

... toujours travailler Bach — ce sera votre meilleur moyen de progresser.

Fryderyk Chopin to Mme. Dubois (1848)

A few words of justification are in order lest the present writer is charged with undoing over two hundred years of editing work on *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*. This edition, essentially a so-called ‘diplomatic’ transcription of the only extant autograph copy (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Mus. ms. Bach P 415), grew out of a personal need to work on these pieces from their original notation: even the best modern critical editions — valuable as they are in their own right, in their eagerness to make things more accessible to modern musicians — can often, ironically, cloud more than guide the eye. Although one can now easily consult scans of the autograph in magnificent quality online through the Bach Digital initiative, the color facsimile (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1971) is quite difficult to come by. Thus such a transcription might be of practical value, at the very least as a study companion to the available reproductions. In addition, reading even from an ideal facsimile of the autograph is fraught with difficulties, many portions of the original being virtually illegible due to decay and damage.

Yet, reading from this transcription is also not without some difficulty: many early 18th-century notational idiosyncrasies take some getting used to, and seeing them in modern-print versions might shock even seasoned, facsimile-savvy musicians. Painstaking care has gone into striking a healthy balance between representing the most musically relevant aspects of the notation and what it is actually possible to do with current music software. (Plate engraving, to be sure, would have been an ideal medium for this manuscript to find its own life in print; but while that sounds like a fascinating project, we shall probably have to make do with an imperfect computerized realization.) Curved beaming in the autograph, for instance, not only makes for a beautiful, intensely fluid look on the page; it also allows certain notational contortions to go practically unnoticed (e.g., the use of incredibly short stems which in turn make room for many more notes than modern print permits). Certain features such as these could unfortunately not be reproduced. And, whenever following the original proved too troublesome, the decision was made to substitute a more conventional realization; in those cases, endnotes showing the exact notation of the autograph are provided in the Appendix, page 122.

A crucial aspect of this edition is that it focuses solely on the autograph: however interesting, reliable and closely connected to Bach some of the other sources may be, the origin of those differing details (be they embellishments, accidentals, tempo indications, fingerings, or the occasional variants) would then need to be explicitly indicated, further complicating the text. Far from discouraging the study and comparison of different sources, I simply believe in the value of working from a single one at a time — in this case also the most important one — and using it as a springboard in that very personal and individual quest for textual coherence. (I have made a small exception in the case of a missing page in the autograph score containing the entire F-sharp major Fugue and the first few measures of the F-sharp minor Prelude: they were transcribed from a manuscript copy also located at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Mus. ms. Bach P 202, which dates from the 1740s.) It goes without saying that in the present publication no performance suggestions of any kind have been added to the text.

As to age-old controversies concerning temperament, and whether or not the title page conceals a solution to this riddle, I shall remain agnostic. Imposing and awe-inspiring as both books of the ‘48’ are, their undeniable pedagogical origins and objectives belie the projection of an excessive, monolithic unity upon them — especially through placing the issue of temperament before the music. Perhaps we have grown too accustomed to complete performances or recordings of either one of the books

and have thus come to perceive the chromatic succession of the individual pieces as holding them together in a kind of mystical unity, and that this unity should in turn necessarily prescribe a single temperament or instrument throughout. A more flexible approach may be recommended instead, by reclaiming their status as possibly the best sets of musical *exercises* and *composition/improvisation models* ever written — which, of course, does not preclude performance. As such, individual pairs of preludes and fugues revolve mainly around a single technique or difficulty that can and should be studied somewhat in isolation. In an age when composition, improvisation and performance were part of indivisible musical discipline, students and professionals used such models as much as, if not more than, the available theoretical texts. Almost every imaginable genre, style, and compositional or instrumental technique from the period is represented here, each demanding a particular, individual type of focus from the player. Thus, there is something for everyone: far from being the exclusive domain of, say, harpsichordists or pianists, *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier* allows any serious musician to follow in many a great composer's footsteps and derive invaluable knowledge and practice, regardless of instrument or field of activity.

