



**J.S. BACH**  
**ORGELBÜCHLEIN**  
BWV 599-644  
**STEPHEN FARR**

## Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

### Orgelbüchlein BWV 599–644

Stephen Farr *organ*

*Organ by Tobias Heinrich Gottfried Trost,  
Stadtkirche, Waltershausen, Germany*

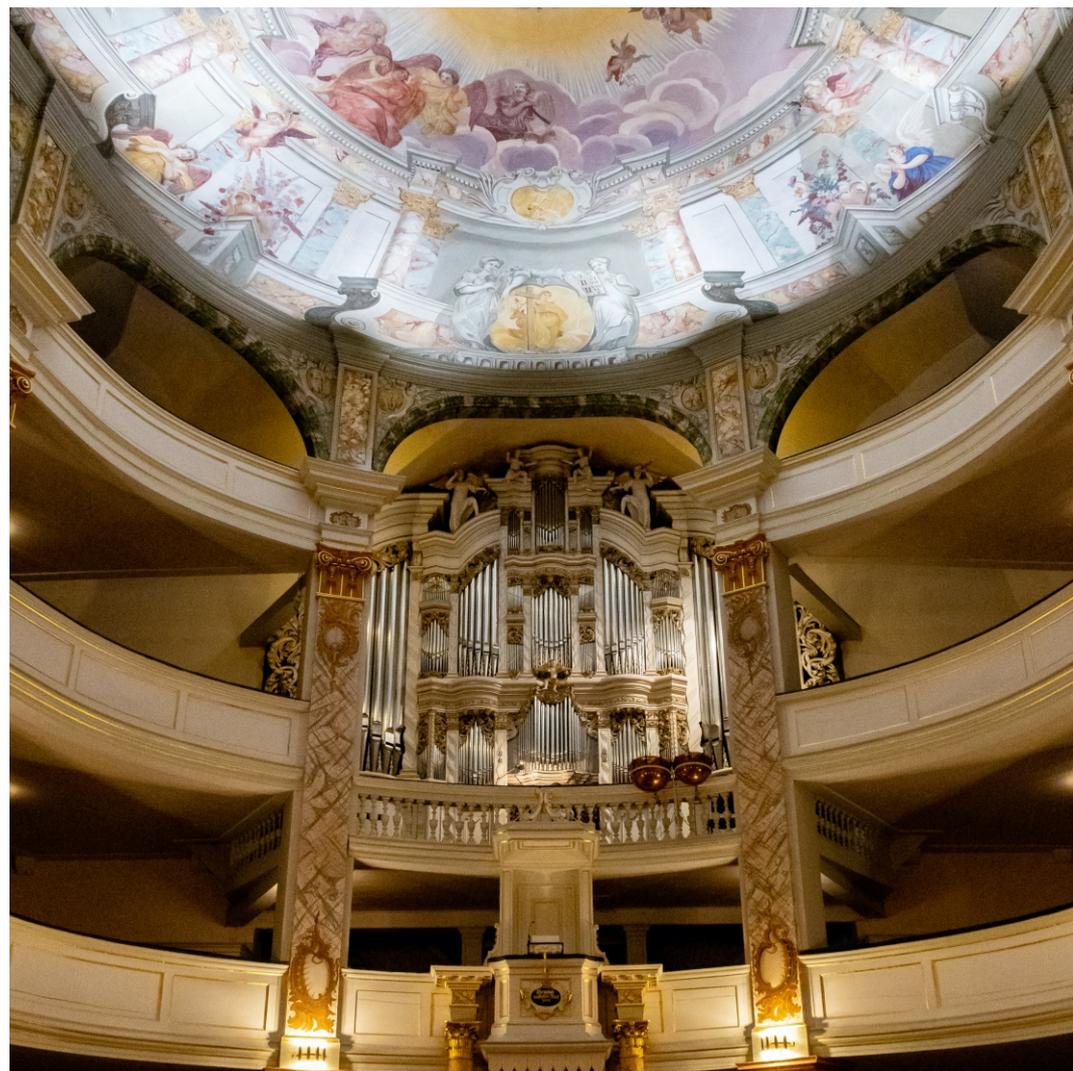
About Stephen Farr:

*'[...] rock steady rhythmic playing, crisp articulation and commanding overview. His approach is refreshingly unfussy and quirk free, and he draws on an unfailingly interesting palette of tonal colours'*  
Gramophone

*'[...] Farr's playing needs no musicological justification; it sparkles and seduces in equal measure'*  
Classical Ear

