



Johann
Sebastian
BACH
keyboard
works

JILL CROSSLAND
piano

Partita No. 1
English Suite No. 2
Toccata in D major
Chromatic Fantasia & Fugue

 **diversions**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750): Keyboard Works

Toccata in D major, BWV 912		13:20
1	I Introduction (Presto)	0:43
2	II Allegro	2:38
3	III Adagio	6:35
4	IV Fugue	3:22
English Suite No. 2 in A minor, BWV 807		24:13
5	I Prelude	4:43
6	II Allemande	4:47
7	III Courante	1:48
8	IV Sarabande	4:39
9	V Bourrées 1 & 2	4:28
10	VI Gigue	3:45
Partita No. 1 in B flat major, BWV 825		21:37
11	I Praeludium	2:45
12	II Allemande	4:25
13	III Courante	3:16
14	IV Sarabande	6:03
15	V Menuets 1 & 2	3:10
16	VI Gigue	1:56
Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor, BWV 903		16:06
17	I Fantasia	9:21
18	II Fugue	6:44
Total duration		75:18

Bach Keyboard Works: The Music

The four works on this disc exemplify the two sides of Bach's compositional journey – a continual experimentation, aggregation and integration of different European styles, and the evolution of an entirely personal synthesis.

The toccatas come early in Bach's output (the D major was likely written in 1707) and clearly show the influence of Buxtehude and of North German organ music, in particular the free, improvisatory, *Stylus fantasticus*. But they are *manualiter*, that is, they have no pedal part. The D major makes both characteristics explicit – its very opening is based on the pedal part of one of Bach's organ preludes, BWV532, and the entire work is notable for the original and florid transition passages. In one copy, one such passage is even marked *con discrezione* ("as the performer wishes"). There is evidence that Bach thought of the toccatas as a collection, though he never explicitly bundled them as such. The D major, with its alternating fast and slow sections, is extrovert and cheerful, but still demanding and innovative in containing a fugue in a remote key (F sharp minor) and requiring a sure virtuoso touch ('Toccata' literally means 'something touched' and would therefore imply a piece with demanding technical dimension).

After the toccatas, Bach wrote two sets of keyboard suites, this time drawing on a characteristic French form – multi-movement collections of pieces in dance rhythms. The English Suites are characterised by an elaborated prelude- that to No. 2 may well be the most virtuosic– while their French Suite counterparts have none. We have no certain idea why the Suites are entitled 'English' and indeed the 'French' set appears to have been so named simply to distinguish them from the English set. The title seems to have been a nickname used from the 1750s, whether (as recounted by Bach's biographer Forkel, but with no evidence) they were written for an English nobleman, or whether because they bear some resemblance to the keyboard works of Dieupart, a composer based in London. The title is given some authenticity because it appears on a copy owned by Bach's son Johann Christian. After the prominent Prelude, the Suite has the usual sequence of dances (Allemande-Courante-Sarabande) before ending with Bourrée and Gigue.

Bach's first Partita is original and a landmark – Bach's official Opus 1, the first work he thought worthy of publication. We know that Bach closely followed the music being composed elsewhere in Europe, and the activity of his great contemporary Handel was no exception. Bach's keyboard partitas are in some measure a response to Handel's *Eight Great Suites* (we think Bach had seen

these by 1722) and Bach offered the first partita in 1726, advertised in a Leipzig newspaper, to initiate a subscription series. Partita 1 is strikingly fluid and winning, much more transparent and easier to appreciate than its successors – perhaps partly, then, for commercial reasons. Its prelude is notably lyrical, its melodic subjects are accessible and the greatest technical demands are reserved for the final gigue. This last movement, which requires hand-crossing, but on one manual, also alludes to the same technique in French music, as introduced by Couperin and Rameau, but for two manuals. Again, there is the suite-like sequence of dances, with the penultimate movement an innocent minuet.

In 1879, a manuscript of the first Partita was found with a dedicatory poem, apparently by Bach himself, and offering the work to the Prince of Saxony-Anhalt. The poem compares the ‘first-born’ (i.e. first published) work to the ruler’s first-born son, whose birth the dedication celebrates. We do not know if the poem is authentic, but some have seen the Partita’s stately Sarabande as a specific allusion to nobility as a theme.

Bach was always mindful of both the academic and performative side to his music. The six keyboard partitas were Part 1 of a comprehensive ‘Keyboard Practice’ (*Clavierübung*) that covered both harpsichord and organ and was in its own way a survey of European styles.

By the time we reach the Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue, written around 1717, but revised over the next ten years, we see a perfect identity of emotional intensity, harmonic imagination and formal technique in the writing. Instead of sectional writing in the toccatas or separate movements, this work allows the listener no respite from a continuous emotional involvement. It is at once more improvisatory and a large-scale structure, flowing as if in a single gigantic breath.

The Chromatic Fantasia wears its heart on its sleeve, and that appealed to the *Sturm und Drang* Romantic generations during the period after Bach’s death, when the composer fell into obscurity. It was therefore the one work that retained its popularity and was known continuously, despite never having been published. Forkel remarks that there is no other piece of Bach like it, and Mendelssohn was prominent in reviving the work as a performer in concert in the 1840s. The Fantasia begins with a toccata-like section, and spins off into improvisations and recitative of various kinds. The fugue builds to a gigantic conclusion. The name ‘Chromatic’ is again not Bach’s choice, but a nickname, and refers predominantly to the fantasia.

Ying Chang

Bach Keyboard Works: The Performer

Jill Crossland is from West Yorkshire and studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, and later in Vienna with Paul Badura-Skoda and Sally Sargent. She now pursues an active concert and recording career.

Jill has played regularly on the South Bank and at the Wigmore Hall in London and at the Sage Gateshead; her appearances have also included Bridgewater Hall, St George's Bristol, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Vienna Musikverein, Vienna Konzerthaus, Cadogan and Fairfield Halls and the National Concert Hall, Dublin. She has been a member of the Arts Council England Musicians in Residence scheme, and she has appeared on radio and TV, including live and recorded broadcasts on BBC Radios 3 and 4 and has featured in the Classic FM Hall of Fame



Jill's recordings include works by Bach, Handel, Scarlatti, Mozart and Beethoven for the Divine Art and Diversions labels, as well as the Bach Goldberg Variations on Warner Classics and works by Rameau and the complete Bach "Well-tempered Clavier" for Signum Classics. Her recordings have received high critical praise on both sides of the Atlantic. Among many critical plaudits, her Bach Well-tempered Clavier has been described as "among the most satisfying recent releases of [his] keyboard music" (Rob Cowan *BBC Radio 3*) and "rank[ing] with the finest previous versions, altogether a remarkable achievement" (*Penguin Guide to CDs*) and her Beethoven as "magnetic" and "delightful" by *American Record Guide*.

For more information see www.jillcrossland.com and see performances on her YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/c/JillCrosslandPiano>

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