

# The Baroque Period

**T**he Baroque period is the time between about 1600 and 1750. It refers to a style and a way of thinking that was expressed by artists of all kinds, including painters, sculptors, architects, and musicians. The Baroque style began in the decorations and architecture of Roman churches and palaces but soon spread to the rest of Europe. Baroque artists wanted to create an expressive, dramatic effect, so they made buildings with fancy designs and paintings with rich colors. The music of Baroque composers was also elaborate and filled with ornaments.

Originally, the name Baroque was used to criticize the ornate, fancy styles of Baroque art and architecture. During the late 1700s, people thought this style was more decoration than substance, so they called it Baroque, which comes from the Portuguese word *barroco*, an irregularly shaped pearl. Audiences now admire the rich sounds and textures, improvised harmonies, and interesting ornaments of Baroque music.

## Italy

As with Baroque art and architecture, Italian musicians played an important role in developing Baroque music. They invented operas and oratorios (see page 11) and began writing with major and minor scales rather than the modes that were popular during the Medieval and Renaissance periods. They also started writing tempo and dynamic markings in their music, and this is why most music markings are still in Italian today.

Some of the first Baroque composers were Italian, including Giovanni Gabrieli, Claudio Monteverdi, Girolamo Frescobaldi, Arcangelo Corelli, Antonio Vivaldi, and Jean Baptiste Lully. These composers changed how music sounded. They were tired of simple melodies and began to experiment with different harmonies, rhythms, and ornaments. The new ideas influenced composers in Germany, France, and the rest of Europe, including J.S. Bach, George Frideric Handel, Henry Purcell, Jean Philippe Rameau, Francois Couperin, and Johann Pachelbel.

*A girl of the Baroque period playing a harpsichord.*



## Kings and their Palaces

The courts of European kings, emperors, and noblemen were centers for musical and cultural activities. The most important was the court of King Louis XIV of France. He bought beautiful furniture, pictures, and sculptures for his palace at Versailles. There were also gardens, stables, a theater, library, art gallery, museum, and a chapel at the palace. King Louis employed many servants as well as composers, musicians, painters, and even doctors. Other rulers wanted their castles to be as impressive as Versailles, so they built libraries and art galleries and hired their own orchestras.

While many musicians worked as court musicians, others composed great music for the church. At the same time instruments and printed music were becoming available to the middle class, and more people played music at home.

## Baroque Instruments

During the Baroque period many improvements were made to instruments by skilled craftsmen. The piano had not been invented, so Baroque composers wrote keyboard music for the organ, harpsichord, and clavichord. Baroque keyboard instruments were beautifully decorated. String instruments were greatly improved, and violins made in Italy during this period are still considered the best ever made. The bassoon was invented in Italy around 1540 to produce deep, low notes and was very popular by 1600. In earlier times the trumpet was used to announce the arrival of kings or to signal armies during battles. During the Baroque period, the trumpet became an important orchestral instrument, and trumpet players earned more money than other musicians. Drums were decorated with silver and hung on expensive embroidery straps. Sometimes drummers in bands also performed acrobatic stunts. Another popular instrument was the guitar. Spanish guitarist Robert de Visée worked for King Louis, and soon everyone wanted to play the guitar.

## Baroque Music

Church music was very important during the Baroque period, but non-religious music also became popular. Baroque composers tried to express a single emotion in their



*Noblemen and ladies dancing at a royal court.*

compositions, such as sadness, happiness, or awe. Although early Baroque composers in Italy focused on vocal music, as better instruments were developed, many solo and orchestral works were written for them. Several popular forms were fugues, dance suites, toccatas, sonatas, concertos, passacaglias, and themes and variations.

Although Baroque composers began writing in some instructions for performers, many things were left for the musicians to improvise. There were rules of playing that all musicians learned, and then they added their own ideas about how the music should sound.

Because more people were learning to play music at home, musicians began writing books on how to play correctly. From these books we have clues about how to play Baroque pieces as they were originally heard. It was common to add ornaments such as trills and turns to the music. These ornaments were sometimes indicated by signs, and composers wrote instructions on how to play them.

