Forty Bach Chorales

Johann Sebastian Bach

Arranged by Peter Billam

for keyboard

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It is the chorales, not his trademark fugues, that lie at the heart of Bach’s technique. Wolff refers to Bach’s collection of 370 four-part chorales that charted the course for tonal harmony. Donald Francis Tovey observes: Counterpoint, the art defined by Sir Frederick Gore Ouseley as that of ‘combining melodies’. . . This definition is not quite complete. Classical counterpoint is the conveying of a mass of harmony by means of a combination of melodies. Thus the three melodies combined by Wagner in the Meistersinger prelude do not make classical counterpoint, for they require a mass of accompanying harmony to explain them.

Forkel recounts, in Ernest Newman’s translation: Bach began teaching composition not with dry counterpoint that led nowhere, as was the way with other music teachers of his time; . . . He went immediately to pure four-part thorough-bass, laying much stress on the setting-out of the voices, since in this way the conception of the pure progression of the harmony was made most intelligible. From there he went to the chorale. In these exercises he himself set the original bass, and made his pupils add only the alto and the tenor. Gradually he let them make the bass also. Everywhere he insisted not only on the utmost purity of the harmony in itself, but also on naturalness of progression and a melodic flow of all the separate voices.

Bach, in other words, based his technique at the frontier between voice-leading and harmony; on how voice-leading should be done so as to create harmony. The importance of this approach is that it is not limited to Bach’s voice-leading rules, or harmonic style.

The forty chorales offered here transcribed for keyboard are a small selection from the 388 Bach has left us. The selection is arbitrary, determined largely by easy page-layout when in alphabetical order, and biased towards the grander settings and the stand-alone chorales independent of cantatas. The words are mostly omitted for space reasons, though they do determine many details of melodic gesture or harmonic movement. The words can be found at www.uvm.edu/~classics/faculty/bach

Musically there is so much of interest here; the chromaticism of Es ist genug will reappear in Berg’s violin concerto, the extravagant voice-crossings in Christum wir sollen loben schon, the two-and-a-half-bar phrases of Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele and the five-bar phrases of Uns ist ein Kindlein heut geborn, the lovely tune and fluent bass-line of Sollt ich meinem Gott nicht singen, and much else.

These pieces can be used for a variety of musicianship exercises, such as keyboard sight-reading practice, singing one voice and playing the other three, transposed sight-reading, and so on. For this reason, apart from the easily-printable pdf format, these pieces are also available in muscript format so that you can generate, for example, midi versions for dictation, or soprano-bass-only versions for voice-leading practice, etc.
BWV 26  Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig 4
BWV 262 Alle menschen müssen sterben 4
BWV 104 Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr 5
BWV 4 Christ lag in Todesbändern 5
BWV 274 Christe, der du bist Tag und Licht 6
BWV 121 Christum wir sollen loben schon 6
BWV 288 Das alte Jahr vergangen ist 7
BWV 18 Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt 7
BWV 303 Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott 8
BWV 43 Ermuntre dich, mein schwacher Geist 8
BWV 145 Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag 9
BWV 306 Erstanden ist der heilige Christ 9
BWV 155 Es ist das Heil uns kommen her 10
BWV 310 Es wird schier die letzte Tag herkommen 10
BWV 60 Es ist genug 11
BWV 32 Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele 12
BWV 315 Gib dich zufrieden und sei stille 12
BWV 318 Gottes Sohn ist Kommen 13
BWV 330 Herr, ich habe misgehandelt 13
BWV 371 Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit 14
BWV 228 Lobt den Herren, denn er ist sehr freundlich 16
BWV 376 Lobt Gott, ihr Christen allzugleich 16
BWV 245 Machs mit mir, Gott, nach deiner Güt 17
BWV 378 Mein Augen schließ ich jetzt 17
BWV 382 Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin 18
BWV 386 Nun danket alle Gott 18
BWV 387 Nun freut euch, Gottes Kinder all 19
BWV 307 Nun freut euch, lieben Christen gemein 19
BWV 62 Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland 19
BWV 390 Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren 20
BWV 396 Nun sich der Tag geendet hat 21
BWV 400 O Herzensangst, o Bangigkeit und Zagen 21
BWV 402 O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß 22
BWV 394 O Welt, ich muß dich lassen 23
BWV 180 Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele 23
BWV 413 Sollt ich meinem Gott nicht singen 24
BWV 414 Uns ist ein Kindlein heut geborn 25
BWV 248 Von Himmel hoch da komm ich her 25
BWV 437 Wir glauben all an einen Gott 26
BWV 178 Wo Gott der Herr nicht bei uns hält 27

Chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach

BWV 26

Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig

BWV 262

Alle menschen müssen sterben

Chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach

BWV 288
Das alte Jahr vergangen ist

BWV 18
Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt

BWV 303 Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott

BWV 43 Ermuntre dich, mein schwacher Geist
Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag

Erstanden ist der heilige Christ
Chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach

BWV 155
Es ist das Heil uns kommen her

BWV 310
Es wird schier die letzte Tag herkommen

Es ist genug

Herr, wenn es dir gefällt, so spanne mich doch aus! Mein Jesus kommt; nun gute Nacht, o Welt, ich fahre ins Himmelshaus, ich fahre sicher hin mit Frieden, mein großer Jammer bleibt da -

