

BACH AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

Coordinator: James Smith

The “modern” era of Classical Music was fundamentally shaped by J.S. Bach. His iconic works continue to illuminate the deepest recesses of the human condition, both through their ability to move us and through their influence on signal composers who followed. We connect with these treasures through close attention and listener-friendly analysis, as we understand terms like Baroque, Counterpoint, Fugue, Cantata, Passion, Theme and Variation, and Musical Ornamentation and Beauty. Bach wrote music in both sacred and secular genres, both vocal and instrumental. Many of his greatest works are on our menu. For all levels of listener.

Readings and other Materials/Online Services: Listening through on-line Youtube Videos. Online readings also will be assigned.

Having coordinated many study groups on classical music at IRP, **James** is now timorously taking on the great master.

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Week 1: What is **Baroque Style**? How did Bach define and change it? What is the relationship between Ornamentation and Structure, and how do they add up to meaning?
Brandenburg Concertos, 2, 4, and 5.

Week 2: What is the role of **Counterpoint** in music? How can it be used most effectively? Listening: The Art of the Fugue

Week 3: **Variations on a theme**. What are they? Why are they so central to all of music (and all of life)?
Listening: Goldberg Variations

Week 4: **The Many Voices of the Solo Instrument**. No one wrote more compellingly and miraculously for a single instrument. This week we listen to the strings:
Partita No. 2 for Solo Violin. Suite #3 for Solo Cello.

Week 5: **The Well-Tempered Clavier**. Why does he pair up preludes and fugues? Does the musical key make a difference?

How many emotions can be expressed by one instrument?

Week 6: **Keyboard after Keyboard.** How did Bach exploit and expand the genres of the day? Do the pieces sound better on a harpsichord or a piano? Listening: Keyboard Partita in C minor. French Suites. English Suites.

Week 7: **The Power of the Organ.** The range, intensity, and sonorities of the Organ were inspiration for some of Bach's most stunning pieces. What can an Organ do that a harpsichord can't? Listening: Toccata and Fugue in D minor

Week 8: **Does God Hear Us?** Bach said that he "wrote his music for God." Can you relate to his religious music if you believe in a different god? Or none at all? (The answer is yes). Listening: Canata BMV 82, "Ich Habe Genug". Cantata BMV 8, "Liebster Gott"

Week 9 and 10: **The Ultimate Mass.** The B Minor Mass is considered to be among the greatest works of genius in the repertoire. What is a Mass trying to do? Why should we care about them if we are not Lutherans, or believers at all, but merely members of the Mass of Humanity?

Week 11 &12: **Music's Deepest Passion** A staggering range of human passions and conflicts are evoked by The St. Matthew Passion. What makes the form so effective? How do the themes transcend Christ's story? In what sense can we say that all of Bach's most potent musical abilities come together in this work?