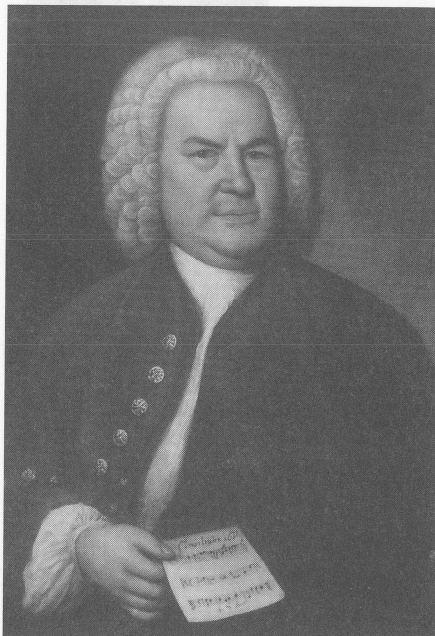


Johann Sebastian Bach



born
March 21, 1685
Eisenach, Germany
died
July 28, 1750
Leipzig, Germany

“
The organ, to my
eyes and ears, is the
king of instruments.
—Wolfgang Amadeus
Mozart
”

Yo'-hahn Sih-bahs'-tian Bakh

You can put a little “ch” at the end of his last name.

A composer of the Baroque era.

Both of Johann Sebastian Bach's parents died before he turned 10. After their deaths, Johann lived with his older brother Christoph, a church organist, who taught Johann harpsichord and organ. For virtually his entire life, Johann Sebastian Bach was a church musician, beginning as a boy soprano in a church choir. After his voice changed he became a violinist in a church orchestra at Lüneburg, near Hamburg, Germany.

As a teenager, Bach often traveled to Hamburg to hear concerts and to take organ lessons. In 1703 (age 18), he became the town organist at Arnstadt, and it was here that he first began to compose music. Four years later he married, and was soon appointed the court organist and violinist to the Duke of Weimar. In this position, Bach was able to study all styles of music and develop his composing skills. He wrote many pieces for organ and harpsichord as well as several sacred **cantatas**.

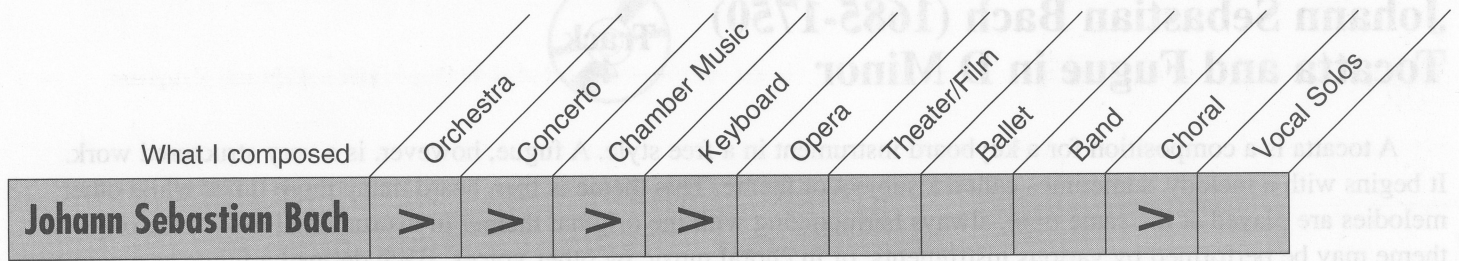
In 1717 (age 32), the Prince of Cöthen hired Bach as his court choirmaster. In this position he had more time to compose hundreds of works for **clavier** (including one of his most famous works, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*), strings, instrumental ensembles of all sizes, solos, duets, trios, and **concertos**. His wife, Maria, died suddenly in 1720, and a year later he married Anna Wülken, a fine singer.

Bach remained at Cöthen until 1723 (age 38), when the Prince's new wife decided she preferred less serious music than that which Bach composed. Bach moved to Leipzig, Germany, and became choirmaster at a private choir school. He also supervised the music in two Leipzig churches and wrote music for all church occasions. Bach was never totally happy in this position, but he took the job so his children could be educated at the school. When he was a court musician, professional musicians were available to perform his music. Now his works were performed, often poorly, by student and amateur musicians. His pay was less and his living conditions were sub-standard. Nevertheless, he remained at the choir school for the rest of his life.

In Leipzig, Bach composed almost endlessly, providing music for both the church and the community. He also taught music, Latin, and conducted the choir at the choir school. Occasionally, he traveled throughout Europe to hear the music of other composers.

In appearance, Bach was a bit overweight. He was courteous, dignified, and loyal to his friends. As a teacher, he was considerate and patient with his students. As a composer, he approached his work as a job that had to be done. When asked to describe his life as a composer, he answered, “I worked hard.” He wrote in all musical forms and styles except opera. Bach probably would not have expected his music to be performed today, more than 200 years after his death; his goal was simply to create music for everyday occasions in eighteenth century Leipzig.

