

Bach Classical European Music Festival small group tours

Reading List

Bach: A Musical Biography

by Peter Williams

J. S. Bach composed some of the best-loved and most moving music in Western culture. Surviving mostly in manuscript collections, his music also exists in special and unique publications that reveal much about his life and thoughts as a composer. In this book, Peter Williams, author of the acclaimed *J. S. Bach: A Life in Music*, revisits Bach's biography through the lens of his music. Reviewing all of Bach's music chronologically, Williams discusses the music collection by collection to reveal the development of Bach's interests and priorities. While a great deal has been written about the composer's vocal works, Williams gives the keyboard music its proper emphasis, revealing it as crucial to Bach's biography, as a young organist and a mature composer, as a performer in public and teacher in private, and as a profound thinker in the language of music.

Bach & God

by Michael Marissen

Bach & God explores the religious character of Bach's vocal and instrumental music in seven interrelated essays. Noted musicologist Michael Marissen offers wide-ranging interpretive insights from careful biblical and theological scrutiny of the librettos. Yet he also shows how Bach's pitches, rhythms, and tone colors can make contributions to a work's plausible meanings that go beyond setting texts in an aesthetically satisfying manner. In some of Bach's vocal repertory, the music puts a "spin" on the words in a way that turns out to be explainable as orthodox Lutheran in its orientation. In a few of Bach's vocal works, his otherwise puzzlingly fierce musical settings serve to underscore now unrecognized or unacknowledged verbal polemics, most unsettlingly so in the case of his church cantatas that express contempt for Jews and Judaism. Finally, even Bach's secular instrumental music, particularly the late collections of "abstract" learned counterpoint, can powerfully project certain elements of traditional Lutheran theology. Bach's music is inexhaustible, and *Bach & God* suggests that through close contextual study there is always more to discover and learn.

Bach's Major Vocal Works: Music, Drama, Liturgy

by Markus Rathey

Every year, Johann Sebastian Bach's major vocal works are performed to mark liturgical milestones in the Christian calendar. Written by a renowned Bach scholar, this concise and accessible book provides an introduction to the music and cultural contexts of the composer's most beloved masterpieces, including the Magnificat, Christmas Oratorio, and St. John Passion.

In addition to providing historical information, each chapter highlights significant aspects—such as the theology of love—of a particular piece. This penetrating volume is the first to treat the vocal works as a whole, showing how the compositions were embedded in their original performative context within the liturgy as well as discussing Bach's musical style, from the detailed level of individual movements to the overarching aspects of each work. Published in the approach to Easter when many of these vocal works are performed, this outstanding volume will appeal to casual concertgoers and scholars alike.

Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician

by Christoph Wolff

Although we have heard the music of J. S. Bach in countless performances and recordings, the composer himself still comes across only as an enigmatic figure in a single familiar portrait. As we mark the 250th anniversary of Bach's death, author Christoph Wolff presents a new picture that brings to life this towering figure of the Baroque era. This engaging new biography portrays Bach as the living, breathing, and sometimes imperfect human being that he was, while bringing to bear all the advances of the last half-century of Bach scholarship.

Wolff demonstrates the intimate connection between the composer's life and his music, showing how Bach's superb inventiveness pervaded his career as musician, composer, performer, scholar, and teacher. And throughout, we see Bach in the broader context of his time: its institutions, traditions, and influences. With this highly readable book, Wolff sets a new standard for Bach biography. *The Learned Musician* was a finalist for the 2001 Pulitzer Prize in Biography.

Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven

by John Eliot Gardiner

Johann Sebastian Bach is one of the most unfathomable composers in the history of music. How can such sublime work have been produced by a man who (when we can discern his personality at all) seems so ordinary, so opaque-and occasionally so intemperate? John Eliot Gardiner grew up passing one of the only two authentic portraits of Bach every morning and evening on the stairs of his

parents' house, where it hung for safety during World War II. He has been studying and performing Bach ever since, and is now regarded as one of the composer's greatest living interpreters. The fruits of this lifetime's immersion are distilled in this remarkable book, grounded in the most recent Bach scholarship but moving far beyond it, and explaining in wonderful detail the ideas on which Bach drew, how he worked, how his music is constructed, how it achieves its effects — and what it can tell us about Bach the man.

