

J.S. Bach's Late Collections

By about 1730 it must have been clear to Bach that the Baroque aesthetic and style embodied in his music was going out of fashion. During his career he had composed in all of the Baroque genres except opera (which he had never needed to write). By the 1730s he had a substantial repertoire of works to draw from in Leipzig and no longer needed to continually compose new pieces. These factors help explain a number of special works and collections that Bach produced in the last two decades of his life.

In the 1730s and 1740s Bach composed a number of works that seem to have been deliberately intended to serve as models of the various styles of Baroque music. These last works can be considered the culmination of Bach's career as a composer as well as a monument to Baroque music as a whole.

Clavier-übung (Keyboard practice) [1731, 1735]

Part 1: six partitas (suites) for harpsichord

Part 2: French overture, dance suite, Italian concerto

Part 3: German organ chorale preludes, prelude and fugue

Part 4: Goldberg Variations (aria and 30 variations; every third variation is a canon)

B-minor Mass [1749]

Full Latin mass using all available sacred vocal styles from *stile antico* to the most modern *concertato* writing

Three sets of chorale-based organ pieces [1748-1749]

Part 1: 18 chorales that demonstrate a variety of compositional techniques

Part 2: Schübler Chorales (6 of Bach's favorite chorales from cantata movements)

Part 3: 5 canonic variations on the chorale "Vom Himmel hoch"

Musical Offering (*Musikalisches Opfer*) [1747]

Works based on a theme by King Frederick II ("the Great") of Prussia: a three-part ricercar, a six-part ricercar, a trio sonata for flute with violin and continuo, and ten canons

Art of Fugue (*Die Kunst der Fuge*) [unfinished at Bach's death]

Plan: proceed systematically through the art of fugal composition, from simple fugues and canons up to a quadruple fugue (fugue with four subjects)