Because Baroque keyboard pieces were written for the piano, you should imagine the light, delicate sounds of a harpsichord or clavichord when you play them. In order to sustain the light sound, the keyboard player often added trills, embellishments, broken chords, and arpeggios to the music. Rhythms were clear and precise, except in more dramatic pieces like toccatas. Learning more about Baroque styles and instruments will help you play the music better.

# Johann Sebastian Bach

**J**ohann Sebastian Bach was born on March 21, 1685 in Eisenach, Germany. He lived a long successful life and died in 1750. He is the most famous Baroque composer and one of the greatest musicians of all time. Bach traveled frequently throughout his life and worked at many different musical jobs. He was respected all over Germany and was often asked to test new organs at churches.

## Bach's Childhood

Bach grew up in a musical family; his father played the violin and trumpet and worked as the court trumpeter and director of town music in Eisenach. J.S. Bach's parents both died when he was young, so he went to live with his older brother Cristoph, who was an organist in a nearby town. Cristoph was a talented organist who taught his younger brother to play all of the keyboard instruments of the time. (The piano had not yet been

invented.) Young J.S. Bach also learned how to repair and build organs when the church's organ was rebuilt.

Bach stayed with his brother for five years but then went away to school because his brother needed more room for his children. He received a scholarship to the school and in return sang in a choir. He received a small salary for singing in the choir and sometimes performed for weddings and other special occasions.

When Bach's voice changed, he switched to playing the organ and other instruments. He also studied math, poetry, history, religion, physics, and Latin. After finishing school, Bach worked at a couple of jobs as a church organist. He finally found steady work as a church organist in Arnstadt, Germany.

## Bach at Arnstadt

Bach is often thought of as a serious, important figure, but as a young man in his early twenties, Bach was not a success at his first job. The local musicians did not like him and neither did the church congregation. He was severely scolded when he left for a one month vacation and stayed away for three months instead. Bach had walked 300 miles to hear a famous Danish organist play and stayed to listen to a series of recitals. While he was gone, he missed all of the Advent and Christmas services, which made the church committee very angry. Although Bach learned



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

## Bach's Family

Bach had twenty children with his two wives, Maria Barbara Bach and Anna Magdalena Wilken. Both of his wives came from musical families, and all of the children were taught to sing and play instruments. Three of his sons, Wilhelm Friedemann, Carl Philipp Emanuel, and Johann Christian, became well-known composers, although they were not as talented as their father.



A picture of Bach when he was at Weimar.

many musical ideas while he was away, the church members did not like the new, more difficult music he wrote for them to sing. Bach continued to have trouble with officials throughout his life and did not like them telling him what to do.

### Other Employers

Bach left Arnstadt a year later and eventually went to work for the Duke of Weimar, an important nobleman who was interested in music. Bach had recently married a distant cousin Maria Barbara Bach, and while at Weimar, six of their children were born. Bach became a well-known teacher during this period and also composed many important works, including organ music, harpsichord toccatas, and many cantatas. He also became famous as a talented organist and was offered important jobs in other towns.

After Weimar, Bach worked for Prince Leopold. There he composed his sonatas for violin and harpsichord, solos for violin and cello, the "Brandenburg" concertos, and part of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Unfortunately,

during this time his first wife died. He soon married Anna Magdalena Wilken and moved to Leipzig where he had an important job as the cantor of the St. Thomas Church. Bach supervised the music at four Leipzig churches, taught students at the church's school, and wrote music for town and church events. Bach spent 27 years in Leipzig and wrote many of his compositions there.

