

Bach Then and Now

Many people consider Johann Sebastian Bach to be one of the greatest composers of all time. Bach lived and worked during the end of the Baroque Era (about 1600–1750). Two features of Baroque

music are **ornamentation** and **polyphony**. The driving force in Baroque music is the continuous bass line and accompanying harmony, called **basso continuo**.

Which of these Baroque instruments look different from their modern versions? **Listen** for these instruments in Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 2*. Point to the instruments as you hear them in this **concerto**.



▲ Baroque oboe



▲ Recorder



◀ Baroque trumpet



▲ Baroque violin



◀ Harpsichord



Baroque cello ▶

Brandenburg Concerto No. 2



6-1

Movement 3
by Johann Sebastian Bach
as performed by the Orchestra of the Age of
Enlightenment,
conducted by Monica Hugget

Bach dedicated all six Brandenburg Concertos to a nobleman from Brandenburg, Germany.

ornamentation The addition of decorations, or embellishments, to the basic structure of the work.

polyphony Music consisting of two or more separate melodies within a common harmonic structure sung or played together.

basso continuo The bass line and continuous harmony in baroque music, usually played by a cello or bassoon and a harpsichord or organ.

concerto Composition for orchestra and one or more solo instruments.

Music MAKERS

Johann Sebastian Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) was born in Eisenach, Germany. As a teenager, he earned a living by singing in a church choir and by playing violin and viola in a court orchestra. By 1717, Bach was a famous organist. He moved from town to town in Germany, to work as an organist, choir director, and director of chamber music for different churches and courts.

Bach wrote most of the music he performed. The music he wrote was based on the needs of his patrons and employer. Bach wrote a wide range of works for choir, organ, harpsichord, chamber groups, and orchestra.



A Wake-Up Chorale

Bach often used familiar **chorale** [ko-RAHL] melodies in his music. **Play** this chorale melody, “*Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*” (“Sleepers Awake, a Voice Is Calling”).



Listen for the chorale melody in a **cantata** and then an arrangement for organ. **Compare** the two recordings. How did Bach change the melody?



Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme

6-2 *Cantata No. 140, from Movement 4*
by Johann Sebastian Bach
as performed by the American Bach Soloists,
Jeffrey Thomas, conductor
Bach wrote this cantata for a church service during
the weeks before Christmas in 1731.



Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme

6-3 *Chorale Prelude*
by Johann Sebastian Bach
as performed by E. Power Biggs
Bach wrote preludes for organ to precede choir
pieces in church services.

chorale A hymn-tune first used in Germany in the 1500s.

cantata Music for singers, solo instruments, and a small orchestra, often based on a biblical text, composed for a church service.

Bach Now

Bach's music still captivates audiences today. Soloists and ensembles of all kinds perform his music in many different ways. Dancers, from ballet to tap, perform to Bach's music.

Baroque composers often borrowed a melody they had written for one piece and included it in a new composition, assigning it to different instruments or voices. Today Bach's music is still arranged for new combinations by modern musicians.

Listen to the Swingle Singers perform their own version of *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*. Compare this version to the church cantata and organ versions you heard before. What similarities and differences do you hear?

Note This

Some of Bach's employers, such as Prince Leopold of Cöthen, played instruments themselves. Bach often composed music especially for them, and sometimes they performed in ensembles he led.

ON YOUR OWN

Visit the classical music section of a local music store and identify other examples of Bach's music performed in either a Baroque or modern style.



Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme

6-4 from *Cantata No. 140, Movement 4*
by Johann Sebastian Bach
as performed by the Swingle Singers

"Scat" syllables—nonsense syllables like those used in jazz improvisation—are used in this arrangement by Ward Swingle for voices, acoustic bass, and drums.

The Swingle Singers ▼



Listen to a **gigue** [ZHEEG] by Bach, played on a modern cello. Tap the beat as you listen. Would this music be more suitable for singing or dancing?



Gigue (Dance)

from *Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major, S.1010*

6-5 by Johann Sebastian Bach
as performed by Yo-Yo Ma

This *gigue* is just one of the movements in a suite of dances for solo cello. Bach wrote six of these suites.

The music of Bach is also performed and adapted by brass musicians today. The Canadian Brass has made their own arrangements of Bach's music for brass quintet. They add syncopation to create a Dixieland jazz sound. **Listen** for syncopation in their arrangements of this piece.



Be-Bop Bach: Prelude No. 2

from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*

6-6 by Johann Sebastian Bach
as performed by the Canadian Brass

The Well-Tempered Clavier is a set of 24 pieces—each one in a different key.



