

NAXOS

2 CDs

**J.S. BACH**

**The Art  
of Fugue,  
BWV 1080**

**Sergio Vartolo,  
Harpsichord**

**Maddalena Vartolo,  
Harpsichord**



## Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

### Die Kunst der Fuge (The Art of Fugue), BWV 1080

Various influences lie behind the conception and composition of Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Art of Fugue*, represented in the autograph copy and in the two engraved printed editions.

The autograph manuscript has survived in four fascicles. The first, which I shall simply call the *Autograph*, to distinguish it from the other three, which I shall call *Appendici/Beilagen 1- 2- 3*, is bound in a volume entitled "*die Kunst der Fuga*", most likely in the hand of Bach's son-in-law, J. C. Altnickol, and contains fourteen pieces in score. In the second fascicle the *Canon per Augmentationem contrario motu* is preserved in the form of *Abklatschvorlage*, a direct preparation for the engraving. The third fascicle gives the version for two harpsichords of the second pair of three-part mirror fugues on two sheets completely similar to the *Autograph*. The last fascicle contains the famous incomplete *Fuga a 3 soggetti*, again in the form of *Abklatschvorlage*, but in tablature.

Of fundamental importance to *Die Kunst der Fuge* is Girolamo Frescobaldi, generally cited only in a vague reference in a report by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and the mention of a copy of the *Fiori Musicali* belonging to Bach from 1714 onwards, a scholarly neglect attributable to doubts, particularly by German scholars, of the Italian influences on Bach, who is still widely viewed as a figure restricted to the German and, in particular, Lutheran sphere. Bach's wider interest, however, in earlier music, goes far beyond the geographical, temporal and cultural limits of his day, linking his work to a cultural and religious *koïnè* of truly universal scope.

In Bach's *Art of Fugue* the close influence of Frescobaldi can be noted in the general conception, in the structure of the polythematic *Ricercare* and in the formulation of the themes. The following points of contact can therefore be identified in Bach's work, and particularly in *The Art of Fugue*:

1. The importance of score notation.
2. Notation in 'mensural' values (in the printed edition of *The Art of Fugue* they are double those of the *Autograph*).
3. The use of the theme and its inversion, reminiscent of Frescobaldi's first two *Capricci*, based respectively on the ascending and descending hexachords.
4. The polythematicity of the *Ricercare*, and more specifically its trithematicity (Frescobaldi's *Ricercare IX* is even tetrathematic), according to which the individual theme is first developed independently, then combined in the final section.
5. The augmentation and diminution of the subjects.
6. 'Kyrial theology', according to which, for example, the subject of the person of the Son and of the Paraclete is combined with that of the Father within a sole Divinity, both in the *Christe* sections of the *Fiori Musicali*, particularly in the *Messa della Domenica*, and in the *Fuga BWV 552 of Clavier Übung III*.
7. The use of *ob[b]lighi*.
8. Bach's recourse to chromaticism, particularly in *Contrapunctus XI*; in compositional terms Frescobaldi employs chromaticism both in a programmatically and virtuosically anomalous form (in his *Capriccio VIII cromatico di ligature al contrario* [i.e. with dissonances resolved upwards] and *Capriccio IX di durezza*) and with an expressive function (in the other *Capricci* and the *Fiori Musicali*, an outstanding example being the *Toccata Cromatica per l'Elevazione* from the *Messa della Domenica*).
9. The similarities between *Contrapunctus IV* and the *Capriccio III sopra il Cucho*.
10. The idea for the third subject BACH of the *Fuga a 3 soggetti* as a means of rounding off the cycle,

paralleling Frescobaldi's *GiroLamo/GiroLmeta* (the *Capriccio sopra la Girolmeta* ending the *Fiori Musicali*).

11. The BACH subject is also plausibly suggested by the theme of the *Ricercare sopra Mi, Re, Fa, Mi* (already anticipated in Frescobaldi's *Fantasia VI*).

