

FUGUES WITHOUT WORDS:  
A HEARING OF FOUR FUGUES FROM  
*THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER*  
AS PASSION MUSIC<sup>1</sup>

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As concerns the playing of chorales, I was instructed by my teacher, Capellmeister Bach, who is still living, not to play the songs merely offhand but according to the *Affect* of the words.

Johann Gotthilf Ziegler (1746)

This article offers a circumstantial argument for motivic connections between four fugues in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and the *St. Matthew Passion*. The fugues in question are those in c-sharp minor and b minor of Book I, and the f-sharp minor and b minor of Book II. No doubt the most provocative place to begin threading such a connection would be with Charles Burney's curious censure of Bach's fugal technique in his 1789 *General History of Music*.

[Johann] Sebastian Bach . . . disdained facility so much, that his genius never stooped to the easy and graceful. I never have seen a fugue by this learned and powerful author upon a *motivo*, that is natural and *chantant*; or even an easy and obvious passage, that is not loaded with crude and difficult accompaniments.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from a paper read at the University of Glasgow, April 25, 2009, in conjunction with a study day on "Bach's Passions" sponsored by the Society for Music Analysis.

<sup>2</sup>Burney, *A General History of Music*, III, 110, as quoted in Yo Tomita, "Bach's *Credo* in England: An Early History," *Bach Studies from Dublin*, eds. Anne Leahy and Yo Tomita (Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd., 2004), 206.