### Bach's Music

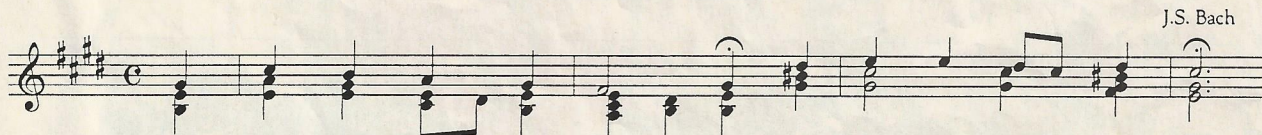
Bach wrote an enormous number of works, including the *St. Matthew Passion*, the B-minor Mass, six Brandenburg concertos for orchestra, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, nearly 300 church cantatas, and thousands of pieces for voice, strings, orchestra, and keyboard. He was a devout Lutheran, and many of his compositions were written for the church. During his lifetime he was better known as an organist, teacher, and conductor than as a composer. After his death, his compositions were rarely heard by audiences until Felix Mendelssohn organized a performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* 80 years later.

### A Family Tradition

During the Baroque period, jobs such as furniture making, metalworking, woodcarving, and musical instrument making took years to learn. Often many generations in the same family would work at the same job. Parents would begin teaching their children the difficult skills when they were very young.

In Germany the Bach family had a long family tradition as musicians. In some places the name Bach had come to mean musician because all of the Bachs were musicians. From 1550 to 1800 there were over 50 Bach musicians that we know about. There were probably many more whose names have been forgotten. Johann Ambrosius Bach, the father of Johann Sebastian Bach, was a violinist, and all of J.S. Bach's sons were musicians.

### St. Matthew Passion





## Rain in the Vineyard

*Naiomi Kaufman composed "Rain in the Vineyard." Naiomi is 13 years old and has been playing the piano for 5 years. She lives in Sonoma, California and studies piano with Carol Parson.*

Naiomi Kaufman





## Animal Composition Contest

This month we announce an animal composition contest. You might write a piece about your pet or a more unusual creature like a lion or butterfly. All compositions must be your own work, but teachers and parents can help you write the notes on paper. On the back of the piece, write your name, age, address, teacher's name, and how many years you have played the piano. Write clearly so we can read the music. The contest deadline is April 7, and compositions will not be returned. Winners will receive a small prize, and the best compositions will be printed in the May and July issues of *Piano Explorer*. Good Luck!



# The Harpsichord

The harpsichord is one of the best-known instruments from the Baroque period. Although it was invented in the 1400s, it reached the height of its popularity between 1700 and 1760, during the Baroque period. The harpsichord looks like a small grand piano, but its delicate, plucked notes actually sound more like a giant guitar.

Like the piano, the harpsichord could play solos or as a member of a small chamber group. It was also often used to accompany singers. When Baroque harpsichordists accompanied singers or violinists, they were expected to make up the accompaniment part. They were given the melody and a figured bass part (see page 12 for more on figured bass.) From this the player came up with an accompaniment part.

The harpsichord has a keyboard and strings that are tuned to specific notes, as the piano does. When a harpsichord key is pressed, the strings are plucked by tiny picks called quills. The piano uses felt-covered hammers to hit the strings. As a result, the harpsichord has a light, clear, delicate sound, and the piano produces a full, rich tone.

Another difference between the two instruments is the way they change dynamics. To play louder on the piano, you press the keys harder. On the harpsichord, no matter how hard you press the key, the string is plucked the exact same way and at the same dynamic level. It does not get louder or softer. The harpsichord also cannot create crescendos or diminuendos. This limits the number of effects that a harpsichord player can produce.

