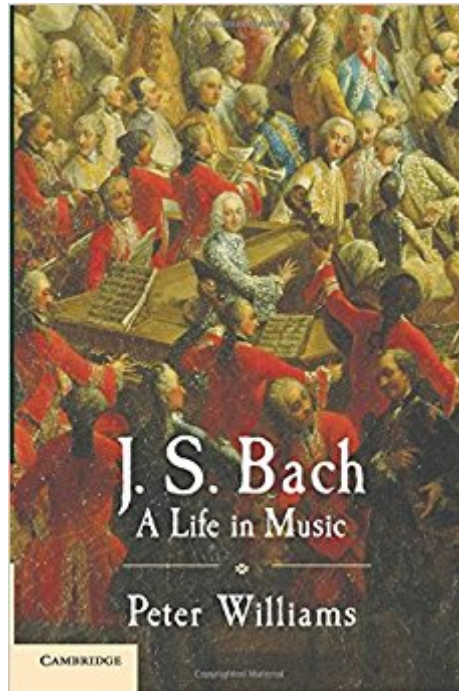




The book was found

J. S. Bach: A Life In Music



Synopsis

Peter Williams approaches afresh the life and music of arguably the most studied of all composers, interpreting both Bach's life by deconstructing his original obituary in the light of more recent information and his music by evaluating his priorities and irrepressible creative energy. How, even though belonging to musical families on both his parents' sides, did he come to possess so bewitching a sense of rhythm and melody and a mastery of harmony that established nothing less than a norm in Western culture? In considering that the works of a composer are his biography, the book's title *A Life in Music* means both a life spent making music and one revealed in the music as we know it. A distinguished scholar and performer, Williams re-examines Bach's life as an orphan and family man, as an extraordinarily gifted composer and player and as an ambitious artist who never suffered fools gladly.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

2007 Outstanding Academic Title -- Choice Magazine "... its freshness of approach and practical knowledge of the music are enthralling." --The Herald "Peter Williams' observations in this ... well-written volume add an imaginative and fresh dimension that will keep the 'little grey cells' charged. ... This ... volume could be a useful 'precursor' and we are the beneficiaries as a result." --The Journal of the London Bach Society "... Williams is a master of deconstruction, asking questions and speculating on every phrase of the text in a concise and precise manner, thereby revealing lines of thought that inspire further thinking and research by the reader. Definite answers

are rarely possible, but this is a biography that inspires engagement, and is a necessary part of any library of anyone passionately interested in the life and work of the greatest of all composers." --Choir & Organ"... Williams is a writer both erudite and compelling ... this is a biography unafraid to raise awkward questions and make a gallant attempt to answer them. ... William's study, a substantial read, fills an important place in English language Bach literature." --BBC Music Magazine"Williams's book is dense and challenging ... a rewarding read, certain to enthrall equally any lover of Bach's music and admirer of the techniques of forensic enquiry." --Musical Times"...It is in this combination of musicology, common-sense psychology and an almost Shakespearean sense of drama that I find Williams at his best". --Newsletter of the American Bach Society

Peter Williams' fresh approach to the life of J. S. Bach explores the composer's life as an orphan and family man, extraordinarily gifted composer and player and as an energetic and ambitious artist, whose mastery of harmony established nothing less than a norm in Western culture.

This book provides a useful different way of looking at Bach's life and music by working almost sentence by sentence through the well-known Obituary of 1750/1754 by C.P.E. Bach and Agricola. Williams doesn't hesitate to grapple with thorny issues, nor to question interpretations/speculations we may have become comfortable with and wrongly begun to treat as if they were fact. I bought the book because I greatly admire Peter Williams' previous writings on Bach and organ music. I was slightly disappointed with this book, however. I'm an amateur musician who has read a lot about Bach. For me, core references are Christoph Wolff (2000) 'Johann Sebastian Bach; the learned musician' (scholarly and fascinating to read), and 'The New Bach Reader' (David & Mendel/ Wolff). I'd suggest not bothering with the Williams book unless you are already familiar with such books. You'll only value what Williams questions in a sentence or two if you're familiar with arguments over the same issue in other places.

Bach is my religion, and I am an adult beginner piano student, with roughly four years of classical piano lessons under my belt. Those two facts color my opinion of this biography and of other Bach biographies I have read, namely those by Christoph Wolff and Martin Geck. I do like the Peter Williams biography better than the other two. It is scholarly without being overly so, reverential without going overboard, analytical and informative on the music front without being exhaustive and boring. And I greatly enjoyed the approach of dissecting the obituary written at Bach's death, fleshing out the entries, and/or setting the record straight. The Wolff is very good but leaves me

cold, and, to be honest, I couldn't make it all the way through the Geck. I am a tough grader -- hence the four stars. Though I found the Williams biography an extremely engaging read, I do think/hope that the definitive five-star Bach biography has yet to be written.

J.S. Bach: A Life in Music was full of gorgeous pictures and information on Bach. The CD that came with it started with Bach's early music, then progressed to his final masterpieces. I liked hearing the progression. I used this book for information I needed for a graduate level psychology class. We had to do a case study on a famous person. Bach was a great study! Wonderful book.

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