



MANY FACES OF



JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Gil Sullivan



HUNNIA RECORDS

GIL SULLIVAN

Steinway Model D. Concert Grand Piano, Hamburg



BACH ON THE PIANO

Bach on the modern Steinway! - a bubbling cauldron of division, debate, and even derision, raging for well over half a century, and future-proofed as long as those stubborn pianists continue to stand so tenaciously!

Musicology these past 75 years surrounding historical-instruments and practises, has made dinosaur strides, whereby we no longer hear grotesque, self-indulgent, overly-romantic performances so ubiquitous in the early 20th century - Beecham's Handel's Messiah (with added trombones no less!!), or Mengelberg's St. Matthew Passion come to mind.

From this same era, Wanda Landowska postulated an argument for performing Bach on the harpsichord. Her recordings regrettably demonstrate a thickly textured style on a heavy instrument built more like a grand piano, with a like-minded proclivity for that old phrase, *big is better!* In a once famous exchange with the great cellist Pablo Casals over how Bach should be played, she said "You play Bach your way, and I'll play Bach *his* way". And so - from the middle of last century until today - the feud continues as to whether Bach on the piano can be remotely considered legal tender.

Happily, through the dint of constant musicological research, **all** musicians are both better educated and far more respectful of Baroque, and indeed, all 18th century playing styles and practises. Notwithstanding Landowska's "19th century" harpsichord, her interpretations proffered a new future for 'informed' performing practices, a huge step forward from 19th century attitudes, that sadly "used" Bach's music to express turgid romantic ideals.

Despite being considered old hat even before his death, we do know Bach was hugely open-minded and immersed in new musical styles and inventions. Countless "pioneering" harmonies in his music trod roughshod over contemporary harmonic laws, eliciting slings and arrows from all quarters "for having hitherto introduced sundry curious embellishments in the chorales and mingled many strange notes in them, with the result that the congregation has been confused."

In 1733, he played and rejected a wholly new invention, the fortepiano, (to be fair, Cristofori had only built the very first, 13 years earlier). Fourteen years on however, he fervently embraced the more modern Silbermann fortepiano so earnestly, he composed *The Musical Offering*, the very first work specifically for this instrument!

Clearly another foray into the future was *The Well Tempered Clavier*. Here, Bach discerned a time when all keys would be equal. For thousands of years prior, most keys were actually out of tune; the more remote, the more out of tune. But Bach had a vision! He foresaw a future when this would not be so. In this respect, *The Well Tempered Clavier* is therefore something of an experimental work; a theoretical premise cast, like a fishing fly, into a stream of the future. Indeed, could this readily argue for playing his music on an *instrument* of the future?

With a man of Bach's towering intellectual genius, it's perfectly conceivable he would *not* cast such final judgement over any modern instrument; after all, these are instruments for making music! Why would he *not* be enthralled? Arguing he would not, because it was 'intended' for the harpsichord, deprecates his genius for seeing into the future and embracing change. Bach could already see the piano was evolving, from that thin, weak instrument of 1733, to a stronger, bolder, and more musically viable one of 1747. Can we believe that, in 1747, Bach believed the fortepiano had reached its zenith of development.....??

Myself a composer for many years, I also believe all composers compose music by singing it first, either aloud or in their heads; I don't believe, at that very nucleus moment, they hear music instrumentally. "Music itself" is the true genesis! The instrumental objective is a secondary thought. To ignore this simple fact, and believe the very birth of each musical idea is purely instrumental would be to ignore the very embryo of music composition. Bach's music is **pure** music, regardless of the instrument, evidenced indeed by the dozens of his own compositions he himself re-scored for other instruments!

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RECORDING SETUP

Microphones: **2x Neumann M-149, 2x Neumann U87, Schoeps MK2 Stereo pairs**

AD/DA: **Merging Hapi**

DAW: **Pyramix MassCore**

EQ: **Prism Sound Maselec MEA-2**

Peak limiter: **Prism Sound Maselec MPL2**

Effect: **Bricasti Design M7+ M10**

Analog Mixing Console: **Studer 962**

TRACK LIST

01	Chorale prelude in F Minor, BWV 639: I call to you, Lord Jesus Christ (Transc. Kempff)	02:54
02	Flute Sonata in E Flat Major, BWV 1031: II. Siciliano (Transc. Kempff)	04:12
03	Well Tempered Clavier, Book 2: Prelude No. 14 in F-Sharp Minor, BWV 883/1	04:03
04	Well Tempered Clavier, Book 2: Fugue No. 14 in F-Sharp Minor, BWV 883/2	05:22
05	Partita No. 1 in B-Flat Major, BWV 825: I. Praeludium	02:05
06	Partita No. 1 in B-Flat Major, BWV 825: II. Allemande	03:50
07	Partita No. 1 in B-Flat Major, BWV 825: III. Corrente	03:30
08	Partita No. 1 in B-Flat Major, BWV 825: IV. Sarabande	06:28
09	Partita No. 1 in B-Flat Major, BWV 825: V. Menuet I	02:04
10	Partita No. 1 in B-Flat Major, BWV 825: VI. Menuet II	01:03
11	Partita No. 1 in B-Flat Major, BWV 825: VII. Gigue	02:32

12	Well Tempered Clavier, Book 2: Prelude No. 8 in E-Flat Minor, BWV 877/1	04:32
13	Well Tempered Clavier, Book 2: Fugue No. 8 in D-Sharp Minor, BWV 877/2	05:39
14	Six Little Preludes, BWV 933-938: Praeludium in C Major, BWV 933	01:34
15	Six Little Preludes, BWV 933-938: Praeludium in C Minor, BWV 934	02:21
16	Six Little Preludes, BWV 933-938: Praeludium in D Minor, BWV 935	01:47
17	Six Little Preludes, BWV 933-938: Praeludium in D Major, BWV 936	02:24
18	Six Little Preludes, BWV 933-938: Praeludium in E Major, BWV 937	01:45
19	Six Little Preludes, BWV 933-938: Praeludium in E Minor, BWV 938	02:53
20	Well Tempered Clavier, Book 2: Prelude No. 7 in E-Flat Major, BWV 876/1	02:32
21	Well Tempered Clavier, Book 2: Fugue No. 7 in E-Flat Major, BWV 876/2	01:49
22	Italian Concerto in F Major, BWV 971: 1. -	04:23
23	Italian Concerto in F Major, BWV 971: 2. Andante	04:45
24	Italian Concerto in F Major, BWV 971: 3. Presto	04:09

Total time:

78:36

ALBUM INFO

Recorded: **Hunnia Records / ProVibe Studio, 25-29 November 2025**

Piano technician: **Balázs Tóth**

Recording engineer: **Sándor Árok**

Balance engineers: **Sándor Árok, Kevin Roper**

Recorded audio format: **Pure DSD256**

Mastering engineer: **Tom Caulfield**

Photographer: **Jun Pang**

Producer: **Róbert Zoltán Hunka**

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