



# Ricercare a 3

*J. S. Bach*

**From the Musicial Offering**

**For Keyboard**

*Typeset by Peter Billam*

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## The Musical Offering

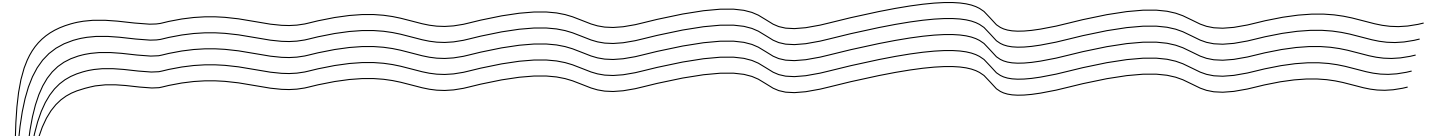
In May of 1747, after finishing the B minor Mass and the second book of the Well-Tempered Clavier, Johann Sebastian Bach travelled to Potsdam, accompanied by his son Wilhelm Friedeman, to visit his successful son Carl Philipp Emmanuel, who was personal harpsichordist to Frederick the Great of Prussia. 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 and B-flat major. The right hand features a melodic line with various ornaments and fingerings (4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 4). The left hand is mostly silent in these measures.

Measures 7-12. Measure 7 includes a trill (tr) and a fermata. Measure 10 is marked with a '10' and contains a sequence of eighth notes. Measure 12 ends with a trill (tr) and a fermata. Fingerings include 3, 4, 2, 1, and 1.

Measures 13-18. Measure 15 is marked with a '15' and contains a sequence of eighth notes. Measure 18 ends with a trill (tr) and a fermata. Fingerings include 1, 2, 1, 4, 1, 2, 3, 2, 3, 1, and 1.

Measures 19-24. Measure 20 is marked with a '20' and contains a sequence of eighth notes. Measure 24 ends with a trill (tr) and a fermata. Fingerings include 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 3, 1, 3, 4, 1, and 1.

Measures 25-30. Measure 25 is marked with a '25' and contains a sequence of eighth notes. Measure 30 ends with a trill (tr) and a fermata. Fingerings include 5, 4, 2, 1, 5, 1, 3, 1, 4, 2, 3, 1, 4, 2, and 2.

Measures 31-36. Measure 30 is marked with a '30' and contains a sequence of eighth notes. Measure 36 ends with a trill (tr) and a fermata. Fingerings include 1, 4, 2, 5, 1, 2, 3, 4, 2, 3, 1, 5, 4, 3, 5, 4, 1, and 1.

Measures 1-14 of the Ricercare a 3. The piece is in G minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. The notation shows a complex interplay between the treble and bass staves. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. Measure numbers 1, 5, 9, and 13 are placed above the treble staff. The bass staff contains a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Measures 15-28 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation continues with intricate melodic lines and rhythmic patterns. Measure numbers 15, 19, 23, and 27 are placed above the treble staff. The bass staff continues with its eighth-note accompaniment, featuring some rests and accidentals.

Measures 29-34 of the Ricercare a 3. This section includes a measure rest in measure 30. Measure numbers 29, 31, 33, and 34 are placed above the treble staff. The treble staff features more complex rhythmic figures, while the bass staff maintains the accompaniment.

Measures 35-44 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation shows a continuation of the complex textures. Measure numbers 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, and 44 are placed above the treble staff. The bass staff continues with its accompaniment, including some rests.

Measures 45-49 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation features a variety of rhythmic and melodic motifs. Measure numbers 45, 47, 48, and 49 are placed above the treble staff. The bass staff continues with its accompaniment.

Measures 50-54 of the Ricercare a 3. The final section of the piece on this page. Measure numbers 50, 52, 53, and 54 are placed above the treble staff. The notation concludes with a final cadence in the treble staff and a sustained note in the bass staff.

The musical score is presented in six systems, each containing a treble and bass staff. The key signature is G minor (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece is marked with a tempo of 'Ritardando' and a metronome marking of 55. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The piece concludes with a final cadence in the bass staff.

5 4 5 2 4 2 1 3 4 80 3 2 5 4 1

2 1 2 1

5 3 2 1 2

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

3 2 1 3 3 2

85

90

5 3 2 4 3 1 2 4 5

4 3 4 4 4 5

95

1 2 3 4 2 4 2 4

3 2 7

Musical notation for measures 95-100. The system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 95 has a fingering of 5 4 in the treble and 1 in the bass. Measure 96 has a tempo marking of 100. Measure 97 has a fingering of 3 in the treble and 5 3 in the bass. Measure 98 has a fingering of 5 3 in the treble and 1 in the bass. Measure 99 has a fingering of 5 3 in the treble and 1 in the bass. Measure 100 has a fingering of 5 3 in the treble and 1 in the bass.

