

Bach A Pictorial Biography by Michael Maul is quite simply the best book on the composer I have ever read.

This beautifully presented and concisely constructed volume puts across the actual personality of this most elusive of great composers in a way that I have never encountered before. And no-one is more qualified to put the Bach message across than Professor Dr Michael Maul. Artistic Director of the Leipzig Bach Festival and Senior Scholar at the Bach Archiv Leipzig, Dr Maul is an internationally renowned and passionate musicologist who has already published award-winning monographs and essays on Baroque music. He is also a dynamic, proactive and engagingly enthusiastic ambassador for Bach and his music all over the world. And it is that very passion as well as comprehensive knowledge of his subject, that shines brightly through every page of this book.

Vitaly, this new book solves the problem that has afflicted Bach biographies of the distant and more recent past: How do you take a huge and complex subject and arrange it in such a way that is both assessable and yet comprehensive? Going back to Imogen Holst's biography of 1966 and ending with Sir John Eliot Gardiner's overwhelming dissertation 'Music in the Castle of Heaven' of 2013, most Bach books are either too elementary or excessively verbose, with neither really offering a rounded portrait of either the man and his music. After a long wait, Dr Maul's book solves that problem.

What appealed to me straightaway was the striking layout of the biography. Dr Maul presents each major episode of Bach's life in a year- by- year basis via a striking 'plate' design. Each page on the left announces the year with cleverly subdivided German and English text underneath and opposite is a striking full illustration relating to the adjacent text you've just been reading. The illustrations themselves are richly presented and bring a beauty and powerful visual appeal that truly breathes new life into the life and legacy of the composer.

Regarding the coverage of that legacy, this new book presents and illuminates a variety of aspects of Bach's life that were certainly new to me, whether it be coverage of his earliest known manuscript, his relationships with both his family and his various aristocratic patrons, aspects of his compositional style or even unusual and engaging anecdotal evidence of the actual character of the man. While everyone knows the famous story of the 'Zippel Fagottist', who is familiar with the Parisian origins of the Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, Bach's brilliance as a teacher, his original contact with the music of Vivaldi and his many attempts to meet with Handel? You'll find the details here along with those of Bach's varied income, his fiery dealings with authority, his actual living conditions and even his dietary desires!

Yet the miracle of this new book is that the music is always included as well, works both familiar and more obscure are presented and analysed in a way that is both concise and revealing. And, as mentioned, the illustrations, drawn mainly from the extensive Bach Archiv itself, include the people, places and individual objects that played a vital part in the composer's personal and musical development.

In essence, Dr Maul's book achieves the best of all possible worlds: Aimed at a broad readership, it also offers rich rewards to the seasoned Bachian and as such provides the Bach biography I for one have been waiting for!

Robert Kenchington

Founder and Administrator, Johann Sebastian Bach Society. 11.12.21