page of J. S. Bach's
autograph manuscript of
The Well-Tempered Clavier,
Volume I

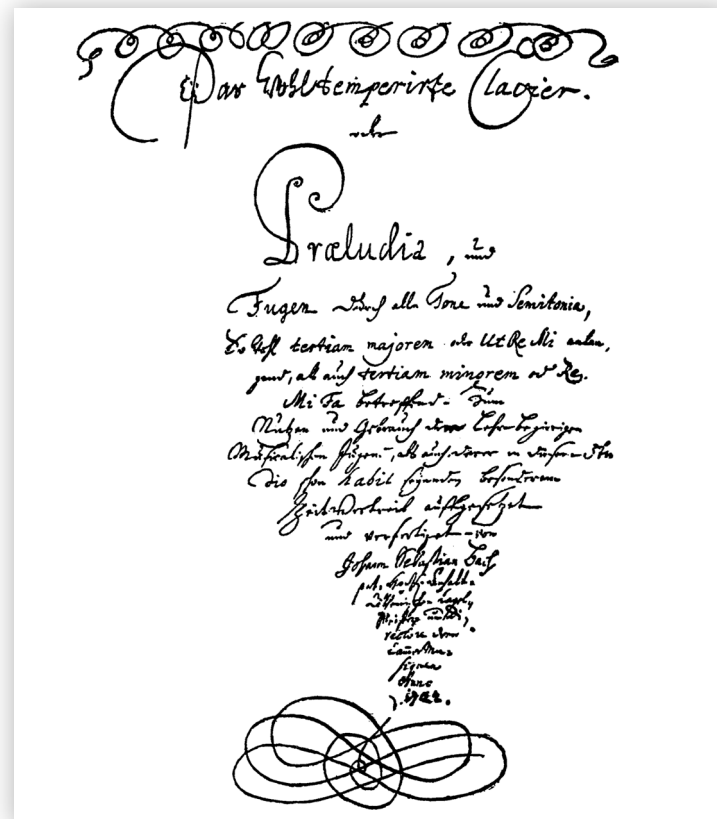
The title page of this work, seen in the facsimile at the right in J. S. Bach's own graceful handwriting, reads as follows:

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 Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), 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 *pianoforte*.

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 use 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 the 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 (1885–1967), 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 Jorgenson’s excellent and exhaustive 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 (1645–1706), 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, Spinetten 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. Johann Pachelbel (1653–1706) wrote keyboard suites using 17 keys. In 1704 Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer (1656–1746), in his *Ariadne musica*, presented preludes and fugues for organ in 19 major and minor keys plus the Phrygian mode on E. In 1719, Johann Mattheson (1681–1764) used all 24 keys in a series of figured bass studies for organ. 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 and 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 eight major and seven 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 Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849), Franz Liszt (1811–1886), Richard Wagner (1813–1883), Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) and most 20th-century composers.

About This 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 *The 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 predating 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 (Franz Kroll's edition for C. F. Peters, the same editor's later edition for the Bach-Gesellschaft, and Dr. Hans Bischoff's edition for Steingraber, now reprinted by Kalmus) were all in disagreement on many small but significant details. Also in disagreement with all of these are the Alfred Kreutz Urtext (Peters), Otto von Irmer Urtext (Henle), and the Dehnard/Kraus or Wiener Urtext editions. Moreover, the three urtexts are not in total agreement! The well-known edition of Donald Francis Tovey, admittedly

prepared 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 editions Carl Czerny (1791–1857), Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), and Edwin Hughes (1884–1965) 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 light gray print lighter 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 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 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 been published to date. A careful reading of the following pages will reveal why this is true.

The Sources

The Well-Tempered Clavier was not published until over 50 years after Bach's death. The only sources of authentic information are the composer's own autograph manuscript and the copies made by his close friends, relatives, students and their pupils.

1. The Autograph Manuscript (P415)¹

This, the primary source for the main text in dark print, is the only known copy of the first volume in J. S. Bach's own hand (described in the section, “About This Edition,” second paragraph). This manuscript is complete except for one missing page (two sides), which contained Fuga 13 (F-sharp major) and the first six measures of Praeludium 14 (F-sharp minor). The manuscript is somewhat faded, due to its age. Unfortunately it suffered rather severe water damage during a flooding of the Danube River in the 1840s. There are some erasures and a number of alterations, of which not all may be

in J. S. Bach's own hand. It is usually possible to determine, more or less, what the text was before it was altered. This manuscript is often referred to as "The Wagner-Volkmann Autograph," after the names of two of its previous owners.

