

# 'THE 48'

**Friday 13 August**

**11.00am, 2.00pm, 5.30pm & 8.00pm**

**Upper Chapel, Sheffield**

In 2021 Libby is performing Bach's epic '48' in all 48 ceremonial counties of England to raise money for four musical charities.

**LIBBY BURGESS piano**

**JS BACH The Well-Tempered Clavier**  
*(performed in four parts)*

## **JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)** **The Well-Tempered Clavier**

*The Well-Tempered Clavier* follows the overall plan of a prelude and fugue in each of the 24 major and minor keys, starting in C major, then C minor, rising by semitones to finish in B major and B minor. It's a structure that demonstrated the feasibility of the 'well-tempered' tuning method for the keyboard, which enabled music to change key without sounding out of tune, while showing the varying characteristics of the different keys. Nowadays we use 'equal-temperament', so the contrasting colours of the different keys are less apparent.

It took Bach most of his creative life to write the two Books, with the first Book of 24 preludes and fugues completed in 1722 and the second Book in 1742, combining to make 'The 48'.

Despite its apparently formulaic structure, the expressive range of these pieces is astonishing, and was eloquently summarised by the harpsichordist Ralph Kirkpatrick:

*Much that is really idiomatic to the keyboard appears in many of the preludes and some of the fugues, but much is designed to stimulate the imagination to desert the confines of the keyboard for other media and for the larger dimensions of polyphonic orchestra and choir. Some pieces are sketches for jewelled miniatures; some for vast frescos. Some are intimate and lyrical; some quiver with the intensity of a passion that is just as intensely controlled; some fringe on the pedantic; and some are frankly sublime.*

The stylistic differences between the two Books of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* are subtle but significant: in general the Preludes in Book II are conceived on a larger scale, with about half of them in binary form. As for the Fugues in Book II, they are all in either three or four parts but their variety is extraordinary. In part this is determined by the way in which Bach works out his ideas, but the most important factor is the different character of the fugue subjects themselves.

After Bach's death, the two Books of 'The 48' circulated in manuscript copies and a few isolated pieces were published by Bach's pupil Johann Kirnberger (who published the B minor Prelude from Book II in 1773 as a musical example in a harmony book), Johann Friedrich Reichardt (the F minor Fugue in 1782) and Augustus Friedrich Christopher Kollmann, organist of the German Chapel in London, who published the C major Prelude and Fugue in his *Essay on Practical Musical Composition* (1799).

Kollmann was one of the first to recognise Bach's lasting significance: in a 'Sun' diagram of composers, published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in October 1799, Bach is at the centre, surrounded by the likes of Haydn, Handel, Mozart and Gluck. It was only in about 1801 that *The Well-Tempered Clavier* was finally published complete, in three different editions: Hofmeister in Vienna, Simrock in Bonn and Nägeli in Zurich. Others soon followed, including Carl Czerny's edition (1837) purported to demonstrate his memories of how Beethoven played the

preludes and fugues. However far-fetched its claims might have been, Czerny's edition – which sold extremely well – did much to establish the work in the standard repertoire. Countless editions followed, some with distinguished editors including Busoni, Bartók and Donald Francis Tovey (whose edition also includes his insightful analyses of each prelude and fugue and which was the first to use the autograph manuscript acquired by the British Library in 1897).

The earliest recording of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* was made in the 1930s by Edwin Fischer: Book I in 1933–4, and Book II in 1935–6. The first recordings using a harpsichord were by Wanda Landowska (1951–4) and Isolde Ahlgrimm (1953). Since these pioneering efforts, recordings have proliferated, mostly using either the piano or the harpsichord, though others use clavichord or organ. Regardless of the instrument used, what shines through every imaginative interpretation of 'The 48' is Bach's genius for exploring what can be achieved on a keyboard instrument, displaying a dazzling range of textures, moods and colours through 24 pieces, all of which are exquisitely constructed.

*Programme note* © Nigel Simeone

## LIBBY BURGESS

Pianist Libby Burgess is well-known on concert stages across Britain, playing in the country's major halls and festivals, on Radio 3, and on a range of recordings. Praised by *The Observer* for her 'warm, sensitive pianism', she collaborates with many of the UK's finest instrumentalists and singers when not taking on crazy country-wide solo projects. Libby is Artistic Director of New Paths Music, Co-Artistic Director with Martin Roscoe of the Beverley Chamber Music Festival, was formerly Head of Keyboard at Eton College, and is also in demand as coach, speaker and writer.

In 2021, pianist Libby Burgess performs Bach's epic '48' in each of England's 48 ceremonial counties, raising funds for musical charities in the wake of the pandemic. If you are able to, please consider donating to support these charities:

[uk.virginmoneygiving.com/bachproject48](https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/bachproject48)

You can also point your smartphone camera at this QR code to visit the donation site:



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