Gardiner's background as a historian has encouraged him to search for ways in which scholarship and performance can cooperate and fruitfully coalesce. This has entailed piecing together the few biographical shards, scrutinizing the music, and watching for those instances when Bach's personality seems to penetrate the fabric of his notation. Gardiner's aim is "to give the reader a sense of inhabiting the same experiences and sensations that Bach might have had in the act of music-making. This, I try to show, can help us arrive at a more human likeness discernible in the closely related processes of composing and performing his music". It is very rare that such an accomplished performer of music should also be a considerable writer and thinker about it. John Eliot Gardiner takes us as deeply into Bach's works and mind as perhaps words can. The result is a unique book about one of the greatest of all creative artists.

The Cello Suites: J. S. Bach, Pablo Casals, and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece

by Eric Soblin

One evening, journalist Eric Soblin attended a recital of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Cello Suites* and began an epic quest that would unravel three centuries of intrigue, politics, and passion. Winner of the *Mavis Gallant Prize for Nonfiction* and the *McAuslan First Book Prize*, *The Cello Suites* weaves together three dramatic narratives: the disappearance of Bach's manuscript in the eighteenth century; Pablo Casals's discovery and popularization of the music in Spain in the late-nineteenth century; and Soblin's infatuation with the suites in the present day. The search led Soblin to Barcelona, where Casals, just thirteen and in possession of his first cello, roamed the backstreets with his father in search of sheet music and found Bach's lost suites tucked in a dark corner of a store. Casals played them every day for twelve years before finally performing them in public. Soblin pursues the mysteries that continue to haunt this music more than 250 years after its composer's death: Why did Bach compose the suites for the cello, then considered a lowly instrument? What happened to the original manuscript? A seamless blend of biography and music history, *The Cello Suites* is a true-life journey of discovery, fueled by the power of these musical masterpieces.

Evening in the Palace of Reason: Bach Meets Frederick the Great in the Age of Enlightenment

by James R. Gaines

Johann Sebastian Bach created what may be the most celestial and profound body of music in history; Frederick the Great built the colossus we now know as Germany, and along with it a template for modern warfare. Their fleeting encounter in 1747 signals a unique moment in history where belief collided with the cold certainty of reason. Set at the tipping point between the ancient and modern world, *Evening in the Palace of Reason* captures the tumult of the eighteenth century, the legacy of the Reformation, and the birth of the Enlightenment in this extraordinary tale of two men.

Bach and the Meanings of Counterpoint: New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism by David Yearsley

This book offers new interpretations of many of Bach's late compositions which include complex musical techniques such as canon. These techniques held great significance for Bach and his contemporaries not only on account of the great skill they demanded but because of the meanings attached to them. Intricate musical devices were crucial to the Lutheran rituals of death and dying, to alchemy, to Enlightenment philosophies of stylistic change and musical progress, to musical representations of political power, and to the legacy of Bach into our own time.

Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion by Celia Applegate

Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* is universally acknowledged to be one of the world's supreme musical masterpieces, yet in the years after Bach's death it was forgotten by all but a small number of his pupils and admirers. The public rediscovered it in 1829, when Felix Mendelssohn conducted the work before a glittering audience of Berlin artists and intellectuals, Prussian royals, and civic notables. The concert soon became the stuff of legend, sparking a revival of interest in and performance of Bach that has continued to this day. Mendelssohn's performance gave rise to the notion that recovering and performing Bach's music was somehow "national work". In 1865, Wagner would claim that Bach embodied "the history of the German spirit's inmost life". That the man most responsible for the revival of a masterwork of German Protestant culture was himself a converted Jew struck contemporaries as less remarkable than it does us today? a statement that embraces both the great achievements and the disasters of 150 years of German history.