- |  |        |  |        |
|--|--------|--|--------|
| 1. Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV 599   | [1:16] | 17. In dir ist Freude, BWV 615   | [3:08] |
| 2. Gott, durch deine Güte <i>oder</i> Gottes Sohn ist kommen, BWV 600                    | [1:12] | 18. Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin, BWV 616                              | [1:53] |
| 3. Herr Christ, der ein'ge Gottes Sohn <i>oder</i> Herr Gott, nun sei gepreiset, BWV 601 | [1:25] | 19. Herr Gott, nun schließ den Himmel auf, BWV 617                           | [2:31] |
| 4. Lob sei dem allmächtigen Gott, BWV 602  | [0:54] | 20. O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig, BWV 618                                       | [3:34] |
| 5. Puer natus in Bethlehem, BWV 603  | [0:54] | 21. Christe, du Lamm Gottes, BWV 619   | [1:24] |
| 6. Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ, BWV 604  | [1:41] | 22. Christus, der uns selig macht, BWV 620                                   | [2:12] |
| 7. Der Tag der ist so freudenreich, BWV 605  | [1:52] | 23. Da Jesus an dem Kreuze stund, BWV 621                                    | [1:18] |
| 8. Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her, BWV 606   | [0:43] | 24. O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß, BWV 622                                | [5:39] |
| 9. Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schar, BWV 607   | [1:15] | 25. Wir danken dir, Herr Jesu Christ, daß du für uns gestorben bist, BWV 623 | [1:02] |
| 10. In dulci jubilo, BWV 608   | [1:24] | 26. Holf Gott, daß mir's gelinge, BWV 624                                    | [1:38] |
| 11. Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allzugleich, BWV 609  | [0:46] | 27. Christ lag in Todesbanden, BWV 625                                       | [1:15] |
| 12. Jesu, meine Freude, BWV 610  | [2:48] | 28. Jesus Christus, unser Heiland [der den Tod] BWV 626                      | [1:07] |
| 13. Christum wir sollen loben schon, BWV 611   | [2:40] | 29. Christ ist erstanden, BWV 627  | [4:07] |
| 14. Wir Christenleut [habn jetzund Freud], BWV 612                                       | [1:28] | 30. Erstanden ist der heilige Christ, BWV 628                                | [0:50] |
| 15. Helft mir Gotts Güte preisen, BWV 613  | [1:08] | 31. Erschienen ist der herrliche Tag, BWV 629                                | [1:06] |
| 16. Das alte Jahr vergangen ist, BWV 614   | [2:24] | 32. Heut triumphieret Gottes Sohn, BWV 630                                   | [1:35] |
|  |        | 33. Komm, Gott Schöpfer, heiliger Geist, BWV 631                             | [0:46] |

34. Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend, BWV 632	[1:15]
35. Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier, BWV 634	[1:53]
36. Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier, BWV 633	[2:40]
37. Dies sind die heiligen zehn Gebot, BWV 635	[1:26]
38. Vater unser im Himmelreich, BWV 636	[1:16]
39. Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt, BWV 637	[1:26]
40. Es ist das Heil uns kommen her, BWV 638	[1:07]
41. Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV 639	[1:50]
42. In dich hab ich gehoffet, Herr, BWV 640	[0:57]
43. Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein, BWV 641	[1:55]
44. Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten, BWV 642	[1:38]
45. Alle Menschen müssen sterben, BWV 643	[1:36]
46. Ach wie nichtig, ach wie flüchtig, BWV 644	[0:43]
Total playing time	[79:02]



### J.S. Bach: *Orgelbüchlein*, BWV 599–644

Between 1708 and 1717, Bach worked in Weimar, initially as court organist, then (from 1714) as *Konzertmeister*. This was near the start of his career: it's easy to forget that Bach was a young man in his 20s and early 30s during his time in the city. Famously, his tenure in Weimar did not end well: in 1717, after falling out with his employer Duke Wilhelm Ernst, the hot-headed Bach was arrested and spent a month (from 6 November to 2 December 1717) jailed in a fortress to cool his heels. He may have left the Weimar court under a cloud, but had already been appointed to a new post as Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold in Cöthen. His years in Weimar saw the production of a great deal of keyboard music, including some of the preludes and fugues that later became part of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, and, from 1714 onwards, a number of church cantatas, including *Himmelskönig sei willkommen* BWV 182 (for Palm Sunday) and *Erschallet, Ihr Lieder* BWV 172 (for Whitsunday). On the domestic front, Bach had married his first wife Maria Barbara (1684–1720) in 1707, and during their years in Weimar, they started a family. It was a grim inevitability of the time that three of the children she bore died in

infancy, but among those born in Weimar were Wilhelm Friedemann (1710–1774) and Carl Philipp Emanuel (1714–1788), both of whom went on to illustrious musical careers.

