

The Composer's Composer

Module 6 of *Music: Under the Hood*

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Outline

- Biography of J. S. Bach
- Joy and celebration: *Brandenburg 3*
- Misconceptions about Bach's music
- Analysis of *C-sharp Minor Fugue* (WTC)
- Beam me up, Johann Sebastian

Biography

- Johann Sebastian Bach, 1685-1750
 - Part of large musical family
 - Children were surrounded by music.
 - Orphan at age 10, lived with older brother.
 - Choirboy, but not a musical prodigy.
 - Why did he become the most famous?
 - “I have had to work hard. Anyone who works just as hard will get just as far.”

Biography

- **Johann Sebastian Bach, 1685-1750**
 - **Details of his life are sketchy.**
 - He would have it this way. The music was not about him.
 - Wrote “INJ” (*In Nomine Jesu*) on many of his scores, including secular music.
 - **Difficult relations with employers**
 - Complained of too much work and too little pay.



Bach at age 30

Biography

- Johann Sebastian Bach, 1685-1750
 - Married twice
 - 7 children with cousin Maria Barbara
 - 13 children with Anna Magdalena, met at Köthen
 - Half of his children died before adulthood



Maria Barbara



Anna Magdalena

Biography

- Johann Sebastian Bach, 1685-1750
 - Liked to have a good time
 - Sang barroom songs with friends on Sundays after church
 - Devoted to family
 - Became blind in old age
 - But kept working.
 - May have been diabetic.



Bach with 3 of his sons

Biography

- Career

- Court musician at age 18, Weimar.
- Choir director & organist at 3 churches, age 20-23
 - Expected to write cantatas for church services
 - Bad relations with employers
- Court organist at Weimar, age 23
 - Wrote *Toccatà and Fugue in D minor*



Bach's house in Weimar

Biography

- Career
 - Court musician at Köthen, age 32
 - Got along well with Prince Leopold
 - Wrote *Brandenburg Concertos* for Duke of Brandenburg
 - Wrote *Well-Tempered Clavier*

Schloß Köthen



Biography

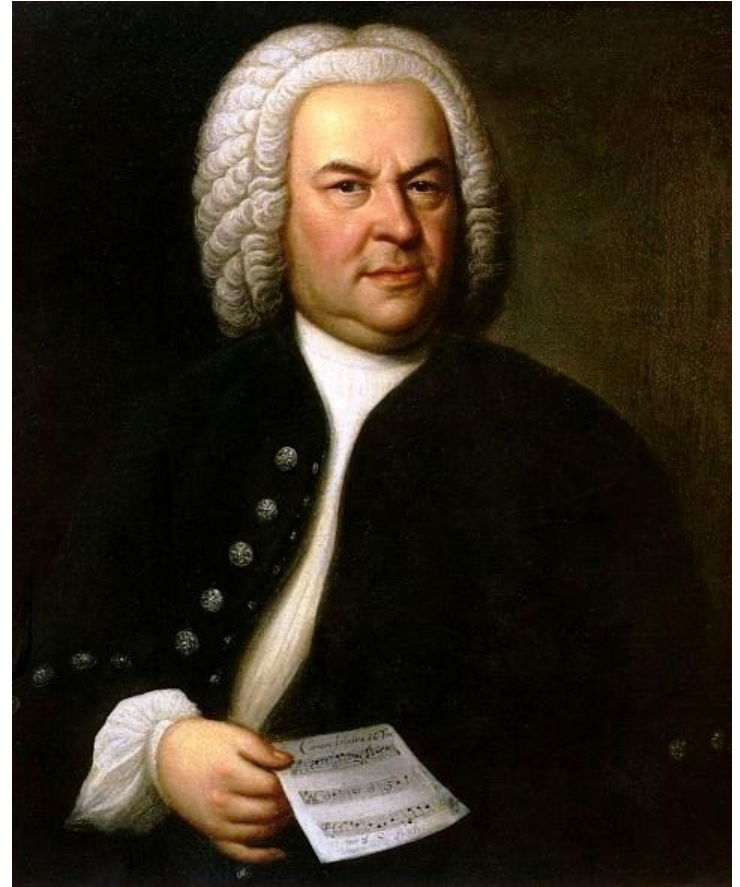
- Career
 - Church organist and choir director in Leipzig, age 38
 - Wrote a cantata every week
 - Wrote *St Matthew Passion* and other passions
 - Wrote part of *Mass in B Minor* at age 48, finished at age 64
 - Wrote *Art of the Fugue* (unfinished) shortly before his death, age 65.

Thomaskirche, Leipzig



Biography

- Musical achievement
 - Primary musical task of Baroque era:
make abstract music intelligible
 - Bach indulged in some numerology to do this.
 - This didn't work.
 - His main contribution is highly-structured **counterpoint**.



