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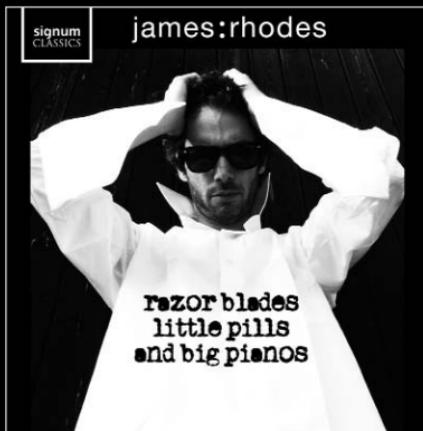


Jill Crossland
Well-tempered Clavier, Books 1 & 2

SIGCD136

This box set consists of the complete Well-tempered Clavier series by J.S. Bach, performed by Jill Crossland. Colloquially known as the "48" from the two books of twenty-four preludes and fugues, these works form one of the great landmarks of keyboard repertoire.

"Within seconds you're drawn into the gentle hammer-strokes that unlock Crossland's warm, rounded and perpetually singing sonority ... The preludes inspire Crossland's best work" The Gramophone



James Rhodes
Razor Blades, Little Pills and Big Pianos

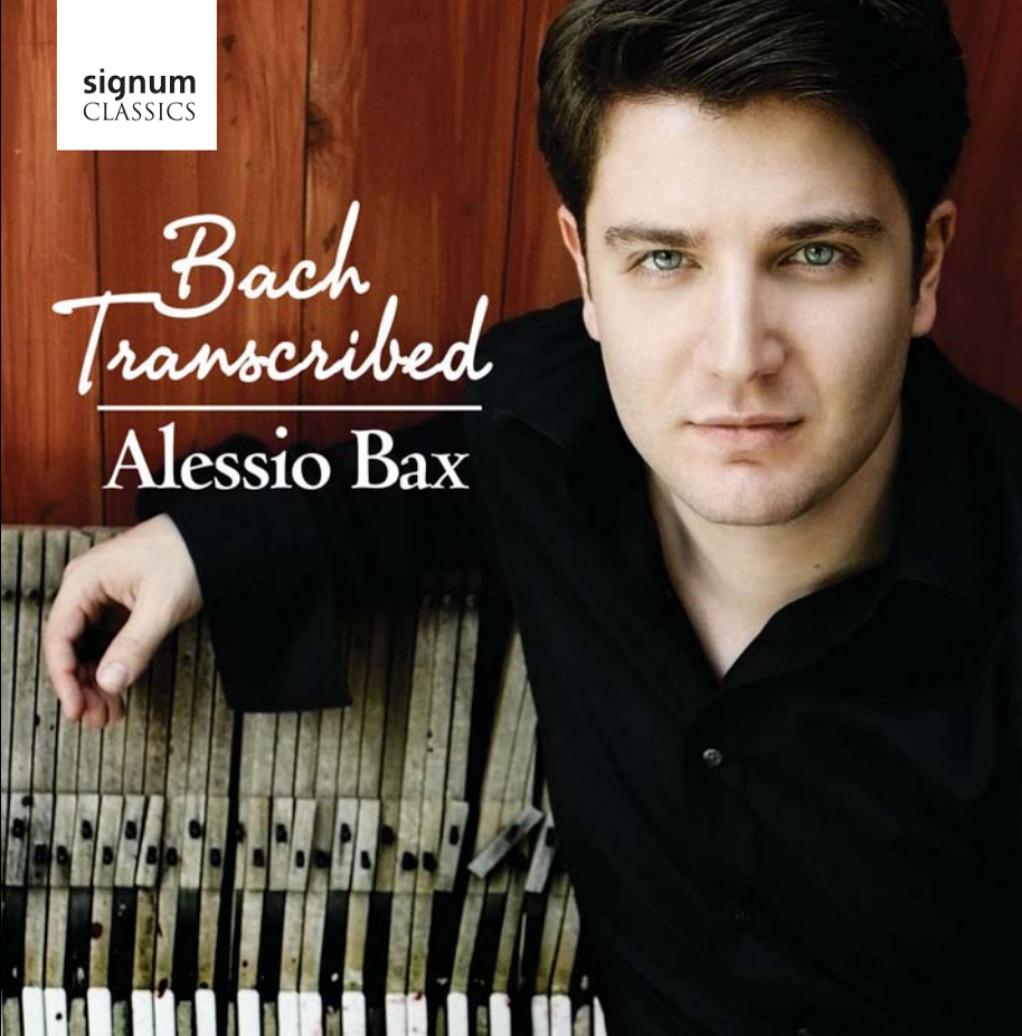
SIGCD153

"Razor Blades, Little Pills and Big Pianos" explores the emotive landscape that we call "life". This debut recording is somewhat of a biographical expression of James Rhodes's complex and unorthodox journey. It was Bach, Beethoven and Chopin; not Faith Hope and Charity, that offered him comfort.

"Sensitivity and thunder are his hallmarks" Rick Jones

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Bach
Transcribed
Alessio Bax



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BACH TRANSCRIBED

Violin Sonata No.1 in G minor		L. Godowsky	
1.	Adagio		[5.07]
2.	Fuga		[4.09]
3.	Siciliana		[3.51]
4.	Presto [Finale]		[3.18]
5.	Sheep May Safely Graze	E. Petri	[5.18]
6.	Air from the Orchestral Suite No.3 in D major	A. Siloti	[5.33]
7.	Gavotte (Tempo di Borea) from the Violin Partita No.1 in B minor	C. Saint-Saëns	[3.19]
8.	Andante from the Violin Sonata No.2 in A minor	A. Siloti	[4.52]
9.	Siciliano from the Flute Sonata in Eb major	A. Siloti	[2.18]
10.	“Zion hört die Wächter singen”, from the Cantata BWV 140 “Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme”	W. Kempff	[5.17]
11.	Largo from the Keyboard Concerto in F minor	A. Bax	[3.43]
12.	Bourrée from Cello Suite No.3 in C major	L. Godowsky	[4.30]
