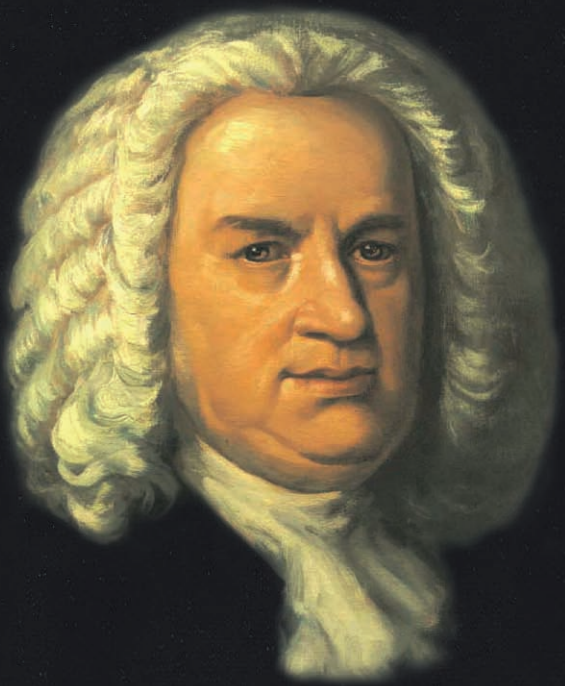
LIFE AND WORKS



Johann Sebastian

# Bach

Written and narrated by
**Jeremy Siepmann**
with **John Shrapnel** as Bach

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## Preface

If music is 'about' anything, it's about life. No other medium can so quickly or more comprehensively lay bare the very soul of those who make or compose it. Biographies confined to the limitations of text are therefore at a serious disadvantage when it comes to the lives of composers. Only by combining verbal language with the music itself can one hope to achieve a fully rounded portrait. In the present series, the words of composers and their contemporaries are brought to life by distinguished actors in a narrative liberally spiced with musical illustrations.

The substantial booklet contains an assessment of the composer in relation to his era, an overview of his major works and their significance, a Graded Listening Plan, a summary of recommended books, a gallery of biographical entries on the most significant figures in his life and times, and a calendar of his life showing parallel developments in the arts, politics, philosophies, sciences and social developments of the day.

**Jeremy Siepmann**

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# Johann Sebastian Bach

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## Cast

Jeremy Siepmann – Narrator
John Shrapnel – Bach
Other parts read by Trevor Nichols, Ruth Sillers and David Timson

**Jeremy Siepmann**

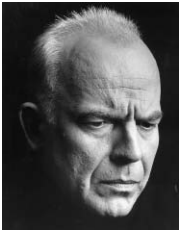
Though long resident in England, Jeremy Siepmann was born and formally educated in the United States. Having completed his studies at the Mannes College of Music in New York, he moved to London at the suggestion of Sir Malcolm Sargent in 1964. After several years as a freelance lecturer he was invited to join the staff of London University. For most of the last 20 years he has confined his teaching activity to the piano, his pupils including pianists of worldwide repute.

As a writer he has contributed articles, reviews and interviews to numerous journals and reference works (including *New Statesman*, *The Musical Times*, *Gramophone*, *BBC Music Magazine*, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*), some of them being reprinted in book form (Oxford University Press, Robson Books). His books include a widely acclaimed biography of Chopin (*The Reluctant Romantic*, Gollancz/Northeastern University Press, 1995), two volumes on the history and literature of the piano, and a biography of Brahms (Everyman/EMI, 1997). In December 1997 he was appointed editor of *Piano* magazine.

His career as a broadcaster began in New York in 1963 with an East Coast radio series on the life and work of Mozart, described by Alistair Cooke as "the best music program on American radio". On the strength of this, improbably, he was hired by the BBC as a humorist, in which capacity he furnished weekly satirical items on various aspects of American life.

After a long break he returned to broadcasting in 1977 and has by now devised, written and presented more than 1,000 programmes, including the international-award-winning series *The Elements of Music*. In 1988 he was appointed Head of Music at the BBC World Service, broadcasting to an estimated audience of 135 million. He left the Corporation in Spring 1994 to form his own independent production company.

**John Shrapnel**



Born in Birmingham and brought up in Manchester, John Shrapnel joined the National Theatre (under Laurence Olivier) playing many classical roles including Banquo and Orsino. With the RSC he has appeared in classical Greek theatre as well as numerous Shakespearean plays. His TV work varies from Stoppard's *Professional Foul* and *Vanity Fair* to *Inspector Morse* and *Hornblower*. Films include *Nicholas and Alexandra*, *One Hundred and One Dalmations* and the role of Gaius in *Gladiator*. He has also read *A Life of Dante* for Naxos AudioBooks.

**Trevor Nichols**

Trevor Nichols trained at LAMDA and has subsequently worked extensively in theatre (including the National Theatre), television and radio. He has read many serials and short stories for the BBC, including for *Morning Story* and *Woman's Hour*, and read several books on audio cassette, including *Famous People in History* for Naxos AudioBooks.

**Ruth Sillers**

Ruth Sillers began her career with the National Youth Theatre. Her theatre work includes productions for the Royal National Theatre Studio and the Donmar Warehouse. She has performed in several plays for BBC Radio drama, including Noel Coward's *Easy Virtue* and *Medical Detectives*. She also reads regularly for Radio 4 and the BBC World Service. Ruth has also read for Naxos AudioBooks' release of *Lady Susan*.

**David Timson**

David Timson studied acting and singing at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He has performed in modern and classic plays through the UK and abroad, including *Wild Honey* for Alan Ayckbourn, *Hamlet*, *The Man of Mode* and *The Seagull*. Among his many TV appearances have been roles in *Nelson's Column* and *Swallows and Amazons*. For Naxos AudioBooks, he has recorded, to date, three volumes of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and directed *Twelfth Night* as well as playing Feste. On Naxos, he takes the part of the Narrator in Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* and in the series 'Opera Explained'.

# 1 Historical Background: The Eighteenth Century

**Overview**

The eighteenth century has rightly been called "the century of revolutions" (though the nineteenth can lay equal claim to this title), but the most lasting of these revolutions, on the whole, were agricultural, industrial and scientific, not military or political. Human knowledge expanded to an unprecedented degree, with effects on daily life which would eventually eclipse the transient decisions of governments and rulers. Wars, as ever, proliferated, with five in particular having the most lasting impact: the Wars of the Spanish and Austrian Succession, the Seven Years War and the American and French Revolutions.

Despite the gathering groundswell of democracy, absolute monarchies continued to flourish in most parts of the world. Prussia and Russia (the latter, ironically, under the Prussian-born Catherine the Great) became world powers, French power diminished under the increasingly inept rules of Louis XV and Louis XVI, the British Empire expanded, most dramatically in India, and America became a major player on the international political stage. More important, however, than any armed insurrection or expansionist military campaign was the emergence of an increasingly powerful and independent middle class. More than any previous century, the eighteenth was a century of commerce.

World trade was an immediate beneficiary of the improvements in transport and communications which flowed from the scientific and technological advances then taking place

on almost every front. By the mid-eighteenth century, raw materials were being imported from countries all over the world, often to the social and economic disadvantage of the exporting nations. Europe, on the other hand, profited hugely, exporting a wide range of goods and spawning a large quantity of financial institutions – banks, stock exchanges, insurance companies, and so on. Cheques were increasingly used in place of cash, and the proliferation of paper money increased the amounts a pedestrian could easily carry. For the newly well-to-do, shopping became a pastime as well as a business.

Among many significant medical advances which substantially improved the quality of life, the most important was the discovery of a vaccine against smallpox – but not before one epidemic in 1719 killed 14,000 people in Paris alone. An unforeseen side effect of middle-class affluence and improved standards of public and personal hygiene was an increase in population which threatened to outstrip the food supply. Although many did indeed starve, the era saw more and greater changes in agricultural methods than had occurred for many centuries. Farming became a major industry as the demand for food and wool increased. But of all eighteenth-century revolutions, none had more far-reaching consequences than the Industrial Revolution.

Originating in Britain in the middle third of the eighteenth century, it owed its initial impetus to the invention of the steam engine, first used as a means of draining mines but rapidly put to use in factories. With the unprecedented proliferation of new machinery which vastly increased the speed and output of manufacturing, England became known as “the workshop of the world”, and prospered accordingly. The revolution soon spread to other countries, shifting the balance of power from the aristocratic landowner to the industrial capitalist and creating a large urban (and increasingly vocal) working class.

Yet despite a burgeoning, increasingly prosperous middle class, which made much of “good manners” and the trappings of gentility, the great majority of the population in Europe as elsewhere continued to live in poverty, suffer ill health and die early (and in many cases, starving). Education for the poor was minimal, illiteracy and crime were rife, child labour was

commonplace and political representation was generally non-existent. In the Old World and the New, slavery continued unchecked, although an increasing number of Europeans, particularly in Britain, found the practice repugnant.

Throughout Europe, indeed in many parts of the world, the traditional ruling classes came increasingly under threat. Of the numerous insurrections which erupted in the eighteenth century, the first of world significance was the American Revolution (1776–83), from which emerged the newly independent United States, a country of vast resources, with a political creed resoundingly based on libertarian principles. With its Declaration of Independence and formal Constitution, it served as a beacon to oppressed minorities elsewhere, and undoubtedly emboldened the disaffected in France, whose own revolution, initiated by the storming of the Bastille in July 1789 and lasting effectively until Napoleon's seizure of power ten years later, was to be the bloodiest, and in some ways the most counter-productive, in history. In 1793 alone, during the infamous Reign of Terror, more than 18,000 people were publicly beheaded. In the meantime, the revolutionary government (in reality a sequence of governments) was simultaneously at war with most of Europe, which justifiably feared that the revolution might spread beyond French borders.

**Science and Technology**

The eighteenth century was a veritable festival of exploration and discovery in medicine, mechanics, physics, chemistry and many other fields, including weaponry. Here, as elsewhere, ingenuity sometimes outstripped practicality, as in the ill-fated, one-man, hand-cranked Turtle submarine launched into the depths off the east coast of America in 1755. More useful was Harrison's marine chronometer of 1735, which enabled sailors to pinpoint their exact position at sea; more lethal were Wilkinson's precision-boring cannon of 1774 and Bushnell's invention of the torpedo in 1777. On more peaceable fronts, the period saw the discovery and first harnessing of electricity, most famously by Benjamin Franklin, inventor of the lightning conductor, and the

Italian Alessandro Volta, who invented the electrical battery and whose surname, minus the 'a', has long since become a household word. Another similarly honoured was James Watt, whose improvement of Newcommen's steam engine in 1764 precipitated the Industrial Revolution (the term "watt", incidentally, refers to a unit of power rather than to anything exclusively electrical). Other notable inventions include Chappe's telegraph (a mechanical form of semaphore used to relay coded messages over long distances) and the hydraulic press.

**Religion**

As ever, religion remained both inspirational and contentious, not only between faiths but within the various sects of the same faith. In the years of Bach's youth and early manhood, for instance, the Lutheran wing of Protestantism in Germany was still experiencing the effects of the so-called 'second reformation' triggered by the Pietist movement within Lutheranism itself (for more detail, see pp.20–2). And although there were signs of increased tolerance in parts of the wider world – as in England, which saw the founding of Methodism by John Wesley in the 1730s and of the Shaker sect in 1772, and, rather surprisingly, in Russia, where Catherine the Great granted freedom of worship in 1766 – religious bigotry continued to flourish, particularly in the relations of Protestants and Roman Catholics.

**Ideas**

The seventeenth century, following on from the rationalist trends of the previous century, was the age of the Enlightenment, one of the richest eras in the history of western philosophy. Thinkers in every sphere of endeavour, influenced by the quickening flood of scientific discovery, placed ever greater faith in reason as the gateway to truth and natural justice. Highly critical of the status quo and hostile to religion, which they saw as enslaving humanity with the chains of superstition, their writings reached a wide audience and contributed directly to the underlying ideals of the American and French Revolutions. Although based mainly in France,

where its principal proponents were Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau, the movement attracted other important thinkers, most notably the Scots David Hume and Adam Smith, the American Thomas Paine and the Germans Immanuel Kant and Gotthold Lessing. Voltaire and Rousseau, in particular, used satire as a potent political weapon, and Diderot presided over one of the greatest works of scholarship ever produced, the 28-volume *Encyclopédie*, inspired by the English encyclopedia published by Ephraim Chambers in 1728 and including 17 volumes of text and 11 volumes of illustration. Rousseau's *Discourses on the Origins of Inequality* (1754) pilloried the decadent effects of civilisation and proclaimed the superiority of the "noble savage". His *Social Contract* of 1762 emphasised the rights of people over government and exhorted people everywhere to overthrow all governments not representing the genuine will of the population. Both books are among the most influential ever written. Adam Smith was an economist whose great work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) took the revolutionary step of defining wealth in terms of labour, and advocating individual enterprise and free trade as essentials of a just society. Hume's best-known philosophical work, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), is an attack on traditional metaphysics and suggests that all true knowledge resides in personal experience. Kant, on the other hand, argued that right action cannot be based on feelings, inclinations or mere experience but only on a law given by reason, the so-called "categorical imperative". The title of Thomas Paine's famous book *The Rights of Man* is self-explanatory.

**The Arts**

The eighteenth century saw the birth and early development of the modern novel with the works of Daniel Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders*) and Samuel Richardson (*Pamela, Clarissa*). Above all, however, it was a century of great poets who effectively created the Romantic movement which was to find its musical manifestation in the nineteenth century. Pre-eminent among them were the Germans Goethe and Schiller, closely followed by the Britons Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge. But it was also the century of the great philosopher-satirists, of

whom the greatest were Voltaire (*Candide*), Swift (*Gulliver's Travels*) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see above). Satire was also conspicuous in the realm of painting, as in the work of William Hogarth (*The Rake's Progress*). The greater painters and sculptors were among the finest portrait artists who ever lived: David, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Chardin (who prophetically turned his attentions away from the upper classes and painted the lower bourgeoisie and working classes), Goya (whose grim 'romantic' visions came in the next century) and Houdon, whose sculptures of Voltaire, Jefferson and Washington are almost eerily lifelike. Amongst the greatest scholars and men of letters was Samuel Johnson, whose monumental *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) was the first ever compiled. In the realm of dance, the eighteenth century saw the rise of modern ballet, centred, like so much else, in France. The most influential figures were the ballerina Marie-Anne Camargo (who in 1720 took the revolutionary step of shortening the traditional flowing, court-style dresses to reveal the feet and legs), the choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre (*Les Petits Riens*) and the composer Jean-Philippe Rameau.

**Architecture**

Except in the upper reaches of society, domestic architecture in eighteenth-century Europe changed relatively little. That of public buildings and the dwellings of the well-to-do changed dramatically on both sides of the Atlantic. The grandiose and ornate gestures of the Baroque era gave way to simpler styles, many of them strongly influenced by the graceful majesty of classical Greek and Roman designs. Famous examples are the White House and Capitol building of Washington D.C., "Monticello", Thomas Jefferson's home in Virginia (designed by himself) and the Royal Crescent at Bath in England. With the proliferation of new cities spawned by the Industrial Revolution, and the steady expansion of the United States, architects and town planners turned their attentions to the design not only of buildings but of towns and cities themselves. The gridiron pattern of Manhattan Island in New York is the fruit of just such

planning, and was to be duplicated in many American cities. Here the regularity and symmetry of the neo-classical approach had a thoroughly practical purpose: with this scheme, cities could be indefinitely extended in any direction. A striking feature of industrial architecture, in particular, was the use of new materials such as cast-iron.

**Music**

The eighteenth century saw the culmination of the Baroque in the great works of Bach and Handel, and the finest flowering of the Classical era which succeeded it. Domenico Scarlatti was the exact contemporary of Bach and Handel but such was the astounding originality and exotic nature of the keyboard sonatas which have kept his name alive that he stands largely outside mainstream trends and developments. In some respects, his most important music is closer in spirit and style to the Romantics of the nineteenth century than to anything written in his own time.

If the defining feature of the Baroque style was a combination of grandiosity and polyphony (see Glossary) with a high degree of ornamentation, in the Classical era, relative simplicity of harmony, texture and style were entirely in keeping with the ascent of the middle-class and the progressive weakening of the aristocracy. The learned, long-lined contrapuntal weaves of the Baroque gave way to the more straightforward texture of melody and accompaniment, often simple broken chords in a pattern known as the Alberti bass (a simple 'spelling out' of three-note chords, one note at a time), and the basic harmonic vocabulary became much simplified. Most music written in the Classical era (roughly 1750–1820) is based on an economical framework of four or five basic chords or triads (see Glossary) and draws its material from two or three relatively short, self-contained melodic 'themes', frequently of a simple, folk-like character. Not only themes but phrases tend to become shorter and more regular than in most Baroque music. Large-scale structures, too, become generally clearer and more symmetrical, showing clear

analogies with the classical architecture of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Along with a somewhat ritualised approach to form comes a more formal, more 'objective' approach to the expression of emotion. It's often easier to describe the contour of a classical theme than it is to associate it with a particular mood. The prevailing virtues are symmetry, order, refinement and grace. The most significant contribution of the classical era to the history of music is the crystallisation of Sonata Form (see Glossary), brought to its highest peak by Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. Virtually all of the great works of the classical ear are based on it. The principal genres of the period – sonata, string quartet, concerto and symphony – are all, in fact, sonatas, differing only in the size and character of the chosen instrumental medium.

