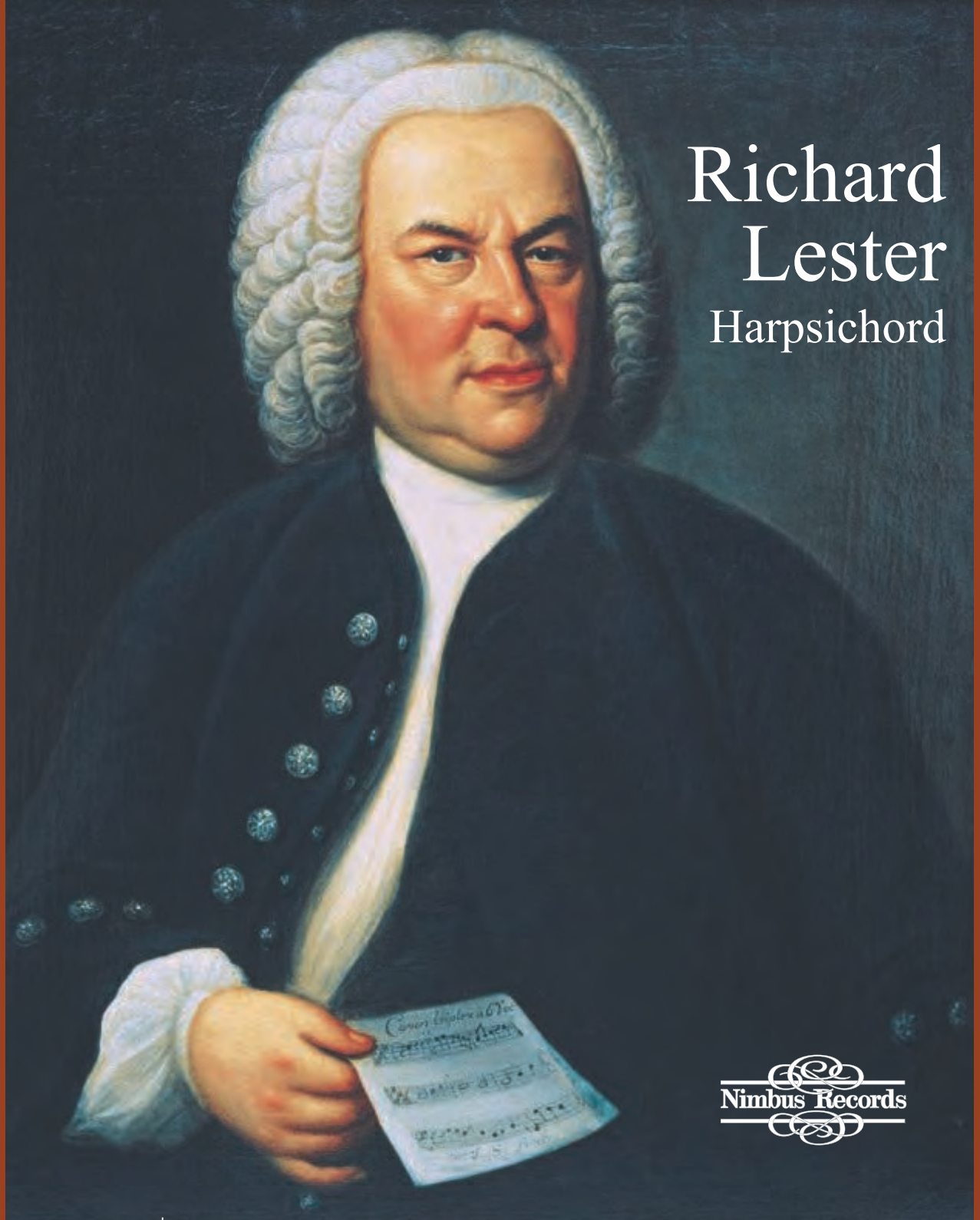


Richard
Lester
Harpsichord

BACH

2

Nimbus Records

J S Bach Volume 2

Richard Lester, harpsichord

Disc 1

English Suite No 3 in G minor BWV 808

1	Prelude	3.54
2	Allemande	4.19
3	Courante	3.43
4	Sarabande	3.37
5	Les agréments de la même Sarabande	3.59
6	Gavottes I & II	4.03
7	Gigue	3.19
8-9	Prelude and Fugue in E flat major Book I No 7 BWV 852	4.31 : 2.41
10-11	Prelude and Fugue in C minor Book I No 2 BWV 847	2.08 : 1.54
12	Two Part Invention No 8 in F major BWV 779	1.08
13	Two Part Invention No 4 in D minor BWV 775	1.10
14-15	Prelude and Fugue in F minor Book I No 12 BWV 857	2.07 : 4.39
16-17	Prelude and Fugue in C major Book I No 1 BWV 846	2.19 : 2.21

