

NAXOS

**Wilhelm
Friedemann
BACH**

Keyboard Works • 2

**Fantasias
and
Fugues**

**Julia Brown,
Harpsichord**



Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710–1784) Keyboard Works Vol. 2: Fantasias and Fugues

The eldest son of Johann Sebastian Bach, Wilhelm Friedemann was born on 22nd November 1710 in Weimar and died in Berlin on 1st July 1784. He was first taught by his father and after 1723, when the family moved to Leipzig, he became a student at the Thomasschule. He spent four years studying law at the University of Leipzig before finding employment as organist at the Sophienkirche in Dresden for thirteen years. At this time Dresden was a centre for operatic and theatrical performances; the opulent surroundings offered a distinct contrast to the austere Bach household. In 1746 Wilhelm Friedemann left liberal and glamorous Dresden for a post as organist at the Liebfrauenkirche in Halle, the centre of Pietism. The atmosphere was more strict, and music was suffered only as a means of “inspiring and refreshing the congregation in worship” - as stated in Friedemann’s contract. From 1764 until his death twenty years later he held no official position, although he had been widely recognised as one of the most distinguished organists of his time. In 1774 he left for Berlin, where he spent his last years living from the earnings of a few concerts, teaching, and the support of benefactors.

Friedemann Bach was greatly admired for his virtuosity as a keyboard player and organist. A 1774 account of one of his public performances mentions it had “just the right ingredients to set the pulse racing, fresh ideas, striking changes of key, dissonant movements ...” As a composer, contemporary writings mention the enormous compositional density, intricacy and artistry of his works. In spite of the elements of sudden contrast and lightness, Friedemann incorporates enough traditional traits for his compositions to be regarded by his contemporaries as old-fashioned and complex. The eighteenth century was a time of change, both in people’s outlook on the universe as well as music aesthetics. Friedemann’s music is marked by both conservative and progressive elements; he shifts back and forth between old and new, between contrapuntal writing and simple melodic lines. This vacillation is attractive and it creates his highly personal style, filled

with changes in expression and sudden surprises.

What remains of Friedemann Bach’s output is probably a mere fraction of what once existed. With few exceptions, his compositions were disseminated only in the form of manuscript copies, though they were highly valued in some circles. In spite of this situation, we have examples of sonatas, fantasias, polonaises, a suite, fugues and shorter pieces for clavier (harpsichord, clavichord or fortepiano).

Along with the *Polonaises, F 12* [Naxos 8.557966], Friedemann’s *Eight Fugues, Fk 31*, are his most famous pieces; they were widely disseminated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Manuscript copies of this collection were available from music dealers in Berlin, Hamburg, Leipzig and Vienna. We also have an authorised copy with a dedicatory letter to Princess Anna Amalia of Prussia, dated 24th February 1778, and a complete autograph. These fugues are characterized by highly individualised themes and the predominance of free episodes. The variety of affects used and the highly individualized subjects makes them sound more like character pieces. They are all three-part fugues, and are small masterpieces of formal concision and thematic development; they are arranged in order of key, beginning with C major. The final *Fugue in F minor* is larger in scope, and the chromatic theme lends itself to very dramatic and discordant passages.

Fantasy was taught as the supreme goal of practical musicianship, as in Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach’s keyboard method. Contemporary accounts describe eighteenth century masters of the keyboard frequently improvising. The fact that fewer *Fantasias* were published does not mean that they were less prevalent. If they were written down at all, they were intended as instructive examples for students. According to Carl Philipp, in a *Fantasy* “the clavierist has all the freedom possible”, and harmonic daring, surprises “and any other reasonable deception make a fantasy good”.

No autograph copies have come down to us for Friedemann’s *Fantasias*, only secondary undated ones.

The lack of autograph sources creates problems of misattribution and questions in a chronological investigation. It is possible that all the *Fantasias* were composed after Friedemann left his post at the Marienkirche in Halle – a time when he was most active as an independent keyboard virtuoso performer. The ornaments used and the wide keyboard range required for most of the *Fantasias* also indicate that these were written during Friedemann's mature years.

His *Fantasias* hold a fascinating originality, balancing between traditional and modern writing. They are filled with contrasting sections: some fugal writing (as the *Fantasia in D minor, Fk 19*), *Alberti* bass and recitatives (as in *Fantasia in E minor, Fk 21*), sections without bar-lines (*Fantasia in A minor, Fk 23*), quick changes in mood and tempo (as in *Fantasia in C minor, Fk 15*). This last was commissioned by the Baltic baron Ulrich Georg von Behr (1745-1813).

