

## **Johann Sebastian Bach (1675–1750) — Prelude and Fugue in e-flat minor/d-sharp minor, BWV 853 (c. 1722)**

Extracted from J. S. Bach's tome of masterful counterpoint, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, this pair is unique in the sense that prelude and fugue are notated in different keys. Though enharmonically identical, the prelude is written in e-flat minor, with six flats, while the fugue is in d-sharp minor, which requires six sharps. By contrast, the prelude and fugue in e-flat minor from WTC Book II does not exhibit a fugue in d-sharp minor, it is as expected, in the key of e-flat minor. One explanation for this might be that J. S. Bach may have re-used a fugue which was originally composed in d minor and transposed it into d-sharp minor in order to include it in the WTC book I, a simpler task than rewriting the whole fugue in e-flat minor.

Consisting of a continuo-like accompaniment, and highly ornamented melodic line, the prelude is reminiscent of a tragic *recitativo accompagnato* from a cantata or oratorio. Harmonically, the piece is interesting in that it is largely written using minor harmony, except for a brief section in G-flat major, and C-flat major. A further transformation in style happens midway through the prelude, Bach writes a section using a sharp dotted rhythm, in the style of a French baroque overture. In the ending, the continuo takes over the melodic line, using a static harmony until the final cadential sequence.

The fugue in d-sharp minor is regarded as the most intellectual and well-wrought fugue of the entirety of both books of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Written in three voices, Bach makes exemplary use of fugal techniques, including simple and complex stretti, melodic inversion, and rhythmic augmentation and diminution.

After the fugal exposition, the subject immediately appears in stretto between the two higher voices. A stretto is where the subject entries overlap and are played in part simultaneously. Shortly after this, there is the first diminution stretto, during which the subject entries overlap, but one voice's entry is of the theme is at a speed 1.5x faster than the original presentation of the subject. Shortly after, the next entries present the subject in its inverted form, contrary vertical motion compared to the original theme— simply put, the subject is played upside down. This inverted subject then cycles through the remaining voices, and then combines with itself in stretto. The inverted subject later enters again in stretto with an inversion of the prior rhythmically diminished subject, and a fragment of the unaltered subject. The fugue continues and uses even further complicated fugal techniques, such as presentation of the original subject, in stretto with a rhythmic augmentation of the theme, twice as slow as the original. Finally, ending with the most complex three voice stretto, during which the subject is played simultaneously at three different speeds by the three voices.