

Johann Sebastian Bach 1685–1750



JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH was the best-known member of a famous musical family. He lived all of his life in a section of Germany that in those days was called Thuringia.

As a young boy, Bach took music lessons from a number of fine teachers. One of them was his own older brother, with whom he lived after his parents died. Bach had a fine boy-soprano voice and learned to play the violin, harpsichord*, clavichord* and organ.

As a young man, he was well known in his own country as a teacher, organist and conductor. It was not until many years after his death that people all over the world came to realize what a great *composer* he had been. In 1950 the whole world honored him on the two hundredth anniversary of his death.

Bach was one of the busiest musicians who ever lived. He gave lessons on the instruments that he had learned to play as a boy; he taught singing, and even Latin, to schoolboys; he directed choirs and small orchestras; he copied (by hand) almost all of the music he used; and he even tuned and repaired his own musical instruments! Yet, no matter how busy he was, he always found time for composing and wrote music both for the church and for the court.

An important part of his music was for keyboard instruments—organ, harpsichord and clavichord. The harpsichord and clavichord were keyboard instruments somewhat like the piano, which were popular before the piano was invented. Even though the piano was invented during Bach's lifetime (in 1709), he played one only a few times and never composed any music for it. Today, since harpsichords and clavichords are uncommon, we play his music on the piano.

Bach did not write very much keyboard music for young students. The four pieces in this collection are not actually by Bach himself and are simpler than anything he composed. They are part of a music notebook¹ that Bach and his wife, Anna Magdalena, prepared for their own children's music lessons. We do not know the names of the composers of the four pieces in our collection, but we do know that they were popular in Bach's day and that his children learned to play them.

¹This notebook has come to be known as the *Anna Magdalena Bach Notebook*. It includes many pieces by Bach and some by other composers.

*Bourrée

Allegro (♩ = about 132)

From the "Anna Magdalena Bach Notebook"

The first system of the Bourrée consists of measures 1, 2, and 3. The music is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The treble clef part begins with a quarter note G4 (finger 1), followed by a quarter note B-flat4 (finger 4), and then a triplet of eighth notes: A4 (finger 3), G4 (finger 1), and F4 (finger 5). A trill (tr) is indicated above the first note of the triplet. The bass clef part starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G3 (finger 3), and then a quarter note B-flat3 (finger 1). The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below the first measure, and *f* is placed below the third measure.

The second system of the Bourrée consists of measures 4, 5, and 6. The treble clef part begins with a quarter note G4 (finger 2), followed by a quarter note B-flat4 (finger 5), and then a triplet of eighth notes: A4 (finger 3), G4 (finger 5), and F4 (finger 3). The bass clef part starts with a quarter note G3 (finger 2), followed by a quarter note B-flat3 (finger 1), and then a quarter note D3 (finger 1). The system concludes with a repeat sign.

The third system of the Bourrée consists of measures 7, 8, and 9. The treble clef part begins with a quarter note G4 (finger 2), followed by a quarter note B-flat4 (finger 1), and then a quarter note G4 (finger 2). The bass clef part starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G3 (finger 1), and then a quarter note B-flat3 (finger 4). The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below the first measure, and *f* is placed below the third measure. The system concludes with a repeat sign.

The fourth system of the Bourrée consists of measures 10, 11, and 12. The treble clef part begins with a quarter note G4 (finger 4), followed by a quarter note B-flat4 (finger 4), and then a quarter note G4 (finger 4). The bass clef part starts with a quarter note G3 (finger 5), followed by a quarter note B-flat3 (finger 5), and then a quarter note D3 (finger 5). The system concludes with a repeat sign.