



Ricercare a 3

J. S. Bach

From the Musicial Offering

For Keyboard

Typeset by Peter Billam

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The Musical Offering

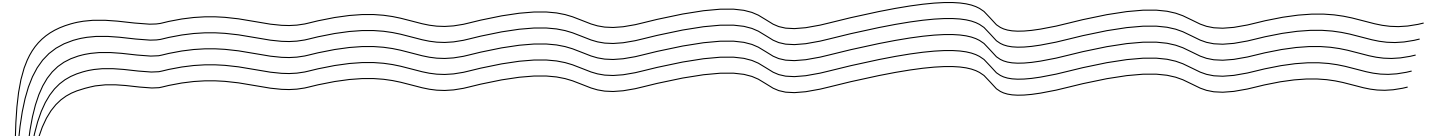
In May of 1747, after finishing the B minor Mass and the second book of the Well-Tempered Clavier, Johann Sebastian Bach travelled to Potsdam, accompanied by his son Wilhelm Friedeman, to visit his successful son Carl Philipp Emmanuel, who was personal harpsichordist to Frederick the Great of Prussia. Johann Sebastian was still a humble schoolteacher; he taught Latin and Music at St Thomas School in Leipzig.

Potsdam was a very musical court. Personal flute teacher to Frederick the Great was Johann Joachim Quantz, the finest flute player in the country, the author of the book "On Playing the Flute", and the only person allowed to find fault with the king's flute playing. Carl Philipp Emmanuel would have spent much time playing music with Quantz, and they must have sounded wonderful. Frederick himself was a fine flute player, and a composer whose works are still played by flute players today.

When Johann Sebastian arrived, the King immediately cancelled the evening's planned concert. He had an extensive collection of harpsichords, and Johann Sebastian, without being given time to change out of his travelling clothes, was ushered from room to room and asked to improvise on each one.

The King also had fifteen of the new fortepianos, which he correctly foresaw as the great new wave in music. They were loud modern inventions, where the strings were so thick that they could not even be plucked, but had to be hit with hammers. Silbermann, of Freyburg, had devised an elaborate mechanism to allow the hammer to rebound even as the key remained pressed. The fortepiano had some of the touch sensitivity of the clavichord, but was loud enough to be played in concert, even in public; however, it could not play vibrato, as the clavichord could. This was the only time that Johann Sebastian played on the new fortepiano, and every piano player since would love to know what he thought of the instrument, and how he played it. Certainly Silbermann was the organ-maker that Johann Sebastian most admired, so the new creation would have been accorded respect.

As is usual with visiting organists, Johann Sebastian was asked to improvise on a given theme. The King sat at the keyboard and played a fine Bach-like theme, rich and dramatic, and asked his guest to improvise a fugue upon it. The King admired the learned treatment of his subject, and asked Johann Sebastian to play it in four, then five, and finally six voices. Nobody knows what Johann Sebastian played in response, and I am sure that it sounded superb, but he probably failed to sustain a six-voice texture, and presumably the King pointed this out.



A six-voice fugue is an almost unheard-of technical challenge – there is none in the Well-Tempered Clavier, for example – and the King's theme, which does not fit in stretto with itself, is particularly unfavourable to treatment in many voices. On the other hand, because of its great eloquence, it is a wonderful subject for a three-voice fugue, and presumably Johann Sebastian pointed this out.

Arnold Schoenberg even suggested that the royal theme had been devised by Carl Philipp Emmanuel as a practical joke, because he knew a six-voice treatment would be impossible. I do think it was written by Carl Philipp Emmanuel, because it shows a superb understanding of Johann Sebastian's style, and is simply too good for the King to have invented. However, I do not think Carl Philipp Emmanuel, at the peak of a brilliant career, and well aware of his father's extraordinary powers, would have felt any need to ridicule him.

The King also desired to hear Johann Sebastian perform on the organ, so the next day he was taken round all the organs in Potsdam. The following day he returned to Leipzig.

The voyage to Potsdam is a defining event in the western musical tradition, because it is the only time Johann Sebastian was accorded public honour, the only time he played the fortepiano, and because it brings him, and all his contrapuntal powers, into contact with the best of the next generation, who were to develop the style which became that of Haydn and Mozart.

Six months later, Johann Sebastian sent to Potsdam a *Musical Offering* which he had had engraved at his own expense. The opening piece is a three voice fugue (*Ricercare a 3*) on the King's theme; this I see as Johann saying to Frederick "When I mentioned that the best setting for this theme was in three voices, this is what I had in mind ..." . The centrepiece is a six voice fugue (*Ricercare a 6*) on the King's theme; this I see as Johann saying to Carl Philipp "You see ? My art is adequate to your test ..." . The finale is a trio sonata, for flute, violin and continuo, largely based on the King's theme, a delight to play, perhaps the greatest and certainly the grandest trio sonata ever written. Between these three pieces are eight smaller ones, all on the King's theme. They include a number of puzzle canons, and the *Fuga Canonica in Epiadiapente* for flute and keyboard.

