

A Chance to Hear Bach Alongside His Contemporaries

By [Catherine Yang](#), [Epoch Times](#) | April 20, 2017 | Last Updated: April 20, 2017 7:24 am



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) is perhaps one of the composers referred to most; his name often used as a metonym for baroque or even classical music as a whole. But during his day, a few of his contemporaries were much more popular, but today they are obscure.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) is well known, and Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767) is not unfamiliar to classical music fans. But then there are composers like Johann Friedrich Fasch (1688–1758) and Christoph Graupner (1683–1760) who, unless you have spent time studying the baroque literature, are probably new names. All were prolific German composers who worked during the same period of time.

"They're Johann's peers, some of the unsung musicians from that period," said Frederick Renz, director of Early Music New York (EMNY). "Who would know Mr. Graupner? But his music is fantastic."

For instance, three years ago Renz found a Graupner piece that he said he fell in love with but only recently had the chance to program.

Graupner's Overture in D major is an eight-movement suite of dances, where, in between minuets, there are mysterious sounding movement titles like "constancy" and "boredom."

"This particular one, it has a certain spring character," Renz said. "It's in the key of D major, which is normally the baroque key for trumpets and drums and fanfares, but this piece is so sweet in so many ways. It has a lightness; perfect for springtime."

On [May 6](#), EMNY will perform high baroque orchestral works by all of these composers at the First Church of Christ, Scientist, near Lincoln Center. The selected works feature the baroque transverse flute, a wooden flute that only has one or two keys and holes for changing the pitch.



(Early Music New York)

Six Degrees of Separation

While these composers—Bach, Handel, Telemann, Fasch, and Graupner—did not all personally know each other, they were at least aware of each others' work.

Handel, whose father actually wanted him to be a lawyer instead of a musician, never met Bach. They were born in the same year, only about 80 mile from each other, and at least once just narrowly missed the other. In 1719, Handel was visiting family in Halle, Germany, and when Bach heard of this, he was only 20 miles away, and so he made a trip to Halle, only to find that Handel had already left for London the day before.

Telemann, on the other hand, was a friend to both of these composers. He and Handel met early, before Telemann began university, and exchanged letters often, throughout their careers. Bach made Telemann the godfather (and namesake) of his son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach.

Telemann was also more prolific than either Bach or Handel, who were hugely prolific composers themselves. He actually wrote close to as much music as Bach and Handel combined (600 suites, 200 concertos, 40 operas, and over 1,000 pieces for the church).

While one might marvel at Bach's talent in counterpoint and fugue, Renz said, Telemann was more popular: "He wrote a tune that you could whistle on your way home."

Telemann also crossed paths with Graupner and Fasch in some way: they had all declined the same music director post in Leipzig, which ended up going to Bach. Graupner had written a letter of praise for Bach when he heard the composer was applying for the position.

Graupner knew Handel too—the two of them played in the Hamburg Opera's orchestra together (Graupner on harpsichord and Handel on violin).

Graupner knew Fasch as well; the younger musician studied composition under Graupner for a short while.

Graupner also produced a great quantity of works (over 2,000), which survived better than Telemann's. After his death, his manuscripts were locked up due to a legal battle which caused his music to fall into obscurity, but ended up preserving the body of his works for the future.

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