

Johann Sebastian Bach: Man and Musician



A Curriculum Overview

Mary Beth Huttlin

2012

Table of Contents

Preface	p. 1
Overview of Curriculum	p. 3
Introduction	p. 3
<i>A Walk with Bach</i>	p. 5
Bach's Life	p. 12
History of the Georg Erdmann Letter	p. 15
Letter Writing Project	p. 15
Bach Today	p. 16
Epilogue	p. 18
Audience guide and script to <i>A Walk with Bach</i>	p. 21
Chorale Text Translation	p. 22
Letter to Georg Erdmann	p. 23
History Detective Questions for Letter	p. 25
Letter Writing Project Outline – Becoming Bach	p. 27
Money in the Time of Bach	p. 28
The 'New Face' of Bach Article	p. 30



The Birth House of J. S. Bach
Eisenach, Germany

Preface

The tradition of music education made a radical shift starting in the mid-nineteenth century with the work of Lowell Mason and the advent of public school music, which reached the primary school level in 1864 in Boston and was not wide-spread until the turn of the twentieth century. This evolution marked a significant change from the music education traditions of the previous centuries which typically centered around an “apprenticeship” design in which a student would work for and with a master musician in an individualized setting and, in this environment, would be taught the “trade” over time.

However, the spread of music education in public schools resulted in a boom in a whole new genre of music in the early twentieth century. Suddenly composer-educators were presenting music written specifically for children designed to reinforce the development of particular skills. This was in stark contrast to previous centuries in which students apprenticing with a master teacher would usually be taught by studying the work of the master teacher as well as the masterworks of previous generations of musicians.

A strong tradition of teaching primarily skill-based educational music persists today. While this skill-based music written specifically for young students is often very effective in solidifying technique and certainly has much merit for its inclusion in our contemporary curricula and should not be eliminated, sometimes the connection to the lineage of the development of music throughout history that was so strong during the era of musical apprenticeships is lost if a student’s musical experiences are not broadened to include some masterworks from throughout music history.

It is this concern that led the National Association for Music Education (formerly MENC) and National Committee for Standards in the Arts to include an emphasis on performing varied repertoire to help facilitate a better understanding of music in relation to history among their nine National Standards for Music Education.

This is also the concern that has led me to so passionately advocate for the incorporation of pieces based on masterworks from throughout music history into the elementary and middle school orchestra curriculum. Transcriptions and respectful arrangements are often necessary to present these works to students with more limited ability. However, if we were to delay presenting these works until the students’ skills have reached the point at which they can play the musical works in their original form, many students would never reach that point in their study and, therefore, would not have this opportunity or exposure and for those that do eventually reach that point, it is often several years before they have the skills to embark on learning these works. Just as we advocate for the use of “primary documents” from many eras in the study of literature and history, we must also advocate for the use of “primary music” from across music history.

My passion for the importance of playing “primary music” is also fueled by my own educational experience. I very vividly recall the first time I played a “real orchestral work” by a familiar composer – I was in eighth grade, had played for five years and we performed an arrangement of the *Allegro molto* from W. A. Mozart’s Symphony No. 40 in g minor, K. 550. I had never even heard the piece before, but something about the work inspired me to suddenly understand so much more deeply what an orchestra was and what it meant to be a musician studying an instrument. My heart still skips a beat when I hear

that piece performed and I hope that my students can experience the same thrill as they are introduced to these works of J. S. Bach.

As a component of this unit, I transcribed segments of four different works by Johann Sebastian Bach. For students learning to play an instrument, it is often more meaningful to have the opportunity to interact with a piece of music through learning to play parts of it as opposed to only listening to it. The process of learning to play it helps cultivate a more intimate understanding of the music and allows students to view both the work and the composer from a perspective that cannot be matched through other experiences.

In order to match the ability of my young students, I selected excerpts very carefully so as to not have to alter Bach's original writing significantly. However, despite my firm commitment to finding a way to present Bach's works to younger students and maintaining the integrity of the excerpts to the greatest extent possible, I did experience some concern about the fact that I was taking what was a complete entity in the eyes of its creator and presenting only a segment of it. However, after much consideration, I have taken solace in the idea that reading excerpts of larger works is commonplace in literary study so there is strong precedence for the practice. Even more importantly, Bach was a teacher and evidence indicates that he made similar revisions to some of his works for his particular purposes. As one of very few composers to teach music in an organized school and to teach young students (starting with students in the 5th grade) for twenty-seven years, I am convinced that Bach would have understood and probably would have done the same thing for his own students.



