

Bach-Stokowski, *Prelude in B minor, BWV 893*



Johann Sebastian Bach (31 March 1685 – 28 July 1750) was a German composer and organist whose ecclesiastical and secular works for choir, orchestra, and solo instruments drew together the strands of the Baroque period and brought it to its ultimate maturity. Although he introduced no new forms, he enriched the prevailing German style with a robust contrapuntal technique, an unrivalled control of harmonic and motivic organization, and the adaptation of rhythms, forms and textures from abroad, particularly Italy and France.

In 1722 Bach wrote a collection of solo keyboard pieces, titled *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* (The Well-Tempered Clavier) that consists of preludes and fugues in all 24 major and minor keys. In 1742 Bach composed a second book of the same kind, but titled it only "Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues." The two collections are now considered to comprise *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (Books I and II) which is generally regarded as one of the most important works in the history of Western classical music.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, one of the most influential conductors of his generation, Leopold Stokowski, arranged nearly 40 works by Bach for the modern symphony orchestra (the arrangement of the Prelude in B, BWV 893 was completed in 1929). Stokowski had progressive views, lurid presence on the concert stage, and innovative approach to music-making. Stokowski embraced everything modern, and synthesized music, art, and dance in ways that were new to the American audiences. His interest in sound reproduction and transmission resulted in pioneering recordings utilizing the latest technological developments. In his pursuit of the perfect balance and blends of color in the concert hall, he often experimented with the placement of players' seating by moving sections of the orchestra to different parts of the stage. Stokowski's unorthodoxy is perhaps his greatest legacy, for it was his willingness to take risks and challenge convention that occasioned his most significant triumphs.

The Prelude in B minor, BWV 893 is the last, 24th prelude, from the second book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. It is transcribed for a string orchestra and runs approximately 5 minutes. The composition was premiered on December 13, 1929 by the Philadelphia Orchestra with Leopold Stokowski conducting.