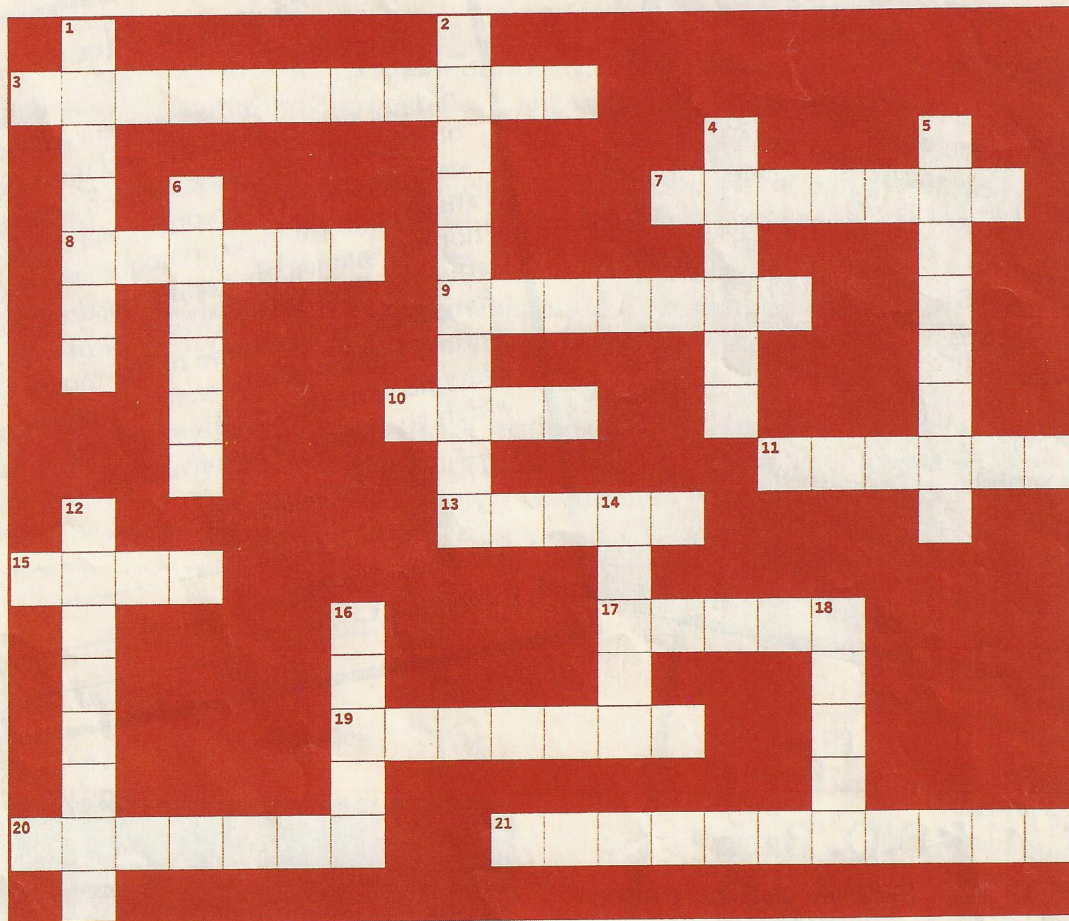
To help with this problem, harpsichord builders added an extra keyboard, called a manual, with different sets of strings and quills. One keyboard could play notes loudly and the other softly. Although harpsichords could play *piano* and *forte* with the extra keyboard, they still could not create crescendos. You can imagine how excited keyboard players must have been when the piano was invented, and they could produce these effects.

Harpsichords are smaller than pianos and do not have as many keys. They usually had a range of only 4 or 5 octaves. (The modern piano has over 7 octaves.) The keys are also narrower. A musician with small hands can reach an octave more easily, but pianists who try to play a favorite piece on the harpsichord might overreach a few notes at first.

By the end of the 1700s, the piano overshadowed the harpsichord. Composers, performers, and audiences were excited by piano because it could play dynamics, accents and other effects. Today musicians are rediscovering the harpsichord and performing the music of Baroque composers as it originally was meant to be played.



# Crossword Puzzle



## Across

3. A popular Baroque keyboard instrument
7. Bach wrote the St. Matthew \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Harpsichord strings are plucked by \_\_\_\_\_.
9. An Italian Baroque composer
10. A percussion instrument
11. A string instrument played by Robert de Visée
13. Many early Baroque composers lived in \_\_\_\_\_.
15. A German Baroque composer
17. An ornament in Baroque music
19. Many later Baroque composers were from this country.

20. A woodwind instrument that plays low notes
21. He reintroduced Bach's music to audiences

## Down

1. Musical period after the Renaissance
2. Early Baroque composer
4. George Frideric \_\_\_\_\_
5. Musical form popular in the Baroque period
6. String instrument
12. Bach wrote 300 church \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Bach studied this language at school.
16. Popular keyboard instrument
18. King \_\_\_\_\_ XIV



What did the musician's chicken say?  
Bach, Bach, Bach.

