



J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: In-Depth Analysis and Interpretation by Siglind Bruhn

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observations about instrumentation and key, following a line of reasoning familiar to readers of the author's *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Works of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

Even more explicitly biographical are Howard H. Cox's "Bach's Knowledge of the Bible" and Robert Marshall on "Bach at the Crossroads of Cultural History." Robin Leaver's "Bach and the German Agnus Dei" explores the historical associations of the chorale cantus firmi incorporated into the Kyrie of the F-major Mass (BWV 233). But despite the careful scholarship into the tunes' prehistory one must wonder how many of the meanings read into them are really present in Bach's settings.

It is possible only to mention the remaining offerings. Gregory Butler completes his work on the engravers of Bach's first keyboard editions by identifying those of part two of the *Clavierübung*. Laurence Dreyfus argues that Bach's fugues should be placed in categories (subgenres) defined not according to twentieth-century ideas of style but by eighteenth-century identifications of the particular fugal techniques employed in each. Alfred Dürr writes on the early transmission of the *WTC* in England, Hans-Joachim Schulze on the autograph of the so-called motet BWV 118/I, which he traces to a lost *Trauermusik*. There are also offerings by Gerhard Herz, J. Merrill Knapp, Alfred Mann, Ray Robinson, and Albi Rosenthal.

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J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: In-Depth Analysis and Interpretation. By Siglind Bruhn. (Global Art Music Education.) Hong Kong: Mainer International, 1993. [4 Vols. \$29.95.]

For close to two centuries the preludes and fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (*WTC*) have occupied a central position in the canon of piano pedagogy. Scores, if not hundreds of books, whether for performers or analysts, provide all sorts of insights into this collection. They range from the bald empiricism of Frederick Illife's *The Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues of Johann Se-*

bastian Bach Analysed for the Use of Students (London: Novello, [1897]) to the esoteric reflections of Ralph Kirkpatrick's *Interpreting Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). In many ways, Donald Francis Tovey's *Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues by J. S. Bach* (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 1924) is the quintessential and perhaps best known treatment. Tovey combines analytical insight and practical performance suggestions in an elegant format that prefaces each piece with a concise yet penetrating essay. There may not be much left to say to about the *WTC*, but Siglind Bruhn is to be commended for her attempt to bring a rational and determined approach to understanding and performing these works through systematic analysis.

Although each of the four volumes contains one-quarter of the contents of *WTC*, the organization is not what one might expect: volume one contains the first quarter of *WTC*, Book 1, and the first quarter of *WTC*, Book 2. The other volumes follow suit. Thus each volume contains analyses of preludes and fugues from *both* volumes of *WTC* in a regrouping that in fact downplays the stylistic contrasts that set the two books apart.

Each of the four volumes contains two parts: following a brief introduction that discusses the historical origins of *WTC*, the first part, "questions," outlines Bruhn's analytical method and the second part gives "model answers," which are in effect analyses and interpretations of each piece. Occupying the bulk of each volume, the "model answers" lead to interpretive conclusions regarding tempo, dynamics, and articulation in particular.

Bruhn sees analysis as asking pertinent questions, and then seeking meaningful answers: This book "aims to help you, its reader, achieve a creative understanding and interpretation of Bach's preludes and fugues by encouraging you to think for yourself" (p. 7). A laudable aim, but is it successful? The set of eight principle questions regarding the preludes and seven regarding the fugues amount to a catechism of the *WTC*. The questions themselves, such as "What is the importance of the subject in this fugue?" carefully direct the reader's attention to compositional issues, in this case an interpretation of the way

in which the subject operates as a design force within a fugue. Subordinate questions within each section, such as “Where does the first harmonic progression conclude?” or “What is the predominant pulse?” aim to extract pertinent analytical data as a basis of interpretation. The selection of questions is carefully planned, but it is unfortunate that issues of register and chromaticism, which Bach so often utilized with considerable dramatic effect, are not specifically addressed. Surprisingly, the “questions” section is reproduced entirely in each of the four volumes.

The model answers contain plenty of useful information; but Bruhn rarely demonstrates how the student is to make the crucial step from analytical data to interpretive conclusions. Regarding the A-major Prelude (*WTC*, 1), for example, Bruhn comments that “this character includes a strong lyrical element” (4: 60). This may well be true, but how is a student to make such a deduction except through intuition, in which case the analytical apparatus becomes redundant? It is disappointing to follow one of Bruhn’s thorough and detailed analyses with the hope of developing an enlightened performance approach merely to conclude that a piece constitutes either a “rather lively” or a “rather calm” basic character. Judging from Bruhn’s criteria, the C-major Prelude of *WTC*, 1, ought to go at lightning speed, since it has a regular rhythm and many leaps. Yet performers more often than not luxuriate in the repetitions of the simple but entrancing arpeggios and concentrate on a gradual buildup of tension across the span of the piece.

Harmonic tension is one of the most prominent issues for interpretation in Bruhn’s view. No doubt harmonic tension is rarely dealt with directly in piano instruction, but it is simplistic to say that the subdominant (or its representative) has the highest tension, the dominant has less tension, and the tonic represents relaxation, or that tension centers around motion from a starting consonance through secondary harmonies towards a cadence. While these relationships are often true, they are not immutable, for tension depends ultimately on context. Because of her rigid methodology, Bruhn occasionally assumes a more simplistic understanding of musical process

than the richness of the music deserves. Tovey’s terms of reference may be vague, but he never underestimates the complexity of the materials.

The most extraordinary feature of the book is the presentation of the thematic plan of each figure in a four-color chart. Subjects are pink, countersubjects are blue, free counterpoint is green, and episodes are yellow. The charts themselves are excellent if extravagant means of presenting the main components of a fugue, and performers should find them a useful aid in memorizing the music.

Analysis for the sake of interpretation is a laudable goal. It seems unarguable that an informed performance is a better performance, yet doubt remains that in-depth analysis can ultimately substitute for a well-developed musical instinct. This is manifest throughout the book, where Bruhn cannot completely elucidate the decision-making process that permits one to make the kind of determinations that the author suggests and that ultimately lead to a compelling performance. Nevertheless, if this book can impress upon its readers that there is real value in understanding the music they are performing, then it has succeeded in its task.

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Jean Girard, musicien en Nouvelle-France: Bourges, 1696–Montréal, 1765. By Elisabeth Gallat-Morin. [Québec]: Septentrion, 1993. [349 p. ISBN 2-921114-87-9 (pbk.). Can\$27.50.]

Canadian musicologist-harpsichordist Elisabeth Gallat-Morin has made a major contribution to the history of musical life in colonial Canada with her monograph on Jean Girard (1696–1765), a Sulpician cleric-musician, who was sent by his order to Montreal in 1724 to serve as organist and teacher at the parish church and school. The author’s attention was drawn to this shadowy figure some sixteen years ago when she discovered among the holdings of Quebec’s Centre de recherche en histoire de l’Amérique française a manuscript