Then Johann Sebastian Bach turned his attention to the *Art of Fugue*.

Peter Billam

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Ricercare a 3

Measures 1-6 of the Ricercare a 3. The piece is in 2/2 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The right hand begins with a series of notes, including a trill in measure 5. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above the notes.

Measures 7-12. Measure 7 features a trill (tr) and a measure rest (10). The right hand continues with eighth-note patterns. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4.

Measures 13-18. Measure 15 is marked with a measure rest (15). The right hand features a series of eighth-note runs. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. A trill (tr) appears in measure 17.

Measures 19-24. Measure 20 is marked with a measure rest (20). The right hand continues with eighth-note patterns. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4.

Measures 25-30. Measure 25 is marked with a measure rest (25). The right hand features eighth-note patterns. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. A trill (tr) appears in measure 29.

Measures 31-36. Measure 30 is marked with a measure rest (30). The right hand continues with eighth-note patterns. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. A trill (tr) appears in measure 35.

The first system of the piece, measures 1-14, is written in G minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. The right hand features a complex melodic line with many accidentals and ornaments, while the left hand provides a steady bass line. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. Measure numbers 1, 5, 10, and 14 are placed at the beginning of their respective measures.

The second system, measures 15-34, continues the intricate melodic and harmonic development. The right hand has a more active role with frequent sixteenth-note patterns. The left hand maintains a rhythmic accompaniment. Measure numbers 15, 20, 25, 30, and 34 are marked.

The third system, measures 35-44, shows a change in texture with more rests in the right hand. The left hand continues with its rhythmic pattern. Measure numbers 35, 40, and 44 are indicated.

The fourth system, measures 45-54, features a return of more active right-hand passages. The left hand provides harmonic support. Measure numbers 45, 50, and 54 are marked.

The fifth system, measures 55-64, continues the piece's complex interplay of melody and rhythm. Measure numbers 55, 60, and 64 are marked.

The sixth system, measures 65-74, concludes the piece with a final melodic flourish in the right hand. Measure numbers 65, 70, and 74 are marked.

51 3 3 55 2 3

4 2 5 2 3 60 4 3 2

3 1 2 3 1 1 2 4 5

5 1 2 65 1 2 1 3 2 3 1 4 2

70 1 3 2

75 1 2 3 1 2 7 3 4-5

Measures 1-4 of the piece. The score is in G minor (three flats) and 3/8 time. The right hand features a complex melodic line with many slurs and ornaments. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. A tempo marking of 80 is present above measure 4.

Measures 5-8 of the piece. The right hand continues with intricate melodic patterns, including a triplet in measure 6. The left hand maintains its accompaniment. Fingerings and slurs are clearly marked throughout.

Measures 9-12 of the piece. The right hand has a more active role with sixteenth-note passages. The left hand has some rests in measures 10 and 11. Measure 12 ends with a fermata.

Measures 13-16 of the piece. The right hand features a series of sixteenth-note runs. The left hand has rests in measures 13 and 14. Measure 16 ends with a fermata. A tempo marking of 90 is present above measure 15.

Measures 17-20 of the piece. The right hand has a series of slurs and ornaments. The left hand has rests in measures 17 and 18. Measure 20 ends with a fermata.

Measures 21-24 of the piece. The right hand has a series of slurs and ornaments. The left hand has rests in measures 21 and 22. Measure 24 ends with a fermata.

Musical notation for measures 95-100. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower in bass clef. Measure 95 starts with a treble clef key signature of two flats and a common time signature. Fingerings 5 and 4 are indicated above the first two notes. Measure 100 is marked with the number 100. Fingerings 3 and 5 are indicated above the final notes of the system.

Musical notation for measures 101-105. The system consists of two staves. Measure 101 has a treble clef key signature of two flats and a common time signature. A trill (tr) is marked in the bass staff. Measure 105 is marked with the number 105. Fingerings 3, 5, 2, 5, and 3 are indicated above the notes in measures 101-104. Fingerings 1 and 1 are indicated below the notes in measure 105.

Musical notation for measures 106-110. The system consists of two staves. Measure 106 has a treble clef key signature of two flats and a common time signature. Fingerings 2, 3, and 2 are indicated below the notes in the bass staff. Measure 110 is marked with the number 110.

Musical notation for measures 111-115. The system consists of two staves. Measure 111 has a treble clef key signature of two flats and a common time signature. Measure 115 is marked with the number 115.

Musical notation for measures 116-120. The system consists of two staves. Measure 116 has a treble clef key signature of two flats and a common time signature. Measure 120 is marked with the number 120.

Musical notation for measures 115-124. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

125

Musical notation for measures 125-134. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

130

Musical notation for measures 135-144. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

Musical notation for measures 145-154. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

135

Musical notation for measures 155-164. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

140

Musical notation for measures 165-174. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. The music features complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

Measures 143 and 144 of the Ricercare a 3. The system shows two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. Measure 143 is marked with a fermata. Measure 144 is marked with the number 145. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat).

