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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.



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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).



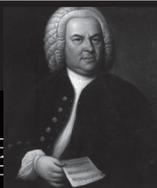
Bach lived during the **Baroque** era, a term which describes the fancy and complex style of music and art produced around the late 1600's and early 1700's. He wrote in all the popular musical forms of the day, depending on where he was working at the time. Whilst working as a church musician he wrote 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!

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.



Lesson Ideas

Design a Facebook profile for J.S. Bach. Include “Basic Information” (Network, Birthday, Relationship Status, Religious Views), “Personal Information” (Contact details, Education and Work), “Friends” (any significant people who lived at the same time as Bach) and create some “Groups” that Bach may have belonged to. Finish it off with a photo copied from the Fact Sheet. Students not familiar with Facebook could design a passport.

Imagine that you could invite J.S. Bach over for coffee. Make a list of three questions you would like to ask him about his life or the time in history that he lived. Have a class discussion on what the answers would be or choose a student to be Bach and ask them some of the questions. For an extra special addition to this activity, have the class bring in some gingerbread or other traditional German snack to share.

Extension Activity:

Find a work of art on the internet that was created around the same time that Bach was alive. Do some research to find some of the ways that the art work reflects the same Baroque style that Bach’s music does.

Here is somewhere to start: <http://www.alifetimeofcolor.com/study/timeline.html>

Listening Activity

Bach’s music has such universal appeal that it has been played in every conceivable fashion by every conceivable instrument. Below are two recordings of Bach’s well-known Toccata and Fugue in d minor. The first is a recording on an organ, the instrument it was originally written for. The second is played on an electric guitar and drum machine. Watch portions of both video recordings and discuss the differences.

Possible topics to consider in your discussion are:

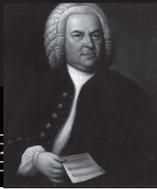
What are the similarities and differences between the two versions?

Which one do you like better? Why?

What do you think Bach would have thought of the electric guitar version?

Organ version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_FXoyr_FyFw

Electric Guitar Version: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itb7xpd8epA&feature=related>



Listening List

You can use your own recordings or view videos and get audio links to these pieces from:
http://www.funmusicco.com/private/pmlp_module2/resources/lesson1.html
(you'll need to login)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 2, 1st Movement
"Air" Orchestral Suite N° 3 in D Major

Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring Choral from Cantata 147
St Matthew Passion: Excerpts

Resource List

The Baroque Music website has an excellent pictorial history of Bach's life and times: <http://www.baroquemusic.org/bachillustrated.html>

A good site for a general historical and musical overview of the Baroque era: <http://www.essentialsofmusic.com/eras/brqcon.html>

Mr Bach Comes to Call from the Classical Kid's range of CD's is an excellent and engaging narrative of Bach's life, interspersed with excerpts of his greatest works. These CD's are often available in local libraries.

Art Links

Rembrandt: *Christ in The Storm On the Sea of Galilee*
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rembrandt_Christ_In_The_Storm_On_The_Sea_Of_Galilee.jpg