



Johann Sebastian Bach 1685-1750

One of the greatest gifts we can give, or receive, is the gift of joy. You will have to look hard to find any who have ever given more joy to the world than Johann Sebastian Bach. Even now more than 250 years after he died, Bach's music still lifts our hearts and energizes the soul.

Bach wrote his music for God. Most of his works are explicitly biblical. The famous missionary doctor Albert Schweitzer, who was also an expert on Bach, called him "the Fifth Evangelist." Bach's music is indisputably in a league by itself.

Bach's heavenly sounds were conceived in a life beset by earthly struggles and trials. Born into a family of musicians, Johann learned to sing and play several instruments at an early age. But both parents died before he was ten. Johann got his first organist job at age 17, but even then there were conflicts with the church leaders. They insisted that he direct the choir – which was notable lacking in musical ability. Already, Bach was writing innovative choral pieces, but his singers couldn't handle them. And he lacked the patience to put up with them, even to the point of engaging in a street fight with one of the choir members.

He moved to another church and a new conflict. They complained couldn't Bach write something less ornate – something that would draw attention to God and not to the music itself? Bach strongly protested that his aim was to create "well-regulated church music to the glory of God." He took a new job with the Duke of Weimer, a respected religious man who appreciated good music. This was a fertile period in Bach's life. He fathered seven children, and gave birth to a new cantata each month. Bach set before himself and accomplished the seemingly impossible task of preparing a different cantata for every Sunday for a three-year period. And remember that he not only had to create the music, but also get it copied for the performers and rehearse with them. But the relationship with the duke deteriorated. When Bach decided to take another job, the duke had him arrested and jailed for a month.

The struggles continued. Shortly after taking the new job, his wife died, leaving him with a house full of children. A second marriage to Anna Magdalena was a happy one. She supported his musical work, sang his compositions in a bold soprano, and bore him thirteen more children.

His final and most important position was as the Cantor of the Tomasschule at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, Germany. He suffered a stroke and died July 28, 1750. He was 65 years old. It is noted that there are more recordings of Bach's music than of any other composer. One count found over one thousand different albums.