### *Editorial Guidelines*

Titles have been uniformly formatted throughout, and *Bach Werke Verzeichnis* and measure numbers are provided. Clefs follow the original throughout: soprano for the right-hand staff, bass and occasionally alto for the left. Key signatures follow modern convention; that is, there are no extra accidentals repeated at the octave as in the original. Key signatures in the autograph are often repeated in miniature form when a clef change takes place in the left hand, but this peculiarity has also not been reproduced. Time signatures are original throughout. The distribution of notes between the staves follows the original as well — this often looks artificially strange due to the gap between the staves in modern print being wider than in the autograph. The relative position and orientation of beams, stems, slurs and ornaments are also original. Individual note stemming and flagging, even in the context of thick clusters, follow the original throughout — this sometimes results in a more noticeable horizontal displacement of notes than in standard modern notations. Extended ledger lines — another beautiful aspect of notation in Bach's time — were too cumbersome to reproduce and have therefore been standardized; for similar reasons, *custos* indicating the very first note of the next system at the right end of each staff have been omitted. Peculiarities such as changes in the beaming, unusual number of rests within the measure or a repeated accidental after a tie, are often no more than tell-tale signs of system- or page-breaks and have been kept as in the autograph. The orientation of ties and placement of rests have at times been tacitly altered for the sake of readability. All textual indications except for the very few original tempo indications or modifications have been omitted. An intriguing v-shaped fermata that only appears below the left-hand staff — occasionally side by side with its round counterpart — and the meaning of which we cannot determine has been also reproduced.

A particularly trying aspect of this notation for modern musicians to confront is the use of accidentals. It here follows the original throughout and works as follows: an accidental does not hold for the duration of the measure but must be repeated until context makes its cancellation clear (i.e., a natural sign may or may not be needed for its cancellation). This often leads to ambiguity and may force us to rely more on our own instincts and not an editor's. By far the most special feature of *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier* in this regard is the absence of signs for double accidentals: a note is meant to be doubly altered if preceded by an accidental *already in the key signature*, and a natural sign after a doubly-altered note means it should revert to its normal, singly-altered form; this type of use of naturals can also appear in the following measure as cautionary accidentals. (Incidentally, since Bach and his circle started using separate signs for double accidentals only in the early 1730s, double accidentals from the Mus. ms. Bach P 202 extract had to be reverted to 1720s usage in order to conform with the rest of the book.) Even Bach himself seems to have had occasional trouble with usage (e.g. Prelude and Fugue 8 in E-flat minor/D-sharp minor), although those errors stemmed from the added difficulty of transposing while copying the music. If this sounds somewhat confusing, it is important to emphasize that actual experience will reveal more than any sort of verbal explanation can.

*Acknowledgements*

This edition would have never materialized without help from the following people, hereby thanked profusely: besides providing a most meticulous music engraving, Bill Cooley's input was of invaluable help throughout, and I cannot possibly thank him enough; Nino Kereselidze, who quietly instilled the '48' as daily practice along with much other wonderful advice and insight; Marián Herrera suggested taking the project to Ut Orpheus, and Sandro Ruscio then somehow made the impossible happen in Bologna; Mei-Ting Sun provided a much needed extra facsimile copy and all sorts of ideas; Carl Schachter, as always, gave expert suggestions, especially at the early stages; Joel Speerstra and everybody at the Smarano Academy who offered much enthusiasm and encouragement of the project; Álvaro Torrente, who steered me towards Bach Digital; Luis Gago, Janet Hathaway, Mauricio Molina, John Moran, Antonella Severo and Vita Wallace, who assisted in the nick of time with editing my English into intelligible shape; I would also like to extend much belated gratitude to Irene Schreier Scott and the Techniques of Music faculty at the Mannes College of Music, for the idea of such a project owes very much to their teachings (not to mention for actually putting up with me). Of course any errors in this edition are my own.

DAVID AIJÓN BRUNO  
October 2010