Bach's Weimar years were extremely important in the development of his organ music and, more generally, his engagement with Italian music, particularly Vivaldi and Corelli: his organ transcriptions of Vivaldi concertos (BWV 593, 594 and 596) date from 1713–14, encouraged by his then co-employer, the tragically short-lived and extremely musical Duke Johann Ernst (1696–1715) who had acquired copies of music by Italian composers during his studies at Utrecht University. The other Weimar concerto transcriptions for organ (BWV 592 and 595) are based on concertos by the young Duke himself. After Johann Ernst's death, the court was ruled solely by his brother Wilhelm Ernst (a Lutheran so fanatical that he would only permit those who could demonstrate an understanding of Lutheran theology to serve in his army). He was a man whose judgement Bach questioned openly in 1717 after Johann Wilhelm Drese had been appointed as Kapellmeister (in succession to his father), a post Bach himself had applied for – and it was Bach's furious and defiant

attitude that earned him four weeks in prison.

But while the Italian influence was to have a profound impact on the development of Bach's musical language, the greatest organ music to come from the Weimar years was quintessentially German rather than Italian, inspired by – and anchored in – Bach's Lutheran roots, specifically the church chorales (hymn-tunes) that were at the heart of the Lutheran liturgy. The *Orgelbüchlein* (*Little Organ Book*) BWV 599–644 was almost entirely written in Weimar (three of the 46 pieces were added later), though the original scheme was much more ambitious. The autograph manuscript is unusual in containing many more blank staves than filled ones, since Bach set out to write 164 chorale settings. We know just how many he planned because the manuscript includes the titles of the tunes he intended to use, written at the top of pages that are otherwise empty. Bach may not have realised the whole of his grand scheme, but the 46 pieces in the collection are an extraordinary testimony to his genius, bringing the greatest creative imagination to his treatment of chorale melodies. Albert Schweitzer – organist, humanitarian and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize – described the *Orgelbüchlein* as 'one of

the greatest events in all music', adding that it constitutes 'the dictionary of Bach's musical language.' Although this particular 'dictionary' was anything but a dry reference book, Bach's handwritten title page (written about five years after he left Weimar) suggests that his main purpose was to produce a set of pieces for teaching:

Little Organ Book

In which a student of the organ receives instruction on performing a chorale in a multitude of ways while achieving mastery in the study of the pedals, since in the chorales contained herein the pedals are treated entirely obbligato.

In honour of our Lord alone  
That my fellow men their skill may hone.

Written by Johann Sebastian Bach,  
Kapellmeister to his Serene Highness the  
Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen.

Russell Stinson's study of the *Orgelbüchlein* (1999) proposes a broader purpose for these chorale preludes, though still one which is essentially pedagogical, describing it as 'a compositional treatise, a collection of liturgical organ music, an organ method, and a theological statement. These four identities are so closely intertwined that it is hard to know where one leaves off

and another begins.' All true, but there's a further dimension which raises these settings to a level of greatness to which organ chorale preludes, let alone teaching pieces, do not usually aspire: this is highly emotional music, almost every bar permeated with Bach's fervour and faith. His basic musical material was the melodies of the chorale tunes themselves, but he also took the meaning of their sung texts to determine the expressive range of his settings: as Martin Geck put it, these are pieces 'rich in emotion, style and sensuous tone-painting'.

Did Bach assemble this collection (or at least part of it) for an audience beyond the student organists mentioned on the (later) title page? The earliest pieces were probably composed in about 1710 (or even earlier) and then copied into the autograph manuscript in 1713, the year in which Bach applied for the post of Kapellmeister in Halle. Peter Williams has speculated that they may have been intended as part of a portfolio of compositions assembled as part of an application for the job (which he subsequently declined). By the time he came to write the title page in Cöthen a decade later, in about 1722, his son Wilhelm Friedemann was already showing

exceptional promise as a keyboard player, and was probably one of the 'organ students' Bach had in mind. In other words, Bach may well have reconceived the *Orgelbüchlein* as a collection of teaching pieces once he realised that at least one member of his own family was likely to benefit from them.

