



AUSTRALIAN
BRANDENBURG
ORCHESTRA

CIRCA

Circa & The Art of Fugue

The power of the mind, body, and music

BRISBANE SERIES PARTNER



VIKING
EXPEDITIONS

Circa & The Art of Fugue

Concert approximately 85 minutes without interval

ARTISTS

Paul Dyer AO (Sydney) Artistic Director
Australian Brandenburg Orchestra
Yaron Lifschitz (Brisbane) Artistic Director, Circa
Circa Ensemble

CREATIVES

Libby McDonnell Costume Designer
Yaron Lifschitz Lighting Designer
Trent Suidgeest Creative Consultant
Simon Hardy Creative Consultant

PERFORMANCE DATES

QUEENSLAND PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE	MELBOURNE RECITAL CENTRE	CITY RECITAL HALL
Tue, 05 Aug, 2025 7PM	Thu, 07 Aug, 2025 7PM	Tue, 12 Aug, 2025 7PM
	Sat, 09 Aug, 2025 7PM	Wed, 13 Aug, 2025 7PM
	Sun, 10 Aug, 2025 5PM	Fri, 15 Aug, 2025 7PM
		Sat, 16 Aug, 2025 2PM
		Sat, 16 Aug, 2025 7PM

Commissioned by the Moss Arts Center, Virginia Tech and the University of Georgia Performing Arts Center.

The Australian Brandenburg Orchestra is privileged to live, create and perform on the lands of the longest living culture in the world, and we pay deep respect to traditional custodians and Elders, past and present.

Repertoire

Johann Sebastian Bach

The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080

Set 1 — Simple fugues

- Contrapunctus 1
- Contrapunctus 2
- Contrapunctus 3
- Contrapunctus 4
- Canon alla Ottava

Set 2 — Counter-fugues

- Contrapunctus 5
- Contrapunctus 6
- Contrapunctus 7

Set 3 — Double/Triple fugues

- Contrapunctus 8 a 3
- Contrapunctus 9
- Contrapunctus 10
- Contrapunctus 11
- Canon alla Duodecima in Contrapunto alla Quinta

Set 4 — Mirror fugues

- Contrapunctus 12, recta
- Contrapunctus 12, inversa
- Contrapunctus 13, inversa
- Contrapunctus 13, recta
- Canon per Augmentationem in Contrario Motu

Set 5 — Unfinished fugue

- Fuga a 3 Soggetti

Harpsichord preparation by
Jason Boyd (Brisbane),
Gary Beadell (Melbourne)
and Nathan Cox (Sydney).

Chamber Organ preparation by
Simon Pierce (Brisbane),
Campbell Hargraves (Mel)
and Nathan Cox (Sydney)

Paul Dyer AO Artistic Director



Paul Dyer is one of Australia's leading specialists in period performance.

Paul co-founded the Brandenburg in 1989 after completing postgraduate studies at the Royal Conservatorium in The Hague, and has been Artistic Director and conductor since that time. He is a performing artist comfortable in his unique music arena — whether working in ancient music, contemporary music, opera, with artists such as circus performers, contemporary dancers, or visual artists.

Paul is an inspiring teacher and has been a staff member at various conservatories throughout the world. In 1995, he received a Churchill Fellowship and he has won numerous international and national awards for his CD recordings with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra and Choir, including the 1998, 2001, 2005, 2009 and 2010 ARIA Awards for Best Classical Album.

Paul has performed with many international soloists including Andreas Scholl, Cyndia Sieden, Marc Destrubé, Hidemi Suzuki,

Stefano Montanari, and countertenor Derek Lee Ragin. Leading an ensemble of Brandenburg soloists, in August 2001, Paul toured the orchestra to Europe with guest soloist Andreas Scholl. In 2015, he was featured on the soundtrack of the James Bond 007 movie, *Spectre*.

A passionate cook, entertainer, foodie, teacher, swimmer and traveller, he is friends with people and artists from Istanbul to India, Japan and Italy, and creates a unique platform for overseas performing artists to work with him and the Brandenburg in Australia.

Among his list of achievements, Paul was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 2013 for his 'distinguished service to the performing arts in Australia'. In 2003, Paul was awarded the Australian Centenary Medal for his services to Australian society and the advancement of music, and in 2010, Paul was awarded the Sydney University Alumni Medal for Professional Achievement.