St. Thomas Church and School
Leipzig, Germany

Johann Sebastian Bach: Man and Musician

Curriculum Designed by Mary Beth Huttlin

Target students: Orchestra students in grades 5-7 (depending primarily on playing skill level)

*Throughout this curriculum we look at Bach both as historians (in 2012, gathering evidence about him through clues left behind) as well as putting ourselves in the position of being his “contemporary” (as if we were alive then and were getting to know him.) It is for this reason that we begin with just a skeletal framework about who he was. Both of these viewpoints converge at the end with the letter writing project as students use what they have learned about Bach to write a letter that accurately represents a letter that he could possibly have written.

Introduction:

The Golden Record

Imagine you had opportunity to communicate with aliens and you had fewer than 90 minutes to represent all there is to know about music on Earth. What would you include?

- This was the situation in 1977 when the Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 space crafts were launched containing a “Golden Record” of sounds and information about life on Planet Earth.
- The intention was that once the space crafts left our solar system, it would journey for 40,000 years and may potentially come in contact with life on some other planet. With the “Golden Record,” the aliens would be introduced to life on Earth as they hear greetings in 55 languages, experience sounds of nature, view 115 images and sample some of the 27 musical excerpts from around the world.
- Of all of the elements included on the “Golden Record,” the music of J.S. Bach is most represented by length of recording as well as by in number of selections included (3).
- *Why might that be? Why do people continue to listen to, play and enjoy music from three centuries ago? We do not wear clothes, eat foods or work jobs like they did three centuries ago – what is it that makes this music ‘timeless?’*

NASA’s Golden Record Resource:

<http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/spacecraft/goldenrec.html>

Music Encoded on the Golden Record

<http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/spacecraft/music.html>

Who was this J.S. Bach whose music was so well-represented on the Golden Record?

What do you know?

What do you want to know?

How can we find out more?

Skeletal Introduction:

*Students have the opportunity to meet J.S. Bach as they would meet anyone alive today – initially they learn some basic facts about the person and then, as we progress and get to know him through his music (his own voice which transcends time), we begin to learn more about him. By the end, we put his life together in a timeline to fill in the details.

J.S. Bach

- German composer
- Lived 300 years ago and died 26 years before the American Revolutionary War
- Wrote both choral and instrumental works
- Often best known for his organ works

Music of J. S. Bach for Our Performance:

A Walk with Bach – Johann Sebastian Bach

Arr. Mary Beth Huttlin

General Educational Considerations

- At each rehearsal, incorporate a vignette from the life of Bach to slowly reveal more about him as a person. Sometimes tell only half of the story, leaving a “cliff hanger” until the next rehearsal.
- The greatest challenge for your students in playing Bach is strong independence of parts necessary to play the intricate counterpoint.
 - Students should be well-familiar with playing rounds, duets, trios and other orchestral works (both in large ensembles and in smaller ensembles with one or two people playing each part) before embarking on learning Bach.
 - Explain to students that each section has a separate set of notes and rhythms and that everyone in the ensemble will not be moving together all of the time.
 - Each part should be rehearsed separately before rehearsing all parts together.
 - Utilize “sizzling” and other ensemble-building techniques to help align the parts.
 - Many “Music Animation Machine” videos are available on YouTube to help students visualize what counterpoint is and how the parts interact with each other. (The link to the *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor* Music Animation Machine is listed below.)
- It is highly advisable for the teacher to be very familiar with both the original scores of the works and recordings of the complete works.
- It is important in learning the *Introduction*, *Bouree* and *Allegro*, to discuss with students that these are just small segments of much larger works, but that the transcriptions of those small sections adhere closely to the original manuscripts
- Students will benefit greatly from hearing/watching recordings of each work periodically throughout the time in which they are rehearsed.
- The performance of *A Walk with Bach* is also an important educational opportunity as students share a brief glimpse into Bach’s life and music through a narration that weaves together the four movements of the work.