Standing largely apart from this development is the parallel evolution of opera, dominated in the first half of the century by Handel and Rameau, and in the latter by Mozart and Gluck (1714–87). Because he confined himself for the most part to opera, Gluck's name tends to get left out when people refer loosely to the Classical era, but he was one of the giants. His greatness lies in the quality of his music but his long-term significance derives from his radical reforms, which did much to simplify and purify an art which had become overladen with irrelevant conventions, complicated by labyrinthine love plots and disfigured by an excessive attention to virtuosity for its own sake. He derived his plots from classical Greek mythology (*Orfeo ed Euridice, Iphigénie en Aulide, Armide* etc.), suited the music to the emotional and dramatic requirements of his libretto, softened the distinction between recitative and aria (see Glossary), paid scrupulous attention to subtleties of character development and elevated the role of the chorus (another nod to the classical Greeks). Mozart, although his operas (*Don Giovanni, The Marriage of Figaro, Così fan tutte, The Magic Flute* etc.) are perhaps the greatest ever written, was not a reformer.

# 2 Bach in His Time

The Germany into which Bach was born in 1685 was still convalescent more than three decades after the Thirty Years War (1618–48) had shattered it into a bloody kaleidoscope of political and religious dissent. Not so much a country as a loose collection of mostly minor dukedoms and principalities, few of which could boast much in the way of political or military power, it was also an uneasy mix of Protestant and Roman Catholic courts (for both of which Bach wrote at one time or another). But it wasn't all shards and splinters. Kingdoms like those of Bavaria and Saxony were sizeable entities, buttressed by armies of a strength and discipline to be reckoned with. The most powerful and aggressive of these was the kingdom of Prussia, whose military might reached its peak in Bach's lifetime under the command of Frederick the Great – a ruthless and brilliant tactician, but also an exceptionally enlightened and cultured despot whose musical household boasted several of the finest musicians in Europe. The most famous and influential of these were Johann Joachim Quantz, who provided the flautist king with a seemingly endless sequence of flute concertos (he was also the author of a highly important musical treatise), and Bach's second-eldest son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, whose fame in his lifetime was far greater than his father's (and who also wrote a highly important musical treatise). Frederick himself was an accomplished composer and performer in his own right.

Looking back over the past three and a half centuries we see a European musical tradition dominated by German or Germanic composers – from the three great S's of the early Baroque

(Johann Hermann Schein, Samuel Scheidt and Heinrich Schütz) through Telemann, Bach and Handel to Haydn, Mozart, Gluck, Beethoven, Weber, Schubert, Mendelssohn and Schumann, on to Liszt (Hungarian born but essentially Germanic), Wagner, Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler and Strauss, and culminating, in the twentieth century, with Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Hindemith and Stockhausen. In 1685 no such tradition existed. Indeed, Germany throughout the seventeenth century had been something of a backwater generally. Lacking a port on the Atlantic seaboard, Germany had largely stagnated both commercially and culturally, while the Spanish and Portuguese, Dutch, French and English built and maintained empires in the Americas and the West Indies, as well as establishing trade routes and associated colonies in the Indian subcontinent and the Far East. The resultant burgeoning of wealth, enterprise and cultural vitality largely passed the Germans by. They lived, both before and after the Thirty Years War, in a rigidly stratified society whose inflexible order and symmetry were comforting even to many in its lower ranks. Such was the rigour of the segregation in numerous schools and churches that boys of the ruling class were required, under threat of punishment, to converse at mealtimes and to play their games only in Latin, thus ensuring the exclusion of the lower orders (to this end, fully 80% of the books published in Germany in the middle 1660s were written in Latin), and in many churches each class had its own baptismal font.

It might be said that the perfect musical analogue to this meticulously refined stratification is the art of counterpoint, of polyphony, except for the fact that in counterpoint, all melodic strands, however separate and distinct they may remain, are fundamentally equal. There isn't one line for a duke, a second for his administrators and a third for the peasants who worked his land. But the sheer logic necessary to the composition of 'correct' counterpoint (which can be written by a computer) was certainly comparable to the reverence for dispassionate reason that threatened German Protestantism in the seventeenth century. The two intersected in the curiously named 'Doctrine of the Affections' (Affektenlehre), by means of which emotions were to be represented by various types of musical figures and patterns, which were then to be applied

consistently from the beginning of a movement or free-standing piece to its end – the exact opposite of the dramatic and emotional 'confrontations' which were to dominate the sonatas, symphonies and operas of the classical era. This textural and emotional consistency within specific movements is a hallmark of many of Bach's preludes, arias, overtures and suites, and helps to explain the French novelist Colette's uncomprehending description of him as "a Divine sewing-machine" (what she, like all too many musical performers, failed to discern is the fantastic rhythmic variety that underlies the superficial consistency).

The mechanistic character of the Doctrine of the Affections was typical of the extent to which feeling and logic, particularly in the sphere of German Protestantism, had become polarised. To the ordinary worshipper, the Lutheran Church had become so obsessed with dogma and the exercise of rationality in the cause of faith that it had lost touch not only with the spirit of the Reformation but with many of the worshippers themselves. In the time-honoured tradition of German secular society, they felt excluded. In the quite new spirit of a rapidly rising middle-class, however, they were no longer prepared to accept this. What happened was a kind of mini-reformation, largely sparked, ten years before Bach's birth, by the preacher Philipp Jakob Spener. In one of the most influential German books of the time, *Pia desideria*, or 'Pious Longings', he called for a return to the true spirit of the Reformation, which had manifestly been betrayed by the Lutheran Church in its increasing obsession with structure and ritual. The Pietists, as his followers came to be known, propounded no new theology or doctrine. Rather they argued that true Christian faith, the true love of God, was not something to be logically expounded or intellectually explained, but to be experienced as feeling – as exaltation, through a true union with the Almighty. With the Pietists, emotion took centre stage. Theology and Latin were the prerogative of a manipulative minority. Only feelings were universal. The learned was suspect. And nothing was more learned than polyphony. The Pietists thus became a significant force in the musical as well as the social and religious history of seventeenth-century Germany – and in the creative history of J.S. Bach.

The dominant influences on German composers of Bach's generation, and that immediately preceding it, were Italian. The greatest composer of the early Baroque era was Claudio Monteverdi, who was also the first great composer of opera, and the founding father of orchestration. The first great German operas, those of Handel, were all essentially Italian – in name, language, style and convention. Most of Mozart's and all of Haydn's operas were likewise Italian. And out of a cross-fertilisation of the Italian operatic aria and the predominantly French instrumental dance suite came the main orchestral form of the Baroque, the instrumental concerto. Here again, the most formative influences were Italian: Corelli, Torelli, Tartini, Albinoni, Geminiani, Manfredini, and most influential and prolific of all, Vivaldi.

In the great German cities Berlin, Brunswick, Dresden, Hamburg, Hanover and Munich the dominant influences remained Italian well into the Baroque era. In Bach's part of Germany, however – Thuringia, where the Bach family of musicians flourished for generations – there was an exceptionally strong indigenous musical tradition, which in many ways was directly opposed to the Italian tradition, whose styles and conventions were intimately connected to the tenets of Roman Catholicism. It was in Thuringia that Martin Luther, the founding father of Protestantism, was born. It was in Thuringia that he was educated, in Thuringia that he was sheltered after his excommunication and in Thuringia that he died. All of which might be supremely irrelevant to our story but for the fact that music was of consuming importance to Luther, both spiritually and doctrinally. He was an enthusiastic amateur, familiar with a good deal of contemporary music, both in and beyond the German lands, he played the lute well, he was a highly accomplished flautist, and he dabbled in composition. Some of the most famous Protestant hymn tunes were composed by Luther, the most celebrated being *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* ('A Mighty Fortress is our God') – on which Bach based one of his most exalting and exciting cantatas.

Luther's establishment of the German hymn, or chorale, was perhaps the single most important factor in the development of a distinctively German musical style, especially, of

course, in church music, and particularly in the early Baroque period. Luther had been the first to translate the Bible into German and his insistence on the use of the vernacular in worship naturally extended to the congregational hymns sung in church. With only six exceptions – the Magnificat and the five Latin masses (four of them almost unknown, even today) – all of Bach's liturgical works are in German. But where music and its use in the church were concerned, Protestant Germany did not present a united front. There were sometimes bitter divisions, between the Pietists, who believed that music in church should be confined to the congregational singing of chorales – that it should not, through too great an artfulness, distract from the inner experience of worship – and those like Bach (and Luther), for whom music, and polyphonic music particular, came second only to theology itself. For Luther, music was to be encouraged in both church and home since it was "a beautiful and gracious gift from God" that could "drive away the devil and make people joyful". That 'Godly' joyfulness is perhaps the most notable characteristic of Bach's music in general. Ironically, Luther was in many ways a confirmed traditionalist, even a conservative, who strongly favoured the retention of an elaborate choral repertory, with both German and Latin texts, to be sung not by the congregation at all but by trained choirs under the direction of sophisticated Kapellmeisters. The Pietists, however, were not necessarily unmusical, and often had no principled objection to music as such. Thus a Pietist Duke or Prince could maintain a lively and highly accomplished musical establishment and in some cases could even write music for it.

Thanks to a combination of religious differences and the fragmentation wrought by the Thirty Years War, the professional German musician of Bach's time faced a somewhat confused and confusing situation when it came to finding employment. In addition to such straightforward jobs as church organist (vacancies for which arose sooner or later in almost every village, town and city) were related jobs with a similar but more extensive remit, such as that of the Cantor, whose task was to teach music and usually Latin as well, in schools affiliated with specific churches, and to organise a town's formal and ceremonial activities. (Bach held just such a

position in Leipzig for the last 27 years of his life.) There were also the *Stadtpfeiffer* (literally 'state pipers') who provided the music for municipal and civic functions, and supplemented the churches' instrumental resources when required. Opportunities were most plentiful in the big cities which encompassed universities, where there was much music-making in the community at large, with amateur choirs and orchestras, many of which included professionals as well (Bach's Collegium Musicum in Leipzig being a case in point). Interestingly, music was not included in the curriculum of any German university at that time.

More prestigious and generally more lucrative was a position as Kapellmeister or Konzertmeister at one of the many royal courts which dotted the landscape. Despite the name, the Kapellmeister (literally, 'chapel master') was not necessarily involved with church music of any kind. During his service as Kapellmeister at the Court of Anhalt-Cöthen, for instance, Bach was almost exclusively occupied with secular instrumental music. Even the minor courts offered more opportunities for advancement, and although the pay could be irregular it was generally good when it came, there were often many fringe benefits, and the mere title of court Kapellmeister was much coveted.

The power and prestige of the royal courts, however, were steadily to diminish during Bach's lifetime. In Germany, as in Austria, France and England, society itself was undergoing a transformation whose extent and importance were imperfectly understood at the time. International, even intercontinental trade was increasing at a rapid rate, and the concomitant rise of the so-called middle class was gradually to usurp the traditional prerogatives of the aristocracy and nobility. With the rise of an independently wealthy and socially ambitious bourgeoisie came the hitherto unknown institution of the public concert. And with the rise of a new and relatively unsophisticated audience came a change in public taste which today might be described as a 'dumbing down'. The fantastic sophistication of Renaissance and Baroque polyphony gave way increasingly to the simpler textures of a clearly differentiated melody and accompaniment, the latter becoming predominantly harmonic, based on chords which were

frequently kept trundling along by such devices as the Alberti bass.

Bach's music, never more so than in his final, unfinished masterpiece *The Art of Fugue*, represented the culmination of the age of polyphony. By the time he died, at the not extremely old age of 65, Bach was regarded by an increasing number of people, his sons included, as yesterday's man – a brilliant, awe-inspiring, if rather turgid anachronism, out of touch with the spirit of the time. Simplicity was in, complexity was out. Only three years after Bach's death, the French philosopher and self-styled composer Jean-Jacques Rousseau swept aside with a stupefying arrogance everything Bach had stood for:

> Fugues, imitations, double designs, and all complex contrapuntal structures … these are arbitrary and purely conventional devices which have hardly any merit save that of a difficulty overcome – difficult sillinesses which the ear cannot endure and reason cannot justify. They are evidently the remains of barbarism and bad taste, that only persist, like the portals of our Gothic churches, to the shame of those who have had the patience to construct them.

Four years after that was written, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria. Bach's music played no part in his upbringing. He may not even have known of his existence. Johann Christian Bach he knew. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach he knew of. But Johann Sebastian? He might have heard him mentioned in passing as their father, but it could well be that Johann Christian, Bach's youngest son, never thought even to mention him. It wasn't until he was at the height of his career that Mozart first came across the music of Johann Sebastian, and it changed his life. The last movement of Mozart's last symphony, the so-called 'Jupiter', is a marvel of polyphonic genius that might never have come into being if it weren't for Johann Sebastian (interestingly, Mozart provided his own preludes to several of Johann Sebastian's fugues). The Jupiter's finale is perhaps the most glorious monument ever written to the "difficult sillinesses" which so incensed Rousseau – "sillinesses" whose like was to permeate the works of such

disparate composers as Beethoven, Wagner, Strauss, Mahler, Schoenberg and Hindemith, to name only a few of the many great composers whose debts to Bach – *the* Bach – are beyond calculation.

# 3 The Major Works and their Significance in Bach's Output

Of all the greatest composers, Bach was among the most prolific, and more unusually, the most consistent. Despite the vastness of his output, however, truly minor works by Bach are hard to find. No-one is likely to claim that the Two-Part Inventions, or the Little Preludes, among the keyboard works, are as great as the Goldberg Variations or *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, but when you consider what they are – instructive pieces for beginners and very moderately equipped amateurs – they come top of the heap. A heap that includes Mozart's childhood pieces, Schumann's *Album for the Young* and Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*, among many others. Likewise, no-one in their right mind would claim that the 'Peasant' Cantata is even in the same ballpark as the B minor Mass, but for what it is, it's as close to perfect as one could hope to ask.

**Organ Works**

Bach's earliest masterpieces are among the solo organ works which he wrote mostly during his Weimar years (1708–17), although mention should be made of the still earlier Toccatas for harpsichord, which remain in the concert repertoire of many pianists and virtually all harpsichordists. Nor should one overlook the extraordinarily moving Cantata No. 4, *Christ lag in Todes Banden*, which may be even earlier. Ironically, the most famous organ work of all time, the great Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565, is now thought by some scholars to be an arrangement (possibly but not necessarily by Bach himself) of a long-lost work (almost certainly

*not* by Bach), originally conceived for unaccompanied violin (!). This remains, however, a controversial view.

**Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, BWV 582.** No-one, as far as I know, has ever disputed the authorship of this towering masterpiece, although some have argued that this too was not originally conceived for the organ, but rather for a harpsichord fitted with a pedal keyboard (this hybrid was devised principally so that organists could practise at home). Like so many of Bach's masterpieces, the notes themselves far transcend any particular instrumental dress, and the work's impact, its enthralling journey from simplicity to complexity, has been conveyed with equal strength and conviction not only in arrangements for piano but in full-blown orchestrations (though seldom in a truly Bachian idiom). The work's dramatic, emotional and spiritual power is matched by a mastery of technique and structure which adds to an aura of disbelief when we learn that this is the work of a young man just into his twenties. But so it now appears to be (putting an altogether new gloss on the street brawl with Geyersbach (see pp.118–21)).

**Toccatas, Fantasias, Preludes and Fugues.** No other instrument inspired Bach to conceive movements of such length and dramatic sweep. The *Passacaglia* generally weighs in at roughly twenty minutes, with the so-called 'St Anne' Prelude and Fugue, BWV 552, and the much-arranged Toccata, Adagio and Fugue, BWV 564, not far behind, while the Prelude and Fugue in B minor, BWV 544, like that in C minor, BWV 546, the so-called 'Dorian' Toccata and Fugue, and the great Fantasy and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542, clocks in at around 15 minutes. By contrast, few of the paired preludes and fugues from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* exceed seven minutes, and most last under five. But with Bach, size isn't just reckoned in length. In many performances, the great organ Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV 543, runs to ten minutes or less, but its spiritual immensity compares with anything in the repertoire.

**Chorale Preludes.** The big Toccatas, Preludes and Fugues, such as those just mentioned, are probably the most famous of Bach's organ works, but still more remarkable, in many ways, are his many so-called 'chorale preludes' – in effect, miniature improvisations on simple Lutheran chorale or hymn tunes (though no-one but Bach could improvise at this often exalted level, and these are, in fact, meticulously composed little masterworks). Most of them come from four major collections (Bach's own): the two books of the *Orgelbüchlein* ('Little Organ Books'), Part III of the *Clavierübung* (literally, 'Keyboard Study'), the so-called *Schübler Chorales* and two manuscript collections made in Leipzig. Their spiritual range is almost infinite, yet relatively few in the *Orgelbüchlein* last as long as four minutes, many last less than two, and some less than one. The most famous of them, most familiar through piano transcriptions, include *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, *Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland*, *Ich ruf' zu dir*, *Herr Jesu Christ* and *In dulci jubilo*. Far from miniature are the late Canonic Variations on *Vom Himmel hoch*, but these are in a category of their own. Still more so, however, is Bach's final work, which was left uncompleted (only just) at the time of his death.