Yaron Lifschitz Artistic Director, Circa



Yaron Lifschitz makes shows. Big ones, small ones, and ones that defy easy categorisation. More than 80 productions have toured across six continents and played to over two million people picking up a shelf's worth of awards including six Helpmanns, The ISPA Distinguished Artist Award and the Australia Council Theatre Award.

He's brought circus to the Barbican, string quartets and acrobats to Brooklyn Academy of Music, a year of performances to Berlin and major shows to major festivals and venues around the world. He's created strange, beautiful things in tents, concert halls, spiegeltents, and opera houses as well as cemeteries and cathedrals. His film work has appeared at the Berlin and Melbourne Film Festivals.

Yaron was the founding Artistic Director of the Australian Museum's Theatre Unit, he has taught directing at NIDA and ATYP and directed opera, concerts and events. In 1999, he was the first Artistic Director of Rock 'n' Roll Circus and in 2004 he transformed it into Circa. In 2018, he was Creative Lead of *Festival 2018*, the cultural program of the 21st Commonwealth Games — one of the most ambitious arts events in Queensland's history.

At the heart of Yaron's work is restless curiosity and a fierce belief in the power of performance to connect and transform.

About the Brandenburg



Photo by Keith Saunders

The Australian Brandenburg Orchestra is the national Baroque music flagship. It is a world leader in historically informed performance and hugely influential in the broader musical landscape.

The rise and triumph of the Brandenburg through the unflagging passion and vision of its co-founders Paul Dyer and Bruce Applebaum is one of the most extraordinary success stories in the nation's performing arts history.

Since its stunning debut at the Sydney Opera House in 1990, the orchestra has introduced Baroque (and earlier) music at a serious level, playing on instruments authentic to the period. The Brandenburg is renowned for its energetic spirit, stylistic diversity, ambition and innovation. In the words of the Honorable Dame Quentin Bryce, the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra 'has brought untold rewards in its brilliant musicianship, imaginative programming, outstanding soloists and partnerships. It has created adventures steeped in tradition yet luminously alive and liberating.'

The unique company vibrantly reawakens Baroque and Classical masterpieces for a contemporary audience. The Brandenburg's 20 recordings with ABC Classics include five ARIA Award winners for Best Classical Album.

Discover more at brandenburg.com.au

'...what stands out at concert after concert is the impression that this bunch of musicians is having a really good time. They look at each other and smile and laugh... there's a warmth and sense of fun not often associated with classical performance.'

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

About Circa



Photo by Keith Saunders

Circa: circus that moves the world.

Circa is one of the world's great performing arts companies. Since 2004, they have called Brisbane, Australia, home while touring the world, captivating audiences in over 45 countries and reaching more than two million people. Circa's award-winning performances have earned standing ovations, rave reviews and sold-out shows across six continents.

Everything they do is fuelled by their core values: quality, audacity, humanity. Circa is at the forefront of a new wave of contemporary Australian circus, redefining the art form by showcasing how extreme physicality can forge powerful and emotive experiences. They are relentless in the way they push boundaries, blending movement, dance, theatre and circus.

Under the visionary leadership of Yaron Lifschitz, and in collaboration with an extraordinary ensemble of circus artists, they craft a diverse array of productions that constitute 'a revolution in the spectacle of circus' (Les Echos).

Each year, Circa tour their shows across the world and premiere multiple new creations. They are a staple at prestigious festivals and venues in New York, London, Berlin and Montreal as well as throughout Queensland and across Australia.

Their extensive engagement programs, including Circa Academy, Circability and Circa Cairns (a First Nations-led circus initiative) provide access, participation and professional development outcomes. Circa have delivered major projects including the Creative Lead on the Commonwealth Games Festival 2018 and managing *arTour* for the Queensland Government.

We invite you to join them as they continue to 'redraw the limits to which circus can aspire' (The Age).

Circa acknowledges the assistance of the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body and the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

Circa is based in Meanjin (Brisbane) on the lands of the Jagera and Turrbal people. We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the many lands on which we create and perform. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Always was, always will be.