I. Introduction

From Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565

Historical Background

Believed to have been written before 1708 and understood to have been written while he was living in Arnstadt or Mühlhausen, Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in D minor* was most likely meant to be a compositional manifestation of his brilliant organ improvisations. However, the question remains as to who actually wrote it. The opening toccata is free in nature, yet even the first few notes present significant harmonic tension which persists throughout the work. Following the dramatic toccata is an equally exuberant fugue which concludes with an improvisatory postlude. While the form of the *Toccata and Fugue* matches other Bach organ works from the same period, other elements of the work strongly suggest a composer other than Bach. However, because Bach's compositional voice was still developing in this early period of his career, the question of authorship remains unresolved. Regardless, concerned that Bach's masterpieces were falling into obscurity, Leopold Stokowski transcribed the *Toccata and Fugue* for full orchestra in 1952 and, after transcribing several other works, he became one of Bach's most ardent supporters since Felix Mendelssohn.

Educational Considerations

- Although the attribution of the *Toccata and Fugue in D minor* to Bach is questionable, this piece was important to include as it was one of the only works by Bach that students easily recognized in their daily lives yet they never realized that it was written by Bach.
- To accommodate the limited ranges and keys possible while playing in first position, I changed the key to G minor.
- The four instruments of the orchestra are used in independent lines for the different octaves and manuals of the original score. The different timbres of the instruments also help to recreate the varied timbres in the different registers of the organ.
- The violas will need to be quite strong in the penultimate measure so that the resolution and creation of the g minor chord is clear.
- The greatest challenge for students is the “accidentals” in the *Introduction*. One way to combat that challenge is to present the g minor scale before presenting the piece. Intonation issues can be ameliorated by incorporating more minor songs into the general music singing curriculum and into early string study so that students are more familiar with the minor tonality and can then apply that aural familiarity to their string playing.
- Each student receives a part that contains the entire score as it is easier for students to follow the familiar motives being played by each section than to count numerous measures of empty rests.
- The bowing has been left as free bowing to allow students to change bow as often as necessary especially on the long notes and to encourage rich sounds, imitating the rich sound of the organ.

Uses in Popular Culture

- Movies, commercials, cartoons, video games, ring tones
- Movies:
 - In 1940 it was used in the film, 'Fantasia' and was played in Leopold Stokowski's orchestration by the Philadelphia Orchestra.
 - In 1954 it was used in the film, '20,000 Leagues Under The Sea' and was played by Captain Nemo (James Mason) on the organ.
 - In 1965 it was played by Professor Fate (Jack Lemmon) on a 'player' organ (with his thumbs bandaged) in the movie, 'The Great Race'.
 - In 1975 it was the theme in the original film 'Roller Ball' with James Caan.
 - In 2007 it was used in the Ski film "Seven Sunny Days" by Matchstick Productions in the Segment 'Whistler Jump'.

Source:

http://www.last.fm/music/Johann+Sebastian+Bach/_/Toccata+and+Fugue+in+D+Minor

Resources:

Traditional Performance - Karl Richter, Organist

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zd_olFy1mxM

Performance with Score Highlighted

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SG_KfgSJbeAg

Music Animation Machine Version

http://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_78634&feature=iv&src_vid=ipzR9bhei_o&v=ATbMw6X3T40

II. Chorale – “Brich an, o schönes Morgenlicht” *From Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248*

Historical Background

Despite being called an 'oratorio,' Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* as well as his *Easter* and *Ascension Oratorios* do not adhere to the traditional definition of an oratorio. Instead, they better

match the description espoused by Erdmann Neumeister that an oratorio is a literary genre that combines biblical verses, aria texts and chorales in one overarching work separated into several sections. Much of the material that comprises the *Christmas Oratorio* is borrowed from earlier secular cantatas and between September 1733 and October 1734 these former works were joined with newly-composed recitatives, choruses and chorales to create a single, unified work dedicated to the royal family of Dresden. The chorale, "*Brieh an, o schönes Morgenlicht*" is part of the second large-scale section of the oratorio and it describes the beauty of the morning on which the shepherds were informed by the angels of the Christ Child's birth.

