

Bourrée in E Minor

Music by Johann Sebastian Bach



For many classical guitar students, playing the Bourrée in E minor by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) is a rite of passage from playing mere exercises to playing music that many non-musicians will recognize and appreciate. Bach wrote the Bourrée sometime after 1712 (the exact date is unknown) as part of his Lute Suite No. 1, and it was adapted for guitar in the 20th century, after the instrument earned acceptance in classical circles. Andrés Segovia recorded a version of it in 1947; since then, the piece has made its way onto countless classical guitar recordings, and it has a firm place in the repertoire. However, classical guitarists aren't the only ones to cut their teeth on the Bourrée—case in point: British rockers Jethro Tull, who included a jazzed-up band version on their 1969 album *Stand Up*. Their decidedly non-classical performance provided the blueprint for an arrangement often performed live (but never officially released) by Michael Hedges—playing flute!—and electric bass virtuoso Michael Manring.

Thanks to its popularity outside the classical realm, referring to the piece merely as “the Bach Bourrée” will generally allow people to recall the correct tune, but you'll probably want to be more specific when trying to impress your classically trained

friends. This is because “Bourrée” actually refers to a dance popular in France's Auvergne region during the 17th century, and the name has been used for countless compositions of the Baroque period.

If you've never played or studied any of Bach's music, the Bourrée in E minor makes for an excellent introduction. Even though it isn't overly complex or difficult to play, it is a beautiful representation of Bach's sense of harmony and counterpoint, with distinct bass and melody lines moving so perfectly against each other that it may give you the chills as you play the piece. If you're having difficulty with the independence of the movements, try learning the melody and bass line separately, one at a time, fusing them together after you're comfortable with each. Pay special attention to the fingering in bars 17 and 22, as it's easy to get your fingers tied up in knots if you're not careful.

Even if you're not a classical player, mastering pieces such as this offers a great learning experience for any fingerstyle guitarist, as it not only teaches picking-hand techniques that are independent of set patterns but it also demonstrates excellent form and structure.

—TEJA GERKEN

The musical score is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The bass clef staff below it contains guitar-specific fretting numbers (0-5) for the left hand. The first system covers measures 1 through 8. The second system covers measures 9 through 16, with a first ending bracketed around measures 15 and 16. The third system covers measures 17 through 24, with a second ending bracketed around measures 23 and 24. The piece concludes with a final chord in measure 24.

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