Musicians



Paul Dyer* (Sydney)
Harpsichord / Chamber Organ



Shaun Lee-Chen* (Perth)
Concertmaster, Baroque Violin



Ben Dollman* (Adelaide)
Principal Second Baroque Violin,
Baroque Viola



Marianne Yeomans (Sydney)
Baroque Viola



Jamie Hey* (Melbourne)
Principal Baroque Cello

Circa Ensemble



Shea Baker



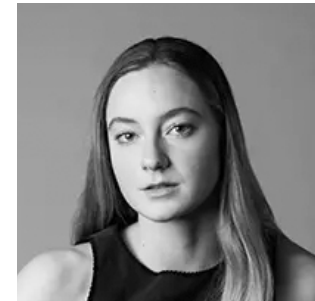
Asha Colless



Maya Davies



Oliver Layher



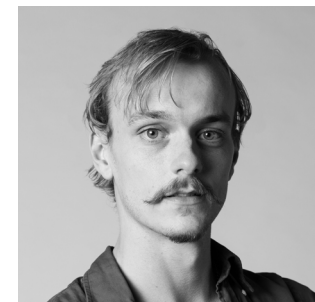
Sophie Seccombe



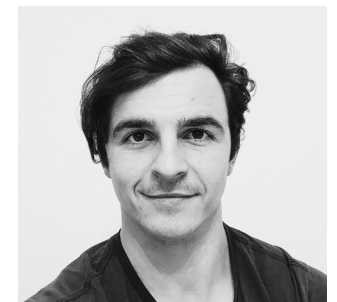
Anais Stewart



Tristan St John



Adam Strom



Harley Timmermans

* Denotes Brandenburg Core Musician

CIRCA





Viking is a proud sponsor of the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra.

Viking's onshore cultural insight and personal enrichment program for *The Thinking Person* complements the Brandenburg's values of exploration, new experiences and community connection through collaboration.

With a shared passion for culturally rich and immersive experiences, Viking is proud to support *Circa & the Art of Fugue*, a performance that pushes limits and transcends traditional boundaries

Viking is rated "World's Best" for rivers, oceans and expeditions by *Travel + Leisure*. We look forward to welcoming you on board our award-winning ships.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Bach: The Art of Fugue — A Journey Beyond Music

by Paul Dyer

In 2025, I decided to perform two of Bach's most profound works with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra: the complete *Orchestral Suites* and *Die Kunst der Fuge* (The Art of Fugue).

Studying *The Art of Fugue* has been a mind-opening experience. It's like stepping inside a vast, intricate, grand mosaic. Every part is carefully crafted, its effect preordained, and yet, so natural and imbued with life. It's music written for the full range of human emotions—complex, bold, and truthful—astonishing in its craft and deeply moving in its spirit. When performing it or listening to it, it is very personal.

But this music also reaches beyond. It places us face to face with eternity. Bach's main device here, *counterpoint*, isn't just a compositional technique. It's a spiritual structure. It creates tension, release, harmony, and dissonance, just like life itself.

The Map of Bach

Alongside intellect is 'emotional intelligence': the ability to perceive emotion in ourselves and others, to communicate it, a sensitivity and empathy. It is said that music somehow lies right at this intersection between what we call the *brain* and the *soul*.

Brain
Maths
Logic
Reason
Truth



Soul
Emotion
Sensitivity
Expression
Art

This is where Bach lives — his music pivots right in the center.

Quotes That Resonate

There is a quote attributed to Aphex Twin (Richard D James) about Bach that I love: 'Algorithms of emotion.' And a lovely quote from the great singer, pianist, songwriter, and American civil rights activist Nina Simone: 'Bach made me dedicate my life to music.' Nina has described Bach's music as being pure emotion, pure sound and has said that there is something deeper, something eternal in it, and that she plays Bach everyday.

Unpacking The Art of Fugue

Bach's *The Art of Fugue* is the crown jewel of his final decade. A summation of everything he knew about composition, logic, and expressive potential. *The Art of Fugue* is the contrapuntal essence of his life's work. It forms the keystone in this great arc of masterpieces that spanned his last ten years. I have divided it into five sets for this performance:

1. Simple fugues + a canon
2. Counter fugues
3. Double/Triple fugues + a canon
4. Mirror fugues + a canon
5. *Fuga a 3 Soggetti* (incomplete)

Bach never called them *fugues* in the manuscript. He used the Latin term *contrapunctus* (counterpoint), which means weaving independent lines of music into something cohesive, complex, and beautiful. The original manuscript was written in an open score, like a vocal motet, in four different clefs. It's musical architecture.

