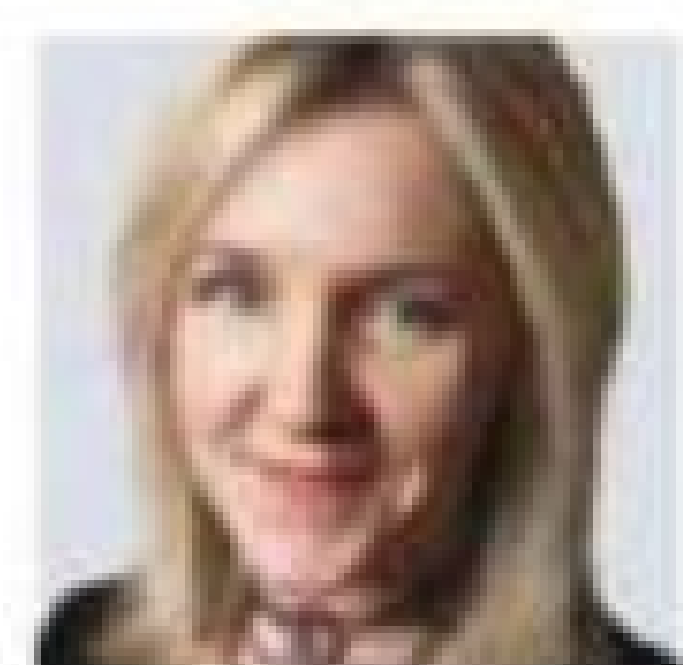


Pachelbel's Canon



This issue our classical maestro **Bridget Mermikides** transcribes a wonderful piece by one of France's most respected and celebrated 17th century composers.

ABILITY RATING

● ● ● ● ● Advanced

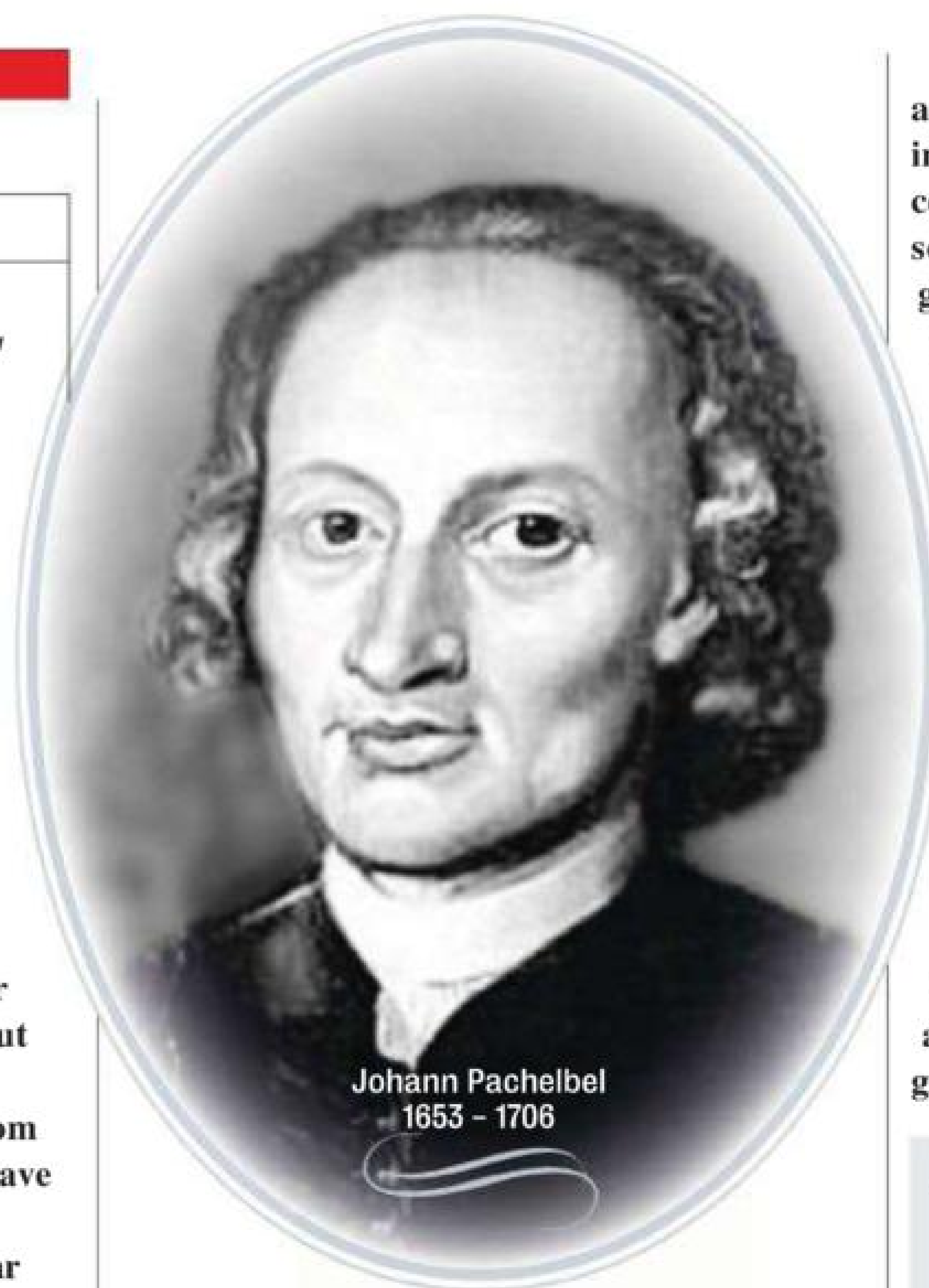
INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
KEY: C	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fretting hand stamina
TEMPO: 58 bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bass with upper melody
CD: Tracks 14-15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Free-stroke scale runs

