You’ve heard his music on the radio. You’ve heard it in shopping centres and on T.V. advertisements. You may even have heard it performed by a rock band. Would it surprise you to learn that the brilliant musician in question was born over 300 years ago? His name is Johann Sebastian Bach and he is one of the greatest composers of classical music the world has ever known.

JS Bach was born in Germany in 1685 and came from a family full of famous musicians. His ideal early childhood was struck by tragedy when both his parents died within a year of each other before his tenth birthday. He went to live with his brother who taught him to play the organ and before long, his career began to flourish. Although we know Bach as a famous composer, he was best known in his day as a skilled violinist, organist and harpsichordist (a keyboard instrument which preceded the piano).

Bach lived during the Baroque era, a term which describes the fancy and complex style of music and art produced around the late 1600’s and early 1700’s. He wrote in all the popular musical forms of the day, depending on where he was working at the time. Whilst working as a church musician he wrote many of his famous cantatas, which are long musical works to be played and sung during church services. These works demonstrate his deep religious beliefs, which were a very important part of his life and music. When he was employed as a court musician, Bach wrote many beautiful instrumental works for his royal employers, including sonatas, suites and concertos for a wide variety of instruments.

Bach’s final job was working as Musical Director for the city of Leipzig. Here he was incredibly busy composing and directing music for four churches and two choirs as well as producing any music needed for special occasions. He was fortunate to have a wife who was skilled at copying music very quickly, as there were no photocopiers around back then!

Despite his genius as a musician, Bach was a devoted family man. He had twenty children to two different wives. Towards the end of his life, Bach slowly lost his sight and died at the age of 65 of complications resulting from eye surgery. He left behind him a rich musical legacy which we can still enjoy today.

**Fast Facts**

- **Name:** Johann Sebastian Bach
- **Dates:** 1685-1750
- **Country of birth:** Germany
- **Historical Era:** Baroque
- **Contemporary Composers:** Handel, Vivaldi
- **Contemporary Artists:** Rembrandt
- **Other People/Events:** Isaac Newton, George Washington, Voltaire, invention of the steam boiler

**Fun Fact**

A recording of Bach’s music is floating in outer space! In 1977, the spacecraft Voyager 1 and 2 were launched to probe areas of outer space never before explored. On board was a “Golden Record,” a collection of the very best examples of human life and achievement, intended as a greeting to any form of life that may find it. Three recordings of Bach’s music were chosen to be included in this “Who’s Who” of human history.
Do you know what the name “Bach” means when translated into English?
Find out by writing the correct answers and reading the word formed by the shaded boxes.
(All the information you need is in the Fact Sheet)

1  The name of the keyboard instrument which preceded the piano

2  The form of music written to be performed in a church service

3  One of the instruments Bach played

4  The town where Bach served as Musical Director

5  The name of the style of music written in the late 1600s-early 1700s

6  The country of Bach’s birth

Crack the Code
What did Bach’s employer, Duke Wilhelm Ernst do when Bach announced that he was looking for a new job?

Code Key

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |
In the attic of a modest home in Germany in the late 1600s, a small boy was secretly teaching himself to play the keyboard. His ambitious father’s plans for him to become a lawyer did not include music lessons, so his practice was all done behind his father’s back, or, as it were, above his head! His father eventually found out about it and provided music lessons, but was still insistent that his son pursue a proper career. It was not until after the death of his father that George Frideric Handel began formal music training and went onto become one of the finest composers of the Baroque era.

Handel’s early musical training began in Germany, but he found Germany boring and uninspiring, so he went to Italy to study his first love, opera. He lived in Italy for three years and learned from some of the greatest Italian composers about opera and how to make words sing.

Handel returned to Germany in order to work for the Elector of Hanover, on the condition that he be allowed to take some time off, right away, to go to London. The Elector agreed and after some time in London, he eventually went back to work….for one summer. He once again got itchy feet and his next trip to London lasted for the rest of his life.

Apart from operas, Handel wrote a wide variety of instrumental music including concertos, suites, sonatas and other types of chamber music. He also wrote a great deal of vocal music including cantatas and oratorios. His oratorios were extremely popular in London, and one of them, The Messiah, became his best known work. The first performance of the messiah was in Dublin, but at the first London performance, the King was in attendance and was so impressed with the “Hallelujah Chorus“ from this work that he stood to his feet. Of course, when the King stands, everyone stands - and to this day, audiences have continued the tradition to stand during the “Hallelujah Chorus”.

Towards the end of his life, Handel went blind. One story says that it was because he had practiced his keyboard so much in the dark attic when he was a youngster. He was so well loved and respected in London, that when he died, over 3000 people attended his funeral and he was given the honor of being buried in Westminster Abbey.

