

Johann Sebastian Bach

the 48 fugues and 1 prelude from
'The Well-tempered Clavier'

in an open score edition prepared by
Kyle Rother

“for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning”

The study of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach has formed a foundation to musical education for over 300 years. Considered by many to be one of the fathers of Western Classical music, his influence has been almost inestimable. Widely renowned in his own time as a teacher and didact, a large portion of his compositional output was intended for educational and instructional purposes, including most significantly the four parts of the *Clavier-Übung*, as well as the two books of 24 preludes and fugues each, collectively known as the ‘Well-tempered clavier’ (WTC). Indeed, the title page of Bach’s own manuscript of this work bears the inscription “for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning”, and teachers to this day have taken him at his word, prescribing the learning of selections from ‘the 48’ as an essential part of the study of keyboard playing. Furthermore, the analysis of these works forms a significant part of early music theory training, and Bach is still widely regarded as one of, if not the single most important writer of fugue in history.

Learning to play counterpoint – and fugue especially – is one of the most technically demanding aspects of keyboard playing, and the cultivation of this skill is most usually deferred to tertiary level. The study of contrapuntal music is prescribed by most conservatories and schools of music, with piano students being required to present such works in their exams, and these are most usually selected from the WTC. This makes the set one of the most strongly represented works in the repertoire, and one of the most highly used resources in any music library. Approaches to teaching these pieces differ, but a common practice is to prescribe the learning of each ‘voice’ separately, adding one to another in various combinations, and eventually putting them all together into a coherent whole.¹ This method is complicated somewhat by the usual disposition of keyboard music into two ‘staves’, one representing the left hand and one the right hand. This disposition often does not take account of the actual movement of the separate voices, making it challenging to maintain the individuality of each voice (up to 5 at a time) while fitting them all into the 10 available fingers – an often mind-bending undertaking!

A valuable resource in the teaching and learning of these pieces (or any fugue, for that matter) is a score where the usual keyboard layout is deprecated in favour of a disposition of the voices into what is known as ‘open score’. In this layout, each voice is placed on its own staff, making it much easier to read on its own, without the ‘entanglement’ and confusion of its interactions with the other voices. This allows the student to learn each voice as a logical entity on its own, with its own fingering, simplifying the matter of putting all the voices back together again.

Several editions of the WTC in open score do exist, but they are all commercial offerings, leaving a gap for an ‘open source’ open score edition. That is the gap this project seeks to fill: an openly available, public domain edition of the WTC in open score, each piece available separately, thus enabling a student to access only the piece they are learning at the time, without having to acquire the full set. The pieces are

¹ Fitch, Graham. *Contrapuntal playing: the art of disentanglement*. Available: (<http://www.practisingthepiano.com/contrapuntal-playing-the-art-of-disentanglement/>)

available in PDF format for ease-of-use and printing, as well as in a ‘source’ format, which means that the content can be freely edited and re-used. As well as being of value to piano teachers and their students, the resource could also be used by music theory and analysis students.

This edition was typeset and engraved using [Lilypond](http://www.lilypond.org) (<http://www.lilypond.org>), an open source music notation program. The primary source is the 1866 Breitkopf & Härtel Bach-Gesellschaft Ausgabe, which is in the public domain. Reference was made to both the Henle and Bärenreiter urtext editions, as well as to the scholarly and critical commentaries of Alfred Dürr, however the final expression is in all cases that of the composer or the present editor. It of course goes without saying that the serious student should always have recourse to as many authoritative sources as possible when preparing any of these pieces – whether for performance or for personal pleasure – and this edition should be read along with others.

Notes:

Fugue IV in c-sharp minor, BWV 849: in m. 103 the alto entry has been rendered to imitate the tenor entry in m. 105; this mitigates extended part crossing.

Fugue V in D major, BWV 850: in m. 3 (and subsequently) the rhythm has been rendered as a dotted 8th note plus triplet 32nds. Throughout, the alto and tenor voices have been separated.

Prelude VII in E-flat major, BWV 852: in mm. 59-60 the tie on the last a-flat in the alto is not authentic, but imitates the soprano entry in m. 61; however, not including the tie makes the anapest rhythm of the countersubject first heard in mm. 30-31.

Fugue X in e minor, BWV 855: even though it's only in 2 voices, this fugue is included for the sake of completeness.

Fugue XVII in A-flat major, BWV 862: the tie in the descant voice going over the barline from m. 6 into m. 7 is suggested, as it aligns with the same motive in later entries (eg. m. 11, m. 14, m. 19). Henle and Bärenreiter editions differ on the ties in the alto in mm. 30-31 – ties appear in early versions, and make for a pleasant syncopation; however, they are missing from later versions.

The present edition was prepared using public domain sources, Bach's music is in the public domain, and the editor asserts no copyright in the content or the format. All are free to use this content in any way. The preparation of this edition was made possible by a grant from the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching at the University of Cape Town.