13.	Chaconne from the Violin Partita No.2 in D minor	F. Busoni	[14.28]
	Total Timings		[65.45]

ALESSIO BAX PIANO

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Today it is remarkable to realise that there was a time when Bach was viewed as a respectable and learned rather than inspired composer, serious to a fault and designed for an essentially cold and academic taste. His children referred to him as ‘the old wig’ and it wasn’t until the nineteenth century that awareness of his true stature (aided by Mendelssohn’s enthusiasm) occurred. Only then did musicians become conscious of the unique depth and spiritual dimension of his all-encompassing art, a small step towards seeing him as the true father of music. For many the 48 Preludes and Fugues remain the ‘Old Testament’ of music (with Beethoven’s 32 Piano Sonatas following as the New). Yet there is nothing of the old in so many of Bach’s boldly experimental works, in *The Art of Fugue*, the *Goldberg Variations*, the *Gigue* from the 6th English Suite, the *Prelude and Fugue in A minor* (described by Albert Schweitzer as ‘among the grandest things in keyboard literature’) and perhaps most of all the *Prelude (fantasia) in A minor BWV 922* (to take a random selection). Here Bach exhibits an improvisatory freedom and daring that gives his music a timeless veracity and lends some credence to András Schiff’s belief that ‘Bach is the most romantic of all composers.’

Delius may have scorned what he saw as Bach’s restriction and conservatism but others, more informed and less biased, have tirelessly celebrated what they undoubtedly saw as the foundation stone of great music. Several pianists, too, have placed Bach at the centre of their repertoires (Glenn Gould and Rosalyn Tureck, who early in her career forsook all others to concentrate exclusively on Bach) while many great Russian pianists (Tatiana Nikolayeva, Feinberg and Richter) rejoiced in music previously dismissed in their country as little more than useful examination fodder.

