

# Johann Sebastian Bach, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (1722)

## Abstract

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), probably the best-known German composer of the Baroque era, was born in Eisenach (in the small Duchy of Saxe-Eisenach) to a family of composers. Orphaned at the age of ten, he spent the rest of his childhood living with his eldest brother, Johann Christoph, a composer from whom he received his initial musical education. At the age of 18 he began working as a musician for Protestant churches first in Arnstadt and then Mühlhausen. Appointments to courts in Weimar and Köthen followed, and Bach wrote most of his secular compositions during this period. From 1723 until the end of his life, he held the position of cantor at Leipzig's Thomaskirche, composing music for the city's major Lutheran churches and the university's Collegium Musicum. In 1736, he was awarded the title of court composer by Augustus III of Poland, who also held the title of Elector of Saxony.

While serving as music director at the court in Köthen, Bach compiled a book of preludes and fugues in all 24 keys which he titled "Das wohltemperierte Clavier" [The Well-Tempered Clavier]. It was first published in 1722. The excerpt featured here is the Prelude and Fugue I in C Major. Bach stated that the collection was published "for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning, and especially for the pastime of those already skilled in this study." In the eighteenth century, the term *clavier* could refer to several keyboard instruments such as the harpsichord or clavichord, and sometimes even the organ. About 20 years after this compilation was completed, Bach published a second volume. The manuscripts were copied and distributed widely at the time; a first printed edition was published in 1801. Today, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* is one of Bach's best-known works for keyboard, which has inspired many composers since the Bach revival in the nineteenth century.

## Source

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Source: Johann Sebastian Bach, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Performed by Wanda Landowska. RCA Victor, 1958. Available from the Internet Archive, Unlocked Recordings [urn:discogs:release:4315784], [https://archive.org/details/lp\\_the-well-tempered-clavier-complete\\_johann-sebastian-bach-wanda-landowska/disc1/01.01.+Prelude+And+Fugue+I+In+C+Major.mp3](https://archive.org/details/lp_the-well-tempered-clavier-complete_johann-sebastian-bach-wanda-landowska/disc1/01.01.+Prelude+And+Fugue+I+In+C+Major.mp3)

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