



PENTATONE

TRACK INFORMATION

LINER NOTES

THE AA-KERK ORGAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



**Bach** Clavier-Übung III  
**James McVinnie**



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Clavier-Übung III

Disc 1

1	Praeludium pro Organo pleno BWV 552i	9. 05
2	Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit BWV 669	3. 21
3	Christe, aller Welt Trost BWV 670	4. 24
4	Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist BWV 671	5. 06
5	Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit BWV 672	1. 36
6	Christe, aller Welt Trost BWV 673	1. 24
7	Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist BWV 674	1. 19
8	Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 675	3. 14
9	Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 676	5. 19
10	Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 677	1. 06

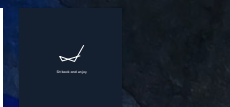
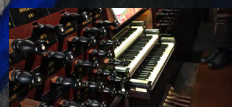
Total playing time Disc 1: 36. 03

Disc 2

1	Dies sind die heiligen zehen Gebot BWV 678	4. 32
2	Dies sind die heiligen zehen Gebot BWV 679	2. 09
3	Wir gläuben all an einen Gott BWV 680	3. 20
4	Wir gläuben all an einen Gott BWV 681	1. 42
5	Vater unser im Himmelreich BWV 682	6. 28
6	Vater unser im Himmelreich BWV 683	1. 38
7	Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam BWV 684	4. 07
8	Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam BWV 685	1. 32
9	Aus teifer Not schrei ich zu dir BWV 686	6. 14
10	Aus teifer Not schrei ich zu dir BWV 687	4. 37
11	Jesus Christus, unser Heiland, der von uns den Zorn Gottes wandt BWV 688	3. 46
12	Jesus Christus, unser Heiland BWV 689	4. 59
13	Duetto I	2. 41
14	Duetto II	3. 36
15	Duetto III	3. 01
16	Duetto IV	2. 47
17	Fuga a 5 con pedale pro Organo pleno BWV 552ii	7. 14

Total playing time Disc 2: 64. 35

James McVinnie, organ





I first heard Bach's *Prelude & Fugue in E-Flat* as a young teenager, played by a visiting recitalist in concert at Westminster Abbey. Time has erased most of the details of my first visit to this extraordinary building, but some remain: the Abbey's Waterford crystal chandeliers, strangely reminiscent of Joan Collins's earrings – Martin Neary, the then Abbey Organist in his red cassock, black gown and white preaching bands – the enormous polished Purbeck marble columns of the nave... What sticks out most though is the final section of the *Fugue*, culminating in its thundering final pedal entry; for me, a thrilling, life changing moment and surely one of Bach's most inspired conclusions.

I left the concert and, perhaps unwisely set about learning these pieces which bookend Bach's enormous *Clavier-Übung III*, the collection out of all his organ music to which – thirty or so years later – I feel the closest connection.



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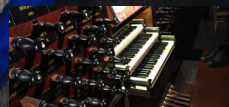


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Johann Sebastian Bach published four volumes of keyboard music in a series entitled *Clavier-Übung* (Keyboard Practice). The first two parts contain some of his finest keyboard music (the Six Partitas, the Italian Concerto and the French Overture) but nothing could quite have foreseen the enormous scale of his third volume which appeared in 1739, Bach's very first published volume of organ music, comprising twenty-seven works unified by a great musical and theological design.

*Clavier-Übung III* is a compendium of compositional techniques and an encyclopaedia of musical styles ancient and modern, but it is also an affirmation of Bach's own Christian faith and a musical summation of the doctrine of the Lutheran Church. The year of its publication was a significant one for Leipzig, marking both the bicentenary of the preaching of Martin Luther in *Thomaskirche*, where Bach was *Kantor*, and the city's official acceptance

of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutheran Church's main profession of faith.