THIS ISSUE'S CLASSICAL guitar column features a solo guitar arrangement of the ever popular 1694 Baroque orchestral piece, Canon in D by the German composer Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706) – now known simply as Pachelbel's Canon. Pachelbel was a master of the harmonic devices of his era, and many of these fundamental concepts have established much of how we construct chords and their progressions to this day. Pachelbel's Canon was originally scored for 3 violins with keyboard accompaniment, but it has since been arranged, performed and recorded on a wide variety of ensembles from piano solo to full orchestra. You may also have come across Funtwo's 2005 viral YouTube performance of Jerry Chang's electric guitar arrangement of the piece.

The piece works with a wide range of ensembles, and although over 300 years old, it is very accessible to contemporary listeners from diverse backgrounds.

There are a few reasons for its timeless accessibility. Firstly it is based on a simple set of diatonic chords that is frequently used in pop songs. It also is underpinned by a 2-bar ground bass (also known as a basso ostinato) – a compositional device which is in essence a bass


“Although over 300 years old, this great piece is very accessible to contemporary listeners from different backgrounds.”



Johann Pachelbel
1653 – 1706

loop upon which melodies and harmonies are built. Although this was originally a Baroque device, it is common in many styles from jazz to metal to electronica. Thirdly, of course this piece is in a canon form. This is where an idea is played and then immediately imitated by another instrument or musical line. Although a canon may be in a very simple form like London's Burning (known as a round), Canons may include very sophisticated techniques. Pachelbel's Canon is relatively simple, one violin plays the leading melody and then another plays a similar following melody, 2 bars later. This simple canonic structure makes for a mesmeric and compelling listener experience and has now made it possible for performers to emulate sections of this piece with a looping device.

The individual parts of Pachelbel's Canon are relatively simple, combining in ever increasing layers and technical and rhythmic complexity, however emulating the piece on solo classical guitar is quite a challenge. Due its ground bass structure, this is an excellent study piece, as it can be broken up into looped 2 or 4 bar sections for practice purposes, and the sections can quite readily be rearranged and edited for performance as desired.

