

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(1685–1750)

“The Man From Whom All True
Musical Wisdom Proceeded”

A 250th Anniversary Exhibition

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“The Man From Whom All True
Musical Wisdom Proceeded”

A 250th Anniversary Exhibition

Prepared by students of Music 215r
under the direction of Professor Christoph Wolff

Houghton Library
and
Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library
Harvard University

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Catalog entry 1.1: J. S. BACH. *Canon à 4 Voc: perpetuus*. 1713. Manuscript leaf.
 Original leaf: 8.5 x 14.2 cm.

Case 1: Original Sources, Manuscript and Printed

Bach's music manuscripts are the most telling and significant documents that record his creative life. They are, in fact, traces of his music. However, these manuscripts—mainly scores and performing parts—are extremely scattered throughout the world. One will never know exactly how many works he composed in his lifetime. This is largely due to the handling and division of his estate in 1750. Although the inheritance was to be allocated among his widow and nine surviving children, Bach's four musical sons inherited the bulk of his music. Most of what has survived today, however, stems from the two oldest sons of Bach. Carl Philipp Emanuel created a well-organized estate catalog, while Wilhelm Friedemann's unstable lifestyle forced him to sell the manuscripts from his father's estate.

There is an awareness of a musical personality that emerges from Bach's penmanship. The changing of his handwriting style (both calligraphic and utilitarian) throughout the years reflects on the time of origin of many of his works that are not explicitly dated. However, one must also keep in mind that the majority of performing parts was prepared by family members and students closely supervised by Bach.

The publication of Bach's works was not carried out in any systematic fashion during the composer's lifetime. Although some of his keyboard works were published as early in his Leipzig tenure as 1726, many of his largest and today most popular works, such as the *St. Matthew Passion*, were not in print until after Beethoven's lifetime. Only with the Bach-Gesellschaft Edition, begun a century after his death, did a nearly-complete collection of Bach's works emerge.

Because print runs of Bach's works were short, it is not surprising that manuscript copies of out-of-print publications survive from the later decades of the 1700s. The eighteenth century equivalents of out-of-print photocopies, these manuscripts usually preserve the line breaks, placement of accidentals, and section headings of the original prints. Even when the works were available in print, in many cases it was less costly to make a manuscript copy than to purchase a printed edition.

1.1 JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Canon à 4 Voc: perpetuus, BWV 1073. Autograph album entry. Weimar, 2 August 1713.

Canon for four voices

To contribute this little item at this place to the Honored Owner [of this book] in the hope of friendly remembrance is the wish of

JOH. SEBAST. BACH
Court Organist and Chamber
Musician to His Saxon Highness

Weimar, August 2, 1713

This canon is the earliest extant dated autograph of Bach. It was written for a “friendship” album belonging to an unidentified owner, perhaps a pupil of Bach’s. The verso of this album leaf (the album has not survived) contains a Ciceronian Latin dedication by “Georgius Christianus Titius,” the Chancellor of the University of Jena at that time. Particularly because very few personal letters and correspondence survive, these canons for friends and acquaintances carry personal as well as musical significance. [See 2.5 for another canon dedication.]

Houghton Library: bMS Eng 870 (35b)

Displayed with: Canon Solution

1.2 JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Alto part of the cantata *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir*, BWV 130. Manuscript leaf with autograph emendations. Leipzig, 1724.

The complete set of 17 performing parts of this cantata (only 11 survive and are scattered throughout the world) was copied directly from Bach’s score by Christian Gottlob Meissner (1707–1760), a student of Bach at the St. Thomas School. He was one of Bach’s principal copyists, an invaluable one when performance copies were needed immediately. This part was for a first performance of the work on September 29, 1724. Bach’s proofreading emendations seen at the bottom of the manuscript (“chorale sequitur volti”—chorale follows/turn over quickly) reveal his specific performance instructions. The extra alto clefs also at the bottom of the page suggest that the copying was done in stages.

Houghton Library: bMS Eng 870 (35a)

1.3 JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Particel by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach for the cantata *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her*, BWV 9. Manuscript leaf. Halle, between 1750 and 1764.

The following inscription, in German, appears on the top of the recto:

*“Original handwriting by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. / This certifies
F.W. Jähns [1809–1888] Royal Music Director / in Berlin.”*

The autograph score of this Cantata was inherited by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. Because the original parts belonged to the lineage of Bach’s widow Anna Magdalena, he had to write out copies for performances as town organist in Halle (1746–1764). Wilhelm Friedemann needed this part in addition to the score for the rehearsal and performance of his father’s work.

Houghton Library: pf MS Mus 62

1.4 JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Clavier-Übung III, original edition. *Dritter Theil der Clavier Übung bestehend in verschiedenen Vorspielen über die Catechismus—und andere Gesaenge, vor die Orgel*. Leipzig: In Verlegung des Authoris, 1739.

This work was published by Bach himself. The music consists mainly of chorale large and small preludes, playable on organ, organ without pedals, or pedal harpsichord. The preludes vary in length and difficulty, presumably to appeal to a larger audience and to ensure financial success of the print-run. Bach divided the engraving work between two workshops, Krüger and Balthasar Schmid (engraver and publisher of 1.5 below). Differences between the two engravers can be seen on the open pages 19 (Schmid) and 20 (Krüger), especially in the shapes of the *custos* (the marks at the end of each system showing where the first note of the next system will lie) and of the final fermatas. Krüger's engraving so closely resembles Bach's handwriting in places that it led earlier scholars to conclude that Bach did his own engraving. Although there is some evidence that he may have done his own engraving at times (see 2.5) there is no reason to believe that he had this sort of fluency with copper etching techniques. More likely, the etching was done by an engraver accustomed to reproducing drawings.

Houghton Library: *54-1761F

1.5 JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Clavier-Übung IV: Goldberg Variations. *Clavier Übung bestehend in einer Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen vors Clavicimbal mit 2 Manualen*. Nuremberg: Balthasar Schmid, 1741.

The early edition of the *Goldberg Variations* was published by Balthasar Schmid. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Leipzig and Nuremberg had emerged as the leading German publishing cities (as other, non-music documents in this exhibition will attest). Nuremberg specialized in the style of engraving exemplified by the *Goldberg Variations* printing. Entire pages were drawn into the plate in much the same manner as an art engraving, rather than building the music up from individual notes and rests, as is done in type and in later musical typography.

The title, *Goldberg Variations*, was attached to the pieces through a probably apocryphal story related by Johann Nikolaus Forkel, Bach's first biographer, in 1802:

For this model . . . we have to thank the instigation of the former Russian ambassador to the electoral court of Saxony, Count Kaiserling, who often stopped in Leipzig. . . . Once the Count mentioned in Bach's presence that he would like to have some clavier pieces for Goldberg, which should be of such a smooth and somewhat lively character that he might be a little cheered up by them in his sleepless nights. Bach thought himself best able to fulfill this wish by means of Variations. . . . He produced only a single work of this kind. Thereafter, the Count always called them his variations. . . . Bach was perhaps never so rewarded for one of his works as for this. The Count presented him with a golden goblet filled with 100 *louis-d'or*. Nevertheless, even had the gift been a thousand times larger, their artistic value would not yet have been paid for.

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JGL, MSC