It is therefore hardly surprising that so many composers have wished to pay personal and often idiosyncratic tribute to Bach, ranging across the board from Liszt, Rachmaninov and Kabalevsky to Villa-Lobos (his exotic Bachianas Brasileiras) and including a wide variety of pianists and pianist-composers.

And this brings me to the question, when is a transcription a transcription? Liszt, to take a towering example, wrote 193 transcriptions. And these divide into ‘partitions’ (objective recreations where the chosen work is lifted bodily from one medium to another without undue elaboration or alteration of its intrinsic nature or character) and ‘paraphrase’ or more particularly ‘paraphrase de

concert' where the glory or triviality of the original is accentuated and concentrated by a dizzying form of *précis*; the accent as much on the recreator as the creator, on the arranger as well as the composer. Altruistic if self-promoting, all great transcribers are motivated by a desire to share their love of the great and less great usually in an age when the dissemination of music was difficult, when concerts were often inaccessible and records non-existent.

Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938), to take the first transcriber in Alessio Bax's recital, was a pianist of legendary prowess capable, particularly in private, of achieving ultimate feats of pianistic brilliance reflected in his Strauss Paraphrases and his *53 Studies* on Chopin's *27 Studies*, a delight in taking virtuosity to new undreamed of heights. Yet even here he confronts the inevitable brickbats that came his way, the accusation of tampering and gilding the lily or a 'trading on sacred soil' with a show of disarming candour and modesty. He wishes only to 'probe hidden beauties' believing that Bach would not have disapproved, in view of the amazing modernisms so frequently found in his compositions and considering his very free amendments to his own and other composer's works. Indeed, for the ever-outrageous Kaikhosru Sorabji, Godowsky

transcended Bach's 'dry, rattling skeletons of compositions' investing them with a grandeur and richness beyond the originals. Alas, Godowsky would have felt slighted and insulted rather than praised by such a claim, particularly when it was his intention to approach with 'awe and reverence the imperishable wonders of Bach.' And here, in the *First Violin Sonata*, Godowsky achieves an extraordinary fusion of virtuosity and restraint. Single lines are embellished with all of his fullness and contrapuntal skill yet the result is never less than serious. Violinists will gasp in admiration or outrage while pianists will find themselves confronted by a mighty challenge, requiring rare agility and an acute ear for keeping so many multi-textures, layers and lines clear.

Again, Egon Petri's transcription of *Sheep May Safely Graze* is a far cry from Harriet Cohen's more familiar version. Here, Bach's hauntingly beautiful melody is lovingly ornamented with many opalescent parts and textures.

Alexander Siloti (1863-1945) was a pupil of Liszt, famous for his transcription of Bach's *E minor Prelude* (or rather made famous by Emil Gilels who invariably offered it as a valedictory encore at the close of his recitals) and infamous for his scissors-and-paste job on Tchaikovsky's *Second*

Piano Concerto. And his way with the *Air from the Orchestra Suite No.3 in D major*, the *Andante from the Violin Sonata No.2 in A minor* and the *Siciliano from the Flute Sonata in E flat major* is altogether more effortless and transparent, aiming for simplicity rather than elaboration.

Wilhelm Kempff (1885-1991), a uniquely subtle pianist with a sonority all his own, also believes that Bach is best served by simplicity and, unlike his roseate and romantic transcription of, say, Handel's G minor Minuet from his first Harpsichord Suite, he is memorably restrained in *Zion hört die Wächter singen* and so, too, is Alessio Bax himself in his arrangement of the *Largo from the F minor Concerto*.

Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) brings a touch of French chic to Bach's *Gavotte (Tempo di Borea) from the Violin Partita No.1 in B minor*, his vital and stylish transcription at the opposite pole to Bax's final offering, the mighty Bach-Busoni *Chaconne*, a set of 29 variations on an eight bar theme taken from the *D minor Partita for Solo Violin*. Here, we return to virtuosity on the grandest scale and a reminder that for Busoni (1866-1924) the piano was the true King of Instruments.