Partita No 5 in G major BWV 829

18	Praeambulum	2.59
19	Allemande	5.34
20	Corrente	1.59
21	Sarabande	5.01
22	Tempo di Minuetto	2.00
23	Passepied	1.43
24	Gigue	5.00

Total playing time 76.11

Disc 2

French Suite No 5 in G major BWV 816

1	Allemande	3.19
2	Courante	2.08
3	Sarabande	4.42
4	Gavotte	1.13
5	Bourrée	1.36
6	Loure	2.17
7	Gigue	4.06
8-9	Prelude and Fugue in G minor Book I No 16 BWV 861	1.56 : 2.19
10-11	Prelude and Fugue in G major Book I No 15 BWV 860	1.13 : 3.33
12	Two Part Invention No 3 in D major BWV 774	1.23
13	Two Part Invention No 12 in A major BWV 783	1.45
14-15	Prelude and Fugue in F sharp minor Book I No 14 BWV 859	1.31 : 3.22
16-17	Prelude and Fugue in C sharp major Book I No 3 BWV 848	1.45 : 3.14
18-19	Prelude and Fugue in A flat major Book I No 17 BWV 862	1.31 : 2.51
20	Three Part Sinfonia in E flat major BWV 791	2.57
21-22	Prelude and Fugue in B flat minor Book I No 22 BWV 867	3.22 : 3.28

Partita No 1 in B flat major BWV 825

23	Praeludium	2.12
24	Allemande	4.54
25	Corrente	3.42
26	Sarabande	5.53
27	Menuet I & II	3.22
28	Gigue	3.01

Total playing time 78.34

When the project of presenting Bach's keyboard works was first discussed, it was decided to present every CD as a Bach recital, each focussing on several major works from his extensive keyboard output, rather than adopting the more academic approach of featuring complete oeuvres; although this may well be released in that format at the end of the series.

In January 1703, at the age of 18, Johann Sebastian Bach was appointed court musician in the chapel of Duke Johann Ernst III in Weimar, a post which did not particularly stretch the young composer's talents, but nevertheless proved to be a prestigious post for one so young. His prowess as a keyboard player, however, had spread widely, and after a request to give the opening recital on a new organ in Neue Kirche, Arnstadt, he was invited to become their organist; a post that he accepted. It was a position though that brought many frustrations and in 1706, he applied for another post as organist at the Blasius Church in Mühlhausen. The position not only included a financial boost, but also improved conditions, and a far superior choir. Bach was able to convince the church and town government at Mühlhausen to subsidise an expensive renovation of the organ at the Church. Shortly after arriving at Mühlhausen, Bach married Maria Barbara Bach, his second cousin.

Bach left Mühlhausen in 1708, returning to Weimar, this time as organist, and from 1714, as *Konzertmeister* (director of music) at the ducal court, where he had an opportunity to work with a large, well-funded contingent of professional musicians. This was to be the beginning of a successful period of composing keyboard and orchestral works and it is there that he allegedly wrote the so called six English Suites, thought to have been composed around 1715.

For the Prelude of the English Suite No 3 in G minor Bach follows the conventional Italian concerto grosso style of Vivaldi, Corelli and Torelli, by contrasting smaller *concertino* sections of solo instruments with a larger *ripieno* group. The most prominent example of this style is the Concerto in the Italian style to be heard in Volume One of this series. The remaining movements of the English suite, typically contain a series of ever popular courtly dances: a gentle moving Allemande, a majestic Courante, and a stately Sarabande, repeated in its entirety by Bach in freely ornamental style that offers a glimpse of how we, as performers, can elaborate on the master's un-adorned movements. The Suite ends with two stately Gavottes and a lively Gigue. Bach's familiarity with French dance forms stem from his early days at the Michaelisshcule in Lüneburg between 1700 and 1702, where he would, as part of a complete education, have

experienced aspects of the French arts in particular. Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne endorse this point in their book, 'Dance and the music of JS Bach', stating that 'French culture was a forceful presence in most of the places in which Bach lived and worked.'

Baroque dance is a fascinating subject and over this projected series of CD sets, I will examine various dance forms from contemporary sources. The forms that Bach employs in his suites pose interesting questions. Perhaps the most relevant question is how close to original models Bach's dances actually are? Bearing in mind the basic, repetitive models of the time, we can only conclude that by taking each extremely elementary form he crafted it into works of incredible beauty, whilst retaining the characteristics of a particular dance. Two basic forms were in evidence: the dances of the common people and the courtly variety. We can assume that most classical composers borrowed from the latter. Let's face it; borrowing popular dance forms of the courtly variety was certainly a prudent financial move that boosted revenue.