Fun Fact

Handel wrote one of his best known pieces of orchestral music for his employer King George 1 (previously known as the Elector of Germany). It was first performed whilst the King was floating down the Thames River on a barge, with the orchestra on another barge floating close by. The King liked the long series of movements so much, that he asked for it to be played three times that day. Needless to say, Handel and the orchestra were exhausted. This piece of music is aptly named Water Music.
Answer the following questions about Handel using the answers from the Word Bank below. Then, find all those answers in the word search puzzle.

1. Where was Handel born? ________________
2. Where did he go to study music because home was too boring? ________________
3. Which country did Handel move to and come to call home? ________________
4. What profession did his father want him to follow? ________________
5. What kind of music was Handel’s first love? ________________
6. The __________ is Handel’s most well known oratorio.
7. The King of England stood when heard the ________________ Chorus?
8. Where was “The Messiah” first performed? ________________
9. Handel lived during which era of music? ________________
10. Originally, in Germany, Handel worked for the ________________ of Hanover, who eventually became the ________________ of England.

**Word Bank**

- Germany  Elector  Italy  king
- England  Baroque  lawyer  Dublin
- Opera  Hallelujah  oratorio  Messiah

**Word Search**

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H E S T B M E S S I A H
H L Q L A W Y E R Z L P
A E A B R W T M E S S U
J C A R O T N D Y O X Z
U T R D Q G E R M A N Y
L O N T U Q N W E R T L
E R Y U E B G I I O P A
L M O N B D L V K C X T
L G P F D S A I A E Z I
A H E H J K N L N T E Q
H I R E V A D K L L H G
O R A T O R I O W B E F
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From the remaining letters, put a box around the letters that spell our composer’s name.
In the 1920s, an Italian boarding school was doing a spring clean when it discovered boxes full of old music manuscripts. The school, having no idea what the music was, thought that they might be able to sell the music to raise some funds. They sent the music to a University scholar for evaluation. The scholar in question went into fits of excitement when he realized that the scores were previously unknown compositions from the almost equally unknown baroque composer Antonio Vivaldi. This discovery began a renewed interest in the music of Vivaldi, who was a very well known composer during his lifetime, but had fallen into relative obscurity. Thus, Vivaldi’s reputation as a worthy and equally important contemporary of Bach and Handel was reinstated.

Vivaldi was born in Venice, Italy. He was the son of a professional violin player who gave him an ideal start in his musical studies. At the age of 15, Vivaldi began studying to become a priest and thus, along with his bright red hair, he gained his life long nickname of Il Prete Rosso (The Red Priest). He did not actually end up performing the typical duties of a priest for very long because his struggle with a type of asthma left him short of breath and unable to recite Mass. Instead, he spent much of his life working in an orphanage teaching violin and directing the orchestra. Later in his life he traveled around Europe and earned a living writing and performing music.

Much of Vivaldi’s music was written for the orphans he worked with and includes over 500 concertos for various instruments, sonatas and other, operas and sacred vocal music. Some of his best known music is a series of violin concerti called The Four Seasons. Each concerto corresponds to a different season of the year, the most famous one being La Primavera (Spring).

At the height of his career, Vivaldi was well known and popular with royalty and nobility. He wrote a wedding cantata for Louis XV of France and was even knighted by the Roman Emperor, Charles VI. However, a combination of bad luck and the fact that musical styles were changing, left him abandoned and penniless. He died from an illness at the age of 63 and was buried in a pauper’s grave.
1 Word Search

O O B O E L O U T E B V
A T S S O P O V O N F E
L R U T E E I I R O E N
C E O R R O D V E I R I
V C A I L O L A A R D C
A N M I O R E L T O H E
E O N O R B O D M T A N
D C O L I N C I H A A L
V I S E L R A H C R U M
E A U C E L L O V O I O
I L P R E T E R O S S O
L I P R I M A V E R A N

CONCERTO
IL PRETO ROSSO
SONATA
OPERA
ORATORIO
PRIMAVERA
VENICE
VIOLIN
VIVALDI
CHARLES IV

2 Match these words from the word search to their definitions

Concerto City where Vivaldi was born
Primavera A piece with at least one soloist with orchestral accompaniment
Il Prete Rosso A piece for one or a few instruments accompanied by keyboard
Venice Spring
Opera The Red Priest
Violin A long vocal work with orchestral accompaniment that tells a story
Sonata The instrument Vivaldi played

3 Write the unused letters from the word search in order to reveal some of the instruments that Vivaldi wrote for. Some of them are unusual instruments that you may not have heard of. Do an internet search to find out what they are.

1 ___ ___ ___
2 ___ ___ ___
3 ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
4 ___ ___ ___
5 ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
6 ___ ___ ___ ___ , ___ ___ ___ ___
7 ___ ___ ___ ___
8 ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
9 ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
10 ___ ___ ___ ___
11 ___ ___ ___ ___