12. The fact that both composers, as a device for concluding an essentially serious cycle (*Fiori Musicali* and *Goldberg Variations*), light-heartedly combine the *Bergamasca* with another theme (the *Ruggero* theme in the *Fiori Musicali*; *Kraut und Rüben* and the ground bass theme in the *Goldberg Variations*).

13. The thematic influence of Frescobaldi's *Recercar I* on the subject of the *Fugue in C sharp minor, BWV 849*, of *Book II* of the *Wohltemperierte Klavier*, which again bears a certain similarity to the BACH subject.

14. The influence of the theme of Frescobaldi's *Recercar X sopra La, Fa, Sol, La, Re* on the *Fugue in C minor, BWV 871*, of *Book I* of the *Wohltemperierte Klavier* (which also features a marvellous augmentation).

15. The terms *Soggetto*, *Obligo* and *Ricercar* are typical of Frescobaldi's work and more generally of the sixteenth-seventeenth-century contrapuntal art (as well as Frescobaldi's *Ricercari*, those of Battiferri were also widespread in Germany).

16. The term *Alto Modo* is frequent in the *Fiori Musicali*.

17. The very conception of *Clavierübung III* can be traced to the Mass cycle in the *Fiori Musicali*.

18. The presence, attested in the posthumous catalogue of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's books, of *XVI Ricercari* by Frescobaldi under the rubric "*Von verschiednen Meistern*".

19. The existence, in the Bibliothèque Royale of Brussels, of a manuscript belonging to J. G. Harrer, Bach's contemporary and successor at Leipzig, entitled "*Ricercari / del Sr Girolamo Fresco- / baldi / Organista della Basilica / di S. Pietro / in/Roma*" and containing various *Ricercari* and *Capricci*.

20. An artistic bond with Frescobaldi is suggested by Forkel in Chapter 5 of his biography, where under point No. 1 of a list of Bach's "transgressions" of the ordinary rules he writes: "He allowed himself octaves and fifths only in places where they would sound well; that is, where the cause of their being forbidden no longer existed". In his Preface to the *Capricci*, Frescobaldi had written in a similar fashion.

As regards the much-discussed *Fuga a 3 soggetti*, in the absence of certain documents, it is difficult to find valid grounds for excluding it from the cycle. On the one hand, it is worth observing the similarity of the opening subject with the fundamental theme in its *passaggiata* form, as from *Contrapunctus V* in the inverted form and *Contrapunctus VI* in the regular form, thanks to the identical four opening notes and the harmonic similarity.



Moreover the inverted fundamental theme can also be detected in the second subject.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a three-part fugue. The first system, starting at measure 107, shows the fundamental theme in the soprano part, which is then taken up by the alto and tenor parts. The second system, starting at measure 118, shows the inverted fundamental theme in the soprano part, with the alto and tenor parts providing harmonic support. The notation includes clefs, a key signature of one flat, and various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes.

It is suggested here that in the *Fuga a 3 soggetti* the variation of the fundamental theme (*rectus* and *inversus*), which has in any case already been subjected to progressive modifications in the course of the cycle, is made precisely because it lends itself to combinations with the third theme on Bach's name. On the other hand, the idea that the fugue must be completed with the inclusion of the fundamental theme should be rejected outright, given that it is without doubt contrapuntally irregular for two fugue subjects (the fundamental subject and the first subject of the fugue) to have such a striking resemblance.

It is suggested that the printed editions were recommended and supervised above all by F.W. Marpurg, to whom we could ascribe both the didactic title of the cycle, *Die Kunst der Fuge*, and the term *Exempeln*, both found in the treatise he published in 1753. On the evidence of this treatise it is suggested that a possible title on Bach's part could have been *Clavier Übung (V)*. Likewise, concerning the *Contrapuncti*, a more correct term for Bach would have been that of *Ricercari*, in analogy with the example of the six-voice *Ricercar* in the *Musical Offering*.