In the chapter on dance tempos in Robert Donington's 'The interpretation of early music' he writes, 'Dance steps can only be performed correctly within narrow margins of speed. It is thus possible to discover the tempo of a dance by actually reconstructing it and dancing it…… It must, however, be remembered that both the steps and the figures of a dance may have varied widely, sometimes almost unrecognisably, at different times and places; and with them, the tempo.

It must further be remembered that dances which have once left the dance-floor and become musical forms in their own right almost inevitably undergo some modification, and usually a considerable transformation. They tend to slow down as well as growing more flexible in rhythm. Their style may be more sophisticated, their figuration more elaborate, their mood more introspective. A Sarabande by J.S. Bach must clearly be interpreted in the light of its own context, not as it might be if it were a mere background for dancing.'

Consulting Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen Berlin (1752)* (On playing the flute), we read that with regard to French music, 'it is well known that most dancers understand very little about music, and frequently do not know the correct tempo themselves; for the most part they regulate themselves only by their mood at that moment, or by their ability…. Disputes frequently arise between the dancers and orchestra for this reason,

since the former believe that the latter either did not play in the right tempo, or did not perform their music as well as they did the Italian whose music is more 'arbitrary……'

Having accompanied dancers myself on many occasions, I know only too well that disputes often arise. Quantz continues, that although 'accuracy of tempo is very important in music of all types, it must be observed most rigorously in music for the dance. The dancers must regulate themselves by it not only with their ears but also with their feet and body motions.'

Other contemporary statements on the subject regarding tempi are also illuminating in this regard with some striking similarities and naturally some discrepancies. Several attempts at judging tempi using pendulum-like devices had been in operation since the 9th century (Abbas Ibn Firnas (810-887). Galileo also discovered the concepts of speed by using a pendulum, and even into the 18th century a series of mostly unsuccessful machines were invented mainly by French theorists. Etienne Loulié developed a silent, adjustable pendulum metronome in 1696. Michel d'Affilard published a table of dance tempi in 1705 based on Joseph Sauveur's pendulum. Henri-Louis Choquel (La Musique rendue sensible par la méchanique) (Paris 1762) also provided useful information.

I believe that although tempo is important, it is the spirit of the dance that is the governing factor, coupled with buoyancy, breath and poise when performing movements in the Bach suites. Although Quantz gives accurate descriptions of various dances in terms of string accompaniment, it is the French dance to which he refers. Bach though surely never intended that anyone actually danced to these various movements. The Minuet from Partita 5 is a classic example where for most of the piece alternates between three and two, a rhythmic conundrum that would confound the most astute pupil requested to identify the meter. It would be a balletic catastrophe if dancers attempted to dance to this particular Minuet. I remember Fernando Valenti once saying of the Sarabande in the sixth partita that so little remains of the original dance form that it has been said it is 'the ultimate pulverisation of a dance form in all of Bach's works.'

Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne highlight some other important points with regard to the dance movements in Bach's Suites when they say that 'French court dancing, a symbol French culture was especially in favour in Germany. ' '…most of Bach's titled dance music implies a

connection to French court dancing. Minuets, Gavottes, Passepieds, Courantes, Sarabandes, Gigues and Loures were frequently performed at the courts and in the cities where Bach lived.' To this list I would also add the Allemande which is usually the first off the mark in Bach's suites, acting either as an introductory movement or following a Prelude.

The Allemande

Thought to be of German origin, the Allemande seems to have become more stylized in the French courts. German contemporary sources describe it as 'a serious and dignified movement and should be so performed,' and, 'must be composed and likewise danced in a grave and ceremonious manner' (Johann Gottfried Walther. *Musicallisches Lexicon, Leipzig, 1732*. Likewise in *Der Vollkommene. Capellmeister (Hamburg, 1739).* Johann Mattheson described it as 'serious and well-composed harmoniousness in arpeggiated style, expressing satisfaction or amusement, and delighting in order and calm.' Characteristics include a short note (semiquaver or quaver at the end of the bar) a moderate tempo, and usually in common time. It often precedes the courante, and in that respect, the Allemande generally takes on a more graceful lilt with the absence of strongly marked rhythms. The slower tempo of the allemande contrasts well with the ensuing courante.

