

Bach to School

Teacher's Guide

Bach in Time

Dana Marsh, Artistic Director

Washington Bach Consort



A Letter from the Consort

Dear Educator:

I am thrilled to hear that your school will be taking part in the Washington Bach Consort's Bach to School program. As a teacher, I'm sure you realize the importance of the arts in providing a full, well-rounded education to every child.

Personally, I have loved the music of Bach since I was a child singing in the Washington National Cathedral Choir. Bach's music has a lot to teach children—in fact, much of music theory as we know it today is based on the study of Bach's music.

We hope that this educational guide will be helpful to you as you prepare your students for their visit. For best results, we suggest that you take two 30-minute periods before the program to get your students ready and another period after the program to solidify what they've learned. By the way, we love to receive letters, drawings, and reviews from students! Your response is also important to us, so please be sure to return an evaluation form to us at the end of the performance. Tell us what you like and don't like about this guide, our performance, or our music. With your input, our program can only get better. Enjoy the show!

Sincerely,



Dana Marsh
Artistic Director
Washington Bach Consort



Bach to School



Let's talk...

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born: March 21, 1685 in Eisenach, Germany

Early Life: He was the eighth child of a well-known organist, with whom he began his musical studies. He lost his parents at the age of 10. Bach moved in with his older brother Johann Christoph, also an organist in Ohrdruf. During his stay, Bach excelled at organ, clavier, singing, violin and composing, as well as in school. At fifteen, he became a choirboy. He would memorize scores from the church library.

In **1705**, Bach walked 200 miles to see the greatest organist of the time, Buxtehude.

Professional Career: Bach became the church organist at Arnstadt when he was nineteen, and moved on to the same position at Muhlhausen. However, his original music was not accepted there.

In **1708**, he started his first major job as church organist and chamber musician in Weimar while writing the most impressive organ repertoire ever created by one man.

By **1717**, Bach was regarded as one of the greatest organists of his day. However, his employer (the Duke of Weimar) thought of him as a simple musician. Insulted by his treatment, Bach accepted the position of Kapellmeister (choir master) at Cothen.

In **1723**, Bach moved to Leipzig, where he remained until his death. Bach's eyesight and health eventually began to fail and an unsuccessful eye operation resulted in total blindness. He continued to compose until his death on July 28, 1750.

Did you know? In 1977, NASA launched The Voyager spacecraft into outer space, along with a 12-inch gold plated record containing sounds and images selected to portray the diversity of life and culture on Earth. The musical selections feature works by J.S. Bach, as well as other prominent composers and popular musicians.



The Bach Family

In 1735, Bach began to document two centuries of his family history in, "Origins of the musical Bach family."

From his first marriage, Bach had seven children. After his first wife's passing, Bach married Anna Magdalena, with whom he had thirteen children.

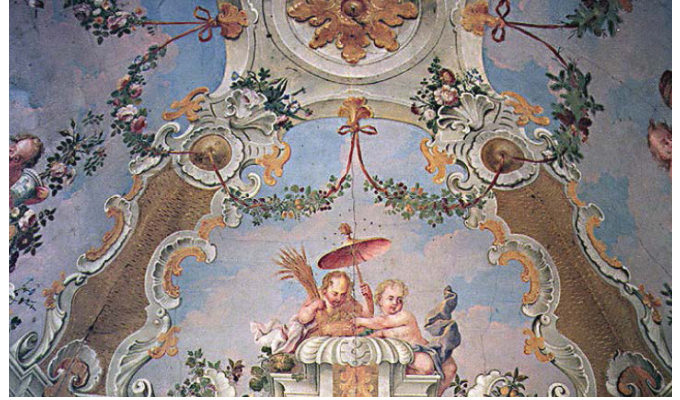
Bach's most musically successful sons were Carl Philipp Emanuel (C.P.E.) and Johann Christian (J.C.).



Picture of J.S. Bach with his sons.

The Baroque Era (1600–1750) corresponds roughly to Bach's lifetime (1685–1750), with Bach as an influential figure of its musical expression.

Bach's World



This ceiling is an example of Baroque art and architecture.

Bach lived in a world where churches were a BIG part of everyday life, and the main source of employment for artists and musicians. Artists were servants or, often, salaried employees.

The only other employers in the arts were the people at the emperors, kings, princes, and grand dukes ruled by divine right*.

Bach worked for one such prince until the prince's wife, who didn't like Bach or his music, had the prince cause his imminent departure.

