



Ricercare a 3

J. S. Bach

From the Musicial Offering

For Keyboard

Typeset by Peter Billam

© Peter J Billam, 1998

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The Musical Offering

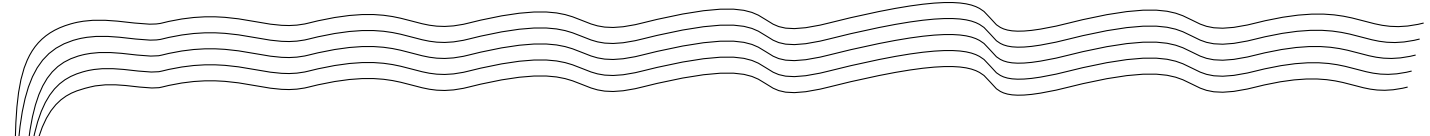
In May of 1747, after finishing the B minor Mass and the second book of the Well-Tempered Clavier, Johann Sebastian Bach travelled to Potsdam, accompanied by his son Wilhelm Friedeman, to visit his successful son Carl Philipp Emmanuel, who was personal harpsichordist to Frederick the Great of Prussia. 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

First system of musical notation for 'Ricercare a 3'. It consists of a treble and a bass staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with various ornaments and fingerings (4, 5, 4, 3, 2, 4). The bass staff is mostly empty, with a few notes in the first measure.

Second system of musical notation. The treble staff features a trill (tr) and a measure marked '10'. The melodic line continues with intricate patterns and fingerings (4, 2, 1, 1). The bass staff remains mostly empty.

Third system of musical notation. The treble staff has a measure marked '15'. The melodic line is highly active with many sixteenth notes and fingerings (1, 2, 1, 4, 1, 2, 3, 2, 3, 1). The bass staff has a trill (tr) and some notes.

Fourth system of musical notation. The treble staff has a measure marked '20'. The melodic line continues with complex rhythmic patterns and fingerings (1, 2, 4, 1, 3, 3, 4, 1). The bass staff has some notes.

Fifth system of musical notation. The treble staff has a measure marked '25'. The melodic line features a measure with a fermata. Fingerings (5, 4, 2, 1, 5, 1, 3, 1, 4, 2) are indicated throughout. The bass staff has notes and a trill (tr).

Sixth system of musical notation. The treble staff has a measure marked '30'. The melodic line concludes with a trill (tr). Fingerings (1, 4, 2, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 2, 3, 1, 5, 4, 3, 5, 4, 1) are indicated. The bass staff has notes and a trill (tr).

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, 10, and 14 are placed above the treble staff.

Measures 15-28 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation continues with intricate patterns. Measure numbers 15, 20, 25, and 28 are placed above the treble staff. The bass line features a prominent triplet in measure 28.

Measures 29-38 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation shows a continuation of the complex rhythmic and melodic patterns. Measure numbers 29, 34, and 38 are placed above the treble staff. Measure 34 is marked with a '40' above it.

Measures 39-48 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation features a series of sixteenth-note passages. Measure numbers 39, 44, and 48 are placed above the treble staff. Measure 48 is marked with a '45' above it.

Measures 49-54 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation continues with complex rhythmic patterns. Measure numbers 49, 52, and 54 are placed above the treble staff.

Measures 55-60 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation concludes the piece with a final cadence. Measure numbers 55, 58, and 60 are placed above the treble staff. Measure 58 is marked with a '50' above it.

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, accents, and dynamic markings. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The piece concludes with a final cadence in the bass staff.

Measures 1-4 of the first system. The music is in G minor (three flats) and 3/8 time. The right hand features a complex melodic line with many accidentals and slurs. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes.

Measures 5-8 of the first system. The right hand continues with intricate melodic patterns, including triplets and slurs. The left hand maintains its accompaniment. Fingerings are clearly marked.

Measures 9-12 of the first system. The right hand has a more rhythmic, eighth-note pattern. The left hand continues with its accompaniment. Measure 12 ends with a fermata.