Musical notation for measures 101-105. The system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 101 has a fingering of 3 in the treble and a trill (tr) in the bass. Measure 102 has a fingering of 5 2 in the treble and 5 2 in the bass. Measure 103 has a fingering of 5 3 in the treble and 5 3 in the bass. Measure 104 has a tempo marking of 105 and a fingering of 1 1 in the bass. Measure 105 has a fingering of 1 1 in the bass.

Musical notation for measures 106-110. The system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 106 has a fingering of 2 3 2 in the bass. Measure 107 has a fingering of 2 3 2 in the bass. Measure 108 has a fingering of 2 3 2 in the bass. Measure 109 has a fingering of 2 3 2 in the bass. Measure 110 has a fingering of 2 3 2 in the bass.

Musical notation for measures 111-115. The system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 111 has a tempo marking of 110. Measure 112 has a tempo marking of 110. Measure 113 has a tempo marking of 110. Measure 114 has a tempo marking of 110. Measure 115 has a tempo marking of 110.

Musical notation for measures 116-120. The system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 116 has a tempo marking of 115. Measure 117 has a tempo marking of 115. Measure 118 has a tempo marking of 115. Measure 119 has a tempo marking of 115. Measure 120 has a tempo marking of 115.

Musical notation for measures 121-125. The system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 121 has a tempo marking of 120. Measure 122 has a tempo marking of 120. Measure 123 has a tempo marking of 120. Measure 124 has a tempo marking of 120. Measure 125 has a tempo marking of 120.

Measures 115-124 of the piece. The music is in G minor (two flats) and 3/4 time. It features a complex texture with many beamed sixteenth notes and triplets in both the treble and bass staves. Measure 115 starts with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a quarter note in the bass. Measure 124 ends with a half note in the treble and a quarter note in the bass.

125

Measures 125-134. Measure 125 begins with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a quarter note in the bass. The piece continues with intricate sixteenth-note patterns and triplets. Measure 134 concludes with a half note in the treble and a quarter note in the bass.

130

Measures 135-144. Measure 135 starts with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a quarter note in the bass. The music features a mix of sixteenth-note runs and chords. Measure 144 ends with a half note in the treble and a quarter note in the bass.

Measures 145-154. Measure 145 begins with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a quarter note in the bass. The texture remains dense with many beamed notes. Measure 154 ends with a half note in the treble and a quarter note in the bass.

135

Measures 155-164. Measure 155 starts with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a quarter note in the bass. The piece continues with complex rhythmic patterns. Measure 164 ends with a half note in the treble and a quarter note in the bass.

140

Measures 165-174. Measure 165 begins with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a quarter note in the bass. The music features a mix of sixteenth-note runs and chords. Measure 174 ends with a half note in the treble and a quarter note in the bass.

Measures 143-144 of the Ricercare a 3. The system shows two staves with complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals. Measure 144 is marked with the number 145.

Measures 145-146. Measure 145 is marked with the number 150. The notation continues with intricate melodic and harmonic lines.

Measures 147-148. The system shows two staves with complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

Measures 149-150. Measure 149 is marked with the number 155. The notation continues with intricate melodic and harmonic lines.

Measures 151-152. The system shows two staves with complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

Measures 153-154. Measure 153 is marked with the number 160. The system shows two staves with complex rhythmic patterns and accidentals. Measure 154 contains a triplet of eighth notes and a group of four sixteenth 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 2 1 5 4

4 2 4 2 2 2 1/5 4

175

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

3 2 3 1 2 1 1 3 3 1 2/5 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

5 1 2/4 4 4

**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 Epidiapente* for keyboard and melody instrument; from the *Art of Fugue: Contrapuncti 1* and *4* 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. By Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Schubert Dances*, recorders and guitar, *Schubert Dances*, piano 4 hands. 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. By other composers: *Claudio Monteverdi, Ecco Mormorar l'Onde*, SSATB recorders; *Twelve Italian Songs*, voice and guitar; *John Wilbye, Draw on sweet Night*, SSATTB recorders, and for flute choir; *Telemann, Twelve Flute Fantasias*, recorder; *John Carr, Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute or recorder and guitar; *Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes*, recorder and guitar; *Easy Classical Pieces*, Bb trumpet and piano.

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