

Johann Sebastian Bach

Partita No. 1 • English Suite No. 3 • French Suite No. 5
Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue • Chaconne (Brahms)
Fantasy and Fugue (Liszt) • Chorales (Kempff)

Idil Biret, *piano*

The Solo Keyboard Music • Bach published during his lifetime four volumes of keyboard pieces under the title *Clavierübung* which began with a set of six *Partitas*, published between 1726 and 1731. The first of the set was the *Partita No. 1 in B flat major*. The *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue in D minor*, was apparently written during Bach's time at Cöthen, probably about 1720, and revised in Leipzig about 1730. The six *English Suites*, the 3rd being included here, have nothing particularly English about them, except their title. They were written perhaps in Weimar in about 1715 or possibly during Bach's period at Cöthen. Bach brought together a set of five *French Suites*, of which the 5th is Biret's favourite, later augmented to six and forming part of the *Clavierbüchlein* for Anna Magdalena, his second wife. The *Italian Concerto in F major* was published in 1735 in the second volume of the *Clavierübungen*, with the original title *Concerto nach Italienischen Gusto*. It reflects the style of the Venetian solo concertos by Vivaldi.

Transcriptions • Bach's *Fantasia and Fugue in G minor*, couples two works that may originally have had a separate existence. They have been variously dated. Liszt's transcription of the *Fantasia*, of which there is an alternative version, and of the *Fugue* were made in 1868. Brahms made three *Studies* on Bach's music. The studies, published in 1879, end with a version of the famous *D minor Chaconne* from the *Partita for unaccompanied violin* arranged for the left hand only. Kempff's activity as an organist and as a composer is less well known. The foundation of his many-sided musical activity lay in his early years in Potsdam. Even before his first recital as a pianist he made his début as an organist in the Church of St. Nicholas. His piano arrangements of Bach's organ Chorale Preludes should be seen in the light of this close connection with the two instruments, as well as the free transcriptions of music of the eighteenth century that he published from 1931 in the series *Music of the Baroque and Rococo*, following the model of d'Albert and Busoni.

Idil Biret and the Music of Bach • Idil Biret heard the music of Bach very early. At the age of three she was trying to play from ear the Preludes of Bach from the *Well Tempered Clavier* which her mother played on their piano (she could not master the fugues) and drawing his picture in her note book. In her memoires, Idil's mother Leman Biret writes: *After listening for a while (to orchestral music on the radio) Idil would detect the main melody and then play it on the piano with one finger. Afterwards, when she reached the age of four, she would play these on the piano with two hands and with the correct harmony. Bach preludes and fugues from the Well Tempered Clavier, for example, which even the talented musicians took considerable time to study and memorise, were mastered by Idil in only a few days after listening once or twice, after which she would play these without a single wrong note.* Then, at the age of four her teacher Mithat Fenmen formally introduced Idil to the music of Bach when he made her listen, on an 78rpm record by Edwin Fischer, to the *Prelude and Fugue in F minor from the Well Tempered Clavier Book II*. Idil Biret says that Bach's music has been a part of her life ever since.

One evening in 1946, Idil and her parents were attending a concert in Ankara given by her professor, Mithat Fenmen. President Ismet İnönü and his wife were there as well as the Minister of Education. The Minister said to Idil that the President would like to hear her play. Idil replied that she would be glad to do so at the end of the concert. She then played the *Prelude and Fugue in C sharp minor* from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier Bk I* and another work by, whereupon President İnönü hugged her and complimented her profusely. After this, Idil's musical education was discussed and during a session of the Turkish Parliament a law was passed ('Idil's Law' on July 7, 1948) which provided the means for her to pursue her musical education abroad.

