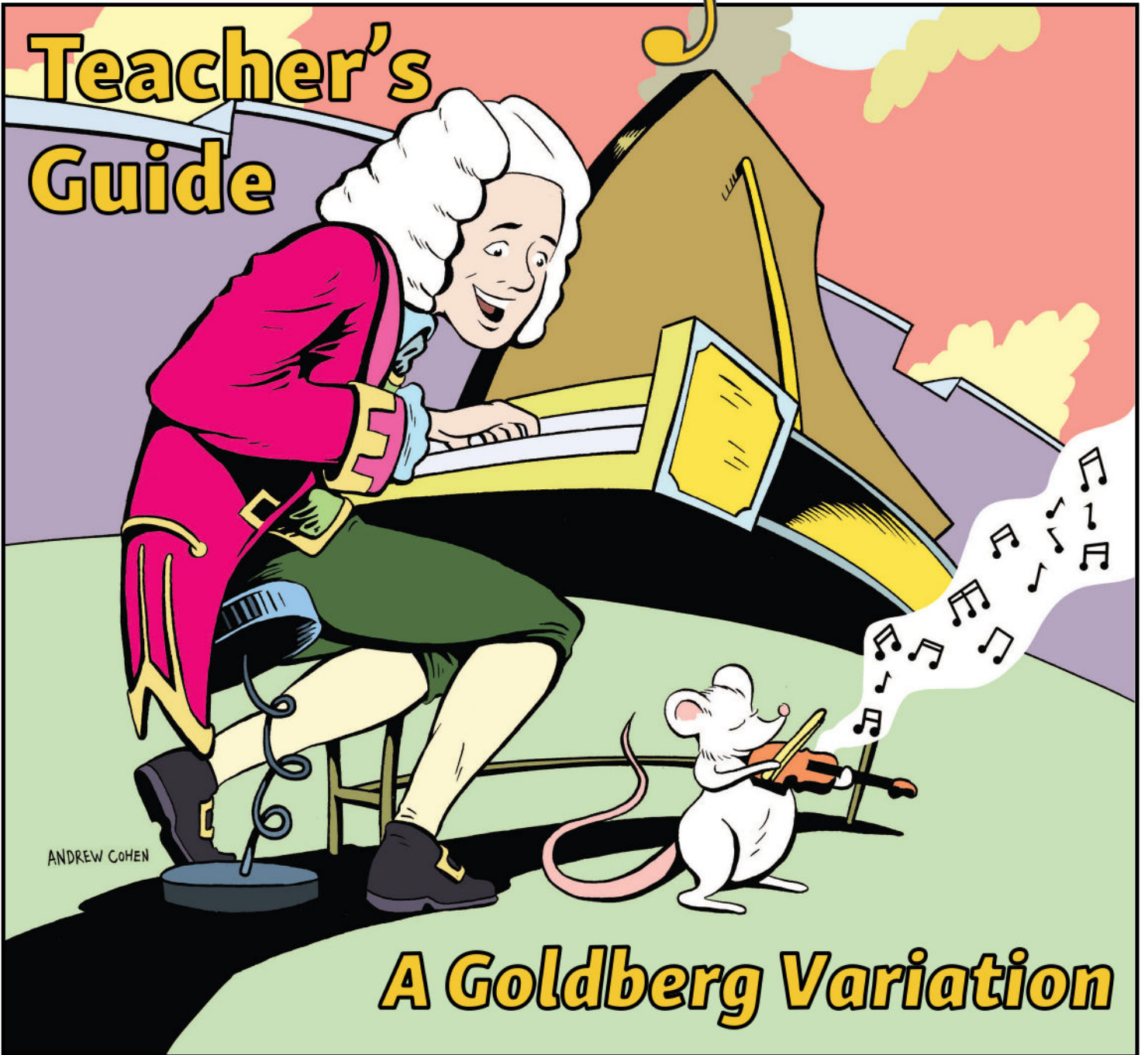


# Bach to School

## Teacher's Guide



## A Goldberg Variation

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



The logo features the words "Bach to School" in a stylized font. The word "Bach" is in purple with a piano keyboard graphic integrated into the letter "B". The word "to" is in green. The word "School" is in purple and includes a treble clef graphic as the letter "S".



Let's talk...