Most of the pieces contained in *Clavier-Übung III* are chorale preludes, a common genre of the period and a kind of musical meditation on the theological essence of a chorale's text. At the heart of the Lutheran faith was the belief that the individual could attain salvation from God directly, without the need of priestly intervention in the confessional box. The singing of chorales in the vernacular to secular dance tunes by Protestant congregations at the Reformation was central to this seismic shift — a radical development after centuries of Latin plainchant sung by clergy on behalf of the man on the street. By 1739, the chorales Bach sets in this collection would have been instantly recognisable by everyone who heard them.

*Clavier-Übung III* comprises an opening *Prelude* and closing *Fugue* and chorales for the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, followed by



St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, at the time of Bach, 1723



Track	Time
1. Prelude	00:00
2. Kyrie	00:00
3. Gloria	00:00
4. Mass	00:00
5. Credo	00:00
6. Sanctus	00:00
7. Agnus Dei	00:00
8. Fugue	00:00



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a series of chorales based on Martin Luther's Catechism, a summary of the principals of Christian faith as Luther saw it. Published in 1529 in two versions: 'Large' and 'Small', Luther's large version was intended for the instruction of clergymen and fathers raising their families. The small version was meant as a kind of Sunday School teaching aid to be used by children. The language of each is appropriate for the intended reader and is largely in 'question and answer' format. After the Bible, it formed, and is still used today as the primary summation of the Lutheran faith.

Luther's Catechism is divided into five sections:

- Ten Commandments
- Creed
- Lord's Prayer
- Baptism
- Communion

which Bach mirrors in *Clavier-Übung III*, with the addition of a Penitential section between Baptism and Communion.

Bach offers paired settings of chorales for each of these six sections — mirroring Luther's large and small Catechism: one intricate and large scale chorale prelude with pedals complimented by a more intimate, short setting for the hands to play alone. Bach never allows the shorter settings to be a lesser cousin to their seemingly more dominant pair. In the case of the *Aus tiefer Not* pair, I always feel the shorter of the two cuts deeper than the first.

Here is a bird's eye view of *Clavier-Übung III*:

Opening Prelude	Praeludium in Organo Pleno BWV 552i	Three national styles
Kyrie-Christe-Kyrie	Kyrie — Christe — Kyrie BWV 669—674	Two settings (large & small)
Gloria in excelsis	Allein Gott in der Höh sei ehr BWV 675—677	Three settings
<i>Catechism Chorales</i> Ten Commandments	Dies sind die Heiligen zehen gebot BWV 678 & 679	Two settings (large & small)
Creed	Wir Glauben in einen Gott BWV 680* & 681	Two settings (large & small)
Lords Prayer	Vater unser im Himmelreich BWV 682 & 683	Two settings (large & small)
Baptism	Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam BWV 684 & 685	Two settings (large & small)
Penitence	Aus tiefer Not schrei' ich zu dir BWV 686* & 687	Two settings (large & small)
Communion	Jesus Christus, unser Heiland BWV 688 & 689	Two settings (large & small)
Four Duets	Four Duetti BWV 802—805	Two settings (large & small)
Closing Fugue	Fuga a 5 pro Organo Pleno BWV 552ii	Three distinct sections





The six *Catechism Chorales* are neatly divided into two subgroups indicated by the dotted line. The large scale chorale setting of the middle chorale in each subgroup, indicated by the asterisk, is set for *organo pleno* (full organ), Bach here offering important stylistic architecture to the collection.

The total number of pieces in the collection is twenty-seven, the midway point being the fourteenth piece, *Wir Glauben* BWV 681, a miniature French Overture with regal dotted rhythms. This stylistic detail is part of a wider compositional plan: Bach writes in the *French style* at similar midway points in all of the other three parts of his *Clavier-Übung* series: French Overtures mark the beginning of the fourth of the Six Partitas, the opening movement of the French Overture BWV 831 (in *Clavier-Übung II*) and the fifteenth of the thirty *Goldberg Variations* (*Clavier-Übung IV*). The same is true of the sixth (out of eleven)

*Contrapunctus in stylo franchise* of the Art of Fugue BWV 1080.