The Courante

It is generally considered that the Courant was born in France. It was one of the most popular dances at the court of Louis XIII in the seventeenth century, and in aristocratic circles it was the dance that appeared more than any other in French harpsichord and lute music, and according to Pierre Rameau it was danced by his majesty, King Louis XIV. Unlike the fast Italian variety in triple meter, the French version was more stately and grander, usually beginning with an upbeat with characteristic alternation between 3:2 and 6:4. Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg the German music critic and theorist commented that '[6:4 is] the proper rhythm of Courantes in the Courant style, which indeed belong strictly to 3:2 time, yet it approaches in various places very near to the 6:4, time in respect of the external form of the measure; the difference is generally to be marked by playing the 6:4 passages with a 3:2 accent. The late Herr Capellmeister Bach has left us a sufficiency of genuine models of the proper French time.'

It has been suggested that all the Courantes in the English Suites are in fact, French in character, but mostly devoid of alternation between 3:2 and 6:4. Readers interested in the relationship

between 3:2 and 6:4 should listen to the second Courante from François Couperin's Huitième Ordre which conveys the alternation between both in a most convincing way. Other contemporary accounts of the courante taken from Robert Donington's Interpretation of Early Music, include: Johann Gottfried Walther, *loc cit*. (*Musicalishes Lexicon*, Leipzig 1732) 'The measure of the Courante or rather the rhythm of the Courante dance is the most solemn of any' [an exaggeration; but the contrast of this slow French courante with the quick Italian Coranto is instructive.]

It is clear that the aforementioned reference is designed for the accompaniment of the dance, but as Donington infers, 'the dances of Baroque composers contained within the Suite should be interpreted as complete musical entities rather than mere background dance music.'

Wilfred Mellers in his book François Couperin and the French classical tradition, sets out the contemporary statement of tempi in France during Louis XIV reign which is worth noting. According to Michel d'Affilard who published tables in 1705, the Courant is performed in 3:2 at around a minim = 90. However, Quantz states that it should be performed 'majestically', suggesting a tempo of one pulse beat to a crotchet, i.e. crotchet = 80.

The Italian version of the Courante, the Corrente is significantly faster than its French counterpart and therefore has quite a different balletic character. The Partita No 1 in B flat major and the Partita No 5 in G major both have contrasting Italian Correntes. The Corrente in Partita 1 in ¾ time is based on repetitive triplet figurations that skip lightly throughout the piece, punctuated in two sections by trills that culminate in discordant jolts that gently and briefly growl at us in the bass. The Corrente from Partita No 5 in 3/8 is quite different, commencing with a three note upbeat followed by sequences of semiquavers and arpeggio figures that scurry around in two part texture in breathless interplay, and may well be the reason that Bach chose 3/8 and not ¾.

The Sarabande

Bach produced some of his most expressive music through the medium of the Sarabande and unusually, there are two fine examples that appear in the English Suite in G minor.

Quantz says that 'The Sarabande has the same tempo as the Entrée, the Loure (French Suite No

5 in G major) and the Courante, but is played with a rather more flattering expression.' His tempo suggestion is a crotchet = 80.

The Sarabande from the Partita No 1 and the 3rd English Suite are masterpieces in what the Italians term, *diminutioni* (the art of embellishment through melodic variation) and comes under the umbrella of *affetti* (emotion, passion and expression). The frequent intensification of gravity imposed on the second beats of the bar is a common characteristic and in fact the third beat of many bars contains no support for the right hand melodic figurations. And in a number of other cases, the second beat is given more intensity by the addition of textural density. The Sarabande of Partita No 5 again contains ornamental filigree that propels the music forward. In all three examples I humbly follow Bach's 'suggestion' of ornamenting repeats.

A subject of great debate is the convention of *notes inegales* (in which specific equally written notes in step-wise motion are played unequally, creating a mildly lilting 'jazzy' effect) a practice that when introduced, can enhance the character of Bach's dance movements that have a French flavour. It appears that although many French writers advocate this lilting inequality solely between notes of step-wise movement, it has been pointed out by David Ponsford (French Organ Music in the Reign of Louis XIV) that 'in actual musical practice the demarcation between conjunct and disjunct intervals does not seem to have been so rigid.' It should also be noted that the French were keen that, *le bon gout* should always be respectfully born in mind.

It is clear that the aforementioned reference is designed for the accompaniment of the dance, but as Donington infers, 'the dances of Baroque composers contained within the Suite should be interpreted as complete musical entities rather than mere background dance music.'