It only remains for me to add a personal note. I first heard Alessio Bax as a jury member at the 1997 International Hamamatsu Piano Competition in Japan where he won first prize, preceding this by a first prize at Ferrol in Spain and yet another first at Leeds in 2000. His performances in Japan were of an astonishing brilliance and acuteness and never more so than in Granados's *Amor y la muerte* (No 5 from the *Goyescas*) which I remember as if it was yesterday. And now this richly enterprising Bach transcription recital can only enhance his already formidable international standing and career.

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BIOGRAPHIES

ALESSIO BAX

Winner of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant for 2009, Alessio Bax is praised internationally for his lyrical playing and insightful interpretations. At the age of 19 he won the First Prize at the Hamamatsu International Piano Competition in Japan, and was First Prize winner in the universally acknowledged Leeds International Pianoforte Competition in 2000. Acclaimed by the international press, his performances have been described as “real music-making that makes its own world on stage and invites the audience in as guests” (*The Independent*), and “successfully combining authority and poetry” (*Daily Telegraph*).

Alessio Bax’s extensive concerto repertoire has led to appearances with over 80 orchestras including the London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National, Dallas Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, Houston Symphony, Rome Symphony, Hungarian Symphony, NHK Symphony, Tokyo Symphony, and New Japan Philharmonic. He has worked with a number of esteemed conductors such as Marin Alsop, Alexander Dimitriev, Jonathan Nott, Vernon Handley, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Ken-ichiro Kobayashi, Dmitry Sitkovetsky and Sir Simon Rattle.



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Bax’s festival appearances include London’s International Piano Series (Queen Elizabeth Hall), the Verbier Festival in Switzerland, England’s Aldeburgh and Bath festivals, the Ruhr Klavierfestival, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, BeethovenFest, and Musikfestspiele Saar in Germany. He has performed in recital at music halls in Rome, Milan, Madrid, Paris, London, Tel Aviv, Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, New York, Washington DC, and Mexico City. Also an active chamber musician, he has collaborated with Joshua Bell, Steven Isserlis, Andrés Díaz and Nobuko Imai,

among others. He joins Lincoln Center’s Chamber Music Society Two residency program for outstanding artists for three seasons beginning in 2009-10.

His 2004 recording for Warner Classics, *Baroque Reflections*, received rave reviews and was selected as “Editor’s Choice” by *Gramophone* magazine. In 2003, Bax recorded with his wife, Lucille Chung, the complete works for two pianos and piano-for-four-hands of György Ligeti on Dynamic Records. In 2005, they recorded Saint-Saëns’s *Carnival of the Animals* with conductor Miguel Harth-Bedoya and the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra. He has recorded the complete works for piano and organ of Marcel Dupré on Naxos, and Brahms Piano Concerto No. 1, live with the New Japan Philharmonic, for Fontec. Also on Fontec, Bax released a live recording of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 3 with the Hamamatsu Symphony Orchestra.

www.alessiobax.com

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Editor - Andrew Mellor

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In 2005, Alessio Bax was selected to play the Fugue of Beethoven’s “Hammerklavier” Sonata for Maestro Daniel Barenboim in *Barenboim on Beethoven*. The documentary was produced by Channel 13/PBS, in conjunction with Bel Air Media, BBC, and NHK Japan. It was broadcast worldwide and released as a DVD box set in 2006 on the EMI label. His performances are often broadcast live on the BBC, CBC (Canada), RAI (Italy), RTVE (Spain), NHK (Japan), WDR, NDR and Bayerische Rundfunk (Germany), Hungarian Radio Television, Serbian RTE, among others.

Alessio Bax graduated with top honors at the record age of 14 from the conservatory of his home town, Bari, Italy, under Angela Montemurro. He studied in France with François-Joël Thiollier, and attended the Chigiana Academy in Siena under Joaquín Achúcarro. He moved to Dallas in 1994 to continue his studies with Achúcarro at SMU’s Meadows School of the Arts. He is now on the teaching faculty there. He and his wife, pianist Lucille Chung, reside in New York City.

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SignumClassics, Signum Records Ltd., Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middx UB6 7JD, UK +44 (0) 20 8997 4000 E-mail: info@signumrecords.com