

Bach to School

Teacher's Guide



Hercules at the Crossroads

Dana Marsh, Artistic Director
Washington Bach Consort



Overview

Thank you for your interest in Hercules at the Crossroads! We, the musicians/teaching artists, and staff of Washington Bach Consort, are looking forward to working with you and your students.

Hercules at the Crossroads is a two-part program for 3rd–5th graders, featuring an inclusive, participatory performance of a cantata (a mini-musical!) by J.S. Bach about the hero, Hercules.

Bach's Cantata, Hercules at the Crossroads, is originally in German. In this production, the Washington Bach Consort presents most of the text in English, and some of the text in German with translations. Students will have the opportunity to hear and sing music in English and in German as a part of the in-school workshop and the concert.



What to Expect

At the school visit:

Before the performance, two teaching-artists from WBC visit your class to provide musical, mythical, and historical contexts of the music, and familiarize participants with the key elements of the story and the music. Students will learn to sing (in German) and sign (in ASL) short musical selections from Hercules and will participate at key moments in the performance. A note sheet will be provided to help guide the students.

At the concert:

The concert performance of Hercules at the Crossroads lasts about 45 minutes. A slide-show with key images and text translations is projected over the stage. Students will participate in the concert (remaining in their seats, singing along with the professional orchestra and singers), performing music learned during the school visit. A discussion session follows the performance to reinforce concepts introduced in the workshop.

The Bach Family

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

Bach had a total of 20 children throughout his lifetime, only some making it to adulthood. His most musically successful sons were Carl Philipp Emanuel (C.P.E.) and Johann Christian (J.C.).



Picture of J.S. Bach with his sons.



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 before moving to Ohrdruf to live with his older brother Johann Christoph. During his stay, Bach excelled at organ, clavier, singing, violin and composing, as well as in school. At fifteen, he became a choirboy and he would memorize scores from the church library.

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. It remained this way until a revival in the 19th century that led to Bach's original works becoming more widely recognized. He is now regarded as one of the greatest composers of all time.

In 1695, Bach moved in with his older brother Johann Cristoph, an organist, after the death of his parents.

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.

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's World

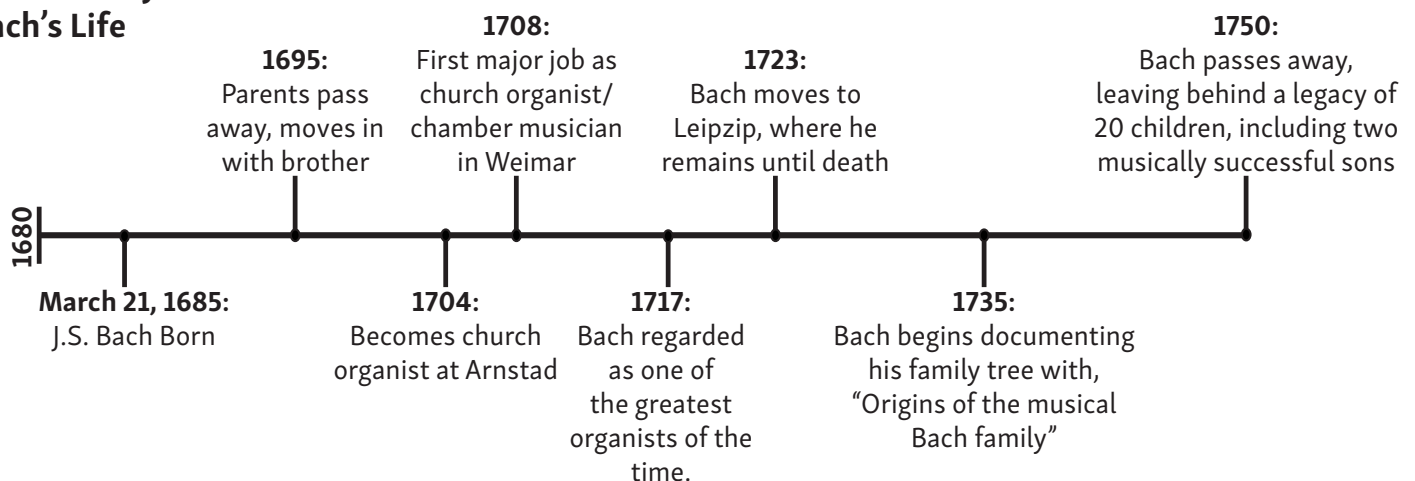
In the arts, such as architecture or music, fancy and elaborate decoration is a typical characteristic of the Baroque period.



^ This ceiling is an example of Baroque art and architecture.



Timeline of J.S. Bach's Life



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

Bach lived in a world where the churches were a BIG part of everyday life, and the main source of employment for artists and musicians.

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

Artists were servants or, often, salaried employees, ranking only with secretaries, farm managers, butlers, and cooks.

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.

*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 great talents was his ability to take a tune, either his own or a great hymn, and decorate it so it was better than the original.

When Bach was Born in 1685...

- George Frederic Handel, another influential composer for the Baroque period, (b. February 23, 1685) was one month old.
- Louis XIV of France had been king for almost 40 years. He went on to become the longest-ruling Monarch in European history.

When Bach was 8...

- The Nine Years War began with King Louis XIV's invasion of the Rhineland in October.

When Bach was 10...

