

Baroque Era

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany, where his father was a town musician. Bach came from a long line of composers - over 300 years' worth of Bach's all worked as professional musicians. By the time Johann was 10, both his parents had died, so he was brought up by his older brother, who was a church organist. Johann became a very good organist, too.

Johann Sebastian Bach held three major jobs in his life: first he worked for a duke, then for a prince, and finally, he became director of music at the St. Thomas Church and School in Leipzig, Germany. Even though his job in Leipzig kept him very busy, in his spare time, Bach conducted a group of musicians who liked to get together to perform at a local coffee house.

During his lifetime, people thought of Bach as just an ordinary working musician. No one really knew much about his music until 100 years after his death, when another composer, Felix Mendelssohn, conducted a performance of Bach's St. Matthew Passion.

Bach is now seen as one of the greatest geniuses in music history. He wrote all kinds of music -- for organ and other keyboard instruments, orchestras, choirs, and concertos for many different instrumental combinations.

Georg Friedrich Händel was born in Halle, Germany. But since he spent most of his professional life in England, he's better known as George Frederick Handel.

Even though Handel was very interested in music, his father (who was a barber and surgeon) was not. There's a story that Handel smuggled a clavichord -- a VERY quiet instrument -- into the house so that he could practice in secret. Handel's father insisted that his son become a lawyer, until the day that Handel sat down at the keyboard and dazzled a duke. The duke convinced Handel's father to let his son study music.