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## Instruction, Devotion, and Affection: Three Roles of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*

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### Abstract

Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* has been analyzed from almost every angle imaginable, yet it has not often been studied from the position of discovering what forces influenced Bach while he was writing it. For example, Bach was a keyboard teacher for most of his professional years, and this influenced many of the styles and genres in which he chose to write his preludes and fugues. This also influenced his desire to gather the preludes and fugues into a unified collection. Additionally, Bach was a devout Lutheran who never discarded his religion when he sat down at the keyboard to compose. No matter if the piece was sacred or secular, with text or without, Bach believed that all music should glorify God. His music in the *Well-Tempered Clavier* shows this devotion through musical symbols that signify aspects of the Christian life such as the cross. Lastly, the Doctrine of Affections influenced Bach's thinking that certain keys should have a specific affect on the listener. While Bach did not always follow the prevailing Doctrine of Affections philosophies of the day, he did purposefully create specific contrasting moods for each key. This paper seeks to prove through historical documentary research that Bach's composition of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* was influenced by his role as a teacher, by his religious background, and by the Doctrine of Affections.

### Keywords

Bach, Well-Tempered Clavier

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## Instruction, Devotion, and Affection: Three Roles of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*

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Musicians compile collections of music for many reasons. Some collections function as systematic teaching pieces, such as Czerny's keyboard studies. Others serve religious purposes, such as a mass or oratorio. Additionally, composers often put together collections of pieces which portray a certain mood. But few collections of pieces bring together these three aims into one. Bach achieved all three of these aims in his collections of preludes and fugues, titled the *Well-Tempered Clavier* Books 1 and 2. Bach's composition of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (WTC) was influenced by his role as a teacher, by his religious background, and by the Doctrine of Affections.

Many people wanted Bach as a teacher because he was a celebrated organist and improviser, yet his own education was rather sparse. His eldest brother Johann Christoph Bach instructed him on "the first principles on the clavier" when the younger Bach was about ten years old.<sup>1</sup> This would have included basic instruction on the different styles of ornaments, as well as how to read music notation and figured bass. Also, students of that era typically copied music of the masters as a way to learn composition and technique. Yet Johann Christoph withheld music by Pachelbel, Froberger, and Kerl from J. S. Bach. But the boy, not to be daunted by this, snuck out of bed at night and copied those pieces by moonlight.<sup>2</sup> Much of Bach's instruction came through copying music and imitating it on his own. Because of this he created

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<sup>1</sup> David Ledbetter, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: The 48 Preludes and Fugues* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 127.

<sup>2</sup> Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, *The Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 216-217.

much of his own style and technique, which in turn influenced his teaching style.<sup>3</sup>

Bach's method of instruction started out with teaching his students the manner in which he approached the instrument. For the first six months of lessons he would have them only practice exercises to strengthen the fingers and give a clear and clean touch.<sup>4</sup> He also assigned them exercises in trills and other ornaments from the very beginning, since these comprised a standard part of every Baroque musician's repertoire. These exercises were also beneficial for teaching composition to students as they could provide a springboard for creating variations and other types of compositions.<sup>5</sup>

As can be imagined, all of this technical practice could become boring and tedious for the student. So Bach also wrote short pieces such as his two-part inventions and little preludes that incorporated the various exercises into a musical whole. After his students had mastered the touch sufficiently Bach would set them to work on his harder compositions, including pieces which he later collected in the *WTC*. These pieces were still in the style of the inventions and little preludes: musical pieces created to help the student practice basic foundational techniques and patterns.

Many of the pieces in the *WTC* came from Bach's teaching pieces. Bach re-worked a number of his little preludes into more fully developed pieces and then included them in the *WTC*.<sup>6</sup> Often these preludes were based on the basic building blocks of music in which Bach so carefully instructed his students. The preludes in C major, C minor, D major, D minor, B-flat major, G major, and E minor in the *WTC* Book 1 all fall under this category.<sup>7</sup> Also, some of the preludes in the *WTC* are two- or three-part inventions, which also would have come from the tradition of teaching pieces. Many of these pieces were

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<sup>3</sup> David and Mendel, *The Bach Reader*, 327-328.