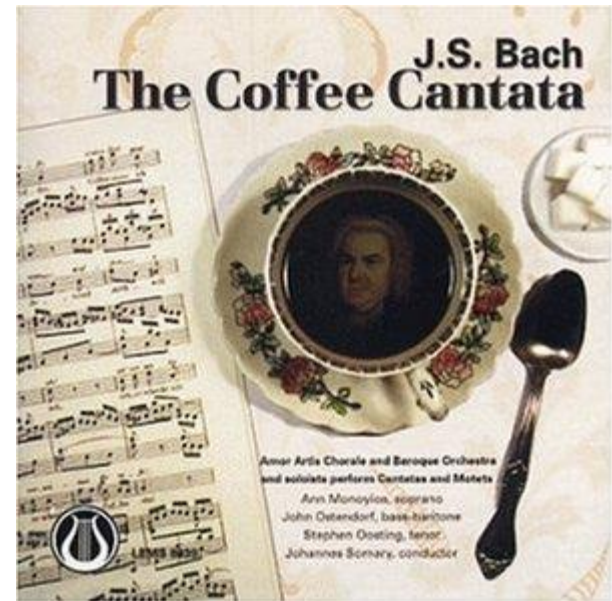
Biography

- What is counterpoint?
 - **Counterpoint** consists of several independent musical voices that interact in harmony.
 - For example, [Dixieland music](#).
 - A metaphor for Western culture.
 - We are individualists but coexist by following the rules.
 - Bach became all-time master of counterpoint.
 - Reflects Enlightenment view that order underlies the complexity of the universe.



Misconceptions

- Think Bach is always serious? Try these:
 - *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major*
 - Performed at Schloß Köthen, where it was composed and first performed (with Bach playing viola)!
 - Check out 3rd movement, 5:52
 - *Coffee Cantata*
 - *Father upset because daughter wants to “drink coffee” with her boyfriend.*
 - *Coffee = “The Devil’s drink”*
 - *Check out scene at 3:25*



Misconceptions

- Think Bach isn't emotional? Try these:
 - Chaconne from *Partita No. 2 in D minor*, for solo violin
 - One of the great monuments of Western civilization
 - Mass in B minor
 - Likewise.



Misconceptions

- Think Bach organ fugues are boring? Try this:
 - *“Gigue” Fugue in G major* for organ



C-sharp minor Fugue

- **Well-tempered Clavier**
 - Perhaps greatest music book ever.
 - **Unparalleled collection** of 48 preludes and fugues
 - Incidentally, demonstrates tempered tuning (but not equal temperament).
 - Preludes & fugues use all 24 major & minor keys.



C-sharp minor Fugue

- C-sharp minor fugue
 - From Book 1 of WTC.
 - A complex fugue for 5 voices
 - Somber mood.
 - Shows that even the most highly **cerebral** music can be highly **emotional**.
 - This is the essence of Western music.



Bach's manuscript

FUGA IV

A 5 VOCI

BWV 849

Exposition

[Audio file – with graphics](#)

[Audio file –
Hélène Grimaud \(3:12\)](#)

Codetta

Key:

Major Section

Minor Section

Episode, Stretto, etc.

S = subject

CS1 = countersubject 1

CS2 = countersubject 2

Development

CS1 Countersubject 1 CS1

S

Episode 1

2nd middle section

S CS1

Key:

Major Section

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Episode, Stretto, etc.

S = subject

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CS2 = countersubject 2

CS1 S Countersubject 2

CS2

CS2 CS1 S CS1 CS2

Episode 2

3rd middle section

CS1 S CS1 CS2

Episode 3

4th middle section

CS2 CS1 CS2 CS2

Key:

Major Section

Minor Section

Episode, Stretto, etc.

S = subject

CS1 = countersubject 1

CS2 = countersubject 2

The image displays a musical score with several sections highlighted in green boxes and labeled with blue text: **Episode 4**, **Recapitulation**, **Episode 5**, and **Closing Section**. The score is annotated with orange arrows and labels: 'S' for the subject, 'CS1' for countersubject 1, and 'CS2' for countersubject 2. The score is written in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The annotations show the following structure:

- Episode 4:** A section starting with the subject (S) in the treble clef and countersubject 1 (CS1) in the bass clef. It includes a second countersubject (CS2) in the treble clef.
- Recapitulation:** A section where the subject (S) returns in the bass clef, accompanied by CS2 in the treble clef.
- Episode 5:** A section featuring CS1 in the treble clef and CS2 in the bass clef, with the subject (S) appearing in the bass clef towards the end.
- Closing Section:** A final section with CS1 in the treble clef and S in the bass clef.