**The Art of Fugue.** Bach wrote this musical last will and testament on four separate staves, as in a string quartet, with no hint of an intended instrumentation. For very many decades, this great compendium, exploring the technique of fugue with a thoroughness and mastery unapproached before or since, was thought to be the ultimate expression of 'pure' music – music for the mind alone, unsullied by the senses. Today, musicologists are broadly agreed that it was in fact intended for the keyboard, and the organ keyboard in particular, although it has been performed very effectively in many different instrumental combinations. For all its historical and artistic importance, however, it's among Bach's most austere and unapproachable works, appealing, in the experience of many people, more to the intellect than to the heart. At the same time, there can be something serenely reassuring and calming about a world in which perfect order and

equality prevail, just as there's something exciting, inspiring and revelatory about entering the inner sanctum of one of the greatest minds in human history, and finding oneself able to follow its workings, discovering more with every encounter. As with all the greatest works, the scope for exploration is infinite – or at any rate far beyond the possibilities of even the longest human life to encompass.

**Keyboard Works**

The full organ has more keyboards than any other instrument but at the same time stands apart, in kind, from the harpsichord, clavichord and piano, and is for that reason treated separately in virtually all discussions of Bach's music. The term 'clavier', used by Bach in connection with all the works discussed below, is a generic German term encompassing all keyboard instruments, and Bach very seldom indicates that a work is intended specifically for one or the other. The 48 preludes and fugues of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* are variously suitable for one kind or another, but the evidence is internal, not specific. Many of the more intimate and introspective pieces are most naturally suited to the small-toned clavichord, with its super sensitivity to touch, which allows for a subtlety of melodic inflection far beyond the capacities of the organ and quite impossible on the harpsichord, where gradations of volume and tonal colour lie beyond the capacity of any player. Others have a natural grandeur and ceremonial pomp which rule out the clavichord altogether, and an incisiveness and precision of attack which can most effectively be achieved on the harpsichord or piano. Still others seem to cry out for the sustained tone which only the organ can produce – and there's one in particular (the A minor fugue from Book I) that can be played as written *only* on the organ (or a harpsichord or piano fitted with a pedalboard). The only instrument which can play all of Bach's keyboard music (apart from the organ works) with equal effectiveness is the piano, which was in its infancy during Bach's lifetime, although it won his approval near the end of his life.

**Early keyboard works.** The earliest of Bach's keyboard works to survive in the modern repertoire is in fact the earliest to have survived at all. We know nothing of his preparatory works, and with the sole exception of the piece in question, the *Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother*, we have nothing from his teens. The *Capriccio* was written when Bach was 17 years old and already a thoroughly proficient composer. Uniquely in his instrumental output, it's a piece of programme music, with a descriptive title given to each movement. It has great charm, but gives no hint at all that a masterpiece like the Passacaglia and Fugue for organ was even on the far horizon, let alone in the near future. The seven Toccatas, most of which are commonly played today, are more or less contemporaneous with the Passacaglia, but while they show a marked advance on the *Capriccio* they too withhold the genius that was soon to burst forth.

**The Well-Tempered Clavier.** Bach presumably began writing pieces for the harpsichord and clavichord at least by the time he reached his teens, but as mentioned above, nothing earlier than the *Capriccio* of 1704 has survived. We do know, however, that work on Book I of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* was well underway during the period of his imprisonment in Weimar in 1717, although the project wasn't completed until 1722. This astonishing collection of 24 paired preludes and fugues (one in every key, systematically progressing from C major to B minor), is widely considered, in combination with Book II, completed 20 years later, to be Bach's greatest keyboard work. The title has often been misunderstood as being the equivalent of 'The Good-Tempered (or good-natured) Clavier', hence the particular charm associated with it by a great many people. The truth is more prosaic, and not at all easy to explain. The scales on which most western music has been based for the last 400 years or so, and which give us our system of keys, are derived from a natural phenomenon which is much easier to hear than to explain. Namely that a vibrating string, or column of air, vibrates not only along its whole length but, simultaneously, in fractional cross-sections of that length, be they its two halves, three thirds,

four quarters and so on. It thus produces not merely one note – the one we can instantly hear – but several others, in a rising and ever-shrinking sequence of intervals, the first few of which can be detected by an only moderately trained ear.

Go to the piano, if you have one, and hold down middle-C, but without sounding it. While holding it down, strike the C an octave below it nice and hard, releasing it immediately while continuing to hold down middle-C. Now, as if by magic, a note which you never struck at all – middle-C – will be sounding loud and clear. What you'll be hearing is the upper half of the original tone. If you now release middle-C and strike the lower C again, this time holding it down, you may be able to detect that upper octave middle-C as part of the bass C you've just struck, without even having held it down. Now hold down, without striking, the G above middle-C. Once again strike that low C very loudly and immediately release it, while continuing to hold down the G. The sound of the G will come into focus at once – again without your ever having struck it. Now strike the low C again and *keep* it down, this time *without* holding down the G. In the resonance of that one bass note you should soon be able to detect the G within it. You've now come face to face with the so-called 'overtone series', or 'harmonic series', as it's also known. And there are other, ever more closely spaced pitches above the ones you'll have heard so far – *each one of which generates its own overtones* (or 'upper-partials', to turn jargonese). But although the 'natural' sequence continues onwards and upwards, in ever diminishing intervals, the piano stops dead when it reaches the second octave above the bass note, or 'fundamental'. This is because it has been tuned according to an artificially adjusted system known as 'equal temperament', in which the octave is divided into 12 exactly equal intervals, making it possible to play in and move *to* any key, which is *not* possible using the once prevalent system known as 'mean-tone' temperament, which adheres far more closely to the natural 'harmonics' of the overtone series, in which the divisions are not exactly equal. Thus in the 'natural' tuning of the 'mean-tone' system, the pitch of a D sharp is not identical to the pitch of an E flat, which it is in 'equal temperament'. Hence the true meaning of Bach's title, and its

direct relevance to the fact that *The Well-Tempered Clavier* contains preludes and fugues in every key. Both the title and the orderly and systematic way in which the pieces are arranged, rising in successive semitonal steps through all the major and minor keys, give the work the appearance of a consciously planned aural 'treatise', but this is misleading. Both books are in fact collections of pieces written at various times and for a variety of purposes, almost all of them, however, with an 'instructive' purpose, but only a few of them consciously destined for inclusion in a larger context. Being in the nature of a domestic anthology, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* was probably never intended for public presentation, and certainly not for performance as a single, unified cycle. The most striking feature of both books, apart from the phenomenal standard achieved throughout, is the extraordinary variety of their contents – in length, style and difficulty. In Book I, the durations range from roughly two minutes to almost 12 minutes, and the styles from the simplest chord progressions (Prelude No. 1 in C) to a massive fugue (No. 24 in B minor) whose opening subject is so chromatic (see Glossary) and almost keyless that it might have been written by Arnold Schoenberg, the most revolutionary 'modernistic' composer of the twentieth century – the man who did away with 'key' altogether (still more amazing, from this point of view, is the almost savage A minor fugue from Book II). In mood and 'colour', the two books together pretty well box the compass.

**Suites and Partitas.** It wasn't until the 1720s, when Bach was in his middle-thirties, that he began the long sequence of keyboard masterworks which provide the main fare of the Bach player today. Bach liked to do things in sixes. Thus we have, prominent among the keyboard works, the six French Suites, the six English Suites, and the six Partitas (there are also, incidentally, six Brandenburg Concertos, six Suites for unaccompanied cello, six Sonatas and Partita for Unaccompanied Violin, six 'Schübler' Chorales and so on). The terms 'partita' and 'suite' are basically interchangeable. Both refer to multi-movement works, generally an established sequence of dance movements, to which extra movements are sometimes added. The

basic sequence generally adopted by Bach is (1) Allemande, (2) Courante, (3) Sarabande, (4) Minuet(s), and (5) Gigue, although in the French Suites he frequently adds other Baroque dance forms such as the Gavotte and Bourée. The **French Suites**, of which the best known is the Fifth, in G, with its irresistible Gigue, are the lightest in texture and mood of the great Bach suites, and slighter, for the most part, in duration. They are also, on the whole, less demanding technically than either their 'English' counterparts or most of the Partitas, and lie within the grasp of the moderately advanced amateur, although some, like the last in E major, demand fleet fingers. Their Frenchness, however, is something of a mystery, as is the Englishness of the English Suites, especially since the most significant 'foreign' features in both are Italian. The **English Suites** are bigger and considerably more taxing for players than their 'French' counterparts, and like most of the Partitas begin with large-scale movements of considerable grandeur and technical demands. Isolated movements have become very popular owing to their inclusion in many pianistic anthologies and their relatively slight technical difficulty but there are others of similar ilk which are equally deserving of attention. Broadest of all Bach's keyboard suites in their appeal are the six **Partitas**, of which the First is perhaps the most lyrical, the Second the most dramatic, the Third the most elusive (except for its magical *sarabande*), the Fourth the grandest, the Fifth the most light-hearted and virtuosic, and the Sixth the most profound and noble. All in all, a gold mine from start to finish.

**Goldberg Variations.** Certainly the longest, far and away the most technically demanding (especially on the piano, since the work was written for a harpsichord with two keyboards) and probably the greatest single work in Bach's entire keyboard output, the 'Goldbergs' are rivalled in importance and quality only by Beethoven's monumental Diabelli Variations, but are considerably less taxing for the listener. Indeed there's nothing taxing for the listener at all, except perhaps for the astonishingly profound and intense 25th variation, which is worthy of late Beethoven in the depth of its melancholy, loneliness and compositional genius. The ravishing

theme comes from the *Anna Magdalena Notebook* and it's the bass line and its attendant harmonies rather than the melody that forms the basis of the 30 variations that follow.

**Miscellaneous keyboard works.** Although Bach apparently liked to group his compositions in sets, ranging from the three Minuets in the Notebook for Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, to the 48 preludes and fugues of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, a number of one-offs, so to speak, have become established favourites in the keyboard repertoire, perhaps the most famous today being the so-called 'Italian' Concerto, which emulates on the two-manual harpsichord the alternation of orchestral and solo passages which is the hallmark of all concertos, Italian or otherwise. These are characterised not only by alternations of loud and soft but (if only implicitly – Bach seldom marked these things in his scores) in the type of articulation used by the player to distinguish one body from another. The work is one of the most exhilarating pieces in the entire keyboard repertoire, ranging from the pomp and formality of the first movement through a ravishing slow movement, conjuring up images of Italian oboe concertos (especially those of Albinoni and Vivaldi), to the virtuosic dash of the last movement, which has all the vitality of a young colt let loose in a field after a period of confinement. Here, as so often, one can only marvel at the fantastic spiritual health of Bach's temperament. One good recording of this wonderful work, on either harpsichord or piano, is worth a whole raft of pharmaceutical anti-depressants.

Utterly unique in Bach's output is the aptly named Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, which may bring us as close as we can ever get to his legendary improvisations. Alternately virtuosic and reflective, the fantasy itself is almost exotic in its harmonic rovings and slinky atmospherics, while the great fugue, with its chromatic subject, is a stirring and exciting journey whose purposeful stridings never succumb to stodge or self-conscious monumentalism. In various romantic arrangements, this was probably the most-played of Bach's keyboard works through much of the nineteenth century, and at least the first quarter of the twentieth century.

**Non-keyboard Solo Instrumental Works**

The most important of these, by far, are the six Suites for unaccompanied cello and the Sonatas and Partitas for unaccompanied violin (the Partita for unaccompanied flute, while excellent, is not in the same league). The Cello Suites contain some of the noblest and some of the most profoundly moving music Bach ever wrote. The richness of the Third Suite in C major, for instance, despite being written for a low-pitched, 'one-line' melody instrument, has an intensity and a harmonic depth which can make even the modern grand piano seem puny by comparison. And the great Chaconne from the D minor Partita for Unaccompanied Violin is one of the most colossal masterpieces in musical history. Lasting roughly a quarter of an hour, the piece is of truly symphonic scope and power and is almost universally acknowledged as the greatest work ever written for the violin, unaccompanied or otherwise. In the nineteenth century it was best known in piano arrangements, the most famous (and notorious) being Ferruccio Busoni's, which is so lavishly reborn in pianistic terms, and 'romantic' pianistic terms at that, that it amounts almost to another composition.

**Chamber Music**

Best known are the six sonatas for violin and harpsichord, the three sonatas for harpsichord and viola da Gamba (now usually played on the cello), and the six for harpsichord and flute. While none of these contains anything comparable to the greatest of the unaccompanied instrumental music, all are highly attractive and stylish works (although the authenticity of some of them has been questioned), and the best are among the best ever written. All remain in the active repertoire and have been frequently recorded. Of Bach's singular chamber works, the greatest and most demanding, of players and listeners alike, is *The Musical Offering* for flute, two violins and harpsichord, dedicated to Frederick the Great of Prussia, who composed the theme on which the entire work is based. Its best-known movement, the six-part 'Ricercar' has lived a separate

life in the modern orchestral arrangement by Anton Webern. And one might also include the Sixth Brandenburg among Bach's chamber works, given that it's scored for only eight players, interestingly divided into two groups: the 'modern' (two violas, one cello and harpsichord) and the 'archaic' (two bass viols and a violone, which were already archaic in Bach's day). The slow movement of the Fifth Brandenburg, too, is a chamber work, played by the three soloists from the surrounding movements, namely flute, violin and harpsichord.

**Orchestral Works**

Most of Bach's many orchestral works are widely known and loved and are unlikely ever to lose their central position in the active repertoire. Topping the list are the endlessly fresh and exhilarating Brandenburg Concertos – each scored for a very different collection of instruments, and no two of them alike. Although collected together and dedicated to the Margrave of Brandenburg as a set, they were not originally envisaged as a group, but were composed at various times and in various circumstances. Given Bach's predilection for educative and instructional works they could aptly have been subtitled 'Six Completely Different Ways to Write a Concerto'. Bach's capacity for musical invention was seemingly limitless. While virtuosity as such is not a feature of most of his music, his range and his extraordinary success rate proclaim him a virtuoso *composer* without equal, certainly in his own time (Handel was nothing like so versatile at such a level).

Each of the Brandenburgs is a so-called *concerto grosso*, a concerto for a *group* of soloists (a contradiction in terms, but never mind), as opposed to the more common variety featuring a single soloist, or pair of soloists. Among his solo concertos, the most famous are the violin concertos in A minor and E major and the D minor keyboard concerto (which like most of Bach's keyboard concertos began life as a violin concerto, and can be heard as such on Naxos 8.554603). Equally familiar are the great D minor Concerto for two violins (the greatest of all his violin concertos to have survived) and the Concerto for violin and oboe. Deserving of equal

fame, however, are the A major, E major and F minor harpsichord concertos, and the wonderful multiple concertos for two, three and even four harpsichords and orchestra (the last being an arrangement of Vivaldi's Concerto in B minor for four violins). Less familiar than any of these is the Triple Concerto in A minor for the same combination as in the Fifth Brandenburg, but adapted from other works and without quite the zing of its siblings.

Apart from the hauntingly tranquil 'Air on the G String', the four Orchestral Suites (also known as Overtures, although they are all multi-movement works which are not overtures *to* anything) are rather less familiar than the concertos, although they are far from neglected. Different although they are in certain respects, they give us Bach at his most public and ceremonial and have enough joy and vigour to light up a good-sized city.

**Vocal and Choral Works**

Bach's surviving cantatas number more than 200 and there are incredibly few that don't have at least something to make one inwardly gasp in wonder or laugh with the sheer joy of it (how can *anything* be this beautiful?). Most are liturgical, but some are secular, and celebrate such varied subjects as hunting, drinking coffee, buttering up the local bigwigs, the rival claims of domestic contentment and worldly riches, weddings, birthdays, name days and so on. The best known are the 'Wedding' Cantata (Naxos 8.550431), the 'Peasant' Cantata and the 'Coffee' Cantata (Naxos 8.550641), the 'Hunt' Cantata (Naxos 8.550643), and the sole Italian cantata *Non sa che sia dolore* (Naxos 8.550431).

Of the sacred cantatas, those that have enjoyed the most consistent popularity since the advent of recording include No. 140, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*; No. 4, *Christ lag in Todes Banden*; No. 106. *Actus Tragicus*; No. 147, *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben* (Naxos 8.550642, containing 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring'); No. 80, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (8.550642); No. 8 *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben*; No. 51, *Jauchzet Gott in alle landen* (Naxos 8.550643); No. 82, *Ich habe genug* (8.550763); No. 12, *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen;*

No. 199, *Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut* (8.550431); Nos 36, 132 and 61 (Naxos 8.554825); and No. 78, *Jesu, der du meine Seele* – to name only a few. In addition to these are the glorious Magnificat (Naxos 8.550763) and the six (almost unaccompanied) motets (8.553823).

All the larger-scale vocal works – the *Christmas*, *Easter* and *Ascension Oratorios*, the two great Passions and the B minor Mass – are front-runners in Bach's prodigious choral output. The *Christmas Oratorio* (Naxos 8.550428–30) is actually a collection of six distinct cantatas, replete with trumpets and drums, and is about as festive and uplifting as music gets. Less well-known but in many ways just as satisfying are the *Ascension* and *Easter Oratorios*. The latter provides an example of one of Bach's most controversial practices, namely re-using decidedly secular material, sometimes very down to earth indeed, in works for the church. Virtually all the music in it first saw the light of day in a birthday entertainment for Duke Christian of Weissenfels.