In the arts, such as architecture or music, fancy and elaborate decoration is a typical characteristic of the Baroque period.

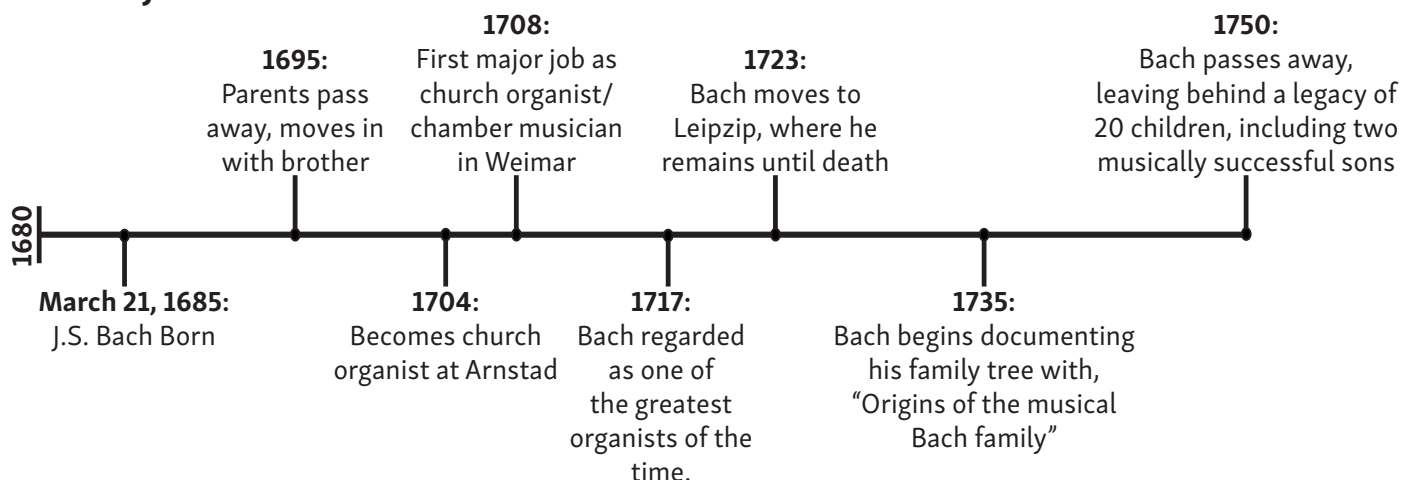


Bach spent the last twenty seven-years of his life in Leipzig, where his job was to compose music for the city and the churches, direct the church choir and instruments, occasionally play the church organ, and instruct at the St. Thomas school.

*Divine Right: An ancient idea that began with Europe's medieval kings, claiming that they had been chosen by God and were his representatives on Earth. These kings had absolute power and could do as they liked.

One of Bach's talents was his ability to take a tune and decorate it so it was better than the original.

Timeline of J.S. Bach's Life



When Bach was Born in 1685...

- Charles II of England died, to be succeeded by William and Mary.
- Louis XIV of France had been king for almost 40 years. He went on to become the longest-ruling Monarch in European history.
- John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, was 35 years old. His career spanned the reigns of five monarchs.

When Bach turned 10...

- A window tax was imposed in England, causing many shopkeepers to brick up their windows to avoid the tax.

When Bach turned 21...

- Benjamin Franklin was born.

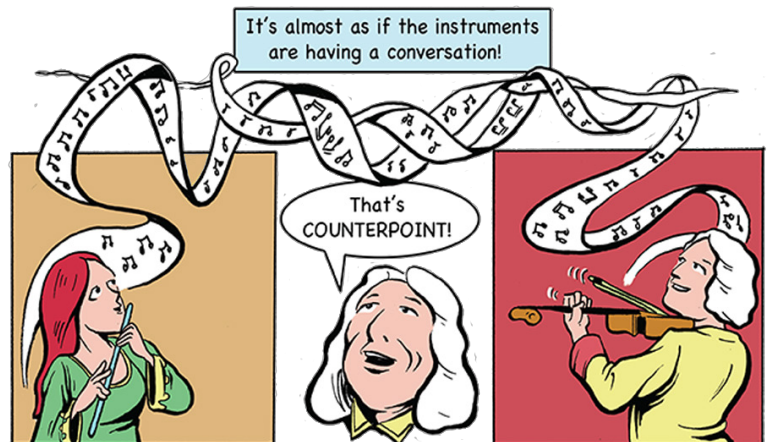
When Bach died in 1750...