Educational Considerations

- In public schools which are concerned about referencing religion, it is important to help students recognize the historical importance of the chorale as a musical setting of a religious text which indicates the prominence of the church at the time that it was written and represents the focus of much of Bach's career and output.
- If a school is particularly strict about not referencing religion at all and teaching the historical basis is not an approved alternative, it is possible to teach this piece with the students' limited understanding that the subject is the beauty of the morning sun.
- Because of changes in contemporary sacred music and the role of religion in society, many students are not familiar with the idea of a chorale or even formal vocal singing. A brief introduction to the choral sound and "singing" nature of choral music is important to helping young ensembles cultivate a "singing" style of playing.
- By far the most challenging elements of the *Chorale* are coordinating the ensemble pauses indicated by the breath mark and the intricate counterpoint.
 - To help students adjust to the idea of phrasing and pausing midway and at the end of a phrase, it may be advisable to initially stop momentarily at each breath mark. At the breath mark midway through the phrase, ask students "Are we settled back 'home' yet?" and then ask the same question at the end of the phrase.
 - It is recommended that the music prior to the breath mark midway through the phrase be considered "up" motion and the music between the breath mark midway through the phrase and then end of the phrase should be considered "down" motion.
 - "Question and answer" format to phrasing
 - Words can be added to better reinforce this idea of phrasing. For example, in the first phrase, "Say – did you happen to see my dog? <breath mark midway through the phrase> "Why, no, I haven't seen him."

Resource:

Bach's Original Manuscript with Recording - Brieh an, o schönes Morgenlicht

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgLHYFGgUgA>

III. Bourree

From Cello Suite #3 in C Major, BWV 1009

Historical Background

The six Cello Suites by J. S. Bach were written circa 1720 in Cöthen and closely adhere to the traditional classical suite construction, consisting of an allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue with the possible addition of other dances inserted between the sarabande and gigue. The third Cello Suite includes a pair of bourrees, of which this is the first. It is believed that Bach intended to make the Cello Suites a set and it is conjectured that the first four Cello Suites were written for Cöthen cellists C. F. Abel and Christian Bernhard Linike. However, it is thought that the final two Cello Suites were written for a different occasion and for a different cellist as they are significantly more challenging technically and considerably longer.

Educational Considerations

- It can be useful to introduce the idea of a “Bach Cello Suite” by playing the *Prelude* from Bach Cello Suite No. 1, BWV 1007 since some students will recognize it.
- The concept of a “suite” will be foreign to most students and it is important to mention that it is a collection of contrasting pieces and that each is originally derived from a different style of dance. However, no one would have danced to these suites – they were for concert settings.
- A bass part is included as an opportunity for the basses to also share in playing a melodic part. However, it should be noted that the bass part is very challenging because of shifting and the notes do not lay as comfortably on the E, A, D and G strings of the bass.
- The original triple-stops have been omitted.
- Because of the technical demands of the sections of continuous eighth notes for the young cellist and bassist, a few notes have been omitted so that harmonically important notes can remain as quarter notes.
- The most significant alterations to Bach’s original scores occurred in the transcription of the *Bourée* because Bach moves harmonically from the tonic to the dominant in the original section of this movement which is featured in our transcription. Because the first section is relatively short, the harmonic uncertainty and need to resolve which are inherent to the dominant harmony remain despite a strong perfect authentic cadence if one stops at the end of the first section. For that reason, a “coda” ending with two newly-created, Bach-inspired transition measures has been added to incorporate the final

few measures of the entire movement, allowing the movement to end in the tonic harmony.

Resources:

Mstislav Rostropovich – 1991- *Cello Suite No. 3 Bourrees*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuD3gFGETEE>

Mstislav Rostropovich – 1962 - *Cello Suite No. 3 Bourrees*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ud3BvW2MAj4>

IV. Allegro

From Brandenburg Concerto #3 in G Major, BWV 1048

Historical Background

The autographed score of Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos is dated March 24, 1721 and indicates that the collection is dedicated to Christian Ludwig, the Margrave of Brandenburg, whom Bach had met two years earlier (presumably while purchasing a new Mietke harpsichord for his employer at the time, Prince Leopold of Cöthen.) Whether Bach ever received any payment for the works or whether they were a gift remains unknown. However, it is believed that many of the movements in the six concertos were not originally written for the concerto and, instead, were revisions to previous works. In general, contrary to many contemporary performances, the Brandenburg Concertos were meant to be chamber music, often featuring just one person on each part.

