



# **Ricercare a 6**

*J. S. Bach*

**From the Musicial Offering**

*Transcribed by Peter Billam*

**For two Violins, two Violas and two Celli**

© Peter J Billam, 1998

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## The Musical Offering

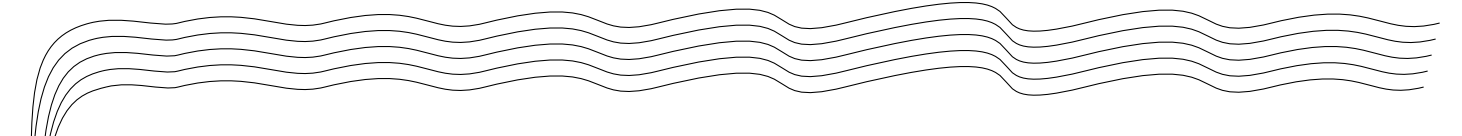
In May of 1747, after finishing the B minor Mass and the second book of the Well-Tempered Clavier, Johann Sebastian Bach travelled to Potsdam, accompanied by his son Wilhelm Friedeman, to visit his successful son Carl Philipp Emmanuel, who was personal harpsichordist to Frederick the Great of Prussia. Johann Sebastian was still a humble schoolteacher; he taught Latin and Music at St Thomas School in Leipzig.

Potsdam was a very musical court. Personal flute teacher to Frederick the Great was Johann Joachim Quantz, the finest flute player in the country, the author of the book "On Playing the Flute", and the only person allowed to find fault with the king's flute playing. Carl Philipp Emmanuel would have spent much time playing music with Quantz, and they must have sounded wonderful. Frederick himself was a fine flute player, and a composer whose works are still played by flute players today.

When Johann Sebastian arrived, the King immediately cancelled the evening's planned concert. He had an extensive collection of harpsichords, and Johann Sebastian, without being given time to change out of his travelling clothes, was ushered from room to room and asked to improvise on each one.

The King also had fifteen of the new fortepianos, which he correctly foresaw as the great new wave in music. They were loud modern inventions, where the strings were so thick that they could not even be plucked, but had to be hit with hammers. Silbermann, of Freyburg, had devised an elaborate mechanism to allow the hammer to rebound even as the key remained pressed. The fortepiano had some of the touch sensitivity of the clavichord, but was loud enough to be played in concert, even in public; however, it could not play vibrato, as the clavichord could. This was the only time that Johann Sebastian played on the new fortepiano, and every piano player since would love to know what he thought of the instrument, and how he played it. Certainly Silbermann was the organ-maker that Johann Sebastian most admired, so the new creation would have been accorded respect.

As is usual with visiting organists, Johann Sebastian was asked to improvise on a given theme. The King sat at the keyboard and played a fine Bach-like theme, rich and dramatic, and asked his guest to improvise a fugue upon it. The King admired the learned treatment of his subject, and asked Johann Sebastian to play it in four, then five, and finally six voices. Nobody knows what Johann Sebastian played in response, and I am sure that it sounded superb, but he probably failed to sustain a six-voice texture, and presumably the King pointed this out.



A six-voice fugue is an almost unheard-of technical challenge – there is none in the Well-Tempered Clavier, for example – and the King's theme, which does not fit in stretto with itself, is particularly unfavourable to treatment in many voices. On the other hand, because of its great eloquence, it is a wonderful subject for a three-voice fugue, and presumably Johann Sebastian pointed this out.

Arnold Schoenberg even suggested that the royal theme had been devised by Carl Philipp Emmanuel as a practical joke, because he knew a six-voice treatment would be impossible. I do think it was written by Carl Philipp Emmanuel, because it shows a superb understanding of Johann Sebastian's style, and is simply too good for the King to have invented. However, I do not think Carl Philipp Emmanuel, at the peak of a brilliant career, and well aware of his father's extraordinary powers, would have felt any need to ridicule him.

The King also desired to hear Johann Sebastian perform on the organ, so the next day he was taken round all the organs in Potsdam. The following day he returned to Leipzig.

The voyage to Potsdam is a defining event in the western musical tradition, because it is the only time Johann Sebastian was accorded public honour, the only time he played the fortepiano, and because it brings him, and all his contrapuntal powers, into contact with the best of the next generation, who were to develop the style which became that of Haydn and Mozart.

Six months later, Johann Sebastian sent to Potsdam a *Musical Offering* which he had had engraved at his own expense. The opening piece is a three voice fugue (*Ricercare a 3*) on the King's theme; this I see as Johann saying to Frederick "When I mentioned that the best setting for this theme was in three voices, this is what I had in mind ..." . The centrepiece is a six voice fugue (*Ricercare a 6*) on the King's theme; this I see as Johann saying to Carl Philipp "You see ? My art is adequate to your test ..." . The finale is a trio sonata, for flute, violin and continuo, largely based on the King's theme, a delight to play, perhaps the greatest and certainly the grandest trio sonata ever written. Between these three pieces are eight smaller ones, all on the King's theme. They include a number of puzzle canons, and the *Fuga Canonica in Epiadiapente* for flute and keyboard.

