

GMLI 545: J.S. Bach

Professor: Dr. Benjamin Binder

E-mail: binderb@duq.edu

Office Phone: 412-396-4355

Office Location: Room 215, School of Music

Office Hours: Drop-in or by appointment

Location of Class Meetings: Room 107, School of Music
Time and Date of Class Meetings: Thursdays 5:15-6:55 pm
Credits: Two
Prerequisites: Graduate Status or MUSC I-IV

Course Description

A wide-ranging exploration of the life and works of Johann Sebastian Bach, addressing questions like these: Is Bach's music truly universal? How can we reconcile the intellectual and expressive sides of Bach's musical personality? What is the religious context for Bach's music, and why does it matter? How does Bach's music relate to that of his contemporaries, and what makes Bach special? Issues of performance and interpretation, including some unconventional modern responses to Bach, will be considered throughout.

Course Objectives

At some point, practically every musician engages with the music of Bach. When budding pianists of all ages first attempt to tickle the ivories, much of the music that their teachers set before them is by Bach, and the preludes and fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* have been fixtures in lessons and at auditions for generations. Transcriptions of Bach, particularly of his sonatas and suites for solo cello and violin, are staples of the repertoire for almost every conceivable instrument. Members of both amateur and professional choral ensembles can expect to take part in a performance of one of Bach's religious works on a regular basis. For that reason, it's always a good idea for classical vocal soloists to have a few of Bach's oratorio and cantata arias up their sleeve; indeed, when a singer's technique is on the fritz, nothing tunes up the voice better than Bach. Standard music theory classes continue to uphold Bach's chorales as the quintessence of good harmony and voice-leading, and no one can get through music school without having tried their hand at replicating one of them. Bach, in short, has been and continues to be the "daily bread" of many musicians in the Western tradition.

One of the major objectives of this course will be to understand why this is the case. What is it about Bach's music that has made it so compelling, enduring and vital to so many people, especially musicians themselves? We will try to get to know Bach on his own 18th-century terms whenever possible, so that we can observe any distinctions between his musical agenda and our own. We will also explore the

notion that it's impossible to truly understand any single work by Bach without possessing a certain familiarity with his whole compositional output. Whatever it is that makes Bach's music so essential has often been thought to transcend boundaries of instrumentation and genre; a keyboard fugue may be a concerto grosso in disguise, while the phrasing of the melodic line in a violin sonata may follow the logic of a cantata aria. By examining works from throughout Bach's oeuvre, we will put ourselves in a better position to situate any work we study in the future into the broader context of Bach's overall worldview – compositionally, aesthetically, culturally, spiritually, politically, and philosophically.

Learning Outcomes

Here are some of the things you will do or should be able to do by the end of the semester:

- Have a working knowledge of the details of Bach's life and career
- Understand the specific functions that Bach's music fulfilled in his time and place; distinguish these from the role his music plays in our own cultural environment
- Consider the ways in which Bach's music expresses and/or challenges the philosophy, theology and socio-political structure of 18th-century Germany
- Recognize the conventional musical forms and genres that Bach employs in his music; appreciate the way in which Bach manipulates and deviates from these basic structures
- Explain how Bach's mature compositional voice developed from his interaction with contemporaries such as Vivaldi and Buxtehude; characterize the things that make Bach's music uniquely his own
- Analyze Bach's complex musical designs with fluency and sensitivity; use the results of analysis to make performance decisions
- Have a historically-informed opinion about fundamental issues of performance practice in Bach's music such as tempo choice and articulation
- Compare, contrast and make creative connections between Bach's work in different genres and styles
- Evaluate the effects of recent engagements with Bach's music that make use of the other arts (modern dance, theatre, landscape design); consider whether Bach's music can be made more accessible to its modern audiences

Course Materials

You are required to obtain the following item:

Wolff, Christoph. *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician*. New York: Norton, 2000. This is available at the University Bookstore.