The presentation of the score to the Margrave opened the opportunity for the Margrave's court musicians to perform the work, further advancing Bach's compositional career, but also gave the Margrave a score for study. It is believed that all of the six Brandenburg concertos (in addition to many other works of Bach) are enigmatic, with specific musical elements symbolizing non-musical ideas. The numbers 3 and 9 are very important to the composition of the *Allegro* in Brandenburg Concerto No. 3. It is also important to note that there are originally nine distinct parts in the Brandenburg No. 3 score and they were split as 3 violins, 3 violas, 3 cellos.

Educational Considerations

- As students are becoming familiar with the Allegro, encourage them to find instances of the numbers 3 and 9 being prominently displayed. Discuss the importance of the number 3 in terms of fairy tales, religion and ancient cultures. (The number 9 was also important in mythology and Classical ideology as well as the numeral embodiment of perfection – 3 groups of 3.)
 - Examples:
 - The tiny motive on which the whole work is based: two eighth notes followed by a quarter note.
 - The first phrase that opens the piece contains 1) a high tiny motive and a low tiny motive, 2) a high tiny motive and an even lower tiny motive and 3) a high tiny motive and a yet lower tiny motive which >finally!< moves on to the rest of the piece.
 - There are 3s present at every level – motive, phrase (finally move on to the rest of the piece on the third ‘attempt’) and intervallic relationship between the low notes as the continually descend (outlining a triad)
 - Measure 18 – there is a 9-note motive that is first played by the violins (the beginning of a repetitious cycle), then again by the violas (again, no success breaking out of the cycle) and again by the violins, where the repetitious cycle finally breaks free on the third iteration.
- The rhythm has been expanded to indicate the rhythmic relationships among the notes with quarter notes and eighth notes as opposed to eighth notes and sixteenth notes to make the parts easier for students to understand. The original meter was 2/4, but the current transcription is in 4/4 again to help students navigate the music.
- Violin and viola students should be encouraged to use the quarter notes as resting points among the eighth note moving lines. This is essential to avoid rushing. They can visualize each set of two pick-up eighth notes as an up motion and each quarter note as a “pillowy” down motion, as if one is dancing.
- Cello and bass students may be included to rush their octave leaps, but must understand that the violins and violas have constant eighth notes to fit in on top of those strong structural notes.
- The most difficult ensemble entrance is in measure 18 when the violins and violas must enter on beat 2 with strong, independent lines. It is easy for the lower strings to cover this important, repeating cycle played by the violins in measures 18, 19 and 20.
- The tempi taken in most recordings are too ambitious for younger players – A brisk, yet moderate tempo in which the technique can be even and all notes are clear is best.

Resources:

Munich Bach Orchestra – Karl Richter, Conductor

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHHzop0ha6Y>

Freiburg Baroque Orchestra - Original Instrumentation

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZ9qWpa2rIg>

Who is this man who wrote this music?

* The purpose is delaying a formal introduction into the events in Bach's life until after the students have been introduced to his music is for students to "meet" Bach as a person in a much more natural, as opposed to starkly academic, way. Students will also be much more interested in understanding his life and era after they have begun learning his music and their natural curiosity is sparked.

** Now that we are familiar with four of his works from having learned to play them and several other works from having heard them, what does his music tell us about his life and about the time period in which he lived?*

* For many students, it is shocking to think about someone famous, such as Bach, as a young child. Vignettes about his life as a child have a particularly strong impact on students as they can suddenly identify with someone who was perhaps formerly abstract and out-of-reach.

* Often when learning about history, referencing random years that events happened do not have a great impact on young students. For that reason, it can be helpful to compare each year to American historical developments which are often more familiar to younger students.

* It is also important to discuss what daily life was like during the eighteenth century as many students cannot fathom the lack of scientific knowledge, rudimentary modes of transportation and means of meeting daily needs and the political climate which led to dukes, aristocracy and the power of the church.

