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# J.S. BACH

## KUNST DER FUGE



Pieter-Jan Belder  
*harpsichord & clavichord*

## Johann Sebastian Bach 1685-1750

### Kunst der Fuge BWV1080

CD1	59'48	CD2	58'15
1. Contrapunctus 1	3'43	1. Canon alla Duodecima in	
2. Contrapunctus 2	3'16	Contrapuncto alla Quinta	3'53
3. Contrapunctus 3	3'22	2. Contrapunctus inversus	
4. Contrapunctus 4	5'42	12(1) a 4	3'05
5. Canon alla Ottava	4'18	3. Contrapunctus inversus	
6. Contrapunctus 5	3'46	12(2) a 4	3'12
7. Contrapunctus 6. a 4 in		4. Contrapunctus <i>inversus</i>	
Style Francese	4'55	13(1) a 3	2'23
8. Contrapunctus 7. a 4 per		5. Contrapunctus 13 <i>inversus</i>	
Augmentationem et		13(2) a3	2'27
Diminutionem	4'56	6. Canon per Augmentationem	
9. Canon alla Decima <i>in</i>		in Contrario Motu	3'55
Contrapuncto alla Terza	5'16	7. Contrapunctus 14	
10. Contrapunctus 8. a 3	5'49	( <i>Fuga a 3 Soggetti</i> )	8'44
11. Contrapunctus 9. a 4 alla		8. Contrapunctus 13(1)	
Duodecima	2'54	a due Cembali	2'27
12. Contrapunctus 10. a 4		9. Contrapunctus 13(2)	
alla Decima	4'52	a due Cembali	2'22
13. Contrapunctus 11. a 4	6'53		

### 4 Duetti BWV802-805

10. Duetto in E minor	2'14
11. Duetto in F	3'13
12. Duetto in G	2'31
13. Duetto in A minor	3'04

### 2 Ricercars from Musikalisches Opfer BWV1079

14. Ricercar a 3	5'56
15. Ricercar a 6	8'39

Pieter-Jan Belder *harpsichord & clavichord*  
*Harpsichord by Titus Crijnen 2013, after Blanchet.*  
*Clavichord by Geert Karman after Friederici*

Gerard de Wit *harpsichord* (CD2 tr. 8 & 9)  
*Titus Crijnen 2014, after Ruckers*

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Recording: Jan Willem van Willigen

Editing: Pieter Jan Belder, Jan Willem van Willigen and Peter Arts

Cover: The manuscript of the last Fugue, which has never been finished due to Bach's death

Artist photo: © Pieter-Jan Belder

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While the publication of *The Art of Fugue* (*Die Kunst der Fuge* BWV1080) did not occur until after the death of J S Bach, it is representative of a series of works that were written during the final years of the composer's life that demonstrate a preoccupation with canonic and fugal polyphony. 1742 marked the release of the *Goldberg Variations* (BWV 988), which contained nine strict canons, and two further publications came five years later: *The Musical Offering* (BWV 1079) with its nine canons in varying forms as well as two *ricercari*, and a series of canonic variations on the hymn *Von Himmel hoch* (BWV769), clearly demonstrate Bach's obsession with this type of composition. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that during the same period Bach began another series of canons and fugues under the title *The Art of Fugue*, each of which was constructed on variants of the same theme.

Recent research indicates composition began as early as 1742, although a thorough revision -probably with publication in mind- did not occur until five years later. Its date coincides with the printing of Johann Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739), in which he lists many of the varying species of counterpoint found in Angelo Berardi's *Documenti armonici* (1687). Bach may have seen a draft of Mattheson's publication as early as 1738 and it is possibly in response to a challenge by Mattheson for Bach to write fugues with three subjects that provided impetus for *The Art of Fugue's* composition. This is not to suggest, though, that we owe a debt of gratitude to Mattheson for the fugue cycle since the subject of Contrapunctus 14 has been traced to a fugue in the *Documenti* which Mattheson does not cite. The earlier version of the collection contained ten fugues and two canons and its expansion into the work that has come down to us might have been the result of Bach's affiliation to the Mizler Society. One of the requirements for members was that they publish a work of scientific communication annually. For musicians, though, this could take the form of a composition. On joining, Bach submitted his *Canon Triplex* (BWV 1076) along with the *Canonic Variations* and, in the following year, the *Musical Offering*. Since members of the society who were over the age of 65 were exempt from further submissions, it is probable that *The Art of Fugue* was to be Bach's third and final offering in June 1749.

