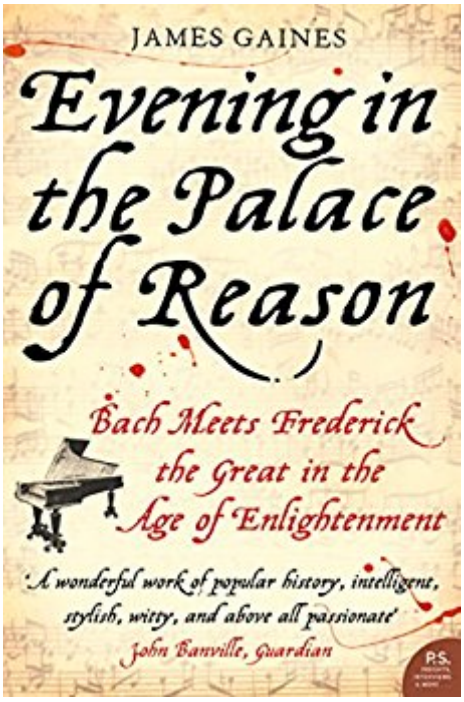
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Evening In The Palace Of Reason: Bach Meets Frederick The Great In The Age Of Enlightenment



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Synopsis

In one corner, a godless young warrior, VoltaireÃ¢â ¬â„¢s heralded Ã¢â ¬Ëœphilosopher-kingÃ¢â ¬â„¢, the It Boy of the Enlightenment. In the other, a devout if bad-tempered old composer of Ã¢â ¬Ëœoutdated Ã¢â ¬â„¢ music, a scorned genius in his last years. The sparks from their brief conflict illuminate a turbulent age.Behind the pomp and flash, Prussia's Frederick the Great was a tormented man, son of an abusive king who forced him to watch as his best friend (probably his lover) was beheaded. In what may have been one of history's crueler practical jokes, Frederick challenged Ã¢â ¬Ëœold BachÃ¢â ¬â„¢ to a musical duel, asking him to improvise a six-part fugue based on an impossibly intricate theme (possibly devised for him by Bach's own son).Bach left the court fuming, but in a fever of composition, he used the coded, alchemical language of counterpoint to write Ã¢â ¬Ëœ A Musical OfferingÃ¢â ¬â„¢ in response. A stirring declaration of faith, it represented Ã¢â ¬Ëœas stark a rebuke of his beliefs and world view as an absolute monarch has ever received,Ã¢â ¬â„¢ Gaines writes. It is also one of the great works of art in the history of music.Set at the tipping point between the ancient and the modern world, the triumphant story of Bach's victory expands to take in the tumult of the eighteenth century: the legacy of the Reformation, wars and conquest, the birth of the Enlightenment. Brimming with originality and wit, Ã¢â ¬Ëœ Evening in the Palace of ReasonÃ¢â ¬â„¢ is history of the best kind Ã¢â ¬â œ intimate in scale and broad in its vision.

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Customer Reviews

I picked this up because I am a huge fan of Bach and have been studying his (easier) piano works. The contrast between the stoic Bach and the mad Frederick the Great were fun but I would've preferred more on Bach than Frederick. All in an I interesting read and very much enjoyed learning about his world and the story behind his famous works as well as works I was not even aware of, e.g. The Musical Offering.

Interesting content--the transition between music as an echo of the structure of the cosmos (Bach) and music as pleasant background (Frederick the Great). This fits into newish music scholarship that focuses on how people actually listen to and think about music, rather than more theoretical work. But Gaines makes much too much of one incident. This is very light as cultural history, and written in the most frustrating kind of popular style that values drama over insight.

Mr. Gaines is extremely knowledgeable about J.S. Bach's life and his music.It was a most enjoyable experience to read about Bach's encounter withFrederick the Great of Pussia. It's a book that I will read over and over again.

Extremely interesting and well written

The converging histories of Frederick and Sebastian take up most of the book, but the two lines are not equivalent: Frederick's story serves mostly as a foil to Sebastian and his music. A few pieces of music are treated in detail.The writing is accessible and --well, flavorful-- but it is by no means always pleasant. (Did a muckraker let fall a few malodorous drops into this stew of cultural history?) And readers might wonder occasionally whether the author was peering into a 20th century crystal ball to find out why people think and act as they do.The perspective of the author becomes more explicit near the end. He does not take into account that music Bach wrote or adapted for religious use, is still used by some people more or less as it was intended. Such listeners and participants

ask God to lead them in worship and devotion through the musical expression of words in the text.It was worth reading, but I won't hurry back to that shelf.

I read the book and then went back and read the parts about J.S. Bach again. Recommended. The music is more meaningful when you know some of the stories behind it. It is heartbreaking to know that he died thinking his music would be permanently out of fashion. And that it was for 150 years. Also, that his son Carl was likely complicit in laying the musical trap that Fredrick set for "old Bach." It was a cruel world then, too.As you read the book, you will want to listen to the works the author describes. Note that there is a helpful (but already dated) Discography at the end of the book. Also consider getting the Bach Edition, a collection of all his works in a big boxed CD set, to accompany the book. Also, consider the Angela Hewitt boxed set of keyboard works played very beautifully on the piano.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750) .... (Says Wikipedia).Here is what the back cover of this book says:(Bach) `created ...the most celestial and profound body of music in history; Frederick the Great built the colossus we now know as Germany... Their fleeting encounter in 1757 signals a unique moment in history where belief collided with the cold certainty of reason.'Awesome, isn't it? Fritz met Bach 7 years after Bach died. Truly a unique moment.And Fritz built Germany, though he himself died in 1786. That was 85 years before the Hohenzollern's Germany was founded by Bismarck in 1871, during the reign of Wilhelm I, who was Fritz' nephew's son's nephew, or something like that.The cold certainty of reason can get a lot done.This is all not the author's fault, so far. The book is generally well worth reading: an entertaining `double biography' of the two men, who were not really meant for each other. Different worlds and different times, despite their overlapping. Bach's Thuringia and Saxony, his music and his religion were not suitable for Fritz' Prussia. Their meeting happened in 1747, when one of them was nearly on his way out (3 more years for him), and the other still relatively fresh in his career as king.Still: Gaines shouldn't have said that the Hohenzollern had ruled Germany for 300 years by then. No, they hadn't. They had started with ruling a small patch in the patchwork, and succeeded in growing their patch to a substantial size inside the total carpet. Germany as an entity didn't exist during Fritz' time. His Prussia had grown to challenge the leadership of the Habsburgs inside the Holy Roman Empire though.(The book has a not altogether bad map at the contents section. The map could have been improved if the edges hadn't been cut off, which would have allowed to see the neighbors, specifically the `original' Prussia. Isn't it a joke that the book's map has `Prussia' outside its frame and needs to place an arrow to the NE?)I feel

more competent about Prussia and the Hohenzollern than about Bach's music. I tend to believe what Gaines writes about Bach, but I am often a little skeptical about his Fritzology. This book was recommended to me by a bassoonist. That supports my trust in its musicology, and it makes me chuckle at the story of young Bach's fist fight with the bassoon student who was offended when Bach said that his bassoon sounded like a bleating goat. You must have forgotten that one, Maestro!

Wonderfully written and filled with pieces of history that even as a classical musician I hadn't put together. Not a fast read but lyrical...as any work about Bach and his contemporaries should be.

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