Measures 13-16 of the first system. The right hand features a series of eighth-note runs. The left hand has a simple accompaniment. Measure 16 ends with a fermata.

Measures 17-20 of the first system. The right hand has a more complex melodic line with many slurs and ties. The left hand continues with its accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated.

Measures 21-24 of the first system. The right hand has a series of eighth-note runs. The left hand continues with its accompaniment. Measure 24 ends with a fermata.

5 4
1
100
3 5 3

3 5 2 5 3
tr
105
1 1

2 3 2

110

115

120

Musical notation for measures 115-124. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. Measure 115 starts with a treble clef chord of G4, A4, B4, C5. The bass line has a whole note G2. Measure 116 has a treble clef chord of A4, B4, C5, D5 and a bass line of A2. Measure 117 has a treble clef chord of B4, C5, D5, E5 and a bass line of B2. Measure 118 has a treble clef chord of C5, D5, E5, F6 and a bass line of C3. Measure 119 has a treble clef chord of D5, E5, F6, G6 and a bass line of D3. Measure 120 has a treble clef chord of E5, F6, G6, A6 and a bass line of E3. Measure 121 has a treble clef chord of F6, G6, A6, B6 and a bass line of F3. Measure 122 has a treble clef chord of G6, A6, B6, C7 and a bass line of G3. Measure 123 has a treble clef chord of A6, B6, C7, D7 and a bass line of A3. Measure 124 has a treble clef chord of B6, C7, D7, E7 and a bass line of B3.

125

Musical notation for measures 125-134. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. Measure 125 has a treble clef chord of C7, D7, E7, F7 and a bass line of C4. Measure 126 has a treble clef chord of D7, E7, F7, G7 and a bass line of D4. Measure 127 has a treble clef chord of E7, F7, G7, A7 and a bass line of E4. Measure 128 has a treble clef chord of F7, G7, A7, B7 and a bass line of F4. Measure 129 has a treble clef chord of G7, A7, B7, C8 and a bass line of G4. Measure 130 has a treble clef chord of A7, B7, C8, D8 and a bass line of A4. Measure 131 has a treble clef chord of B7, C8, D8, E8 and a bass line of B4. Measure 132 has a treble clef chord of C8, D8, E8, F8 and a bass line of C5. Measure 133 has a treble clef chord of D8, E8, F8, G8 and a bass line of D5. Measure 134 has a treble clef chord of E8, F8, G8, A8 and a bass line of E5.

130

Musical notation for measures 135-144. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. Measure 135 has a treble clef chord of F8, G8, A8, B8 and a bass line of F5. Measure 136 has a treble clef chord of G8, A8, B8, C9 and a bass line of G5. Measure 137 has a treble clef chord of A8, B8, C9, D9 and a bass line of A5. Measure 138 has a treble clef chord of B8, C9, D9, E9 and a bass line of B5. Measure 139 has a treble clef chord of C9, D9, E9, F9 and a bass line of C6. Measure 140 has a treble clef chord of D9, E9, F9, G9 and a bass line of D6. Measure 141 has a treble clef chord of E9, F9, G9, A9 and a bass line of E6. Measure 142 has a treble clef chord of F9, G9, A9, B9 and a bass line of F6. Measure 143 has a treble clef chord of G9, A9, B9, C10 and a bass line of G6. Measure 144 has a treble clef chord of A9, B9, C10, D10 and a bass line of A6.

Musical notation for measures 145-154. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. Measure 145 has a treble clef chord of B9, C10, D10, E10 and a bass line of B6. Measure 146 has a treble clef chord of C10, D10, E10, F10 and a bass line of C7. Measure 147 has a treble clef chord of D10, E10, F10, G10 and a bass line of D7. Measure 148 has a treble clef chord of E10, F10, G10, A10 and a bass line of E7. Measure 149 has a treble clef chord of F10, G10, A10, B10 and a bass line of F7. Measure 150 has a treble clef chord of G10, A10, B10, C11 and a bass line of G7. Measure 151 has a treble clef chord of A10, B10, C11, D11 and a bass line of A7. Measure 152 has a treble clef chord of B10, C11, D11, E11 and a bass line of B7. Measure 153 has a treble clef chord of C11, D11, E11, F11 and a bass line of C8. Measure 154 has a treble clef chord of D11, E11, F11, G11 and a bass line of D8.