Then Johann Sebastian Bach turned his attention to the *Art of Fugue*.

Peter Billam

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10

Musical score for measures 10-14. The score is in G minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. It features six staves: two treble clefs (Violin I and Violin II), two alto clefs (Viola I and Viola II), and two bass clefs (Cello and Double Bass). The music is characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns and melodic lines, with frequent rests and dynamic markings.

15

Musical score for measures 15-19. The score continues in G minor and 3/4 time. The six staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola I, Viola II, Cello, and Double Bass) show complex interweaving of lines. The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks, maintaining the piece's characteristic complexity.

Musical score for measures 20-24. The score continues in G minor and 3/4 time. The six staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola I, Viola II, Cello, and Double Bass) show complex interweaving of lines. The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks, maintaining the piece's characteristic complexity.

20

Musical score for measures 18-20. The score is in G minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. It features six staves: two treble clefs (Violins I and II), two alto clefs (Violas I and II), and two bass clefs (Cellos and Double Basses). The music is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns and chromaticism, typical of Bach's style.

Musical score for measures 21-23. The score continues with the same instrumentation and key signature. The melodic lines in the upper staves are highly active, with frequent sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The lower staves provide a steady harmonic and rhythmic foundation.

25

Musical score for measures 24-26. The score concludes with a final cadence. The melodic lines resolve to their final notes, and the harmonic structure is clearly defined. The piece ends with a strong sense of closure.

30

35

Musical score for measures 1-39. The score is arranged in two systems of four staves each. The top two staves of each system are Treble Clef, and the bottom two are Bass Clef. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The music features complex polyphonic textures with various rhythmic values and melodic lines.

Musical score for measures 40-44. The score is arranged in two systems of four staves each. The top two staves of each system are Treble Clef, and the bottom two are Bass Clef. The key signature is three flats. Measure 40 is marked with the number '40'. The music continues with intricate counterpoint.

Musical score for measures 45-48. The score is arranged in two systems of four staves each. The top two staves of each system are Treble Clef, and the bottom two are Bass Clef. The key signature is three flats. Measure 45 is marked with the number '45'. The piece concludes with a final cadence.





System 1 of the musical score, featuring six staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom four are in bass clef. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. It begins with a whole rest in the first staff, followed by a melodic line in the second staff. The third and fourth staves provide harmonic support with eighth and sixteenth notes. The fifth and sixth staves continue the harmonic texture with sustained notes and some movement.



System 2 of the musical score, starting with a measure number '50' above the first staff. The notation continues with intricate melodic and harmonic patterns across the six staves, including various note values and rests.



System 3 of the musical score, continuing the piece with complex rhythmic and melodic figures in all six staves.

55

60

65

Measures 65-67 of the Ricercare a 6. The score is in G minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. It features six staves: two treble clefs, two alto clefs, and two bass clefs. The music is characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth-note runs and slurs, with some notes marked with a 'z' (zaccato).

Measures 68-70 of the Ricercare a 6. The score continues with six staves. Measures 68 and 69 show a continuation of the complex rhythmic textures, while measure 70 features a more melodic line in the upper staves and a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the lower staves.

70

Measures 71-73 of the Ricercare a 6. The score continues with six staves. Measures 71 and 72 show a continuation of the complex rhythmic textures, while measure 73 features a more melodic line in the upper staves and a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the lower staves.

The first system of the musical score consists of six staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom four staves are in bass clef. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The music features a complex texture with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A fermata is placed over a note in the second measure of the top staff.

The second system of the musical score consists of six staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom four staves are in bass clef. The key signature is three flats. A measure rest is present in the first measure of the top staff. The number '75' is written above the first measure of the top staff. The music continues with intricate melodic and harmonic lines across all staves.

The third system of the musical score consists of six staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom four staves are in bass clef. The key signature is three flats. The music features a variety of rhythmic values and rests, with some notes beamed together. The texture remains dense and polyphonic throughout the system.

