

municipal ledgers, the great composer comes off as an “aggressive businessman whining about maltreatment and underpayment,” though in fact he lived a rich professional, social, and family life and earned considerable recognition. Ten of his 20 children died before adulthood, but four lived to become famous musicians in their own right.

Bach was born in Thuringia in present-day Germany, lost both parents by the time he was 10, and by 18 was employed as a professional organist. In 1723 he was named cantor and music director at a school and four churches in Leipzig, where he struggled to stage his compositions using mostly student singers and musicians.

In more than a thousand compositions, Bach perfected the contrapuntal (or counterpoint) style, in which two or more independent but

EXCERPT

Beyond the New South

The Old South hurtled into the New within a single generation, and then—carried headlong by its own momentum—hurtled still faster into the New South as the commerce of corporate homogeneity swept across the region.

—**RICK BASS**, author, in *Southern Review*

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harmonically related melodic parts are played at the same time—a challenging proposition that music teachers sometimes describe to beginning students as akin to patting their heads and rubbing their stomachs at the same time. He changed the way music was played. Before Bach, the thumb had been only rarely used in keyboard playing, but he pioneered its far greater use (along with that of the little finger) to hold down a key

while the other fingers played around it. This made it possible to produce both dominant melodies and elaborate flourishes at the same time. It also made the music harder to play.

During his 27 years in Leipzig, Bach volunteered to compose a new church cantata of his own almost every Sunday for a period of five years. He continually recycled material, changing instrumentation, adding and deleting,

Two of his greatest works, the Mass in B minor (1748–49) and the *Christmas Oratorio* (1734–35), were “tweaked from mostly secular existing gems,” Fromm writes.

In Bach’s day, words mattered more in the Lutheran Church than music. This was liturgical music, after all. Today the words seem pietistic—even “deadly,” Fromm says, while the music is almost universally regarded as inspiring and astonishingly inventive.