<sup>4</sup> Ledbetter, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 132.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Joel Lester, "J. S. Bach Teaches Us How to Compose: Four Pattern Preludes of the Well-Tempered Clavier," *College Music Symposium* 38 (1998): 33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40374319>.

<sup>7</sup> Siglind Bruhn, *J.S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: In-Depth Analysis and Interpretation*, Vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Mainer, 1993), 14.

originally written for Bach's son Wilhelm Friedemann in the collection *Klavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann Bach*.

Bach most likely composed the pieces that he eventually collected into the *WTC* over a long period of time. Many of the pieces were updated several times, often going through many different keys before they were included in their final state in the *WTC*.<sup>8</sup> Hermann Keller states that "with the exception of three pieces: the Prelude in E-flat major, Fugue in D-sharp minor, and Fugue in A minor, all of the pieces contained in Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* were either sketched or completed between 1721 and 1722."<sup>9</sup>

By 1722, Bach had compiled a complete manuscript of the *WTC*.<sup>10</sup> The title page of this manuscript read: "For the use and profit of the musical youth desirous of learning as well as for the pastime of those already skilled in this study." This shows that he considered these pieces primarily as teaching pieces, and secondarily as literature for advanced students to continue learning.

Bach incorporated the *WTC* in his teaching in varied ways. Sometimes he would play select pieces from it for his students first, so they would get the sound in their ear before they even touched the keyboard.<sup>11</sup> H. N. Gerber writes:

At the first lesson [Bach] set his Inventions before [my father]. When he had studied these through to Bach's satisfaction, there followed a series of suites, then the *WTC*. This latter work Bach played altogether three times through for him with his unmatched art, and my father counted these among his happiest hours, when Bach, under the pretext of not feeling in the

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<sup>8</sup> Yo Tomita, "The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1," Last modified 1996. <http://www.music.qub.ac.uk/~tomita/essay/wtc1.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Hermann Keller, *The Well-Tempered Clavier by Johann Sebastian Bach*, Translated by Leigh Gardine (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), 20.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Iliffe, "Construction as to Form of Bach's Forty-Eight Preludes," *Proceedings of the Musical Association* Sess. 23 (1896-1897): 57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/765293>.

<sup>11</sup> David and Mendel, *The Bach Reader*, 328.

mood to teach, sat himself at one of his fine instruments and thus turned these hours into minutes.<sup>12</sup>

Also, the idea of writing a prelude and fugue in every key, while certainly showing the desirability of equal-tempered tuning, also would be beneficial for teaching purposes. If Bach wanted his students to learn the key of F-sharp major, he could give them the prelude and fugue in that key to increase their familiarity with it.

Bach used the pieces from *WTC* as examples and models for his students' own compositions. Composition was considered part of teaching just as much as technique and ornamentation. Bach taught strict counterpoint in which each of the voices spoke with their own specific line, even as the counterpoint progressed in complexity.<sup>13</sup> His fugues especially evidenced this goal, as each subject wove in and out of the musical texture without losing its identity.

Bach also intended the *WTC* to be used for religious purposes. Bach believed that all music should glorify God, and his music was permeated by his personal religious mantra: *Soli Deo gloria* (to God alone be the glory).<sup>14</sup> Obviously Bach's religion could be clearly seen in his vocal and choral works which were designed to worship and glorify God. But his religion could also be seen in his instrumental works.

