



Composers

Bach - Handel - Purcell

Sheet 1

Name

Johann Sebastian Bach - 1685 - 1750

his early years

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany, on March 21, 1665. He was born into a very musical family which produced many prominent musicians over several generations. Johann Sebastian's father, Johann Ambrosius Bach, was a well known musician. He was actively involved in local music and was a well known violinist and court trumpeter. Johann Sebastian, who was called by his middle name, Sebastian, began to learn about music from his father.

Sadly, by the time Sebastian was ten years old, both of his parents had died. He went to live with his older brother, Johann Christoph, in another town called Ohrdruf. Christoph was an organist at his church and he made sure that his younger brother kept up practicing his music.

While Sebastian was a young boy he began to learn to play the violin, viola, clavier (which was a keyboard instrument) and the organ. He also sang in the choir at the church.

Christoph was able to help Sebastian to develop his keyboard skills a lot because he himself was a fine organist and he had to repair and maintain the church organ as well, which meant that he could teach Sebastian very much about the instrument.

Apart from being a talented musician, Sebastian was deeply religious. While he was living with his brother Christoph, he went to school where music and religion were important parts of his studies. Sebastian stayed with his brother until he was fifteen years old. He then went to live in Lüneburg and continued his studies there while earning his own living as a chorister at the Church of Saint Michael. here he learned much more about church music and about music from other countries like France and Italy, which really interested him. He was by now a very accomplished musician and a talented composer.

At the age of eighteen he travelled to Weimar to play the violin in the chamber orchestra of Prince Johann Ernst of Weimar and after that he moved on to Arnstadt, to play the church organ there. Even though he was such a young man he was already getting to be well known and people liked his music very much.

Can you answer these questions?

What was the name of the town where Johann Sebastian was born?

Who was his first music teacher?

Who took care of him after his parents died?

What instrument did his brother play?

Name two instruments that he had to practice.

How old was he when he left his brother's house?

What did he learn about when he went to Lüneburg?

True or False

Johann Sebastian's father played the flute

He came from a very musical family

Johann Sebastian sang in the church choir

He helped repair the violins at church

He was deeply religious

His father died when he was 12

He played organ for Duke Johann Ernst



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Sheet 2

Name

Johann Sebastian Bach - 1685 - 1750 his later years

When Sebastian was twenty he spent three months studying with a famous German composer and organist, Dietrich Buxtehude. He was only supposed to be there for one month but he was learning so much that he stayed on for another two months just because he wanted to. He used a lot of what he learned in his own compositions and his own playing. Some of his new ideas sounded strange to his listeners but most people liked what they heard.

Two years later he married Maria Barbara Bach, a cousin of his, and they went to live in Mülhausen, where Sebastian played the organ in the Church of Saint Blasius. They didn't stay there long. In the following year, 1708, they decided to go back to Weimar where Sebastian was to work for Duke Wilhelm Ernst again as organist and violinist. He stayed there for nine years. During this time Sebastian wrote about thirty cantatas as well as music for organ and harpsichord. He was made leader of the court orchestra in Weimar in 1714 when he was twenty nine years old.

During this time Sebastian traveled around Germany quite a lot giving concerts. He was getting to be famous. At the same time his own family was growing. Sebastian and Maria had seven children altogether, but in those days many children died, especially when they were still babies. Only four of their children survived.

In 1717 Sebastian took his family and moved to Köthen to become the conductor of the orchestra for Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen. In between writing musically professionally, which he did a great deal of, he also managed to write music books for his wife and children, to help them advance musically as well. He wrote the 'Well Tempered Clavier,' the 'Inventions,' and the 'Little Organ Book' for them.

Suddenly, in 1720, his wife Maria died. This left him very sad and with four young children to care for. It must have been a very difficult time for him.

About a year later he married Anna Magdalena Wilcken, who was a singer and the daughter of a musician. She took over the care of his children and helped him to get on with his work. They had thirteen more children but only six of them survived.

The Bach family stayed in Köthen until 1723 when when they moved to Leipzig. Sebastian was appointed musical director and choirmaster of Saint Thomas' church. He stayed in Leipzig for the rest of his life and wrote the greatest of all his music there.

Can you answer these questions?

Which great organist and composer did he study with?

Who was Johann Sebastian Bach's first wife?.....

What work did he do soon after his first marriage?

How many of his children survived altogether?

Who did he go to work for in 1708?.....

What music books did he write for his family

Where did he move to from Köthen

True or False

He taught Dietrich Buxtehude

He wrote 13 cantatas in Weimar

Sebastian wrote 'Inventions' for his family

His second wife, Anna, was a pianist

He moved to Weimar in 1708

He became a conductor for Prince Leopold

He stayed in Leipzig for nine years