2. The Anna Magdalena Bach Manuscript (P202)

This important manuscript was believed for many years to be an autograph. It was first sold by J. S. Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710–1784), to an organist named Müller, thus it came to be known as "The Müller Autograph." Some opening and closing pages were missing, and the rest of the manuscript was ultimately proven to be in the hand of J. S. Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena (1701–1760). The opening pages, through measure 50 of Fuga 4 (C-sharp minor), were completed with considerable care, perhaps by Müller. The closing pages, beginning with measure 69 of Fuga 20 (A minor), were completed in 1739 by one of Bach's students, Johann Friedrich Agricola (1720–1774). Each copyist apparently consulted Bach's unaltered autograph, or some copy of it. In the footnotes accompanying the music score in this edition, the first part of this manuscript is referred to simply as "P202." The portion in the hand of Bach's wife is called "The Anna Magdalena Bach Manuscript." The closing section is designated as "The Agricola Manuscript."

3. The Walther Manuscript (P1074)

This very neat copy is in the hand of J. S. Bach's cousin and very close friend, Johann Gottfried Walther (1684–1748). It contains versions that predate the erasures and alterations now found in the autograph manuscript, and a few interesting variants that are worth noting.

4. The Gerber Manuscript (from the Riemenschneider estate)

In this manuscript, preludes and fugues Nos. 1–18 are in the hand of Heinrich Nicolaus Gerber (1702–1775), who studied the first volume of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* with J. S. Bach in 1725. It seems likely that it was copied directly from the unaltered autograph. Preludes and fugues 3–6 are missing, and the final pages, beginning with Praeludium 19 (A major), are in a different handwriting. Although the calligraphy is interesting and in some cases even beautiful, there seem to be many careless errors, particularly in the pages copied by someone other than Gerber. This important copy was not used in the preparation of the Kreutz and Henle Urtexts.

5. The "Fischhof" Manuscript (P401)

This copy was formerly believed to be an autograph. It is an early 18th-century manuscript in an unknown hand, named for one of its former owners. It bears the name of another owner, "Joh. Chr. Oley, Bernburg." It contains the early versions.

6. The Clavier-Büchlein vor Wilhelm Friedemann Bach

Owned by Yale University School of Music, this manuscript contains the very earliest forms of 11 of the preludes, in the following order: No. 1 (C major), No. 2 (C minor), No. 6 (D

minor), No. 5 (D major), No. 10 (E minor), No. 9 (E major), No. 11 (F major), No. 3 (C-sharp major), No. 4 (C-sharp minor), No. 8 (E-flat minor), and No. 12 (F minor). These are all in the hand of J. S. Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, with occasional small contributions and corrections by the father. Some are in abbreviated form, and four of them are not complete.

7. The Notebook for Anna Magdalena (P225)

Dated 1725, this notebook contains only one selection from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*: Praeludium 1. It is in the hand of J. S. Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena.

8. The Altnikol Manuscript (P402)

This important and exceptionally legible copy is in the hand of J. S. Bach's son-in-law, Johann Christoph Altnikol (1720–1759). It contains the final versions.

9. The Kirnberger Manuscript (P57)

This manuscript is from the estate of J. S. Bach's pupil, the famed musician and theoretician, Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1721–1783), and is presumably in his handwriting. This is a very legible copy, containing the final versions, with a few noteworthy variants.

10. The Schwencke Manuscript (P203)

This is in the hand of Christian Friedrich Gottlieb Schwencke (1767–1822), a pupil of Kirnberger and Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (1718–1795), and a close friend of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788). Schwencke's investigations are important because he was the editor of the first edition of *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Volume I*, published around 1808 by Simrock (almost simultaneously with a very inferior edition published by Nägeli).

11. The Schwencke Manuscript (P417)

This copy is said to have been written by the same person as P203, although its appearance is quite different. In any case, it is an important copy, since it contains what appears to be a study of the original and the final versions. There are footnotes carefully itemizing Kirnberger's variants.