Another matter that must be questioned, and viewed as something of a 'Romantic misapprehension' (an expression coined by Gregory Butler), is the fashionable tendency among certain musicologists to complete works of early music with their own inventions. This has plagued both Monteverdi and Bach.

Here this dubious practice is prompted especially by some confusion in the sources on the incomplete *Fuga a 3 soggetti*. It is only in the *Obituary*, published by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola in 1754, that this piece is referred to as the penultimate work, to be followed by a final fugue for four subjects that can be inverted note by note. Legitimacy has therefore been sought for the recomposition of the lost part of the fugue, through combining what is written in the *Obituary* on a 'last' fugue featuring four subjects with what is indicated by the *Avertissements* of 1751, by the *Nachricht* of the first edition and by Marpurg's *Vorbericht*, which make no mention of a fugue with four subjects and merely point out the incompleteness of the last fugue at the introduction

of the third subject in which Bach identifies himself through his name.

Equally unjustifiable is any hypothesis that the reference in the *Obituary* to note-by-note inversion, which was amplified by the heirs (for greater publicity) by means of the compositional wonders of the two surviving pairs of mirror fugues, can suggest that there once existed a lost mirror fugue based on four subjects. If for no other reason, this would severely challenge the notion that the cycle is keyboard music, given that the extreme difficulties of performing the two existing inversions based on only one subject would be vastly multiplied. Nor would it account for the anomaly of moving from two pairs of mirror fugues based on one subject to one on as many as four subjects. *The Art of Fugue*, moreover, achieves the numerical completeness of the 'name number' fourteen (the letters of Bach's name, on the numerological system A=1, B=2, add up to fourteen, seemingly his favourite number), as, for that matter, does the *Autograph*, though with a different ordering and with different pieces) with the incomplete *Fuga a 3 soggetti* in which the third subject on BACH asserts the authorship in a secularly 'Trinitarian' manner. To this end it is conjectured that the four *Canons* are a compositional addition by analogy with the four duets of the *III Clavierübung* and with the autograph *Appendix* of fourteen canons in Bach's own copy of the *Goldberg Variations*, the composition of which may have interrupted the development of *The Art of Fugue*, perhaps in answer to controversial contemporary criticism (Scheibe).

The *Contrapuncti* of the printed edition correspond to the pieces in the *Autograph* manuscript with the addition of a *Contrapunctus IV*, the introduction of 22 bars to *Contrapunctus X* and two canons. As regards the second pair of three-voice mirror *Contrapuncti* it is worth pointing out that the *rectus* and *inversus* versions cannot be clearly identified. Nonetheless, both in consideration of the fact that the *Abklatzschvorlage* of the piece carrying the definition *inversus* in the printed edition is attributed to Bach's hand and on the strength of the *Autograph*, in which this work is superimposed on the other *Contrapunctus*, for simplicity's sake it is here preferred to maintain the distinction *rectus* and *inversus*, though adopting Schmieder's cataloguing. As a partial explanation of the term *inversus* used in the printed edition it is conjectured that the definition is not so much a qualification of the individual *Contrapunctus* as a reference to the two procedures applied.

On the strength of letters from Carl Philipp Emanuel to Forkel and other contemporary evidence, it is clear that Bach was not a mathematician and that his character presented impulsive features that suggest other readings of his music. Any attempt to confine Bach within the narrow parameters of inflexibly Germanic and Lutheran religiosity should be rejected. Instead, Bach's universality connects him to the great polyphonists, who are revitalised and projected into the future thanks to his innovations in compositional and manual technique and an expressive force expanded to its extreme limits.

