

Music of the Baroque Era: Johann Sebastian Bach (MH 723/823)

Class meetings: Mondays, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 noon, FLR 281

Office hours: immediately after class, and by appointment

Instructor: David Schulenberg (office and voice mail at Wagner College: 718-420-4288; email: dlschulenberg@outlook.com). *The best way to reach me is by email.*

This graduate course surveys the music of J. S. Bach and the ways in which it has been interpreted by musicologists, music theorists, and performers. After an introduction to Bach studies, we shall study examples of Bach's compositions in various genres, using both eighteenth-century sources and modern editions. We shall also read representative writings about each type of work, our ultimate aim being to consider how the music potentially conveys meaning both on the page and in performance.

Our objectives include:

- acquiring a basic knowledge of Bach's biography, the content and range of his oeuvre, and its historical and cultural contexts;
- gaining familiarity with relevant primary and secondary sources and research methods;
- learning appropriate analytic approaches for each work;
- awareness of performance issues raised by each work;
- ability to formulate research questions, give aural presentations, and write a research paper on a topic relating to one or more works by J. S. Bach.

Our basic plan, after two introductory meetings, will be to examine a small number of works each week representing a particular genre. At each meeting, members of the group will give presentations on (a) sources and editions; (b) musical analysis; (c) critical interpretation or meaning; (d) and performance issues, as these relate to the music studied that week. Our goal will not be comprehensive study of the music and the literature about it, but rather general familiarity with the material and understanding of the possibilities that exist for further exploration of it. At the end of the semester, each member will give a presentation to the group on a research topic of his or her own choice, summarizing the content of a formal paper which is due at the last class meeting.

Because of the vastness and richness of Bach's output, and of writings about it, we shall study mature works that have been subjects of extensive scholarship and interpretation—not early compositions or those of Bach's predecessors or contemporaries, which, although fascinating, would take time away from the goals outlined above. During the first half of the semester (up to spring break) we shall examine selections from Bach's instrumental music, turning to vocal music in the second half.

Work for the course. This course is conducted as a seminar. Each class member is expected to come to every meeting prepared to discuss specific reading and study assignments and to give aural presentations as scheduled by the instructor. Presentations will normally be accompanied by printed handouts or equivalent electronic displays that include bibliography and musical examples (scores, audio recordings) as appropriate. Class members not giving presentations on a particular day are expected to participate actively by responding to and raising questions about presentations by others.

There is no textbook, but reading assignments for each week are listed in a separate “Reading List” file. Readings and other assignments must be done *prior* to the meeting at which they will be discussed. Many readings are in e-books and in non-circulating items in the Mugar Library. Some readings and scores will be shared through a Dropbox folder; class members will receive an email message inviting them to join the latter.

An important part of preparing for each meeting is to listen to the assigned works while following the score. It is each class member’s responsibility to locate scores and recordings in the library or online. Over the course of the semester we will compile a list of recordings, shared and jointly edited on Dropbox, so please note URLs and names of performers for online recordings and add this information to the online listening log. For vocal works, first read a translation of the text, either in Dürr/Jones or in [Z. Philip Ambrose’s online text database](#).

The chief written outcome of the semester is the paper, due at the final regular class meeting. It should comprise at least 3000 words (approximately 12 double-spaced pages), including notes and bibliography, and must be in a format acceptable for submission to a journal or other formal publication. The final presentation, which will summarize the content or some aspect of the paper, should be comparable to talks presented at meetings of organizations such as the American Musicological Society or the National Flute Association.

Grading. Final grades will be based in equal proportion on (1) attendance at, preparation for, and participation in seminar meetings; (2) seminar presentations as assigned; and (3) final paper and presentation. Absences from seminar meetings, except for illness or emergency, will result in a reduction of grade. If you know in advance that you must miss a meeting, please notify me by email at least 48 hours prior to the meeting in question, or one week previously if you are scheduled to give a presentation at that meeting.

Semester plan. The semester is divided into segments as follows:
introduction to Bach studies (meetings 1–2)
instrumental music (meetings 3–6)
vocal music (meetings 7–11)
final presentations (meetings 12–13)

Details are listed below. **Bold type** indicates written work to turn in. Reading and study assignments are in a separate “bibliography and work list” file.

class date topic / assignment due

1	1/25	introduction to Bach studies
2	2/1	what Bach wrote; what has been written about him; meaning in (Bach’s) music
3	2/8	keyboard chorales / preliminary statement of topic for final project
	[2/15	Presidents’ Day holiday]
4	2/16*	preludes and fugues
5	2/22	suites and sonatas / prospectus for final project
6	2/29	concertos

- [3/7 spring break]
- 7 3/14 Weimar vocal works / **outline for final paper**
- 8 3/21 Leipzig: first *Jahrgang*
- 9 3/28 Leipzig: second *Jahrgang* (“chorale cantatas”)/ **partial draft of final paper**
- 10 4/4 passion and oratorio
- 11 4/11 secular vocal works / **outline for final presentation**
[4/18 Patriots’ Day holiday]
- 12 4/20** final presentations
- 13 4/25 final presentations / **final paper**

*class meets on Tuesday

**scheduled Wednesday meeting; we will reschedule during the period May 2–7