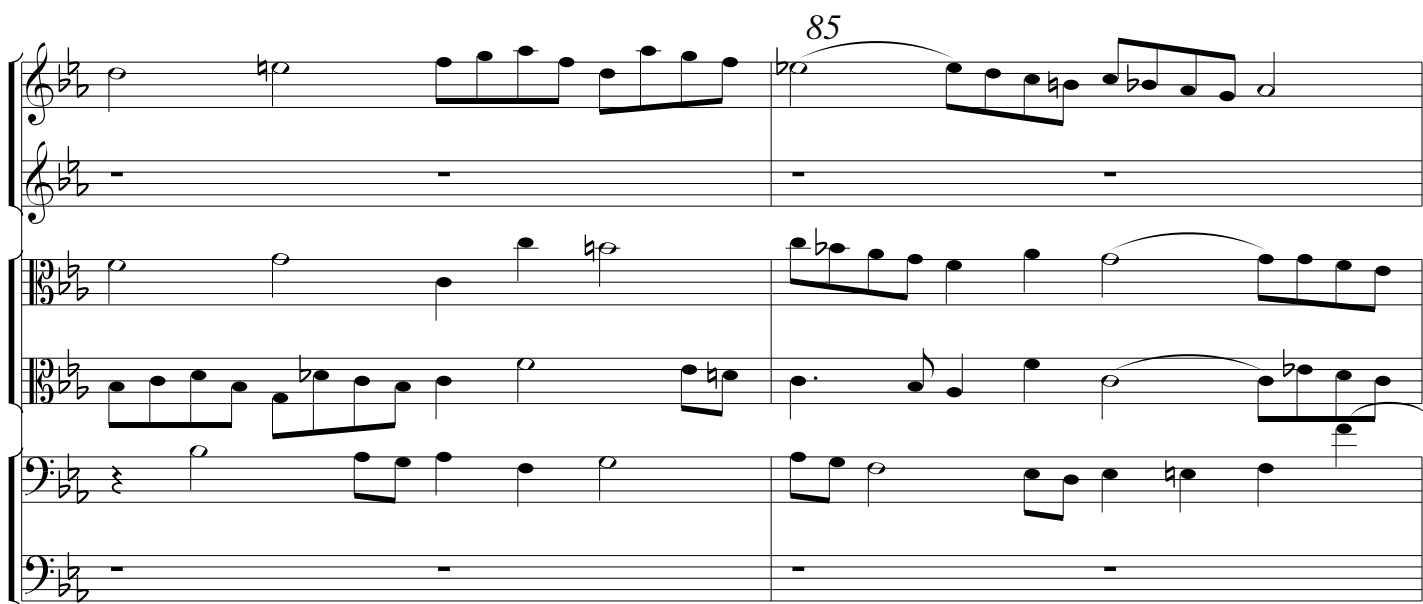


80

This system contains measures 78 through 81. It features six staves: two treble clefs (Violin I and II), two alto clefs (Viola I and II), and two bass clefs (Cello and Double Bass). The music is in G minor (three flats) and 3/4 time. Measure 78 shows a complex rhythmic pattern in the upper strings. Measure 79 has a prominent sixteenth-note figure in the first violin. Measure 80 is marked with the number '80' and features a long, sweeping melodic line in the first violin. Measure 81 continues this melodic line.



This system contains measures 82 through 85. The instrumentation remains the same. Measure 82 shows a more active role for the second violin. Measure 83 features a melodic line in the first violin. Measure 84 has a complex rhythmic pattern in the first violin. Measure 85 continues the melodic development in the first violin.



85

This system contains measures 86 through 89. Measure 86 is marked with the number '85' and shows a melodic line in the first violin. Measure 87 continues this line. Measure 88 features a complex rhythmic pattern in the first violin. Measure 89 continues the melodic development in the first violin.

The first system of the musical score consists of six staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom four staves are in bass clef. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The music features a complex texture with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. There are several slurs and ties throughout the system.

The second system of the musical score consists of six staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom four staves are in bass clef. The key signature is three flats. A tempo marking of '90' is placed above the first staff of this system. The music continues with intricate melodic lines and harmonic support, featuring many slurs and ties.

The third system of the musical score consists of six staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom four staves are in bass clef. The key signature is three flats. The music concludes with a series of sixteenth-note passages and rests, maintaining the complex texture established in the previous systems.

95

100

# Ricercare a 6 – Violin 1 part

5

Viola 1 ...

Violin 2 ...

Bass ...

10

15

Viola 2 ...

20

25

30

35

40

(An?)

