Preludes and Fugues
from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I *(1722)*

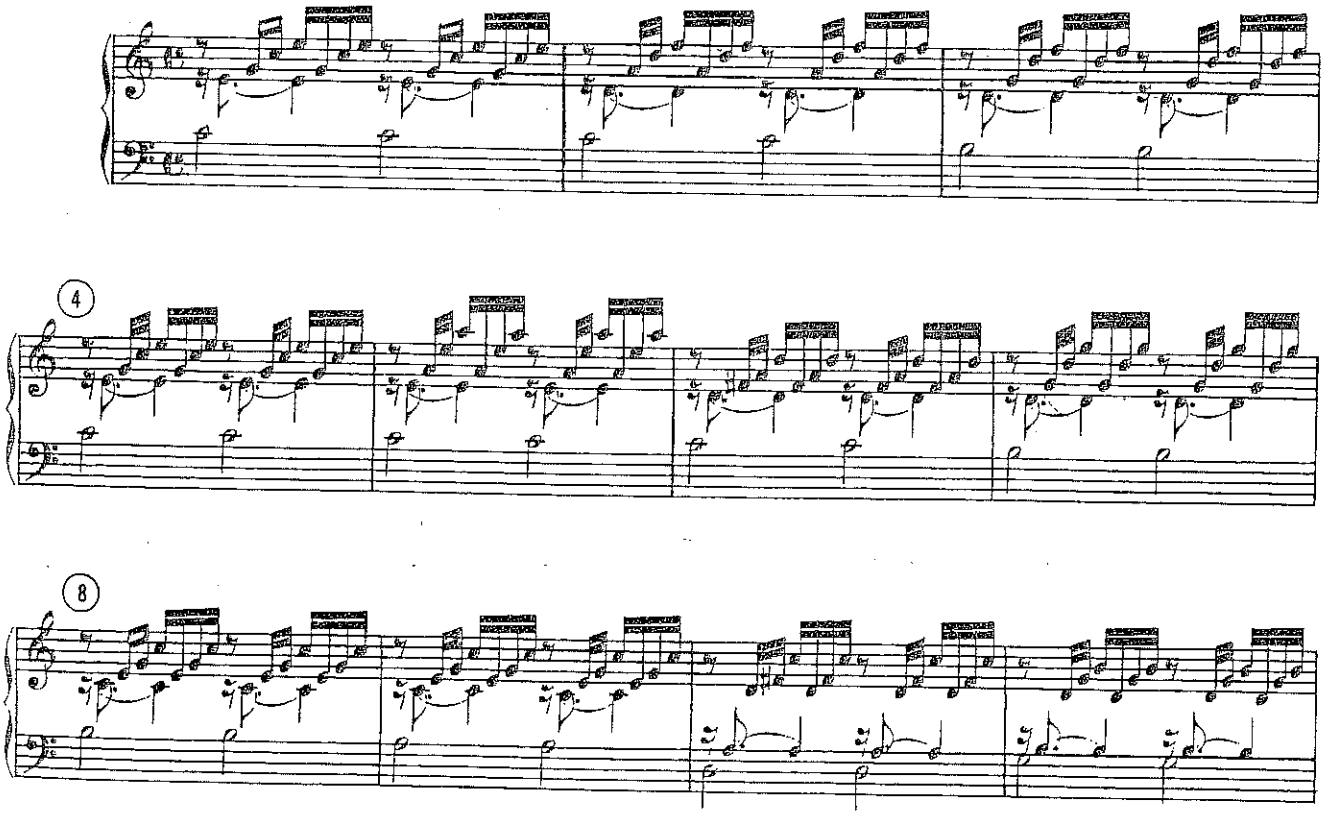
Johann Sebastian Bach *(1685–1750)*

J. S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, two great cycles of preludes and fugues in all 24 major and minor keys published in 1722 and 1744, not only is a supreme technical achievement, but also displays the widest possible expressive and emotional range. The following selection gives a glimpse of this remarkable variety and provides examples of the chief types of fugues and fugal devices. Study of the fugues might begin with the noble G minor (page 133), because it exhibits many "standard" characteristics.