Johann Sebastian Bach



Bach Factoids:

- Bach had 20 children, several of whom became composers.
- Although he wrote thousands of pieces of music, less than a dozen were published during his lifetime.
- Bach never composed an opera; he thought they were frivolous.
- **Richard Wagner** said Bach's music "is the most stupendous miracle in all music."
- Bach enjoyed the music of **Antonio Vivaldi**.

1685: Birth of Johann Sebastian Bach and **George Frideric Handel**.

1704: *Boston News Letter* is published; first newspaper in America.

1709: Invention of the piano by Italian Bartolomeo Cristofori.

1714: D. G. Fahrenheit constructs mercury thermometer with a temperature scale.

1718: Yale University (formerly Collegiate School of America) moves to New Haven, Connecticut.

1731: Benjamin Franklin introduces a subscription library in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1743: First settlement in South Dakota.

1750: Death of Johann Sebastian Bach; the minuet becomes Europe's fashionable dance.

What in the world is happening?

Listen!

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor



A tocatta is a composition for a keyboard instrument in a free style. A fugue, however, is a very structured work. It begins with a melody, sometimes called a subject or theme. This theme is then heard many more times while other melodies are played at the same time, always harmonizing with the original theme. In instrumental music, the original theme may be performed by various instruments, or in choral music by other voices. Bach defined a fugue as a conversation between two or more voices, talking about the same subject in different ways, but in the end always uniting in a final harmonious chord. The fugue was the basis of much of Bach's music.

Bach was probably the greatest organist of his time. During Bach's life, the organ experienced a revolution in technology, with improvements in the tonality and range of the instrument. Churches were building new organs or updating their old ones. Bach was not only a virtuoso organist, but an organ mechanic as well. He often traveled to other towns, supervising construction of an organ, and then giving a concert.

When Bach was the court organist to the Duke of Weimar, he wrote 39 glorious organ works. One of them was the Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor. This is one of the few organ pieces where music historians have evidence of a performance by Bach himself, in 1732.

When you hear the Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor you may think of Halloween and "scary things." It is often used in movies and cartoons to depict monsters.

- Can you hear the arpeggios (separated chords) as opposed to scale passages?
- Raise your hand when the fugue begins. There is a silence just before it begins. Notice how you can hear the bass playing the melody. The organist plays the bass melody with his feet on the pedals of the organ.

“

A three voice fugue resembles a family of identical triplets in perfect agreement.

—Ned Rorem, 1974

”

You will hear the first part of the piece, the toccata, and the beginning of the fugue.

TIMING

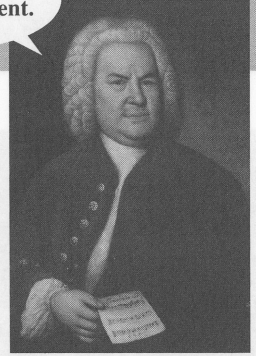
- :01 The piece begins with a fanfare-like introduction.
- :20 Listen for the low organ note. Very low notes such as these are played on foot pedals below the organ keyboard. Long, low held notes are sometimes called "pedal tones."
- :33 A solo passage is played, first softly, then loudly. The melody rises, then falls.
- :58 Listen again for the pedal tone. There is a big chord followed by a solo passage. An unaccompanied solo passage such as this is known as a cadenza. Performers often use cadenzas to show off their skills on their instrument.
- 1:17 Another lengthy, rapid solo passage. Occasionally, the melody "lands" on a full chord, and you may think the melody is going to end, but it doesn't. It just keeps going, pushing forward in an agitated manner.
- 2:46 Finally the melody lands on a minor chord. Instead of saying that a melody "lands" on a chord, musicians say it "cadences" or "resolves" on a chord.
- 2:50 At this point the fugue begins. Listen to the various melodies as they enter.

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Review!

Good luck,
young student.



Johann Sebastian Bach Name _____

Place the letter of the correct answer in the space provided.
For True/False questions, print True or False in the space provided.

- Throughout his life, Bach was always a _____.
A. violinist C. clavier tuner
B. church musician D. singer
- True or False: Bach lived his entire life in Germany. _____
- Which instrument did Bach *not* play? _____
A. harpsichord C. clavier
B. organ D. oboe
- True or False: Bach wrote several operas. _____
- A toccata is _____ A. structured
A fugue is _____ B. in a free style
- True or False: Bach never took music lessons; he was a completely self-taught musician. _____
- True or False: At one point in his life, Bach was a school teacher. _____
- As a child, Bach performed in a musical group. It was _____.
A. a choir C. an orchestra
B. a band D. a ballet
- During his life, Bach composed _____.
A. less than 100 musical works
B. more than 100 musical works
- True or False: Bach became a wealthy man because hundreds of his compositions were published during his lifetime. _____

Bonus:

What composer was born the same year as Bach?
