



A Walk With Bach

A little over 327 years ago, a baby was born into a family of eight children in the small village of Eisenach, Germany. Although his parents were not wealthy, he was born into a very prestigious extended family of musicians. Even before he was born, anyone who was accomplished in music was called a “Bach.” Little did anyone know, later, the work of all other Bachs would pale in comparison to the musical achievements of this baby. His name was Johann Sebastian Bach.

Introduction *From Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565*

When Johann was 9 years old, his mother passed away and, one year later, his father died, leaving Johann an orphan. He was sent to live with his older brother, Christoph, in North Germany. Christoph was responsible for teaching Johann to play keyboard instruments and Johann secretly studied his brother’s musical scores to learn about composition. Due to his fine singing voice, at the age of 15 Johann received a scholarship to attend the prestigious St. Michael’s School. It was there that he received a formal choral education and was introduced to both playing and repairing church organs.

Chorale *From Oratorio BWV 248*

Early in his career, Johann was hired as organist and music director in the court of Duke Wilhelm of Weimar. Later he worked for Prince Leopold of Cöthen. At each court, Johann composed, performed and conducted music to entertain the nobles. He had the great fortune to work with some of Germany’s finest musicians and wrote chamber music for them.

Bourree *From Cello Suite #3 in C Major, BWV 1009*

In 1723, Johann was hired as music director and organist at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig. He was also responsible for teaching the students of the St. Thomas school to sing, play musical instruments and understand music theory. His family lived in an apartment on the first floor of the school building. Johann Sebastian Bach continued to compose, perform and teach at St. Thomas until his death in 1750.

Allegro *From Brandenburg Concerto #3 in G Major, BWV 1048*

Chorale: Brich an, du schönes Morgenlicht From the *Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248*

Brich an, du schönes Morgenlicht,
Und laß den Himmel tagen!
Du Hirtenvolk, erstaune nicht,
Weil dir die Engel sagen,
Daß dieses schwache Knäbelein
Sol unser Trost und Freude sein,
Dazu den Satan zwingen
Und alles wiederbringen.

*Break out, O beautiful light of morning,
and let the heavens dawn!
You shepherd folk, do not fear
because the angels tell you
that this weak baby boy
shall be our consolation and joy,
subdue Satan
and bring peace at last!*



St. Thomas Church – Site of the Premiere
of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248*
Leipzig, Germany

Bach's letter to School Friend Georg Erdmann

Most Honored Sir,

Your Honor will have the goodness to excuse an old and faithful servant for taking the liberty of disturbing you with the present letter. It must be nearly four years since Your Honor favored me with a kind answer to the letter I sent you; I remember that at that time you graciously asked me to give you some news of what had happened to me, and I humbly take this opportunity of providing you with the same. You know the course of my life from my youth up until the change in my fortunes that took me to Cöthen as Capellmeister. There I had a gracious Prince, who both loved and knew music, and in his service I intended to spend the rest of my life. It must happen, however, that the said *Serenissimus* should marry a Princess of Berenburg, and that then the impression should arise that the musical interests of the said Prince had become somewhat lukewarm, especially as the new Princess seemed to be unmusical; and it pleased God that I should be called hither to be *Director Musices* and Cantor at the St. Thomas School. Though at first, indeed, it did not seem at all proper to me to change my position of Capellmeister for that of Cantor. Wherefore, then, I postponed my decision for a quarter of a year; but this post was described to me in such favorable terms that finally (particularly since my sons seemed inclined toward [university] studies) I cast my lot, in the name of the Lord, and made the journey to Leipzig, took my examination, and then made the change of position. Here, by God's will, I am still in service. But since (1) I find that the post is by no means so lucrative as was described to me; (2) I have failed to obtain many of the fees pertaining to the office; (3) the place is very expensive and (4) the authorities are odd and little interested in music, so that I must live amid almost continual vexation, envy, and persecution; accordingly I shall be forced, with God's help, to seek my fortune elsewhere. Should Your Honor know or find a suitable post in your city for an old and faithful servant, I beg you most humbly to put in a most gracious word of recommendation for me – I shall not fail to do my best to give satisfaction and justify your most gracious intercession in my behalf. My present post amounts to about 700 thaler, and when there are rather more funerals than usual, the fees rise in proportion; but when a healthy wind blows, they fall accordingly, as for example last year, when I lost fees that would ordinarily come in from funerals to an amount of more than 100 thaler. In Thuringia I could

get along better on 400 thaler than here with twice that many, because of the excessively high cost of living.