In this book, Celia Applegate asks why this particular performance crystallized the hitherto inchoate notion that music was central to Germans' collective identity. She begins with a wonderfully readable reconstruction of the performance itself and then moves back in time to pull apart the various cultural strands that would come together that afternoon in the Singakademie. The author investigates the

role played by intellectuals, journalists, and amateur musicians (she is one herself) in developing the notion that Germans were “the people of music.” Applegate assesses the impact on music’s cultural place of the renewal of German Protestantism, historicism, the mania for collecting and restoring, and romanticism. In her conclusion, she looks at the subsequent careers of her protagonists and the lasting reverberations of the 1829 performance itself.

Bach’s Dialogue with Modernity: Perspectives on the Passions

by John Butt

Providing a detailed analysis of Bach’s *Passions*, this 2010 book represents an important contribution to the debate about the culture of ‘classical music’, its origins, priorities and survival. The angles from which each chapter proceeds differ from those of a traditional music guide, by examining the *Passions* in the light of the mindsets of modernity, and their interplay with earlier models of thought and belief. While the historical details of Bach’s composition, performance and theological context remain crucial, the foremost concern of this study is to relate these works to a historical context that may, in some threads at least, still be relevant today. The central claim of the book is that the interplay of traditional imperatives and those of early modernity renders Bach’s *Passions* particularly fascinating as artefacts that both reflect and constitute some of the priorities and conditions of the western world.

Bach: a Passionate Life

by John Gardiner (writer and director)

As part of BBC’s Baroque Spring Season, BBC Two presented a new feature documentary presented by John Eliot Gardiner, one of the world’s leading interpreters of Bach’s music. This 90-minute documentary invites viewers on a journey to discover the man behind the music. *Bach: A Passionate Life* takes us on a physical, musical and intellectual journey in search of Bach, the man and the musician.

The Cambridge Companion to Bach

by John Butt

The Cambridge Companion to Bach goes beyond a basic life-and-works study to provide a late-twentieth-century perspective on J. S. Bach, the man and composer. Benefiting from the insights and research of some of the most distinguished Bach scholars, this *Companion* covers cultural, social

and religious contexts, surveys and analyzes Bach's compositional style, traces his influence, and considers the performance and reception of his music through the succeeding generations.

J. S. Bach: Volumes 1 and 2

by Albert Schweitzer

Independent of his international renown as a humanitarian, Albert Schweitzer is well known as a great musicologist; a reputation that rests largely upon this book. Schweitzer's *J. S. Bach* is one of the great full-length studies of the composer, his life, and his work. Its influence on the subsequent performance of Bach's music was enormous, and there is scarcely a later work on Bach which does not acknowledge a deep debt to Schweitzer's. *Grove's Dictionary* says of the book, "Schweitzer has probably been more quoted than any authority since Spitta."

The first volume contains a virtual history of Protestant church music, examining the role of music in the early Protestant services of many European countries. Frequent allusions to the parallel development of art and poetry, to the leading philosophic and religious concepts of the time, and to events of contemporary history supplement and enrich the text. Narrowing the study to Germany, Schweitzer traces to their roots the forms used by Bach (with particular emphasis on the German chorale and the forms built around it), and assess the contributions of Schütz, Sheidt, Buxtehude, Pachelbel, and others of Bach's predecessors. The volume includes a full account of Bach's life, and discusses his works for organ, clavier, strings, and orchestra. Suggestions for performance include sections on bowing, on playing chords and double stops, and on the practice of ornamentation in Bach's time.

Volume Two is concerned with Bach's choral music — the chorales, cantatas, the *Magnificat*, the *St. Matthew* and *St. John Passions*, the motets, songs, oratorios, and masses. The illuminating analysis of these works, illustrated by hundreds of musical examples, is dominated by Schweitzer's highly original theories regarding Bach's pictorial representation of the text in the music, and the expressive motives Schweitzer has found and identified throughout Bach's compositions. A long concluding chapter makes recommendations for performance on tempo, phrasing, accentuation, dynamics, and on the size and arrangement of the orchestra and choir.

Schweitzer's *J. S. Bach* is among the definitive reference works on Bach and is high on the list of required reading for music students. Yet it is not a difficult or formidable work. It offers a stimulating, well-written narrative, with much in it to interest the music lover as well as the scholar.