All other materials (scores, recordings, readings, videos) will be distributed in class, posted online (through E-Res or on Blackboard), and/or held on reserve behind the

circulation desk at Gumberg Library. Your weekly assignment sheet will always give precise information about the location of all necessary materials.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class meeting. You are responsible for reminding me of your attendance if you are late; if you don't, you may be marked absent. Latecomers will be recorded as such; persistent or egregious lateness will be penalized at my discretion.

Absences from class are either excused or unexcused, and *only verified excuses will be accepted*. Valid excuses for missing class are limited to illness (verified by a note from a professional health-care provider), pre-existing commitments (e.g. performing ensemble tour or paid professional engagement, verified by a printed program), family emergencies (verified by Karen Kriss), mental health emergencies (verified by the Counseling Center or other health professional) and religious holidays not otherwise specified in the Duquesne calendar. You must inform me of pre-existing commitments and religious holidays as soon as possible. If you fail to do so, I may not accept the excuse. While I will hold to these guidelines, I reserve the right to determine whether or not an excuse is valid.

All unexcused absences will result in a deduction of 50 points from your final grade. Excused absences will not be penalized, provided that you make up the work you missed. The makeup assignment I give you will probably consist of a written summary and critique of the materials we had discussed for the class you missed, but it may consist of other activities as well. You need to complete the makeup assignment in order to avoid the 50-point penalty, and your performance on the makeup assignment will be counted as your preparation and participation for the class you missed (see info on preparation and participation grade below). If your excused absence was foreseeable (e.g. a concert tour), you must turn in the makeup assignment by the beginning of the class meeting you are missing (or, at my discretion, at some other specific time, depending on the nature of the assignment). If your excused absence was not foreseeable (e.g. illness), the makeup assignment is due by the beginning of the following class meeting.

Graded Assignments

1. By and large, this will be a discussion-based, workshop-style seminar course, supplemented by a few mini-lectures. Therefore, a large portion of your final grade will be determined by your **preparation and participation** for class. At the beginning of every class meeting, I will distribute an assignment sheet dictating what you are expected to read, listen to, analyze, study, think about, and generally do or be ready to do before our next meeting. Your preparation and participation grade will be based largely on how well you are able to demonstrate during our discussion that you have done this assignment. Your grade is also dependent on active, engaged, creative, thoughtful, and constructive participation in our

discussions, both in terms of quantity and quality. Be aware that sparse, insubstantial and/or non-existent participation will likely result in a very low participation grade.

A rubric and grading scheme for preparation and participation, distributed separately, will offer more details on how your grade in this area will be formulated. It will also provide you with a guide on how to maintain excellence in your preparation and participation. Shortly before the midpoint of the semester, I will send you a report to let you know how you are doing in the area of preparation and participation, based on the rubric. I will give you a sense of what grade you would receive in that area if the class were already over. However, please keep in mind that this will only be an approximate indication of where your grade currently stands, not an actual grade.

One final note on preparation and participation: small written assignments or brief class presentations may be assigned from week to week that will be graded separately and taken from the overall point total devoted to this area (270 points). For example, I might ask you to present a summary of an article to the class worth 20 points. I would grade your summary out of the 20 points, and the remainder of your preparation and participation grade (250 points) would be calculated proportionally based on the rest of your overall performance throughout the semester.

2. For 12 of our class meetings, you will have the opportunity to submit a **response paper** as part of that week's assignment. At the end of each week's assignment sheet, I will explain what you need to do in this paper. Generally speaking, a response paper is a document of no less than 500 words (approx. 2 pages, double-spaced) in which you briefly summarize the material I've specified and offer your own critique and ideas in response to it, according to the stated instructions. This usually involves some combination of reading and listening material from that week's assignment. These papers are intended to help you organize your thoughts before we meet, so that we can get right into the discussion with the questions, concerns, and ideas that you've already formulated.