One way Bach's religion affected his instrumental compositions was that he was deeply concerned about creating music that was as perfect as it could possibly be. He was influenced by a contemporary musical cyclopedist, Johannes Tinctoris, who said, "It is proper to any artist that he be most satisfied with his work if it be perfect. Wherefore it must be held that God, who has not known a work of imperfection, must be most pleased with the most perfect art since he has created most perfect work himself."<sup>15</sup> Therefore, to Bach a musician must strive to create only the most perfect music. This influence can be seen in Bach's continual revision and perfection of his pieces in the *WTC*.

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<sup>12</sup> Tomita, "The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1."

<sup>13</sup> David and Mendel, *The Bach Reader*, 329.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Bach's religion also affected his compositions in that he aspired to write music that covered the totality of something, whether a genre, style, instrument, or key signature. He was driven by the desire to do his very best as a workman for God. Bach knew that all of his music was a reflection on the One who gave him the talent to create it, and thus he wanted to create masterpieces to show how great a God he served. The *WTC* is an excellent example of this, as Bach not only used all keys, but also all available styles and genres (from old *cantus firmus* style to new arioso-type melodies). According to Peter Williams, "Without doubt [the *WTC*] was meant to serve as an exposition of musical laws: to show how those laws had been practiced, how they could be practiced and how they strengthened – rather than restricted – the musical spirit.... And this law is no textbook abstraction but a kind of truth given to the talented by the Creator of all things, who expected the musician to use his talent to its full potential."<sup>16</sup>

Another way Bach's religion is seen in the *WTC* is through his use of symbolism. He uses a symbol of a cross, which can only be seen when looking at the notes on the page. As can be seen in Ex. 1, if a line is drawn through the heads of the notes, an ascending then descending pattern emerges representing the arms of the cross.<sup>17</sup> Another way of looking at it is that if the notes were all laid on top of each other in a chord, the chord would look like a miniature cross. Bach uses this symbol most significantly in the final preludes and fugues of the *WTC*, almost as musical settings of his S. D. G. to finish out these large-scale collections.

Ex. 1. J. S. Bach, Prelude and Fugue in B minor, *WTC* 1 (Notes in the cross figure circled).<sup>18</sup>

Prelude, mm. 42-43:

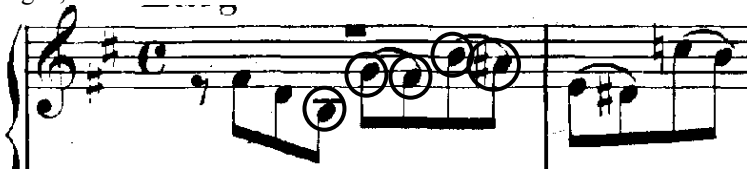


<sup>16</sup> Peter Williams, "J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: A New Approach," *Early Music* 11, no. 1 (1983): 46, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3137505>.

<sup>17</sup> Erwin Bodky, *The Interpretation of Bach's Keyboard Works* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 246.

<sup>18</sup> Bach, *Wohltemperierte Klavier* Book I, 117-118.

Fugue, mm. 1-2:



Even though the preludes and fugues from the *WTC* did not have texts that explicitly stated Bach's religious beliefs, they were written by a composer who kept his religion at the forefront of his mind even while composing abstract keyboard music. In the words of Erwin Bodky, "The greater a person is, the more it becomes inevitable that whatever occupies his creative mind penetrates even the smallest utterances of his daily life. It is therefore not surprising that Bach's deep-felt religion, which is the basis of his entire personality, shapes the character of quite a few of his keyboard works."<sup>19</sup> In fact, Bach most likely considered himself "at his most devoted and religious precisely when he was writing his most abstract and complicated music."<sup>20</sup>

To say that the *WTC* sounds "religious" or "sacred" can be subjective, yet many people have been quoted as saying that playing or listening to Bach's music lifts their soul. Helmut Walcha, a German organist who specialized in Bach's music, said that "Bach opens a vista to the universe. After experiencing him, people feel there is meaning to life after all."<sup>21</sup> But not only musicians can sense the sacred in Bach's music. Roger Fry, an English artist, is quoted as saying, "Bach almost persuades me to become a Christian."<sup>22</sup>

Bach also designed these pieces to affect the listener with different emotions. This idea came from the prevailing philosophy of Bach's time: the Doctrine of Affections. This doctrine was an established theory of the Baroque period, which dictated that music should serve to arouse different emotions or *affections* in the listeners.<sup>23</sup> By

<sup>19</sup> Bodky, *Interpretation of Bach's Keyboard Works*, 241.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, *A New Approach*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Helmut Walcha. BrainyQuote.com, Xplore Inc, 2013.

