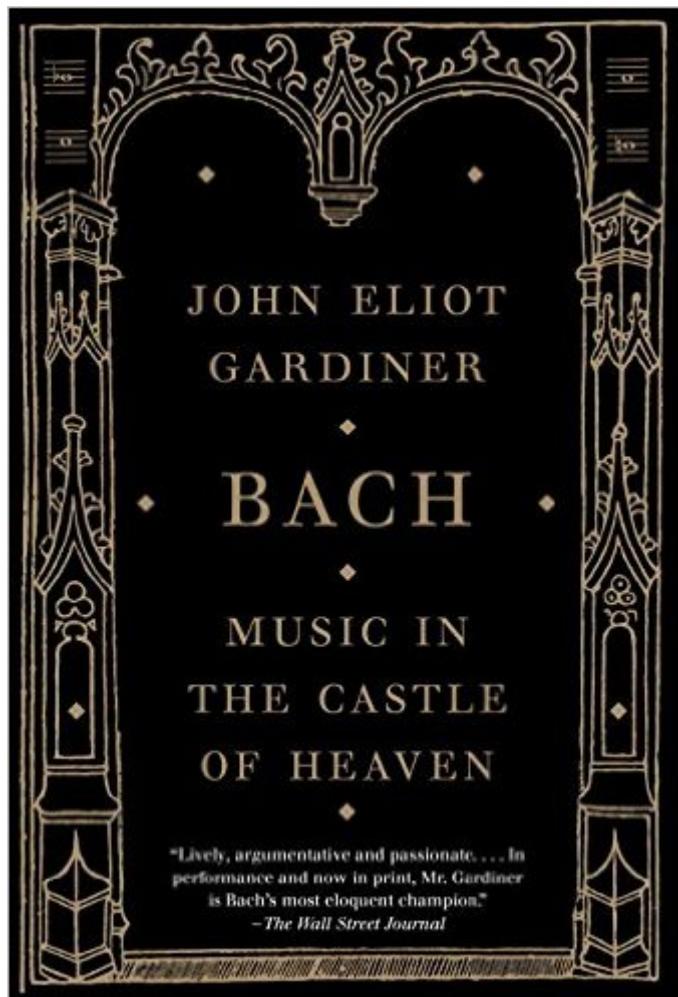


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Bach: Music In The Castle Of Heaven



Synopsis

One of the Best Books of the Year*[†] The Economist[†] The Christian Science Monitor[†] Financial Times *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 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 day 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.

Book Information

Paperback: 672 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (March 3, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1400031435

ISBN-13: 978-1400031436

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.4 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars[†] See all reviews[†] (173 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #135,163 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Classical #316 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > History & Criticism #384 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Classical

Customer Reviews

I do not mean to derogate from Sir John Eliot Gardiner's status as one of the great luminaries of the podium in our age--to say nothing of his status as a pioneer and perfecter of period performance practice--but in the end the capstone of his career might well turn out to have been in the medium of prose rather than musical performance! This is, quite simply, the most fascinating, engrossing, erudite and stunningly written work on the Leipzig Cantor available. Too bad it focuses primarily on his sacred music (I would love to have Gardiner's obiter dicta on many of the keyboard, chamber and orchestral works treated only tangentially here); but within that limited scope, Gardiner has

achieved something quite remarkable: a work of musical historiography that manages to combine rigorous scholarship with philosophical acumen and literary flair. As a philosopher with a keen interest in the interface between aesthetics and religion, I particularly appreciated Gardiner's thorough understanding of the exigencies of church music within the Lutheran tradition, and his situating of the tradition within the larger framework of Church history, scriptural exegesis and Christian spirituality. His effort to discern Bach's character and aspirations from his church music rather than principally from the documentary evidence (which is relatively meager) fixes the reader's (and listener's) attention where it must always begin and end--namely, with the scores themselves, as performed and heard.

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