

Bach, Handel & Vivaldi

The 3 Great Composers
of the Baroque Period

There were more than
800 composers active in the
Baroque period whose music is published.

Of these, there are **about 65**
whose names are still known today,
mostly by musicians.

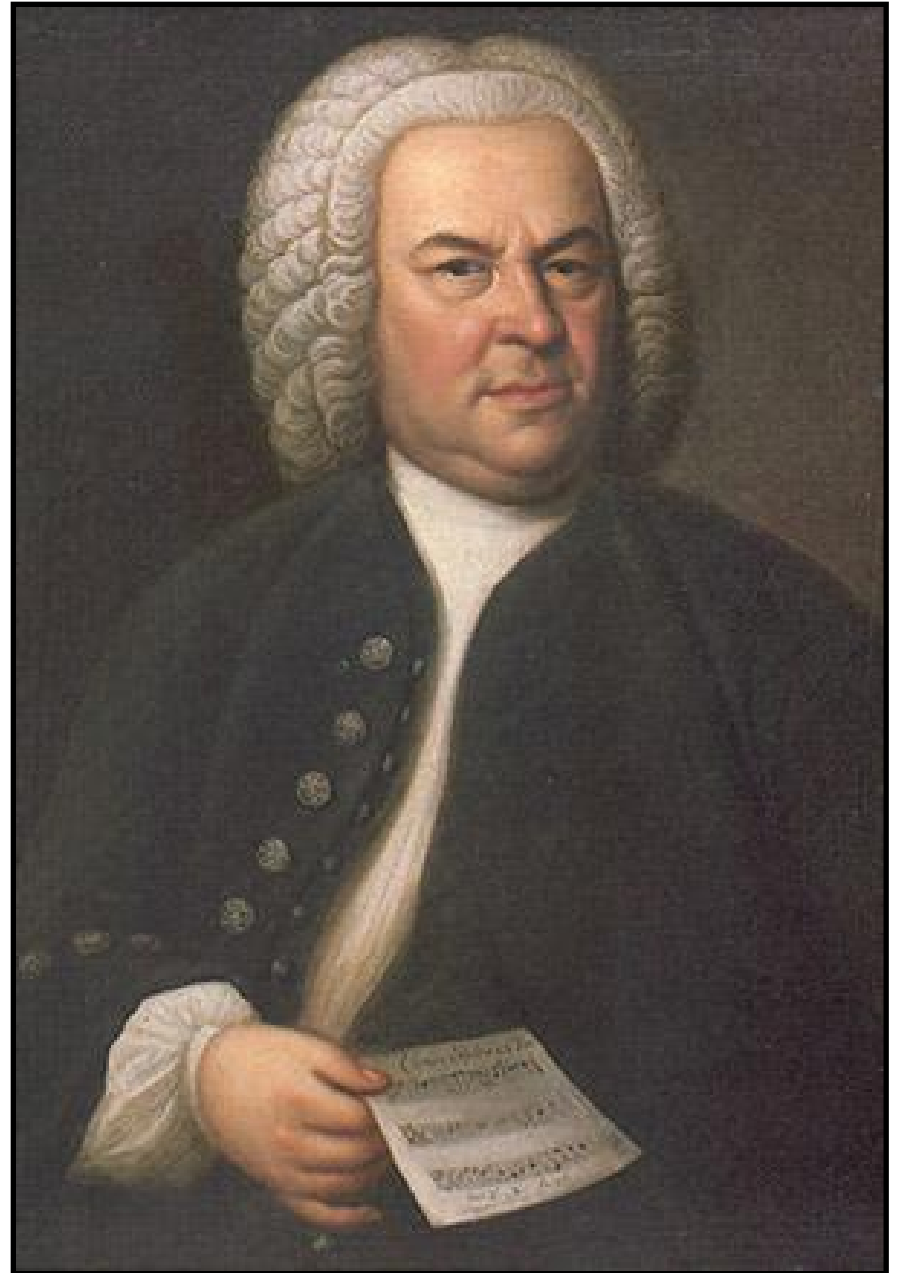
But among those 65 Baroque composers
whose music is remembered today,
3 names stand out far above the rest:

- **Johann Sebastian Bach**
- **George Frederick Handel**
- **Antonio Vivaldi**

Johann Sebastian Bach

(also called
J.S. Bach)

German;
1685-1750



Johann Sebastian Bach

Occupations:

organist & church choir director

harpsichordist, violinist, violist

music teacher

composer

Johann Sebastian Bach

composed:

- **Sacred choral music**,
including over 200 cantatas
 - **Organ music**,
including Preludes and Fugues
 - **Harpsichord music**
- **Chamber music and works for
chamber orchestra**

Following the development of a new system of tuning for musical instruments called **Equal Temperament** that enabled keyboard instruments to play in any key, Bach composed a collection of **24 preludes and fugues in every major and minor key**, called ***The Well-Tempered Klavier.*** *

This was the first major work in the history of music to utilize every major and minor key.

**** Klavier is the German word for the piano.***

Prior to the adoption of **Equal Temperament** tuning, instruments that had mechanical tone production could only play in a few related keys without sounding badly out of tune.

The adoption of **Equal Temperament** tuning and Bach's composition of ***The Well-Tempered Klavier*** paved the way for a new system of harmony in which any of the 12 chromatic tones (the black and white keys on the piano) could be used harmonically in any key.

For this reason, ***The Well-Tempered Klavier*** is considered one of the most important and influential works in musical history.

Bach wrote this music for other musicians, and for future generations to study. His dedication in the printed music states:

“For the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning, and especially for the pastime of those already skilled in this study.”