The *St Matthew Passion* and the *St John* have also aroused controversy, but for different reasons, although Bach can hardly have been surprised. One of the requirements of his job as Cantor of the St Thomas School in Leipzig was that he should "so arrange the church music that it shall not be too long, or of such a nature as to have an operatic character." In each of the Passions, Bach offended on both counts. *St John* runs to nearly two hours, *St Matthew* to almost three, and each uses operatic conventions, if not operatic styles. With their recitatives, arias and choruses, and with the soloists in each being given specific 'roles', both works (among the greatest ever written) struck many people, in Bach's time and since, as too operatic by half. And the *St John Passion*, in particular, is so vividly and unashamedly dramatic in its imagery, layout and musical styles that Bach seems almost to have been inviting the controversy which it so predictably aroused. Both works require a serious investment on the part of the listener. This is the last music to use as a kind of aural wallpaper. It's music not merely to be heard but to be listened to, with one's whole attention.

It's easy to feel after hearing the Mass in B minor (Naxos 8.550585–86) that this is not only Bach's greatest work, but the greatest work ever composed – and the greatest hymn to joy (the

finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony notwithstanding). No music is more exalted, more profound, more soul-shakingly glorious than this. How one man could contain all this within him and then go through the slow and laborious task of writing it all down, note by note by note, is one of those mysteries which cause one to talk of miracles.

But how is it that a devout Lutheran, steeped from birth in the doctrines and perspectives of Protestantism, came to write a mass, i.e. a work belonging entirely to the Roman Catholic not the Protestant liturgy, in the first place? What's more, the fact is that the Mass in B minor is not alone; there are four, short masses which preceded it, and like the great B minor, their genesis remains a mystery. It should be noted, however, that parts of the Latin Mass remained in use in some of the larger Lutheran churches, of which the Leipzig Thomaskirche and Nikolaikirche were two. The likelihood is that the shorter masses were composed either for the Roman Catholic court at Dresden (this was certainly the case where the original forms of the Kyrie and Gloria are concerned) or for a Bohemian patron, the Catholic Count Sporck. Remembering, too, that the B minor Mass, like *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, was not an integrated single work, conceived and composed as a whole, but in many respects a compilation of earlier works, it seems entirely probable that Bach never intended it for liturgical use but used it as a framework for the expression of his own very personal faith in the glory of God.

# 4 A Graded Listening Plan

With a surviving body of almost 2,000 pieces, the idea of compiling a graded listening plan is a little daunting, to say the least. Comparatively little of Bach's output is in any way difficult for the listener. It's true that some of the late works, *A Musical Offering* or *The Art of Fugue* and some of the fugues in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, for instance, are on the austere and cerebral side and demand very considerable concentration of the listener, but most of Bach's works are eminently approachable.

**Works for Organ**

The Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565, is quite simply the most famous organ work in history, and by inference the most popular. From there, try the Toccata, Adagio and Fugue, BWV 564 – best known for many decades in Busoni's arrangement for solo piano. The Prelude and Fugue in E flat major, BWV 552 (known by the nickname "St Anne") is in its way a rather more imposing work, particularly the lengthy Prelude, which often clocks in at over ten minutes. One of the most thrilling, and even modernistic of Bach's organ works is the great Prelude and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542, and the Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor is a positively awe-inspiring work, demanding (and repaying) one's most concentrated attention. But no Bach lover should neglect the many shorter works, the miraculous family of 'chorale preludes' contained in the two volume *Orgelbüchlein*, those comprising Volume III of the *Clavierübung* and the so-

called *Schübler Chorales.* Indeed in the whole of Bach's output for the organ there isn't a single dud. Definitely to be kept for last is *The Art of the Fugue:* Bach's summation of all he knew about counterpoint – which was everything. And here listening should be selective to begin with; never more than a few fugues at a time. If the work was written for performance at all, it was certainly not conceived as a single integrated structure, like a symphony, to be listened to at a sitting.

**Works for Solo Keyboard**

What do you do on entering a gold mine which seems to have no end? If you don't know the Italian Concerto, make a bee-line for it. Here you have formality, proportion, intellect and art combined with an irresistible vitality, a quite fantastic spiritual health (a Bachian hallmark) and a vigorous physicality matched only by Beethoven. And then the hauntingly beautiful, sorrowful, oboe-like meditation of the slow movement, and after that, the jubilant bustle and drive of the finale, which is as exciting, entertaining and involving as any football game.

Then try the Partita No. 5 in G – one of the all-time great 'feel-good' pieces, with its unabashed delight in virtuosity, its almost uncontainable sense of happiness, of *joy* (another Bachian hallmark, present in virtually all of his works in this key), its grace, its lilt, its artful rhythmic teasing, and its pervasive sense of dance. And another G major Fifth: the French Suite No. 5, with its understandably famous concluding Gigue – again, one of the sunniest works ever written. And while we're in G major, try the Preludes and Fugues in that key in both books of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.

The greatest of all Bach's keyboard works in G (arguably the greatest of his solo keyboard works bar none) is unquestionably the Goldberg Variations – which can be listened to complete or in bits (the variations themselves are grouped in little suites). Every one of its variations is a jewel in its own right, and together they embrace virtually any mood you care to mention. They are charming, poignant, dazzling, plaintive, grandiloquent, playful, jubilant, lonely (the highly

chromatic 25th variation, the only one that's not an immediately accessible listen, is one of the loneliest meditations ever written), diabolically clever, most of them permeated by the dance – and every one of them can stand on its own as a self-contained 'Little Prelude', to borrow a title given by Bach to a number of his short, free-standing pieces (all of them wonderful, within the limitations of their scope, some of them very short indeed – one of the best lasts less than half a minute).

Of all Bach's sets of suites, the six Partitas are probably the most consistently engaging. After the G major, already mentioned (No. 5), I'd recommend exploring them in the following order: No. 1 in B flat, No. 4 in D major, No. 2 in C minor, No. 6 in E minor (perhaps the greatest of them all) and No. 3 in A minor.

The six French Suites are all gold-standard, and perhaps more immediately and consistently appealing than their probably greater 'English' cousins. After No. 5 in G, my recommended order for exploration would be No. 6 in E, No. 4 in E flat, No. 3 in B minor, No. 1 in D minor and No. 2 in C minor.

The English Suites are bigger, in many ways more formal, considerably more difficult to play and probably more demanding of the listener than the French Suites, but their stature is probably even higher. My recommended order would be: No. 2 in A minor, No. 3 in G minor, No. 6 in D minor, No. 1 in A, No. 4 in F, and No. 5 in E minor.

The 48 Preludes and Fugues of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* contain such a variety (essentially all-encompassing) that a graded choice would be ludicrous to attempt. Suffice it to say that most musicians would agree with Pablo Casals' description of Bach's '48' as 'the Old Testament' of music, with Beethoven's 32 Piano Sonatas as 'the New Testament'.

The seven Toccatas are among the earliest of Bach's works to have survived, and all have much to recommend them (try the C minor for a start) but there's a certain obsessiveness and repetitiousness in some of them which rules them out as a starting-point for the newcomer to Bach's keyboard music.

Of all Bach's keyboard works, the ones most didactic in intent and inspiration are undoubtedly the Two- and Three-part Inventions (the latter also called Sinfonias). These are pieces written primarily for the player and were probably never envisaged as concert repertoire. The most interesting, subtle and profound pieces here are to be found among the Sinfonias, and the Two-part Inventions contain some very engaging pieces, but some of them can easily seem rather dry and unrewarding for the listener. I personally would not recommend any of them as a listener's introduction to Bach's keyboard output, although their value to the player and student can be very great. From here on, the Bachian world of the keyboard is your oyster.

**Other Solo Instrumental Works**

The Sonatas and Partitas for Unaccompanied Violin and the six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello defy one to believe that the violin and the cello are really one-line melody instruments. Through a combination of double-stopping and an extraordinarily clever alternation of higher and lower registers, Bach actually writes *fugues* for solo violin. The most famous of the solo violin works is the great Chaconne which crowns the D minor Partita. This is a colossal achievement by any standard, and a work of almost overpowering nobility and grandeur. It's a *huge* piece – not only by the clock (in some performances it lasts for almost a quarter of an hour) but in its epic emotional scope and its dramatic pacing. For many decades it was best known in Busoni's appropriately colossal arrangement for solo piano (though his enormous liberties amount in effect to a re-composition), but there's another arrangement, seldom performed but of immense value to all pianists, namely Brahms's almost literal transcription for the left hand alone.

The Cello Suites contain nothing quite so sensational, but if anything their overall artistic stature and emotional richness surpass even the works for unaccompanied violin, and with greater consistency. There is here a particular kind of nobility, serenity and spiritual purity which only the cello seems to have inspired in Bach. This is not a matter of degree but of quality. Nobility, serenity and spiritual purity abound in his music, but these suites inhabit a special

region of their own. Try the magnificent Third Suite in C major first, then perhaps the more intimate First Suite in G. The richly warm E flat Suite, No. 4, begins by sounding almost like a transcription of a Chopin nocturne (Bach, by the way, was Chopin's favourite composer), the C minor is deeply contemplative and is perhaps the most intense of the six. But these are all works to live with and to revisit many times.

Bach's three original Suites for the Lute (one of them entitled Partita) are very attractive pieces indeed and are part of the daily bread of many classical guitarists. Like all suites their individual movements, all dances of one kind or another, can stand alone as self-contained pieces, to be enjoyed without reference to their original context.

Less immediately engaging than any of the above, perhaps, but by no means to be sniffed at, is the Partita in A minor for Unaccompanied Flute. Its limitations are principally the limitations of the instrument, which lacks the ability (except in extraordinary circumstances) to sound two notes at the same time – no double-stopping, in short – and is tonally less versatile, in a Bachian context, than the violin and the cello.

**Chamber Music**

Until we get to *The Musical Offering* (which should definitely be tried last), the principal chamber works to have found a regular place in the repertoire are the six Sonatas for Violin and Keyboard, the six Sonatas for Flute and Keyboard (two of doubtful authenticity) and the three Sonatas for Viola da Gamba and Keyboard, now usually played on the cello or viola. The most consistently beautiful of all, for me, are the three Sonatas for Viola da Gamba and Keyboard, and it's there that I'd advise anyone to begin exploring Bach's chamber music, starting with No. 2 in D major, followed by No. 1 in G major and No. 3 in G minor.

The violin sonatas are full of delights, and movements, too, of greatly affecting poignancy. In whatever contrapuntal combination, these works are an almost continuous outpouring of beautiful melody and of musical conversation at the highest level. As an introduction you

couldn't do better than to start with the Third Sonata, in E major, whose combination of reflectiveness and joy is hard to resist – and who would try? Next, try the Second Sonata, with its wonderfully buoyant final movement. Why not start there, in fact? Unusual, perhaps, to begin at the end, but, again, why not? Thirdly, I'd move on to the Fourth Sonata, in C minor, whose outpourings of melody are quite haunting, and whose quick movements are full of the most infectious vitality. Then try the Sixth Sonata, in G, with its unexpected movement for solo harpsichord, and its typically G major brand of joy. If not captivated, poach around in other areas of Bach's output and then come back to these sonatas later on.

The overall quality is maybe a little more uneven in the Flute Sonatas, which, however, are never less than very agreeable, but with No. 1 in B minor, BWV 1030, and No. 5 in E minor, BWV 1034, one strikes pure gold.

**Orchestral Works**

The riches here lie so thick on the ground that it scarcely matters where you begin. I would not, however, recommend the Triple Concerto (for flute, violin and harpsichord) as a first port of call. That honour should probably go to the six Brandenburg Concertos, whose abiding popularity throughout the twentieth century shows no sign of flagging in the twenty-first and speaks eloquently for itself. They are purest gold from start to finish, and despite their great variety of form and instrumentation they are unalloyed pleasure givers, guaranteed to refresh the spirits and exhilarate the soul. My recommended order would start with No. 5 in D, one of the most buoyant and uplifting pieces ever written, and then move on to No. 4 in G (Bach's most joyful key), No. 6 in B flat, where Bach demonstrates that there's nothing incongruous about joy in the lower register (cellos and violas predominate), No. 2 in F, with its fabulous virtuoso high trumpet part, No. 3 in G, for strings only, and No. 1 in F. But with music like this, you can really jump in anywhere and find yourself not too far from heaven.

The violin concertos, including both the Double Concerto and the one for violin and oboe, are

uniformly superb and involving – mostly life enhancing in their joy but also touched (particularly in the slow movements of the Double Concerto and the Violin/Oboe Concerto) with a uniquely Bachian combination of sadness and rapture (no-one, not Wagner, not anyone, ever wrote greater love music than this).

The keyboard concertos, it appears, are all arrangements of mostly lost concertos for violin or oboe or both, but are none the worse for that. In fact, taken as a whole (including the concertos for two, three and even four harpsichords) they can fairly be said to rival in consistency of inspiration and mastery of construction the greatly more numerous concertos of Mozart, generally considered the most perfect ever written. If you're new to them, I'd recommend starting with the sunny A major Concerto, among the most contagiously happy pieces of music ever written. After that, try the amazing (and not often heard) Concerto in C for Three Harpsichords, BWV 1064, especially the last movement, which is one of the most exhilarating blends of excitement and joy in human history (if it was a drug, it would probably be banned). Then go for the biggest (and greatest) of the lot, the tremendous Concerto No. 1 in D minor, understandably the best-known and most recorded harpsichord concerto in history (and it's just as exciting on the piano). At this point, it hardly matters where you turn next, but if further guidance is of any help, I'd recommend first the large-scale E major Concerto, BWV 1053 followed by the most compact of them all, No. 5 in F minor, BWV 1056.

The four Orchestral Suites, also called Overtures, are all magnificent, perhaps the best known being No. 3 in D, from which comes the famous 'Air on the G String'. No. 2 in B minor, for flute and strings, is exhilarating in quite a different way (particularly in its lickety-split finale), No. 1 in C is a wonderful blend of formality and tunefulness, and No. 4 is full of pomp and splendour. That's the order I'd recommend to the newcomer, but with music as accessible and immediate in its appeal as this, no pointers are really necessary.

**Choral and Vocal Works**

With well over 200 cantatas, motets, chorales and sacred songs, the two great Passions, the three great oratorios (Christmas, Easter and Ascension Day) and the B minor Mass, where in the world should one begin to traverse the unparalleled universe of Bach's vocal music? The first things that come to mind are excerpts rather than complete works: the purity and lilting serenity of *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* (Cantata No. 147), the lyrical simplicity and tenderness of *Sheep May Safely Graze* (Cantata No. 208), the dancing, enchanting joy of the duet from Cantata No. 78 (one of the most irresistibly uplifting and heavenly things ever written), the glory and splendour of the opening aria of Cantata No. 51 with its ecstatic and ceremonial duet between soprano and trumpet, the opening chorus of the *Christmas Oratorio*, the comedy of the 'Peasant' Cantata, many of the movements of the Mass in B minor – all these have at least three things in common: a degree and variety of joy which is unique to Bach, an all-pervasive, palpably physical sense of dance which fairly defies you to sit still, and an ecstatic spirituality of positively exalting healthiness. But time to take the bull by the horns and proceed to whole works.

For sheer joy and uplift, any of the following should set you soaring. The indescribably wonderful Cantata No. 80 (*Ein feste Burg is unser Gott*) is one of the great ceremonial joyfests of all time, with its trumpets and drums, its rapturous duet with oboe and violin obbligato (one of the most beautiful pieces of any kind ever written, fit to make you cry at its sheer loveliness) and its splendid choruses. Hardly less transporting is Cantata No. 147 (original home of *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*), which is probably as close as one can hope to get to heaven on earth (both cantatas on Naxos 8.550642). The great Magnificat, too (Naxos 8.550763), is a knock-out from start to finish. Less grand but equally exciting is the solo Cantata No. 51 for soprano and orchestra, coupled on Naxos 8.550643 with the wonderful, secular 'Hunt' Cantata (No. 208), with its splendid horns, beguiling arias (including the famous *Sheep May Safely Graze*), joyful choruses and one utterly superb, lilting duet with violin obbligato. And as well as the whole of

the *Christmas Oratorio*, six magnificent cantatas in one, as it were (Naxos 8.550428–30), there are three separate Christmas cantatas – Nos 36, 61 and 132 – which fairly defy the feet to remain on the ground (all three on Naxos 8.554825).

For the sublime, profound and very deeply moving side of Bach's Christian faith, and his universality of spirit, two early cantatas demand inclusion in any list such as this: Cantata No. 4 (*Christ lag in Todes Banden*) and Cantata No. 106 (despite its misleading numbering), *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*, also known as the "Actus Tragicus", as do the all-but-unaccompanied motets (Naxos 8.553823). But the greatest of all Bach's choral works are the *St John Passion* (Naxos 8.550664–65), the *St Matthew Passion* (8.550832–34) and the towering Mass in B minor (8.550585–86), and I recommend coming to them in that order, as Bach did. Music comes no greater than this.