**Sergio Vartolo**

*(adaptation by Keith Anderson of an English version by Hugh Ward-Perkins)*

*This abstract is taken from a study by Sergio Vartolo introducing the facsimile edition of Mus.ms. Bach P200, Bach's autograph and of the printed edition published by the Florence Studio per Edizioni scelte (SPES):*

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tel.+39 055 21 86 90, fax. +39 055 28 05 92*

## Some Short Observations on the Interpretation

I have tried particularly to provide a reading that was not an example of sterile musicology but above all attentive to the musical content: an interpretation and not a mere performance. I have consequently used a historic instrument, the harpsichord, but without worrying about what instruments were supposed to have been used by Bach in the 1740s, a precaution absolutely useless in view of the breadth of views and influences to which musicians were subject in the baroque era, where we see instruments of very different types normally used.

For this reason I play a Taskin model that reflects a style, the French, to which Bach dedicated his splendid *Contrapunctus VI*, and this is why I also employ the *peau-de-buffle*, the use of which, although documented organologically from 1767, in any case reflects the many and varied interests, the curiosity, the aesthetic and the modernity of Bach, who invented and had constructed instruments such as the *viola pomposa* and above all the lute-harpsichord, this last named in his will and of which Agricola left the following description in a note to Adlung's *Musica mechanica organoedi* (1768):

*The editor of these notes remembers having seen and heard a "Lautenclavicymbel" in Leipzig in about 1740, designed by Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach and made by Mr. Zacharias Hildebrand, which was smaller in size than a normal harpsichord but in all other respects similar. It had two choirs of gut strings, and a so-called little octave of brass strings.*

As far as concerns the phrasing I have in the first place given a recognisable sign of the theme by clearly identifying the first phrase through a single breath that develops up to the fifth note included: C sharp (B flat in the inversion of the theme), heralding diminished sevenths. Therefore in the diminished theme I have given particular prominence to the urgency of the crotchets or quavers up to the climax C sharp/B flat.

Always from the point of view of clear and directional phrasing I have paid attention to the breathing, articulations and tendencies of the period, using for this purpose the technique of bringing out voices according to the stipulations of François Couperin, of which more in the fuller version of the notes (see below): aspiration and suspension.

Of fundamental importance for this purpose has been the use of an open score in which the four individual lines are clearly differentiated, too often neglected by performers. To give one example, in *Contrapunctus IV* I have given attention, through breathing, phrasing and the Couperin technique, to the inverted theme combined with the song of the cuckoo but also taken account of the module of the three connecting quavers that appear at the end of the theme at the fourth bar but which, already in the fifth and sixth, exhibit an *ostinato* character thanks to the restriction of the extremes of the interval of a diminished third.

Collating the Autograph with the printed version has revealed not only preceding versions but also revisions of the printed version itself, all of which I have attempted to adopt into an integrated whole. In particular, *Contrapunctus VI* presents in the Autograph important elements of specific notation, which with respect to the printed version appear already to be virtually an integral rather than a still to be introduced part of that version and in this sense I have incorporated them. From the point of view of achieving the most completely integrated set of performance indicators I have also preferred in *Contrapunctus VIII* to play all the trills indicated in the printed version, even where they are difficult to execute. Further, I have not tried to make the task easier with the specious observation that they are not present in the Autograph, taking into consideration the very probable hypothesis of the loss of the score from which the printed version was presumably drawn.

I have adopted a similar procedure with the ornamentation of *Contrapunctus IX* carrying forward the trill indicated in bar 5 into all following entries. From bar 27 of *Contrapunctus XI* I have given a lower mordent to the inversion of the initial subject of *Contrapunctus VIII* with the exception of the bars where this appears in *recto* (58, 69, 107) and where I have obviously played an upper trill.

Similarly I have included the trills in the two pairs of mirror versions without recourse to the hypothetical three hands in passages which demand a more difficult stretch. In the *Fermata of the Contrapunctus inversus a 3* (CD 2, track 4) the nose can also be useful!