If it's not Baroque, don't fix it.

Go for Baroque.

Don't go away, we'll be Bach in a minuet.

Handel with care.

Our team won with Bach-to-Bach home runs.



## Baroque Bits

### Baroque Moods

Baroque composers often used tempo markings to set the mood of a piece. Today *allegro* only means fast, but in Baroque music it tells the musician to play "cheerfully." *Largo* means to play "in a grand, singing style," but not necessarily slow. Composers also used key signatures to represent different feelings:

- C Major – rejoicing
- C Minor – sad
- G Major – quietly joyful
- G Minor – serious, sweet, and tender
- A Major – calm and peaceful
- A Minor – honorable

### Baroque Pieces

After Bach's death in 1750, Baroque music practically disappeared. Musicians did not play it anymore, and most pieces only survived because written copies were passed on from one generation of students to the next. Baroque music did not become widely popular again until after the First World War. You may not have realized that some of the most famous musical works were written by Baroque composers. Can you guess which composers wrote these pieces?

1. *The Well-Tempered Clavier* \_\_\_\_\_
2. *Messiah* \_\_\_\_\_
3. *The Four Seasons* \_\_\_\_\_
4. *Canon in D* \_\_\_\_\_

### P.D.Q. Bach

C.P.E. and J.C. Bach are well-known sons of Johann Sebastian Bach, but you may not have heard of P.D.Q. Bach. He was the last and certainly the least of J.S. Bach's many children. He led a wild life and is known for leaving behind large, unpaid hotel bills and spaghetti stains on his compositions. His music resembles that of several other composers because he stole musical ideas from nearly every composer and style imaginable. In *Eine Kleine Nichtmusik* (*nicht* is German for not) he stole the string parts from Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (*A Little Night Music*) and wrote unusual melodies for the winds to play on top of them. In the *1712 Overture*, he took the melody of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and combined it with "Yankee Doodle."

If this all sounds a little hard to believe, you are right. P.D.Q. Bach is actually the invention of composer Peter Schickele. When Schickele was in college, he began giving humorous performances and writing



Schickele playing P.D.Q. Bach music

funny music. Audiences loved hearing the works of the pretend P.D.Q. Bach, and soon Schickele was giving performances with some of the most famous orchestras in the country. Schickele also writes serious music for both adults and children.

## Definitions

**Tocatta:** A popular Baroque form of music written for instruments rather than singers. German composers wrote many organ toccatas. Bach wrote a number of toccatas for organ and harpsichord.

**Cantata:** A type of composition written for singers, often based on religious works. Bach wrote hundreds of church cantatas but also composed some non-religious pieces, including the "Coffee" Cantata.

**Clavier:** A word that refers to keyboard instruments. Sometimes in early compositions it meant that the performer could choose which keyboard instrument, the harpsichord, clavichord, or later the pianoforte, to use.

**Oratorio:** An important type of Baroque composition. An oratorio is a religious opera based on a Bible story. It did not use elaborate settings or costumes and was often performed in church.

**Terraced Dynamics:** The Baroque style of writing dynamics. In Baroque music composers did not write many dynamic markings other than forte and piano. A loud section is often followed by a quiet one rather than writing a gradual crescendo or diminuendo. The dynamics are at two different levels or terraces.

### Famous Baroque People

**Galileo** (1564-1642): Italian mathematician, astronomer, and physicist.

**William Shakespeare** (1564-1616): English writer of plays, including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

**René Descartes** (1596-1650): French philosopher who wrote "I think, therefore I am."

**Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini** (1598-1680): Italian sculptor, architect, and painter.

**Harmensz van Rijn Rembrandt** (1606-1669): Dutch painter and one of the most important artists of the 1600s.

**John Milton** (1608-1674): English poet who wrote *Paradise Lost*.

**Isaac Newton** (1642-1727): English physicist and mathematician who discovered the law of gravity and invented calculus.