- Utilize the "**Money in the Time of J. S. Bach**" article as a component of the study of daily life in the eighteenth century.

Overview of Bach's Life for Students

1685

- Born in Eisenach, Germany (central Germany)
- His extended family were mostly musicians ("Bachs")

1695

- Both parents died by the time he was 10 and he was left an orphan.
- He was sent to live with older brother Christoph in Ohrdruf, Germany and there learned to play the organ, violin, harpsichord as well as to sing.
- He met school friend Georg Erdmann at the *Gymnasium* in Ohrdruf and they later attended St. Michael's School together.

1700

- Received a scholarship for his fine soprano singing voice and studied music at St. Michael's School in Lüneburg, Germany (North Germany).
 - Sang in neighborhood to earn money.

1703

- Hired as organist and choirmaster at Arnstadt.

1705

- Walked 260 miles to hear an organ recital performed by his musical idol, Dieterich Buxtehude.

1707

- Married Maria Barbara and they had 7 children before she died 13 years later

1708

- Worked for the Duke of Weimar as a court composer
- He had to compose music for all the Duke's parties and special events (non-church music.)

1714

- Became the director of the Duke's orchestra and had to compose one non-church cantata per month.

1717

- Challenged French organist Louis Marchand to an "organ duel" at the Court of Dresden and won by default when Marchand disappeared due to intimidation during the night before the performance.
- Put in prison for a month by the Duke because applied for and was chosen to be the Kapellmeister in Cöthen for Prince Leopold, himself a musician.
 - Composed all of the *Brandenburg Concerti* for Prince Leopold

1720

- While Bach was in Carlsbad 'on tour' with the Prince, Maria Barbara dies leaving Bach to care for 7 children – ages 1 to 12

- By the time Bach returned, Maria Barbara had already been buried and her unwed sister was caring for the children.

1721

- Married Anna Magdalena, who was a gifted soprano performing two of his cantatas. Despite being different ages (he was 36, she was 20), they married and had 13 children. With her musical training, she was able to assist Bach.
 - She also cared for Maria Barbara's children so they had a total of 20 children. 11 died as babies – 5 were named "Johann," 2 were named "Johanna" and 4 later became composers themselves.
 - The Bach household tended to be a chaotic place sometimes. ("...as his house perfectly resembled a dovecote in its liveliness. – son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, 1775.

1723

- Moved to Leipzig to become church music director and music teacher at St. Thomas Church and School for Boys
 - Stayed there until his death 27 years later.
 - Bach composed one cantata per week for the first five years – each cantata was based on the Scripture readings for the week.
 - Also had to care for the boys living in the boarding school.
 - Lived in an apartment on the first floor of the St. Thomas School. (They had to expand the apartment to accommodate Bach's 20 children.)
 - Began to lose his eye sight.

1750

- Died as a result of an infection sustained after his second eye surgery.
 - Four of his sons became composers and musicians
 - Anna Magdalena died in poverty.
 - 20th Century - Currently buried under the altar of St. Thomas Church.
 - Bach was never particularly celebrated or famous in his own lifetime

1830

- 80 years later – Mendelssohn rediscovered Bach's music and Bach became very famous

1977

- Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 carry the "Golden Record" containing recordings of three Bach pieces.

Letter to Georg Erdmann and Bach's Own Correspondence

Historical Background

It remains unknown exactly how much casual or work correspondence Bach actually maintained. It has been conjectured that perhaps he never managed to keep up with frequent correspondence given his many responsibilities. That may have been especially true in Leipzig with the extensive demands working for the St. Thomas Church and School, his new directorship of the *Collegium Musicum*, his increasing notoriety as an organ expert and talented musician, and his large family. For this reason, details about Bach's early life and home life are sketchy and various other primary documents have been used to piece together his professional career. However, among the very few letters that do exist is a letter Bach wrote to his school friend Georg Erdmann, who was then living in Danzig, Germany.

In August 1730, Bach was reprimanded by the St. Thomas Council for delegating his teaching duties to a junior colleague, Petzold; not maintaining proper discipline in his choirs and for his frequent absences as he traveled around Germany pursuing other musical opportunities without proper authorization. The Council threatened to decrease his salary and, in a rage, Bach wrote to Erdmann, asking for assistance in finding a 'convenient post' where he could escape the 'trouble, envy and persecution' which he was facing in Leipzig. The result is a fascinating letter revealing a glimpse of Bach's personality, opinions about his work in Leipzig and a few details about his home life.