Johann Sebastian Bach
is widely considered to be
**the greatest composer
of the Baroque period
and
one of the greatest composers
of all periods of musical history.**

Musical Examples - Bach

The next two slides contain videos of two of J.S. Bach's very well-known compositions.

The first is a very simple work, Bach's

Prelude No. 1 in C from **The Well-Tempered Clavier**.

This work consists of a steady rhythmic pattern that repeats continuously as the harmony changes measure by measure, sometimes changing only one note.

The second work is one of Bach's more complex works, the famous **Prelude and Fugue in D Minor for organ**.

Please listen to the them in their entirety.

J.S. Bach Musical Example 1

Prelude No. 1 in C Major, BWV 846

from

J.S Bach's *The Well-Tempered Klavier*
performed by the legendary Canadian pianist

Glenn Gould

[Click to Open Baroque Opera Musical Example 1](#)

To open the video in a new window, press and hold the Shift Key when you click the above link. When you finish viewing, close the new window to return to the slide presentation.

J.S. Bach Musical Example 2

Toccata and Fugue in D minor
for Organ

performed by Stephen Malinowski, organist

[Click to Open J.S. Bach Musical Example 2](#)

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George Frederic Handel

German-
English;
1685-1759

George Frederik Handel

Occupations:

violinist, harpsichordist
conductor, opera composer
theatre manager
stock investor

George Frederik Handel

composed:

- **Sacred choral music,**
including 29 oratorios
including his famous oratorio, ***Messiah***
- **Operas (42)**
- **Many works for chamber orchestra**
including **27 concerti grossi** and
16 organ concerti

Handel's most important work is probably his oratorio, **Messiah**, which contains some of the best-known choral music ever written, most notably the “**Hallelujah Chorus.**”

Handel is also known today as the earliest major composer in musical history whose **operas** are part of the **standard repertory.**

Opera companies all over the world perform Handel's operas on a regular basis.

Musical Examples - Handel

The first example of music by Handel is the very famous **“Hallelujah” Chorus** from Handel’s oratorio, **Messiah**.

An **oratorio** is a large work for chorus, solo voices and orchestra, of which **Handel's Messiah** is the most famous example.

The **“Hallelujah” Chorus** is among the most famous and recognizable choral works in Western music. The chorus is accompanied by a Baroque orchestra.

George Frederik Handel Musical Example 1

Hallelujah Chorus
from
Handel's Oratorio, ***Messiah***

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Musical Examples - Handel

The second example of Handel's music is a famous **recitative and aria** from Handel's opera **Xerxes**, based on the life of King Xerxes of Persia who lived from 519 to 465 BC.

A **recitative** (from the Italian word, "recitativo") is a type of vocal music in an **opera, cantata or oratorio** in which the words are sung in a rhythmically-free way that resembles speech.

An **aria** is a song-like composition in an **opera, cantata or oratorio** for a solo voice, usually with instrumental or orchestral accompaniment.

George Frederik Handel Musical Example 2

Aria, “Ombra mai fu”

from

Handel’s Opera, *Xerxes*
performed by Canadian contralto

Maureen Forrester

[Click to Open Handel Musical Example 2](#)

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Antonio Vivaldi

Italian;
1678-1741

Antonio Vivaldi

Occupations:

- Catholic priest
 - violinist
- music teacher
 - conductor

Antonio Vivaldi

composed:

- **More than 500 concertos**
including more than 200
for violin solo and orchestra
- **Sacred choral works,**
including his best known choral work,
Gloria in D
- **More than 40 operas**

Vivaldi's most important and best-known work is **The Four Seasons**, a group of 4 concertos for solo violin, string orchestra and harpsichord.

Concerto is an Italian word used to describe a musical composition, usually consisting of three sections or movements, **for one or more solo instruments accompanied by an orchestra.**

The concerto was one of the most important musical genres of the Baroque period.

Although Vivaldi composed more than **500 concertos** for various instruments, **The Four Seasons** is by far his best-known work.

Part of the reason for this is that **The Four Seasons** is one of the earliest examples of what is known as **program music**.

Program music is a kind of instrumental music that tells a story or depicts a scene.

In **Vivaldi's The Four Seasons**, the music of each of the four concertos depicts one of the seasons of the year: **Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter**. Vivaldi's music in each of these concertos captures a real sense of the feeling of each season.

Listen now to the **1st movement** of Vivaldi's violin concerto entitled **Spring**. And as you listen, notice how Vivaldi uses a technique that is characteristic of Baroque music: **terraced dynamics**, that is, the alteration of loud and soft musical passages.

Antonio Vivaldi Musical Example 1

“Spring” from ***The Seasons***

1st Movement: Allegro

Ukrainian Festival Orchestra

Josef Spacek – violin

Theodore Kuchar – conductor

Recorded live at Lviv Organ Hall

August 7, 2018

[Click to Open Vivaldi Musical Example 1](#)

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Like most composers of the Baroque period, Vivaldi also composed a considerable number of sacred choral works in Latin. One of these, a setting of the **“Gloria in excelsis”** part of the **Latin Mass**, is one of the most frequently-performed choral works in the world.

As the final example of Vivaldi’s music, please listen to the opening movement of **Vivaldi’s Gloria in D.**

It is scored for chorus, two soloists and a small orchestra consisting of **oboe, trumpet, strings and continuo.**

Antonio Vivaldi Musical Example 2

“Gloria In Excelsis Deo”
from Vivaldi’s ***Gloria in D***

John Aldis Choir
English Chamber Orchestra
Vittorio Negri, Conductor

[Click to Open Vivaldi Musical Example 2](#)

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Audio Feature:

The Relationship Between Bach & Handel

3 minutes, 35 seconds

[Click to Open Audio Feature](#)

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