There are 12 notes in the main theme. It is then used in every conceivable permutation, like a puzzle: straight, inverted, upside down, extended, mirrored and so on.

It is an apotheosis of genius, reaching perfection, both creatively and intellectually. Counterpoint was the highest kind of music making that afforded the greatest degree of spiritual exaltation. The complexity is unbelievable and the execution for the performers is challenging.

We have a few things from Bach's lifetime including a signet ring seal (c.1730) and a glass goblet from 1736. He designed a beautiful ornate symbol on them and, typical of Bach, there are two layers of meaning. His initials are layered on top of one another and entangled together in symmetry, but in a very ornate way. In the final *Fuga a 3 Soggetti*, as if he was signing off on this final piece, a hidden inscription of the letters of Bach's name are cleverly notated in the music score.

The Final Moment

I decided to perform *The Art of Fugue* on the four string instruments you hear tonight in homage to the original manuscript copy in Bach's own hand. After our first rehearsal, I suggested to Ben Dollman (Principal Second Baroque Violin) that he might like to think about playing Baroque viola in selected sets. After discussion as a group, we decided which sets might work to enjoy the lower, darker, richer sound of having two violas play together instead of two violins.

Central to Bach's life were my keyboard instruments, the harpsichord and chamber organ. I decided to perform only the fifth set (*Fuga a 3 Soggetti*) on the chamber organ, and the rest on harpsichord. It is the climax and most intricate piece of *The Art of Fugue*.

In July 1750, near the end of his life, Bach was lying in bed, barely able to move. With his wife Anna Magdalena and one of his students beside him, he asked for a goose quill and paper. He dictated his final musical phrase — a chorale prelude based on a hymn. It would be his entry into paradise.

Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein
(When in the hour of utmost need) BWV 641

It was a chorale prelude that he'd composed 30 years earlier for organ. He returned to it in his final moment — a hymn of surrender, peace, and transcendence. It completes his life on earth, a profound state, a moving tribute, an intense beauty and a gift to us all, to humanity.

Why This Matters Now

This performance is not just a concert. It's an invitation to feel, to think, and to connect. Bach shows us that complexity and beauty are not opposites. That logic and emotion are not enemies. That music can be a map, one that leads us inward and upward at the same time.

Tonight is the wonderful creation of Yaron Lifschitz, myself, the Circa Company and the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. It is complex, astonishing, truthful and bold. I hope our production *Circa & The Art of Fugue* moves you as deeply as it's moved us all.



Paul Dyer AO
Artistic Director

Director's Notes by Yaron Lifschitz

Theatre, to borrow from Kafka, 'should take an axe to the frozen sea within us'. When one tackles a masterpiece—a monster—of the size and significance of *Die Kunst der Fuge*, one grapples not just with music, but with history, spirituality, structure, mathematics and, pretty much, the rest of the universe. In short: it is impossible. Impossible to express physically, even in the most articulate of forms. And circus is, even at best, far from the most expressive of forms.

Balanchine famously said there are no mothers-in-law in dance. In circus, there are barely parents. Our ability to express complex interpersonal relations is limited. The choreographic structures that fugues inspire rich in abstraction and philosophy elude our expressive vocabulary.

So why do it? Why tackle this absurdly large, almost ridiculously complex work with nine acrobats and five musicians? Not to conquer it, or even to scale it. But because through it, we might reveal something about the nature of effort itself, about complexity and complicatedness, and the awkward dance between the two. In the striving, the doing, the questioning, there is a glimpse of something deeply human. What TS Eliot called 'an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing'.

In that effort could be a hint of what lives once the axe has broken the frozen sea within. It might offer, like some grainy image of a Nessy of the soul, a glimpse of what our thawed heart could look like?



Yaron Lifschitz
Artistic Director, Circa



Italian Baroque with Circa, 2022. Photo by Keith Saunders

Circa & The Art of Fugue

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080

'The end and ultimate cause of all music . . . should be none else but the glory of God and the recreation of the soul. Where this is not observed, there is no real music but only a devilish blare and hubbub.'