# Johann Sebastian Bach

## The 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.).

**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, after which he moved in with his older brother. During this time, Bach excelled at organ, clavier\*, violin, singing, and composing, as well as in school. At fifteen, he became a choirboy and would memorize scores from the church library.

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



Picture of J.S. Bach with his sons.

**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.

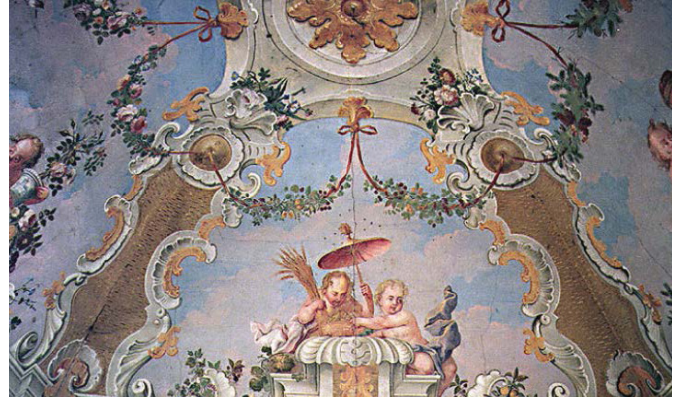
**In 1723**, Bach moved to Leipzig, where he remained until his death. Bach's eyesight and health eventually began to fail and an unsuccessful eye operation resulted in total blindness. He continued to compose until his death on July 28, 1750.

**Did you know?** In his lifetime (65 years), Bach composed **1,128** pieces of music. There are a further 23 works which were lost or unfinished. His best-known compositions include The Well-Tempered Clavier, Toccata and Fugue in D minor, and **Goldberg Variations**.



**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.

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.

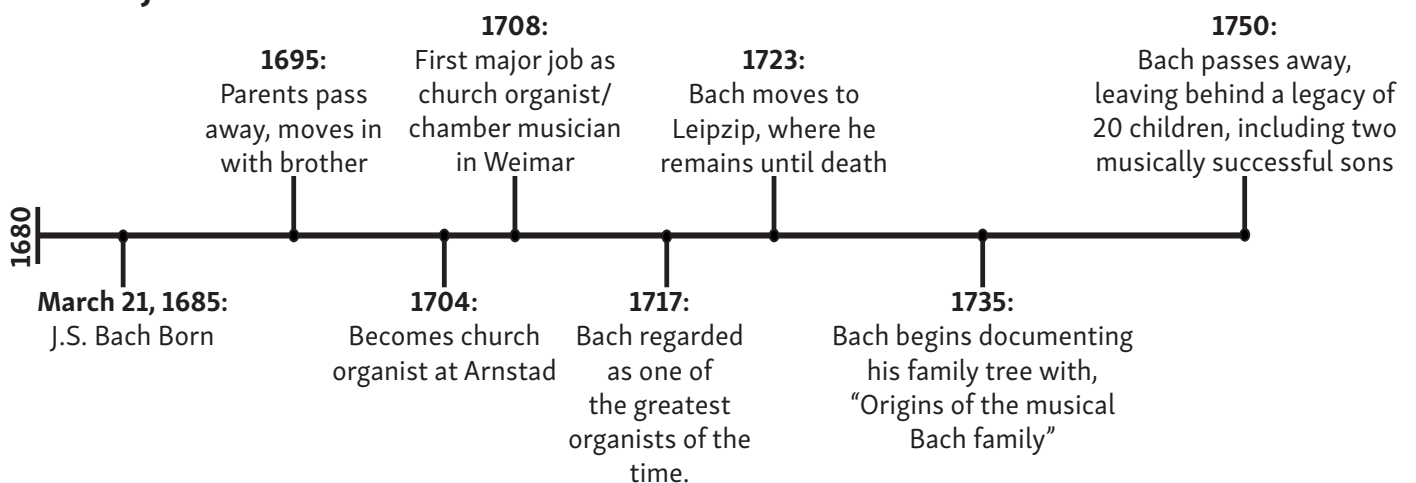
\*Divine Right: An ancient idea that began with Europe's medieval kings, claiming that they had been chosen by God and were his representatives on Earth. These kings had absolute power and could do as they liked.

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

## Timeline of J.S. Bach's Life



### When Bach was born in 1685...

- George Frederic Handel, an influential composer for the Baroque period, (b. February 23, 1685) was one month old.