Portrait of Bach  
Elias Gottlob Haussmann

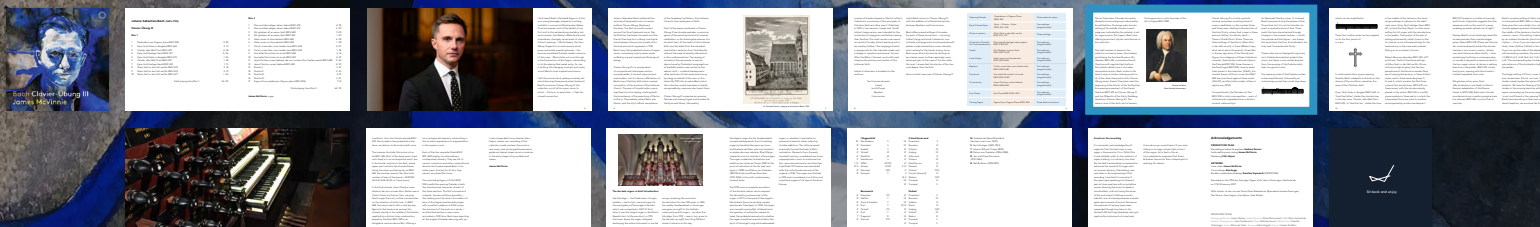
*Clavier-Übung III* is a richly symbolic musical ecosystem involving a kind of macro-meditation on the number three and three-ness, relating to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, where God is seen in three persons: Father, Son & Holy Spirit — Three in One & One in Three. There are three settings of the Gloria (*Allein Gott in der Höh sei ehr*) in three different keys, all of which are in three parts, three flats in the key signature of the *Prelude* and *Fugue*, two subgroups of three Catechism chorales, three distinct national styles in the *Prelude* BWV 552i, three themes in the final *Fugue* BWV 552ii, twenty-seven total pieces in the collection (3x3x3), the chorale theme of *Christ, unser Herr* BWV 684 has nine times against three voices (9x3=27), and the total number of bars is eighty-one (27x3).

Compositionally the *Prelude in E-Flat* BWV 552i is richly cosmopolitan — each of its three main ingredients has a distinct musical national style.

As Alexander Fiseisky notes, 'it is indeed Bach's purpose to sing the praises of the Triune God, but it is not his intention to paint a musical picture of God. Three parts that are characterized through changes in the musical texture — in both the prelude and the fugue — are always the same God, the One, the Indivisible, the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity.'

These notes are not designed to give any sort of detailed analytical guide to the music, but there is one central element from the opening of the *Prelude* which feels too good to miss.

The opening notes of the *Prelude* contain a downward flourish, followed by an octave leap up and then small step down:

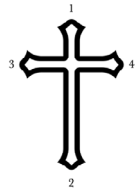




which can be simplified to:



These four outline notes can be mapped on to the four points of a cross.



In what seems like a joyous opening flourish, Bach catapults us directly to the drama of the crucifixion narrative, the apex of the Christian faith.

*Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit* BWV 669, to 'God the Father', states the chorale tune in the top voice. *Christe, aller Welt Trost* BWV 670, to 'God the Son', states the tune

in the middle of the texture in the tenor range, perhaps an allusion to the adult male voice. *Kyrie, Gott Heiliger Geist* BWV 671, to God the Holy Ghost, is a five-voice setting for full organ with the chorale tune in the pedals. The smaller of the pair of settings does exactly what it says on the tin: shorter more intimate settings for the hands alone, in this case each prelude fitting on to one sheet of music.

Robert Quinney describes BWV 675–677 as follows: 'Each of the three settings of *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr* (Alone to God on high be glory, the German paraphrase of the Gloria in excelsis Deo) are of varying dimensions, in three distinct styles, and in three ascending keys: F, G, and A, which are also the first three notes of the chorale tune. BWV 675 is in three voices, with the chorale melody placed in the centre. BWV 676 is a softly joyous prelude in three parts, in which the tune passes from one voice to another, accompanied by ornate counterpoint.