- A window tax was imposed in England, causing many shopkeepers to brick up their windows to avoid the tax.
- He moved in with his brother, Johann Cristoph.

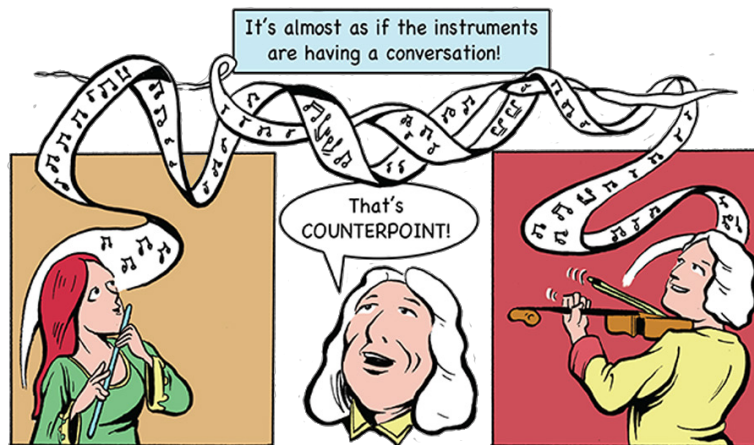
When Bach was 50...

- George Frideric Handel's opera Ariodante played at the Royal Opera House in London.

When Bach died in 1750...

- George Washington was 18 years old.

Did you know? In 1700, he was granted a scholarship at St. Michael's School in Luneburg for his fine voice.



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. Many of his works incorporate the numbers 14 and 41.

Mostly though, he studied music and music theory. He was so good that, at first, you don't realize just how complex his pieces are. He was the master of counterpoint - a writing technique where there is more than one melody played at the same time.

Palace of Versailles was the principal royal residence of France from 1682, under Louis XIV. The complex art work and architecture are full of symbolic meaning. This is another great example of Baroque architecture.



Did you know? Bach struggled terribly with his eyesight, becoming completely blind in March 1750. He still continued to compose music as much as he could, even dictating works to his son.

Despite being born in the same year and only about 81 miles apart, Bach and Handel never met.

Glossary

Accompaniment: An instrumental or vocal part designed to support a melody.

Aria: A complicated solo song with instrumental accompaniment that is typically meant to showcase the soloists skills.

Baroque: Refers to the music, art, and architecture in Europe of 1600-1750. The music is characterized by extravagant and expressive melodies, the use of counterpoint, and it's chromatic (See below) nature. Bach himself was a Baroque composer, completing many popular pieces during this time such as Cantatas.

Cantata: A medium-length musical composition for chorus, soloists, and instruments, based on a sacred text, poem, or play.

Composing: To write or create a piece of art, more specifically music.

Fugue: A piece of music based on a short melody called the "subject" which is imitated, reversed, inverted, slowed down and sped up to make an entire piece.

Harmony: The combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions.

Improvisation: 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.

Interval: The distance that is found between two individual notes.

Melody: A series of different notes or sounds, in a piece of music. The notes are played or sung one after another to make up a song. The notes in a melody may be low or high.

Meter: Where beats are combined in groups of two, three, or more to a measure.

Orchestra: A group of musicians that play instruments together to make music.

Organ: A keyboard instrument that makes different pitches with different sized pipes. The sound comes from air being pushed through the pipes. Some organs only have only twenty pipes while some have over 20,000!

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.

Scale: Typically made of seven notes, the interval sequence begins with two whole steps, one-half step, three whole steps, and one-half step.

*Major Scale: Major keys sound brighter and more positive in comparison to minor keys.

*Minor Scale: Can sound sad and less positive.

Secular: Anything, such as music or art, that is *not* related to the church or has any religious affiliation.

Tempo: The rate or speed at which a piece of music is played.



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, and intense expression.

Bach's first works were for the organ, including preludes and fugues, and trio sonatas. Bach also composed music for the harpsichord including preludes, toccatas, fugues, dance suites, and variations. These are musical forms that were created and/or popularized during the Baroque period. For example, a fugue is a piece of music that is based on a short melody called the "subject" which is imitated, reversed, turned up-side down, slowed down and sped up to make an entire piece!

As for vocal music, Bach composed nearly 300 church cantatas, a few secular (not relating to the church or having any religious affiliation) cantatas, motets, and the Mass in B minor, a particularly famous piece.

When Bach died, he and this impressive collection of music was forgotten because of a wide-spread change in 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.



^Signature of Johann Sebastian Bach

Connecting to ELA Standards for Grades 3-5

BEING

Students will learn about the story-telling power of the cantata and its role in 18th-century European culture, and today.

PERCEIVING

Students will learn about how the elements of the music (e.g. meter, melody and accompaniment, imitation, and text-painting) play a role in telling the story.

CONNECTING

Students will participate in the interpretive process as they learn to perform key sections of the music.

BUILDING

Students will learn the structural elements of Cantata form, including recitative, aria and chorus/chorale, including what distinguishes each of these elements.

TRUSTING

As a part of the in-school workshop, teaching artists will guide students through the process of creating an original recitative.

BRIDGING

Students will participate in a question and answer session with visiting musicians about their careers as professional musicians specializing in Bach, and the life experiences that led them to this career.



www.bachconsort.org
education@bachconsort.org

