



# **Ricercare a 3**

*J. S. Bach*

**From the Musicial Offering**

**For Keyboard**

*Typeset by Peter Billam*

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## The Musical Offering

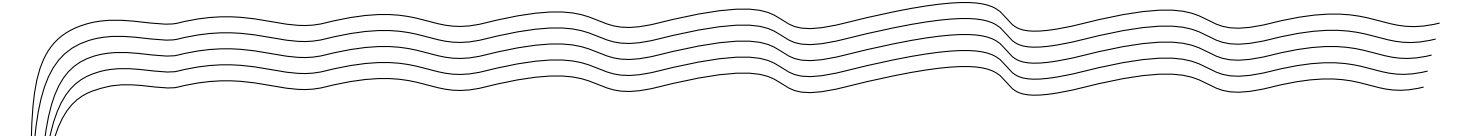
In May of 1747, after finishing the B minor Mass and the second book of the Well-Tempered Clavier, Johann Sebastian Bach travelled to Potsdam, accompanied by his son Wilhelm Friedeman, to visit his successful son Carl Philipp Emmanuel, who was personal harpsichordist to Frederick the Great of Prussia.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

First system of musical notation for 'Ricercare a 3'. It consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 2/2. 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 continues the melodic line with a trill (tr) and a measure marked '10'. The bass staff has a few notes in the first measure.

Third system of musical notation. The treble staff features a measure marked '15' and continues with melodic lines and fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 2, 3, 1). The bass staff has a trill (tr) in the fourth measure.

Fourth system of musical notation. The treble staff has a measure marked '20' and continues with melodic lines and fingerings (1, 2, 4, 1, 3, 3, 4, 1). The bass staff has a few notes in the first measure.

Fifth system of musical notation. The treble staff has a measure marked '25' and continues with melodic lines and fingerings (5, 4, 2, 1, 5, 1, 3, 5, 3, 1, 4, 2). The bass staff has a few notes in the first measure.

Sixth system of musical notation. The treble staff has a measure marked '30' and continues with melodic lines and fingerings (2, 1, 3, 4, 2, 1, 3, 4, 3, 5, 4, 1). The bass staff has a trill (tr) in the fourth measure.

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 melodic lines and harmonic support. Measure numbers 15, 20, 25, and 28 are placed above the treble staff.

Measures 29-38 of the Ricercare a 3. This section features more rhythmic complexity with eighth and sixteenth notes. Measure numbers 29, 34, and 38 are placed above the treble staff.

Measures 39-44 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation shows a continuation of the intricate melodic patterns. Measure numbers 39, 42, and 44 are placed above the treble staff.

Measures 45-49 of the Ricercare a 3. The notation includes various ornaments and grace notes. Measure numbers 45, 47, and 49 are placed above the treble staff.

Measures 50-54 of the Ricercare a 3. The final section of the piece on this page, featuring a concluding melodic phrase. Measure numbers 50, 52, and 54 are placed above the treble 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 55 and contains various technical challenges such as triplets, slurs, and specific fingering instructions.

- System 1:** Measures 1-4. Treble staff starts with a triplet of eighth notes (5, 1, 3). Bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (2, 3, 4).
- System 2:** Measures 5-8. Treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes (3, 4, 5). Bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3).
- System 3:** Measures 9-12. Treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3). Bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (2, 2, 1).
- System 4:** Measures 13-16. Treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes (3, 4, 5). Bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3).
- System 5:** Measures 17-20. Treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3). Bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3).
- System 6:** Measures 21-24. Treble staff has a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3). Bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (1, 2, 3).

Measures 1-4 of the Ricercare a 3. The score is in G minor (three flats) and 3/8 time. The right hand features a complex melodic line with many accidentals and ornaments. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes. Measure numbers 5, 4, 5, 2, 4, 2, 1, 3, 4, 80, 3, 2, 5, 4, 1 are placed above the staff.

Measures 5-8 of the Ricercare a 3. The right hand continues with intricate melodic patterns. The left hand has a more active role with eighth-note accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. Measure numbers 5, 3, 2, 5, 4, 4, 5, 4, 4, 5, 3, 2, 1, 3, 3, 5, 2 are placed below the staff.

Measures 9-12 of the Ricercare a 3. The right hand has a more rhythmic, eighth-note texture. The left hand continues with a steady accompaniment. Measure number 85 is placed above the staff.

Measures 13-16 of the Ricercare a 3. The right hand features a series of eighth-note runs. The left hand has a more active role with eighth-note accompaniment. Measure number 90 is placed above the staff.

Measures 17-20 of the Ricercare a 3. The right hand has a more rhythmic, eighth-note texture. The left hand continues with a steady accompaniment. Measure numbers 5, 3, 2, 4, 3, 1, 2, 4, 3, 2, 4, 5 are placed above the staff.

Measures 21-24 of the Ricercare a 3. The right hand features a series of eighth-note runs. The left hand has a more active role with eighth-note accompaniment. Measure number 95 is placed above the staff.





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

Measures 145-149 of the Ricercare a 3. The music is in G minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. Measure 145 is marked with a fermata. The notation shows a complex interplay between the treble and bass staves, with frequent sixteenth-note patterns and slurs.

Measures 150-154. Measure 150 is marked with a fermata. The music continues with intricate rhythmic patterns and chromatic movement in both hands.

Measures 155-159. Measure 155 is marked with a fermata. The piece features a variety of note values and rests, creating a dense and rhythmic texture.

Measures 160-164. Measure 160 is marked with a fermata. The notation includes a variety of articulation marks and slurs, emphasizing the melodic lines.

Measures 165-169. Measure 165 is marked with a fermata. The music concludes with a series of sixteenth-note runs and a final cadence.

Measures 170-174. Measure 170 is marked with a fermata. The final measures of the piece feature a series of sixteenth-note patterns and a final cadence. The piece ends with a fermata on the final note.

165

170

175

180

**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, and lectured in composition at the Conservatorium. He founded **www.pjb.com.au**, becoming the first composer to sell scores on-line, 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; *Four Duets BWV 802-5*, keyboard; *Six Preludes and Fugues* from Book I, keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1031* in 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 of the Musikalisches Opfer* for keyboard; *Ricercare a 6*, for sSATBG recorders, or strings, or two keyboards; and *Fuga Canonica*; 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 Brahms: *Fugue in Ab minor for organ*, for SATB recorders and gamba, in A minor; *Choralsvorspiele for organ* plus settings by Isaac, Bach, Praetorius, recorders. *John Carr, Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute or recorder and guitar. Franz Liszt, *Late piano pieces*, 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. Arnold Schoenberg: *Verklärte Nacht* for piano. Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Dances*, recorders and guitar, *Dances*, piano 4 hands. Scriabin, *Two Preludes op.67*; *Five Preludes op.74*, piano. Telemann, *Twelve Flute Fantasias*, recorder. Wilbye, *Draw on sweet Night*, SSATTB recorders, and for flute choir. *Twelve Italian Songs* and *Seven English Songs*, voice and guitar; *Folk Guitar Solos*; *Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes*, recorder and guitar; *Bushband Dances*, violin, accordeon and banjo; *Easy Classical Pieces*, Bb trumpet and piano; *Famous Beginnings*, for piano.

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