



## Bachanalia: The Essential Listener's Guide to Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier

*By Eric Lewin Altschuler*

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By applying what Stephen Jay Gould describes in his preface as a "Bill James" style of statistical analysis of baseball teams to the 48 fugues and preludes in Bach's composition for the harpsichord, the author has created a unique listening guide to this musical composition. Altschuler's essays - one for each fugue in the Well-Tempered Clavier - are full of playful, often ingenuous analogies (to baseball teams, horror movies, chocolate chip cookies and sex) that render sophisticated musical concepts with clarity to listeners with little, or no, musical training.

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**Bibliography**

- Rank: #2525933 in Books
- Published on: 1994-03
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.75" h x 6.75" w x 1.00" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 352 pages



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### Editorial Review

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Written as a teaching tool, J. S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* is a cornerstone of Western art music. Each of its two books consists of 24 preludes and fugues in all the keys possible to classical tonal music. From Mozart's time on, the WTC has taught musicians the richness of classical tonality and remained a steady source of inspiration to performers, composers, and music lovers of all types. Definitely a music lover, Altschuler is obsessed with the WTC. The result of lifelong study, *Bachanalia* combines deep understanding of Bach with an offbeat, lively presentation, based on Bill James' style of statistical analysis of baseball teams, that offers the uninitiated much useful background information on Bach and the WTC and provides a detailed essay on and thumbnail structural schema of each fugue. The approach works fairly well, for, like baseball teams, fugues are generally similar and specifically unique. Altschuler is particularly good at explaining fairly arcane, technical music-theory terms to those without musical training and at showing how a given fugue can be heard employing the techniques described. Exuberantly written, each page testifies to Altschuler's passion. *John Shreffler*

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**Joseph Mitchell:**

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