There is some arduous work for the fretting hand in this piece (use drop D tuning) and one difficult aspect is giving the bass notes their full value (holding them for a full beat) while executing the upper part(s) at the same time. This often means needing to hang onto a bass note with one finger while the other fingers are busy taking care of the melody. Stretches and stamina are needed in the fretting hand for this kind of solo playing and can only be achieved through careful, patient practice gradually building up sections of the piece. 

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 is pointing slightly upwards. The right hand should now naturally land on the strings close to the sound hole. 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 Check out The Baroque Chamber Orchestra's The Only Classical CD You'll Ever Need. This clear and excellent harpsichord and string arrangement is worth listening to when learning this piece. Also Craig Ogden has arranged Canon in D beautifully for classical guitar and strings for The Guitarist (2010 Classic FM Records).



Craig Ogden:
Australian
classical
virtuoso

LEBRECHT

»

CD TRACK 15

up a bad habit that will considerably hinder the development of your technique. **[Bar 11]** Here the rhythm subdivides again and we move into semiquavers (16th notes). There are occasional places where the bass note has to be cut off such as the F# at the end of bar 13 to accommodate the melody but on the whole it is possible to keep those bass notes consistent so do try! At bar 16 a full barre at the 5th fret is needed for the 1st beat followed by a half barre on beat 2. Aim to give both the upper notes and the bass notes their full value in this bar.

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PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 15

[Bar 27-30] At bar 27 the rhythm changes to a one beat motif that repeats in sequences. Try to keep the rhythm crisp and clear here. Again there is a mixture of legatos and non-legato versions of this rhythm that is open to interpretation. On beat 3 of bar 30 the melody line is played across three strings with indicated

fingering in both hands. This, if executed cleanly should create a nice fluent effect. **[Bar 37]** On beat 4 of bar 37 it is very difficult to play the 3rds in the melody while sustaining the bass note F#. It is possible however, by following the fingering indicated next to the notation and pivoting on the 3rd finger in order to grab »

27

D A Bm F#m G D G A

E 2 3 0 2 2 3 2 3 4 2 2 0 4 2
B 3 3 5 3 2 2 3 4 4 2 3 4 2 5
G 0 0 2 4 4 2 0 4 2
D 0 0 2 4

29

D A Bm F#m G D G A

E 3 2 3 2 2 3 2 2 5 3 2
B 4 4 2 4 2 3 5 3 2 2 5 3 2
G 5 4 0 2 4 2 4 2 5 3 2
D 5 0 2 4

5 a m i m p

31

D A Bm F#m G D G A

E 3 2 3 2 2 3 2 2 0 3 2
B 4 4 2 2 3 2 3 5 3 2 2 0 3 2
G 5 4 0 2 4 2 4 2 5 3 2
D 5 0 2 4

33

D A Bm F#m G D G A

E 3 2 3 2 2 3 2 2 5 3 2
B 4 4 2 2 4 2 3 3 5 3 2 5 3 2
G 5 4 0 2 4 2 4 2 5 3 2
D 5 0 2 4

35

D A Bm F#m G D G A

E 3 2 2 3 2 5 3 3 0 3 2
B 0 2 2 3 2 5 3 3 0 3 2
G 0 0 2 4 4 2 0 4 2
D 5 0 2 4

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 15

the E & G (second semiquaver). If this proves to be too awkward to play, the lower voice of the 3rds or even just the E on the 2nd semiquaver can be dropped. I'm a great believer in cheating or making it slightly easier where possible so long as it doesn't compromise on the integrity of the music.

[Bar 43 to end] The final section is mostly chordal and requires precise position of the fretting hand in order to sound tidy so be patient with the learning process and take your time. Don't forget that this piece can be easily edited and made shorter by picking and choosing your own set of preferred 2-bar sections.

Chord progression: D, A, Bm, F#m, G, D, G, A

Chord progression: D, A, Bm, F#m, G, Dadd11, G, A

Chord progression: D, A, Bm, F#m>5, G, D, G, A, D, A, Bm, F#m>5

Chord progression: G, D, G, A, D, A, Bm, F#m>5, G, D, G6, A

Chord progression: D, A, Bm, F#m, G, D, G, A, D