This suggests that by this date the work was in more than an embryonic state.

The collection, however, was to remain unpublished until after Bach's death: 1751 saw the first imprint with its final incomplete fugue and the following year saw a new impression with an expanded preface by the theorist Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg. It also contained a number of alterations that consisted of an arrangement of the fugues in a format Bach probably never intended. This included: (1) the addition of an early version of Contrapunctus 10, which had already been printed. In its revision, Bach added 23 bars at the opening and made numerous textural corrections. (2) The restructuring of the hierarchical order of canons, allowing them to mirror the arrangement of the fugues. (3) The final unfinished fugue was placed at the end of the cycle, rather than as the fourteenth climactic one. (4) The inclusion of two three-part mirror fugues scored for two harpsichords and placed in the wrong order. (5) The addition of the organ chorale *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein*.

The music was written in open-score with each voice designated its own stave. This format has led to an amount of speculation concerning whether or not it is to be performed as an ensemble work, yet the arrangement of the fugues' individual voices makes them unsuitable for anything other than performance at the keyboard. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a number of authors have suggested that *The Art of Fugue* is an example of absolute music, that is, a paradigm of contrapuntal technique that was never intended to be performed and this theory is slightly more difficult to challenge. While Marpurg's introduction to the revised edition is of little use in determining Bach's intentions, it is clear that his sons—who were responsible for both imprints—were in no doubts as to its suitability for performance. Yet we must consider their motives. Bach was not wealthy and because his estate amounted to very little, there was probably a genuine need to provide financial assistance for his widow, Anna Magdalene. Since work had begun on preparing the volume for publication, its completion might have provided a small income from sales. However, we can only surmise that its reception was poor since it was hastily revised and repackaged the following year, with additions -possibly as compensation for the final unfinished fugue- acting as a means of making the volume

more attractive to keyboard players. While this does little to contradict the absolute music theory, if the assumption that *The Art of Fugue* was under preparation for a final submission to the Mizler Society is correct, it is almost certain he would have adopted an open-score format. It was in this state that the submission of the *Canonic Variations* and the six-part *ricercare* from the *Musical Offering* (the provenance of which, as a two-stave draft, dictates its instrumentation) and enough examples are found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy and France to suggest that for fugal composition, an open-score was a preferred means of conveying the music. These are manifest in, for example, Frescobaldi's *Fiori Musicale* (Rome, 1635), François Roberday's *Fugues et caprices* (Paris, 1660) as well as in the *quatuors* found in French organ books of the period. In addition, we should also consider that, as a more cerebral means of conveying what could easily be presented on two staves, the format might have been deemed ultimately suited for such a learned organisation as the Mizler Society.

Of the fugues, we can be reasonably certain that the running order of the first group is correct since they follow a hierarchical system of complexity and thematic development. With the exception of Contrapunctus 4, which was added for the printed edition, these are simple fugues that employ a single form of the subject and are close to the *stile antico* preferred by previous generations of composers in their restrained expressive and harmonic content. Contrapunctus 5 continues in the same manner, though it combines two versions of the subject (those of Contrapunctus 1 and 3—its inversion).

Contrapunctus 6 is marked 'in stile francese' and uses the emphatic dotted rhythms peculiar to the French *ouverture*. It combines the subject in *rectus* and *invertus* versions in both original and diminished (half) note values. Contrapunctus 7 treats the subject in augmentation and diminution. Contrapunctus 9 (which is the final fugue of the existing autograph) and 10 are a pair of double fugues that involve invertible counterpoint at the tenth and twelfth respectively. Each open with new subjects that are later combined with the theme. Contrapunctus 8 and 11 are both triple fugues that use related secondary subjects. From here on, things become somewhat confused. Contrapunctus 12 and 13 are mirror fugues that appear in their original form in which the counterpoint of the

second is completely inverted, and Contrapunctus 14 is a 239-bar fragment that breaks off shortly after the exposition of the third subject (B-flat, A, C, B-natural, corresponding in German musical notation to the letters BACH). Given the nature of this subject, it is likely that the fugue was intended to finish the cycle. Years after his father's death, C P E Bach appended a note to the manuscript that reads: 'While working on this fugue, in which the name BACH appears in the countersubject, the author died'. Yet this is most likely to be incorrect: Bach would certainly have wanted to test the possibilities provided by the themes and it is probable that a previous version existed that has not survived. This leaves the two-keyboard arrangements of Contrapunctus 13. It is unlikely that Bach intended these to be published in the collection since they do not fit in with the logical construction of the cycle. Nevertheless, they remain an excellent example of invertible counterpoint in the spirit of the collection as a whole and their inclusion here is as an appropriate form of appendix.