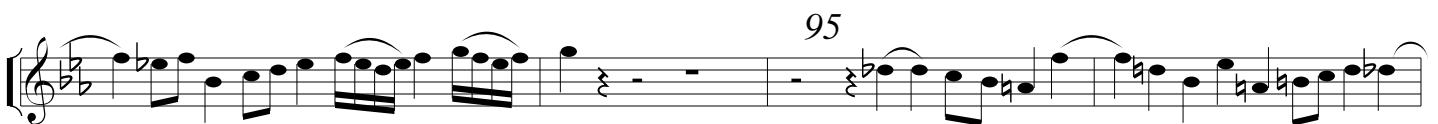
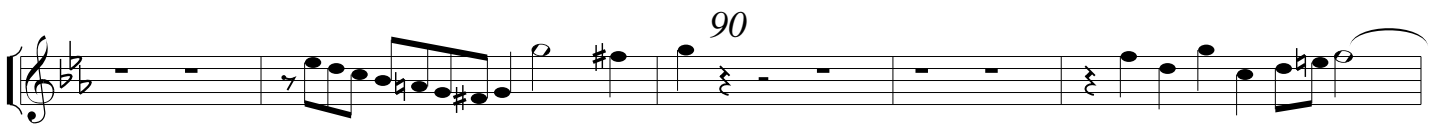
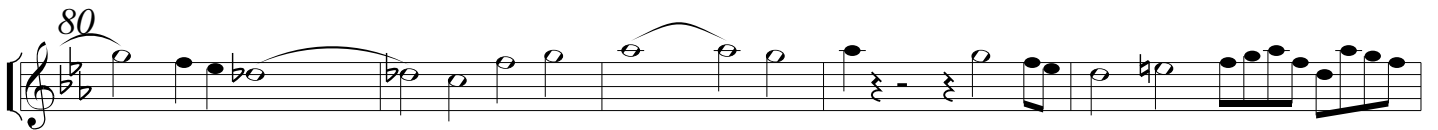
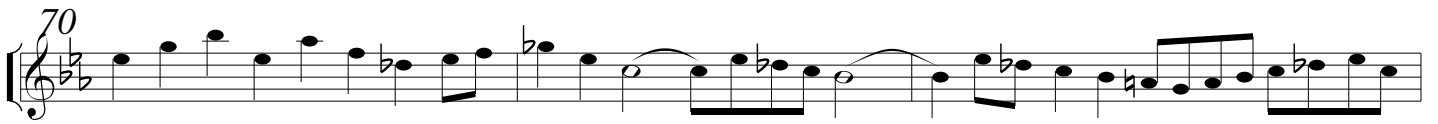
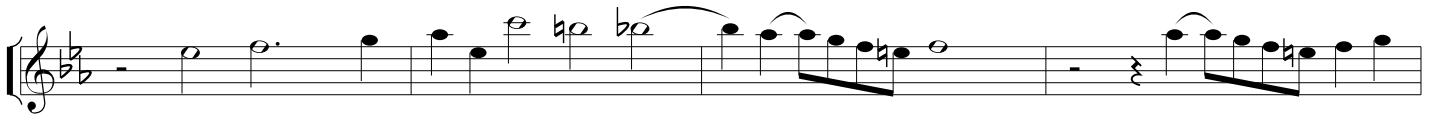
45

50

55

Detailed description: This is a musical score for the Violin 1 part of 'Ricerca a 6'. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a time signature of 4/2. The music begins with a five-measure rest, indicated by a '5' above the staff. The first system includes staves for Viola 1, Violin 2, and Bass, all of which have rests. The second system shows Viola 2 with a ten-measure rest ('10') and a fifteen-measure rest ('15'). The main melody for the Violin 1 part starts at measure 20. It features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, with various accidentals (sharps and flats) and slurs. Measure numbers 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, and 55 are clearly marked above the staff. At measure 40, there is a performance instruction '(An?)' above the staff. The piece concludes with a five-measure rest at the end of the page, marked with a '55'.





# Ricercare $\frac{5}{6}$ – Violin 2 part

The image displays a musical score for the Violin 2 part of 'Ricercare 5/6'. The score is written in a single system with 11 staves. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/2. The music begins with a five-measure rest, indicated by a '5' above the first staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and slurs. Measure numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, and 50 are clearly marked above their respective staves. The piece concludes with a final cadence in the 50th measure.