- JS Bach, *Precepts and Principles for Playing ThorOUGH-Bass*, Leipzig, 1738

In his lifetime, Bach was widely recognised as a virtuoso keyboard player whose technical skills, musicianship, and creativity were unparalleled, but he was not regarded as a unique musical genius nor one of the most influential composers in the Western classical tradition as he is now.

At least part of the reason for this is that unlike his better-travelled contemporaries Handel and Telemann, Bach lived his whole life confined to a small area of approximately 100 square kilometres in central Germany, apart from rare visits to Berlin and Dresden, and one visit to Hamburg (300 kilometres away). He was born in the small German town of Eisenach where his father was director of the town musicians, and after the death of both parents he was raised by his older brother, a church organist. Bach spent the first 20 years of his career working mainly in the courts of lesser German nobility, then moved to Leipzig in 1723 at the age of 38. He would spend the rest of his life there.

Leipzig was a major commercial centre and by the time Bach moved there it had become known as 'the marketplace of Europe', regularly attracting thousands of visitors to its three annual trade fairs.

During the Easter trade fair visitors could buy everything from shrunken Turks' heads to imported coffee, ivory crucifixes from Florence, woollen jumpers from England or even tobacco from America. The wealth brought by this commercial activity supported a thriving musical scene which included an opera company and at various times up to three musical societies, one of which, the 'Gross Konzertgesellschaft' represented the beginning of a tradition of publicly funded orchestral music. This tradition has continued to this day in the famous Gewandhaus Orchestra.

At the time, Leipzig was also home to Germany's largest university and the centre of the publishing industry. Bach's appointment to direct the school attached to the church of St Thomas and provide music to the main four Leipzig churches was a definite step up, and he was only the Leipzig town council's third choice for the position. They had wanted 'a famous man' and had offered the job to Telemann, but 'since the best could not be obtained, a mediocre candidate would have to be accepted'.

The position involved a heavy workload. As well as directing the school and teaching there, he composed new music every week for Sunday church services and directed rehearsals and performances with the stretched resources of the school choirs and a few professional musicians. Yet between 1723 and 1729, his output included around 250 cantatas, the *St Matthew Passion* and *St John Passion*, the *Magnificat* and the first two sections of the gigantic *Mass in B minor*.

In Leipzig, Bach also composed for and performed with the *Collegium Musicum*, a university musical society which had been founded by Telemann. He provided music and directed performances for civic occasions, taught private students and his own children, and played the organ in other churches, as well as fulfilling private commissions. Clearly a driven man with a huge amount of energy, in the early 1740s Bach embarked on six major compositional projects which were to involve him on and off until his death in 1750.

***Die Kunst der Fuge* (The Art of the Fugue)**

The Art of Fugue is one of this group of works which Bach wrote to illustrate all the possibilities of a particular musical genre through the music itself. The others were the *Mass in B minor*, BWV 232, *The Musical Offering*, BWV 1079, *Canonic Variations on 'Vom Himmel hoch da komm' ich her'*, BWV 769, and the *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988 (a set of variations for harpsichord also on a single theme). *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, BWV 846-893, in which Bach explored the tonal system through the composition of preludes and fugues in every major and minor key, is also considered to be part of this group. Bach composed the first volume relatively early in his career, before he arrived in Leipzig, but volume II was completed in the early 1740s, at the same time as he was working on *The Art of Fugue*.

Through these six works Bach set out to sum up everything he had learned and achieved in that particular genre, and to push that knowledge as far as it could go. He did not intend any of these works to be purely theoretical. Rather, the theory was worked out in a musical language that still met Bach's own requirement that music's purpose

'be none else but the glory of God and the recreation of the soul'.

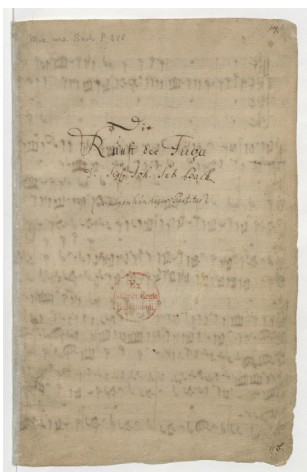
The motivation which drove Bach's composition of *The Art of Fugue* was his desire to explore in depth all the possibilities that could be found through using a single musical subject. This was entirely new, as a musical work centred systematically on fugues had never been composed. Although fugal writing had long been an integral compositional feature—and particularly so in the Baroque period—no theoretical work on fugal writing existed before a treatise by the German music theorist Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg in 1753, which itself was largely based on *Die Kunst der Fuge*.

