

# 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 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 *Toccatina 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

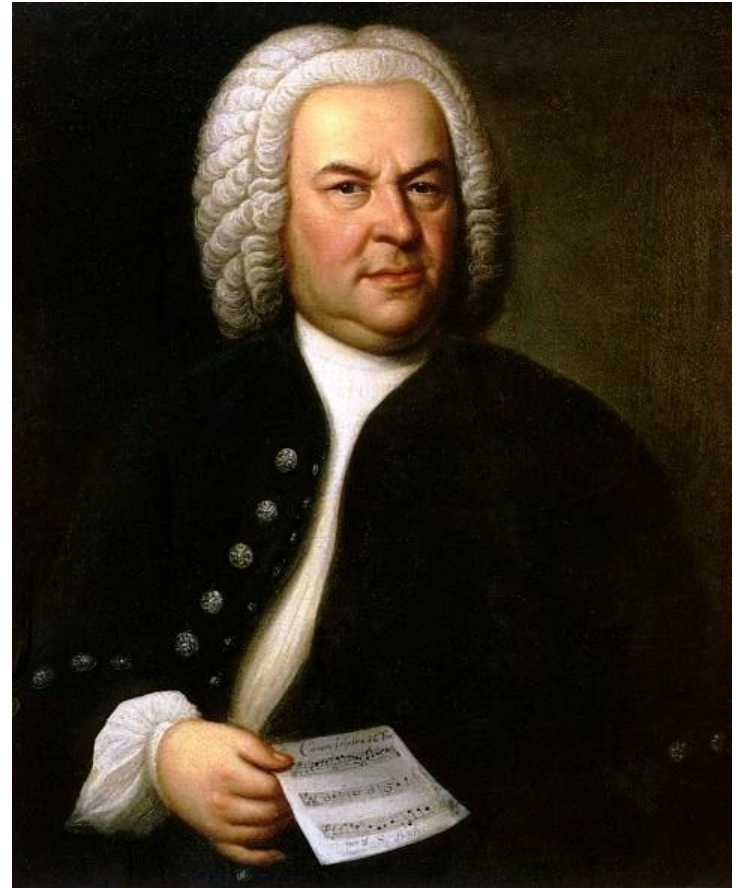
- Career
  - Church organist and choir director in Leipzig, age 38
    - Wrote a cantata every week
    - Wrote *St Matthew Passion* and other passions
    - Wrote part of *Mass in B Minor* at age 48, finished at age 64
    - Wrote *Art of the Fugue* (unfinished) shortly before his death, age 65.

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**.



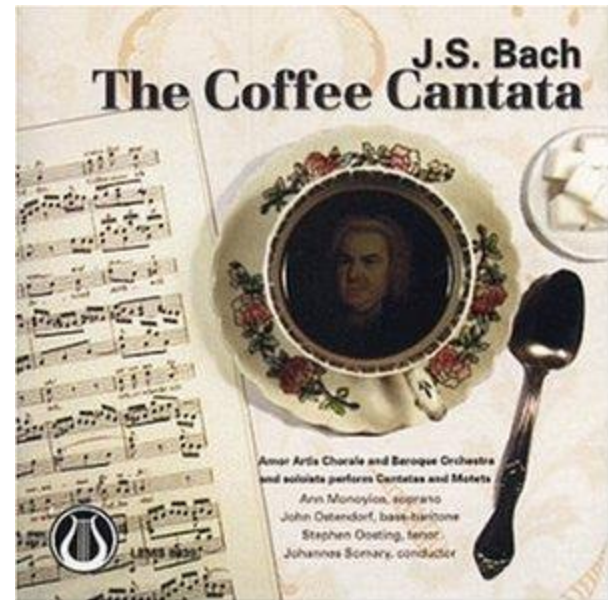
# Biography

- 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*
    - YouTube performance at Schloß Köthen, where it was composed and first performed (with Bach playing viola)!
    - Check out 3<sup>rd</sup> 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

Episode 1 2nd middle section CS1

Key:

Major Section

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Episode, Stretto, etc.

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CS1 S Countersubject 2 CS2

CS2 CS1 S CS1 CS2

Episode 2 3rd middle section CS1 CS2 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 six systems of staves. The score is annotated with various labels and arrows to identify musical elements:

- Episode 4:** A green box highlights a section in the first system.
- Recapitulation:** A blue label is placed above the second system.
- Episode 5:** A green box highlights a section in the fifth system.
- Closing Section:** A blue label is placed above the sixth system.

Labels and arrows indicate the following elements:

- S (Subject):** Indicated by orange arrows pointing to specific melodic lines in the first, second, fourth, fifth, and sixth systems.
- CS1 (Countersubject 1):** Indicated by orange arrows pointing to specific melodic lines in the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth systems.
- CS2 (Countersubject 2):** Indicated by orange arrows pointing to specific melodic lines in the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth systems.

CS2  
CS1  
CS2  
CS2  
S  
CS2  
CS2  
S  
CS2  
S  
CS2

Key:

Major Section

Minor Section

Episode, Stretto, etc.

S = subject

CS1 = countersubject 1

CS2 = countersubject 2

CS2  
CS2  
CS2  
CS2  
Episode 6  
CS2

CS2  
CS2  
Final dominant

CS2  
CS2  
CS2  
Final statement of subject  
Coda

S  
Final cadence  
Plagal cadence

Appoggiatura with intense dissonance



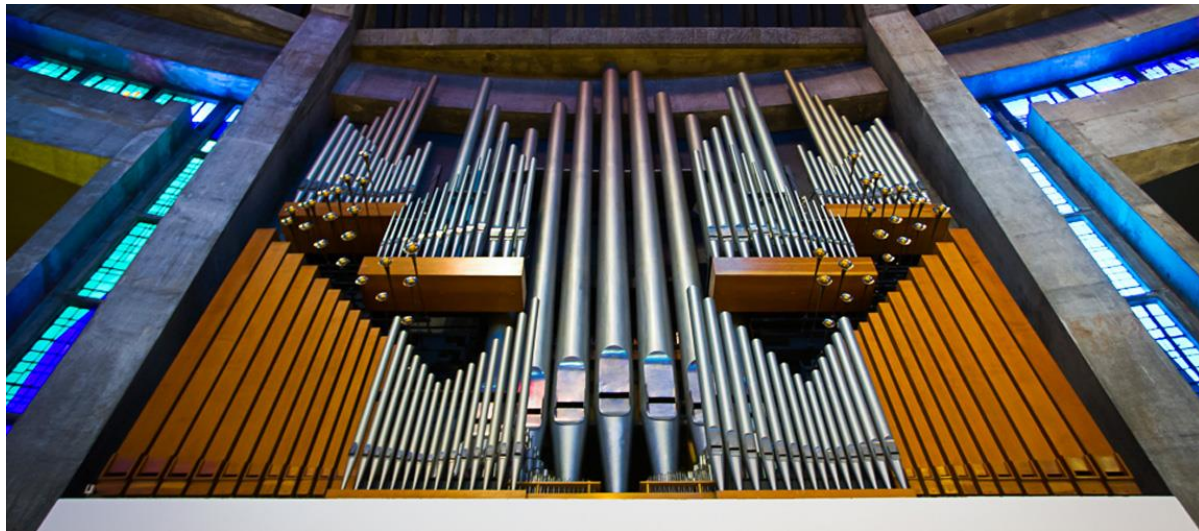
# Beam me up, Johann Sebastian

- 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?

