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**HANDEL**  
**Harpichord Suites**  
**Nos. 1 - 5**

**Alan Cuckston**



1990 Recording

Playing Time : 61'44"

## **George Frideric Handel (1685 - 1759)**

**Suite No. 1 in A Major**

**Suite No. 2 in F Major**

**Suite No. 3 in D Minor**

**Suite No. 4 in E Minor**

**Suite No. 5 in E Major**

When the thirty-five year old Handel set about making an authoritative edition of his finest harpsichord music in London, he claimed he was "obliged to publish ... because surreptitious and incorrect copies ... had got abroad" - referring to a pirate edition which had appeared in Amsterdam. Handel's new 1720 publication of Eight Suites is drawn from a stock of work which goes back in some instances to his teenage years in Hamburg. Only the Allemande and Courante of the third suite were newly composed. Otherwise, it is clear from the manuscript sources that the bulk of it was composed by 1717/18, and that after 1720 Handel virtually abandoned keyboard solo composition.

As a boy Handel had received his early training from the organist Zachau at his birth place, Halle. In 1698 the student assembled and dated a manuscript music book of works composed by his own master together with those other 17th century German composers whose influence we can detect in his own earliest surviving compositions. In 1703 he went to Hamburg, remaining for three years. In 1705 his opera *Almira* was performed there, and in it are found certain distinctive cadence patterns which may also be discovered in some of the pieces of keyboard music. They may be judged to be contemporaneous, as the cadences are not found in later works. Probably Handel earned part of his living in Hamburg by giving harpsichord lessons. As was customary, he must have written music for his public to play. Nor was the organ - for which

he was to write the first concertos - forgotten at this time - several pieces 'work' on either instrument.

There is an interesting anecdote related by Johan Mattheson, who was also employed with Handel at the Hamburg Opera. In 1703, aged 21, Mattheson relates how he and Handel "travelled together on the 17th August of that year to Lübeck, and in the coach we composed many double fugues - in our heads, not written down ... There we played almost all the organs and harpsichords and we arrived at a particular conclusion with respect to our playing ... namely, that he wanted to play only the organ and I the harpsichord".

The reason for their journey was to visit Dietrich Buxtehude, then aged 66, who, having served for 35 years as organist at St. Mary's, was looking for a successor who would also marry his eldest daughter. Neither of these two prospective candidates seems to have fancied the idea.

The five splendid fugues found in the harpsichord suites put us in mind of the budding 18-year old on his coach trip. In their maturer manifestations Handel's fugues are not inferior, despite their looseness of part-writing, to those of Bach's Well-Tempered Klavier. The dramatic juxtaposition of different kinds of texture at the beginning of the F minor Fugue moreover alerts us to the characteristically physical feel of Handel's writing for the harpsichord. And Handel's notation - particularly in the preludes - signals to the player the liberty to bring the fantasy of his own fingers in to play what Mattheson was to call the "Stylus Phantasticus" and contrasts well with the rigidly structured fugues they made up in their heads.

The Roman Diary of Francesco Valesio for 14 Jan. 1707 tells us that "There has arrived in this city a Saxon who is an excellent harpsichord player and composer of music - who today exhibited his process by playing the organ at St. John Lateran, to the astonishment of everybody."

At 22 Handel shows us in his early Italian-period works that he had completely assimilated the French and Italian styles of instrumental music.

Both are boldly juxtaposed in his harpsichord suites Nos. 2 and 6 and part of No. 7 were originally Italianate sonatas. Handel did not strictly adhere to the form of the French dance-suite, so Variations and Chaconnes are found, as well as Adagios and Allegros.

In the first biography of the composer, published in 1760, John Mainwaring tells us that "Handel had an uncommon brilliancy and command of finger, but what distinguished him from all other players who possessed these same qualities was that amazing fulness, force and energy which he joined with them. And this observation may be applied with as much justness to his compositions, as to his playing."

- In the years after 1720 further collections of Handel's harpsichord pieces appeared, taken from the miscellaneous stock left over. They too proclaim those youthful years, and that fire and fervour of which Mainwaring so eloquently speaks.

### **Alan Cuckston**

Alan Cuckston was born in England and now lives in Yorkshire, the county of his birth. He studied music at King's College, Cambridge and took a B Mus. in Performance and Palaeography. As a pupil of the late Thurston Dart, Mr. Cuckston developed his enthusiasm for early English music. He is now a well-known harpsichordist and has made many recordings for RCA and Swinsty Records.

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STEREO

COMPACT  
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DIGITAL AUDIO

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## Suite No. 1 in A Major

1	Prelude	(1:41)
2	Allemande	(2:56)
3	Courante	(2:43)
4	Gigue	(1:42)

## Suite No. 2 in F Major

5	Adagio	(2:20)
6	Allegro	(1:48)
7	Adagio	(1:25)
8	Allegro	(2:31)

## Suite No. 3 in D Minor

9	Prelude	(0:58)
10	Allegro	(2:33)
11	Allemande	(4:07)
12	Courante	(2:05)

13	Air	(2:47)
14	Variations	(3:43)
15	Presto	(2:24)

## Suite No. 4 in E Minor

16	Allegro	(4:23)
17	Allemande	(2:29)
18	Courante	(2:07)
19	Sarabande	(3:03)
20	Gigue	(1:47)

## Suite No. 5 in E Major

21	Prelude	(1:35)
22	Allemande	(3:10)
23	Courante	(1:45)
24	Air & Variations	(4:33)

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Producer: Peter H. Hill  
Music Notes: Alan Cuckston  
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