In the *Contrapuncti* I wanted to differentiate the single episodes in the *Ricercare* style that marks *The Art of Fugue*. Therefore I have not played the complete *Contrapuncti* with the same registration but have underlined the various affects with occasional changes of keyboard and with modest use of the machine-stop with knee-lever. In this way I have aimed to enhance the rich variety so greatly neglected by performers in the fashionable baroque mode who have imposed a uniformity of sound in reaction to the Landowska-type harpsichord and to excessively colouristic organ registrations, at first understandable but now absolutely and stolidly formalised.

On the other hand without Bach's clear indications who would alternate in the form prescribed the colours of the *Italian Concerto* or of the *Dorian Toccata BWV 538*?

I experience always a certain discomfort in playing the Fugue with three subjects and in particular the BACH theme that with its obsessive rhythm gives a tragic element, augmented by the unexpected interruption. The secular "trinitariety" of the form confirmed ostensibly as the third statement (the place of the Holy Spirit!) by the name theme recalls the mythical struggles of the Titans against Jupiter or the proud building of the Tower of Babel (*Genesis XI, 4*) followed by its spectacular downfall.

Finally I wish to record that the harpsichord tuning is, according to Marpurg's indications, absolutely equal, owing to modern Bachian harmonic notions of which I have given an account in the extended version of my study (see below).

I have already noted how at present it is only pianists who seek an interpretation in the true spirit of Bach (though often from a distorted perspective, as mentioned in my extended study). Leader among all, also in the attempt to use proper ornaments and diminutions, is András Schiff (alias Andrea Barca) who presents Bach in a fascinatingly new dimension.

I must finally declare that, in spite of my identification of Bach as a universal genius, he remains nevertheless an absolute genius, born from the bosom of German culture that has enriched humanity in the intellectual field in the highest way.

## Acknowledgements

For the realisation of the present recording thanks go first of all to Monsignor Alberto Turco, Master of Music of Verona Cathedral, and to Professor Graziella Squassabia, Directress of the St Cecilia Diocesan School of Music in Verona for having allowed me the use of the Great Hall and for having helped the success of the project by suspending teaching activity during the recording. With the numerous problems in performance that I had to resolve the greatest help was provided by Maestro Marco Vincenzi, my former pupil, who helped me with his competence and electronic devility in the equal tuning of the harpsichord. Maestro Barthélemy Formentelli patiently saw to the mechanism of the fine Taskin copy instrument and the Italian harpsichord, both made by him.

The skill of Sound Engineer Michael Seberich brought out the sound of the instruments while the editing was meticulously carried out by his colleague Simon Lanz. Maestro Antonio Scavuzzo provided me with artistic assistance of the highest competence, guiding me with careful skill in the realisation of the *Magnum Opus*: to him my acknowledgement (and that of the Kantor).

Keith Anderson has patiently deciphered my thinking, translating the fuller script available on the internet (at [www.naxos.com/libretti/570577.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/570577.htm)) with admirable accuracy: to him my particular thanks.

Sergio Vartolo

## Sergio Vartolo

Sergio Vartolo studied music, organ and harpsichord at the Conservatorio di Bologna and graduated from the University of the same city in Letters. Since 1970 he has performed throughout Europe as harpsichordist, organist, conductor, stage director and singer. His recordings as a soloist and as a conductor, of which there are now some seventy, have been awarded the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik (Frescobaldi *Toccatas*), Choc du Monde de la Musique (Frescobaldi *Capriccios*), and Diapason d'Or (Luzzaschi *Madrigals*), among other honours. For fourteen years, until 1998, he held the post of Maestro di Cappella at the Basilica of S. Petronio in Bologna. He is an academician of the famous Accademia Filarmonica of Bologna, where, among many other great musicians, in 1770 Mozart was received as a member.