Es ist genug, es ist genug.
BWV 32  Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele

BWV 315  Gib dich zufrieden und sei stille
Chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach

BWV 318  Gottes Sohn ist Komm

BWV 330  Herr, ich habe misgehandelt

BWV 371

Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit

Chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach

Chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach

in dem höchsten Thron, zu dir schreien wir aus Herzens Be-
gier! E- le-i-son! Ky- ri-
ego! Gott heiliger Geist! Tröst, stärk uns im Glauben
aller meist, daß wir am letzten End fröhlich abscheiden aus
diesem E- lendl! E- le-i-son!
Chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach

**BWV 228**

Lobt den Herren, denn er ist sehr freundlich

**BWV 376**

Lobt Gott, ihr Christen allzugleich
Chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach

**BWV 245**
Machts mit mir, Gott, nach deiner Güt

**BWV 378**
Mein Augen schließ ich jetzt
BWV 390  Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren
Chorales by Johann Sebastian Bach

BWV 396  Nun sich der Tag geendet hat

BWV 400  O Herzensangst, o Bangigkeit und Zagen
O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß
Wir glauben all an einen Gott
Peter Billam was born in London in 1948, studied piano, and lived in Switzerland from 1973 to 1983, where he studied composition, classical guitar, flute and voice, worked as Musical Director of the Théâtre Populaire Romand, and as recording engineer, record producer and computer programmer. He moved to Tasmania in 1983, lectured in composition at the Conservatorium, conducted recorder ensembles and choirs, studied recorder, voice and harpsichord. He founded www.pjb.com.au, becoming the first composer to sell scores on-line, with on-line delivery, taking scores from Composer to Performer in one immediate step. www.pjb.com.au offers a new approach to music publishing. These pieces are written to be read, made to be played!

Compositions at www.pjb.com.au include: Five Short Pieces, guitar, 1979; Divisions on an Italian Ground, flute and guitar, 1980; Five Rounds, choir, 1986; Go Forth and Multiply, choir, 1986; Three Violin Duets, 1987; Fable, for piano, 1987; To Erich Jantsch, SAATB recorders, 1988; A Suite of Curves, trombone (or horn) and piano, 1990; Two Recorder Duets, alto recorders, or other melody instruments, 1991; Trombone Quintet, trombone, flute, piano, bass, and percussion, 1994; Three Songs, on poems by Jack Kerouac, Vikram Seth and Dylan Thomas, voice and piano (only the first and third of these are available), 1994; Piano Study, piano, 1994; Four Dances, various ensembles including recorder quartet, string quartet, 1995; The Poet in the Clouds, on a poem by S. T. Coleridge, SATB choir, 1995; Tres Casidas del Diván del Tamarit, on poems by Federico García Lorca, voice and piano, 1997; Three Suites, for the solo line, piano, and piano and a solo line, 2000; Die Zeiten, on poems by Kästner, Bachman and Jünger, choir (only the second and third of these are available), 2000; Three Duets for flutes, 2001; For Four Hands for piano four hands, 2002; Three Preludes for piano, 2003; Second Solo Suite for flute, violin, viola or cello, 2003; Guitar Duet for two guitars, 2006; We Who Mourn for choir, 2007; Trio With Guitar for guitar and two clarinets or two recorders or two violas, 2008.

Arrangements include: By J. S. Bach: Trio BWV 655, piano and flute; Vor deinen Thron BWV 668, piano; Fugue in F minor BWV 689, SATB recorders; Flute Sonata BWV 1031 transposed into G major for alto recorder and keyboard; Flute Sonata BWV 1032 completed by Peter Billam for flute and keyboard, also in C major for alto recorder, and in G major for descant; Ricercare a 3, from the Musikalisches Opfer for keyboard; Ricercare a 6, for SATBG recorders, or strings, or two keyboards; Fuga Canonica in Epidiapente for keyboard and melody instrument; from the Art of Fugue: Contrapuncti 1 and 4 for keyboard, and Contrapunctus 14 as completed by D. F. Tovey, for keyboard, or for SATB recorders, or for strings; Passacaglia and Fugue in C for piano four hands; Chorales with Descant for melody instrument and piano; Cello Suites I, II and III for flute or alto recorder, Forty Chorales for piano, Der Geist hilft für SATB-SATB recorders. By Johannes Brahms: Fugue in Ab minor for organ, for SATB recorders and gamba, in A minor; Choralvorspiele for organ with previous settings by Isaac, Bach, Praetorius, recorders. By Franz Schubert: Four Songs, voice and guitar; Schubert Dances, recorders and guitar, Schubert Dances, piano 4 hands. By G. F. Händel: Concerto Grosso in A minor op 6 no 4, harpsichord and recorders; Recorder Sonata in Bb no 5, in G for tenor recorder and keyboard. By other composers: Claudio Monteverdi, Ecco Mormorar l’Onde, SSATB recorders; Twelve Italian Songs, voice and guitar; John Wilbye, Draw on sweet Night, SSATBB recorders, and for flute choir; Telemann, Twelve Flute Fantasias, recorder; John Carr, Divisions on an Italian Ground, flute or recorder and guitar; Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes, recorder and guitar; Easy Classical Pieces, Bb trumpet and piano.

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