Gavotte

The Gavotte is a French folk dance in 2 or 4 time, taking its name from the Gavot people of the Pays de Gap region of Dauphiné, where the dance originated. Finding its way into the court, it became more refined, especially at the court of Louis XIV where it was extremely popular. Characteristics include an anacrusis usually beginning at the half bar. Various authorities in the 18th century suggest a tempo of between 96 and 152 to the crotchet. Sources include Michel d'Affilard (1705), Lachapelle, Onzembry (1732), Choquel (1762) and Johann Joachim Quantz

(1752), who says that ‘a Gavotte is almost equal to a Rigaudon; it has, however, a steadier movement.

The Partitas were Bach’s last set of suites and were composed between 1725 and 1731. Each Partita opens with a variety of diverse styles including an Overture and a Toccata. They were collected into one volume in 1731 under the title Clavier-Übung (Keyboard Practice).

The Well-Tempered Clavier comprised a set of 24 Preludes and Fugues in all 24 keys. Without going into too much detail, the temperaments of Bach’s day varied. In the old system of mean-tone temperament it was only possible to play in a certain number of keys; the more remote keys would have sounded sour to our ears. Numerous theorists and composers developed tuning systems whereby all the keys could be used. Nickolas Forkel, Bach’s biographer wrote in 1802 that Bach had his own system of tuning so presumably it catered for all keys. The subject of temperament is discussed briefly below with the intention of further elaboration in later volumes.

The Preludes and Fugues on this recording are all taken from the Well-Tempered Clavier Book One, the title page of which reads,

> *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier oder Præludia, und Fugen durch alle Tone und Semitonia, so wohl tertiam majorem oder Ut Re Mi anlangend, als auch tertiam minorem oder Re Mi Fa betreffend. Zum Nutzen und Gebrauch der Lehrbegierigen Musicalischen Jugend, als auch derer in diesem studio schon habil seyenden besonderem Zeitvertreib auffgesetzet und verfertiget von Johann Sebastian Bach. p. t: Hochfürstlich Anhalt-Cöthenischen Capel-Meistern und Directore derer Camer Musiquen. Anno 1722.*
>
> *The well-tempered Clavier, or Preludes and Fugues through all the tones and semitones, both as regards the tertiam majorem or Ut Re Mi [i.e., major] and tertiam minorem or Re Mi Fa [i.e., minor]. For the profit and use of the studious musical young, and also for the special diversion of those who are already skilful in this study, composed and made by Johann Sebastian Bach, for the time being Capellmeister and Director of the Chamber-music of the Prince of Anhalt-Cothen. In the year 1722.*

A more detailed account of the Well-Tempered Clavier will appear as we journey through this series. My 'Damascus moment' with Bach came at the age of 15 when my teacher, the inspirational and great pianist, Bernard Roberts, realising that I was forsaking the piano for the organ, played me the Prelude and Fugue in B flat minor, heard on this recording, to re-kindle my fading interest in the piano. His playing of the work ignited a passion and affection for Bach's music that has remained with me all my life. I have chosen keys that I feel complement one another as well as displaying contrasting moods and character.

The Inventions and Sinfonias, also known as the two and three part inventions were written as exercise material for Bach's son Wilhelm Friedemann, the earliest version *Klavierbüchlein für W Fr. Bach* in 1720.

The sheer inventiveness of these pieces speak volumes and can be summed up in the words of Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1721–83), one of Bach's most gifted pupils and an eminent theorist in the second half who praised Bach's method of teaching as follows: 'he proceeds steadily, step by step, from the easiest to the most difficult, and as a result even the step to the fugue was only the difficulty of passing from one step to the text.'

THE HARPSICHORD

The harpsichord on this recording is a double manual instrument built in 2011 by Colin Booth, and is derived from a single-manual harpsichord by the Hamburg builder, Johann Christoph Fleischer, and dated 1710. The original is housed in the Musikinstrumenten-Museum in Berlin. On the Booth instrument there are two eight-foot registers strung in iron and red brass, a four-foot stop and a harp or buff stop. The temperament is based on Neidardt and the pitch is 415hz (see below). The painting, also by Colin Booth is a copy of John William Waterhouse's Eco and Narcissus from Ovid's Metamorphosis, in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, Merseyside. On the smaller lid is the Latin inscription MVSICA SICVT AMOR DONVM DEI (Music, like love is a gift from God).

Johann Georg Neidhardt (c1680-1739)

During his lifetime, Neidhardt, who had received musical tuition from Johann Nicholas Bach, devoted much time to studying the subject of musical temperaments, and together with Andreas Werkmeister (1645-1706) he calculated around four unequal temperaments, the last of which is

thought to be possibly the closest proximity to our own equal temperament. The major problem however with equal temperament is that theoretically each key is the same and therefore does not possess its own identity or character. Even discounting the question of pitch, the 'sound' of each key will be theoretically be identical. Unequal temperament allows each key greater individuality.