BWV 677 passes in a matter of seconds, and its lack of gravitas suggests that the sequence ends on the crest of a wave, receding upwards, almost out of sight.'

Perhaps Bach's most ravishingly beautiful chorale prelude, *Dies sind die heiligen zehen Gebot* BWV 678 (These are the holy ten commandments) states the chorale melody in two voices in canon, (where one voice follows another strictly – here symbolising God's law in a baroque play on words) underneath a sensuous duet in the two upper voices, all above a walking bass line in the pedals. BWV 679 is lively and joyous, opening with the chorale's insistent repeated tonic note.

*Wir glauben all an einen Gott* (We all believe in one God) is Luther's German adaptation of the Nicene Creed. In BWV 680, Bach sets intricate counterpoint over a walking angular bass line whereas BWV 681, is a mini French overture.

Bach's complex setting of *Vater unser im Himmelreich* BWV 682 is in five parts: three play their own stately trio, with the chorale appearing almost unheard, in the middle of the texture in two further voices in canon. This setting is dominated by an insistent lombardic (short-long) rhythm – it's as if you can hear echoed *Vater, Vater* (Father, Father) in the music. If you line up the notes of the alphabet with ascending numbers, the sum total of J S BACH (J=9, S=18, B=2, A=1, C=3, H=8) is 41. The corresponding bar contains the sole instance of this lombardic rhythm in the pedals.

The larger setting of *Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam* (Christ, our Lord, to Jordan came) evokes the scene of Christ's baptism. We hear the flowing of the River Jordan in the running bass line with the upper voices playing the same angular 'cross' motif heard in the opening Prelude; Bach here reminding us that even at Jesus's baptism, we are never far from his





Samuel Clever (1809-1871)  
organist

Track information table with columns for track number, title, and duration.



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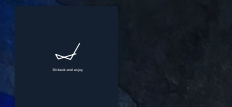


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crucifixion. As in the *Christe* prelude BWV 670, the chorale is here presented in the tenor, an allusion to the male adult voice.

The massive *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* BWV 686 (Out of the deep have I cried unto thee) is in six contrapuntal parts: four in the hands, and two in the feet, whose upper part contains the chorale theme. Using the same numbering key as BWV 682, the number seventy five (the total number of bars of the piece) = ELEISON (5+11+5+9+18+14+13) or 'have mercy'.

In the final chorale, *Jesus Christus unser Heiland, der von uns den Zorn Gottes wand* ('Jesus Christ our Saviour Turn, we pray, God's anger from us'), Luther concentrates on the salvation of sinful man. In BWV 688, the music starts with a wild zig-zag figure for the hands and we hear the chorale melody in the middle of the texture supplied by a distinct stop combination, played by the feet. BWV 689 is an altogether more sombre affair, offering a

rich contrapuntal tapestry, culminating in the chorale's appearance in augmentation in the soprano voice.

Each of the four exquisite Duets BWV 802–805 display an extraordinary contrapuntal wizardry. They are full of canons, inversions and other compositional devices which preoccupied Bach in his latter years. And yet for all this, they remain very beautiful music.

The concluding *Fugue in E-Flat* BWV 552ii recalls the opening Prelude in both the structure and character of each of the three sections. The first is broad and majestic, the second flows gracefully – the midway point (in terms of numbers of bars of the fugue) spectacularly aligns with a perfect cadence in B-flat major, the dominant of the work as a whole – and the third section is even more animated in 12/8 time, Bach here depicting all the angels of Heaven dancing with joy.

I owe a huge debt to my teacher Hans Fagius, whose own recording of this collection made me hear the music in new ways, and whose gentle persuasive guidance helped shape me as a musician in the early stages of my professional career.