55

60

65

70

75

80

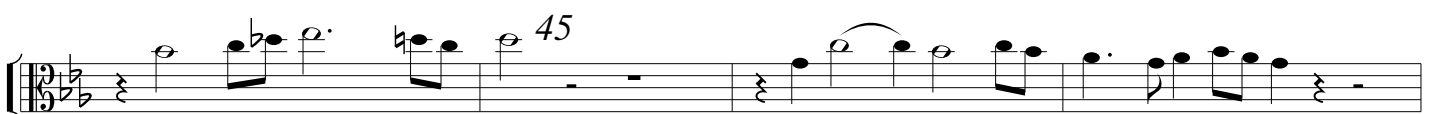
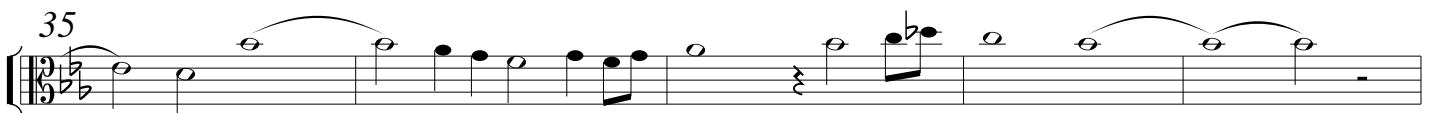
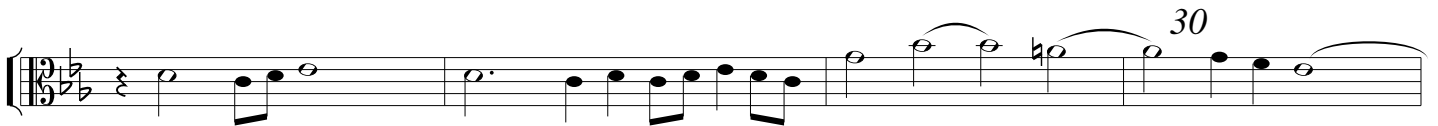
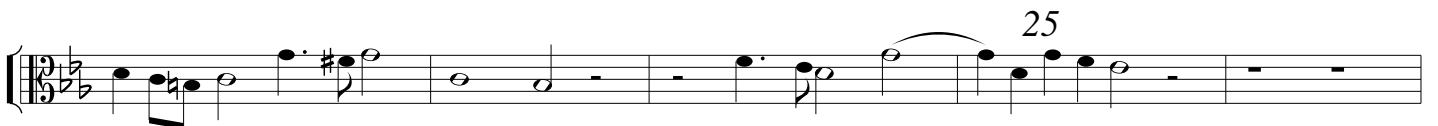
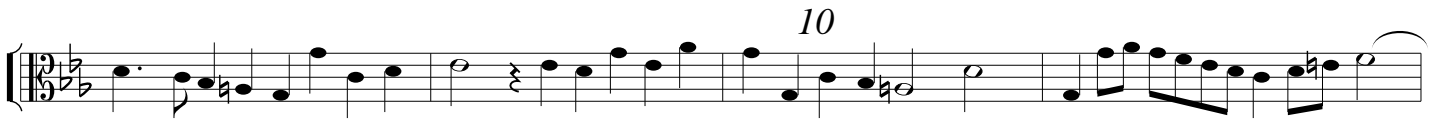
85

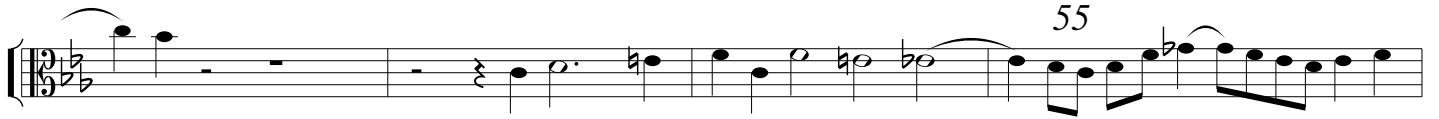
90

95

100

# Ricercare a 6 – Viola 1 part

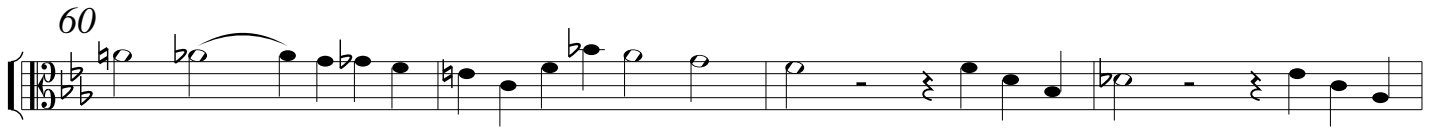




Musical staff 1, measures 51-54. The staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a common time signature. It contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 51-52 and a fermata over measure 53. Measure 54 ends with a double bar line.



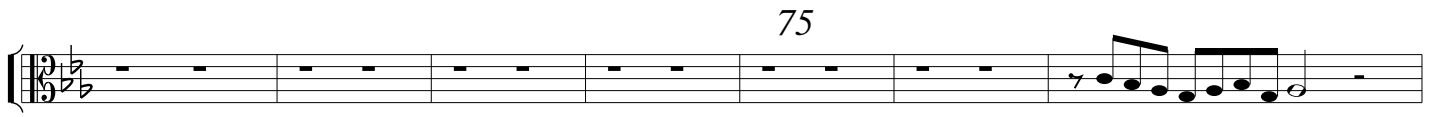
Musical staff 2, measures 55-58. The staff continues the melodic line with a slur over measures 55-56 and a fermata over measure 57. Measure 58 ends with a double bar line.



Musical staff 3, measures 59-62. The staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a common time signature. It contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 59-60 and a fermata over measure 61. Measure 62 ends with a double bar line.



Musical staff 4, measures 63-70. The staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 63-64 and a fermata over measure 65. Measure 70 ends with a double bar line.