You need to complete 6 response papers by the end of the semester, which means you can skip 6 weeks of papers. It is your responsibility to keep track of this, however, not mine. Papers will be graded largely on how well they demonstrate that you've read and/or studied the material and made some substantial progress in coming to understand it. I also expect you to follow the instructions given in the assignment sheet about what you need to discuss in these papers. If I ask for your own creative contribution in the paper (and I almost always will), then I be looking for that as well; these are *response* papers, not just summary papers. Your prose need not be perfect, but it should be clear enough for me to understand what you're trying to say.

Finally, if you like, you may submit extra response papers over and above the 6 required papers as extra support for your preparation and participation grade. Those of you who find it difficult to participate regularly in class because of linguistic or personal issues may want to exercise this option. If during class discussion you show me that you've done the work and thought creatively about it, there is probably no need to submit these extra papers. Extra papers will not be graded with points – I will simply read them and factor them in to my calculations when it comes to figuring out your preparation and participation grade. Extra papers should be e-mailed to me, not posted on Blackboard.

3. The final two meetings for this course will be devoted to **presentations**. For this project, you will choose a piece by Bach (or just one movement from a piece) and deliver a 15-minute presentation based on sound scholarly research in which you make an argument about some aspect of the piece in a way that relates to one or more of the issues we have been exploring all semester. Further information about these presentations will be distributed separately.

4. As part of the presentation project, you will write an brief **annotated bibliography** related to your chosen piece. This will give you the chance to explore the scholarly materials that you studied for your presentation in greater depth. The bibliography will consist of summaries and critiques of 3 scholarly sources relevant to your piece, including a discussion of how each one would be useful in resolving the central issue or question you are investigating (minimum 300 words each, approx. 1 page each). Further information about the annotated bibliography will be distributed separately.

5. On Thursday 12/3, I will hand out the **take-home final exam**. This is an open-book exam covering all the material from the entire semester. You will be given two essay questions to answer, including specific requirements about what pieces and readings to discuss. The exam is designed to take 4 hours (2 hours for each essay), and my expectations will be set accordingly. However, you will have eight days to prepare for and complete the exam. Exam essays are due on Thursday 12/10 at 5 pm on Blackboard.

Other Information About Graded Assignments

I will not accept any late assignments in this course. All late/missed assignments receive a grade of 0. I will allow you *one extension* during the term, provided it is justified. The earlier you request an extension, the more likely I am to authorize it. An extension may be used on any response paper; however, it may not be used for the final exam.

Please note that all written assignments must be typed and submitted in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or PDF format to Blackboard, following the instructions given on the assignment sheet..

Grading Scheme

Preparation and participation:	270
Response papers:	180 (6 X 30)
Presentation:	250
Annotated bibliography:	50
Take-home final exam:	250
Total:	1000

Scale For Final Grades

At the end of the semester, you can add up all the points you've earned to determine your final grade:

A 930-1000 A- 900-929 B+ 870-899 B 830-869 B- 800-829 C+ 770-799
C 700-769 D 600-699 F Below 600

All violations of the Duquesne University Academic Integrity Policy (<http://www.duq.edu/academics/university-catalogs/2014-2015-undergraduate/academic-policies/academic-integrity>) will be handled with the utmost severity, according to the procedures explained in the policy. Please review the policy in detail. If you witness an integrity violation, you must inform me about it immediately. If you are an accomplice to an integrity violation, you will be prosecuted along with the principal perpetrators. I will be on the lookout at all times for integrity offenses, and I encourage you to do the same. Our learning environment is not a police state, of course, but it should be a place of the highest ethical standards, where respect and concern for the academic process and for one's colleagues is paramount.

Please understand that you can discuss each week's assignment with other students outside of class in order to help each other get a better handle on course material. However, when it comes to the actual execution of any graded assignment – the response papers, the final exam, the presentation, the annotated bibliography – you must do all your own work. (In addition, for the final exam, you may *only* consult with me for help.) I strongly encourage you to contact me at once if you have any questions or concerns about a possible academic integrity issue, so that we can maximize your ability to help one another and minimize the chances of an unintended violation.