**James McVinnie**



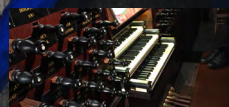
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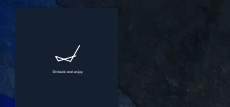


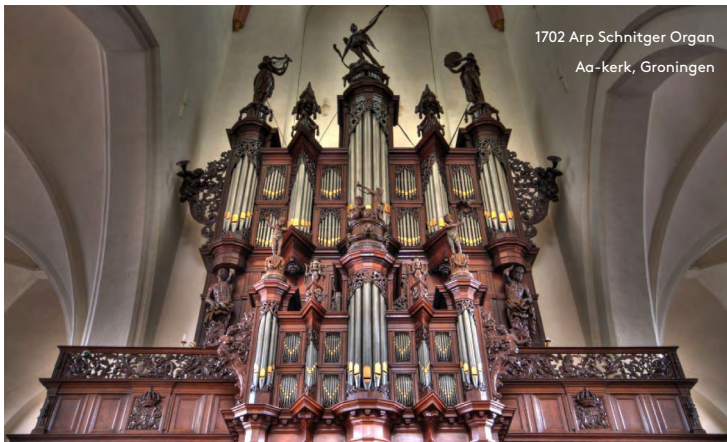
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1702 Arp Schnitger Organ  
Aa-kerk, Groningen



**The Aa-kerk organ: a brief introduction**

Arp Schnitger — the Stradivarius of organ builders — built a four manual organ for the west gallery of Groningen’s Aa-kerk which was completed in 1697. At that time, it was the largest organ in the Dutch Republic but its life was short: in 1710, the tower above the organ collapsed, destroying the entire instrument in one fell

swoop, rendering the enormous Aa-kerk silent for over 100 years. In 1814, the nearby Academiekerk in Groningen was given as a gift to the Catholic community and its organ — another fine Schnitger from 1702 — was in turn given to the Aa-kerk as a gift from King Willelm I, where it remains to this day.

Schnitger’s organ for the Academiekerk incorporated pipework from its existing organ by Hendrick Hermans van Loon and Andreas de Mare, and was housed in an elaborate case made by Allart Meijer, carpenter and city architect of Groningen. The organ underwent alterations and additions by Johannes Timpe (1815 at the point of relocation to the Aa-kerk and again in 1830) and Petrus van Oeckelen (1857/8) & Jan and Klaas Doornbos (1919–1946) in line with contemporary musical taste.

The 1970s saw a complete renovation of the Aa-kerk interior which required the dismantling and removal of the organ in 1977 to the quire of Groningen’s Martinikerk (home to another equally spectacular Schnitger). In 1990, the organ was moved home by Reil of Heerdé and the question of restoration reared its head; fierce debate ensued as to whether the organ should be reconstructed in the spirit of Schnitger’s original Academiekerk

organ, or whether it was better to preserve its eclectic state, retaining its later additions. The latter proposal eventually formed the basis of Reil’s restoration. Elements from the early twentieth century, considered now to be inappropriate in such an instrument as this, were removed and a new Schnitger style Pedal 16’ Posaune was reinstated after the unfortunate removal of the original in 1928. The organ was finished in 2011 and is considered one of the most important organs of its type in Northern Europe.



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**I Rugpositief**

16'	Quintadena	S
8'	Praestant	S
8'	Gedekt	S
4'	Octaaf	M
4'	Roerfluit	M
2'	Gemshoorn	S
1 1/2'	Sifflet	M/T/R
IV-V	Scherp	S/T/R
8'	Dulciaan	M/S
8'	Trompet	T

**II Hoofdmanuaal**

16'	Praestant	S
16'	Bourdon	O
8'	Octaav	M
8'	Holpijp	M
8'	Salicional	O
4'	Octaav	M
4'	Nachthoorn	O
2 2/3'	Nazard	D
2'	Octaaf	M/S
V	Cornet (discant)	O
III-V	Mixtuur	O/D
16'	Trompet	O
8'	Trompet	S