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/h/helmutwalc234335.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Roger Fry. BrainyQuote.com, Xplore Inc, 2013.

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/r/rogerfry178105.html>

<sup>23</sup> David Whitwell, "On the Doctrine of the Affections." *Essays on the Origin of Western Music* (2012): 1, [http://whitwellessays.com/docs/DOC\\_889.doc](http://whitwellessays.com/docs/DOC_889.doc).



experiencing a range of affections, they believed that the listener would become a healthier and more balanced person. Thus, many composers wrote pieces with a sequence of contrasting moods, using musical gestures, dissonances, different tonalities, and other musical ideas.

A well-known musical theorist of Bach's time, Johannes Mattheson, wrote treatises on the Doctrine of Affections, each becoming gradually more specific. In his last book, *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister* (The Complete Chapel-Master) written in 1739, Mattheson catalogued very specific affections and the means by which a composer could produce them through his or her music.<sup>24</sup> This idea definitely influenced Bach in his composing. Yet at the same time, Bach was never formulaic in the ways that he sought to arouse emotion. As David and Mendel observe, "He was neither so poorly endowed with imagination that he had to establish for himself a whole reservoir of ready-made patterns, to draw on whenever inspiration failed, nor so theoretically minded that he would heed the pedantic attempts of his contemporaries to establish music as a branch of rhetoric."<sup>25</sup>

Instead, Bach created his own affections for each key. Sometimes he followed the prevailing affections of the day, and other times he took his own twist on the key. In this way, he followed the idea of each key having an affection, but he did not become simply another composer trying to make E major sound like "desperate or deathly sorrow."<sup>26</sup> Since Bach collected the pieces of the *WTC* in all twenty-four keys, he had ample room to explore his own affections for each key. As Engels states, "Bach associated each tonality with a distinct emotional dimension."<sup>27</sup>

It is fascinating to note that Bach arranged the *WTC* in prelude-fugue pairs of major and minor – two modes that typically give very different ranges of moods. For example, his Prelude and Fugue in C-sharp major (from Book 1), are pastoral, light, and full of laughter and fun. The Prelude and Fugue in C-sharp minor directly following are simple and

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<sup>24</sup> Hans Lenneberg and Johann Mattheson, "Johann Mattheson on Affect and Rhetoric in Music (I)." *Journal of Music Theory* 2, no. 1 (1958): 47-48, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/842930>.

<sup>25</sup> David and Mendel, *The Bach Reader*, 34.

<sup>26</sup> Bodky, *Interpretation of Bach's Keyboard Works*, 228.

<sup>27</sup> Marjorie Wornell Engels. *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: An Exploration of the 48 Preludes and Fugues* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2006), 4.

sober, “in a world beyond joy or sorrow even.”<sup>28</sup> So Bach, being the thorough composer he was, wrote not just one or two pieces with contrasting moods. He wrote a whole collection.

Bach typically treated C major clearly and simply in the preludes and fugues of both *WTC* books. He often used either arpeggio or scalar passages in this key, which also correlated with his teaching purposes for this collection. For example, the C-major prelude from Book 1 used primarily arpeggio patterns. Also, the corresponding fugue used an ascending C-major scale as its subject.<sup>29</sup>

C minor was a stronger key for Bach, often permeated with a feeling of boldness and confidence. For example, the prelude from Book 1 in this key is a toccata, which comes at the listener with the uninterrupted force of a hurricane.