Musical staff 5, measures 71-74. The staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 71-72 and a fermata over measure 73. Measure 74 ends with a double bar line.



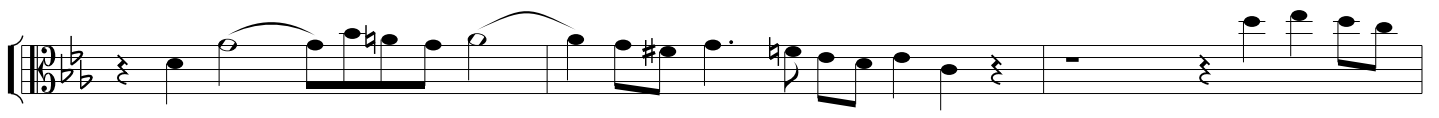
Musical staff 6, measures 75-80. The staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 75-76 and a fermata over measure 77. Measure 80 ends with a double bar line.



Musical staff 7, measures 81-84. The staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 81-82 and a fermata over measure 83. Measure 84 ends with a double bar line.



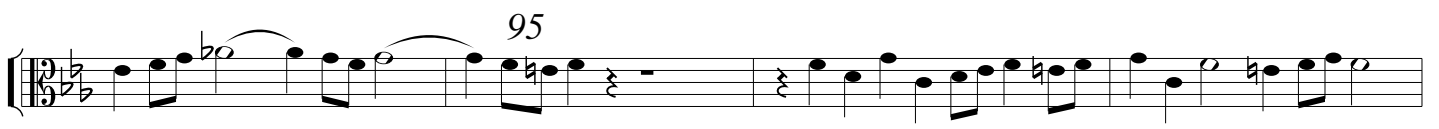
Musical staff 8, measures 85-88. The staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 85-86 and a fermata over measure 87. Measure 88 ends with a double bar line.



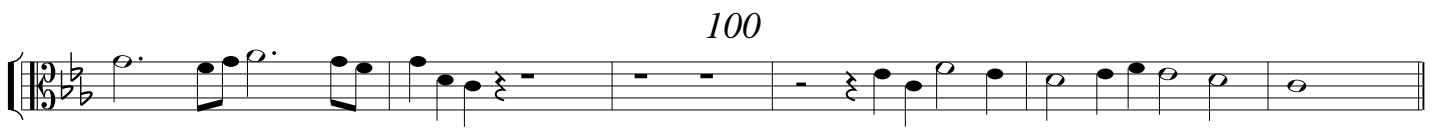
Musical staff 9, measures 89-92. The staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 89-90 and a fermata over measure 91. Measure 92 ends with a double bar line.



Musical staff 10, measures 93-96. The staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 93-94 and a fermata over measure 95. Measure 96 ends with a double bar line.



Musical staff 11, measures 97-100. The staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 97-98 and a fermata over measure 99. Measure 100 ends with a double bar line.



Musical staff 12, measures 101-104. The staff contains a melodic line with a slur over measures 101-102 and a fermata over measure 103. Measure 104 ends with a double bar line.

# Ricercare a 6 – Viola 2 part

5

Viola 1 ... Violin 2 ...

10

Cello 1 ...

15

20

25

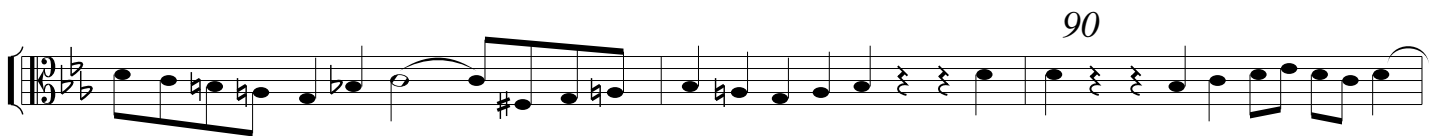
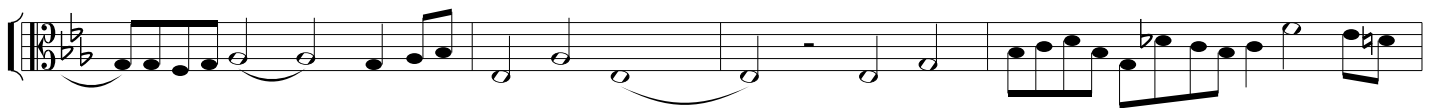
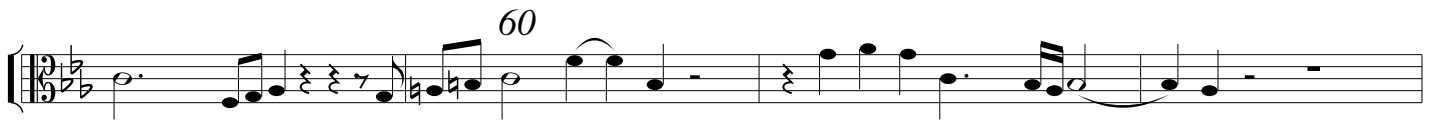
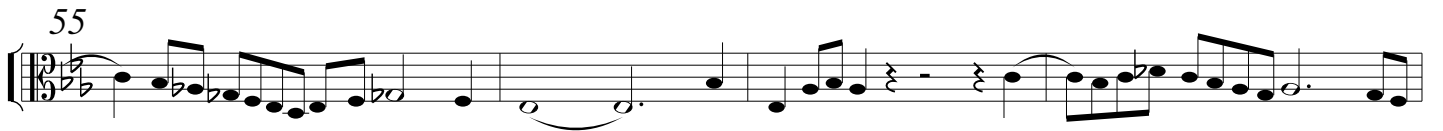
30