Though the pieces in the *Orgelbüchlein* are widely contrasted in mood, there are some common features. These were elegantly summarised by Peter Williams in his last book, *J.S. Bach: A Musical Biography* (2016):

In the ways the *Orgelbüchlein* sets them, most of the hymn melodies are more immediately recognisable than in some other kinds of organ music: almost all consist of a short harmonisation realised by means of subtly integrated motifs, going straight through the melody without breaks between the hymn-lines. ... The aim is to affect the believing listener through original harmonies, resulting in new sounds conceived with a new purpose.

The sheer variety of these settings is a source of wonder: each has a beautifully well-defined character and individuality – an approach to composition that almost seems to prefigure music of the next century, and the mood-pieces of Mendelssohn,

Schumann and Brahms. It was Brahms, indeed, who paid the greatest compliment to the *Orgelbüchlein* by drawing on its techniques and structures as a blueprint for his own final work, the set of Eleven Chorale Preludes Op. 122. As Stinson demonstrated in his book on *The Reception of Bach's Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms* (2006), Brahms studied this music in considerable depth, analysing 'over a dozen *Orgelbüchlein* chorales in terms of their motivic structure, form, rhythmic design and harmonic style.' Brahms certainly profited from the experience, and modelled several of his own chorale preludes on those in the *Orgelbüchlein*. But Brahms was not the first great nineteenth-century composer to have been struck by the beauty and inventiveness of Bach's settings. In about 1830, Mendelssohn acquired an early manuscript of the *Orgelbüchlein* which he believed (wrongly) to be in Bach's hand. But what mattered more was that these pieces were entirely unknown and unpublished (Mendelssohn was thrilled by them, and in the 1830s he even copied some out as gifts for friends). Mendelssohn himself prepared an edition for the London firm of Coventry & Hollier, containing 44 chorales from the *Orgelbüchlein*. They were published in two volumes in 1845–6 as *Johann Sebastian Bach's Organ*

*Compositions on Corales [!] (Psalm-Tunes) edited from the Original Manuscripts by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy*. In his preface, Mendelssohn wrote that the '44 Short Preludes ... not only bear [Bach's] name, but most evidently the marks of his genius.' Bach's rehabilitation in the nineteenth century owed much to Mendelssohn's devotion to his music (most famously, perhaps, his rediscovery of the St Matthew Passion), and his edition of the 'Compositions on Corales' was another significant landmark: well over a century after their composition, it was the first appearance in print of the *Orgelbüchlein*.

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### Recording Bach's *Orgelbüchlein*

For all the numerous questions surrounding our understanding of Bach's intentions in composing the *Orgelbüchlein*, of one thing we can be certain: that he never envisaged anyone sitting down to listen to, or play, its forty or so settings complete in a single session. Bach might have thought it a special sort of absurdity even to consider doing so.

But of course the possibility that the recording will be consumed in a single sitting can't be excluded. So any performer recording the work is, in turn, immediately presented with conundrums, and perhaps it is interesting to turn over some of them here in a reflective adjunct to more practically-minded material on how to play it. A short summary of the questions might include: how varied should the choice of registrations be? How much should *tempi* vary between chorales? After all, the chorale melodies as sung have their own fundamental momentum: they certainly weren't fast in eighteenth century Thuringia. And the compositional detail of Bach's settings needs time to speak. How much, to continue, should theories about the liturgical function of the set be taken into account when recording it for modern ears? If Peter Williams were correct in his hypothesis that the collection was compiled with an eye to eventual use in Halle, the strictures in place there concerning tempo and registration of organ chorales should quite possibly, for the authentically-minded, result in a recording played almost

entirely on sober 8 'stops. And at slow, or very slow, tempi. One can imagine the reaction of a modern listener to that outcome. And, in any case, it would be a curious thing for a player not to explore the remarkable colours the instrument chosen for this recording offers. Two further specific points: I include here a repeat of the second half of BWV 633. Bach indicated this repeat in both BWV 633 and 634, although the chorale text itself does not require one, so it seemed a good compromise to offer both options, as the settings are so similar. And in BWV 600, the alert listener will notice some textual variants: these follow J.T. Krebs' copy of the chorale, in an edition kindly supplied by William Whitehead. All the *Orgelbüchlein* settings are transmitted, often with variant readings, in secondary copies. Some scholars believe that they preserve revisions to the autograph MS which originate with Bach himself, an intriguing possibility which it's pleasing to acknowledge in passing.

