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Johann Sebastian Bach



Important Facts to Know About Johann Sebastian Bach

Born: 1685 in Germany

Died: 1750

Period of Music: Baroque

Instrument(s) He Played: Organ, harpsichord, clavichord, violin

Major Compositions:

Harpsichord: *Little Book for the Keyboard, The Well-Tempered Clavier, Books 1 and 2*

Organ: *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor*

Orchestra: *Brandenburg Concertos*

Choral: *Christmas Oratorio, St. Matthew Passion*

Interesting Facts: Bach taught many of his 20 children to play musical instruments. He composed the *Little Book for the Keyboard* for his nine-year-old son, Wilhelm Friedemann.

Track 1



Suggested Listening: *Invention in A Minor*

The Story of Domenico Scarlatti

(1685–1757)

In 1685, the same year that Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel were born in Germany, Domenico Scarlatti was born in Naples, Italy. His father, Alessandro Scarlatti, was an important composer of operas and was credited with developing the form of Italian opera that prevailed in the 18th century.

Taught at first by his father, Domenico followed in his father's footsteps and began to compose opera. His first operas, *Ottavia ristituita al trono* and *Giustino* were performed when Domenico was 18 years old.

on the harpsichord.

Scarlatti established himself in Rome. First he composed chamber music and operas for the miniature opera theater of Queen Maria Casimira who was exiled from Poland. In 1715, he became music director of St. Peter's in Rome. Handel left Rome and there seems to have been no more contact between the two friends, though they continued to admire and respect each other.

In 1720, Scarlatti became court harpsichordist to the King of Portugal and teacher of Princess Maria Barbara in Lisbon.

The keyboard music he composed for Princess Maria Barbara turned out to be his greatest contribution to music literature. He returned to Naples in 1725 when his father died. In 1728, he married Maria Catalina Gentili, and together they had five children. In 1729, Princess Maria Barbara married the Spanish crown prince who became King of Spain. Scarlatti followed her to Spain and spent the rest of his life in Maria Barbara's service. Many of his keyboard sonatas reflect the vivid colors and vital rhythms of Spanish folk music and dances.

In 1738, Scarlatti's *30 Essercizi per Gravicembalo* (Studies for Harpsichord) were published in London and became widely used. He composed over 500 single-

movement sonatas as well as innovative compositions foreshadowing the sonata form. One of his most famous keyboard pieces is called "The Cat's Fugue," K. 30, L. 499. Scarlatti's cat walked over the keyboard striking notes that Scarlatti used for the subject of the fugue. Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas alone place him among the great Baroque composers.



Princess Maria Barbara and members of her court.

In 1705, his father sent him to Venice to study with Gasparini who was musical director at the Ospedale della pieta, where the composer Antonio Vivaldi also served. While in Venice, Domenico met George Frideric Handel and they became good friends. Scarlatti and Handel admired each other, and once traveled to Rome together. A patron of the arts, Cardinal Ottoboni, arranged a contest between them on the harpsichord and organ. Handel won the organ honors, but Scarlatti was unbeatable