

# Prelude in C major

from *The Well-tempered Clavier*, Book 1

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)  
BWV 846

3

6

9

12

15

## About J. S. Bach...

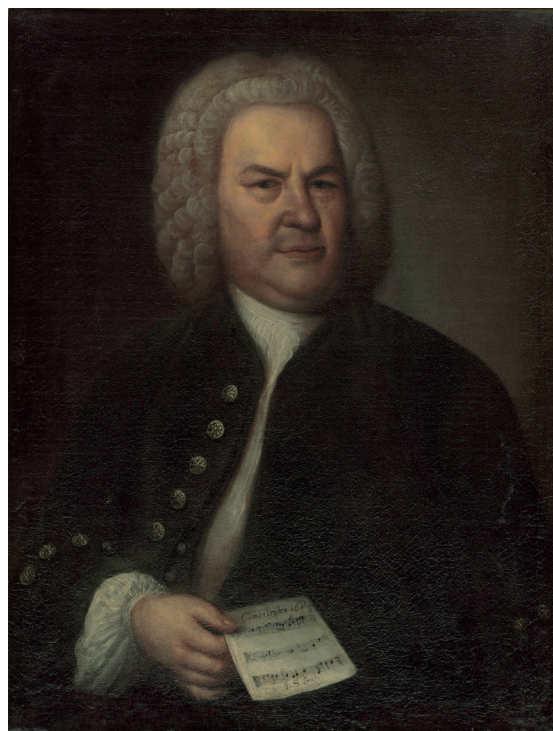
Johann Sebastian Bach was born on 21 March 1685 in Eisenach. He was sent to study at the choir school in Lüneberg in 1700, after which he worked for some years as an organist. In 1717 Bach took up the post of Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, in which role he composed much of his orchestral, chamber and solo harpsichord music.

In 1723 Bach left for Leipzig, and the post he would hold for the rest of his life: Cantor of the Church of St Thomas. Bach's duties at Leipzig were more demanding than those of his previous posts. As a result, music for the Lutheran liturgy dominates Bach's output during the 1720s.

The last decade of Bach's life saw the composition of what are often known as his 'summation' works: the 'Goldberg' Variations, *The Musical Offering*, *The Art of Fugue*, and the Mass in B minor.

Bach's health began to deteriorate in the late 1740s, and he died on 28 July 1750.

Emily Kilpatrick



J. S. Bach, aged around 60, by E. J. Haußmann



Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach seated at the organ, 1725

## Prelude and Fugue in C major...

In *The Well-tempered Clavier* we recognize the composer as artist and philosopher, pedagogue and acoustician. *The Well-tempered Clavier* far exceeds anything attempted in earlier surveys of keys and modes.

The title of the work seems to make it clear that it was intended to display the merits of a tuning method that made it possible to compose in each of the 24 keys. However, Bach seems not to have himself bestowed the title of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* on this set and it is debatable as to whether equal-tempered tuning is what the title refers to.

The first book, comprising 24 preludes and fugues, was completed in 1722. The first of the preludes subtly encapsulates the principal qualities of the set, its gradual movement downwards across the keyboard foreshadowing and inverting the collection's upward progression through the major and minor keys. Its companion fugue is based on a gentle scalic subject, which is present in every bar until the closing cadence.

Emily Kilpatrick