Now I must add a little about my domestic situation. I am married for the second time, my late first wife having died in Cöthen. From the first marriage I have three sons and one daughter living, whom Your Honor will graciously remember having seen in Weimar. From the second marriage I have one son and two daughters living. My eldest son is a *Studiosus Juris*, and of the other two [from the first marriage], one is in the *prima* class [the top class of school] and the other in the *secunda*, and the eldest daughter is also still unmarried. The children of my second marriage are still small, the eldest, a boy, being six years old. But they are all born musicians, and I can assure you that I can already form an ensemble both *vocaliter* and *instrumentaliter* within my family, particularly since my present wife sings a good, clear soprano, and my eldest daughter, too, joins in not badly. I shall transgress the bounds of courtesy if I burden Your Honor any further, and I therefore hasten to close, remaining with most devoted respect my whole life long.

Your Honor's most obedient and devoted servant

Joh. Sebast. Bach

Leipzig, October 28, 1730



Hans, D. T. and Mendel, A.. (1998). *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*. New York, New York: Norton and Company, Inc..



Be a History Detective!

Questions to Consider...

1) At the beginning of the letter, Bach uses some interesting nicknames.

Who is “Your Honor”? _____

Who is “an old and faithful servant”? _____

2) What happened to Bach’s job in Cöthen? Did he like the job?

3) Where did Bach go after he worked in Cöthen? What job did he take?

4) What is wrong with his current work?

5) What does Bach ask Georg Erdmann to do?

6) How much money is Bach paid at his present position? What is wrong with that? How does he sometimes get a little extra money?

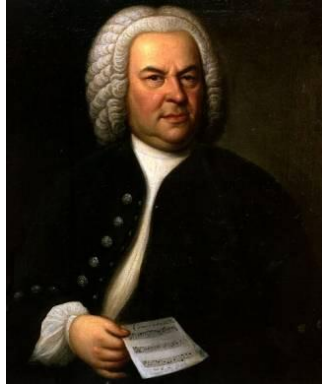
7) Describe Bach's family. How has it changed over time?

8) Who is musical in Bach's family?

9) Why did Bach send this letter?

Draw a picture of what life might have been like in the Bach household





Becoming Bach

Now that you know so much about Johann Sebastian Bach, pretend that you are J. S. Bach and you need to write a letter.

- Choose a recipient for your letter based on what you know about him.
- Then choose a concern or issue that you wish to discuss in the letter.
- Finally, select ten facts about J. S. Bach that you can smoothly incorporate into the letter.

Recipient for the letter: _____

Concern or issue in the letter: _____

Date for the letter: _____

Ten Facts:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

10)

If you lived in the time of Bach...

Wages and Costs in the Time of J. S. Bach

Conversion

1 thaler = \$72.00 in modern currency

1 groschen = \$3.00 in modern currency

1 pfennig = \$0.25 in modern currency

Bach's Remuneration

Salary and Wage Details	18 th Century Currency	Modern Currency
Salary at St. Thomas School and Church	700 thaler	\$50,400
Bach's annual salary, without benefits, as Capellmeister in Cöthen, 1717.	400 thaler	\$28,800
Anna Magdalena Bach's annual salary as Cöthen court singer, 1722.	300 thaler	\$21,600
Bach's annual fee for private study with him, including room and board, 1712.	100 thaler	\$7,200
Honorarium for a congratulatory cantata, 1736, 1738.	50 thaler	\$3,600
Organ examination fee, 1746.	22 thaler	\$1,584
Honorarium for Guest Performance in a Church, 1713, 1717.	12 thaler	\$864
Fee for a keyboard lesson to a nobleman	6 thaler	\$432
Cantor's fee for weddings and funerals in Leipzig (according to St. Thomas), 1723	1 thaler	\$78
Travel expenses, per diem for meals	16 groschen	\$48
Semi-annual fee for maintenance of instruments belonging to St. Nicholas Church (1728)	8 thaler, 3 groschen, 6 pfennig)	\$586.50

