

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 -1750)

J.S. Bach is the most famous of a German family of musicians. He was esteemed as an organist in his time, and received major standing as a composer after a 19th-century revival of interest. He was provincial, devoutly religious and produced a huge volume of both secular and ecclesiastical music noted for its prodigious counterpoint and harmonic expressiveness.

The following opinions give you some idea of his unique place in music: Mozart; 'Now there is music from which a man can learn something.' Brahms; 'Study Bach; there you will find everything.' Beethoven (who looked after Bach's impoverished daughter) '...an immortal god of harmony.' Wagner; '...the most stupendous miracle in all of music.' Debussy; '...a benevolent god to which all musicians should offer a prayer to defend themselves against mediocrity.'

Recognised as one of the most influential works in the history of Western music, the 48 preludes and fugues were composed in two books, each having a prelude and fugue (pair) written in the 12 major and minor keys. The title 'Well Tempered Clavier' refers to the piano tuning of the time that evolved to the current 'equal temperament' tuning.

Prelude twenty two features elements of composition such as inexorable bass, contrary motion, sequences, and the consecutive use of thirds and other intervals. The counterpoint is layered enough at times for the harmony to be obvious, but as ever with Bach, even one or two lines give a strong feeling of harmonic progress. Everything turns on that supreme gift.