

Thank you for taking an interest in St Mary the Blessed Virgin, Addington, and our forthcoming day of Bach. Although our day was triggered and motivated by our desire to relaunch our fund-raising efforts for the refurbishment of our Hall, stalled as they were by Covid-19, we do also hope that for those who attend even for a short time, the exuberance, tenderness, agonies and triumphs of Bach's music will itself provide healing and renewal as we hopefully emerge from the most restrictive of the precautions we have been obliged to take to protect each other from harm.

Bach composed the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in 1722 when he was working in Köthen, and the second book some 20 years later. At Köthen, Bach was Kappelmeister to the Calvinist Prince Leopold, who did not require music for worship, so much of his best-known secular music was composed in this period, including the *Brandenburg Concertos* and the unaccompanied cello and violin suites. The first volume of the Forty-Eight was designed "for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning, and especially for the pastime of those already skilled in this study", and consists of a Prelude and Fugue in each of the twenty-four major and minor keys, beginning with C major and working its way up semitone by semitone to B minor. This enabled Bach to demonstrate that the recently developed systems of "circular" or "equal" temperament, where the difference between G sharp and A flat – detectable by acoustic purists – was neutralised, had made it possible for a keyboard instrument to change key without retuning. Neither the pedagogical aim nor the theoretical one appears to have inhibited Bach's creativity, and both books display a wide range of moods, by turn tender and majestic, wistful and playful, witty and prayerful. Most often there is a match between the prelude and its corresponding fugue, although occasionally they are in dramatic contrast. The remarkable thing about baroque counterpoint is that the most angular and systematic piece is nevertheless tuneful, and the most melodic outpouring still retains control of form, so that every one of these pieces appeals directly both to our æsthetic sensibility and to our appreciation of a logical structure. There is *nothing* more satisfying than the conclusion of a fugue ... except perhaps the punch line of a sonnet.

A few features to look out for in fugal writing: a *stretto* is when one voice starts playing the fugue subject before another has got to the end – this gives an exciting feeling that the music is catching its tail, or alternatively that the piece is about to fall apart altogether. An inversion is just that – one or more entries of the fugue subject turn it upside down (Bach was doing that sort of thing three hundred years before Messiaen, and much more tunefully). At the climax of fugue 22 in Book II, all four voices are playing the dramatic subject at once, in *stretto* and with two of them in inversion. The most grandiloquent technique used is "augmentation" when at the climax of the fugue the subject is played at half speed: Bach does use that to great effect but sparingly in this collection.

The 48 will be played in six groups across the day, each lasting between 40 and 70 minutes. This enables us to provide as much colour contrast as we could – mostly string music in the morning, organ and vocal music in the afternoon. We hope we will stick more or less to the pre-announced schedule, but will not start any section earlier than the time stated – if at any stage we have a few minutes to fill, all present will be exhorted to join in singing one or more verses of a hymn to a tune associated with Bach!

We all hope that the combination of compassion, gentleness, intensity, grandeur and triumph that is encapsulated in Bach's music will provide for us all a means of communicating with the divine.