For Bach, C-sharp major was the key of virtuosity and brilliance. The preludes and fugues from the *WTC* were the only pieces that Bach wrote in this key. According to Keller, “Bach was the first to use this key with the greatest number of sharps in our music and he has remained almost the only one.”<sup>30</sup> He probably originally wrote the Prelude and Fugue in C major, and then simply wrote seven sharps in the key signature instead of transposing it into D-flat major. Even though this might contradict the idea of having a specific affection for the key, Bach still injected his pieces in this key with a certain lightness and bravura that was different from his compositions in C major.

C-sharp minor, on the other hand, was more introspective and questioning. This is another key Bach did not use much, but when he did use it, “the emotional ambience is invariably expressed in music of deeply affecting beauty.”<sup>31</sup> Both of the preludes from Book 1 and 2 in this key truly sound pensive and invite soul-searching with their transparent sadness.

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<sup>28</sup> Cecil Gray, *The Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues of J. S. Bach* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 23.

<sup>29</sup> Johann Sebastian Bach, *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* Book I, Urtext ed. (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1974), 6.

<sup>30</sup> Keller, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 29.

D major was one of Bach's favorite keys to show gladness and joy, whether in exultation or regal dignity.<sup>32</sup> Erin Bodky states that Bach used elements of the French-overture style in both the D-major fugue from Book 1 and the D-major prelude from Book 2.<sup>33</sup> He used many fanfare-type motifs such as in his Prelude and Fugue in D major from Book 2.

D minor was often dark and dramatic, with either inward turmoil or outward anger.<sup>34</sup> Bach used a number of odd chord progressions in this key, especially in the D-minor prelude of Book 1. For the ending cadenza of this prelude, Bach used a chord progression that according to Cecil Gray was "of a rare boldness considering the time at which it was written."<sup>35</sup>

Bach often used the key of E-flat major to show dignity, confidence, and happiness. This key was also traditionally used to symbolize the Trinity, because of the three flats in the key signature.<sup>36</sup> For the E-flat-major prelude from Book 1, Bach also used three distinct styles of composition: preamble, fugal chorale, and double fugue.<sup>37</sup>

E-flat minor or D-sharp minor was often intensely emotional. In Book 1, Bach set his Prelude in E-flat minor and its corresponding Fugue in D-sharp minor, showing the keys to be equivalent in his mind. In Book 2, both the prelude and fugue are in D-sharp minor. It is interesting that Bach chose E-flat minor as the key for the first prelude, because that is the only piece Bach ever wrote in this key.<sup>38</sup> He wrote it after his first wife died, and it expresses a heart-wrenching grief in a quiet, understated way. The jagged melody reaches upwards in cries of despair. As Engels states, "Bach has, in this Prelude, portrayed the soul's tortured transition from despair to resignation with music unparalleled in beauty and eloquence."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>33</sup> Bodky, *Interpretation of Bach's Keyboard Works*, 231.

<sup>34</sup> Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Gray, *Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues*, 31.

<sup>36</sup> Bodky, *Interpretation of Bach's Keyboard Works*, 232.

<sup>37</sup> Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Bodky, *Interpretation of Bach's Keyboard Works*, 232.

<sup>39</sup> Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 67.

“In the early Baroque period, E major was the Key of Heaven, since it was the sharpest and therefore ‘highest’ key then in common use.”<sup>40</sup> Bach was certainly aware of the older affection of this key and tended to use it in a similar manner. For example, Bach uses the motif of a rising second in all four of the pieces in this key from the *WTC* Books 1 and 2 to aurally lift the mood of the piece.

Bach composed sparse, sullen little pieces in the key of E minor. For example, the E minor fugue from Book 1 and prelude from Book 2 are both written with only two voices, almost in the style of one of his inventions.<sup>41</sup>

Traditionally F major was often used to evoke a pastoral or peaceful mood. Bach put his own spin on this and used F major to denote majesty and to demonstrate vivacity and technical skill.<sup>42</sup> The prelude from Book 1 has prolonged trills in each hand as well as fast sixteenth-notes in odd figurations, which show off the performer’s skill.

