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Prelude in C minor

A:1

BWV 999

J. S. Bach
(1685-1750)

[♩ = c.88]

This Prelude was probably composed during the period 1717–23 when Johann Sebastian Bach was *Capellmeister* (director of music) at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. It is an arpeggiated prelude; that is, it consists of a series of chords, all of which are arpeggiated according to the same pattern. Most of Bach's arpeggiated preludes were composed for keyboard instruments. The Prelude in C minor, however, was originally written for the lute, but works equally well when played on a keyboard.

The harmonic structure of the piece is built on pedal points: tonic pedal in C minor (bars 1–7); then, after a transition (bars 7–16), dominant pedal in G minor (bars 17–32), which then becomes a tonic pedal in G minor (bars 33–43). So, unusually for Bach, it ends in the overall dominant, G minor, though with a *Tierce de Picardie* (major 3rd in the last chord). At the third crotchet of every bar, the arpeggiated pattern requires an alternation between right hand and left hand; in other words, the left-hand quavers need to be shortened to semiquavers.

Source: MS copy, 'Praelude in C mol [sic] pour la Lute', in the hand of J. P. Kellner, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Mus. ms. Bach P 804, pp. 101–3. This copy is quite inaccurate, and obvious errors have been corrected without notice. Kellner gives the first bass note of bar 23 as E(b) – a highly unlikely reading in view of the D pedal that prevails from bars 17–32. The reading D is restored here, as it is also in the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* VI/10 (pp. 122–3). All the dynamics and the *rit.* in the penultimate bar are editorial suggestions only. The last chord is written as a crotchet in the source.