12. The Forkel Manuscript (P212)

This incomplete manuscript, probably the least important of the sources, is in the hand of Johann Nikolaus Forkel (1749–1818). He was a friend of J. S. Bach's sons, Carl Philipp Emanuel and Wilhelm Friedemann. Forkel wrote the first biography of J. S. Bach in 1802, gathering his information from letters and interviews from Bach's living relatives and acquaintances. His manuscript contains many variants and abbreviated versions. Forkel edited one of the earliest editions of the *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Volume I*, for Hoffmeister & Co. around 1802. Some of the strange variants found in Czerny's edition are based on the Forkel manuscript and/or his edition for Hoffmeister.

Praeludium & Fuga 1 (C Major)

PRÆLUDIUM 1

(a) Andante con moto ♩ = 80-92

BWV 846

The musical score for Praeludium 1 in C Major, BWV 846, is presented in a standard piano format. It consists of 12 measures in common time (C). The right hand (treble clef) plays a continuous eighth-note pattern, while the left hand (bass clef) provides a simple accompaniment. The score is divided into four systems of three measures each. Measure numbers 1, 3, 6, and 9 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The tempo is marked 'Andante con moto' with a metronome marking of 80-92. Dynamics include *mf*, *p*, and *mp*. The score is divided into four systems of three measures each. Measure numbers 1, 3, 6, and 9 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The final measure (12) ends with a double bar line.

- (a) Tempo indications in modern editions of the first prelude vary from *Moderato* to *Allegro*. Very few tempo marks appear in Bach's Autographs or in the early sources. All tempo indications in light print are either completely editorial or appear in mss other than the Autographs. See the TABLE OF TEMPO INDICATIONS for a listing of tempos taken from various recordings, editions, and commentaries. See also comments in the foreword under ARPEGGIATING CHORDS.

- ② Beginning here the *Clavier-Büchlein vor Wilhelm Friedemann Bach* has the following. The broken-chord figurations of the previous measures should be applied here to each measure except the last.

- ③ Measures 16-20 are missing in the *Anna Magdalena Notebook* (P225).

- ④ Between measures 22 and 23 the following measure, originating as a footnote in the first two Schwencke mss (P203), found its way into some published editions, including Czerny's. It is not authentic and should not be played.

Praeludium & Fuga 7 (E-flat Major)

PRAELUDIUM 7

BWV 852

Andante moderato ♩ = 63 - 72

This *praeludium* is in itself a short prelude and double fugue. The prelude portion ends with the first count of measure 10. After this cadence, the parts begin to suggest the first fugue subject, which is first heard in its entirety in the bass, beginning with the last quarter note of measure 18. This five-note subject appears again in the bass against the second fugue subject, which enters after the first sixteenth note of measure 25 in the soprano. The legato first subject should be brought out with relative prominence at each appearance.

- Ⓐ In the Gerber ms the B \flat is repeated on the second count and held for the rest of the measure. It is not tied to the following measure.

- Ⓑ Here the Walther ms has:  The Altnikol ms has: 
The half note c 2 is missing in the Altnikol and Gerber mss.

- Ⓒ This trill, appropriate at the cadence, is found in the Anna Magdalena Bach ms.

11 *sempre legato*

cresc. *poco dim.* *marcato il basso*

15

poco dim. *marcato il basso*

19

dim. *poco dim.* *poco dim.* *poco dim.*

23

p *p* *p* *p*

mf (*marcato il basso*)

④ The Walther ms has:  This was adopted by Czerny in his edition.

Praeludium & Fuga 19

(A Major)

PRAELUDIUM 19

BWV 864

Moderato ♩ = 63-72 (quasi legato)

poco f (legato)


dim.


f (quasi legato)

dim. *mp*

più f

Beginning with this Praeludium, the Gerber ms is no longer in Gerber's handwriting. There are many discrepancies, only the most important of which will be noted, since most of them seem to be due to careless copying.

① Or:  or see the realization of the trill in measure 14.

②  in Czerny's version, but not in any of our sources.

(poco marc.)

(quasi legato)

dim.

(c)

(d)

dim.

cresc.

(e)

(f)


(marc.)

(quasi legato)

più *f*


cresc.

ff poco rit.

(c) For the middle voice the Czerny edition has  This is not found in any of our sources.

(d) The trill is found in the Walther, Altnikol, and Schwencke P203 mss.

(e) The very logical tie in light print is found in both Schwencke mss. In the Walther ms both of the upper voices are tied here.

(f) The Czerny edition has  While this is consistent with Czerny's reading of measure 4 (see footnote b), it is not in agreement with Bach's Autograph or any of our sources.