# Recommended Reading 5

The number of books on Bach is far beyond the capacity of any normal person to read in a lifetime. Since books, even classics in the field, come into and go out of print, the following discussion is restricted to those that are either in print at the time of writing or easily available from most big libraries.

All of those written before the twentieth-century explosion of musicological research are now long outdated from a strictly scholastic point of view but this doesn't mean that they have necessarily been superseded from a human and biographical point of view, nor that their observations on the music are without lasting validity. Prominent among these is the three-volume *J.S. Bach* by the great doctor, missionary, theologian and organist Albert Schweitzer, first published in 1905, (Dover, 2001, ISBN 0486-21631-4 and ISBN 0486-21632-2) and *Johann Sebastian Bach* by Philipp Spitta (also in three volumes), first published in 1880 (Vol. 1. Dover, 2001, ISBN 0486-27412-8; Vol. 2. Dover, 2000, ISBN 0486-27413-6; Vol. 3. Dover, 2000, ISBN 0486-27414-4).

The most recent of the modern biographies is also the best. *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* by Christoph Wolff (Oxford University Press/W.W. Norton, 2000, ISBN 0-19-816534-X). Indeed musical biographies don't come much better than this, especially given that the amount of first-hand documentary material on or by Bach is chicken feed compared with the glut of biographical riches available to biographers of such titans as Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz

and Liszt. Packed with information, rich in background, both historical and musical, filled with incident and insight, and remarkably vivid in its depiction of Bach's home life, it leaves one with a fresher, more vibrant picture of the composer than any of its predecessors – and fortunately for the general reader, there's little in the way of analytical comment. This is a book which no-one seriously interested in Bach should pass by.

Readers who are newcomers to the Bach literature, and who may be deterred by the near-600-page bulk of Wolff's book, however, might prefer to start with *Bach – An Extraordinary Life* by the noted Bach specialist and eminent harpsichordist Davitt Moroney (ABRSM Publishing, 2000, ISBN 1-86096-190-8). Highly readable and authoritative, yet a mere 100 pages long, it makes an excellent introduction to Bach's life and works.

Moving on to books for the more informed musician and music-lover, two excellent books designed for dipping into rather than for a continuous read are the *Cambridge Companion to Bach*, edited by John Butt (Cambridge University Press, 1997, ISBN 0-521-58780-8) and the *Oxford Composer Companion to J.S. Bach*, edited by Malcolm Boyd (Oxford University Press, 1999, ISBN 0-19-866208-4). Although there's inevitably a good deal of overlapping in terms of the information contained, these two very valuable books are more notable for their differences than for their similarities. The *Oxford Composer Companion* is a straightforward, A–Z reference book, containing more than 900 entries by more than 40 of the foremost Bach authorities in the world. The net is cast almost extravagantly wide, including entries for Schoenberg, Stravinsky and the Swingle Singers, and it's hard to imagine that there's any aspect of Bach or his posthumous influence not covered. The *Cambridge Companion*, by contrast, is a collection of substantial essays by world authorities, organised in three parts: The Historical Context, Profiles of the Music, and Influence and Reception. Both books belong in the library of every serious Bachian, providing a mine of information, readably and sometimes provocatively presented.

For core reference material, including some fascinating reading, another highly recommendable book is *The New Bach Reader*, originally edited by Hans T. David and Arthur

Mendel but recently revised and expanded by Christoph Wolff (W.W. Norton & Co., paperback, ISBN 0-393-04558-3). Lavishly updated (100 new items, many appearing in English for the first time), this surprisingly involving collection contains every known document in Bach's hand and virtually every other scrap of paper by his contemporaries which could possibly shed light, however faint, on the life and work of a superman whose day-to-day existence, outside the sphere of his inner creative fire, was often almost disturbingly ordinary. In addition to the myriad documents contemporaneous with Bach, the book contains numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts of Bach and his works. Whether read cover to cover or dipped into at random, the book is a treasure house of documentary evidence from which a living, breathing portrait of the composer emerges with great vividness.

Finally, three other books for dipping into and consulting rather than for settling down with for a good read on a rainy afternoon. (1) *J.S. Bach: Essays On His Life and Music*, edited by Christoph Wolff (Harvard University Press, 1991) – a collection of 32 essays by one of the most eminent Bach scholars of our time. Some of the essays are probably too technical and demanding for the average lay reader, but there isn't one that's dull. (2) *The New Grove Bach Family*, edited by Christoph Wolff and others (drawn from *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* edited Stanley Sadie (Macmillan, 1980): interesting articles on Bach and his family abound, and the extensive work list is especially useful for pointers to further areas of exploration. (3) *The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach* by Robert Marshall (Schirmer, 1989): a collection of 16 essays by another eminent Bach scholar. As with Wolff's collection, some of these make considerable demands of the reader.

# 6 Personalities

**Abel, Christian Ferdinand** (1682–1761) was a double-bassist in the court orchestra at Cöthen during Bach's period as Kapellmeister there. Bach may have written his three sonatas for viola da gamba and harpsichord expressly for Abel to play.

**Agricola, Johann Friedrich** (1720–74), German composer and writer. A pupil of Bach's in Leipzig, he was later appointed court composer to Frederick the Great at Potsdam. He collaborated with C.P.E. Bach in writing the famous but rather belated Obituary of J.S., published in 1754, four years after Bach's death.

**Albinoni, Tomaso Giovanni** (1671–1751), Italian composer. With Vivaldi, he was one of the most important figures in the development of the solo concerto at Venice. Bach used some of his music in his teaching and based keyboard fugues on themes from Albinoni's Trio Sonatas, Op. l.

**Altnikol, Johann Christoph** (1719–59). A pupil of Bach's in Leipzig, he was an accomplished bass singer and organist and became Bach's son-in-law, marrying Bach's daughter Elisabeth in 1749, the year before Bach's death.

**Bach, Carl Philipp Emanuel** (1714–88). Renowned as composer, harpsichordist and author of a famous treatise, still much read, he was Bach's fifth child and second son, before acquiring fame as a musician he studied law at Leipzig University. Between 1738 and 1768 he was court harpsichordist to Frederick the Great, later becoming Kantor and music director at Hamburg, where he remained until his death. His compositions, most notably his keyboard works, symphonies, concertos and chamber music, were of major importance in forging the late eighteenth-century Classical style.

**Bach, Johann Christian** (1735–82). The most popular of all the musical Bachs in his lifetime, he was the last son of J.S. and Anna Magdalena. At the age of 15, following his father's death in 1750, he went to live with Emanuel in Berlin. Breaking a long family tradition (Lutheranism), he went to Italy and converted to Roman Catholicism in 1754, and became a successful composer of Italian operas. After two years as organist at Milan Cathedral, he moved to London, where he continued to compose operas and became music master to Queen Charlotte. With his colleague and compatriot C.F. Abel, he did much to establish the institution of the public concert. He had a formative influence on Mozart, whom he came to know when the eight-year-old prodigy visited London in 1764.

**Bach, Wilhelm Friedemann** (1710–84), the eldest and, according to some, the most musically gifted son of J.S., he was educated at the Thomasschule and at Leipzig University. Becoming organist at the Sophienkirche in Dresden, and music director at the Liebfrauenkirche in Halle, he later gave up the salaried life, pursuing a precarious freelance career. He ended his days in Berlin after suffering years of poverty and poor health. On the death of J.S., he inherited the largest share of his father's manuscripts, many of which he is reported to have lost or casually given away.

**Birnbaum, Johann Abraham** (1702–48). An academic who taught at Leipzig University, he was a skilful and versatile keyboard player and became Bach's principal champion in the rumpus caused by Scheibe's attack on Bach's music in 1737.

**Böhm, Georg** (1661–1733), German organist and composer. His organ music, especially his chorale settings, had a major influence on Bach, who may actually have been his pupil for a time.

**Buxtehude, Dietrich** (*c*. 1637–1707) was among the most celebrated musical figures in the German musical world of his time. A distinguished composer and long a peerless organist at the Marienkirche in Lübeck, he organised there a famous series of evening concerts, which Bach attended in 1705 having walked 50 miles for that purpose. Buxtehude's music and playing had a formative influence on Bach's musical style.

**Corelli, Arcangelo** (1653–1713). One of the great Italian violinist-composers, he was among the most influential forces in the development of the concerto grosso, of which Bach and Handel were later the greatest masters. His works were relatively few, and entirely instrumental, but their fame and popularity spread throughout Europe.

**Couperin, François** (1668–1733) was the most important French composer of the generation before Bach. He was harpsichordist to King Louis XIV, composed over 200 pieces for the instrument, and published a famous treatise, *L'art de toucher le clavecin* (1716), on how to play it.

**Fasch, Johann Friedrich** (1688–1758) attended the Thomasschule in Leipzig and in 1708 founded the second Collegium Musicum there. He competed with Bach for the post of

Thomaskantor in Leipzig. His prolific output included nearly 100 orchestral suites, some of which Bach transcribed for his own Collegium Musicum in the 1730s.

**Fischer, Johann Caspar Ferdinand** (1670–1746) was Kapellmeister to Ludwig Wilhelm, Margrave of Baden from 1695; his *Ariadne musica* of 1702 was an important forerunner of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier.*

**Franck, Salomo** (1659–1725) studied law at Jena University and at Leipzig. He was at Arnstadt shortly before Bach went there and served as secretary, librarian and poet at the court of Weimar court during Bach's two periods of employment there. His several volumes of cantata texts include about 20 known to have been set by Bach.

**Frescobaldi, Girolamo** (1583–1643) was active in many Italian cities, but especially in Rome. His influence on Bach can be traced both to his *Fiori musicali* of 1635, which Bach owned, and to his famous pupil Froberger (see below).

**Froberger, Johann Jacob** (1616–67) studied with Frescobaldi in Rome and was for many years court organist in Vienna. He did much to establish a German keyboard style and played an important role in the formation of the classical suite of dance movements.

**Goldberg, Johann Gottlieb** (1727–56) studied with Bach at Leipzig in 1742/3, at which time he was harpsichordist to the insomniac Count Keyserlingk in Dresden, for whom Bach wrote his Aria and 30 Variations, now known for obvious if misleading reasons as the Goldberg Variations. In 1751 he was appointed chamber musician to Count Heinrich von Brühl, in whose service he remained until his death at the age of 29. His church cantatas are strongly influenced by Bach's.

**Graupner, Christoph** (1683–1760) attended the Thomasschule in Leipzig and after a brief spell at Leipzig University went to Hamburg and then to Darmstadt, where he was appointed Kapellmeister in 1712. Although preferred to Bach at the competition for the cantorate at Leipzig in 1722, he remained at Darmstadt, with an increased salary (his employers would not consent to release him), until his death. His vast output included operas, some 1400 church cantatas, and a great deal of orchestral and chamber music, virtually all of which is forgotten today.

**Händel, Georg Frideric** (later George Frideric Handel) (1685–1759), was born in the same year as J.S. Bach and Domenico Scarlatti, but enjoyed a very different sort of career from either of them. He studied briefly at the University of Halle before joining the opera orchestra at Hamburg. In 1706 he went to Italy, where he laid the foundations of his illustrious career as an opera composer, but he earned his greatest reputation in London, where he settled in 1712 and remained for the rest of his life. Public apathy, professional rivalry and the unpredictability of singers led to his abandonment of the stage in the 1730s for the not unrelated world of oratorios, which ensured his most enduring fame on both sides of the Atlantic for the best part of two centuries. Strange to say, he and Bach never met.

**Hasse, Johann Adolf** (1699–1783), German composer. He studied with Alessandro Scarlatti (father of Domenico) in Naples and married the famous mezzo-soprano Faustina Bordoni. He was Kapellmeister to the Elector of Saxony in Dresden for over 30 years and became one of the most admired and respected composers in Europe.

**Heinichen, Johann David** (1683–1729) attended the Thomasschule in Leipzig and studied at Leipzig University (1702–6). He wrote operas for Leipzig before 1710, and after a period in

Venice and Rome, where he taught Bach's future patron, Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. Coincidentally, he was engaged as Kapellmeister to the court in Dresden in the same years as Bach left it for Cöthen. He was the author of one of the most important Baroque treatises on music, *Der General-Bass in der Composition* (1728).

**Johann Ernst, Prince of Saxe-Weimar** (1696–1715), was taught the keyboard first by Bach's distant relation Johann Gottfried Walther, and later by Bach himself. The young prince was a gifted composer, and his six Concertos Op. l were published by Telemann in 1718. Bach arranged two of them for harpsichord and two others for organ. It was the prince's enthusiasm for the new Italian styles, and the many scores he brought back with him from his continental studies, that brought Bach too into the Italian orbit, significantly influencing his future development.

**Kirnberger, Johann Philipp** (1721–83) was among the most gifted of Bach's pupils and became one of his most messianic apostles, attempting to disseminate Bach's teaching methods in his own treatises. He lost no opportunity to promote Bach's music and was instrumental in the publication of Bach's chorale harmonisations.

**Krebs, Johann Ludwig** (1713–80) was the son of the composer and organist Johann Tobias Krebs (1690–1762). Both were pupils of Bach, the younger Krebs being particularly well thought of by him. He served Bach as singer, organist and copyist, and on Bach's death in 1750 he competed unsuccessfully to succeed him as Thomaskantor. His own music combines Bachian polyphony with features of the new galant style perpetuated and developed by Bach's sons Carl Philipp Emanuel and Johann Christian.

**Krieger, Johann Philipp** (1649–1725) spent most of his life as Kapellmeister at the Weissenfels

court, where Bach held the title of Kapellmeister *von Haus aus* from 1729 to 1736. His works included over 2,000 church cantatas, and a delightful garland of student songs popular with the scholars of Leipzig University.

**Kuhnau, Johann** (1660–1722) was Bach's predecessor as Thomaskantor in Leipzig, and a man of many gifts. He was a practising lawyer, an accomplished mathematician and a noted linguist. After serving as organist of the Thomaskirche from 1684, he was appointed Kantor in 1701. He is remembered today chiefly for his keyboard music, especially the six programmatic 'Biblical' Sonatas of 1700.

**Marcello, Alessandro** (1684–1750) and his younger brother Benedetto (1686–1739) were both highly gifted amateur composers, some of whose works were known to and arranged by Bach.

**Marchand, Louis** (1669–1732). A French organist of formidable virtuosity and unsavoury reputation, he is best remembered today for his ignominious retreat from a contest with Bach at Dresden in 1717.

**Marpurg, Friedrich Wilhelm** (1718–95), the German theorist, was a passionate admirer of Bach's music. He wrote the preface for a new edition of *The Art of Fugue* in 1752 and extolled Bach's polyphony as a model in his widely read treatise on fugue (*Abhandlung von der Fuge,* 1753–4).

**Mattheson, Johann** (1681–1764) spent most of his life at Hamburg, where he sang tenor in the opera, enjoyed the friendship of Handel, and later served the English ambassador as secretary and diplomat. He married an English woman, Catharina Jennings, in 1709. His compositions included many operas and oratorios, but posterity has valued him for his critical writings, which include historical and biographical material of unique importance besides a good deal of

polemical material.

**Mizler, Lorenz** (1711–78) founded the 'Corresponding Society of the Musical Sciences' in 1738 and published a great deal of important material in the society's official journal. The society enrolled 19 members, including Bach, whose late music found exceptional favour with Mizler.

**Neumeister, Erdmann** (1671–1756) was a student of theology, literature and law at Leipzig University. He wrote nine cycles of cantata texts, reforming the existing type of church cantata by introducing the frankly operatic recitative and da capo aria as important factors. The five texts set by Bach come from two cycles written for the Eisenach court between 1711 and 1714.

**Pachelbel, Johann** (1653–1706) was organist from 1678 at the Predigerkirche, Erfurt, where his pupils included Bach's eldest brother Johann Christoph. In 1690 he moved to Stuttgart and then to Gotha before taking up his final appointment at St Sebald's Church, Nuremberg. He was among the most important composers of organ music before Bach.

**'Picander'** was the pen-name of Christian Friedrich Henrici (1700–64), Bach's librettist at Leipzig. He studied law at Wittenberg and from 1720 worked in Leipzig as a writer, tutor and post-office administrator. He supplied the texts for Bach's *St Matthew* and *St Mark* Passions, and for many of his secular and occasional cantatas.

**Quantz, Johann Joachim** (1697–1773) was by general consent the greatest flute player of his time. He spent his years in the service of Frederick the Great in Berlin, where he earned a basic salary three times as much as Bach received altogether at Leipzig. His compositions include no fewer than 300 flute concertos, most of them composed for the King to play. His treatise *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flote traversiere zu spielen*, written in 1752, is among the most important of the eighteenth century and extends far beyond the actual subject of flute-playing.

**Reincken, Johann Adam** (1623–1722) was one of the greatest organists of the eighteenth century and lived for a few months less than 100 years – a colossal age for that time. His organ improvisations attracted Bach, and he, in turn, found Bach's improvisations beyond compare.

**Scheibe, Johann Adolph** (1708–76) was educated at Leipzig University, where he was strongly influenced by the reformist views of J.C. Gottsched. After several unsuccessful attempts between 1729 and 1736 to secure a post as organist, he established himself in Hamburg as a critic and composer, and from 1740 was active in Denmark, where he died. His criticism of Bach's music, published anonymously in 1737, caused exceptional controversy.

