

Total performance time: approximately 125', including an interval of 20 minutes

Angela Hewitt

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Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

From Das wohltemperierte Klavier, Book 2 (by 1742)

Please note that these works are played through without any break 55'

5. Prelude & Fugue in D	BWV 874	9'
6. Prelude & Fugue in D minor	BWV 875	4'
7. Prelude & Fugue in E flat	BWV 876	5'
8. Prelude & Fugue in E flat minor	BWV 877	9'
9. Prelude & Fugue in E	BWV 878	8'
10. Prelude & Fugue in E minor	BWV 879	7'
11. Prelude & Fugue in F	BWV 880	5'
12. Prelude & Fugue in F minor	BWV 881	7'

INTERVAL

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Sonata No.3 in F minor, Op.5 (1853) 40'

i. Allegro maestoso

ii. Andante: Andante espressivo – Andante molto

iii. Scherzo: Allegro energico – trio

iv. Intermezzo (Rückblick): Andante molto

v. Finale: Allegro moderato ma rubato

Johann Sebastian Bach's famous collections of preludes and fugues, created 'for the use and profit of the musical youth desirous of learning and for the pastime of those already skilled in this study,' were completed in two volumes around 20 years apart. The first was ready by c.1722, modelled on an earlier chromatic sequence of pieces in the same form by fellow German composer Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer – though Bach's preludes and fugues were both more expansive and took in every single key. (Fischer omitted the crunchiest, by contemporary tuning standards.) Bach's second book was finished in about 1742, though it has its roots in earlier work. In both volumes the main selling point, aside from the pedagogical purposes Bach himself stated on the title page, was the fact that new methods of keyboard tuning had made it possible to include numbers in each and every major and minor key whilst avoiding the so-called 'wolf' notes that had been part and parcel of earlier tuning systems. Broadly speaking, the new approach ensured that an instrument was tuned in such a way that every single semitone – that is, adjacent notes on the keyboard – was about the same 'size' in terms of pitch difference, which had not previously been the case.

The apparent restrictiveness of Bach's set-up – pre-determined key structure, pre-determined piece types per key – actually yielded a tremendously varied and imaginative approach to the potential that each prelude and fugue could offer. The D major Prelude is full of joyful fanfare; the D minor galloping and virtuosic; the E flat minor a two-part invention; the F major a floating, organ-like piece. In the final Prelude we hear, in F minor, Bach even tips his hat to newer musical fashions of the kind promoted by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel: the so-called *Empfindsamer Stil* ('sensitive style'), full of graceful, sighing chords in the right hand.

And then there are the fugues, usually in three or four parts, ringing with tolling bells (D major), creeping chromatically across the keyboard (D minor) or bursting with forthrightness and grand posturing (E minor). Bach returned to his model of J.C.F. Fischer in the E major Fugue – a piece that the late 19th-century British composer Hubert Parry called 'one of the most perfectly beautiful and the most perfect as a work of art, whether judged from the point of view of texture, closeness and coherence of treatment of the subjects, or of form'.

These Preludes and Fugues were already well-known to the young **Johannes Brahms** when he turned up on the doorstep of Robert and Clara Schumann on 30 September 1853. Soon after Brahms's arrival, Schumann's composition pupil Albert Dietrich recalled, 'Schumann came up to me before the commencement of one of the choral society rehearsals with a mysterious air and pleased smile. "Someone is here," he said, "of whom we shall one day hear all sorts of wonderful things; his name is Johannes Brahms."'

Brahms was just 20 years old when he made this journey to Düsseldorf; but he had already composed several substantial instrumental pieces, as well as a number of songs. His current work-in-progress at the time of his visit to the Schumanns was a Piano Sonata in F minor – his third such work – which he played in its entirety to Robert and Clara 'aus dem Kopf' ('from the head', i.e. from memory, without the aid of a written score) on 2 November 1853. Thanks to Robert's enthusiastic advocacy and public support of his talent, Brahms was able to begin publishing his works, and after tinkering with this particular piece for another few months, it was ready for the world by February 1854, issued as his Op.5.

The Sonata is littered with assorted literary and musical allusions. It bears the marked influences of Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann himself, in a mode of pianism that perhaps seems more reminiscent in its muscular virtuosity of Liszt than of those later piano works of Brahms with which we are now so familiar. But everywhere there is contrast: subtle shifts of mood, tempo, tonal areas and rhythmic devices carry the texture from dense fistfuls of chords into *quasi*-chorales, lyrical melodies, closely imitative counterpoint and, in the Scherzo, a witty reworking of the finale of Mendelssohn's C minor Piano Trio in dazzling triple-time. The Finale's second section, after the initial statement of the rondo theme, begins with the note sequence 'F–A–E' – a reference to the motto of Brahms's close friend Joseph Joachim, the talented violinist who had engineered his introduction to the Schumanns ('Frei aber einsam' – 'Free but lonely'). And the second movement bears a rather more direct literary reference in the form of a poetic epigram by C.O. Sternau (the pseudonym of Otto Julius Inckermann, a contemporary of the composer):

Der Abend dämmert, das Mondlicht scheint
Da sind zwei Herzen in Liebe vereint
Und halten sich selig umfängen.

The evening draws in, the moonlight shines,
Two hearts are united in love
And hold themselves surrounded in bliss.

Perhaps the most intriguing movement in the Sonata is the fourth – a 'Rückblick' (roughly translatable as 'Looking back', or 'Remembrance'). Over the course of just two pages, Brahms seems to recall shapes and fragments of previous movements without ever referring to them directly. The sparse texture, occasionally angular harmonies and unusual title seem particularly reminiscent of late Schumann; and this bravura piece was to be followed by a solo piano composition quite explicitly in homage to his mentor: the *Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann*, Op.9.

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