- The American Revolution would be fought over 20 years later.
- George Washington was 18 years old.
- Frederick the Great was King of Prussia.

Bach's last large work was the *Mass in B minor*. Consisting mainly of recycled movements* from cantatas written over a 35-year period, it allowed Bach to evaluate his vocal pieces one last time and pick certain parts, or movements, for further revision. The complete work was never performed during the composer's lifetime, but is considered to be among the greatest choral works of all time.

Palace of Versailles was the principal royal residence of France from 1682, under Louis XIV. The ornate art work and detailed architecture are full of symbolic meaning.

You may have heard of chess grand masters who can simultaneously play several matches, or visualize dozens of possible variations in play and their results. Bach's compositions show an even greater mastery in music.



Bach was a great student. He learned French and Italian so he could study the works of the French and Italian composers.

He was very good at math: a great quality of Bach's music is its adherence to mathematical discipline.

Mostly though, he studied music and music theory. He was so good that, at first, you don't realize just how beautifully crafted his compositions are. He was the master of counterpoint - a writing technique where there is more than one melody played at the same time. This weaving of melodies results in music with astounding complexity.



Glossary

Aria: An aria is an elaborate solo song with instrumental accompaniment. In the operas of J.S. Bach's time, the aria was the time for the soloist to dwell on a certain topic in the plot. Also, arias are the most melodic parts of operas, meant to highlight the capabilities of the soloist.

Baroque: This refers to the music, art and architecture in Europe from 1600–1750. The music is characterized by the use of counterpoint (see below), expressive melodies and chromaticism.

Did you know?

The Consort completed Bach's entire 215-cantata cycle. In association with this monumental achievement, the Library of Congress welcomed the Washington Bach Consort performance recording and concert program archives into its permanent collection. In May 2019, the Council of the District of Columbia honored the Washington Bach Consort in recognition of the 30th anniversary of the Consort's free classical music performances.

Canon: The name of a composition in which all of the parts have the same melody, but start at different times within the piece.

Cantata: A medium-length narrative piece of music for voices and instrumental accompaniment. Typically including solos, chorus, and orchestra.

Counterpoint: A technique in which there are two or more different melodies being played at the same time. These melodies often move in opposite directions up and down the scale, which can be called contrary motion.

Fugue: The most advanced form of imitative counterpoint which was perfected by J.S. Bach. It is based on a short melody called the "subject" which is imitated, reversed, inverted, slowed down and sped up to make an entire piece.

Ground Bass: This is a short phrase in the base which is repeated throughout a piece to give it stability and coherence. The part above the ground bass is free to expand the melody imaginatively.

Movement: a self-contained part of a piece of music. Like a sentence, a movement is only one part of the story, that when combined with the other movements (or "sentences"), the piece of music tells the whole story.

Improvisation: This is when a musician expands upon a melody spontaneously, using his/her own imagination. Improvisation (also called "improv") was one of the skills J.S. Bach was most famous for.

Recitative: Another part of Baroque operas, the recitative is where soloists sing with minimal accompaniment in order to move the plot of the opera along. Generally, the recitatives are not very melodic, but rather sound as if the soloist is talking.

Theme and Variation: A form of music that begins with a main melody (the theme) that is then altered or changed in some way throughout the piece (the variation).



The Music of J.S. Bach

Using every musical form available at the time except opera, Bach composed an enormous amount of music (over 1,200 compositions) having such qualities as clear form, strong rhythm, grand proportions, imaginative symbolism, and intense expression.

Bach's first works were for organ, including preludes and fugues, trio sonatas, and chorale preludes. Bach also composed music for the harpsichord including preludes, fantasies, toccatas, fugues, dance suites, variations, sonatas, concertos and suites.

As for vocal music, Bach composed nearly 300 church cantatas, a few secular cantatas, motets, passions, short masses, and the Mass in B minor.

When Bach died, he and this monumental collection of music was forgotten because of a wide-spread change of musical taste. It is said that some of his hand-written music was used in the local market to wrap fish. It was half a century after Bach's death when the genius of Johann Sebastian Bach was rediscovered (or perhaps even discovered for the first time!) and admired by all music-lovers.

Johann Sebastian Bach.

Signature of Johann Sebastian Bach





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