**Schütz, Heinrich** (1585–1672), the greatest German composer of his time, studied with Giovanni Gabrieli in Venice, and his music was heavily tinged with Italianate features from that time onwards. Shortly after his return to Germany in 1613 he went to Dresden, where he served as Kapellmeister to the Elector of Saxony. Except for frequent and sometimes prolonged absences, he remained there for the rest of his long life. Schütz excelled in most vocal genres, and in 1627 composed the first German opera, *Dafne*. His motets and passions are important both in their own right and as precursors of Bach's.

**Silbermann, Gottfried** (1683–1753) came from a family of organ builders and settled in Freiberg in 1711. He built all the major organs in Dresden as well as other important ones in Freiberg, Rotha, Zittau and elsewhere. He also made clavichords and some of the earliest grand pianos, initially criticised by Bach but later endorsed by him, after improvements instigated by his own criticism.

**Telemann, Georg Philipp** (1681–1767) remains the most prolific composer in history. In his

day he enjoyed a fame far exceeding Bach's. He studied at the University of Leipzig, where he also founded a Collegium Musicum among the students and directed the Leipzig Opera. From 1708 to 1712 he was at the Eisenach court, and it was probably there that he first met Bach. After nearly ten years as Kapellmeister at the Barfusserkirche, Frankfurt am Main, he went in 1721 to Hamburg as Kantor of the Johanneum and musical director of the city's main churches. Telemann was an indefatigable composer, publisher, writer, concert promoter and administrator. His surviving compositions include operas, oratorios, well over 1,000 cantatas and numerous examples of every type of orchestral and chamber music.

**Vivaldi, Antonio** (1678–1741), known as the Red Priest because of his flaming ginger hair, was the most famous and influential Italian composer of his generation. He taught at the Ospedale della Pietà, a home and school for orphaned girls in Venice, and it was for that institution that many of his 500 or more concertos were written. They established the three-movement (fast–slow–fast) form of the solo concerto and the ritornello structure of the outer movements. Bach transcribed some of them at Weimar and his own stylistic development as a composer was profoundly affected by them.

**Walther, Johann Gottfried** (1684–1748) became organist at the Stadtkirche, Weimar, in 1707, where he taught the young Prince Johann Ernst and, like Bach, arranged concertos for him. He also wrote some excellent organ music of his own.

**Weiss, Silvius Leopold** (1686–1750), born in Breslau, was one of the greatest lute players of his day, and composed extensively for the instrument. He spent some years in Italy, and in 1717 joined the Kapelle of the Saxon court at Dresden. He travelled widely, including at least one visit to Leipzig, where he visited Bach.