**Antonio Stradivari** (1644-1737): Italian violin maker who made over 1,100 instruments.

### Baroque Opera

In the Baroque period, people were fascinated with the theater and operas. Architects even designed buildings and gardens to look like stage sets. Operas started in Florence, Italy around 1600, and the first opera house opened in 1637 in Italy. Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) wrote some of the best early operas. His opera *Orfeo* (1607) is the oldest opera that still is performed. Opera characters sing different types of songs called recitatives, arias, and choruses. A recitative is a combination of singing and speaking with only a simple accompaniment. Arias are usually accompanied by an orchestra. A group of singers and musicians perform choruses. As time went on, the arias and choruses became more important than the recitatives, and operas became longer and fancier. The stage had elaborate sets and the singers wore dramatic costumes. The development of plays and operas in the 1600s can be compared to the development of movies and television in the 20th century.

# Baroque Basics

During the Baroque period composers used different ideas to give the music its own style and sound.

## Counterpoint

The popular style called counterpoint used two or more melodies. Composers wrote counterpoint in different ways. Sometimes one melody would start the piece, then another instrument would play the same melody a little later. This is known as imitation. If you have ever sung "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" in a round, you have used this type of counterpoint. Other pieces use two or more different melodies played at the same time.

## Fugue

One place you find counterpoint is in the fugue, an important Baroque musical form. J.S. Bach is famous for writing many fugues. In this form, the composer first writes a melody, which is also called the subject, that is played without accompaniment. Bach's C Minor Fugue begins with this subject:



Next the melody is played again, starting on a different note, and a second melody is added, as shown below.



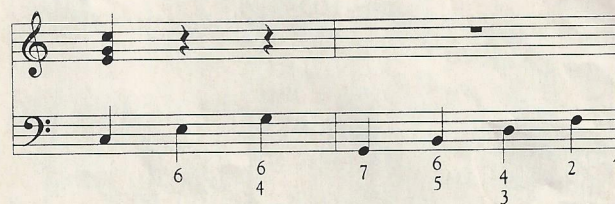
In pieces using counterpoint, the composer sometimes fills in the music with a passage called an episode. This section sounds almost like the main melody, or subject, but not exactly.



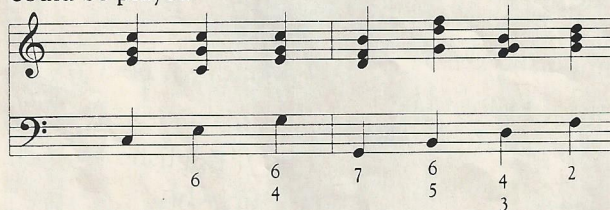
During the fugue, the subject will appear over and over again, sometimes even in a different key.

## Figured Bass

Another common feature in Baroque music is the *basso continuo*, or figured bass. In a Baroque composition, the lowest notes are performed by a bass voice or a low instrument such as a bassoon or cello. The bass line is also played by another instrument such as the harpsichord, organ, or lute. This added instrument makes the bass line sound stronger and also fills in the chords. The notes of the chords were not written out in the score. Instead a number was written above or below the bass notes to show the musician what chord to play. The term figured bass comes from these numbers, or figures.



could be played:



In January you read about how composer Muzio Clementi passed a music test to become an organist at a church when he was nine years old. Part of this test included playing some pieces with figured bass. To make the test even harder, he was asked to play these pieces again in different keys.