35

40

45

50



# Ricercare a 6 – Cello 1 part

5

Viola 1 ... Violin 2 ...



10



15



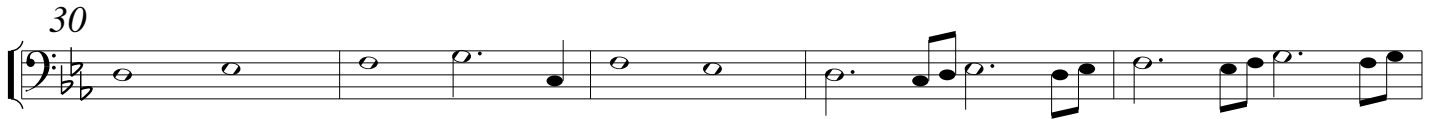
20



25



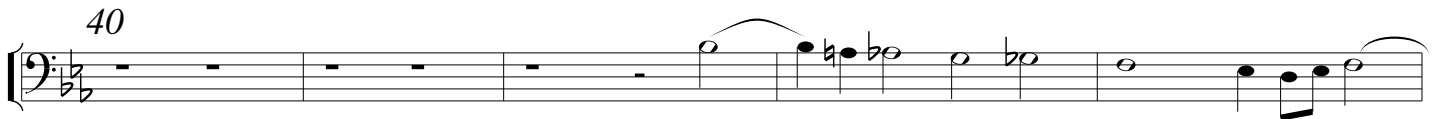
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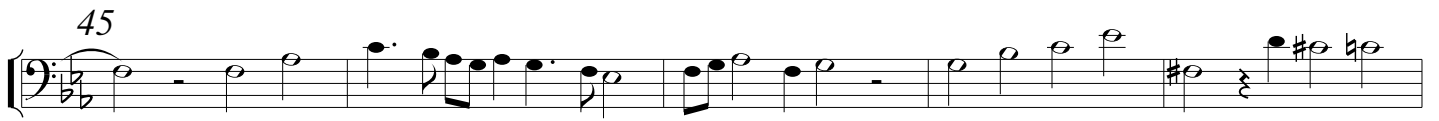
35



40



45



50





55

60

65

70

75

80

85

90

95

100

# Ricercare a 6 – Cello 2 part

5

Viola 1 ... Violin 2 ...

10

15

Bass ... Viola 2 ...

20

Viola 1 ...

25

Bass ...

30

Bass ...

35

Bass ...

40

Bass ...

45

Bass ...

50

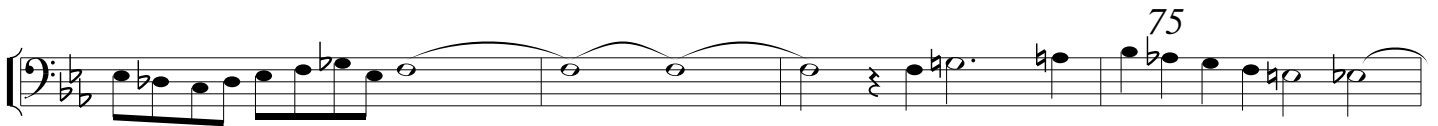
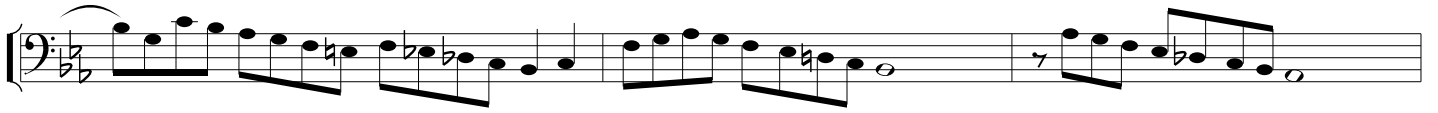
Bass ...

55

Bass ...

60

Bass ...