F minor is another favorite key of Bach’s, which he used specifically to express deep seriousness and tragedy.<sup>43</sup> He does this in all four pieces of the *WTC* Books 1 and 2 by using motifs such as falling diminished sevenths and a chromatic subject for the Fugue from Book 1. Both of these are long-established signs of pain.

The only pieces that Bach wrote in the key of F-sharp major were these preludes and fugues for the *WTC*.<sup>44</sup> He instilled this key with a brightness and delicate lightness, as if he wanted to show the performer that the key which has the second most sharps should be no different from C major.

Bach regarded F-sharp minor as a more subdued key, reserving it for special moments of private, intimate emotion. Both of his fugues in this key from the *WTC* show this mood in their slower note values that crawl along and wind the melodic lines around each other. Also, the F-sharp-minor prelude from Book 1 has very similar melodic ideas to the Fugue in C-sharp major from Book 1. This is a fascinating

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>41</sup> Gray, *Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Engels, *Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier*, 92.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>44</sup> Bodky, *Interpretation of Bach’s Keyboard Works*, 233.

resemblance, “like a landscape first seen in spring, and then revisited in autumn; the features are the same, the tone-colour and the feeling in the air are entirely different.”<sup>45</sup> Thus Bach could take the same melodic idea and change its affect simply by changing its key.

G major was “an expression of overflowing joy” for Bach.<sup>46</sup> Both the preludes and fugues are filled with running sixteenth notes. Also, all of these pieces are in some form of triple meter: 24/16, 6/8, 3/4, and 3/8 respectively. This helps give the feeling of dancing and liveliness to these pieces.

G minor was a favorite piece of Baroque musicians to express pathos. Mattheson described this key as “well fit for tender and refreshing, longing and moderate laments as it is for temperate cheerfulness.”<sup>47</sup> Bach intensified the affection for this key and used it to express deep pain and sadness. For example, the memorable subject in the G minor fugue from Book 1 is a quote from his Cantata 106, written in 1711. The words from the musical quote are “It is the Old Oath – Man, thou art to die!”<sup>48</sup> Bach paraphrased the musical line slightly so it would fit in better with the fugue, but it is still easily traceable to Cantata 106. The connection to the cantata would have stood out to any of Bach’s listeners as a commentary on the nature of this keyboard fugue.

Bach endowed A-flat major with nobility and serene confidence. Some of his pieces in this key from the *WTC* are confident and almost like a cantata; others are calmer, yet still dignified. Composers in the Baroque period rarely used this key.

G-sharp minor is only found in the *WTC*. Bach most likely originally composed these pieces in G minor and then transposed them to G-sharp minor.<sup>49</sup> The pieces themselves are very sweet and tender, but it is hard to see a specific affection that Bach designated for this key, since he seems to have used it only to complete his scheme of a prelude and fugue in every key.

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<sup>45</sup> Gray, *Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues*, 54.

<sup>46</sup> Keller, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, 97.

<sup>47</sup> Bodky, *Interpretation of Bach’s Keyboard Works*, 228.

<sup>48</sup> Engels, *Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier*, 129.

<sup>49</sup> Keller, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, 105.

A major was another symbol of the Trinity, with its key signature of three sharps. Bach uses this key in a sacred manner, incorporating many symbols. For example, in the A-major prelude from Book 1 Bach uses three contrasting melodies: a dance melody (symbolizing joy), the descending chromatic scale (symbolizing anguish), and a sigh motif (symbolizing longing).<sup>50</sup> All of these three together form a powerful symbol of the Christian life.