### When Bach turned 3...

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

### 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 20...

- He walked 200 miles to see the greatest organist of the time, Buxtehude.

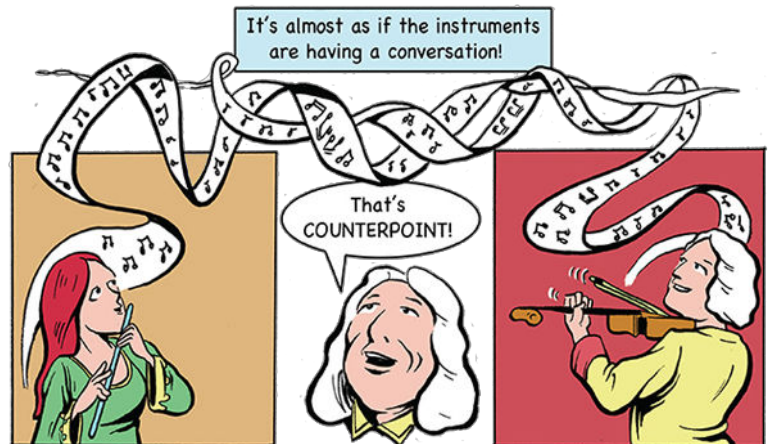
### When Bach died in 1750...

- George Washington was 18 years old.
- Britain produced 2% of the entire world's output of industrial goods, before the Industrial Revolution began.

**Did you know?** Bach's brother did not believe he (J.S. Bach) was ready to learn the pieces in a book of famous compositions that were in the cupboard. So at night, J.S. Bach snuck downstairs and copied the notes by hand using only moonlight so he wouldn't wake anyone up. It took him 6 months! That was how badly he wanted to learn to play the pieces!

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

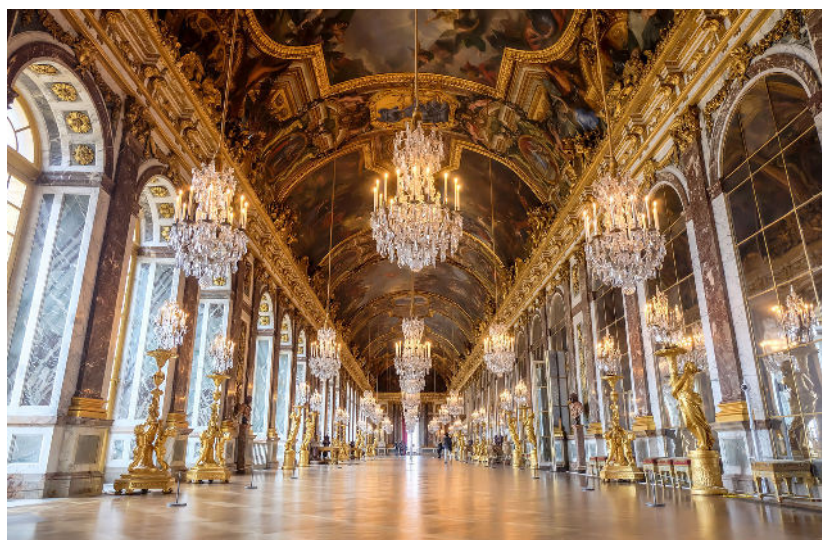
You may have heard of chess grand masters who can simultaneously play several matches, or visualize dozens of possible variations in the game and what their results could be. Bach's compositions show an even greater mastery in music.



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. Many of his works incorporate the number's 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.



# 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.

**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. During this period musical forms such as the suite, sonata, rondo, concerto, opera, and cantata were developed and perfected.

## Did you know?

Bach wrote a collection of keyboard pieces to help students learn various keyboard techniques and methods entitled ***The Well-Tempered Clavier\****.

\*Clavier: A keyboard instrument with strings, such as a piano or harpsichord.

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

**Composer:** A person who writes music.

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

**Counterpoint:** A compositional technique where there is more than one melody played at the same time. Each part becomes significant through its melodic and rhythmic independence.

