

Harpsichord & fortepiano

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Letters to the Editor

BACK TO BACH—AGAIN

From Dr H A Kellner, Paris.

Sir, Davitt Moroney, keyboard virtuoso, musicologist and editor (such as *Die Kunst der Fuge* for Henle), had given introductions to his recitals of the WTC at the Wigmore Hall in London. However, an informal talk addressing the listeners of a concert, introducing a recital, cannot benefit directly from any literature published on the topics under consideration, as it is impossible adequately to quote such work verbally at such lectures. On the contrary, a written paper on those topics cannot be considered as scholarly, or even acceptable, without a reasonable number of well chosen references to publications relevant to the subject. These obvious facts are the cause of the very severe shortcomings of Mr Daw's contribution.

My observation concerns Mr Daw's use of the term *wohltemperirt*. Concerning the sequence of performance, Mr Daw writes:

Colin Tilney . . . has also performed the two Parts cyclically through the keys . . . It would be very easy indeed to retune either equally or in some more 'perfect' tuning . . . Systematic retuning as one progresses through a cycle of fifths is a quick, comparatively easy matter . . . [my italics].

Thus, if the WTC were not to be performed simply sequentially, with which piece would Mr Daw begin, and in exactly what initial tuning? I invite Mr Daw to specify which group of pieces should follow next, and again, together with the accurate specification of the temperament, until all twenty-four pairs of preludes and fugues are exhausted. Such an indication, be it only one concrete, completely specified and defined example, would appear to me to be highly interesting—to stimulate musical execution and performance practice.

Furthermore, I invite Mr Daw to furnish the following four definitions which would appear to

me indispensable for understanding what the author spoke about and intended to tackle.

- What does, for a temperament, "essentially equal" mean?
- What does "essentially equal throughout the system" mean?
- What does "a temperament is very close to another one" mean? Here it would be necessary to obtain a way for a numerical quantification of such a statement.
- What does "fine tuning" signify?

Finally Mr Daw concludes that the title of Bach's autograph, *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, in the most definitive source is appropriate but that spelling variants have no real significance. See, however, my article "Le tempérament inégal de Werckmeister/Bach et l'alphabet numérique de Henk Dieben", *Revue de musicologie* 80/2, pp. 283–298.

Yours sincerely,
HERBERT ANTON KELLNER

Stephen Daw replies:

My article was designed to remind performers and listeners of a number of things about Bach's *Wohltemperirte Clavier* which tend to be forgotten. One of these is that it is impossible to prove—and hence to know—what Bach meant by 'wohltemperirt'.

Those who consider matters only from the point of view of modern instruments such as the piano tend to assume that one single tuning for the whole '48' is implied: this is not necessarily the case.

Retuning the harpsichord is necessary during any reasonably long recital and this also tends to be true if the clavichord or early pianoforte is used. Why should it be retuned to the same tuning? There is barely any evidence at all that Bach or his contemporaries really did play even Book I complete. Although it may be usual for musicians of our own time to expect one single tuning, simple experience shows that when tuning early instruments between pieces played successively in, say, G major and F minor, it is very

tempting to tune together in such a way as to imply a mixture of pure and differently tempered intervals within the two keys, designed not simply to give each key character but additionally so as to make each fit precisely the character of the music being played. This takes the tuner into the realm of interpretation, but there is nothing wrong in that: in the time of Bach any instrument—with the exception of the organ—was regularly tuned by the player and the finer points of tuning were a part of interpretation, even on fretted instruments like lutes and viols.

Tuning is indeed a highly complex issue. Reference was made to performance practice because this area is really a *personal* matter for thinking and listening musicians: it is one where Bach seems to have expected the player to exercise some choice and to do so with sensitivity and care, and for those to whom such considerations are important today it has become a subject not simply of musicological but also of musical significance. In discussing matters of learning about performance practice, any attempt to penetrate beyond uncertain fact into definition of an area of choice is far from irrelevant or misguided.

BUMPS IN THE NIGHT

From Dr Peter Katin HonDMus, Croydon, Surrey

Sir, I was most interested to read Declan Deuchar's review (April 1995) of my recording of the Schubert *Impromptus* for the Athene label.

However, might I blow my own trumpet by pointing out that whatever Mr Deuchar took to be 'an obvious page-turn' must be some other kind of noise, as I recorded both sets of *Impromptus* from memory.

Yours faithfully,
PETER KATIN

Oops! We take your word for it, Dr Katin. What was the noise, I wonder?—Ed.