**Peter Billam** was born in London in 1948, studied piano, and lived in Switzerland from 1973 to 1983, where he studied composition, classical guitar, flute and voice, worked as Musical Director of the *Théâtre Populaire Romand*, and as recording engineer, record producer and computer programmer. He moved to Tasmania in 1983, lectured in composition at the Conservatorium, conducted recorder ensembles and choirs, studied recorder, voice and keyboard. He founded **www.pjb.com.au**, becoming the first composer to sell scores on-line, taking scores from Composer to Performer in one immediate step. *Www.pjb.com.au* offers a new approach to music publishing. These pieces are **written to be read, made to be played !**

**Compositions** at *www.pjb.com.au* include: *Five Short Pieces*, guitar, 1979; *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute and guitar, 1980; *De Profundis* and *Nacht*, on poems by Lama Anagarika Govinda, voice and piano, 1980; *Fünf Bagatellen*, piano, 1980; *Five Rounds*, choir, 1986; *Go Forth and Multiply*, choir, 1986; *Three Violin Duets*, 1987; *Fable*, for piano, 1987; *To Erich Jantsch*, SAATB recorders, 1988; *A Suite of Curves*, trombone (or horn) and piano, 1990; *Two Recorder Duets*, alto recorders, or other melody instruments, 1991; *Trombone Quintet*, trombone, flute, piano, bass, and percussion, 1994; *Three Songs*, on poems by Jack Kerouac, Vikram Seth and Dylan Thomas, voice and piano (only the first and third of these are available), 1994; *Piano Study*, piano, 1994; *Four Dances*, various ensembles including recorder quartet, string quartet, 1995; *The Poet in the Clouds*, on a poem by S. T. Coleridge, SATB choir, 1995; *Tres Casidas del Diván del Tamarit*, on poems by Federico García Lorca, voice and piano, 1997; *Three Suites*, for the solo line, piano, and piano and a solo line, 2000; *Die Zeiten*, on poems by Kästner, Bachman and Jünger, choir (only the second and third of these are available), 2000; *Three Duets* for flutes, 2001; *For Four Hands* for piano four hands, 2002; *Three Preludes* for piano, 2003; *Second Solo Suite* for flute, violin, viola or cello, 2003; *Guitar Duet* for two guitars, 2006; *We Who Mourn* for choir, 2007; *Trio With Guitar* for guitar and two clarinets or two recorders or two violas, 2008; *Canons* for two- and four-hand piano, 2009; *Flute Trio*, 2012; *Twenty Studies* for piano, 2013-14.

**Arrangements** include: By J. S. Bach: *Trio BWV 655*, piano and flute; *Vor deinen Thron BWV 668*, piano; *Fugue in F minor BWV 689*, SATB recorders; *Four Duets BWV 802-5*, keyboard; *Six Preludes and Fugues* from Book I, keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1031* transposed into G major for alto recorder and keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1032* completed by Peter Billam for flute and keyboard, also in C major for alto recorder, and in G major for descant; *Ricercare a 3*, from the *Musikalisches Opfer* for keyboard; *Ricercare a 6*, for sSATBG recorders, or strings, or two keyboards; and *Fuga Canonica in Epidiapente*; from the *Art of Fugue: Contrapuncti 1, 4 and 9* for keyboard, and *Contrapunctus 14* as completed by D. F. Tovey, for keyboard, or for SATB recorders, or for strings; *Passacaglia and Fugue in c* for piano four hands; *Chorales with Descant* for melody instrument and piano; *Cello Suites I, II and III* for flute or alto recorder, *Forty Chorales* for piano, *Der Geist hilft* for SATB-SATB recorders. By Johannes Brahms: *Fugue in Ab minor for organ*, for SATB recorders and gamba, in A minor; *Choralvorspiele for organ* plus settings by Isaac, Bach, Praetorius, recorders. *John Carr*, *Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute or recorder and guitar. By G. F. Händel: *Concerto Grosso in A minor op 6 no 4*, harpsichord and recorders; *Recorder Sonata in Bb no 5*, in G for tenor recorder and keyboard. *Claudio Monteverdi*, *Ecco Mormorar l'Onde*, SSATB recorders. By Arnold Schoenberg: *Verklärte Nacht* for piano. By Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Dances*, recorders and guitar, *Dances*, piano 4 hands. Scriabin, *Two Preludes op.67*; *Five Preludes op.74*, piano. Telemann, *Twelve Flute Fantasias*, recorder. John Wilbye, *Draw on sweet Night*, SSATB recorders, and for flute choir. *Twelve Italian Songs*, voice and guitar; *Seven English Songs*, voice and guitar; *Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes*, recorder and guitar; *Bushband Dances*, violin, piano accordeon and banjo; *Easy Classical Pieces*, Bb trumpet and piano; *Famous Beginnings*, for piano.

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