The choice of an old organ adds its own layer of complexity to these considerations. The Waltershausen instrument, beautifully restored and impeccably maintained, is one of the wonders of the musical world. But as the organist of the church said to me himself, 'it's a very difficult organ'. By virtue of its physical dimensions – the instrument reputedly has the widest pedal board in Europe – and the weight of its playing actions, it will not co-operate with some of the standard interpretative tropes, the Christmassy tinkles and angelic scurryings, available to players

of more ergonomically friendly instruments. Some registers have to be coaxed gently into life; that isn't a process to be rushed. Also, as you will hear from time to time on the recording, this instrument can be noisy, in non-musical ways: we've purposely not tried to erase that occasional evidence of this organ's physical identity.

All these questions add up. They matter. But my solution here is to bear one thing principally in mind. This is Ziegler's statement that his teacher, J S Bach, taught him to play hymns 'not indifferently but according to the affekt of the words'. This is a particular approach, for a very particular, and to me particularly special, set of pieces. BWV 619 was the first organ piece with pedals I ever learnt, almost 45 years ago, in All Saints' Blackheath, as a pupil of Robert Munns: I was proud when I completed it without mistakes for the first time. *Christe, du Lamm Gottes* seems harder to me now than it ever did to the excited small boy who had no inkling that the mysteries of this extraordinary music would deepen as they have.

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**Organ by Tobias Heinrich Gottfried Trost (c.1680–1759),  
Stadtkirche, Waltershausen, Germany**

**II. Hauptwerk**

1. Portun-Untersatz*	16
2. Gross Quintadena*	16
3. Principal*	8
4. Gemshorn*	8
5. Viol d' Gambe*	8
6. Portun*	8
7. Quintadena*	8
8. Unda maris*	8
9. Octava*	4
10. Salcional*	4
11. Röhr-Flöta†	4
12. Celinder-Quinta*	3
13. Super-Octava*	2
14. Sesquialtera*	2½ II
15. Mixtura†	2 VIII
16. Fagott	16
17. Trompetta*	8

**I. Brustwerk**

18. Gedackt*	8
19. Nachthorn*	8
20. Principal*	4
21. Flöte douce*	4
22. Nachthorn*	4
23. Gemshorn*	4
24. Spitz-Quinta*	3
25. Nassad-Quinta*	3
26. Octava†	2
27. Sesquialtera*	2½ II
28. Mixtura†	2 IV
29. Hautbous	8
Tremulant	

**III. Oberwerk**

30. Flöte Dupla	8
31. Vagarr*	8
32. Flöte travers**	8
33. Lieblich Principal*	4
34. Spitzflöte*	4
35. Gedackt-Quinta	3
36. Wald-Flöte*	2
37. Hohl-Flöte*	8
38. Vox humana	8
39. Geigen-Principal*	4

**Pedal**

40. Gross Principal†	16
41. Sub-Bass*	16
42. Violon-Bass*	16
43. Octaven-Bass*	8
44. Celinder-Quinta†	6
45. Posaunen-Bass	32
46. Posaunen-Bass*	16
47. Trompetten-Bass*	8
48. Quintadenen-Bass‡	16
49. Viol d' Gamben-Bass‡	8
50. Portun-Bass‡	8
51. Super-Octava‡	4
52. Rohr-Flöten-Bass‡	4
53. Mixture-Bass‡	VI

\* Original pipework

† Partially original pipework

‡ By Hauptwerk to Pedal transmission

\*\* Playing 4'

Cymbelsterne: 2 (C, G)

Couplers:

by hooks: OW/BW, BW/P

shove coupler: BW/HW

by wind: HW/P

Tremulant: HW, OW, BW

Modified mean tone temperamnet:

a=466.8Hz @ 150

Wind pressure: 69mm



### Stephen Farr (organ)

Stephen Farr's career as a soloist and ensemble and continuo player has taken him throughout Europe, to North and South America, and to Australia. He has performed with some of the world's leading ensembles and conductors, and has appeared in venues including the Berlin Philharmonie (where he performed with the Berlin Philharmonic in the world premiere of Jonathan Harvey's *Weltethos* under Sir Simon Rattle), the Royal Festival Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Symphony Hall Birmingham, Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Notre Dame de Paris, and the Royal Albert Hall. He appears frequently at the BBC Proms: he gave a solo recital in the 2011 season, including the world premiere of Judith Bingham's *The Everlasting Crown*, and made a concerto appearance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo in the 2015 season. He is Director of Music at St Paul's Knightsbridge, and teaches organ at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In 2017 he succeeded Patrick Russill as Chief Examiner of the Royal College of Organists.

