

## Pathways to J.S. Bach Two-Part Inventions

Quiz your older piano students as to who their favorite classical piano composer is, and nine times out of ten, Chopin will be named as the favored musician. Chopin is most certainly one of the top “piano celebrities,” but I always tell my students that J. S. Bach is at the top of my favorites list as well. During the forty or so years of teaching, I can remember, with great satisfaction, a few students who named Bach as their favorite composer.

Why does music of the Baroque period and, specifically, music of J. S. Bach not rate higher for young students? I think there are several reasons for this. Students are not given a great deal of background or preparation through traditional method books for playing early music. Music of the Baroque composers, particularly the contrapuntal style of the Bach Inventions, is difficult. Both hands must play independently and equally. Sometimes students are assigned repertoire that is beyond their ability and the result can be a negative attitude toward that composer or style.

I find it very revealing that in both the Keith Snell Piano Repertoire series (Baroque & Classical) and Celebration Series, The Piano Odyssey Piano Repertoire, Bach Inventions do not appear until Level seven.

The pathway to the Inventions is less clear than preparing for Classic or Romantic stylistic time periods. We have to supplement more material and build the history for a polyphonic style of playing. Students who enjoy composing could write short canons after studying the Katherine Beard pieces in Do What I Do. The first volume of the Bartok Mikrokosmos is also a wealth of material that could inspire study, discussion and composition.

I hope you will find many useful selections from my list that will help you guide your students to a genuine love and appreciation for Baroque music. The list is written in approximate order of difficulty.

Do What I Do, Book 1 & 2  
by Katherine Beard

Willis Publishing Co.

Book one contains 16 short canons in Major 5 finger positions. Book two is also 5 finger position, but has 24 canons in both Major and minor keys. These are older publications that have value for the early experience of equal and independent hand playing. Use them to reinforce scale-playing, knowledge of key signatures, and transposing. They are ideal for sight-playing practice, too.

Piano Repertoire, Baroque & Classical  
Preparatory & Levels one, two  
selected and edited by Keith Snell

Kjos Music Co.

Here are some of the easiest examples of authentic early keyboard repertoire.  
This series is useful in the careful guidance, grading and representation of the Baroque period.

Lady Allyson's Minuet  
by Robert Vandall

Myklas Music Press

This is a charming level 3 sheet that many of my students have enjoyed. It has a gentle, dance quality with flowing RH eighth notes.

Mikrokosmos, Volume I

by Bela Bartok

Boosey & Hawkes

Bartok intended his first four volumes of this series to cover most of the simple technical issues encountered in the early stages of piano study. Volume I has simple rhythms and is almost entirely in 5 finger positions. The pieces are 8 – 16 measures in length. The 36 exercises present canons, imitation & inversion, parallel and contrary motion, modal writing and counterpoint. There are many applications such as vocabulary, sight-reading, composition models, theory and much more.

Little Suite in Baroque Style

by William Gillock

Willis Publishing Co.

Mr. Gillock labeled this sheet (Pre-Bach) and it consists of a Prelude, Festive March, Sarabande and Lively Dance.

Ten Two-Part Inventions for Piano

by Katherine K. Beard

Boston Music Co.

This is an expanded version of the Do What I Do books. The printing quality is weak and there is minimal visual appeal, but the pieces are useful to introduce and/or compare structure with the Bach Inventions. I also play them as examples of imitation for Music Progression students identifying differing textures.

Performing in Style

by Dennis Alexander

Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.

The four major stylistic periods are represented in these original works. Of the eleven pieces, five are Baroque, all of which are homophonic in structure.

Succeeding with the Masters, A Guide to Practicing and Performing the Works of Bach, Handel and Scarlatti  
compiled and edited by Helen Marlais, Volume One and Two

FJH Music Co., Inc.

Be sure to investigate these outstanding books as they are treasures of reference material for teaching and understanding Baroque repertoire. Each volume gives historical perspective, biographies, glossary and detailed practice strategies. They are visually attractive with two-color graphics. To give you an idea of the grading, Volume One contains Bach Minuet in G and Musette in D. The 112 page Volume Two has selections from Anna Magdalena Notebook, little Preludes and easier pieces from Handel and Scarlatti. A CD is included.

Spotlight on Baroque Style

by Catherine Rollin

Alfred Publishing Co.

Seven original pieces in dance form as typically seen in Baroque suites. The trills and mordants are written out for easier execution.

J.S. Bach, Selections from the Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach

selected and edited by Keith Snell

Neil A. Kjos Music Co.

Over a period of five years, J. S. Bach and others filled two notebooks with keyboard pieces as a gift to his wife. Intermediate works include Minuets, Marches and Polonaises. The CD, performed by Diane Hidy, also contains all Two-Part Inventions.

Baroque Folk

by Willard A. Palmer

Alfred Publishing Co.

Fifteen folk songs are arranged in Baroque style. Three are two-part Inventions, two are Minuets and there is a seven movement Suite. Others are a Partita, Gavotte and a Passacaglia.

Miniature French Suite in FM – an Introduction to the Baroque Dance Suite

by George Peter Tingley

Alfred Publishing Co.

This contains a history of performance practices, a glossary of terms and a review quiz.

Fanfare and other Courtly Scenes

by William Gillock

Summy Birchard

Four Suites of appealing miniatures introduce students to the Baroque Suite format. Although they are excellent quality material to develop phrasing, touch and style, they are more homophonic than contrapuntal.

The Baroque Spirit, Books 1 and 2

edited and annotated by Nancy Bachus

Alfred Publishing Co.

Excellent background for general Baroque characteristics, as well as short biographies of over 20 composers whose works appear in both books. Book 1 presents the repertoire by nationality - Italy, Spain, France, Germany and England. Interesting black and white graphics throughout.

J.S. Bach 18 Short Preludes for the Keyboard

edited by Willard A. Palmer

Alfred Publishing Co.

This collection provides the student with a thorough overview of the Baroque Prelude in its many forms. An introductory section gives a thorough explanation of ornamentation.

Telemann Fantasias, first dozen

edited by Richard Jones

The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music

These compositions offer a good alternative to repertoire by Bach. Each Fantasia in this set is in 3 movements, with the first section being identical to the final section. The level of difficulty is very similar to the Two-Part Inventions.

J.S. Bach Two-Part Inventions

edited by Keith Snell

Neil A. Kjos Music Co.

Each Invention is on two pages, with no page turns. They include a table of ornaments and suggested tempos. A companion CD, performance by Diane Hidy, is available.

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The Inventions, BWV 772-786, composed from 1720 to 1723, were designed as teaching pieces. They appear in ascending order by pitch, starting at C and using only Major and minor keys with no more than four sharps or flats.

After consulting Jane Magrath's The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature, I share with you her comment, "a common mistake is to teach the Two Part Inventions **too early** in a student's musical development." She designates the following choices as level 7, or the most accessible in the group of fifteen -- numbers 1 in CM, 2 in cm, 4 in dm, 8 in FM, 10 in GM, 13 in am and 14 in B flat M.

Planning a strong foundation of polyphonic elements is an important key for successful playing and appreciation of the Baroque style. I hope that these repertoire suggestions lead to many pleasant and rewarding hours with Baroque music.

Thanks to Natalie Wickham for suggesting the subject for this article. Please e-mail comments or suggestions for future topics to [db-promusic@excite.com](mailto:db-promusic@excite.com).