# 7 A Calendar of Bach's Life

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1685 | 0 | Births of George Frederick Handel and Domenico Scarlatti; births of John Gay, author of *The Beggar's Opera*, and the German architect Dominikus Zimmermann; fourth folio of Shakespeare's works published |
| 1686 | 1 | Lully's opera *Armide et Renaud* staged in Paris; birth of Italian opera composer Nicola Porpora; first Swedish theatre opens in Stockholm; German Pietist Francke begins his Collegium Philobiblicum for the study of the Bible |
| 1687 | 2 | Lully dies at 55; birth of the German architect Balthasar Neumann; Dryden writes his allegorical poem *The Hind and the Panther* |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Charles II of England succeeded by his brother James II; Duke of Monmouth's rebellion; birth of future Emperor Charles VI; all Chinese ports opened for foreign trade; Pont Royal built in Paris | Johann Sebastian Bach born on 21 March at Eisenach, the youngest son of Johann Ambrosius Bach and his wife Maria Elisabetha |
| League of Augsburg formed in opposition to Louis XIV; Russia declares war on Turkey; death of German physicist Otto von Guericke; birth of German physicist Gabriel Fahrenheit | |
| Hereditary succession of the Habsburg crown recognised by the Hungarian diet of Pressburg; Arguin, Guinea, established as Brandenburg colony; University of Bologna founded | |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1688 | 3 | Birth of Italian composer and organist Domenico Zipoli; deaths of English author John Bunyan and German painter Joachim Sandrart; birth of English poet Alexander Pope; Hobbema paints *Avenue at Middleharnis* |
| 1689 | 4 | Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* produced in London; Racine's tragedy *Esther* staged in Paris; birth of English novelist Samuel Richardson |
| 1690 | 5 | Purcell's *The Prophetess, or the History of Dioclesian* performed in London; Dryden writes *Amphitryon*; John Locke publishes *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; Academia dell'Arcadia founded in Rome |
| 1691 | 6 | Purcell composes *King Arthur* to libretto by Dryden; Andreas Werckmeister publishes *Musikalische Temperatur*; Racine writes *Athalie*; death of Dutch painter Aelbert Cuyp |
| 1692 | 7 | Birth of Italian violinist-composer Giuseppe Tartini; Purcell composes *The Faerie Queen*; births of German architects Johann Michael Fischer and Egid Quirin Asam; Congreve writes *Incognita* |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Frederick William of Prussia, the 'Great Elector', dies and is succeeded by his son Frederick III; war between France and the Holy Roman Empire; Louis XIV invades the German (Rhenish) Palatinate and captures Heidelberg; plate glass cast for the first time | |
| German diet declares war on France; Louis XIV declares war on Britain; Peter the Great becomes Tsar of Russia and begins importation of western European culture; French burn Baden-Baden | |
| Joseph I elected King of the Romans; Spain joins the Great Alliance against France; Calcutta founded by English colonial administrator Job Charnock | |
| Habsburgs recognised as rulers of Transylvania; Massachusetts absorbs Plymouth Colony and is granted a new charter; New East India Company formed in London; Christian Faith Society for West Indies founded in London | |
| Duke Ernst August of Hanover becomes 9th Elector of the Holy Roman Empire; William III defeated at Steinkirk; Johann Konrad Amman publishes first manual of language for deaf mutes | Bach enrolls at the Lateinschule in Eisenach |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1693 | 8 | Alessandro Scarlatti composes his opera *Teodora*; La Fontaine publishes Volume 3 of his *Fables*; Congreve's *The Old Bachelor* staged in London |
| 1694 | 9 | Purcell writes incidental music for Dryden's *Love Triumphant*; births of French writer-philosopher Voltaire and Flemish sculptor John Michael Rysbrack |
| 1695 | 10 | Purcell dies at 36 after completing *The Indian Queen*; births of French sculptor Roubilliac and German poet J.C. Günther; death of La Fontaine |
| 1696 | 11 | Bach's predecessor in Leipzig, Johann Kuhnau, publishes *Frische Clavier-Früchte oder seieben Suonaten* ('The Sonata as a Piece in Several Contrasting Movements'); Kunstakademie founded in Berlin; birth of Italian painter Giovanni Tiepolo; Christian Reuter writes German adventure story *Schelmuffsky* |
| 1697 | 12 | Births of German flautist and composer Johann Joachim Quantz, the painters Antonio ('Canaletto') Canale and William Hogarth, and the German actress and theatre manager Friederike Neuber; Spanish destroy last remnant of Mayan civilisation in Yucatan |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| French sack Heidelberg; Louis XIV begins his peace policy; in America, Carolina divided into North and South Carolina; Kingston, Jamaica, founded; secret society 'Knights of the Apocalypse' founded in Italy to defend the church against the antichrist | |
| Augustus the Strong becomes Elector of Saxony; University of Halle founded in Germany; English fleet bombards Dieppe, Le Havre and Dunkirk; salt tax doubled in England | Bach's mother dies |
| William III takes Namur after serving with his troops in Holland; University of Berlin founded; in Britain, the Royal Bank of Scotland is founded, and window tax is levied in England; pendant barometer invented by Guillaume Amontons | His father dies. Sebastian goes to live with his eldest brother Johann Christoph in Ohrdruf and enters the Lyceum |
| William II campaigns in Holland against the French; in Russo-Turkish War, Peter the Great takes Asov; Russia conquers Kamchatka; Peter the Great sends 50 young Russians to England, Holland and Venice to study shipbuilding and fortification | |
| Augustus, Elector of Saxony, converts to Roman Catholicism and is elected King of Poland; Peter the Great travels to Europe as 'Peter Michailov' where he studies western ways of life for more than a year and a half; China conquers western Mongolia | |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1698 | 13 | Births of Metastasio, great opera librettist, and the composer Giovanni Sammartini; Andreas Schlüter designs Royal Palace in Berlin; birth of writer-historian Johann Jakob Bodmer |
| 1699 | 14 | Births of German composer Johann Adolf Hasse, Kapellmeister to the Elector of Saxony in Dresden for over 30 years, and German architect Georg Knobelsdorff; Racine dies at 60; birth of French painter Jean Chardin |
| 1700 | 15 | Joseph Sauveur measures and explains the vibrations of musical tones; New York Society Library founded; birth of German author and critic Johann Christoph Gottsched; Kabuki theatre developed in Japan |
| 1701 | 16 | University of Venice founded; Yale College founded in America; pioneering music publisher Henry Playford mounts a series of weekly concerts in Oxford; Arai Hakuseki publishes *Hankampu,* a history of the feudal barons (Saimyo) of Japan |
| 1702 | 17 | Birth of Japanese poet Yokai Yagu; Cotton Mather publishes his ecclesiastical history of New England; George Farquhar's comedy *The Twin Rivals* staged in London |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Elector Ernst August of Saxony dies; his eldest son, who later becomes George I of England, becomes electoral prince; Leopold of Anhalt-Dessau introduces goose-stepping and iron ramrods into Prussian army; tax on beards levied in Russia | |
| Peace of Karlowitz signed by Austria, Russia, Poland and Venice with Turkey; Denmark and Russia sign mutual defence pact; Peter the Great decrees that New Year in Russia will begin on 1 January instead of 1 September | |
| Saxony invades Livonia, starting the Great Northern War; English throne passes to the Electress Sophia of Hanover, mother of the electoral prince, later George I; crown treaty between Emperor Leopold I and Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg, who is recognised as 'King in Prussia'; unmarried women taxed in Berlin | Bach leaves Ohrdruf for Lüneburg, where he enrols in the Michaelisschule |
| Frederick III of Brandenburg crowns himself King Frederick I of Prussia; Act of Settlement provides for Protestant succession in England of the House of Hanover; War of the Spanish Succession begins | |
| Charles XII of Sweden captures Warsaw and Cracow; in Britain, William III dies, and is succeeded by Queen Anne; oil lighting comes to many German towns; serfdom abolished in Denmark | Bach applies for (but does not get) the post of organist at the Jakobkirche in Sangerhausen |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1703 | 18 | Births in France of the composer Nicolas de Grigny and painter François Boucher; the building of Buckingham Palace begun in London; death of French author Charles Perrault (*Mother Goose*); *Universal, Historical, Geographical, Chronological and Classical Dictionary* published in England |
| 1704 | 19 | Handel composes his *St John Passion*; German violinist-composer Heinrich Biber dies at 60; death of English philosopher John Locke; Jean-François Regnard's *Les folies amoureuses* staged in Paris |
| 1705 | 20 | Handel's opera *Almira* produced in Hamburg; birth of the great Italian castrato singer Farinelli (Carlo Broschi); Christian Thomasius publishes his *Fundamenta juris naturalis et gentium* |
| 1706 | 21 | Death of German composer-organist Johann Pachelbel; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, German philosopher and polymath publishes *New Essay on Human Understanding*; births of German artists Johann Kändler and Michael Willmann |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Duke of Marlborough captures Bonn; Prince Eugene campaigns in southern Germany; Archduke Charles proclaimed King of Spain in Madrid; Peter the Great lays foundations of St Petersburg | Bach serves briefly as a 'lackey' and court musician at Weimar, before being appointed organist at the Neuekirche in Arnstadt |
| Marlborough marches towards the Danube, meets Prince Eugene near Mandelsheim; they approach Ulm and defeat French and Bavarians at the Battle of Blenheim; first subscription library opens in Berlin; Isaac Newton defends his theory of the emission of light in his *Optics* | |
| Death of Emperor Leopold I; he is succeeded by his eldest son, Joseph I; Royal Observatory founded in Berlin; Edmund Halley accurately predicts the return of comet seen in 1682 | Granted special leave to visit Lübeck for four weeks, to meet and hear the great composer-organist Dietrich Buxtehude, but stays away for four months instead |
| Charles XII of Sweden defeats Saxons and Russians at Franstadt; in the Peace of Altrandstadt, Augustus renounces the Polish throne and recognises King Stanislas I; carriage springs constructed by English inventor Henry Mill | On his return he is summoned to appear before the Arnstadt consistory and explain himself |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1707 | 22 | Death of the great composer-organist Dietrich Buxtehude; Kollegien-Kirche in Salzburg completed; Gottfried Silbermann builds his first organ at Frauenstein in Saxony; Handel and Scarlatti meet and compete in Venice; birth of Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni |
| 1708 | 23 | Handel enjoys successes in Naples and Rome; Italian painter Pompeo Batoni born; first German theatre opened in Vienna; death of German dramatist Christian Weise; professorship of poetry founded at Oxford University |
| 1709 | 24 | Torelli dies at 51; invention of the piano by Bartolomeo Cristofori; births of German composer Franz Xaver Richter and sculptor Johann Feichtmayr; death of Dutch painter Meindert Hobbema; Samuel Johnson born in England |
| 1710 | 25 | Handel becomes Kapellmeister to Elector of Hanover; his opera *Rinaldo* produced in London; births of composers Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (eldest son of Johann Sebastian), William Boyce, Giovanni Pergolesi and Thomas Arne; Leibniz writes *Théodicée* |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Prussia and Sweden sign 'Perpetual Alliance'; England and Scotland unite as 'Great Britain'; death of Peter II of Portugal; billiards introduced in coffee houses of Berlin | Appointed to the post of organist at the Blasiuskirche in Mühlhausen; Bach marries his cousin Maria Barbara Bach at Dornheim |
| Charles XII invades the Ukraine; Peter the Great divides Russia into eight government districts; British capture Sardinia and Minorca; Duke of Marlborough and Prince Eugene defeat French at Oudenarde | Bach returns to service at the court of Weimar, no longer as a lackey but as organist and chamber musician to Duke Wilhelm Ernst; first child Catharina Dorothea born in December |
| 14,000 inhabitants of the German (Rhenish) Palatinate emigrate to North America; Peter the Great defeats Charles XII at the Battle of Poltava; first Russian prisoners sent to Siberia | |
| Berlin Charity Hospital founded; Jakob Christian le Blon, German engraver, invents three-colour printing; English South Sea Company founded; first budget introduced in Russia; | Second child Wilhelm Friedemann born on 22 November |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1711 | 26 | Clarinet first used in orchestra (in Hasse's opera *Croesus*); tuning fork invented; Berlin Academy founded, with Leibniz as president; Alexander Pope writes his *Essay on Criticism* |
| 1712 | 27 | Corelli publishes his 12 Concerti Grossi; Handel's *Il Pastor fido* produced in London; birth of Italian painter Francesco Guardi; Alexander Pope writes *The Rape of the Lock* |
| 1713 | 28 | Handel composes his *Utrecht Te Deum*; Corelli dies at 60; School of Dance founded at Paris Opéra; Spanish Royal Academy founded in Madrid; Scriblerus Club founded in London by Pope, Swift, Congreve and others |
| 1714 | 29 | Birth of composers Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Christoph Willibald Gluck; death of German architect Andreas Schlüter; Leibniz writes *Monadologie*; in England, Nicholas Rowe publishes his nine-volume Stage Edition of Shakespeare |
| 1715 | 30 | First vaudeville comedies presented in Paris; Tiepolo paints *Sacrifice of Isaac*; Isaac Watts publishes *Divine Songs for Children*; births of German poet Ewald Christian von Kleist and author Christian Gellert |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Joseph I, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, dies; in the Peace of Szathmar, Charles VI guarantees Hungarian constitution; war again breaks out between Russia and Turkey; Peter the Great meets Leibniz; Duke of Marlborough dismissed as British commander-in-chief | |
| Birth of future King Frederick the Great of Prussia; Peace Congress at Utrecht; Indian War of Succession breaks out; last execution for witchcraft in England; slave revolts take place in New York | |
| Frederick I of Prussia dies and is succeeded by Frederick William I; Peace of Utrecht signed; Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI issues the Pragmatic Sanction, proclaiming the female right of succession in Habsburg domains; pigtails introduced in Prussian army | Third and fourth children (twins) are born, but both die within a month of birth; Bach competes for the post of organist at Halle in December |
| Holy Roman Empire signs peace accord with France; Elector of Hanover in Germany becomes King George I of England; Duke of Marlborough is reinstated; witch trials outlawed in Prussia; Russia wins control of Finland at the Battle of Storkyro | Offered the post but on reflection declines it; at Weimar he is promoted to *Konzertmeister*; fifth child Carl Philipp Emanuel born on 8 March |
| Louis XIV dies in France and is succeeded by his great-grandson Louis XV under the regency of the Duc d'Orleans; Jacobite Rebellion takes place in Scotland; first Liverpool dock built in England | Sixth child Johann Gottfried Bernhard born on 11 May |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1716 | 31 | François Couperin publishes his *L'Art de toucher le clavecin*; Fischer von Erlach begins the Karlkirche in Vienna; Watteau paints *La Leçon d'amour*; death of Leibniz at 70; birth of English poet Thomas Gray |
| 1717 | 32 | Handel's *Water Music* performed on the Thames in London; composer-violinist-conductor Johann Stamitz born; Watteau paints *Embarquement pour Cythère*; French actress Adrienne Lecouvreur appears for the first time at the Comédie-Française |
| 1718 | 33 | Handel becomes Kapellmeister to the Duke of Chandos; birth of German composer-organist Johann Müthel; Watteau paints *Parc Fête*; Voltaire writes *Edipe* while imprisoned in the Bastille |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI declares war on Turkey; signs Treaty of Westminster with England; first Italian newspaper printed; John Law establishes Banque Générale in France: James Francis Edward Stuart (the 'Old Pretender') leaves Scotland for France | Bach is called to examine new organs in Halle and Erfurt |
| James Francis Edward Stuart ousted from France; birth of future Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa in Austria; school attendance made compulsory in Prussia; Peter the Great revisits Europe; inoculation against smallpox introduced in England | He decides to leave Weimar and successfully applies for the post of Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen but is imprisoned by Duke Wilhelm Ernst to prevent his departure from Weimar; he is freed in December but is given an 'unfavourable discharge' |
| Holy Roman Empire ends war with Turkey with the Peace of Passarowitz; Quadruple Alliance signed by France, the Holy Roman Empire, England and Holland; England declares war on Spain; first bank notes issued in London; Peter the Great arranges the torture and murder of his son Alexis | He visits Karlsbad with Prince Leopold; seventh child Leopold Augustus born on 15 November |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1719 | 34 | Handel becomes director of the Royal Academy of Music in London; Leopold Mozart born; first book written on Turkish music; birth of German poet Johann Wilhelm Gleim; Ludwig Holberg writes *Pedar Paars,* Daniel Defoe *Robinson Crusoe* |
| 1720 | 35 | Handel composes harpsichord suite containing the famous 'Harmonious Blacksmith' variations; Tiepolo paints *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*; first serialisations of novels begin to appear in newspapers; Haymarket Theatre opens in London |
| 1721 | 36 | Handel writes his serenata *Acis and Galatea*; Georg Philipp Telemann becomes director of music in Hamburg; Watteau dies at 37; Johann Theodor Jablonski publishes his *Allgemeines Lexikon*, the first short encyclopedia; birth of English novelist Tobias Smollett |
| 1722 | 37 | Jean-Philippe Rameau publishes his controversial and influential *Traité de l'harmonie*, Johann Mattheson his *Critica Musica*; death of German architect Christoph Dientzenhofer; birth of German painter Johann Heinrich Tischbein; Daniel Defoe writes *Moll Flanders* |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| France declares war on Spain; Hanover signs Peace of Stockholm with Sweden; Liechtenstein becomes independent; in the Irish Parliament Act, England declared Ireland inseparable from England; in Vienna the Oriental Company is founded to trade with the East | Leopold Augustus dies, aged ten months |
| Pragmatic Sanction recognised by Austria; Palatinate Court moved from Heidelberg to Mannheim; Treaty of Stockholm signed by Sweden and Prussia; France bankrupted by failure of John Law's Mississippi Company | Bach returns from another Karlsbad visit with the prince to find that his beloved wife has died and been buried during his absence, aged only 35 |
| Peter the Great is proclaimed Emperor of all the Russias; mass emigration from Prussia; British Chancellor of the Exchequer imprisoned in the Tower of London for fraud; Swiss immigrants introduce rifles into America | He dedicates the Brandenburg Concertos to the Margrave Christian Ludwig; marries Anna Magdalena Wilcke, aged 20, in December; a week later Prince Leopold also marries, but to a wife (also 20) who cares little for music |
| Death of the Duke of Marlborough in England; Hungary rejects the Pragmatic Sanction; Austrian East India Company established; British parliament forbids journalists to cover debates; Workhouse Test Act for care of the poor becomes law | Bach's brother, Johann Jakob, dies at 40; Bach applies to become Kantor at the Thomasschule in Leipzig |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1723 | 38 | Handel's opera *Ottone* produced in London; birth of English painter Joshua Reynolds; death of English architect Sir Christopher Wren; death of the German poet Johann Christian Günther |
| 1724 | 39 | Couperin publishes *Le Parnasse, ou l'Apothéose de Corelli*; Handel's *Giulio Cesare* produced in London; Prince Eugene's Belvedere completed in Vienna; birth of German philosopher Immanuel Kant; Three Choirs Festival founded in England |
| 1725 | 40 | Handel's *Rodelinda* produced in London; Johann Joachim Fux writes his famous treatise on counterpoint *Gradus ad Parnassum*; death of Alessandro Scarlatti; first public concert given in Paris; Prague Opera House founded |
| 1726 | 41 | Rameau publishes his *Nouveau système de musique théorique*; Handel becomes a British subject; Voltaire flees to England after being banished from France; Tiepolo paints frescoes in the Udine palace; Jonathan Swift writes *Gulliver's Travels* |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Prussia establishes Ministry of War, Finance and Domains, and signs Treaty of Charlottenburg with England; Louis XV comes of age; in England, the duty on tea is lowered by Sir Robert Walpole | Eighth child Christiana Sophia Henrietta born; Bach and family move to Leipzig, where he takes up his new post; Cantata 75 given at the Nikolaikirche; Magnificat performed in the Thomaskirche on Christmas Day |
| Austrian Netherlands accepts Pragmatic Sanction; Philip V of Spain abdicates, but returns to the throne after his successor dies; Peter the Great crowns his wife Catherine Tsarina of all the Russias; opening of Paris Bourse in France | Ninth child Gottfried Heinrich born on 26 February; *St John Passion* performed in the Nikolaikirche in April |
| Treaty of Vienna guarantees Pragmatic Sanction; in France, Louis XV marries Maria Leszcynska of Poland; Peter the Great dies and is succeeded by his widow; first edition of *The New York Gazette* published | Tenth child Christian Gottlieb born; Bach gives organ recitals in Dresden; he revisits Cöthen in December |
| Prussia guarantees Pragmatic Sanction in the Treaty of Wusterhausen; Russia joins Holy Roman Empire in war against the Turks; English clockmaker John Harrison invents the gridiron pendulum | Eleventh child Elisabeth Juliana Friederika born in April; eighth child, Christina Sophia Henrietta dies aged three; B flat Partita for keyboard published |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1727 | 42 | Death of Italian composer Francesco Gasparini; births of the painters Thomas Gainsborough, Giovanni Battista Cipriani and Francesco Bertolozzi; Hildebrandt's Mirabell Palace completed in Salzburg |
| 1728 | 43 | Birth of Italian composer Nicola Piccini; John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* produced in London; birth of German artist Anton Raphael Mengs; Ephraim Chambers publishes two-volume *Cyclopaedia,* or *A Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* |
| 1729 | 44 | Birth of German author Gotthold Ephraim Lessing; Albrecht von Haller writes *Die Alpen*; death of English dramatist William Congreve; John Gay's second 'ballad opera', *Polly*, staged in London |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| George I of England dies and is succeeded by his son George II; German principalities begin trafficking in human livestock, selling young rustics to other countries as mercenaries; England becomes a client; Tsarina Catherine dies in Russia and is succeeded by her son Peter II; Spanish besiege Gibraltar; coffee first planted in Brazil | *St Matthew Passion* performed in the Thomaskirche in April; twelfth child Ernestus Andreas born in October but dies on 1 November |
| Emperor Charles VI signs Treaty of Berlin with Frederick William of Prussia; Spain lifts siege of Gibraltar; Madrid Lodge of Freemasons founded in Spain, soon to be suppressed by the Inquisition | Tenth child Christian Gottlieb dies aged three; thirteenth child Regina Johanna born in October; Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen dies at 33; Bach's sister Marie Salome dies at 51 |
| Treaty of Seville between France, Spain, and England signed; Corsica becomes independent of Genoa; North and South Carolina become crown colonies; the future Tsarina Catherine the Great born at Stettin; opium smoking outlawed in China | Visits Cöthen to perform funeral music for Prince Leopold; *St Matthew Passion* given again at the Thomaskirche; he complains to Leipzig town council over unmusical children being admitted to the Thomasschule; becomes conductor of the Collegium Musicum; uncharacteristic illness prevents him from meeting Handel |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1730 | 45 | Johann Adolf Hasse composes *Artaserse*, a German opera in the Italian style; Canaletto paints *Scuola di San Rocco*; in England, William Hogarth paints *Before and After*; French dramatist Pierre de Mariveau writes *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* |
| 1731 | 46 | Hasse becomes Kapellmeister at the Dresden Opera; first ever compositions for the piano (by Lodovico Giustini); public concerts mounted in Boston, Massachusetts, and Charleston, South Carolina; in France, Abbé Prévost writes *Manon Lescaut*; death of English author Daniel Defoe |
| 1732 | 47 | Joseph Haydn born; J.G. Walther publishes his *Musik-Lexikon*, the first musical dictionary; Covent Garden Opera House opens in London; death of German sculptor Balthasar Permoser |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia imprisoned by his father; Tsar Peter of Russia dies and is succeeded by Anne, daughter of Tsar Ivan V; Frederick IV of Denmark succeeded by Christian VI | Fourteenth child Christiana Benedicta Louise dies within days of birth; Bach writes memorandum on church music to the Leipzig town council; writes to his old friend Erdmann in hope of finding a new position in Gdansk; J.M. Gesner appointed Rector of the Thomasschule |
| Treaty of Vienna between England, Holland, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire; Russia, Prussia and the Empire allied against Stanislas I of Poland; English factory workers forbidden to travel to America; Benjamin Franklin founds Philadelphia library | First book of the *Clavierübung* (the six Partitas) published; fifteenth child Christiana Dorothea born in March; the now lost *St Mark Passion* performed at the Thomaskirche; more organ recitals in Dresden |
| King Frederick William of Prussia settles 12,000 Salzburg Protestants in East Prussia; Emperor Charles VI of the Holy Roman Empire secures recognition of the Pragmatic Sanction; ninepins played for the first time in New York | Sixteenth child Johann Christoph Friedrich born in June; fifteenth child Christiana Dorothea dies aged one |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1733 | 48 | Giovanni Pergolesi's opera *La Serva Padrone* staged in Naples; death of Couperin; Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* staged in Paris; births in Germany of the painter Johann Zoffany and the authors Christoph Friederich Nicolai and Christoph Martin Wieland |
| 1734 | 49 | Handel's six Concerti Grossi, Op. 3 published in England; Boucher provides illustrations for the complete Molière edition; birth of British painter George Romney |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Augustus II of Poland and Saxony dies; War of the Polish Succession begins; France declares war against Emperor Charles VI; conscription introduced in Prussia; first Freemasons' Lodge opened in Hamburg; Savannah, Georgia, founded in America | Thirteenth child Regina Johanna dies aged four; first son Wilhelm Friedemann now 23, is appointed organist at the Sophienkirche in Dresden; Bach visits Dresden and presents *Missa* (later to be incorporated into the Mass in B minor) to the Elector Friedrich August II; it goes unacknowledged and unperformed; seventeenth child Johann August dies within days of birth in November |
| Russians occupy Danzig (Gdansk) in Poland; Anglo-Russian trade agreement signed; war breaks out between Turkey and Persia; 8,000 ousted Salzburg Protestants settle in Georgia; first horse race in America | *Christmas Oratorio*, parts I–III, performed in December; J.A. Ernesti is appointed Rector of the Thomasschule |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1735 | 50 | Handel's *Alcina* produced in London; Russian Imperial Ballet School founded in St Petersburg; Rameau's opera-ballet *Les Indes galantes* staged in Paris; Hogarth paints his most famous work, *The Rake's Progress* |
| 1736 | 51 | Pergolesi composes *Stabat Mater* and dies at 26; Handel's *Alexander's Feast* performed in London; death of German architect Mattheus Daniel Pöppelmann |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Turkish–Persian War ended; William Pitt elected Member of Parliament for Old Sarum; sale of spirits banned in Georgia; German-American publisher John Peter Zenger acquitted of seditious libel in landmark trial for freedom of the press in America | *Christmas Oratorio*, parts IV–VI, performed in January; Part II of the *Clavierübung* (the Goldberg Variations) published; son Johann Gottfried Bernhard (20) is appointed organist at Mühlhausen in June, following in his father's footsteps; eighteenth child Johann Christian born in September |
| Future Empress Maria Theresa marries Francis, Duke of Lorraine; once again, war breaks out between Russia and Turkey; German Theodor von Neuhof elected King of Corsica; India rubber appears for the first time in England | 'Battle of the Prefects' with Ernesti begins; while retaining his post in Leipzig, Bach is appointed *Hofcompositeur* to the Elector of Saxony; more organ recitals given in Dresden |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1737 | 52 | Handel's opera *Berenice* staged in London; Roubillac sculpts Handel; John Wesley's *Psalms and Hymns* published in Charlleston, South Carolina |
| 1738 | 53 | Roubillac sculpts Alexander Pope; births of American painters Benjamin West and John Singleton Copley; first cuckoo clocks appear in Germany; Herculaneum excavation begun |
| 1739 | 54 | Handel's oratorios *Saul* and *Israel in Egypt* performed in London; Johann Mattheson publishes treatise on conducting; Rameau's *Dardanus* staged in Paris; birth of the Austrian composer Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Grand Duke of Tuscany, the last of the Medici, dies; Francis, Duke of Lorraine acquires Tuscany; Stanislas of Poland acquires Lorraine; quarrel between George II of England and his son Frederick, the Prince of Wales; Queen Caroline, wife of George II, dies | Son Johann Gottfried Bernhard (22) is appointed organist at the Jakobkirche in Sangerhausen; Bach temporarily relinquishes conductorship of the Collegium Musicum; J.A. Scheibe publishes anonymous attack on Bach's music; nineteenth child Johanna Carolina born in October |
| British troops sent to Georgia to settle border dispute with Spain; in the latest Russo-Turkish war, the Turks take Orsova; Imperial troops driven back to Belgrade; birth of future King George III of England; French roads built by forced labour | Son Carl Philipp Emanuel (24) becomes harpsichordist to the future Frederick the Great; son Johann Gottfried Bernhard (23) contracts heavy debts at Sangerhausen and flees to avoid his creditors |
| Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI signs peace treaty with Turks in Belgrade; Delhi sacked by Persians under Nadir Shah; foundling hospital opens in London; birth of Russian statesman Prince Potemkin | Johann Gottfried Bernhard dies at 24; Bach gives organ recital at the Schlosskirche, Altenburg; Part III of the *Clavierübung* published in September; Bach returns to conducting the Collegium Musicum |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1740 | 55 | Haydn joins court chapel in Vienna as a choirboy; Domenico Scarlatti visits London and Dublin; the German organ builder Johann Snetzler establishes a business in England; Thomas Arne composes the masque *Alfred*, which includes 'Rule, Britannia'; birth of French sculptor Jean Antoine Houdon |
| 1741 | 56 | Handel composes *Messiah* in 18 days; Gluck's first opera, *Artaserse* produced in Milan; J.J. Quantz becomes court composer to Frederick the Great; Antonio Vivaldi dies destitute in Vienna; Rameau's *Pièces de clavecin en concert* published in Paris; first German translation of Shakespeare printed |
| 1742 | 57 | Handel's *Messiah* given its world premiere in Dublin; Karl Heinrich Graun introduces Italian opera to Berlin; birth of German critic Georg Christoph Lichtenberg |
| 1743 | 58 | Handel's *Samson* given at Covent Garden in London; birth of Italian composer Luigi Boccherini; Hogarth paints 'Marriage à la Mode'; Voltaire writes his drama *Mérope*; birth of the Danish poet Johannes Ewald |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Frederick William I of Prussia dies, and is succeeded by his son Frederick the Great; Maria Theresa becomes Empress of the Holy Roman Empire following the death of her father; Frederick the Great begins first Silesian War, against Maria Theresa | Bach visits Halle |
| Maria Theresa accepts crown of Hungary; Frederick the Great takes Silesia, Briege, Neisse, Glatz and Olmütz; England mediates between Prussia and Austria; Bavarian, Saxon and French troops occupy Prague | He visits Carl Philipp Emanuel in Berlin; Anna Magdalena falls dangerously ill; Bach rushes home |
| Prussian troops evacuate Olmütz and defeat Austrians at Chotusitz; Peace of Berlin ends First Silesian War; Charles Albert, Elector of Bavaria crowned as Emperor Charles VII of the Holy Roman Empire | Twentieth child Regina Susanna born in February |
| Maria Theresa crowned in Prague; alliance formed between Austria and Saxony; British troops defeat French at Dettingen; in America, French explorers reach the Rocky Mountains; first settlements in South Dakota | Bach examines organ in the Johanniskirche in Leipzig |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1744 | 59 | Gluck's opera *Iphigénie en Aulide* produced in Paris; first publication of 'God Save the King'; founding of the Madrigal Society in London; Benjamin Franklin edits Cicero's *Cato Major*; death of English poet Alexander Pope |
| 1745 | 60 | Johann Stamitz becomes Kapellmeister in Mannheim; birth of English singer and composer Charles Dibdin; deaths of Swiss architect Johann Lukas von Hildebrandt and Anglo-Irish writer-clergyman Jonathan Swift |
| 1746 | 61 | German poet and moralist Christian Gellert writes *Fabeln und Erzählungen*; birth of Spanish painter Francisco de Goya; François Boucher paints *The Milliners*, Joshua Reynolds *The Eliot Family*; in France, Denis Diderot publishes his *Pensées philosophiques* |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Second Silesian War begins; Frederick the Great takes Prague but is beaten back to Saxony; Prince Peter, heir to the Swedish throne, marries Princess Ulrika, daughter of Frederick the Great; Peter, heir to Russian throne, marries Princess Catherine of Anhalt-Zerbst; France declares war on Maria Theresa and England | Carl Philipp Emanuel (30) marries in Berlin |
| Emperor Charles VII dies, and is succeeded by Francis, husband of Maria Theresa, who becomes the first of the Lorraine–Tuscany line; Prussian victory at Hohenfriedenberg; with the Peace of Dresden, Prussia acknowledges the Pragmatic Sanction | |
| Austria joins Russia in alliance against Frederick the Great; Philip V of Spain dies, and is succeeded by Ferdinand VI; French are victorious at Raucoux; Austria loses the Netherlands; Battle of Culloden in Scotland; wearing of tartans prohibited in England | Wilhelm Friedemann appointed organist at the Liebfraukirche in Halle; Bach examines organ in Wenselskirche, Naumburg |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1747 | 62 | Handel's oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus* given in London's Covent Garden; French philosopher-composer Jean-Jacque's Rousseau's opera *Les Muses galantes* staged in Paris; Biblioteca Nazionale founded in Florence |
| 1748 | 63 | Holywell Music Room opens in Oxford; birth of French painter Jacques Louis David; Carlo Goldoni's comedy *The Liar* produced in Venice; David Hume begins his *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* |
| 1749 | 64 | Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* performed in London; Germany's greatest writer Johann Wolfgang Goethe born; Henry Fielding writes *Tom Jones*; births of German musical educator George 'Abbé' Vogler and Italian composer Domenico Cimarosa |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Prussia and Sweden form an alliance for their mutual defence; William IV of Orange-Nassau becomes hereditary stadtholder of the seven provinces of the Netherlands; carriage tax levied in Britain; sugar discovered in beetroot | He visits the court of Frederick the Great at Potsdam, giving an organ recital in the Heiliggeistkirche; he composes and publishes the *Musical Offering* (based on a theme given to him by Frederick himself); he composes the Canonic Variations for organ; his first grandchild, Anna Carolina, born in September |
| Russian troops advance on the Rhine through Bohemia; Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle; at long last recognition of the Pragmatic Sanction becomes general, with Francis I as Holy Roman Emperor; abolition of hereditary jurisdiction in Scotland; the game of cricket legalised in England | |
| Birth of future French revolutionist le Comte de Mirabeau; Consolidation Act in England results in the reorganisation of the British navy; establishment of Halifax, Nova Scotia as fortress; Georgia becomes crown colony; Giacobbo Rodriguez invents sign language for deaf mutes | Daughter Elisabeth Juliana Friederika marries Bach's pupil, friend and colleague Johann Christoph Altnikol in Leipzig |