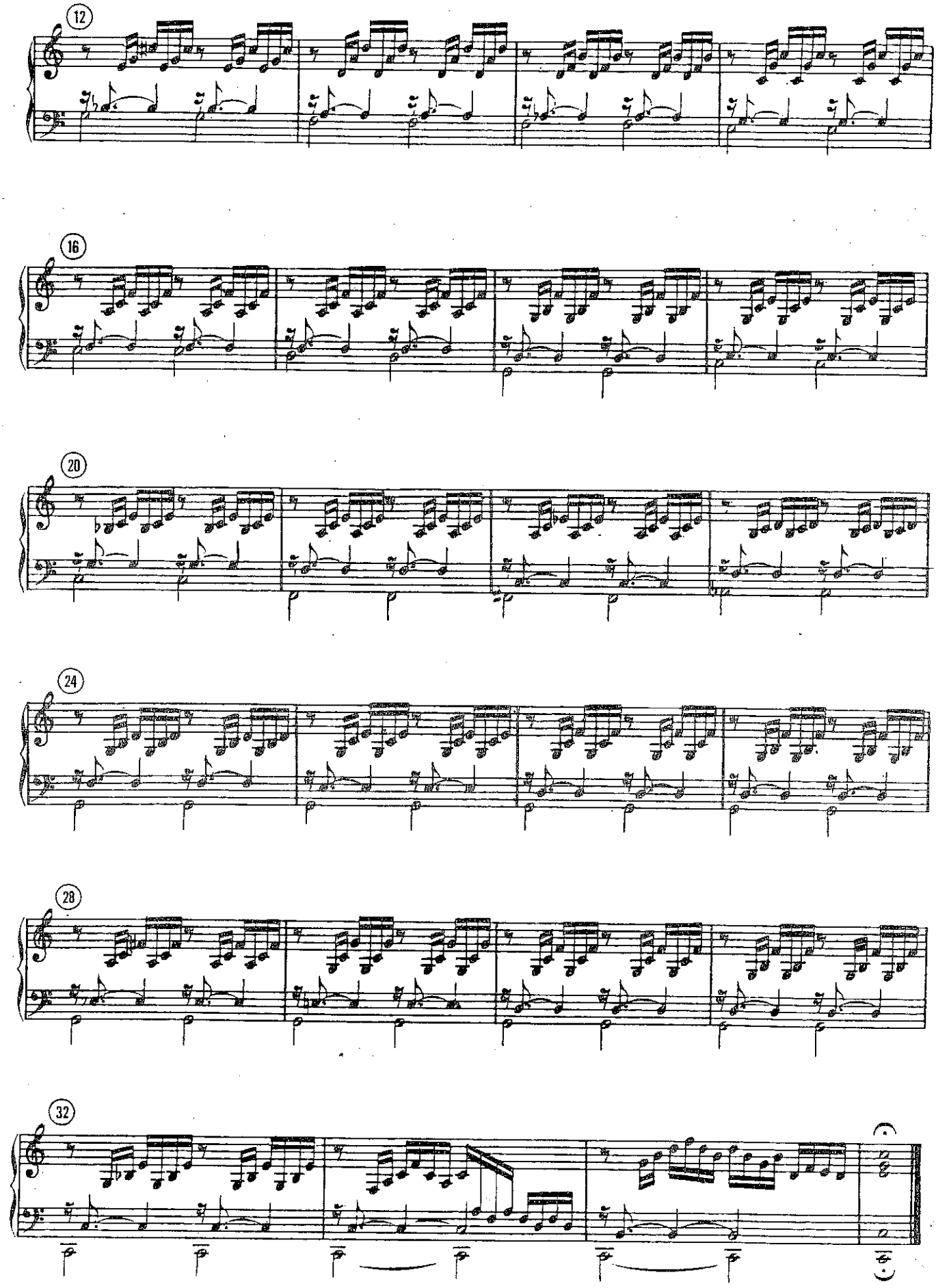
The idea for a collection of preludes and fugues in many keys grew out of seventeenth-century experiments with new systems of tuning, and actually occurred first to a predecessor of Bach, J. K. F. Fischer (ca. 1665–1746), who published in 1702 his *Ariadne musica*, a set of short preludes and fugues for organ in nineteen keys plus the Phrygian mode. (The mythological title denoted that the work was a guide through the "labyrinth" of keys, as Ariadne's ball of thread guided Theseus.) Bach borrowed not only the plan of Fischer's work, but even a few of Fischer's fugue subjects, writing new and much more elaborate fugues on them. One such example is given below: Fischer's F major fugue is set above Bach's to facilitate comparison.

In the twentieth century *The Well-Tempered Clavier* inspired Paul Hindemith's somewhat similar work, *Ludus Tonalis*, a fugue from which will be found on page 537. Other fugues are on pages 254, 487, and 511, and a fugato section is on page 192 at bar 189.

Prelude and Fugue 1 in C major, BWV 846[4]



[4]Heinrich Schenker analyzes this prelude in *Five Graphic Music Analyses*, ed. by Felix Salzer (New York: Dover, 1969), pp. 36–37.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