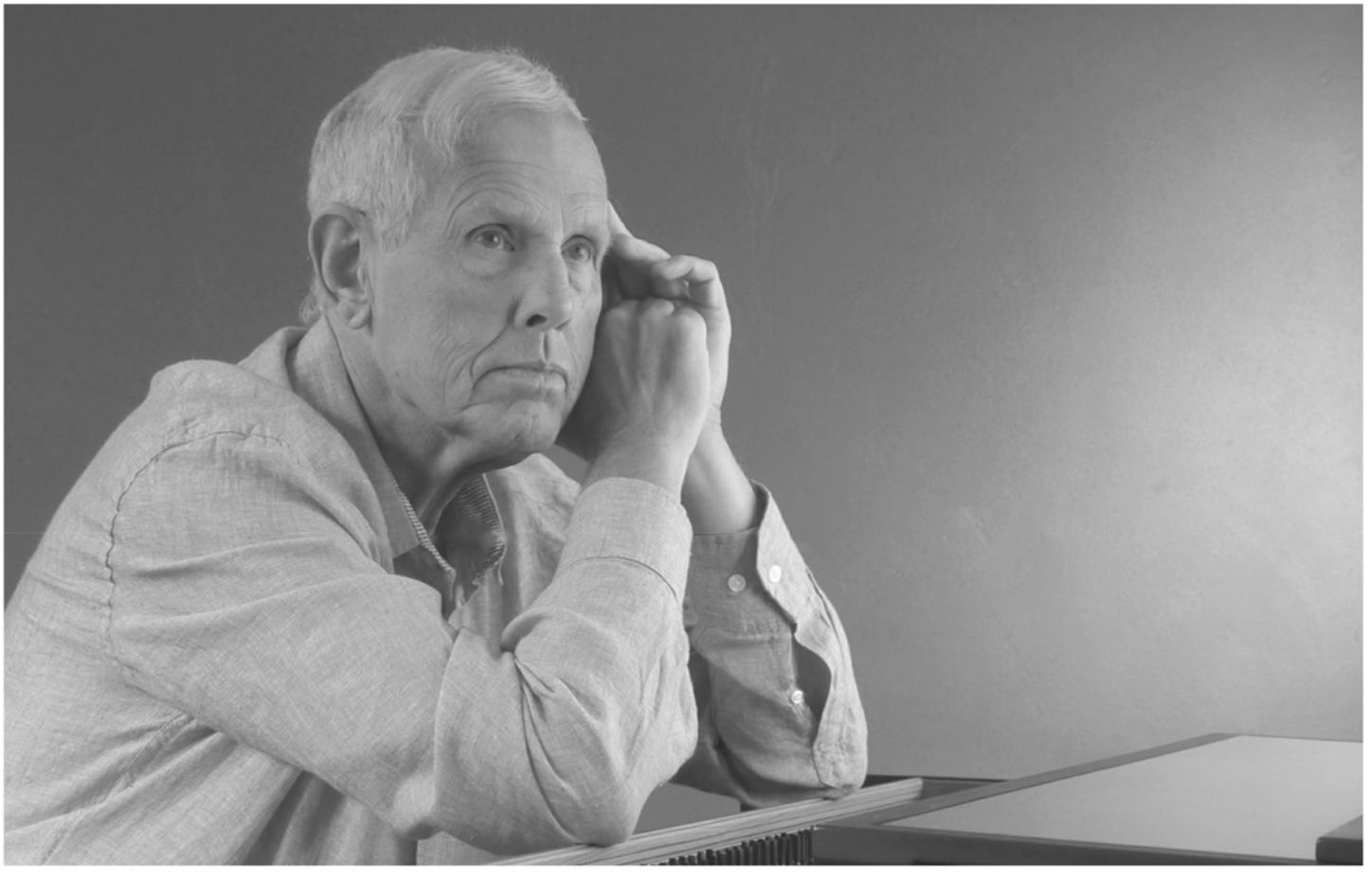
Richard Lester's Bach project will be released on 7 two CD sets.
One release in each of the years 2017 - 2023.

