

J. S. BACH
Works for Harpsichord
Suite in A minor • Six Little Preludes
Capriccio in honour of Johann Christoph Bach
Aapo Häkkinen



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Works for Harpsichord

1 Prelude and Fugue in A major, BWV 896	2:49	18 Prelude in C major, BWV 933	1:46
Suite in A major, BWV 832	7:08	19 Prelude in C minor, BWV 934	2:07
2 Allemande	2:02	20 Prelude and Fugue in D minor, BWV 899	2:55
3 Air pour les Trompettes	2:00	21 Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV 900	4:08
4 Sarabande	1:37	Suite in A minor, BWV 818	10:24
5 Bourrée	0:39	22 [Prelude]	1:52
6 Gigue	0:50	23 Allemande	2:33
7 Capriccio in honorem Johann Christoph Bachii in E major, BWV 993	6:26	24 Courante	1:14
8 Fantasia duobus subjectis in G minor, BWV 917	2:18	25 Sarabande	2:04
9 Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV 895	3:07	26 Menuet	0:54
10 Fantasia in A minor, BWV 922	7:44	27 Gigue	1:47
11 Fugue in A minor, BWV 959	2:55	28 Fantasia sur un Rondeau in C minor, BWV 918	5:12
12 Prelude in D minor, BWV 935	1:38	Suite in E flat major, BWV 819	9:11
13 Prelude in D major, BWV 936	2:01	29 Allemande	2:04
14 Prelude in E major, BWV 937	1:10	30 Courante	1:40
15 Prelude in E minor, BWV 938	1:37	31 Sarabande	2:15
16 Fugue in C major, BWV 952	1:31	32 Bourrée	0:59
17 Fugue in C minor, BWV 961	1:28	33 Menuet and Trio	2:12

Bach's keyboard music runs the gamut of eighteenth-century solo instrumental genres, encompassing suites, fugues, preludes, fantasias, toccatas, sonatas and various other pieces. Much of it is designated for *clavier*, and hence could have been performed on a number of different keyboard instruments, including the harpsichord, the clavichord and the organ. Harpsichords themselves also varied dramatically – while some were small, intimate instruments, others had more than one manual (the technical term for the keyboard itself) and disposition (meaning how many different sets of strings there were, and how they were tuned), affording a wide range of tonal possibilities. Bach himself owned several different kinds.

Despite all this variety his solo harpsichord music had only two primary purposes: instruction and enjoyment (or 'spiritual refreshment', as he put it in the 1726 preface to his *Partitas*). He and other contemporary composers would often write music to help their pupils; there is evidence that BWV 895, for instance, was circulated as a teaching aid among various students.

Bach himself was renowned as a keyboardist – specifically for his organ playing. In 1751, a year after his death, Georg Philipp Telemann wrote a poem in which he mentioned this particular quality, lamenting, 'Departed Bach! Long since your splendid organ-playing / Alone brought you the noble cognomen "the Great"'. Born in Eisenach in 1685, Bach came from a long line of professional musicians (a fact of which he seems to have been very proud), and was taught the keyboard at an early age. It is likely that he also started learning the violin from his father. After his parents died, the ten-year-old Bach moved in with his older brother Johann Christoph, a church organist in Ohrdruf, where he continued his musical studies. Early biographers relate that he was an especially keen keyboardist during these years.

In 1703, having completed his training, Bach was given his first court appointment at Weimar. Word of his skills as a keyboard-player quickly spread, and he soon accepted a post as organist at St Boniface's church in Arnstadt. It was during his tenure here that he famously made a 500-mile round trip on foot to visit his fellow (if, at that time, much

better known) composer and organist Dietrich Buxtehude – without his employers' permission. This kind of disobedience and unpredictability strained his relationship with them, and in 1707 he took up a post in Mühlhausen. Again, however, he did not remain long, and the following year he found himself back in Weimar. He would stay for almost ten years, until his imprisonment and dismissal in 1717.

Many of the pieces on this recording are fairly early works, dating from this turbulent period. Several of them illustrate the young Bach experimenting with counterpoint, harmony and form. The *Prelude and Fugue in A major, BWV 896*, for instance, incorporates quite a complex fugue that makes good use of stretto and inversion, while his *Suite in A major, BWV 832* (once attributed to Georg Philipp Telemann) employs some rather adventurous modulation. Both are relatively early works, as is his *Capriccio in honorem Johann Christoph Bachii in E major, BWV 993*. This piece was dedicated to his older brother Johann Christoph, the 'Ohrdruf Bach', who had taken him in as a child. It includes a brief pedal part, meaning that the piece was possibly intended for the organ.

The *Fantasia duobus subjectis in G minor, BWV 917*, focuses on invertible counterpoint, as the title suggests. It is quite a strict work in terms of its treatment, though it does not sound that way – it has a free, almost improvisatory quality, as do both the dramatic *Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV 895*, which may date from as early as 1707, and the *Fantasia in A minor, BWV 922*, an extravagantly virtuosic work that opens with a grand flourish and ends with a powerful and expressive coda. Another work full of extroverted figuration is the *Fugue in A minor, BWV 959*, though its unusual fugue subject has led some scholars to doubt its authorship.