In his announcement of the publication of *The Art of Fugue* in 1751, Bach's eldest son Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach wrote, 'While the rules we were given were clear and abundant, the needed examples were lacking. Yet one knows how fruitless instruction is without illustration.' Bach was an active and dedicated teacher throughout his whole career. His keyboard compositions were primarily for pedagogical purposes as he made clear on the title page of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. The pieces were 'for the use and profit of the musical youth desirous of learning, as well as for the pastime of those already skilled in this study'.

A strong pedagogical goal also underpins *The Art of Fugue*. None of these works were commissions for which he would have been paid. Rather, they were compositions that Bach wrote for the use of others. In *The Art of Fugue*, Bach's particular focus was the exploration in depth of all the possibilities inherent in a single theme through the use of counterpoint.

From the Latin '*contra punctus*' (which in musical terms means, 'note against note'), in its simplest terms *counterpoint* describes a musical texture in which a melody is added to an existing one. It is characterised by independent voices that interweave with each other. This is in contrast with a musical texture such as a hymn, in which the voices, or parts, move together to make up a series of chords. Bach used the term *contrapunctus* for most of the individual fugues which make up the work.

Fugue is a particular type of counterpoint built on a musical theme in which two or more voices imitate each other with the same melody but starting on different pitches. When the second voice enters, the first voice has a countermelody which harmonises with the main tune, and this continues with the other voices in turn. Further development of the theme usually occurs, before a return to the main theme. Many of Handel's choruses in *Messiah* are structured in this way, for example. The fugue was a common compositional technique in the Baroque period.



Title page from JS Bach's holograph manuscript of *The Art of Fugue*, 1742-46. Image courtesy of the Berlin State Library.

Bach was a recognised master of fugal composition and the art of improvisation, which in this period was a skill that every musician was expected to possess and was highly valued. One of the many anecdotes relating to Bach's improvisatory ability concerns a visit he made in May 1747 to the court of the Prussian king Frederick the Great, where his son CPE Bach worked. The king, who was obsessed with music, played a complex chromatic theme for Bach and asked him to improvise a fugue based on it. Bach improvised a three-part fugue for the king, which he later developed into the work known as *The Musical Offering*.

The Art of Fugue consists of 14 fugues and four canons in D minor. They are all permutations of the same simple melody, which Bach uses to create interweaving parts which imitate each other. Having worked out the theme first in a straightforward way, he develops it into multiple variations that include playing the same melody upside down and in reverse (*retrograde*). Different types of counterpoint are introduced which become more and more complex as the work progresses. What started off as a very simple theme of 12 notes based on a scale and a triad—the foundation stones of Western tonal music—develops and is varied and new themes are added, which themselves are derived from the original one. The number of voices, or parts, varies between two and four. Sometimes Bach turns the melody upside down, so that where it originally ascended in pitch, it now descends. Some passages are mirror images of previous ones. He introduces rhythmic variations such as jazzy dotted rhythms and syncopation, in which the beat is displaced. Each fugue has its own character, some melancholy, some more light-hearted.

When *The Art of the Fugue* was first published in 1751, it was advertised as being playable on a keyboard instrument and has therefore always thought to have been conceived as such. However, Bach did not specify the instrument/s on which *The Art of Fugue* should be played. This allows performers the freedom to also vary the instrumentation, as you will hear in these concerts by the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. Bach would not have intended it to be performed as a complete work from start to finish. Rather, as he suggests in his introduction to *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, it was to be played and studied in private. Nevertheless, it is often only through public performance that most people now become aware of works like these.

The sheer complexity of *The Art of Fugue* has inspired some to believe that it has hidden layers of meaning which go beyond mere musical composition. A German musicologist in the 1980s suggested that it demonstrates the Christian doctrine of redemption and that the work symbolises God's perfection. Meanwhile a Russian musicologist identified numerological links to the Book of Revelation, which describes the apocalypse.



Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach by Elias Gottlob Haussmann, 1746; four years before his death. Currently on display at the Old Town Hall, Museum of City History Leipzig.