Measures 145 and 146. Measure 145 is marked with the number 150. The notation continues with complex rhythmic patterns in both staves.

Measures 147 and 148. The treble staff features a complex rhythmic figure with many sixteenth notes. The bass staff has a more melodic line with some rests.

Measures 149 and 150. Measure 149 is marked with the number 155. The system shows the continuation of the intricate musical texture.

Measures 151 and 152. The notation shows the progression of the piece, with both staves maintaining their respective parts.

Measures 153 and 154. Measure 153 is marked with the number 160. The system concludes with a final cadence in both staves. Measure 154 has a fermata over the final notes.

165

2 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 4

1/4 5 1/5 3/4 3/1 1/5

170

5 4 1 2 3 4-5 2 1 4 2 3 1 5 4 5 3

1 1/4 3 1 2 5 5

3 2 2 3 2 2 2 1 2 1 2 1

4 2 4 2 2 2 1/5 4

175

3 4 1 3 2 1 4 3 1 4 3 1 4 3

3 2 3 1 2 1 1 3 3 1 3 1

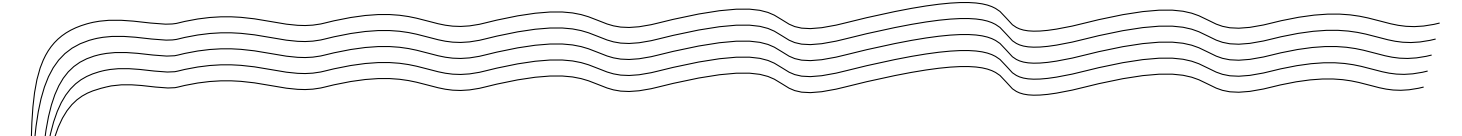
180

1 2 3 2 2 4 5 4 5 1 2 2

3 1 1 1 2

1 3 3 2 4 5 4 5 1 2 2

5 1 2/4 4 4 2



Peter Billam was born in London in 1948, studied piano, and lived in Switzerland from 1973 to 1983, where he studied composition, classical guitar, flute and voice, worked as Musical Director of the *Théâtre Populaire Romand*, and as recording engineer, record producer and computer programmer. He moved to Tasmania in 1983, lectured in composition at the Conservatorium, conducted recorder ensembles and choirs, studied recorder, voice and harpsichord. He founded **www.pjb.com.au**, becoming the first composer to sell scores on-line, with on-line delivery, taking scores from Composer to Performer in one immediate step. *Www.pjb.com.au* offers a new approach to music publishing. These pieces are **written to be read, made to be played !**

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Arrangements include: By J. S. Bach: *Trio BWV 655*, piano and flute; *Vor deinen Thron BWV 668*, piano; *Fugue in F minor BWV 689*, SATB recorders; *Flute Sonata BWV 1031* transposed into G major for alto recorder and keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1032* completed by Peter Billam for flute and keyboard, also in C major for alto recorder, and in G major for descant; *Ricercare a 3*, from the *Musikalisches Opfer* for keyboard; *Ricercare a 6*, for sSATBG recorders, or strings, or two keyboards; *Fuga Canonica in Epiadiapente* for keyboard and melody instrument; from the *Art of Fugue: Contrapuncti 1, 4 and 9* for keyboard, and *Contrapunctus 14* as completed by D. F. Tovey, for keyboard, or for SATB recorders, or for strings; *Passacaglia and Fugue in c* for piano four hands; *Chorales with Descant* for melody instrument and piano; *Cello Suites I, II and III* for flute or alto recorder, *Forty Chorales* for piano, *Der Geist hilft* for SATB-SATB recorders. By Johannes Brahms: *Fugue in Ab minor for organ*, for SATB recorders and gamba, in A minor; *Choralvorspiele for organ* with previous settings by Isaac, Bach, Praetorius, recorders. *John Carr*, *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute or recorder and guitar. By G. F. Händel: *Concerto Grosso in A minor* op 6 no 4, harpsichord and recorders; *Recorder Sonata in Bb* no 5, in G for tenor recorder and keyboard. *Claudio Monteverdi*, *Ecco Mormorar l'Onde*, SSATB recorders. By Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Schubert Dances*, recorders and guitar, *Schubert Dances*, piano 4 hands. *Scriabin*, *Two Preludes op.67*; *Five Preludes op.74*, piano. *Telemann*, *Twelve Flute Fantasias*, recorder. *John Wilbye*, *Draw on sweet Night*, SSATB recorders, and for flute choir. *Twelve Italian Songs*, voice and guitar; *Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes*, recorder and guitar; *Bushband Dances*, violin, piano accordeon and banjo; *Easy Classical Pieces*, Bb trumpet and piano.

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