

The Washington Post

Listening to JS Bach's "Art of the Fugue"

By [David Post](#)

October 20, 2014

Next Saturday evening (November 1), my son Sam and his brilliant colleague, pianist and harpsichordist Ralitza Patcheva, will be performing the complete "Art of the Fugue" by JS Bach in Washington DC – [information on the concert and a tickets form is here](#). [It will be repeated at part of [Catholic U's Washington International Piano Series](#) on November 6.] It's truly one of the great monuments of Western art – and one that is hardly ever experienced live, in its entirety, because of the extraordinary demands it places on the performer(s) and listeners alike, and having a chance to hear it is a little like being told that the Sistine Chapel was being closed to public view except for a one-day public viewing. It's a kind of monumental treatise, written not in text but in music, on musical composition, and having heard the run-through a few days ago I can tell you that hearing it is an overwhelming experience – exhausting but deeply fulfilling and profound in the way that only Bach can be. Bach's facility with fugal writing was other-worldly – how he can write music of such formal complexity, with multiple voices, all being speeded up or slowed down or inverted into mirror form, twisted around and chopped up, is simply astonishing. It's the kind of music where it helps to have some information about what's going on in the notes – and Sam has prepared a series of blog postings [[here](#), and [here](#)], and [podcasts](#), illustrating some of the remarkable features of the music, that are well worth reading/listening to. If you're in the Washington area and want a musical experience unlike anything I suspect you've had before, you should join us at the concert – it's going to be quite a show.

David Post taught intellectual property and Internet law at Georgetown Law Center and Temple University Law School until his recent retirement. He is the author of "In Search of Jeffersons Moose: Notes on the State of Cyberspace" (Oxford, 2009), a Fellow at the Center for Democracy and Technology, and an Adjunct Scholar at the Cato Institute.