

J. S. Bach

Bourée in E Minor



Bridget Mermikides arranges and transcribes a beautiful and influential piece by a composer considered to be 'the father of classical music'.

ABILITY RATING

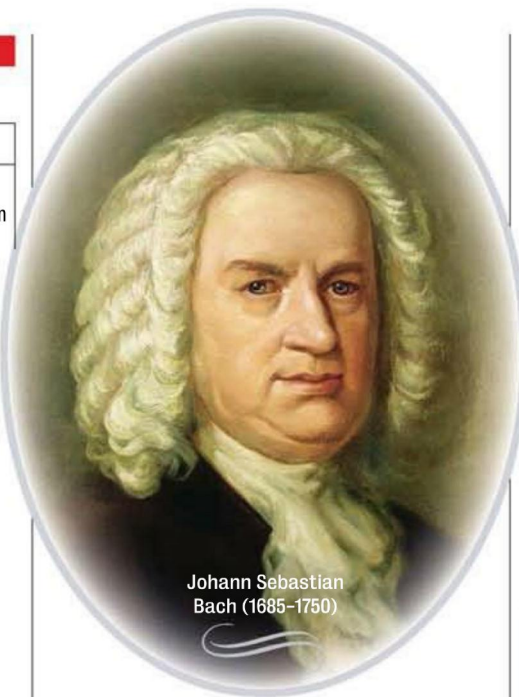


Moderate

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: E minor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Picking hand control
TEMPO: 125bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Melody & bass line separation
CD: Tracks 16-17	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Baroque repertoire

THIS MONTH WE are looking at a piece by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) who - although not widely recognised in his lifetime - is now generally considered to be one of the greatest composers of all time. Bach was a master of several instruments, and a highly prodigious composer, creating over a 1000 exquisite works. Bach's masterful ability to balance many simultaneous melodies, complex harmonies and structural forms has been a source of admiration - and inspiration - to countless musicians for over 300 years. It is hard to understate Bach's genius as a composer, and the level of respect for him by musicians from a wide range of styles. The following anecdote should give you some idea: In 1977, the Voyager space probe was to be launched with a golden record including information about mankind, Planet Earth and messages of peace. When it was suggested that one of Bach's pieces should be included as evidence of earthly intelligence to alien lifeforms, a colleague of Carl Sagan objected, because "that would be just showing off".

“**Paul McCartney claims that Blackbird was written when he took the original picking pattern of Bourée to use on his own chords.**”




Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Bach's Bourée in E minor - originally the fifth movement of his Lute Suite in E minor BWV 996 - has become well known as a guitar piece in its own right, and has been popular among classical guitarists since Segovia arranged it in the 1950s. Paul McCartney claims that Blackbird was written when he took the picking pattern of Bourée to use on his own chords, and it also inspired Randy Rhoads' 'Dee' instrumental in Ozzy's Blizzard Of Oz album.

The original manuscript of the piece has been lost, but it was probably written some time between 1707 and 1717 when Bach was still a young man but already a master musician. A bourée is a type of dance, originating in France and with a fast duple metre (two main beats in a bar). Although this arrangement is

written in 4/4 the strong beats are 1 and 3 - where the chords most regularly change. A bourée also has an 'upbeat' - notes that begin for the first bar proper - and in this case it is the two chords before bar 1 and in bars 8 and 16. The form is an AABB, which may aid memory when playing it. Bach was a master of counterpoint but in this piece there are only two parts. It's important that both are heard throughout and sound flowing and musical. You may even want to practise each voice separately to become acquainted with the composed line.

Bach's pieces can be extremely challenging - and greatly rewarding - to perform on the guitar. Luckily for us this is a relatively approachable work. However, as I always say, the best road to mastering it is patient practice - and enjoying the process of learning as much as the end goal. 

TECHNIQUE FOCUS

POSTURE AND FINGERNAILS

Two important aspects of playing classical guitar are sitting posture and plucking hand fingernails. Firstly, we sit with the inwards curve of the guitar placed on the left thigh (for right handed players), which is raised by placing the foot on a footstool. The lower (larger) bout of the guitar rests on the right inner thigh and the right forearm rests on the upper bout of the instrument. This should hold the guitar securely in place with the neck pointing slightly upwards. The right hand should now naturally land on the strings close to the soundhole. The fingernails need to be grown, shaped and filed smooth to pluck the strings. The length should reach just beyond the fingertip and the shape should follow the same curve. A lot of players like an angle down on the left side (back of the hand facing you) so that the nail acts as a 'ramp' and plucks the string smoothly. A combination of flesh of the fingertip and nail combined seems to give the most desirable tone.



TRACK RECORD Two great arrangements of Bourée are: Jakob Lindberg's 100 Solo Bach (2011 XLS Music Group) - a fine performance with the original instrumentation; and Paul Galbraith's Introducing The Brahms Guitar (1996 Wonderlust), a fluent version performed on his 'Brahms guitar, a standard classical with additional low and high strings, used in a cello posture and attached to a resonating box.



Paul Galbraith's
Brahms guitar with
an additional low
and high string

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 17

[Bars 1-9] This piece consists of two clear parts; bass line and melody. Both parts are played almost entirely free stroke throughout, apart from the occasional rest stroke on the melody line for emphasis. The fretting hand fingering is clearly indicated and should be easy to follow. It's helpful to be clear in your mind about exactly what position you are for technical security, for example; at the start we are in second position until the last beat of bar 2 where we shift to first position.

From there we move back to second position on the last quaver beat of bar 5 and so on. This may sound like an obvious thing to say but do make sure that your fretting hand is always 'seated' in the correct position to ensure the clean execution of notes - and that includes the position of the fretting hand thumb. Allow the thumb to make small position shifts along with the fingers - a common problem can be keeping it 'stuck' in one place on the guitar neck.

$\text{♩} = 125$ approx



Measures 1-4: Em, A6, B, A5, Em/G, F#m, Em, D7/F#, G, A7, B, A7

Measures 5-8: G, B, Em, A6, B, A5, Em/G, F#m, Em, D7/F#, G, C, D, G

Measures 9-12: D/F#, D7, G, G/B, C, E7/G#, Am, D, E, Am, Am/E, E

Measures 13-16: Am, D/F#, D5, G, G/B, C, E/G#, Am, A/C#, D, F#7/A#

Measures 17-20: (Continuation of the previous system)

Measures 21-23: (Continuation of the previous system)

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 17

[Bar 19 to end] The second half of the piece, beginning at bar 19, has more technical movement and may require more practice than the first. Always aim to place the fretting hand fingers down on their tips to help achieve accuracy of touch, and again be clear about the positions on the fretboard to which, and from which, you are shifting. There are numerous instances where the fretting hand fingering creates 'guide' fingers; this is where one finger slides along its

string from one note to the next without losing contact of that string. A good example is in bar 25 where the third finger is used three times in a row and then again on the first beat of bar 26. This should help to keep the melody line connected and fluent. Remember that slow, careful and patient practice is a faster route to reaching your goal than trying to hurry this along! So take your time and enjoy the learning process.

Sheet music for J.S. Bach's Bourée in E Minor, showing measures 26 to 32. The music is written for guitar, with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The fretting hand fingering is indicated by numbers 1-4 below the notes. Chord symbols are provided above the staff for each measure.

Measures 26-28: Chords: Bm, Em, F#, B, E, E7/D, A/C#, A7.

Measures 29-31: Chords: D, C, G/B, G7, C, Bsus7, A6, F#7, B, E/G#.

Measure 32: Chords: Am, D/F#, Gaug, C/E, F#m, B/D#, Em, Am, B, A5, Em/B, Em.

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