135

Musical notation for measures 155-164. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. Measure 155 has a treble clef chord of E11, F11, G11, A11 and a bass line of E8. Measure 156 has a treble clef chord of F11, G11, A11, B11 and a bass line of F8. Measure 157 has a treble clef chord of G11, A11, B11, C12 and a bass line of G8. Measure 158 has a treble clef chord of A11, B11, C12, D12 and a bass line of A8. Measure 159 has a treble clef chord of B11, C12, D12, E12 and a bass line of B8. Measure 160 has a treble clef chord of C12, D12, E12, F12 and a bass line of C9. Measure 161 has a treble clef chord of D12, E12, F12, G12 and a bass line of D9. Measure 162 has a treble clef chord of E12, F12, G12, A12 and a bass line of E9. Measure 163 has a treble clef chord of F12, G12, A12, B12 and a bass line of F9. Measure 164 has a treble clef chord of G12, A12, B12, C13 and a bass line of G9.

140

Musical notation for measures 165-174. The system consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in B-flat major. Measure 165 has a treble clef chord of D13, E13, F13, G13 and a bass line of D10. Measure 166 has a treble clef chord of E13, F13, G13, A13 and a bass line of E10. Measure 167 has a treble clef chord of F13, G13, A13, B13 and a bass line of F10. Measure 168 has a treble clef chord of G13, A13, B13, C14 and a bass line of G10. Measure 169 has a treble clef chord of A13, B13, C14, D14 and a bass line of A10. Measure 170 has a treble clef chord of B13, C14, D14, E14 and a bass line of B10. Measure 171 has a treble clef chord of C14, D14, E14, F14 and a bass line of C11. Measure 172 has a treble clef chord of D14, E14, F14, G14 and a bass line of D11. Measure 173 has a treble clef chord of E14, F14, G14, A14 and a bass line of E11. Measure 174 has a treble clef chord of F14, G14, A14, B14 and a bass line of F11.

Measures 145-149. The music is in G minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. Measure 145 is marked with a fermata. The right hand features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment of quarter notes.

Measures 150-154. Measure 150 is marked with a fermata. The right hand continues with intricate sixteenth-note passages, and the left hand maintains a consistent quarter-note accompaniment.

Measures 155-159. Measure 155 is marked with a fermata. The right hand features a series of sixteenth-note runs, and the left hand continues with quarter notes.

Measures 160-164. Measure 160 is marked with a fermata. The right hand has a melodic line with sixteenth-note ornamentation, and the left hand provides a steady quarter-note accompaniment.

Measures 165-169. Measure 165 is marked with a fermata. The right hand features a melodic line with sixteenth-note runs, and the left hand continues with quarter notes.

Measures 170-174. Measure 170 is marked with a fermata. The right hand has a melodic line with sixteenth-note runs, and the left hand continues with quarter notes. Measures 173 and 174 are marked with a 4 and a 3 respectively, indicating a 4-measure and a 3-measure phrase.

165 5

166 4 5 4

167 5 4 1 2 3 4 2 1 4 2

168 3 5 4 3 1 5

169 5 4 1 2 3 4-5 2 1 4 2

170 3 1 5 4 5 3

171 1 4 3 1 2 5 5

172 3 2 3 2 2 2 2 1 5 4

173 4 2 4 2 2 2 2 1 5 4

174 3 2 3 1 2 1 1 3 3 1 2 5 4

175 3 2 3 1 2 1 1 3 3 1 2 5 4

176 3 2 3 1 2 1 1 3 3 1 2 5 4

177 3 2 3 1 2 1 1 3 3 1 2 5 4

178 3 2 3 1 2 1 1 3 3 1 2 5 4

179 3 2 3 1 2 1 1 3 3 1 2 5 4

180 3 2 3 1 2 1 1 3 3 1 2 5 4

5 1 2 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 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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