The placing of the four canons in the published books was as a block before the final unfinished fugue and while this might allow the listener to perceive the hierarchical principles that drive the work as a whole, their placing in this recording has been to provide a coda to each of the fugal groups. It might be argued that the canons predate the fugue cycle by several years, since the techniques Bach employed in canons 2, 3 and 4 bear striking similarities to the four *Duetts* (more on this below) and this might indicate they were composed at least as early as 1739. These are among the most complex of Bach's canons, with each developing aspects of a form of fugal writing that is almost impossible to maintain as a strict canon. The first, *Canon alla Ottava*, a melodic inversion of the subject of Contrapunctus 1, is the least complicated of the group since the *dessus* consistently represents the leader while the lower voice is always the follower. The second canon 'alla Decima' contains a subject that is also the inverse of Contrapunctus 1 and is divided into two sections: in the first, the leader is found in the lower voice, whereas this role is reversed in the second. The third canon is identical in structure and employs the first fugue's theme in diminution. The final canon, in which the subject is a disjunct variation of the main theme, is also in two sections and is the most sophisticated of

the four. This lies in the treatment of the subject, in double counterpoint, for which the follower is not only in contrary motion but is also treated to rhythmic alteration.

The four *Duetti* (BWV 802-805) were published as part of the third book of *Clavierübung* in 1739, which contains 27 pieces for the organ that make up an organ mass with such constituent elements as Kyries, the Credo and Lord's Prayer. Essentially, the duets are two-part inventions, although those Bach wrote some twenty years previously are incomparable in terms of their scale and sophistication. Their placing, before the final fugue, appears somewhat at odds with the remainder of the volume since they seem to contradict any liturgical role. A number of commentators have suggested they might represent the four prayers contained in Martin Luther's catechism, especially when considering that the final duet begins with a cross motif. While this is an attractive thought, it is unlikely, and it is probable they were added to fill up unused folios in the original imprint. Yet the striking similarities they bear to all but the first canon of *The Art of Fugue* makes them ideal complementary material for this recording. They are similar in length (the duets total 369 bars and the canons 372) and the compositional techniques Bach employed in their composition are similar. The duets incorporate all the usual techniques of regular fugues and employ strict invertible counterpoint, canonic moments (e.g. the strict canon that forms the middle section of the F major duet), motivic imitation and derivation (that is, motifs from scalar figures, broken chords and chromatic movement). The first duet, in e minor, is the only double fugue in which the subject modulates to the dominant. The F major example is in three strains: A (a regular exposition), B (with a canonic second theme and a length that is almost double that of the outer sections), A (a *da capo*). Although in form, the G major *Duetto III* is the simplest of the four, yet its construction is unusual: the detached bass is not thematic and appears to have no purpose from a developmental perspective. The final A minor duet is tightly symmetrical in its balanced phrases of two, four and eight bars and, with the exception of the final five bars, all the counterpoint is invertible.

In the same vein as *The Art of Fugue*, the three- and six-part fugues of *The Musical Offering* were intended for keyboard performance. The genesis of the composition is

mentioned in a few colourful accounts by Bach's early biographers, among which is that of Johann Nikolaus Forkel:

