

**CMSCVA**

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the beauty of few.



# Carsten Schmidt

*Bach to Basics*

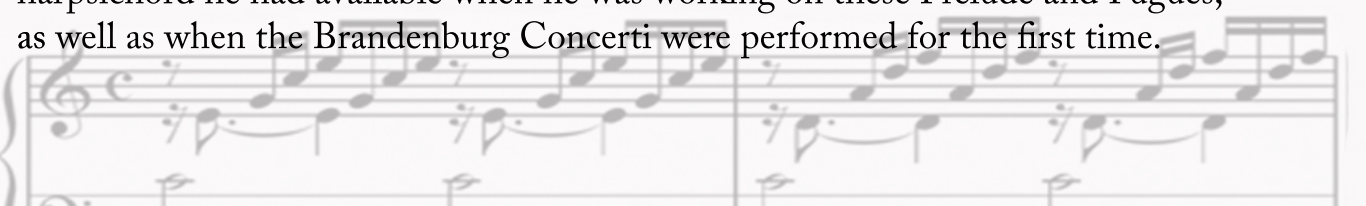
*By Eric Price*

**You are performing book one of the Well-Tempered Clavier, which is a book of preludes and fugues in all 24 major and minor keys written by Johann Sebastian Bach. This is essentially a musical marathon, not only physically but mentally as well; how do you prepare yourself to sustain such a focused state for so long?**

Basically you try to practice a lot leading up to the concert, and also try to play through big chunks of it in one sitting. And, yes, stamina is a pretty big requirement here.

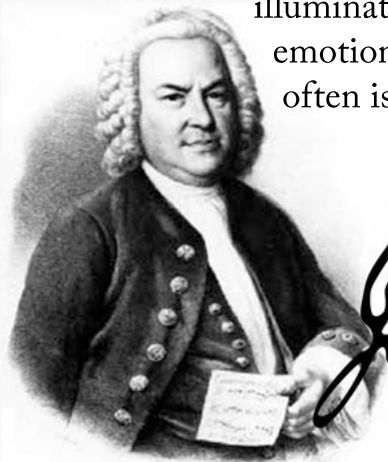
**Your upcoming performance of The Well-Tempered Clavier will be performed on a harpsichord that is a reproduction of Bach's own instrument. What makes his particular harpsichord different from other harpsichords?**

It would be false advertisement to say that the instrument I'm using is a copy of Bach's own. He likely owned a fair number during his life, and as far as we know none of them survived. The one I'm playing in this concert is a copy of a German instrument by Michael Mietke, made in Berlin around 1710. Mietke was the royal harpsichord maker. The original is now in Schloss Charlottenburg in Berlin, and my copy was made two years ago by a German builder, Christoph Kern. We know that Bach was sent by his employer, the prince of Koethen, to pick up a Mietke instrument in Berlin for the court. So this would have been the kind of harpsichord he had available when he was working on these Prelude and Fugues, as well as when the Brandenburg Concerti were performed for the first time.



**Some of the pieces in The Well-Tempered Clavier get their texture from up to four voices being played simultaneously but at the same time are independent in of themselves. When performed on a piano the artist can use dynamics to put emphasis on a particular voice, but on a harpsichord this isn't possible. How do you deal with this issue when playing on a harpsichord?**

Actually, while it certainly challenging to play these pieces on the harpsichord, I find it much more satisfying than on the piano. It is precisely the dynamic limitations that make you seek out ways to create textures and expressivity. It is also not true that the harpsichord is not capable of dynamics, it is just that they are achieved by very different means and in a more subtle way. I often hear Bach playing on the piano that I find quite odd, exactly because the dynamic possibilities are used in ways that do not, to me, illuminate the structure of the pieces, nor their rhetorical and emotional nature. Doesn't have to be that way, but on the piano it often is...



*Johann Sebastian Bach.*

**Pieces from The Well-Tempered Clavier are a staple in the repertoire of up and coming pianists. They teach many valuable lessons in keyboard playing such as voicing, finger independence, and tonal theory. Even though you are a very experienced player, do you still find yourself learning new things from these pieces?**

Yes, every time I sit down with them I feel like I'm getting a lesson from Bach himself, in how to play the keyboard, how to be expressive, how to understand music, and sometimes even in theology.

**If you could take Johann Sebastian Bach out to lunch and have a conversation with him, where would you take him to eat and what would be the first question you ask him?**

I have a feeling we would not have such an easy time finding a place we both liked, I have a feeling he was pretty much a meat and potato kind of a guy (and I'm not). But I would ask him if we should have a beer. And think he would say yes.