Bach completed the first version of *The Art of Fugue* around 1742, but he must not have regarded it as the final work as he made no attempt to have it published then. He continued to work on it over the next four years. He revised and expanded some movements, completely re-wrote some sections of others, and added four new movements. He gave the work the title of *Die Kunst der Fuge* in about 1747. Preparation of the work for publication began after 1748 and Bach himself supervised the process of engraving the metal plates with the scores for printing, although he did not live to see it finished.

By the late 1740s Bach's eyesight was failing, an experience shared by his exact contemporary George Frederic Handel and which was probably due to diabetes. Bach chose to undergo eye surgery in March, and again in April 1750. Without anaesthetic, with primitive instruments, and in unsterile conditions, this must have been excruciatingly painful. Worse, he elected to have the operations done by the British eye surgeon John Taylor. Taylor had written a book on the mechanism of the eye and developed a career as a celebrity oculist. His claims to fame included being appointed royal eye surgeon to the British King George II and being ennobled by the pope, but he was in fact a charlatan who blinded potentially hundreds of people. His treatments included bloodletting, laxatives, and eyedrops made from the blood of slaughtered pigeons, pulverized sugar, or baked salt. After the second operation, Bach fell ill with a fever and died less than four months later in July 1750, at the age of 65.

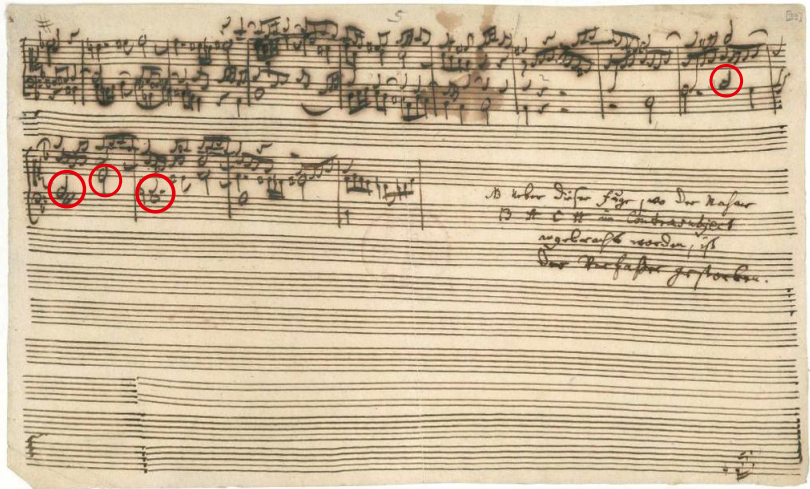
His son Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach ensured that *The Art of Fugue*, though unfinished, was published the year after Bach's death, in 1751. While the work was being prepared for printing, Bach decided to add one more piece, a quadruple fugue with a theme constructed on the letters of his own name, B-A-C-H. (B and H are the German note names for B-flat and B-natural). On the manuscript of the score is a note in the handwriting of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, which states, 'While working on this fugue, which introduces the name BACH in the countersubject, the composer died.'

This is almost certainly not true, as the manuscript was written in Bach's own hand, and at the end of his life he would not have been able to see let alone compose. Why he never finished it is still not known. Various attempts have been made to finish it, but like Mozart's unfinished *Requiem*, how can any other person complete the monumental task of completing the work of one of the greatest musical geniuses the world has even known?

Johann Nicholas Forkel, Bach's first biographer, wrote in 1802:

'If the language of music is merely the utterance of a melodic line, a simple sequence of musical notes, it can justly be accused of poverty. The addition of a Bass puts it upon a harmonic foundation and clarifies it but defines rather than gives it added richness. . . . But it is a very different thing when two melodies are so interwoven that they converse together like two persons upon a footing of pleasant equality . . . From 1720, when he was thirty-five until he died in 1750, Bach's harmony consists in this melodic interweaving of independent melodies, so perfect in their union that each part seems to constitute the true melody. Herein, Bach excels all the composers in the world.'

Program notes © Lynne Murray 2025



JS Bach's unfinished holograph manuscript of *The Art of Fugue*, 1742-46 signed off by his son CPE Bach, 'While working on this fugue, which introduces the name BACH in the countersubject, the composer died.' Image courtesy of the Berlin State Library.

Australian Brandenburg Orchestra

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Governor of New South Wales

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