

The Well-Tempered Clavier Book 1

It was the great 19th century pianist and conductor Hans von Bulow who coined the description of Beethoven's 32 Piano Sonatas as the piano's "New Testament" - and in so doing designated Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues (the two volumes of the 'Well-Tempered Clavier') as the keyboard's "Old Testament". There is, indeed, something peculiarly appropriate in the image of Bach as a Biblical prophet - a musical Moses laying down the laws for future generations.

In this context it is worth looking at Bach's own description of the collection which appeared in 1722:-

"The Well-Tempered Clavier, or, Preludes and Fugues through all the tones and semitones, both with respect to the major third and to the minor third. For the use and profit of musical youth wishing to learn, as well as for the special passing of the time by those already skilled in this study drawn up and prepared by Johann Sebastian Bach - Capellmeister to the Illustrious Prince of Anhalt-Cothen and Director of his Chamber Music."

It is clear that his purpose - at least in part - was didactic: to teach pupils how to play the keyboard and also how to compose. His description may well seem very practical and down-to-earth but what he doesn't say is that the collection is a veritable treasure-trove of musical inspiration, ingenuity and imagination.

One thing we do know is that Bach didn't set out to compose a set of 24 Preludes and Fugues in all the major and minor keys. Some - possibly eleven Preludes - were originally composed for the composer's eldest son - Wilhem Friedemann - to play at home and the collection just grew. There is even a theory that Bach was spurred-on to the idea when he had to spend a month in prison - without a keyboard - at the orders of his previous employer the Duke of Weimar in November 1717. Moving to Cothen was to usher in a particularly happy phase of Bach's career when he was able to concentrate on instrumental music. It would be quite typical of him to attempt something that no composer - to his knowledge - had ever achieved: a systematic traversal of all 24 keys in ascending order.

There is no hard-and-fast evidence as to which keyboard instrument had in mind for his multi-faceted cornucopia of musical invention. He played a wide variety himself which would have been appropriate - from the chamber organ, through a variety of harpsichord to the clavichord and clavier. He would have been aware of the different possibilities presented by the harpsichord - where the strings are plucked - and the clavichord - within which the strings are hammered: the latter thus allowing the fingers to directly alter the tone-production. He may well have different instruments for different pieces as appropriate - and it is virtually certain that he never intended the collection to be played all the way through at one sitting!

By 1742 - well into his final period of employment in Leipzig - another set of 24 Preludes and Fugues was ready and presents a remarkable and complementary synthesis of Bach's keyboard mastery. Ever since the standard pianoforte replaced Bach's keyboard instruments during the 20th century musicians have argued about how the "48" should be played. This remarkable transcription by Katherine Thomas for the modern harp will add a special new dimension to our enjoyment and understanding of this imperishable music. To conclude with another religious analogy it is telling that the greatest composer for the piano - Frédéric Chopin - described the "48" as his 'Daily Bread' - musical sustenance for Soul and Spirit.

Katherine Thomas is a harpist who has performed with artists ranging from Bryn Terfel and Rolando Villazon to Katherine Jenkins and the Manic Street Preachers. She has toured extensively as a soloist and with orchestras such as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of Welsh National Opera where she holds the post of Principal Harp. She has worked closely with many of the world's finest conductors including Sakari Oramo and Sir Simon Rattle.

A graduate of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, Katherine plays the traditional Celtic and triple harps as well as the pedal harp. Her recordings range from classical music and traditional Welsh music to contemporary recordings, with recent projects including new releases by Sheku Kanneh-Mason and *The Four Seasons* re-imagined with the CBSO.

As a chamber musician, Katherine is a member of the Enigma Duo with violinist Laurence Kempton. Replacing the harpsichord and used as a continuo instrument in works such as sonatas by Handel and Corelli, the harp then becomes an entire orchestra as in their version of Bartok's *Romanian Folk Dances* and *Danse Macabre* by Saint-Saëns. Striving to expand the repertoire for their combination, the duo compose and commission new works, challenge the boundaries of the harp's capabilities - no more so than in the Cesar Franck violin sonata.

As a former student of Meinir Heulyn (who is Co-Director of *Alaw*), it was always inevitable that Katherine would be drawn into the world of teaching and arranging. Working with *Alaw*, Katherine has compiled and edited the by now world-renowned four volumes of Scales and Arpeggios for harp students preparing for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music examinations.

A PERSONAL APPROACH TO BACH AND THE HARP

I was introduced to the world of Bach at the age of fourteen, having to study the second Prelude and Fugue for a piano examination. It wasn't exactly a love affair. Taking me almost two years to learn the notes, it was some time before I tackled any Bach again.

Through Grandjany's transcriptions, a visit to the Hochschule in Munich and, in particular, a masterclass on unaccompanied Bach with a cellist, my eyes have since been opened to this astounding world - full of melodic and harmonic complexities and intrigue.

This edition of the Well-Tempered Clavier is not meant to be a book-end on your music shelf, rather it is meant to challenge and inspire. Bach has provided the best workout for me during the past months with its dextrous fingerwork and, on occasion, lightning footwork!

Notes on this edition

My vision in tackling this masterpiece of Western Culture, while making it completely accessible to harpists, was always to produce a book where the music of Bach would shine. Quite remarkably, especially due to its chromatic nature, very little editing was required: the music transfers very well to the harp. Very few compromises have been made (usually where notes are shortened in order to change pedals) but on the whole, I have remained as faithful as possible to the original. Enharmonics have been realised and all pedal markings notated. Owing to the extensive chromaticism in this work, particular attention has been given to the placing of pedals - positioned specifically to avoid hearing any notes changing; damping signs for specific notes have also been indicated (◊). At first glance, they may look quite daunting, but will fall naturally with finger-placing on the strings. Note that the symbol ↷ before a pedal change indicates that it is a right-side pedal to be played with the left foot.

Musical fashions dictate - and evolve: this edition has been prepared so that each individual can create his or her own unique interpretation.

To all those who have been with me while I have been having this torrid affair with J.S. Bach, I will be forever grateful to you all for your patience and understanding. I am truly indebted to Brian Raby for his patience in typesetting these Preludes and Fugues. At the last count I had used up three red pens notating edits and corrections and, amazingly, we the team are still on excellent terms and looking forward to preparing Book 2!

Katherine Thomas
Pontypridd, Easter, 2018

Publishers Note

The pedal markings in this edition place the right-side pedal changes over the left. Many harpists would prefer their pedal markings the other way around. Consequently, we present also a version of this work with this in mind, i.e. left-side pedal changes over the right. Please specify always which version you require.