

Produced by Andrew Kazdin

# Handel: Suites for Harpsichord Nos. 1-4

## Glenn Gould

### SIDE 1

#### SUITE NO. 1 (D.D.)

- Prelude (1:25)
- Allemande (1:54)
- Courante (0:56)
- Gigue (1:05)

#### SUITE NO. 2 (D.D.)

- Adagio (1:30)
- Allegro (1:25)
- Adagio (1:36)
- Fuga (1:36)

### SIDE 2

#### SUITE NO. 3 (D.D.)

- Prelude (1:05)
- Fuga (1:50)
- Allemande (1:31)
- Courante (1:56)
- Air, Variations and Presto (1:10)

#### SUITE NO. 4 (D.D.)

- Fuga (1:36)
- Allemande (1:31)
- Courante (1:05)
- Sarabande (1:45)
- Gigue (1:05)

We tend today to remember George Frideric Handel exclusively as a composer of choral works, operas and a few orchestral suites and to forget the fact that he was well-known in his time as a keyboard virtuoso. His first biographer, John Mainwaring, summed up the general opinion: "Handel had an uncommon brilliancy and command of finger; but what distinguished him from all other players, who possessed the same qualities, was that amazing fulness, force, and energy, which he joined with them."

As might be expected from a virtuoso who was also a composer, Handel wrote a great deal of music for the harpsichord. Yet, the publication, in 1720, of his first book of *Suites de pièces de clavecin* was still an extraordinary event. It was the first authorized publication of any of his instrumental works, and it was to remain the only collection of harpsichord suites he was to issue under his own auspices.

(In 1719, a publisher in Amsterdam had issued a col-

lection of Handel's harpsichord pieces—without permission, as was common in the days before international copyright. Harpsichord music was quite a saleable commodity in England at the time, as demonstrated by the wide circulation of the many domestic and imported harpsichord works issued by the English publisher John Walsh. Later, in 1733, Walsh was to pirate Handel's second volume of harpsichord suites.)

Always a man with a keen business sense, Handel realized that he was losing a fine opportunity. In June 1720, he received a royal privilege to publish his own works. The very first publication under this privilege was the book of eight suites, issued for him in November by John Chester of London.

Handel included in the edition the following note, apparently written by himself:

"I have been obliged to publish some of the following Lessons, because surreptitious and incorrect Copies of them had got Abroad. I have added several new ones to make the Work more useful, which if it meets with a favourable Reception, I will still proceed to publish more, reckoning it my duty, with my Small Talent, to serve a Nation from which I have receiv'd so Generous a protection."

The unauthorized Amsterdam edition of 1719 had apparently been produced from various manuscript copies; not only was it tainted by the usual corruptions, but, also, it consisted of pieces that Handel had produced for various occasions and never revised. Many of these were now thoroughly rewritten and improved by Handel; also, as the composer states, he added a number of new pieces that had not been published previously. Even the arrangement into suites was done with great care, and the suites themselves are presented in a deliberately arranged and contrasted sequence of keys. The two later collections of Handel's suites that appeared during his lifetime were prepared in much the same way as the 1719 Amsterdam edition, and they are, for the most part, musically inferior. Handel may not have cared enough for the details of publishing to do his own proofreading, for the edition of 1720 contains numerous errors. But he did care enough to impart to this edition his compositional intent.

The suites are rather unorthodox in form and do not follow the generally-established dance sequence of the 18th-century instrumental suite. Each of the four recorded here follows a different pattern, and they are best described individually.

No. 1, in A Major. The prelude for this suite consists primarily of a sequence of chords that invite the performer to invent his own embellishments. Glenn Gould

here contributes an intricate personal statement composed expressly for this recording. A brilliant *Prelude*, combining arpeggios and scales, is followed by three dances—Allemande, Courante, and Gigue—that are Italian style.

No. 2, in F Major. This is not really a suite at all but a sonata da chiesa in the Italian style, of the type often composed for violin and continuo. The movements follow the common pattern: Adagio, Allegro, Adagio, Allegro.

No. 3, in D Minor. Like Bach, whose *Clavierübung* Book II appeared fifteen years later, Handel here is writing orchestral music for harpsichord. Unlike Bach, but typically for him, Handel later reused some of the pieces in the *Concerti Grossi* of Op. 3. The first two movements, *Prelude* and *Allegro*, are actually a prelude and fugue. Italianate dances, an Allemande and a Courante, are then followed by an *Air* and *Variations* and a concluding *Presto*.

No. 4, in E Minor. The opening *Allegro* is a fugue, in the style of Italian violin music. The following movements, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue, comprise the most orthodox suite sequence in the entire collection.

While Handel's harpsichord works may not be the most important segment of his production, the best of them are fully worthy of his genius. Their values in relation to Handel's better-known music are pointed out by the eminent musicologist Paul Henry Lang: "A number of these compositions serve as proving grounds for his dramatic works. In them appear certain basic ideas and models that were to follow Handel throughout his career." And of all his works, it is probably the first book of suites, along with the *Organ Concertos*, that provide us with the best picture of Handel as performer-composer.

—Leslie Gerber

Engineering: Kent Warden and John Johnson

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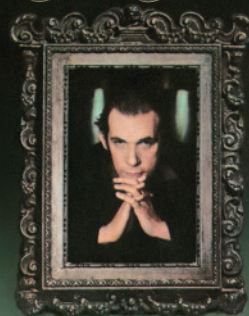
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First Recording at the Harpsichord

# Glenn Gould



# Handel:

## Suites for Harpsichord Nos. 1-4



## George Frideric Handel 1685–1759

### Harpsichord Suite No. 1 in A major HWV 426

A-Dur · en *la* majeur

1	I. Prélude	2:18
2	II. Allemande	3:06
3	III. Courante	2:21
4	IV. Gigue	2:02

### Harpsichord Suite No. 2 in F major HWV 427

F-Dur · en *fa* majeur

5	I. Adagio – <i>attacca</i>	2:30
6	II. Allegro	1:26
7	III. Adagio – <i>attacca</i>	1:58
8	IV. Allegro [Fuga]	1:56

### Harpsichord Suite No. 3 in D minor HWV 428

d-Moll · en *ré* mineur

9	I. Prélude. Presto – <i>attacca</i>	0:59
10	II. Allegro [Fuga]	1:55
11	III. Allemande – <i>attacca</i>	2:32
12	IV. Courante	1:56
13	V. Air con Variazioni	3:59

14	Variatio 1	0:43
15	Variatio 2	0:40
16	Variatio 3	0:41
17	Variatio 4	0:48
18	Variatio 5	0:36
19	VI. Presto	2:04

### Harpsichord Suite No. 4 in E minor HWV 429

e-Moll · en *mi* mineur

20	I. Allegro [Fuga]	2:49
21	II. Allemande – <i>attacca</i>	1:10
22	III. Courante	1:17
23	IV. Sarabande	2:49
24	V. Gigue	1:04

Total Time 44:04

## Glenn Gould harpsichord

**Original LP: M 31512** · Released August 30, 1972

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Cover Photo: Don Hunstein (Glenn Gould) · Liner Notes: Leslie Gerber

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