For more information visit **www.wyastone.co.uk**

Richard Lester, 'one of our leading players' (The Telegraph and The Times) has been at the centre of early keyboard music for almost fifty years. His debut harpsichord recital, at the Wigmore Hall in 1972 was sponsored by his teacher, George Malcolm: and a recording of Scarlatti sonatas for Sutton Sound released in 1975 was chosen as 'the favourite' on Dame Janet Baker's BBC Desert Island Discs in 1982. He has performed extensively at the Southbank Centre, Royal Festival Hall Purcell Room; master-classes and recitals at Dartington International Summer School, the Bath International Festival and at the Bruges Festival. In 2013, he performed in Bergamo Cathedral, and in St Mark's, Venice to a large and enthusiastic audience. His vast discography for Nimbus Records (over 60 CDs in the current catalogue) of music by Bach, Frescobaldi, Scarlatti, Soler, Haydn, Mozart and many others, is acclaimed globally.

Lester's recordings of the complete keyboard works of Girolamo Frescobaldi twice received the 'outstanding' accolade in International Record Review, and in Musicweb International's 'Recordings of the Year' the reviewer commented, 'Richard Lester's series of the keyboard music of Frescobaldi has been a consistent joy. I could have chosen any of the volumes, since they are all characterised by playing both scholarly and expressive.' Glyn Pursglove.

Volume one of Bach's complete keyboard music released in May 2018 was awarded four stars in BBC Music Magazine, and in Musicweb International, Dominy Clements commented 'This



recording, dedicated by Richard Lester to his teacher George Malcolm (1917-1997), makes a fine marker for such an anniversary... standing at the vanguard of something that will rank proudly alongside other such huge projects….. Lester's numerous followers will need little persuading to acquire this Bach programme, and they will surely not be disappointed.'

Mark Sealey on Classical Net wrote ' In the end – with so many competitive recordings of Bach's keyboard output – it will be Lester's felicitous blend of originality with sureness of hand, and vitality with perception that allow this first instalment to be recommended without hesitation.'

www.richardlester.org.uk

Recorded in Buckfastleigh, Devon. April and August 2017
Recording & Editing by Paul Arden-Taylor

Booklet notes: Richard Lester PA: Sandy Rouncefield
Harpsichord maintenance: Colin Booth

Cover photo : Portrait of J S Bach, by Elias Gottlob Haussmann (c. 1745)

www.wyastone.co.uk

NI 5946 Total playing time 153 minutes

Disc 1
Goldberg Variations BWV 988

Disc 2
Concerto in the Italian Style BWV 971
Toccata in D major BWV 912
Capriccio on the departure of a beloved brother BWV 992
Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue
in D minor BWV 903
Six Little Preludes BWV 933-938
Toccata in E minor BWV 914
Fantasia in C minor BWV 906

With two well-filled discs as an opener, this seems like an attractive prospect, and we are immediately treated to what has become one of Bach's best known keyboard works, the Goldberg Variations. While Lester's reading is scholarly, or measured and accurate rather than audaciously individual, my appreciation for his interpretation grew constantly over the first proper run-through and has remained respectfully admiring on subsequent hearings. There is playfulness here, but this is to be found in the inner life of these pieces rather than in their speed—avoiding the superficial virtuosity of velocity. There is certainly no attempt at over-reverential slowness in these cases; logical structure and flow are maintained throughout.

The instrument used for most of this recording is a fine-sounding double-manual harpsichord built by Colin Booth in 2011, based on a single manual example by a Hamburg maker Johann Christoph Fleischer, dated 1710. This has plenty of vibrancy and depth of tone. While the recording is fairly close, there is a nice stereo spread to the sound and the detail is not wearing on the ears.

