



(LEMS 8047)

J. S. BACH

INVENTIONS, SINFONIAS, LITTLE PRELUDES

RICHARD TROEGER, CLAVICHORD

A NOTE ON RECORDING AND PLAYBACK

The clavichord is a quiet instrument, but it can fill a room with extraordinary resonance. The goal of this recording is to reproduce that effect, as it would be heard by a nearby listener. For the most realistic quality, do not play these recordings at a high volume level.

The variations in color and dynamics are the player's own and have not been artificially enhanced.

—Garth Hobden, Recording Engineer

THE LITTLE PRELUDES

The works presented in this recording include some of Bach's most clearly pedagogical compositions. They introduce the student to various keyboard idioms, exemplify many contrapuntal procedures, and even address technical matters at the keyboard. (No. 11 of the 12 Little Preludes includes fingering indications that are undoubtedly by J.S. Bach.) They are also supremely beautiful works of art.

The sets of six and twelve "Little Preludes" were not grouped thus by Bach, but these are useful compilations and have been retained for this series. It is notable that even with

such beginners' pieces, Bach already provides the "foretaste of composition" mentioned in the preface to the *Inventions* and *Sinfonias*. Thus, many of the twelve preludes demonstrate various approaches to the standard keyboard idiom of "figured chords" (Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, and elements of 7, 8, and 11): taking a motive based on a broken chord and repeating it with varied harmonies. Perhaps the most famous examples of this technique are Preludes 1 and 2 from Book 1 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Preludes 7 and 12 suggest, respectively, the dance types of menuet and gigue; No. 10 indeed served as a Trio, added by Bach to a Menuet by Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel (included here). No. 9 is an exquisite miniature evocation of orchestral style. No. 4 and the touching No. 6 are perhaps the most complex movements: tightly wrought pieces reminiscent of imitative ensemble textures. Prelude No. 3 is one of a number of Bach's compositions apparently conceived for either lute or keyboard. It originally introduced a fugue (known only from an incomplete manuscript).

The Six Little Preludes are somewhat more demanding technically and musically than the set of twelve. Again, we find several standard idioms. No. 1 seems orchestral in inspiration; No. 2 is a menuet (complete with double bar at the halfway point). No. 4 imitates a trio movement, complete with a cello-like "walking bass" supporting two upper lines. (By the way, the high e''' in this piece exceeds Bach's usual keyboard limit of d''' and may have been extrapolated—quite logically—from the original version.) Nos. 3, 5, and 6 resemble, to varying degrees, two-part inventions.

The *Inventions* and *Sinfonias*

In Bach's often-cited prefatory note to his *Inventions* and *Sinfonias*, the composer comments on his intention to provide models in composition for keyboard players and for cultivation of a "singing [cantabile] style of playing." At a time when "playing" referred, largely, to developing one's own compositional ideas at the keyboard (hence the term "invention"), this phrase most probably refers to the concept of maintaining a viable, "singable" line in each part, as opposed to merely supportive basses and "filler" harmony. That the composer also refers to a well-nuanced performance can hardly be in doubt.

The two-part *Inventions* and the *Sinfonias* (popularly referred to as "three-part inventions") originally appeared in the *Clavierbüchlein vor Wilhelm Friedemann Bach* (begun 1720), the book of teaching pieces for Bach's eldest son. Here, *Invention* and *Sinfonia* were entitled "Praelambulum" and "Fantasia," respectively. (The term "fantasia," in the earlier Baroque era, could signify a work in strict polyphony, certainly the case here.) The pieces provided a survey of various styles of contrapuntal writing in the fifteen most commonly used tonalities. Bach eventually revised (and sometimes expanded) the pieces, reordered them in an ascending pattern of keys, and at the same time changed the titles to "Invention" and "Sinfonia."

Both sets present a wide variety of contrapuntal treatments. As has been pointed out by several writers, the original ordering of the two-part pieces in the *Clavierbüchlein* suggests a graded presentation of ascending contrapuntal complexity, from the simple imitation of the C-major piece (the first in both orderings) to the generally canonic treatment of the C-minor work (No. 15, as the most complex, in the *Clavierbüchlein* sequence). As in the Little Preludes, we also find the occasional dance style: *Invention*

No. 6 (traditionally played rather slowly) resembles the style of the corrente, in binary form including the double bar; Sinfonia #6 seems to take inspiration from the gigue. The Sinfonias present even more variety than the Inventions, especially in genre: from the old-fashioned, closely wrought polyphony of Nos. 1 and 9 to the suggestions of ensemble trio textures in Nos. 4 and 5; from the almost tour-de-force union of polyphony and “figured chords” in Nos. 6 and 11 to the galant opposition of contrasting figures in the virtuosic No. 15.