## Maddalena Vartolo

Maddalena Vartolo completed her diploma in Organ and Organ Composition under the guidance of Umberto Forni at the Verona F.E. Dall'Abaco Conservatory. She has a further degree in Modern Letters at the Verona University Faculty of Letters and Philosophy with a thesis in the History of Music on Francesco Cavalli's opera *Veremonda, l'Amazzone di Aragona*, libretto by Giulio Strozzi (Luigi Zorzisto), in which she identified both the dedicatory and the correct chronology of the two libretti. She has undertaken further study with Michael Radulescu and with Sergio Vartolo with whom she plays regularly in an instrumental duo. She has been responsible for organizational and logistical aspects of the revision of the text and music for various Monteverdi recordings (*L'incoronazione di Poppea, Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria, Orfeo*) and for performances of *Orfeo* and *La rappresentazione di Anima e Corpo* at the Festival de Musique de La Chaise Dieu in France. She undertakes regular activity as a teacher of keyboard and of musical education in various institutions, public and private.



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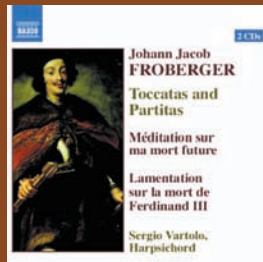
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Playing Time  
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Though unfinished at his death, Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Art of Fugue* is both his musical last testament and a cornerstone of Western composition. At once a miracle of intellectual achievement, musical invention, technical challenges and emotional power, *The Art of Fugue* draws on all of Bach's resources as a master of counterpoint. It is here performed, as the composer apparently intended, on harpsichord, by Sergio Vartolo who uses his own recently-published facsimile edition of the autograph score, and of the engraved first edition (1751/1752).

Johann Sebastian  
**BACH**  
(1685-1750)

**Die Kunst der Fuge (The Art of Fugue), BWV 1080**

<b>CD 1</b>	<b>46:41</b>	<b>2</b> Contrapunctus inversus a 4 BWV 1080/12.1	4:13
<b>1</b> Contrapunctus 1 BWV 1080/1	4:10	<b>3</b> Contrapunctus inversus 12 a 4 BWV 1080/12.2	4:05
<b>2</b> Contrapunctus 2 BWV 1080/2	2:52	<b>4</b> Contrapunctus inversus a 3 BWV 1080/13.1	2:36
<b>3</b> Contrapunctus 3 BWV 1080/3	4:25	<b>5</b> Contrapunctus a 3 BWV 1080/13.2	2:39
<b>4</b> Contrapunctus 4 BWV 1080/4	4:31	<b>6</b> Fuga a 3 Soggetti BWV 1080/19	8:48
<b>5</b> Contrapunctus 5 BWV 1080/5	4:44	<b>7</b> Canon alla Ottava BWV 1080/15	4:38
<b>6</b> Contrapunctus 6 a 4 in Stylo Francese BWV 1080/6	4:57	<b>8</b> Canon alla Decima Contrap[un]to alla Terza BWV 1080/16	5:54
<b>7</b> Contrapunctus 7 a 4 per et Diminut[ionem] BWV 1080/7	4:29	<b>9</b> Canon alla Duodecima in Contrap[un]to alla Quinta BWV 1080/17	3:40
<b>8</b> Contrapunctus 8 a 3 BWV 1080/8	7:30	<b>10</b> Canon per Augmentationem in Contrario Motu BWV 1080/14	5:02
<b>9</b> Contrapunctus 9 a 4 alla Duodecima BWV 1080/9	3:33	<b>11</b> Fuga a 2 Clav. BWV 1080/18.1 [13.1bis]*	2:42
<b>10</b> Contrapunctus 10 a 4 alla Decima BWV 1080/10	5:29	<b>12</b> Alio modo Fuga a 2 Clav. BWV 1080/18.2 [13.2bis]*	2:43
<b>CD 2</b>	<b>55:32</b>		
<b>1</b> Contrapunctus 11 a 4 BWV 1080/11	8:32		

**Sergio Vartolo, Harpsichord**  
**Maddalena Vartolo, Harpsichord\***

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Editor: Simon Lanz • Musical assistance: Antonio Scavuzzo • Booklet notes: Sergio Vartolo  
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