**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.

**Harmony:** The combination of musical notes played at the same time to produce a chord.

**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.

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

**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.

**Rhythm:** a pattern of sound which can be repeated to a regular beat.

**Virtuoso:** An individual who is highly skilled on an instrument.

**Tempo:** How fast or slow the music is played. The speed of the beat.

**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.

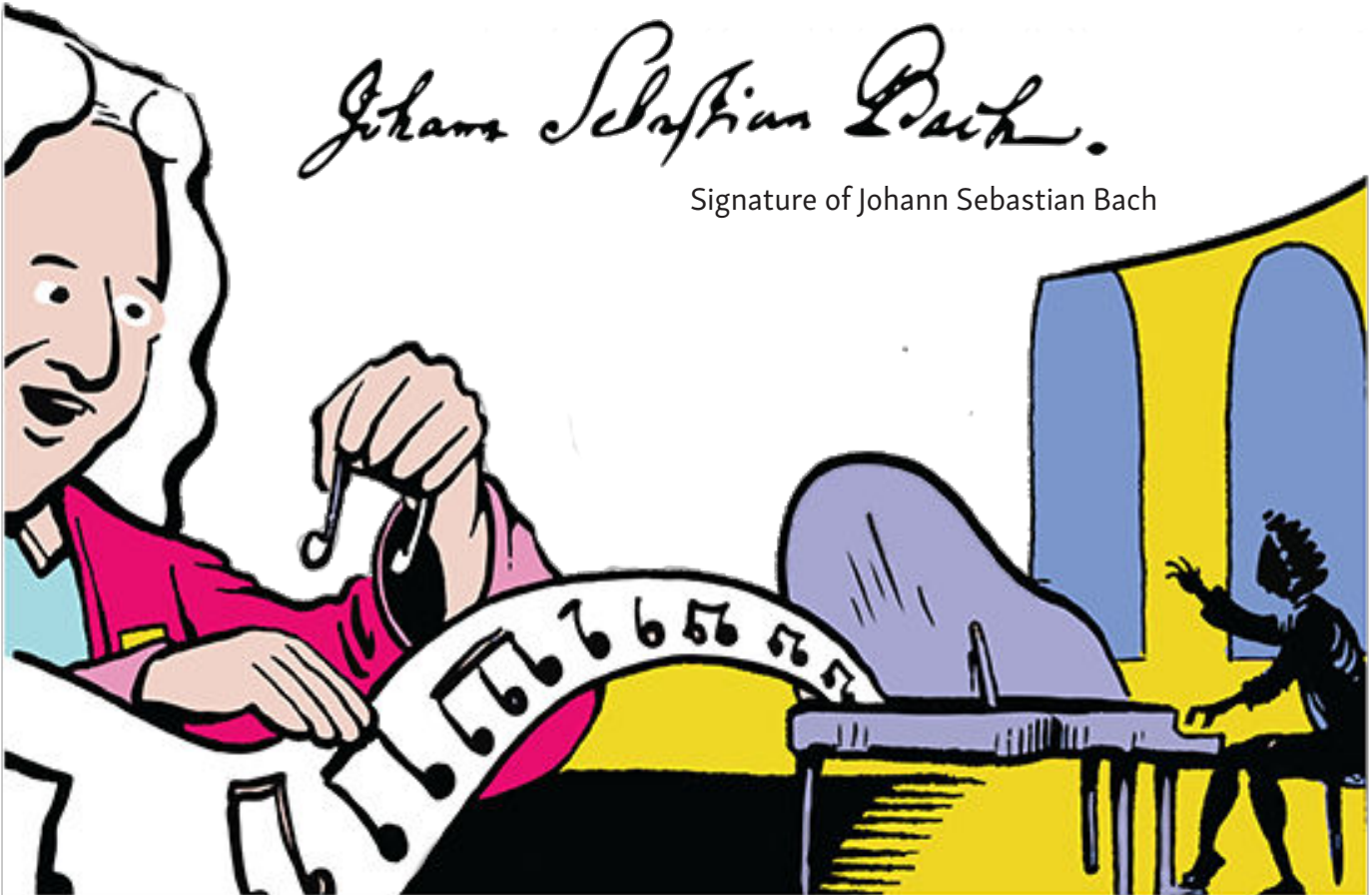
Bach's first works were for organ, including preludes and fugues, and trio sonatas. Bach also composed music for the harpsichord including preludes, toccatas, fugues, dance suites, and variations. These are musical forms that were created and/or popularized during the Baroque period. For example, a fugue 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.

*Johann Sebastian Bach.*

Signature of Johann Sebastian Bach





[www.bachconsort.org](http://www.bachconsort.org)  
[education@bachconsort.org](mailto:education@bachconsort.org)