The reputation of the all-surpassing skill of Johann Sebastian was so extended that the King often heard it mentioned and praised. This made him curious to meet so great an artist [...] At this time, the King used to have every evening a private concert, in which he generally performed some concertos on the flute. One evening, just as he was getting his flute ready and his musicians were assembled, an officer brought him the written list of strangers who had arrived. With his flute in his hand, he ran over the list, but immediately turned to the assembled musicians and said, with a kind of agitation, "Gentlemen, old Bach is come" [...] the King gave up his concert for the evening and invited Bach [...] to try his fortepianos [...] After he had gone on for some time, he asked the King to give him a subject for a fugue in order to execute it immediately without any preparation. The King admired the learned manner in which his subject was thus executed extempore; and, probably to see how far such art could be carried, expressed a wish to hear also a Fugue with six obbligato parts. But as not every subject is fit for such full harmony, Bach chose one himself and immediately executed it to the astonishment of all present in the same magnificent and learned manner as he had done with the King's [...] After his return to Leipzig, he composed the subject he had received from the King in three and six parts, added several intricate pieces in strict canon on the [same] subject, had it engraved [at his own expense] under the title of *Das Musikalisches Opfer*, and dedicated it to the inventor.

Unlike *The Art of Fugue*, *The Musical Offering* is not cyclical and consists of both ensemble and solo pieces. Alongside a trio sonata and ten canons are the two *ricercari* which reflect both archaic and modernistic styles of composition. The motet-like treatment of the six-part *ricercare*, reflects a form enjoyed by such earlier generations of composers as Frescobaldi, while its three-part companion displays a freer and more fantasia-like structure that is suggestive of the extemporisation mentioned in Forkel's account. From this perspective, it recalls the original meaning of the term *ricercare*, which is as a preludial work in an improvisatory manner.

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**Pieter-Jan Belder** (1966) studied recorder with Ricardo Kanji at the Royal Conservatorium of The Hague, and harpsichord with Bob van Asperen at the Amsterdam Sweelinck Conservatorium. He has pursued a flourishing career as harpsichordist, clavichord player, organist, forte-pianist and recorder player.

He has appeared at many international festivals, such as the *Festival Oude Muziek Utrecht*, the *Berlin Musikfest*, the *Festival van Vlaanderen*, the *Festival Potsdam Sans Souci*, *Bremen Musikfest* and the *Leipzig Bachfest*.

He regularly plays solo recitals, and is also very much in demand as a continuo player with such ensembles as the, *The Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century*, *Camarata Trajectina*, *Bach Collegium Japan*, *Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam*, and the *Netherlands Bach Society*, and has been working with conductors such as Frans Brüggen, Ton Koopman, Masaaki Suzuki, Jos van Veldhoven and Philippe Herreweghe, amongst others. Belder has also accompanied soloists such as Johannette Zomer, Nico van der Meel, Harry van der Kamp, Sigiswald Kuijken, Rémy Baudet, Rainer Zipperling and Wilbert Hazelzet. Belder conducts his own ensemble *Musica Amphion*.

In 1997 Pieter-Jan Belder was awarded the third prize at the Hamburg NDR Music Prize harpsichord competition. In 2000 he was winner of the Leipzig Bach harpsichord competition. In 2005 he made his debut as a conductor in the Amsterdam



*Concertgebouw*, and was since then regularly conducting productions with soloists such as Michael Chance and Sarah Connolly (*Dido & Aeneas*) and the choir Collegium Vocale Gent.

He has made over 140 CD recordings, most of them solo and chamber music productions. Since 1999 Belder has worked on his integral recording of the Scarlatti keyboard sonatas, which was released in 2007. Since then he has recorded Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* along with the complete harpsichord works by Rameau and Soler. Brilliant also released a recording of the *Kenner und Liebhaber* series by C.P.E. Bach, recorded on the fortepiano and the clavichord as well as harpsichord concertos recorded with his own group Musica Amphion.

Belder has also recorded several orchestral and chamber-music productions with *Musica Amphion*: Telemann's *Tafelmusik*, the complete works of Corelli, Bach's *Brandenburg* concertos, Bach's concertos for 2, 3 & 4 harpsichords, and the complete chamber music of Purcell. Also he initiated Bach in Context, a concert- and CD series, performing Bach cantatas in their thematic context, and in which also the organ repertoire was incorporated. This series was in corporation with Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam and issued on the label Etcetera.

Pieter-Jan Belder is currently working on recording the harpsichord works by J.S. Bach, Dandrieu and the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*. He has a succesfull duo with baroque violinist Rie Kimura with whom he recorded C.P.E. Bach's violin sonatas for the label Resonus.

Belder teaches baroque performance at the Musikhochschule in Lübeck, Germany.  
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[www.pieterjanbelder.nl](http://www.pieterjanbelder.nl)

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