A minor was a key of confidence and strength amidst turmoil for Bach.<sup>51</sup> He often used superhuman rhythmic energy and drive in this pieces, especially in his preludes from both books. The Prelude and Fugue in A minor from Book 2 are more tumultuous than the first two, with more chromaticism and twisting lines.

B-flat major had a character of cheerfulness and gracefulness for Bach.<sup>52</sup> His Prelude in B-flat major from Book 1 exemplifies this affect perfectly: it is a beautiful little toccata that exudes grace and charm.

B-flat minor is hauntingly beautiful in Bach's hands, becoming both a funeral march of immense sadness in the prelude from Book 1, and an imposing, somber fugue in five voices in the fugue directly following. All the keys Bach introduced to keyboard literature (those of five, six, and seven sharps and flats) are works of exceptional beauty and emotional depth.<sup>53</sup>

Bach used B major in a similar way to B-flat major – showing lightness and charm through his simple counterpoint in the first book, and then an expression of joy and dance in the fast-moving sixteenth notes in the Prelude of the second book.

B minor is believed to be Bach's favorite key of all time, because he used it for so many of his highest quality compositions.<sup>54</sup> It is fitting that this key would be at the end of both of his *WTC* books. Bach uses this key in many ways, often revolving around spiritual intensity and suffering. In the first book, his Prelude and Fugue in B minor are the longest and most weighty pieces in the book, showing the seriousness

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<sup>50</sup> Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 152-153.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>52</sup> Keller, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, 114.

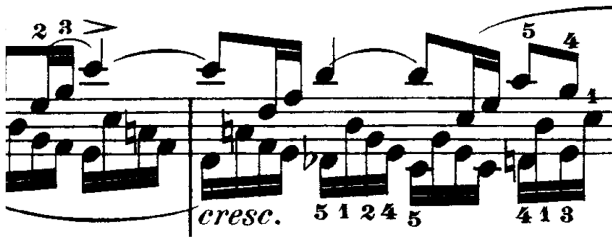
<sup>53</sup> Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 176.

<sup>54</sup> Bodky, *Interpretation of Bach's Keyboard Works*, 238.

and intensity of suffering. But in the second book, his Prelude and Fugue in B minor take a lighter and more hopeful approach to the darkness of this world. In both cases, they provide a fitting close to a collection filled with variety of mood and affect.

Bach also used specific musical ideas and motives to convey certain emotions in his pieces. One of these was the rhythm of two sixteenths to a longer note (eighth or quarter). He uses this either to show states of extreme joy in major keys such as the Fugue in E-flat major from Book 1, or to show melancholy and calm resignation in minor keys, such as the B-flat minor Prelude from Book 1.<sup>55</sup> In this example from the Fugue in E-flat major, the soprano line jumps upward in the sprightly rhythm of two sixteenths to a quarter note tied to an eighth note.

Ex. 2. J. S. Bach, Fugue in E-flat major, *WTC* 1, mm. 4-5.



In this example from the Prelude in B-flat minor, the soprano line climbs upward in the rhythm of two sixteenths to three eighths, this time in a sighing, sorrowful dirge:

Ex. 3. J. S. Bach, Prelude in B-flat minor, *WTC* 1, mm. 1-2.

Upon hearing the work in its entirety, grouping the pieces by key, a listener can clearly identify pieces of the same key not only because of sound, but also because of the certain affect they bring forth. So even a

<sup>55</sup> Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 102.

contemporary listener can distinguish at least some of the affects that Bach created in his pieces.

In writing his *WTC* Bach not only wrote fascinating pieces for the interest and instruction of his students, but he also created musical offerings of praise to his God and pieces of incredible variety in affection. With all of these intended effects of his collection, one might expect Bach's music to sound forced or only excel in one area over another. Yet Bach managed to write beautiful masterpieces even as he fulfilled his pedagogical, theological, and emotional aims. These masterpieces can stand alone as teaching pieces, offerings of worship, or studies in a certain mood. But the whole collection carries an even more powerful impact when all three of these aims are considered.

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