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## Inventions & Sinfonias BWV 772-801

**Elisabeth Joyé (Harpsichord)**

**Bob van Asperen (Harpsichord)**

### Bach's Inventions and Sinfonias

<b>K-1</b>	<b>J.S. Bach: Inventions &amp; Sinfonias</b>		
Two-Part Inventions (15), <a href="#">BWV 772-786</a> [25:43] Three-Part Inventions (Sinfonias) (15), <a href="#">BWV 787-801</a> [30:34]			
<a href="#">Elisabeth Joyé</a> (Harpsichord) [1993 Philippe Humeau harpsichord built on the specifications of a Carl Conrad Fleischer model (1720)]			
Alpha	Dec 2001	CD / TT: 56:17	
Recorded at Chapelle de l'Hôpital Notre-Dame de Bon Secours, Paris, France. <b>Buy this album at:</b> <a href="#">Amazon.com</a>   <a href="#">Amazon.com</a>   <a href="#">Amazon.de</a>   <a href="#">Amazon.de</a>			

<b>K-8</b>	<b>Lessons with Bach: Complete Inventions · Complete Sinfonias · Little Preludes</b>		
Two-Part Inventions (15), <a href="#">BWV 772-786</a> [24:17] Three-Part Inventions (Sinfonias) (15), <a href="#">BWV 787-801</a> [30:12] Prelude & Fugue in A minor, <a href="#">BWV 895</a> [4:14] Six Little Preludes <a href="#">BWV 933-938</a> [1:49, 2:26, 1:54, 2:42, 1:54, 2:42] Five Little Preludes <a href="#">BWV 939-940</a> [0:38, 0:53] Fughetta in C minor, <a href="#">BWV 961</a> [2:05] Prelude for lute in C minor, <a href="#">BWV 999</a> [2:03]			
<a href="#">Bob van Asperen</a> (Harpsichord)			
Aeolus	Sep 1999	CD / TT: 77:49	
Recorded at Doopsgezindekerk, Haarlem, Holland. <b>Buy this album at:</b> <a href="#">Amazon.com</a>			

## Bach's Inventions and Sinfonias

**Donald Satz** wrote (March 12, 2007):  
 Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)  
 2-Part Inventions (15), BWV 772-786  
 3-Part Sinfonias (15), BWV 787-801

[Elisabeth Joyé](#) (harpsichord)  
 Recorded December 2001  
 Released July 2004  
 Alpha Productions 034 [56:32]

w/Little Preludes, BWV 933-940 & 999  
 Fughetta in C minor, BWV 961  
 Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV 895

[Bob van Asperen](#) (harpsichord)  
 Recorded September 1999  
 Released August 2006  
 Aeolus 10034 [78:15]

As many readers know, the pieces on these two discs were composed by Bach to be used by students as 'exercises'. However, Bach's genius is in clear display, as he was apparently unable to suppress his supreme musical mind whenever he put pen to paper. So do put away any thoughts that the Inventions/Sinfonias are "lesser Bach" and not to be taken seriously.

There are many excellent recordings of the Inventions/Sinfonias, my favorites on harpsichord coming from [Kenneth Gilbert](#) on Harmonia Mundi, [Gustav Leonhardt](#) on Sony, [Blandine Verlet](#) on Naive and [Masaaki Suzuki](#) on BIS. I can't say that Elisabeth Joye's performances are on such an exalted level, but she does offer a few outstanding qualities that demand attention.

First, I'll get any and all reservations out of the way. Put simply, Joye's performances are not very interesting as she progresses through the 'exercises'. The primary reasons are a lack of sufficient variety in both articulation and tempo; Joye rarely varies tempo within each piece, so you won't hear any hesitations in phrasing or staggering of musical lines. It's all very straight-forward and lacking in fizz. Another problematic area concerns Bach's faster pieces, as Joye plays most of them much slower than the norm and thereby greatly diminishes the visceral impact and exuberance of the music; the Inventions in D major and E flat major along with the Sinfonia in D major are prime examples. Continuing along, Joye's penchant is for rounded phrasing, and a few of Bach's pieces demand sharpened contours such as the Invention in B flat major with its double-dotted rhythms. Finally, Joye is not one to explore the dark side of Bach's music; her Inventions in F minor and B minor are particularly benign.

With the above array of negatives to contend with, the Joye disc would seem to be one to avoid. But such is not the case, primarily because I have not heard a version of these works that is so luxurious, elegant and comforting. Basically, every aspect of the production is lush from the rich 1993 Philippe Humeau harpsichord built on the specifications of a Carl Conrad Fleischer model (1720) to the opulent soundstage. This is the essence of "Papa Bach", as he stretches out his arms to envelop and comfort all believers. Joye's luxurious treatment hits its peak in the Inventions in G minor and A minor where the music is suspended on a bed of velvet; the Sinfonia in C major finds Joye giving a wonderful account full of love and elegance.

Having stated above that Joye tends to apply rounded contours, I should point out that her Sinfonias in E flat major and B minor use a brisk staccato that is very refreshing after so many smooth applications. Other compelling highlights include the delightful optimism of the Sinfonia in E major and the oozing warmth and acceptance of the Sinfonias in F major, F minor and B flat major.

Turning to the veteran early music keyboardist [Bob van Asperen](#), we leave the world of luxury and comfort for a universe of true dialogue. Right from the 1<sup>st</sup> Invention in C major, it is clear that meaningful conversations are taking place, while [Elisabeth Joyé](#) merely creates a particular atmosphere. The sense of dialogue from van Asperen continues throughout his performances, and I can't emphasize enough how his style makes the music come alive. In addition, he makes subtle use of tempo changes and hesitations that significantly add to the invention of the music.

Concerning specifics, the bitter/sweet nature of the Invention in C minor is incisively explored by van Asperen. He plays the faster pieces quickly, eliciting from this reviewer a exciting sense of tension and exuberance; notable for this effect are his performances of the Inventions in D major, E flat major and G major where excitement and joy leap out of the speakers. Want a little menace? Look no further than van Asperen's

Inventions in E minor and B minor. If you're seeking a frenetic performance of the Invention in F major, van Asperen's your man. The sole Invention that disappoints a little is the one in B flat major where van Asperen takes the same rounded approach as Joye; that surprised me considering van Asperen's usual regimen.

How about van Asperen's Sinfonias? They also constitute entirely compelling music-making such as the pristine and lovely interpretation of the Sinfonia in C major, the driving rhythms of the D major, the remorse van Asperen shares with us in the D minor, and the exquisite dialogue of the E flat major, G minor, and A minor Sinfonias.

More treasure is found in van Asperen's Sinfonia in E minor. This piece is a musical depiction of redemption, and van Asperen takes us from the bottom of despair to a spiritual enlightenment. There's no such luck for the bleak personality of the F minor, and van Asperen gives a superb account of life without faith. van Asperen can also possess a bubbling demeanor as shown in his performances of the Sinfonias in A major and B flat major.

Not content to simply give us a "top-echelon" recording of the Inventions and Sinfonias, van Asperen offers an additional 12 short Bach exercises that are completely delightful with many snatches of melodies the composer used in his more mature works. van Asperen conveys such an enticing range of colours, that this "simple Bach" takes on more substance than I've ever heard in alternative recordings.

**Don's Conclusions:** In state-of-the-art sound, van Asperen's magnificent recording takes pride of place in my collection of Bach's Inventions/Sinfonias with the additional exercises a wonderful bonus. [Elisabeth Joyé's](#) performance has a very limited agenda, but she executes it beautifully with instrument and soundstage in perfect union; if the luxurious treatment appeals, Joye delivers the goods.

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