| Year | Bach's Age | Arts and Culture |
|---|---|---|
| 1750 | 65 | First use of movable type for printing music by Johann Breitkopf in Leipzig; Pergolesi's opera *La Serva padrona* produced in London; birth of Italian composer Antonio Salieri; first playhouse opened in New York; Thomas Gray publishes his *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard* |

| Historical Events | Bach's Life |
|---|---|
| Birth of future Prussian statesman Karl August von Hardenburg; Anglo-French discussions take place on boundary between Canada and Nova Scotia; Spain and Portugal sign treaty on South America | Son Johann Christoph Friedrich (18) is appointed court musician at Bückeburg; Bach works on engraving of *The Art of Fugue*; he is operated on by the English oculist John Taylor with disastrous results; he takes final communion and dies at 65; his body is buried in an unmarked grave in the cemetery of the Johanniskirche, Leipzig |

# 8 Glossary

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| *accelerando* | getting faster |
| accidental | a flat, sharp or 'natural' not present in the prevailing scale |
| *adagio* | slow |
| *agitato* | turbulent, agitated |
| Alberti bass | a stylised accompaniment popular in the later eighteenth century, it is based on the triad, 'spelled out' in the order bottom-top-middle-top (as in C-G-E-G etc.) |
| *allegretto* | moderately fast, generally rather slower than Allegro |
| *allegro* | fast, but not excessively |
| allemande | traditionally the first movement of a Baroque suite – a dignified dance in 4/4 time, generally at a moderate tempo |
| alto | the second-highest voice in a choir |
| *andante* | slowish, at a moderate walking pace |
| aria | solo song (also called 'air'), generally as part of an opera or oratorio |
| arpeggio | a chord spelled out, one note at a time, either from bottom to top or vice versa (C-E-G-C; F-A-C-F etc.) |
| articulation | the joining together or separation of notes, to form specific groups of notes; when notes are separated, that's to say when slivers of silence |

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| | appear between them, the effect is often of the intake of breath, and like the intake of breath before speech it heightens anticipation of what is to follow; when they are joined together, the effect is of words spoken in the expenditure of a single breath (see also 'legato', 'staccato' and 'portamento') |
| augmentation | the expansion of note-values, generally to twice their original length |
| bar, measure | the visual division of metre into successive units, marked off on the page by vertical lines; thus in a triple metre – the grouping of music into units of three, as in 3/4, 3/8 etc. – the three main beats will always be accommodated in the space between two vertical lines |
| bass | the lowest, deepest part of the musical texture |
| beat | the unit of pulse (the underlying 'throb' of the music) |
| binary | a simple two-part form (A:B), part one generally moving from the tonic (home key) to the dominant (secondary key), part two moving from the dominant back to the tonic |
| cadence | a coming to rest on a particular note or key, as in the standard 'Amen' at the end of a hymn |
| cadenza | a relatively brief, often showy solo of improvisatory character in the context of a concerto, operatic aria or other orchestral form; in concertos, it usually heralds the orchestral close to a movement, generally the first |
| canon | an imitative device like the common round (*Frére Jacques*, *Three Blind Mice*, *London's Burning*) in which the same tune comes in, overlappingly, at staggered intervals of time |
| *cantabile* | song-like, singingly |
| cantata | a work in several movements for accompanied voice or voices (from the Latin 'cantare', to sing) |

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| chorale | a generally simple (and usually Protestant) congregational hymn; almost all of Bach's many cantatas end with a chorale; chorales are also frequently used as a basis for instrumental variations |
| chord | basically any simultaneous combination of three or more notes; chords are analogous to words, just as the notes which make them up are analogous to letters |
| chromatic | notes (and the using of notes) which are not contained in the standard 'diatonic' scales which form the basis of most western music; in the scale of C major (which uses only the white keys of the piano) every black key is 'chromatic' |
| clef | a symbol which indicates the positioning of notes on the staff; thus the C-clef shows the placement of Middle C, the G clef (better known as 'treble clef') the location of G above Middle C, and the F-clef (bass) the positioning of F below Middle-C |
| coda | an extra section following the expected close of a work or movement by way of a final flourish |
| codetta | a small coda |
| concerto grosso | a popular Baroque form based on the alternation of orchestra (known in this context as the *ripieno* or *concerto*) and a small group of 'soloists' (*concertino*); the most famous examples are Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos |
| concerto | a work for solo instrument and orchestra, generally in three movements (fast–slow–fast) |
| continuo | a form of accompaniment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which a keyboard instrument, usually a harpsichord, harmonises the bass line played by the cello |

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| contrapuntal | see ‘counterpoint’ |
| counterpoint | the interweaving of separate ‘horizontal’ melodic lines, as opposed to the accompaniment of a top-line (‘horizontal’) melody by a series of (‘vertical’) chords |
| counter-tenor | a male alto, using a falsetto voice, which seldom bears any resemblance to the singer’s speaking voice |
| *crescendo* | getting louder |
| cross-rhythms | see ‘polyrhythm’ |
| *decrescendo* | see ‘diminuendo’ |
| *diminuendo* | getting softer |
| development section | the middle section in a sonata form, normally characterised by movement through several keys (see Sonata in ‘Basic Forms’) |
| diatonic | using only the scale steps of the prevailing key notes of the regular scale |
| diminution | the contraction of note-values, normally to half their original length |
| dotted rhythm | a ‘jagged’ pattern of sharply distinguished longer and shorter notes, the long, accented note being followed by a short, unaccented one, or the other way around; examples are the openings of the *Marseillaise* and *The Star-Spangled Banner*; better still, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*: ‘Mine eyes have seen the glo-ry of the co-ming of - the Lord’ |
| double-stopping | the playing of two notes simultaneously on a stringed instrument |
| duple rhythm | any rhythm based on units of two beats, or multiples thereof |
| dynamics | the gradations of softness and loudness, and the terms which indicate them (*pianissimo, fortissimo* etc.) |
| exposition | the first section in sonata form, in which the main themes and their relationships are first presented |
| fantasy, fantasia | a free form, often of an improvisatory nature, following the composer’s |

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| | fancy rather than any preordained structures; but there are some fantasies, like Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy* and Schumann's *Fantasia in C* for the piano, which are tightly integrated works incorporating fully-fledged sonata forms, scherzos, fugues etc. |
| finale | a generic term for 'last movement' |
| flat | a note lowered by a semitone from its 'natural' position, i.e. the nearest lower neighbour of most notes in a diatonic scale |
| *forte*, *fortissimo* | loud, very loud |
| glissando | literally, 'gliding': a sliding between any two notes, producing something of a 'siren' effect. A famous example is the clarinet glissando at the start of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* |
| Gregorian chant | see 'plainchant' |
| ground bass | a short bass pattern repeated throughout a section or entire piece; a famous example is Dido's Lament from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* |
| harmony | the simultaneous sounding of notes to make a chord; harmonies (chords) often serve as expressive or atmospheric 'adjectives', describing or giving added meaning to the notes of a melody, which, in turn, might be likened to nouns and verbs |
| harmonics | comparable to the falsetto voice of the male alto, or counter-tenor, the term refers to the production on an instrument, generally a stringed instrument, of pitches far above its natural compass; thus the naturally baritonal cello can play in the same register as a violin, though the character of the sound is generally very different |
| homophonic | see 'homophony' |
| homophony | when all parts move at once, giving the effect of a melody (the successive top notes) accompanied by chords |

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| interval | the distance in pitch between two notes, heard either simultaneously or successively; the sounding of the first two notes of a scale is therefore described as a major or minor 'second', the sounding of the first and third notes a major or minor 'third', etc. |
| key | until the 'modernism' of the twentieth century, all so-called 'classical' music, in the western tradition, was based (as most still is) on a particular scale, major or minor, which gives its name to the work or passage in question. Thus a piece or passage based on the C major scale is said to be 'in the key C major', a piece or passage based on the C minor scale is said to be 'in the key of C minor', and so on. The foundation tone (the 'keynote' or 'tonic') might be compared to the sun, and the remaining notes to planets in orbit around it |
| *largo* | slow, broad, serious |
| *legato* | smooth, connected, the sound of one note 'touching' the sound of the next; as though in one breath |
| major | see 'modes' |
| measure | see 'bar' |
| metre, metrical | the grouping together of beats in recurrent units of two, three, four, six etc.; metre is the pulse of music |
| minor | see 'modes' |
| modes | the names given to the particular arrangement of notes within a scale; every key in western classical music has two versions, the major and the minor mode; the decisive factor is the size of the interval between the key note (the tonic, the foundation on which scales are built) and the third degree of the scale; if it is compounded of two whole tones (as in C–E (C–D / D–E)), the mode is major; if the third tone is made up of one |

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| | and a half tones (C–E flat), the mode is minor; in general, the minor mode is darker, more 'serious', more moody, more obviously dramatic than the major; the so-called Church Modes prevalent in the Middle Ages are made up of various combinations of major and minor and are less dynamically 'directed' in character; these appear only rarely in music since the Baroque period (c. 1600–1750) and have generally been used by composers to create some kind of archaic effect |
| modulate, modulation | the movement from one key to another, generally involving at least one pivotal chord common to both keys |
| motif, motive | a kind of musical acorn; a melodic/rhythmical figure too brief to constitute a proper theme, but one on which themes are built; a perfect example is the beginning of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony: ta-ta-ta **dah**; ta-ta-ta **dah** |
| natural | indicates a note that is neither 'sharpened' nor 'flattened'. As a notational sign next to a note, it effect cancels the sharp or flat that would normally affect it |
| nocturne | 'invented' by the Irish composer John Field and exalted by Chopin; a simple ternary (A-B-A) form, its outer sections consist of a long-spun melody of a generally 'dreamy' sort, supported by a flowing, arpeggio-based accompaniment; the Middle section (in some ways analogous to the Development in sonata form) is normally more turbulent and harmonically unstable |
| octave | the simultaneous sounding of any note with its nearest namesake, up or down (C to C, F to F etc.); the effect is an enrichment, through increased mass and variety of pitch, of either note as sounded by itself |
| oratorio | an extended choral/orchestral setting of religious texts in a dramatic and |

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| | semi-operatic fashion; the most famous example is Handel's *Messiah* |
| ostinato | an obsessively repeated rhythm or other musical figure |
| pedal point | the sustaining of a single note (normally the bass) while other parts move above and around it |
| pentatonic | based on a five-note scale of whole-tones, as in the music of the Orient (analogous to the black keys of the piano) |
| phrase | a smallish group of notes (generally accommodated by the exhalation of a single breath) which form a unit of melody, as in 'God save our Gracious Queen …' and 'My Country, 'tis of thee …' |
| phrasing | the apportionment of a phrase |
| *piano, pianissimo* | soft, very soft |
| *pizzicato* | plucked strings |
| plainchant, plainsong | also known as Gregorian chant; a type of unaccompanied singing using one of the Church modes and sung in a 'free' rhythm dictated by the natural rhythm of the words |
| polyphony | music with interweaving parts |
| polyrhythm | a combination comprising strikingly different rhythms, often of two or more different metres |
| prelude | literally, a piece which precedes and introduces another piece (as in the standard 'Prelude and Fugue'); however, the name has been applied (most famously by Bach, Chopin and Debussy) to describe free-standing short pieces, often of a semi-improvisatory nature |
| *presto* | very fast |
| recapitulation | the third and final section in sonata form, which repeats the Exposition but with the tensions of 'rival' keys resolved |
| recitative | especially characteristic of the Baroque era, in an oratorio or opera; it is a |

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| | short narrative section normally sung by a solo voice accompanied by continuo chords, usually preceding an aria; the rhythm is in a free style, determined by the words |
| resolution | when a suspension or dissonance comes to rest |
| rest | a measured 'silence' (or to be more accurate, a suspension of sound) in an instrumental or vocal part |
| rhapsody | the name given to a number of highly disparate works in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries comprising a single movement of a generally Romantic and mostly virtuosic character; the best known examples are Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* |
| rhythm | that aspect of music concerned with duration and accent; notes may be of many contrasting lengths and derive much of their character and definition from patterns of accentuation and emphasis determined by the composer |
| *ripieno* (*concerto*) | the orchestral part in a concerto grosso |
| *ritardando, ritenuto* | getting slower |
| ritornello | a theme or section for orchestra recurring in different keys between solo passages in an aria or concerto |
| scale | from the Italian word *scala* ('ladder'); a series of adjacent, 'stepwise' notes (A-B-C-D-E-F etc.), moving up or down; these 'ladders' provide the basic cast of characters from which melodies are made and keys established |
| sharp | a note raised by a semitone from its 'natural' position, i.e. the nearest upper neighbour of most notes in a diatonic scale |
| *sotto voce* | quiet, as though in a whisper |
| *staccato* | separated; the opposite of legato |

| | |
|---|---|
| syncopation | accents falling on irregular beats, generally giving a ‘swinging’ feel as in much of jazz |
| tempo | the speed of the music |
| tonality | the phenomenon of key |
| tone colour, timbre | that property of sound which distinguishes a horn from a piano, a violin from a xylophone etc. |
| tonic | the foundation tone , or ‘keynote’ of a scale or key |
| *tremolo* | Italian term for ‘trembling’, ‘shaking’; a rapid reiteration of a single note through back-and-forth movements of the bow; equally, the rapid and repeated alternation of two notes |
| triad | a three-note chord, especially those including the root, third and fifth note of a scale (C-E-G, A-C-E etc.) |
| trill | The rapid alternation of two adjacent notes (as in c-d-c-d-c-d-c-d-c-d-c-d-c-d-c-d-c etc.) |
| triplets | in duple metre, a grouping (or groupings) of three notes in the space of two (as in ‘One, two / Buckle-my shoe’) |
| *una corda* | literally, ‘one string’; using the soft pedal on the piano |
| unison | the simultaneous sounding of a single note, as in the congregational singing of a hymn |
| *vibrato* | a rapid, regular fluctuation in volume, giving the note a ‘throbbing’ effect |

# 9 Discography

**Music excerpts are taken from the following discs, available from Naxos.**

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**Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565 Fugue, BWV 578 • Prelude and Fugue, BWV 552 'St Anne' • 'Jesu bleibet meine Freude', BWV 147 • Toccata, Adagio and Fugue, BWV 564 • 'Ich ruf ' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ', BWV 639 • Passacaglia and Fugue, BWV 582**
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