The image displays a musical score with several sections highlighted in green boxes and annotated with labels. The sections are:

- Stretto**: A section starting at measure 94, marked with a green box and the word "Stretto" in green. It contains multiple instances of the subject (S) and countersubject 2 (CS2).
- Episode 6**: A section starting at measure 99, marked with a green box and the text "Episode 6" in green. It features CS2.
- Final dominant**: A section starting at measure 101, marked with a green box and the text "Final dominant" in red. It features CS2.
- Final statement of subject**: A section starting at measure 107, marked with a green box and the text "Final statement of subject" in red. It features CS2.
- Coda**: A section starting at measure 111, marked with a green box and the text "Coda" in blue.
- Final cadence**: A section starting at measure 111, marked with a green box and the text "Final cadence" in red. It features S.
- Plagal cadence**: A section starting at measure 111, marked with a green box and the text "Plagal cadence" in green.

Throughout the score, orange arrows point to specific notes, with labels CS1 and CS2 indicating countersubject 1 and countersubject 2 respectively. Measure numbers 90, 94, 99, 101, 107, and 111 are visible at the beginning of their respective lines.

Key:

Major Section

Minor Section

Episode, Stretto, etc.

S = subject

CS1 = countersubject 1

CS2 = countersubject 2

Appoggiatura with intense dissonance

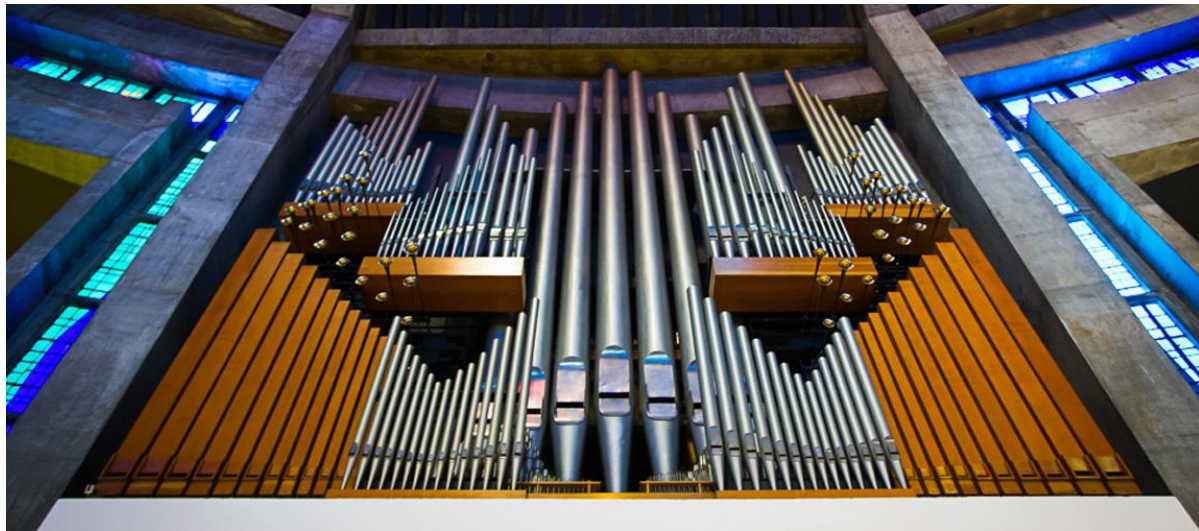
Beam me up, Johann Sebastian

- Bach's organ music lifts us out of the muck of everyday existence.
 - To a higher state of mind.
 - This requires horsepower, both from the instrument and the composer.



Beam me up, Johann Sebastian

- Should music be loud?
 - In this case, yes!
 - The power of the music supports the power of the instrument.



Beam me up, Johann Sebastian

- Example: Joy and celebration
 - Toccata, from *Toccat*a and Fugue in F major.
 - Interweaving voices over pedal point, tonic key (F major)
 - Multiple suspensions 1:00
 - Pedal solo, modulates to dominant key (C major) 1:20
 - Opening material in dominant 1:52
 - Pedal solo in dominant key, modulates to G major 2:50
 - Episode w/ cascading counterpoint, cycles through keys 3:33
 - Episode, increasing complexity 4:06
 - Episode with cascading counterpoint 4:45
 - Deceptive cadence 6:20
 - Closing section with powerful descending pedal 7:17
 - Coda over C major pedal point, final cadence 7:48

Beam me up, Johann Sebastian

- Example: An epic journey
 - Fugue, from “*Dorian*” *Toccata and Fugue in D minor*
 - The subject seems to reach for something higher, but slides back.
 - Metaphor for human struggle through history?
 - All hell breaks loose in the closing section. Armageddon?



Beam me up, Johann Sebastian

- Also try:
 - [Prelude and Fugue in G major, “The Great”](#)
 - Great video, featuring an organ that Bach played.

