

## **Prelude pour la luth ò. Cembal par J. S. Bach** **[Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E flat, BWV 998]**

### **Foreword:**

Despite the title of this late work (1740-5), an inscription not by the composer, BWV 998 contains many technical impossibilities when played on the 13 course lute of 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany. It has been suggested by various writers that the title inscription "Prelude pour la Luth ò. Cèmbal par J.S. Bach" is not in J.S. Bach's own hand, but may have been added by C.P.E. Bach, who owned the MS after his father's death. The other two movements are left untitled in the MS.

In order to play the piece without resorting to anachronistic solutions, transposition, or changes of tuning other than normal alteration of open-string basses to the key of the piece, some adjustments have to be made. These include altering the tuning of the sixth course to A flat (used also by J. C. Weyrauch in his transcription of the Fantasia, Sarabande and Gigue of BWV 997 in C minor), changing the octaves in which the bass is played and using notes stopped on the seventh and eighth courses. Occasionally I have reduced the texture by eliminating octave doubling if that note is heard as an open octave-string.

Since the fugue's subject is quoted in the bass line in the original work, I have made use of a notational and playing technique employed by Charles Mouton and Wenzel, Frei Herr von Radolt. The first of two letters or numbers linked by a tie in the bass indicate that the note should be plucked by the thumb without the octave string, then the octave string is played later in the bar. Players may find this a bit difficult at first, but it does free the left hand from otherwise awkward positions. Playing the note normally would not seriously compromise the piece.

The particular stringing material and spacing of each lute may affect the ease of play in this technique, so in some cases I have given the player the choice of octave by square bracketing the note in question. I have found that the closer the two strings are in diameter, (gut or nylon on nylon overspun) the easier this trick is to execute. My preference is for the unbracketed note. Some of the bass notes have been transposed into a more usual or convenient octave (up or down) without marking them as such.

I have expanded on the original use of dynamic markings in the [Allegro]. The use of dynamic markings is evidence that the work was designed either for the lute or to imitate it, but Bach did use such dynamic indications in two-manual harpsichord music. In the Italian Concerto (BWV 971) for example, dynamics markings are used to indicate manual changes from 8' + 8' to a solo stop on the other manual, in keeping with the appearance of soloistic material within the concerto/ripieno structure.

Since Bach's uncle Nikolaus Bach was known to have made three-manual *Lautenwerke* (lute-harpsichords), it is possible that these indications are intended to clarify the registration. For more on this, see Howard Ferguson's article *Bach's Lauten Werck*, *Music and Letters*, 48, 1967 p.p. 259-64. On the lute these changes would be realized by normal dynamic change, including changing the plucking point or using open, rather than stopped notes where possible. (Refer to my foreword to BWV 996 for more on the *Lautenwerk* and Bach's technique of writing for it.)

Bach ran out of space at the end of the [Allegro] and completed the piece using New German organ tablature, so it seems that the piece was probably intended for Bach's own use at the *Lautenwerk*. The tessitura of the piece is lower than Bach's common practice at the harpsichord, in keeping with his other pieces apparently written for the *Lautenwerk*, BWV 996 and 997, possibly also BWV 1006a.

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