BWV 933–8 are generally known as the 'Six Little Preludes', and comprise a more or less coherent set: they are in pairs of major/minor keys (C major/minor, D major/minor and E major/minor), are all predominantly in two-part counterpoint and are all in binary form. Nonetheless

they were probably not composed around the same time, and were very possibly not compiled into a set by Bach himself. *BWV 933* and *936*, in particular, may well date from significantly later than the others.

No autograph copies exist of the *Fugue in C major, BWV 952* – a brief, three-voice fugue – but its attribution to Bach is strengthened by its similarity to several other works of established authenticity. Another short fugue, *BWV 961*, a *Fugue in C minor*, opens with a solemn, gigue-like gesture, and is slightly improvisatory in structure. The *Prelude and Fugue in D minor, BWV 899* is a somewhat later work than many others on this disc, and its fugue is notable for having a very simple subject, which is then surrounded by complex and subtle part-writing. The *Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV 900*, is sometimes considered part of the same set as *BWV 899* (along with *BWV 890a* and *901–2*) – indeed, they may have been designated as such by Bach himself. It is an impressive piece; dissonant and free, it demands significant virtuosity. Another highly inventive work is the *Fantasia sur un Rondeau in C minor, BWV 918*. As the title suggests, it is indeed a rondeau – its main theme recurs several times. Despite being a Fantasia, however, it is not a flashy piece. Instead, its elegant rhythms and use of imitative counterpoint lend it a sober beauty.

The two final suites on this recording – in A minor, *BWV 818* and E flat major, *BWV 819* – have received much less attention than their more famous cousins, the *English* and *French Suites*. Yet *BWV 819*, in particular, is quite similar to the latter, and some scholars have suggested that it was originally intended for inclusion in that set. Both suites are imaginative and characterful; like the other pieces on this disc they are comparatively little-heard, but they reward listening, and possess a creativity and expressive range that easily matches that of Bach's more famous keyboard works.

Caroline Waight



Photo: Ville Paul Paasimaa

Aapo Häkkinen

Aapo Häkkinen began his musical education as a chorister at Helsinki Cathedral. He took up the harpsichord at the age of thirteen, studying with Bob van Asperen at the Amsterdam Sweelinck Conservatory and with Pierre Hantaï in Paris, and was also fortunate to enjoy the generous guidance and encouragement of Gustav Leonhardt. In 1998 he won second prize and the VRT prize at the Bruges Harpsichord Competition. He was also awarded the NDR special prize for his interpretations of Italian music. Since then, he has appeared as soloist and conductor in most European countries, in Israel, in Japan, in the United States, in Mexico and in Brazil. Aapo Häkkinen has recorded for the Aeolus, Alba, Avie, Cantus, Decca, Deux-Elles and Naxos labels. A frequent guest on both radio and television, he hosts his own programme on Classic FM in Finland. Besides the harpsichord, he regularly performs on the organ and on the clavichord. Since 2003 he has been Artistic Director of the Helsinki Baroque Orchestra.

The Harpsichord

The harpsichord heard on this recording was built by Frank Rutkowski and Robert Robinette in 1970 and belonged to Igor Kipnis until his death in 2002. It is based on the Johann Adolph Hass in the Yale University Collection of Musical Instruments – the latest and most sophisticated surviving Hass double-manual harpsichord. The original has 1x16', 2x8', 1x4', 1x2' and buff stops for the upper manual 8' and for the 16'. The compass is five octaves, FF to f3. The natural keys are of wood with tortoise shell veneer; the sharp keys are of ebony veneered with ivory. The lid painting is dated 1761. On the soundboard is the inscription, 'J. A. Hass Hamb. Anno 1710' of which the third digit has been retouched; it must originally have read 1760. In the Rutkowski & Robinette, the original 2' has been replaced by a *peau de buffle* register with leather plectra.

J. S. Bach was one of the most renowned keyboardists of his day, and he left a rich legacy of music for harpsichord originally intended for instruction and 'spiritual refreshment'. This recording of mostly lesser-known works includes several early examples which afford fascinating insights into the young composer's experimentation with counterpoint, harmony and form. They are all compelling, emotionally powerful works in their own right, with virtuoso content and an expressive range that easily matches that of Bach's more famous keyboard pieces.

**Johann Sebastian
BACH
(1685–1750)**

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A detailed track list will be found in the booklet

Aapo Häkkinen, Harpsichord

Recorded at St Catherine's Church, Karjaa, Finland, 17–19 February 2014
 Producer, Engineer & Editor: Mikko Murtoniemi • Harpsichord by Rutkowski & Robinette (1970) after Hass (1760) • Temperament: 1/6 comma meantone (tracks 1-11), Kellner (12-27), Sorge (28-33)
 Booklet notes: Caroline Waight • Cover image: Wenani / Dreamstime.com



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Playing Time
78:54



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