These *Fantasias* are multi-sectional, and their improvisatory character can be felt through the frequent changes in texture, tempo and key. Each piece is highly individual in the way it combines contrasting and divergent sections. *Fk 15* and *19* are the only fantasias that employ fugal sections. *Fk 19* is comprised of three sections, each also in three-part form, with broken chords in a toccata-style that begins and ends the work. *Fk 21 in E minor* incorporates highly expressive instrumental recitative writing and cantilena sections with recurring *Furioso* sections. *Fk 18* and *23* are both shorter in length. It is possible to imagine that these served as starting points for

free improvisations. *Fk 18 in D minor* is filled with scales and arpeggios, and is written in *da capo* form, briefly interrupted by a *Larghetto* section in F. The charming *A minor Fantasia, Fk 23*, begins with a long section of contrasting tempo markings with no bar lines, then abruptly ends with a *Prestissimo* section. The *Fantasia in C minor* from the Berlin manuscript *P 883* has been attributed to Wilhelm Friedemann because it bears his name on the title page of the manuscript, although it is possibly a composition of Johann Wilhelm Hässler. This is one of many examples in Friedemann's output demonstrating the difficulty of attribution and dating as a result of the lack of printed material and the manner in which the manuscripts were disseminated during Friedemann's lifetime and later.

Many questions remain as to the most appropriate instrument for performing these works. The word 'clavier' encompasses many possibilities. The clavichord is known to have been the favourite instrument of the *Empfindsamkeit* (the expressive and sentimental period); the pianoforte was gaining popularity, and the harpsichord was at the height of its development. In the case of the *Fugues, Fk 8*, these are also successfully performed on the organ. Although performed on the harpsichord for this recording, each of the possible instruments can bring a unique flavour and colour to the interpretation of the works of this gifted composer.

Julia Brown

Julia Brown

Julia Brown was born in Rio de Janeiro. After graduating from Unicamp State University of Campinas in piano, she received a scholarship from the Brazilian Government to study organ at Northwestern University, at Evanston, Illinois. She received her master's degree and doctorate in the class of Wolfgang RübSam. Back in Brazil between 1996 and 1999, she was president of the Brazilian Association of Organists and was active in organizing festivals, teaching and concert appearances. She also initiated a concert series on the historical Cavallé-Coll organ in Campinas Cathedral. She has appeared in concert in North and South America and in Europe, performing at such events as the Oregon Bach Festival, the American Guild of Organists Regional Conventions, Latin American Organist Conventions, and other international organ and music festivals. Her interest in historical performance practice has led her to participate in many master-classes including those in Haarlem, Alkmaar, Pistoia and Romainmotier. As a harpsichordist, Julia Brown performs with the early music ensemble 'Primo Libro' which she formed together with colleagues interested in exploring performance practice and early music. She currently serves as organist and music director at the First United Methodist Church in Eugene, Oregon. Her growing list of recordings includes organ music by Heinrich Scheidemann, Johann Sebastian Bach and Dietrich Buxtehude.



Photo by Jurettia Nidever

The eldest son of Johann Sebastian Bach was hailed as the greatest organist in his time. Living in a time of transition, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach forged his own highly original style, combining the traditional writing learned from his father with new elements of the “expressive and sentimental” period. Among his most famous compositions, the *Eight Fugues, Fk 31* are miniature jewels. His *Fantasias* are wonderful examples of the freedom of expression in the new style of *Empfindsamkeit*.

Wilhelm Friedemann
BACH
 (1710–1784)
Keyboard Works • 2

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|----|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Fantasia in C minor, Fk 15 | 18:58 |
| 2 | Fugue No. 1 in C major, Fk 31/1 | 1:48 |
| 3 | Fugue No. 2 in C minor, Fk 31/2 | 2:47 |
| 4 | Fantasia in E minor, Fk 21 | 10:03 |
| 5 | Fugue No. 3 in D major, Fk 31/3 | 1:14 |
| 6 | Fugue No. 4 in D minor, Fk 31/4 | 1:15 |
| 7 | Fantasia in D minor, Fk 19 | 7:04 |
| 8 | Fugue No. 5 in E flat major, Fk 31/5 | 3:41 |
| 9 | Fugue No. 6 in E minor, Fk 31/6 | 3:19 |
| 10 | Fantasia in C minor, Fk nv2 | 7:39 |
| 11 | Fugue No. 7 in B flat major, Fk 31/7 | 1:36 |
| 12 | Fugue No. 8 in F minor, Fk 31/8 | 5:46 |
| 13 | Fantasia in A minor, Fk 23 | 4:31 |
| 14 | Fantasia in D minor, Fk 18 | 3:26 |

Julia Brown, Harpsichord

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 Producer: Wolfgang Rübsam • Harpsichord: Richard Kingston
 Booklet notes: Julia Brown • Cover painting of W F Bach by Benjamin Chai



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