This Bach keyboard recording project looks more than being merely promising. This first volume stands at the vanguard of something that will stand proudly alongside other such huge projects by Richard Lester, including the entire Scarlatti sonatas, Frescobaldi and numerous others. Lester's numerous followers will need little persuading to acquire this Bach programme, and they will surely not be disappointed. I have a feeling that many fans of Bach played on the harpsichord will have a soft spot for Richard Lester's recordings, and I am happy to be counted amongst their ranks. **Dominy Clements, MusicWeb**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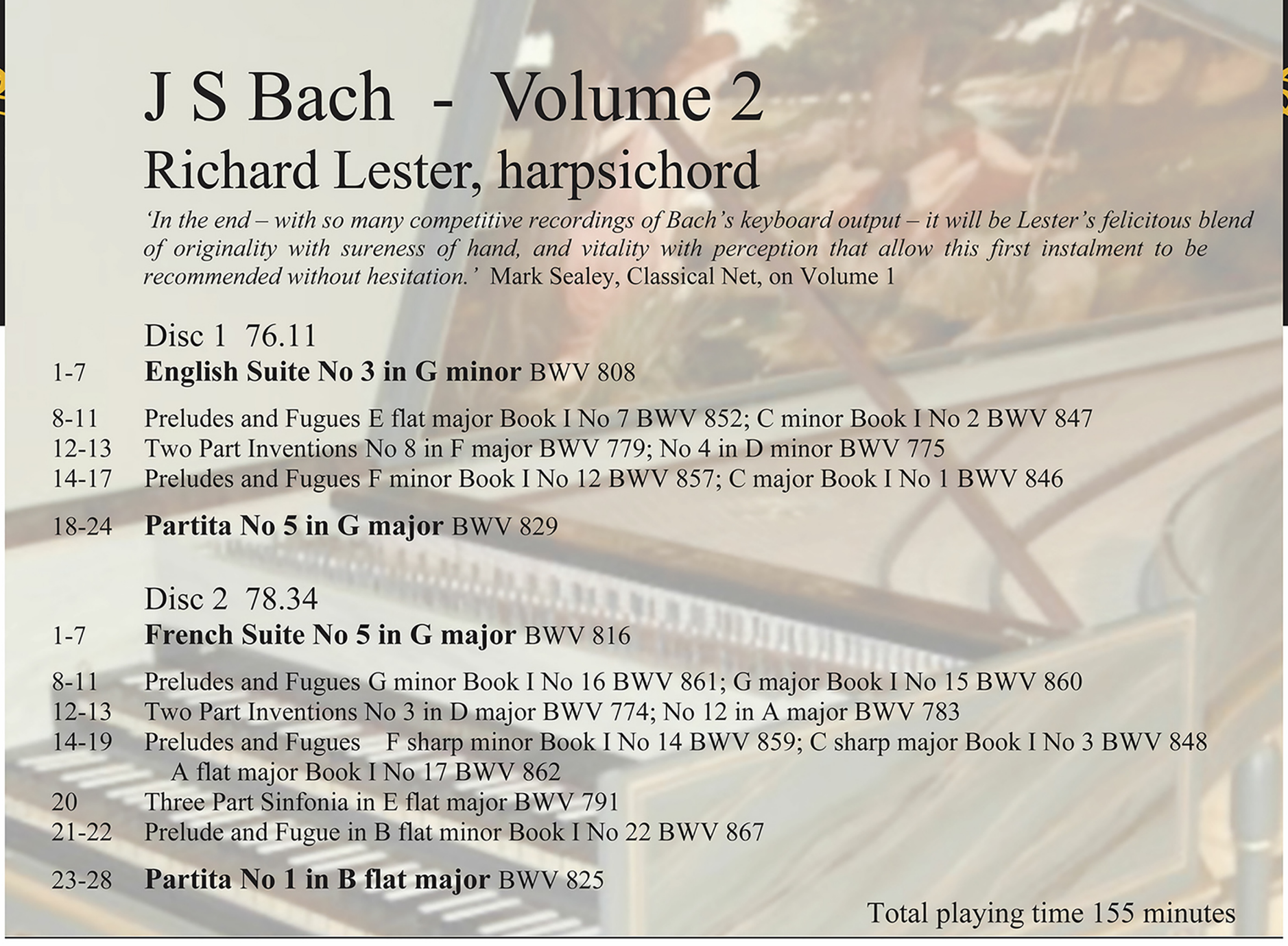

J S Bach - Volume 2

Richard Lester, harpsichord

'In the end – with so many competitive recordings of Bach's keyboard output – it will be Lester's felicitous blend of originality with sureness of hand, and vitality with perception that allow this first instalment to be recommended without hesitation.' Mark Sealey, Classical Net, on Volume 1

Disc 1 76.11

1-7 **English Suite No 3 in G minor** BWV 808

8-11 Preludes and Fugues E flat major Book I No 7 BWV 852; C minor Book I No 2 BWV 847
12-13 Two Part Inventions No 8 in F major BWV 779; No 4 in D minor BWV 775
14-17 Preludes and Fugues F minor Book I No 12 BWV 857; C major Book I No 1 BWV 846

18-24 **Partita No 5 in G major** BWV 829

Disc 2 78.34

1-7 **French Suite No 5 in G major** BWV 816

8-11 Preludes and Fugues G minor Book I No 16 BWV 861; G major Book I No 15 BWV 860
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14-19 Preludes and Fugues F sharp minor Book I No 14 BWV 859; C sharp major Book I No 3 BWV 848
A flat major Book I No 17 BWV 862
20 Three Part Sinfonia in E flat major BWV 791
21-22 Prelude and Fugue in B flat minor Book I No 22 BWV 867

23-28 **Partita No 1 in B flat major** BWV 825

Total playing time 155 minutes

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