**Bovenwerk**

8'	Praestant	T/S
8'	Halfluit	T
8'	Viola di Gamba	T
4'	Fluit	T
4'	Octaaf	T/S
2'	Fluit	T
1'	Flageolet	D
8'	Clarinet	T/O

**Pedaal**

8'	Praestant	S
16'	Bourdon	M
16'	Subbas	O
10 2/3'	Quint	O
8'	Holpijp	O/D
4'	Octaaf	M
16'	Bazuin	R
8'	Trompet	S
4'	Trompet	S

**M** Andreas de Mare II/Hendrick

Hermann van Loon (1679)

**S** Arp Schnitger (1699-1702)

**T** Johann William Timpe (1830)

**O** Petrus van Oeckelen (1856-1858)

**D** Jan and Klaas Doornbos (1919-1946)

**R** Reil Brothers (1990/2011)



**A note on the recording**

It is universally acknowledged by all organists that the best stop on any organ is the acoustic it's in. Whilst this is undoubtedly unfair to the noble art of organ building, it is certainly true that the Aa-kerk's extraordinary reverberation enhances the sound of its organ with an unusual vibrancy. Painstaking care was taken in the engineering of this recording; I wanted it to sound as if the pipes were speaking into listeners' ears at close quarters with a crystalline sound, allowing the music to speak in minute detail, without losing the sense of the instrument's thrilling acoustic habitat—one of intense presence and also great spaciousness of sound. Numerous microphones of varying types were suspended through tiny holes in the Aa-kerk's 85 foot high plastered ceiling to capture the instrument at close hand.

It sounds as you would hear it if you were sitting on a magic carpet right in front of the organ, forty feet in the air. I am indebted to engineers Paul Evans & Andrew Groves for their intrepid spirit in realising this dream.

**Acknowledgements**

**PRODUCTION TEAM**

Recording producer & engineer **Andrew Groves**  
 Audio editing and mixing **James McVinnie**  
 Mastering **Fritz Myers**

**ARTWORK**

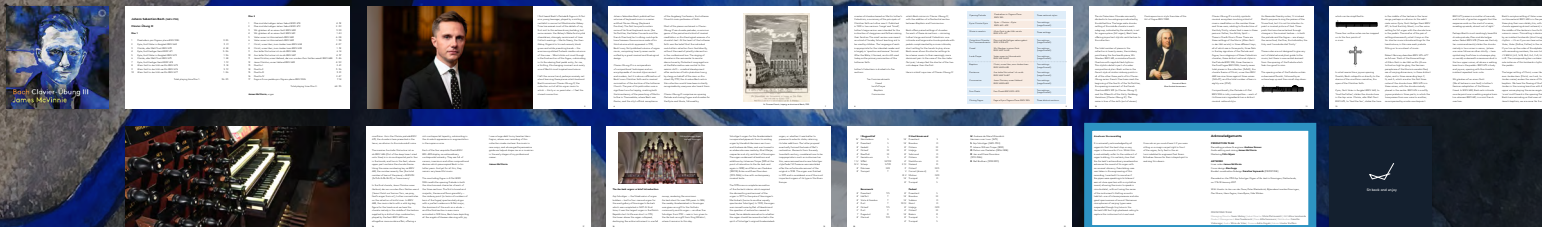
Liner notes **James McVinnie**  
 Cover design **Alex Sopp**  
 Booklet coordination & design **Karolina Szymanik** (PENTATONE)

*Recorded on the 1702 Arp Schnitger Organ of Aa-kerk in Groningen, Netherlands, on 17 & 18 January 2017.*

*With thanks: to Jan van der Touw, Peter Westerbrink, Bijzondere Locaties Groningen, Paul Evans, Hans Fagius, Liam Byrne, Vida Wickes.*

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Sit back and enjoy



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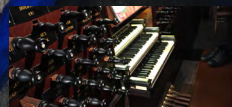
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