Students With Documented Disabilities

All students who have documented disabilities (physical, psychological, or otherwise) must meet with me during the first two weeks of class to arrange for appropriate accommodations. This must be handled through the Office of Special

Student Services. For more information, please see the office website at <http://www.duq.edu/special-students>.

Office Hours and Extra Help

Please knock on my door at any time if you would like my help with anything whatsoever related to the course. If I'm free, I'll be happy to meet with you. I can also make a specific appointment with you to meet at a particular time; just send me an e-mail or ask me in class.

Course Schedule

Please note: This schedule is only a general guide to the semester; your specific assignment will be distributed a week before each class meeting. If any changes are made to the assignment after the assignment sheet has been distributed, I will let you know via e-mail and the Blackboard announcements page. (NB: All Blackboard announcements are duplicated as e-mails, so if you lose track of your e-mail for some reason, you can always check Blackboard for any updates you may have missed.)

Class No. 1: Preliminaries

Thursday 8/27

Introduction: The "Air on the G String" and our image(s) of Bach
Course mechanics and overview
Fugue review

Class No. 2: Bach the organist

Thursday 9/3

C.P.E. Bach's obituary of his father: the basics of J.S. Bach's life and career
Bach's early career as organist
Problems of authenticity: did Bach write the Toccata and Fugue in D minor?
Bach's chorale preludes in the worship service: music and spirituality, or music vs. spirituality?

Class No. 3: Bach and Lutheranism

Thursday 9/10

The Lutheran cantata and Lutheran theology
Bach's cantatas as "musical sermons": doctrinal symbols or emotional outlets?
Coming to terms with the "dark vision" of Bach's cantatas

Class No. 4: The development of Bach's compositional technique

Thursday 9/17

Bach, Buxtehude, and their passacaglias for organ
Bach's keyboard arrangements of Vivaldi's concertos
How Bach learned to "think musically"

Class No. 5: Bach's instrumental music and the ideologies of his time

Thursday 9/24

Bach moves to Cöthen
Formal ingenuity in the Brandenburg Concertos
The "new image" of Bach: evidence, controversies, implications
The cultural meaning of the Brandenburg Concertos: Bach as Enlightenment
revolutionary or pious Lutheran citizen?

Class No. 6: The nature of Bach's musical designs

Thursday 10/1

The concept of "invention"
What are we supposed to listen for when we listen to Bach?

Class No. 7: Cello Suite in C major, BWV 1009 I

Thursday 10/8

Bach and Baroque dance
The role of analysis in making performance decisions

Class No. 8: Cello Suite in C major, BWV 1009 II

Thursday 10/15

Determining tempo and articulation in Bach's music: historical and practical
considerations
Bach and modern dance: Mark Morris collaborates with Yo-Yo Ma

Class No. 9: The "universality" of Bach's musical language

Thursday 10/22

The art of fugue and the meaning of counterpoint
Transcribing Bach

Class No. 10: St. John Passion I

Thursday 10/29

The libretto: theological and literary dimensions
Bach's Passion as encyclopedia of Baroque musical art
Close study of selected sections

Class No. 11: St. John Passion II

Thursday 11/5

More close study
Recent scholarly approaches to the St. John Passion

Class No. 12: St. John Passion III

Thursday 11/12

Can we hear Bach's Passion the way Bach's congregation did? (And do we want to?)
Peter Sellars's staged version: reaching today's audiences
Is Bach's St. John Passion a dramatic work?

*****Annotated bibliography due Monday 11/16 by 5 pm on Blackboard*****

Class No. 13: Music and everyday life in Bach's world; Bach's legacy

Thursday 11/19

Bach in Leipzig: life and music-making in Bach's household and community
Bach reception in the 19th-21st centuries

NO CLASS Thursday 11/26: Thanksgiving

Class No. 14: Presentations I

Thursday 12/3

*****Final exam handed out on Thursday 12/3 in class*****

Final Meeting: Presentations II

Time and date TBD

*****Final exam due Thursday 12/10 by 5 pm on Blackboard*****