


What was wrong with those people tonight? Never have I heard such a cacophony of coughs before. Is there an epidemic? Slap them! Do me a favour, slap them, it was awful! - Maggie Smith

**SAVE
THE
DATE**
20.03.16

6 SOLOISTS
3 CHOIRS
2 ORCHESTRAS
1 MONUMENTAL WORK

NEWCASTLE
UNIVERSITY
CHOIR
enlighten enrich enjoy



Johann Sebastian Bach



“I sometimes think I will spend the rest of my life listening to Bach”, writes a friend of mine. “Not every waking hour, but the time I might otherwise spend listening to other lesser composers, reading magazines and blogs and generally doing other unchallenging stuff.”

“Other composers did produce some good music: Mozart some pretty tunes, Beethoven some stirring symphonies, Britten some moving operas, Lennon and McCartney some fine songs. But none repay repeated listening the way Johann Sebastian does. I can listen to a work of Bach – say the Saint Matthew Passion – over and over and discover something new each time... I am pretty sure Bach was incapable of producing boring or poor music.”

Bach was part of a remarkable family of musicians. When he compiled his family tree in 1835, it included 53 musicians over a period of less than 200 years.

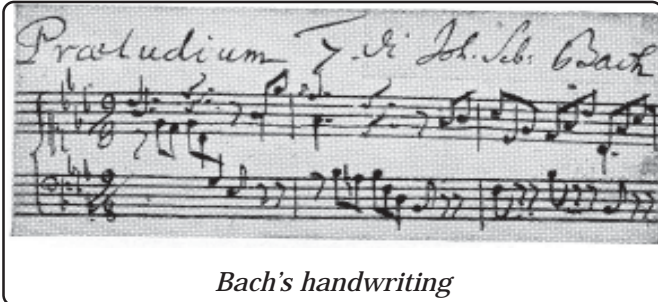
As a young man, he was in trouble with a bassoonist who couldn't play an obbligato riff that Bach wrote for him. The bassoonist and his friends waylaid Bach on his way home, Bach

defended himself with his sword, and the matter ended up before a tribunal.

He was in trouble with authorities for allowing a woman to sing in his choir – the rule was strictly men only. Bach quit his job and married the woman.

In 1717 he was jailed for nearly a month following a violent argument with his boss at Weimar.

Bach composed a total of 972 works, including vocal, choral, keyboard and instrumental pieces.



Bach's handwriting

He also sired twenty children to two wives – only nine of whom survived him

He was regarded as a great organist – an obituary said “Our Bach was the greatest organ and clavier player that ever lived.”

In his old age Bach began to lose his eyesight. He was persuaded to undergo two operations in early 1750, but the procedures left him blind and ruined his health. He died of a stroke and was buried at Old St. John's Cemetery in Leipzig. His grave went unmarked for nearly 150 years.

At the time of his death, he was regarded as out of fashion, and few of his works were published in his lifetime – many remained unknown until the 19th century. Now he is regarded as the greatest composer of the Baroque era. He is also the popular choice of babies and goldfish.

Kazutaka Shinozuka of Keio University's Department of Psychology has discovered that “goldfish could detect complex properties of sounds, such as pitch and timbre.” Furthermore, they also can distinguish one composer from another. The goldfish in question showed a marked preference for Bach's *Toccatà and Fugue in D minor* over *The Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky.

“Scientific studies have demonstrated that fish are more intelligent than people believe,” says Shinozuka. “Please value your goldfish!”

Earlier studies on pigeons and songbirds suggest that Bach is also their preferred choice.

Tamarin monkeys, on the other hand, showed little response to Bach, but surprisingly seemed to

calm down whenever they heard the heavy metal band Metallica.

Some babies react to music even before they are born, In a recent study involving one hundred women, 91 per cent of their 16-week-old fetuses moved their mouths and 73 per cent stuck out their tongues as if they were attempting to ‘sing along’. Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* was the most popular choice, but Bach's *Partita for Flute* solo ran a close second.

The study suggests that music and other sounds could be used to activate brain circuits early, essentially kick-starting the development of the infants' communication skills in utero.

British conductor John Eliot Gardiner is a great champion of Bach and his works. When asked what he thought of the man, he answered “Convivial, cantankerous, remote, present, full of humor but deeply serious. All dichotomies. But a great guy to go out and have a beer with.”

St Matthew Passion is regarded as one of his major works. Critic Tom Huiezena writes: “Bach's *Passion* continues to move audiences nearly three centuries after it was first heard in St. Thomas's Church in Leipzig, Germany. Standing as one of the pillars of Western sacred music, it is at once monumental and intimate, deeply sorrowful and powerful.”

This is your chance to see why. The Great Hall at the University, 2pm Sunday 20th March 2016.

“My jazz muso friends sometimes ask me what it's like to perform looking out into a sea of people twice or thrice my age; to live a life surrounded by the elderly. I tell them it's incredibly rewarding to play music that is 200 years old, on a 200-year-old instrument for 50-year-olds who are finding something completely new to them that enriches their lives, or for 70-plus-year-olds who've seen it all yet who, in these twilight years, still can't get enough of Beethoven and Mozart. When performer and audience share the experience of a Brahms slow movement in a concert hall, we're all older and wiser for it, just as a Mendelssohn scherzo makes us all giddy children again, whether we're Boomers, Beliebers or Gen-Y.

When we play and listen to classical music, age is no boundary.”

- Kristian Winther,
who plays a 1784 Guadagnini Violin
with The Australian String Quartet.