

# KEYBOARD KIDS COMPANION

CREATED BY TEACHERS. *Approved by kids!*

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## MEET THE COMPOSERS

### JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Johann Sebastian **Bach** was born in Germany on March 21, 1685—the same year as George Friedrich **Handel** and Domenico Scarlatti. Bach and Handel were both German Lutherans and organists, but they never met. Many composers, including Romantic era Frédéric Chopin and Impressionistic era Claude **Debussy**, played Bach's music every day for part of their inspiration.

Johann Sebastian was born to a musical family; he was the youngest of eight children. By age ten, Johann Sebastian was an orphan. He and one of his brothers went to live with their older brother.

Bach had twenty children, but only ten lived to grow up. Four of his children—Wilhelm Friedemann, Carl Philipp Emanuel, Johann Christoph, and Johann Christian (his 2nd, 5th, 16th, and 18th children)—also became famous musicians. He wrote many of his compositions to teach his own children performing skills and musical ideas.

Bach knew many famous people. Johann Pachelbel was his brother's teacher, and Georg Philipp Telemann was the godfather of Bach's son, Carl Philipp Emanuel.

Bach was so devoted to good music that he traveled from Arnstadt to Lübeck to hear the famous organist Dietrich Buxtehude perform. Many believe that he walked. That would be the same as walking from Washington, D.C. to New York City!

J.S. Bach played many instruments. He was most famous as a composer, organist, violinist, and **clavier** player (the general term at the time for stringed keyboard instruments: harpsichord, clavichord, and spinet). Although the piano was just invented and not yet popular, we usually hear Bach's stringed keyboard compositions performed on piano today. He wrote and performed music for royalty and for church services, including hundreds of cantatas for chorus. He wrote music for many different instruments. He was a master at polyphony (composing with more than one melody playing at a time), but could also write beautiful, light dances. He was one of the first to teach about the importance of using the thumb when playing keyboard instruments (which was called "Bach's **fingering**" in Germany). His son **Carl** Philipp Emanuel wrote a famous book that included information about this important idea.

He taught music and Latin at a school for boys in Leipzig, and he worked as a church organist. Before he moved to Leipzig, he worked as a musician for the Duke of **Weimar**. One day Bach and the Duke had such a strong disagreement that the Duke had him thrown in jail for almost a month!

Johann Sebastian Bach died on July 28, 1750 at the age of 65. The **Baroque** period of music history ended at the same time.



If you haven't already played one of Bach's compositions, you probably will one day in the future. Speaking of the future...the two Voyager spacecraft, which were launched into the solar system in 1977, contain playback equipment and recordings of J.S. Bach's music as examples of some of the finest achievements by humans!

## SOME FAMOUS COMPOSITIONS BY J.S. BACH



### LISTEN

- Keyboard Concerto in D Minor
- The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I
- The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II
- Toccata and Fugue in D Minor
- Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major
- Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring

Click on the links above to watch the YouTube videos

## ASK THE TEACHERS

## Why do I have to bother with the fingerings in my music?

There are many good reasons we should follow—or at least consider—the fingerings suggested by composers and editors in our printed music. When we use good fingering, rhythm is likely to be more accurate. Good fingering choices help us to play with even tone quality. Composers use certain fingerings to express articulation and phrasing. It even helps us to memorize our music more quickly and dependably. And sometimes it's just about reaching the correct notes. We can save a lot of time because the composers and editors have already tried them out!

Sometimes certain fingerings are merely suggestions and do not work well for everyone's hand since we are different sizes and shapes. But you should always at least try the suggested fingering. Don't ignore them! If suggested fingering doesn't feel comfortable, ask your teacher to check it out. Sometimes you can't tell if the fingering works for you until you put the whole piece together as certain fingering in one phrase might prepare your hand for a following phrase. Sometimes you won't be able to tell if the fingering works best for you until you are playing full or close to full tempo, or have included all the expressive details your teacher asks for. And sometimes you may not have discovered note or rhythm mistakes; as soon as they are cleared up, you might find that the suggested fingering fits you perfectly.

After trying out the suggested fingerings in your music, you and your teacher may decide to experiment with alternatives in some places. Or, your teacher may already have something that fits your hand better in some places. Whatever fingering you and your teacher choose, be sure that you use the same ones each time you play a piece. Consistent fingering will help you to feel more confident in your playing!

## BIRTHDAYS

### MARCH

1	Frédéric Chopin	(1810)	Poland
7	Maurice Ravel	(1875)	France

### APRIL

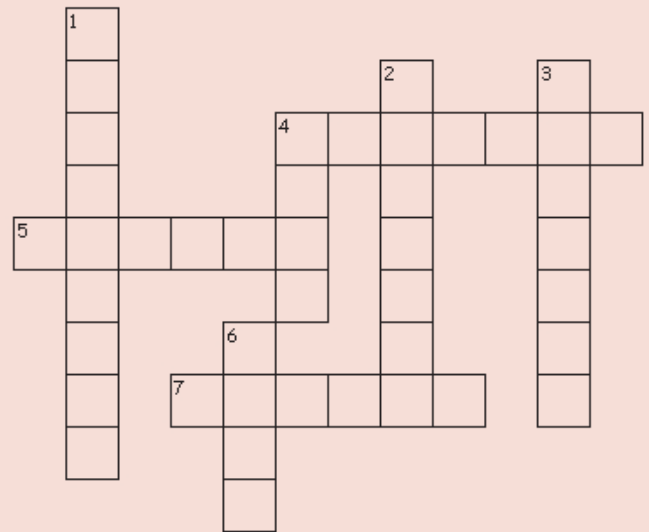
11	Alberto Ginastera	(1916)	Argentina
23	Sergei Prokofiev	(1891)	Russia

### MAY

7	Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky	(1840)	Russia
22	Richard Wagner	(1813)	Germany

## Looking Back to Bach!

Read the story about Johann Sebastian Bach's life to find the answers to this puzzle.



### ACROSS

- General term used in Baroque era for stringed keyboard instruments
- The Duke of \_\_\_\_\_ had Bach thrown in jail when they disagreed.
- German organist and composer born same year as J.S. Bach

### DOWN

- Bach changed the way keyboardists used these
- Historical period in which Bach lived; 1600-1750
- Impressionistic composer played Bach's music every day as inspiration
- \_\_\_\_ Philipp Emanuel Bach: Son of J.S. Bach continued important work about fingering for keyboardists.
- Featured composer: J.S. \_\_\_\_