

Thursday August 2, 7:30pm
Holy Cross Church
Nothing but Bach (almost)

Program Notes

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) is considered by many historians to be the greatest composer of the Baroque era. Bach was not only influential in creating the Baroque style of music, but brought Baroque music to the peak of its development. Bach's music, along with other composers of the Baroque era, took a complete departure from the music of the Renaissance era (the musical time period directly preceding the Baroque era). Renaissance music was known for its trademark polyphonic style (the layering of multiple, independent melodies). These melodies were most often sung by vocalists, or choirs, without any accompaniment. If instruments were used, they copied the parts of the vocalists, but were rarely given independence.

Instrumental music became much more prominent in the Baroque era. Instruments were often given the solo lines and were treated as virtuosos for the first time. Advancements in the development of musical instruments, such as the violin, gave Baroque composers the opportunity to compose more virtuosic solo parts. Groups of instruments, or even a combination of vocalists and instruments, were also commonly featured by Baroque composers. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 6* is an excellent example of a Baroque work featuring multiple solo instruments in the basso continuo style.

Religious music was also central to Bach's career. Throughout his life, Bach held positions as a church organist and composer, for which he composed a weekly cantata to be used during the church service. This led to several hundred sacred works, in which texts from the Bible and Luther's Catechism were set to music. The musical quality of these sacred works rivals the craft and talent of Bach's secular works. Bach's *Cantata 51* features both a vocalist and instrumentalist as soloist.

Georg Philip Telemann (1681-1767) entered the musical scene just after Bach, and is important for his link between the late Baroque era and early Classical era. Telemann builds on many of the Baroque styles developed by Bach, but was considered an innovator when it came to new styles. Telemann's *Concerto for 4 Violins in G* features four equal solo parts. Telemann keeps the focus on the solo instruments, but eliminates the accompaniment line. While Bach also composed for unaccompanied instruments, Telemann is considered the pioneer in this compositional style. Telemann's innovative idea to feature unaccompanied instruments lead to concertos like his *Concerto for 4 Violins in G* and compositions called fantasias, works for a single unaccompanied violin, flute, or viola da gamba (an early type of cello).

Both Bach and Telemann left a legacy for the musical world. Their innovative musical ideas and styles have influenced composers and listeners throughout history, and are still respected and enjoyed today.

~ Laura Schipper