Project:

*It is very beneficial to collaborate with a classroom teacher or English teacher for this project to approach the Erdmann letter and composition of a letter as if J. S. Bach from both a musical and an English skills perspective.

Students will read Bach's letter to Georg Erdmann and act as history detectives to discover evidence to support the details they know and to collect new details about Johann Sebastian Bach.

- Given the language used in the letter, it is advisable that students are given scaffolding to understand what the letter is about and why Bach was sending it.
- It is best to start the 'investigative process' together as a class before breaking into smaller groups so that the 'investigative process' is modeled.
- At the end of the work time, it is important to discuss the letter as a class to avoid any misconceptions and to spur any debate that might arise in collecting clues.

Students will use their knowledge of J. S. Bach's life and music to write a letter that he could possibly have sent. This letter must accurately portray Bach's position and reflect his activities at the time when the letter was supposed to have been written. Collaboration with a classroom teacher or English teacher can be very valuable in the creation of these letters and the study of letter format.

Process:

- Student chooses a recipient for the letter.
- Student selects a concern/reason for the letter to be sent.
- Student outlines letter and identifies ten facts that can be incorporated into the letter. (Numbered on a separate sheet of paper.)
- Student writes letter.
- Student edits letter.
- Students work together to peer review their letters.
- Student creates final copy of the letter, submits the list of ten facts, and "mails" the letter.

Bach Today

The 'New Face' of Bach

To help answer the ubiquitous question, "What did Bach look like?" students will read the article, "True Face of Bach Revealed by Forensic Experts."

True Face of Bach Unveiled by Forensic Experts. (2008, March 1). CBC/Radio-Canada. Retrieved Nov. 27, 2012, from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/music/story/2008/03/01/bach-face-reconstruction.html>

International Bach Competition:

[http://www.bach-leipzig.de/index.php?id=305&L=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=394&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=23&cHash=d6ebd9a6bc135e3e5c1a1b7873bbccd8](http://www.bach-leipzig.de/index.php?id=305&L=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=394&tx_ttnews[backPid]=23&cHash=d6ebd9a6bc135e3e5c1a1b7873bbccd8)

Performance Today® from American Public Media – moderated by Fred Child

Weekend of December 1, 2012 – Interview with pianist Andras Schiff on how he starts his morning by playing Bach

<http://performancetoday.publicradio.org/playlist.php>

Bach in Contemporary Media

- There are many references to Bach’s music throughout all formats of contemporary media and it warrants a discussion as students begin to realize where they have heard his music before.
- “Where have you seen or heard Bach’s music in our contemporary media?”
 - *Fantasia*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOtFR5WG9K8>
 - Many movies
 - Commercials
 - **Several contemporary music groups have ‘covered’ Bach works.**
* Optional: Many of these ‘covers’ make great options for “Venn Diagram Compare and Contrast” Assessments as students compare the new version to Bach’s original version.
 - **Ex. “World Beat Bach”**
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AV7fBOzThA>
 - http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=o-r_ORAO6s
 - **“Bach to Jazz”**
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G69YJcgY8M>
 - Bobby McFerrin on Bach
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSKpqqOBbq4>
 - **“Swinging Bach”**
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB Jr59VeylU>
 - Video Games
 - Ring Tones
- Clips and Excerpts can be shared as time and facilities allow.



Epilogue

As with any large-scale project undertaken, I have confronted some significant challenges over the course of the past eight weeks. I must admit that I have a very talented and dedicated 5th grade orchestra this year and they were more than open-minded and interested in learning these Bach excerpts. However, we very quickly discovered some of the reasons why Bach is so very difficult to play.

