In the last decade of his life, Bach withdrew from many of his long-standing activities as a composing cantor. Now, alone with his genius, he joyfully and purposefully immersed himself in one self-assigned project after another—the culmination of a life’s work—intending to place his own indelible stamp on the vanishing art of pure counterpoint.

_The Art of Fugue_ is Bach’s final major instrumental composition, a unique and prodigious demonstration of contrapuntal craft and imagination. Its fourteen fugues and four canons form a fascinating, thematically united family—and, at the same time, a comprehensive illustrated manual of counterpoint. But what we hear in the work’s slow and deliberate unfolding is the miracle of a vast and moving meditation. _Mirabile dictu:_ the textbook is a poem! And a farewell testament for the ages.