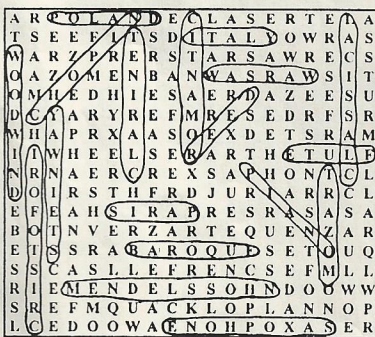
# HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Some important birthdays to keep in mind during the month of March:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 4 - <b>Antonio Vivaldi</b> (1678-1741) Italian Baroque composer  | 14 - <b>Georg Philipp Telemann</b> (1681-1767) German Baroque composer              |
| 5 - <b>Heitor Villa-Lobos</b> (1887-1959) Brazilian composer   | 18 - <b>Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov</b> (1844-1908) Russian composer                    |
| 7 - <b>Maurice Ravel</b> (1875-1937) French Impressionist composer                                     | 20 - <b>Sviatoslav Richter</b> (1915- ) Ukrainian pianist                           |
| 8 - <b>Alan Hovhaness</b> (1911- ) American composer   | 21 - <b>Modest Mussorgsky</b> (1839-1881) Russian composer                          |
| 8 - <b>C.P.E. Bach</b> (1714-1788) German composer, son of Johann Sebastian                            | 21 - <b>Johann Sebastian Bach</b> (1685-1750) the greatest of all Baroque composers |
| 9 - <b>Samuel Barber</b> (1910-1983) American composer   | 24 - <b>Byron Janis</b> (1928- ) American pianist                                   |
| 10 - <b>Arthur Honegger</b> (1892-1955) Swiss-French composer  | 25 - <b>Béla Bartók</b> (1881-1945) Hungarian composer                              |
| 11 - <b>Henry Cowell</b> (1897-1965) American composer   | 25 - <b>Arturo Toscanini</b> (1867-1957) Italian-American conductor                 |
| 13 - <b>Hugo Wolf</b> (1860-1903) Austrian composer  | 28 - <b>Rudolf Serkin</b> (1903-1991) Austrian-American pianist                     |
| 14 - <b>Johann Strauss, Sr.</b> (1804-1849) Austrian composer, father of "The Waltz King," Johann, Jr. | 29 - <b>E. Power Biggs</b> (1906-1977) English-American organist                    |
|  | 31 - <b>Franz Joseph Haydn</b> (1732-1809) Austrian composer                        |

## Answers to February Puzzles

Word Search (page 13)



Quiz (page 14)

- |                |      |
|----------------|------|
| 1. a. Schubert | 4. c |
| b. Beethoven   | 5. b |
| 2. c           | 6. a |
| 3. b           | 7. a |



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# Shinichi Suzuki

(1899-1998)

Shinichi Suzuki, the founder of the Suzuki method of teaching music, died on January 26, 1998. Dr. Suzuki believe that anyone could learn to play an instrument with the right training. His method of teaching music focuses on listening and then playing back what is heard. He thought that learning to play an instrument is similar to learning to speak a language. Because young children under the age of 3 can learn to speak any language, he thought that they could also learn to play an instrument.

Originally the Suzuki method was used to teach the violin. Its focus on listening was perfectly suited to the violin. It is difficult to put a finger on just the right spot on the violin fingerboard to produce the correct note. Young violinists must learn to listen carefully to play in tune. Later the Suzuki method was adapted for the cello, piano, and other instruments. Because Suzuki believed that ear training was so critical, Suzuki students do not learn to read music for several years. Parents are also an important part of the method. They are encouraged to attend lessons, practice with students, and even learn to play the instrument themselves.



The Suzuki books revolutionized music education. Before Dr. Suzuki began teaching young children in the 1950s, most teachers began instruction when children were 10 or 12. Today more than 300,000 students in 34 countries study the Suzuki method, and many more use the songs in the Suzuki method books. Dr. Suzuki's wife, Waltraud, is still alive and is 94 years old. The Suzuki s lived in Matsumoto, Japan, and had no children.

## Quiz

- The years \_\_\_\_\_ are called the Baroque period.
  - 1400-1600
  - 1500-1700
  - 1600-1750
  - 1776-1850
- J.S. Bach was born in \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Italy
  - Germany
  - France
  - England
- Baroque style is fancy and ornate.
  - True
  - False
- \_\_\_\_\_ was an Italian violin maker.
  - Vivaldi
  - Galileo
  - Stradivari
  - Shakespeare
- The harpsichord has hammers that strike the strings to produce sound.
  - True
  - False
- J.S. Bach had \_\_\_\_\_ children.
  - 20
  - 25
  - 10
  - none