The initial shock to my 5th graders was the very strong level of independence of parts. The counterpoint in the *Chorale* and in the *Allegro* was a challenge to align as an orchestra and for each individual student to avoid becoming confused by the various other parts being played at the same time. However, in the course of grappling with the independence of parts challenge, my students developed great rehearsal technique and it really reinforced the need for focus in rehearsal. Eventually, when many of my students were at their group lessons later in the day and played their specific parts, they were eager to have me play all the rest of the parts on the piano so that they could put their part in context. From these experiences, it became very apparent that my students recognized and appreciated the other parts of the piece, even though often in the moment of playing the pieces, their focus was on their own parts.

Part of the beauty of Bach's choral music, such as "*Brich an, o schönes Morgenlicht,*" is that it is organic and breathes as each phrase unfolds. Although all of my students have years' of experience singing, thinking about breath and direction of a musical line is not something that necessarily comes naturally to young string players who are sometimes more worried about having a straight bow, the correct fingers in the correct places on the fingerboard and a bent thumb in their bow hold than about the resulting line of music. However, the explicit need for a flowing, breathing melody in the *Chorale* challenged my students musically and, with a little practice, they learned to 'breathe' not only in their own playing, but also to 'breathe' as a large group. One of the results of this development is that their ensemble skills improved greatly and they play far better together now than ever before. Their sense of direction of the musical line also has improved significantly, which combined with musical 'breathing' has resulted in a much more musical and controlled performance.

Amazingly, we also came to intimately realize how Bach's music seamlessly meanders in and out of keys without the listener even being aware of the transitions, yet, for young string students who learn new notes in the context of major scale passages, these ever evolving scales and keys presented other new challenges. Very often these tricky technical passages also were continuous in motion, without pause, adding an additional level of difficulty. However, these challenges presented me with the opportunity to model and teach strategies for quality practicing, especially when coping with difficult technical passages. Additionally, my students experienced an important life lesson, which is especially apropos in the study of instrumental music: although a task might require significant work initially, all of the effort invested makes the resulting

outcome that much sweeter, allowing students to revel in their achievement and develop a sense of pride and ownership in their accomplishment.

Along the journey of learning “*A Walk With Bach*,” we also have had had some very memorable moments. It is fair to say that initially many students looked at their parts and were suspicious of these challenging pieces and were not quite sure what to think. However, over the past few weeks Bach has won them over entirely and I am frequently receiving requests to find more opportunities to play these pieces and am often asked what the next Bach piece is that we are going to learn.

It is becoming quite apparent that my students are beginning to have an elementary sense for Bach’s musical style and language as three different cellists asked if they could add the “traditional” I – V – I descending arpeggio at the end of the *Bouree* “just because it would make it sound more Bach-like” as they each explained.

Another cellist took her *Bouree* part home and was playing it when her dad dug out his cello and Bach Cello Suite music and proceeded to play the whole movement for her. She came back to school elated the next time I saw her and she took great interest when I shared videos and articles about the International Bach Competition in Leipzig this past summer. She still cannot stop talking about how excited she is about the upcoming concert and how glad she is that she moved here over the summer.

One violinist was quite anxious to tell me that she had advanced a level in her video game and all of sudden the music changed to Bach. Yet another violinist heard about the Bach Cello Suites and asked if he had written any violin suites. After I explained that he had written some violin partitas and was actually a talented violinist himself, she proceeded to ask if I could give to her a copy of a violin partita the following week.

My classroom is located next to the door leading to the playground and another day while the fifth graders were heading outside for recess, I heard a student whistling the melody of the *Allegro*.

A few weeks ago, after a particularly vigorous and spirited playing of the *Allegro*, the orchestra spontaneously erupted in cheers of delight after the final note and one student proclaimed, “We did it!” There was a smile on every face and they were very proud of their accomplishment as they had struggled with the technique initially. A week later, several students remarked, “Our Bach is ready. We’re ready for the concert and I can’t wait.”

...and the stories go on as we complete our final concert preparations. To have played a role in fostering such enthusiasm and interest in Bach, orchestra and music in general is truly humbling. There is no stopping what young people can achieve if we just give them the opportunity and the supports they need.

To close, perhaps the most inspiring moment of all: after a rehearsal a couple weeks ago a student walked up to me and asked, “Ms. Huttlin...you know the place where you found all this Bach music? Do you think they have any Beethoven music?” While nodding slowly in the affirmative and smiling, I answered, “Give me a little time – let me see what I can find!”

