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Johann Sebastian Bach

1685–1750

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH was a member of one of the most famous musical dynasties in history. The Bach family was well known in Germany for almost 200 years before Bach's birth in 1685. His father, uncles, grandfather, great-uncles, and even his great-grandfather had been professional musicians. Bach himself had many children, and four of his sons also became well-known composers.

Johann Sebastian was the greatest member of this famous musical family. He was born in the city of Eisenach in central Germany. As a boy, he studied music with several fine teachers, one of whom was his older brother. He studied violin, harpsichord, clavichord, organ, and singing. When he grew up, he became a highly respected professional musician with jobs both in the court and in the church as a teacher, conductor, and organist.

In addition, Bach composed some of the greatest music ever written—for choir and orchestra, for chamber groups, and for solo instruments. An important part of his keyboard music was for the harpsichord and clavichord, early forerunners of the piano.

Bach did not write very much music easy enough for students, and the pieces in this collection are not actually by Bach himself. Instead, they are easier pieces by other composers (including Bach's sons), pieces that Bach and his wife Anna Magdalena chose for their children's music study. Anna Magdalena collected them in a notebook so their children could play and study them. The notebook has come to be known as the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*. The two minuets are by unknown composers, but the March in D Major was written by Bach's son, Carl Philipp Emanuel.