Stephen Farr was Organ Scholar of Clare College, Cambridge, graduating

with a double first in Music and an MPhil in musicology as a postgraduate student of John Butt's. He then held a number of cathedral appointments before embarking on a freelance career. In 2014 he completed a PhD on the organ works of Judith Bingham.

A prize-winner at international competition level, he has an established reputation as one of the leading recitalists of his generation, with an impressive stylistic grasp of a broad range of repertoire and a particular commitment to contemporary music. His extensive and wide-ranging discography for Resonus encompasses music from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century – recent releases include the complete organ works of Kenneth Leighton and works by J.S. Bach and Judith Bingham – and has received unanimous critical acclaim.

[www.stephenfarr.co.uk](http://www.stephenfarr.co.uk)



## Registrations

### BWV 599

4 5 6 18 41 49 BW/P played on HW

### BWV 600

6 18 29 50

### BWV 601

18 20 23 26 41 49 50 52

### BWV 602

1 3 4 7 9 40 42 43

### BWV 603

18 19 22 41 50 52

### BWV 604

RH 18 20 27 LH 4 41 50

### BWV 605

RH 3 4 6 9 12 13 14 LH 18 21 41 49 50

### BWV 606

18 20 26 28 41 42 43 51

### BWV 607

18 22 41 50

### BWV 608

6 7 23 51 52 BW/P

### BWV 609

3 4 9 13 15 42 43 44 47 51

### BWV 610

3 5 18 23 41 42 49 BW/HW played on HW

### BWV 611

18 BW Trem 41 50

### BWV 612

3 4 7 11 41 49 50

### BWV 613

18 19 20 24 26 41 48 49 50

### BWV 614

RH 31 34 35 LH 6 41 50

### BWV 615

2 3 4 7 9 13 15 18 19 20 24 26 28

40 42 43 44 46 53

BW/HW BW/ P played on HW

### BWV 616

3 5 10 11 41 42 43 49

### BWV 617

RH 18 29 LH 4 7 11 41 49 50

### BWV 618

6 21 52 BW/P

### BWV 619

RH 6 7 LH 31 34 41 49 50

### BWV 620

2 3 4 7 9 13 14 15 18 19 20 24 26 28

40 42 43 44 45 46 53

BW/HW BW/ P played on HW

### BWV 621

31 39 41 49

### BWV 622

RH 18 23 25 LH 1 (8ve higher) 41 50

### BWV 623

3 4 9 13 41 42 48 49 52

### BWV 624

RH 8 LH 18 41 49

### BWV 625

18 19 20 26 41 49 50 52

### BWV 626

2 3 4 6 7 41 42 43 44

### BWV 627

Vers 1: 3 4 6 7 9 12 17 18 20 41 42 43 44 48 BW/P

Vers 2: 18 23 26 41 48 49 50

Vers 3: 1 3 4 9 12 13 14 15 16 40 41 43 44 46 47 51 53

### BWV 628

3 4 7 9 12 18 19 20 22 24 26 BW/HW 42 43 44 46

51 BW/P

### BWV 629

RH 18 19 20 24 26 27 28 29 LH 3 4 6 10 11 41 42

43 47 51

### BWV 630

1 3 4 9 12 13 14 15 18 19 20 26 27 28 BW/HW 40

42 43 44 45 46 47 51 53 BW/P

### BWV 631

18 19 20 24 26 29 41 43 49 51

### BWV 632

3 5 7 9 41 42 43 49

### BWV 633

RH 5 7 11 LH 18 41 50

### BWV 634

RH 18 19 LH 11 (played 8ve lower) 41 49

### BWV 635

18 19 20 24 26 28 41 42 49 50 52

### BWV 636

6 11 40 49

### BWV 637

3 7 9 12 13 15 18 20 26 28 42 43 44 46 47 BW/HW BW/P

### BWV 638

3 6 9 13 41 42 43 49 52

### BWV 639

18 RH 35 37 38 LH 6 41 BW/P

### BWV 640

3 41 49 50

### 641

RH 18 19 23 27 LH 5 6 41 50

### BWV 642

3 9 12 13 18 19 20 BW/HW 41 42 43 BW/P

### BWV 643

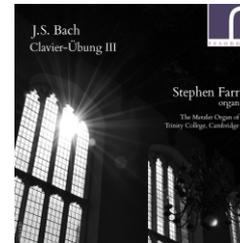
18 23 41 50

### BWV 644

7 11 41 50



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Session photography: Resonus Limited

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Johann Sebastian Bach.