

Well-tempered

From Ledbetter, Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* (Yale University Press, 2002):

“For Bach the issue of tuning was important, or he would not have put it in the title... The function of The Well-Tempered Clavier is, according to the title-page, to demonstrate the possibility of writing and playing in all 24 major and minor keys. The tuning of the instrument was a means to that end.

The term ‘well-tempered’ does not in itself imply a specific tuning, any more than ‘clavier’ implies a specific instrument. It means no more than a tuning in which it is possible to play tolerably in all keys. Much hangs on the word ‘tolerably’ since a variety of tunings have been associated with the term. In the older modern literature it is taken for granted that it meant equal-tempered, and that the function of the collection was to demonstrate the possibilities of equal-temperament, which was thought to have been ‘discovered’ at the end of the seventeenth century...

The situation began to change drastically during the 1960s as keyboard instruments of historical construction became general and players came to realize the startlingly different colors and effects of different tunings...” (p. 34)