Cost of Living

Item	Cost Translated into Modern Currency
1 quart of milk (1725)	\$1.25
1 quart of beer (1699)	\$1.50
1 quart of ordinary wine	\$9.50
1 quart of better wine	\$18.00
15 eggs (1762)	\$9.75
1 egg	\$0.65
1 tub of butter (approx. 4 quarts) (1710)	\$14.25
1 pound of veal (1699)	\$3.50
1 pound of beef (1699) or ham (1697)	\$3.75
103 liters (1 bushel) of rye grain	\$64.50
1 pound of wax candles (1725)	\$2.50
480 sheets of ordinary paper (1725)	\$62.00
480 sheets of fine paper (1717)	\$79.25
Fortepiano	\$8,280
Harpsichord	\$3600 or \$5760
Lute	\$1,512
Violin, made by Jacobus Stainer	\$576
Ordinary violin	\$144
Harpsichord Rental for one month	\$96

Wages for Other Workers

Type of Worker	Remuneration
Female child maid (1700)	\$1.50 per day
Female adult maid (1699)	\$4.50 per day
Gravedigger (1700-1708)	\$18.00 per grave
Carpenter – winter (1725)	\$21.00 per day
Carpenter – summer (1725)	\$24.00 per day
Barber (1722-1729)	\$3,600 annually
Pastor (1722-1729)	\$12,600 annually



Hans, D. T. and Mendel, A.. (1998). *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*. New York, New York: Norton and Company, Inc..

The New Face of Bach



'He was a very dynamic man, with this reconstruction you can see it.'—
*Joerg Hansen,
Bachhaus Museum*

The computer-modeled forensic facial reconstruction of Johann Sebastian Bach is on display during a news conference in Berlin, Germany. (Herbert Knosowski/Associated Press)

True face of Bach unveiled by forensic experts

Saturday, March 1, 2008

[University of Dundee: Bach's reconstructed face](#)

Forensic experts in Scotland have digitally rebuilt the face of German composer Johann Sebastian Bach, revealing a rather portly, jovial-looking gentleman.

Using a bronze cast of Bach's skull, researchers at Dundee University re-created the 18th century composer's face on a commission from the Bachhaus Museum in Germany.

"We carried out a laser scan of the skull, which allowed us to re-create the musculature and skin of the face on our computer system," said Caroline Wilkinson, from the university's center for forensic and medical art.

The resulting image is of a thick-set, friendly-looking man with a broad face, wide, puffy eyes and closely-shorn white hair.

"For most people, Bach is an old man in a wig; it is a stylized image, we have no realistic portrait of him," said Joerg Hansen, managing director of the museum. Hansen added that the new image made the composer "look interesting."

"He was a very dynamic man. With this reconstruction you can see it," Hansen said.

The official picture will go on display at the Bachhaus Museum, in the eastern German town of Eisenach, Bach's birthplace, this month.

Bach's bones were excavated in 1894 and sculptors used them to help create a bust in 1908, but it was still based on an inaccurate portrait of the composer.

Researchers also took into account descriptions of Bach's physical characteristics — he had eye problems and swollen eyelids — and incorporated them into the new image.

Museum officials say having a realistic portrait of the artist is just another way of imagining him as a person.

"It's not really that important to know what he looked like — we love Bach through his music, that is why people come to the museum — but they are also interested in the man," Hansen said.

Bach, who died in 1750, is venerated for creating music of great depth and beauty. Some of his most cherished compositions include *The Brandenburg Concertos*, *The Goldberg Variations* and *Mass in B Minor*.

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>



J. S. Bach is interred beneath the altar at St. Thomas Church
Leipzig, Germany