In 1948, she played the *D Minor Piano Concerto* of Bach with a string quartet at the Ankara Radio Hall. Then, when she went to Paris in 1949 Idil was introduced to Wilhelm Backhaus who asked her to play for him. One of the pieces little Idil played was the *Prelude No.3* from Book I of *The Well Tempered Clavier*. Backhaus liked it very much and, in return, he played for Idil the first movement of Bach's *Italian Concerto*. In the fall of 1949 the French radio in Paris broadcast an interview with Idil and recorded her playing Bach's *Prelude and Fugue No. 3* from the *Well Tempered Clavier* and other works. She later listened to Dinu Lipatti's performance of Bach's Partita No. 1, liked it very much and learnt to play it quickly. The same year Idil was introduced to Wilhelm Kempff who greatly admired her and played Mozart's Concerto for two Pianos with her in Paris at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in front of an audience of 2700. Idil was also introduced to Alfred Cortot and performed for him the *Prelude in C sharp major* from Book I of *The Well Tempered Clavier*. Cortot then asked Idil to play this piece in F sharp which she did without hesitation. This greatly impressed Cortot and he said that Idil was a child prodigy. Upon finishing her studies at the Conservatoire, Idil studied privately with Cortot for two years.

The works of Bach, particularly the Preludes and Fugues of *The Well Tempered Clavier*, formed the backbone of her early studies in Paris and together with the other Bach pieces Idil Biret heard and learnt from an early age they became the staple of her recital programs; *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue, Italian Concerto, Partita No. 1, French Suite No. 5, English Suite No. 3*, the *48 Preludes and Fugues of the Well Tempered Clavier* and the Chorales and Cantata transcriptions of Kempff were among these. In 1991 when Wilhelm Kempff died his family asked Idil to give a recital in his memory at the Sans Souci Palace in Potsdam. At this concert she played all his transcriptions from Bach Chorales and Cantatas and the same year she recorded these. Later, she also recorded the Bach transcriptions of Brahms and Rachmaninov. Then, in 2015, Biret recorded the two books of the *Well Tempered Clavier* and most of the pieces on this LP. These were all released on CD in a box set by IBA (8.501206).

While it would be interesting to hear again Kempff's playing in Bach, Biret's unusual compilation of the Bach transcriptions of Kempff is unlikely to be outclassed in the near future.

GRAMOPHONE 1992

The musical evening started with Brahms' piano transcription of Bach's famous Chaconne for the left hand. Following this was Wilhelm Kempff's transcription of Bach's Siciliano, Idil Biret thus paying tribute to her renowned mentor... all breathtakingly performed. The enthusiastic audience gave Biret a standing ovation.

WESTFÄLISCHE NACHRICHTEN 2004

Biret's Bach is a cliff wall to be scaled, a peak to be reached and an aspiration to be achieved...With these enduring compositions as multisided sculptures to be reexamined, the Bach set constitutes a voyage through the developing art of a child prodigy. It goes a long way toward answering the questions about where the preternaturally gifted interpreter goes when convention and career opportunity become subservient to artistic pursuit. May it be an example to those embarking on a similar journey.

Prof. Marc Medwin - AMERICAN UNIVERSITY 2017



LP 1

Bach	<i>Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue</i>	14:03
	<i>Partita No. 1</i>	19:48
	<i>English Suite No.3</i>	21:14
Bach/Kempff	<i>Jesu bleibet meine Freude</i>	3:07
	<i>Siciliano</i> from flute sonata	2:48
	<i>Es ist gewisslich an der Zeit / Nun freut Euch</i>	2:59

LP2

Bach	<i>French Suite No. 5</i>	20:34
Bach/Liszt	<i>Fantasy & Fugue in G minor</i>	13:00
Bach	<i>Italian Concerto</i>	16:00
Bach/Brahms	<i>Chaconne</i> (left hand)	17:37

Recorded: Château de Flawinne, Namur, Belgium April 22/23, 2015 • Producer: Michel Devos • Fantasy and Fugue, Istanbul June 2011 • Music notes from texts by Keith Anderson and Vera Grützner • Photo front cover: Idil Biret at the Woolsey Hall of Yale University by Sefik B. Yüksel • Compilation and Remastering: Ozan Sarier • Graphic design: Özcan Göksan • Graphic adaptation: Ali Ergün



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