The clavichord heard in the Twelve Little Preludes and the Inventions is a fretted instrument by Ronald Haas (Aptos, California, 1986) based on three very similar German instruments made in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. (Fretted clavichords share strings between adjacent keys, allowing certain advantages to overall design.) Bach and his pupils would certainly have known and used both fretted and unfretted clavichords: the two types (and many sub-species of each) were built side-by-side from the late seventeenth century until the early nineteenth. Although the fretted clavichord’s mechanism favors the “natural” keys, this type of clavichord is far less limited than modern descriptions usually suggest and its color and sensitivity are akin to those of the lute and guitar. I believe that this is the first recording to use a fretted clavichord for these pieces.

The Six Little Preludes and the Sinfonias are played on an unfretted instrument, also by Ronald Haas (1979), modelled on originals by Johann Heinrich Silbermann, nephew and apprentice of Bach’s friend Gottfried Silbermann. Its design relates to earlier eighteenth-century clavichords. In both its historical derivations and musical qualities it is well suited to Bach’s music.

The fretted clavichord’s string-sharing requires a predetermined temperament (since some of the pitch relationships are “built in”), in this case a “well-tempered” system that slightly favors the “natural tonalities” (C, D, etc.) over remote keys (F-sharp major, for example). I have tempered the unfretted clavichord similarly.

—Richard Troeger

TRACKS AND TIMES

15 Two-Part Inventions, BWV 772-786

1 No. 1, C Major 1:10

2 No. 2, C Minor 1:49

3 No. 3, D Major 1:18

4 No. 4, D Minor 0:52

5 No. 5, E Flat Major 1:27

6 No. 6, E Major 2:50

7 No. 7, E Minor 1:39

8 No. 8, F Major 0:53

9 No. 9, F Minor 1:43

10 No. 10, G Major 1:03

11 No. 11, G Minor 1:28

12 No. 12, A Major 1:24

13 No. 13, A Minor 1:06
14 No. 14, B Flat Major 1:28
15 No. 15, B Minor 1:26

16 Little Preludes
17 No. 1, 1, C Major, BWV 924 1:02
18 No. 2, C Major, BWV 939 0:38
19 No. 3, C Minor, BWV 999 1:07
20 No. 4, D Major, BWV 925 1:06
21 No. 5, D Minor, BWV 926 1:07
22 No. 6, D Minor, BWV 940 0:52
23 No. 7, E Minor, BWV 941 0:38
24 No. 8, F Major, BWV 927 0:31
25 No. 9, F Major, BWV 928 1:21
26 Menuet [by G.H. Stölzel] & Trio
(Prelude No. 10, BWV 929) 2:38
27 No. 11, G Minor, BWV 930 1:34
28 No. 12, A Minor, BWV 942 0:40

15 Sinfonias, BWV 787-801
29 No. 1, C Major 1:09
30 No. 2, C Minor 1:49
31 No. 3, D Major 1:19
32 No. 4, D Minor 1:34
33 No. 5, E Flat Major 2:44
34 No. 6, E Major 1:14
35 No. 7, E Minor 1:50
36 No. 8, F Major 1:13
37 No. 9, F Minor 2:34
38 No. 10, G Major 1:08
39 No. 11, G Minor 1:13
40 No. 12, A Major 1:25
41 No. 13, A Minor 1:27
42 No. 14, B Flat Major 1:41
43 No. 15, B Minor 1:25

6 Little Preludes, BWV 933-938
44 No. 1, C Major 1:31
45 No. 2, C Minor 1:16
46 No. 3, D Minor 1:24
47 No. 4, D Major 1:27
48 No. 5, E Major 1:26
49 No. 6, E Minor 1:22

Total Time 67:48

RICHARD TROEGER, clavichordist, harpsichordist, and fortepianist, has been heard as a recitalist and lecturer throughout North America and in numerous broadcasts on CBC Radio and other stations. His performances have consistently received high praise for their combination of warmth, virtuosity, and scholarship. In addition to performing and teaching, Mr. Troeger is the author of many articles on early performance practice, including several entries in the Garland Encyclopedia of Keyboard Instruments. His book *Technique and Interpretation on the Harpsichord and Clavichord* (Indiana University Press, 1987; revised and expanded edition forthcoming from Pendragon Press) has become a standard reference. Current projects include a manual on Bach performance and a book on instrumental articulation, for which he was awarded a Canada Research Fellowship. Richard Troeger has worked with early keyboard instruments and their literature since the age of twelve. His teachers have included Hugh McLean, Marie Zorn, Thomas Binkley, and Anthony Newman. He holds degrees in Performance and Musicology from Indiana University and completed his Doctorate in Early Music there. From 1989-1997 he taught at the University of Alberta, Edmonton. He is President of the Boston Clavichord Society and now lives, performs, and teaches in the Boston area.

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