Take It to the Net To learn more about Johann Sebastian Bach and Yo-Yo Ma, go to www.sfsuccessnet.com.



▲ Yo-Yo Ma playing a modern cello. A modern cello is different from a Baroque cello. The modern cello has a longer neck; tighter, steel-wrapped strings; and an endpin. It sounds a half step higher than a Baroque cello. A modern bow curves toward the hair; a Baroque bow curves out.



"Bach opens a vista to the universe. After hearing him, people feel there is meaning to life after all."
—HELMUT WALCHA

▲ The Canadian Brass

gigue The French word for "jig," it is a quick, lively dance style from the Renaissance and Baroque Eras.

Baroque Style

Select one word from each of the following pairs to help you **describe** the art work at right.

simple

ornamented

flamboyant

understated

crowded

empty

This work represents the period in art history known as the Baroque Era (in music, about 1600 to 1750). One of the most outstanding Baroque composers was George Frideric Handel. Handel wrote many kinds of music, including around 30 **oratorios**. The Handel oratorio most frequently heard today is *Messiah*.

Listen to the “Hallelujah!” chorus from *Messiah*. **Identify** the changes from homophonic texture to polyphonic texture.



Hallelujah!

from *Messiah*

5-5 by George Frideric Handel
as performed by the Toronto Symphony and Mendelssohn Choir
In 1743, King George II of England began the custom of standing during this chorus of the *Messiah* which is still done at most performances today.

Listen to the **recitative**, *Behold I Tell You a Mystery*. **Describe** the rhythm of this recitative. Then **listen** to *The Trumpet Shall Sound*. It is a **da capo aria**.



Behold, I Tell You a Mystery

from *Messiah*

5-6 by George Frideric Handel
as performed by Samuel Ramey, bass
This music prepares the audience for the next selection.



The Trumpet Shall Sound

from *Messiah*

5-7 by George Frideric Handel
as performed by Samuel Ramey
This *aria* features the singer and the trumpet.

oratorio An extended work for orchestra, chorus, and solo voices based on religious, mythological, or poetic literature.

recitative In a vocal work with a story, this movement moves the story along, giving information. It is sung by a soloist in free rhythm.

aria A song for solo voice and accompaniment, which often includes a solo instrument.

da capo aria An *aria* in ABA form.

Arts Connection

▲ A painting of the Thames River in 17th century London entitled *London, England* by Jan Griffier (1652-1718)

Note This

Beethoven called Handel “. . . the greatest and ablest of all composers.” Haydn had this to say about Handel, “He is the master of us all.”



Baroque Boat Party Music

Handel's best-known instrumental works are for orchestra. Especially famous is the *Water Music*, a **suite** of pieces composed as a surprise for King George I of England around 1717. A newspaper reporter of the time wrote this description of the boat party:

About eight in the evening the King repaired to his barge . . . Next to the King's barge was that of the musicians, about 50 in number, who played on all kinds of instruments . . . trumpets, horns, oboes, bassoons, flutes, violins and basses . . . The music had been composed specially by the famous Handel . . . His Majesty approved of it so greatly that he caused it to be repeated three times in all . . . boats filled with people desirous of hearing was beyond counting.

Listen to the "Hornpipe" from Handel's *Water Music*. **Describe** how Handel creates contrast between different sections of the music.



Hornpipe

from *Water Music*

5-8

by George Frideric Handel

as performed by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra

Follow the ABABAB form in this music.



Music MAKERS

George Frideric Handel

George Frideric Handel

(1685–1759) was born and raised in northern Germany. His father wanted him to study law. When Handel was twelve his father died, but he did begin law study at age 18 at the University of Halle. Soon he changed to studying music. His first jobs were in Hamburg, playing in the opera orchestra and composing his first operas. Since Italy was the place for opera at that time, Handel went there in 1706; he stayed for five years and became known as a talented composer. For a brief period he was director of music for the royal family

of Hanover in northern Germany.

He was attracted to the opportunities in England, however, and after 1711 he moved there permanently.

Handel became internationally famous as a composer during his lifetime. Dramatic works were his primary interest—first operas, and then the English oratorio, which he invented.

Although today Baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach is equally or perhaps more famous, apparently Handel was unaware of Bach's music. Bach's fame developed much later.

suite A type of musical composition with several short parts or movements of varying character. Frequently these parts are written in dance forms.