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**Rembrandt: Held by God** (Item #75)

# BACH: MAN OF GOD

An illustrated story of the life of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) that shows God's hand on the work of a genius. Original ink drawings by Theanna Sparrow (one of the illustrators for the *Christian Mother Goose* book).

For 4th grade through adult.  
24 pages; also available as an eBook.

## PROGRAM NOTES

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## Famous quotes regarding J. S. Bach:

"When everything has been weighed that can be said against him, this Leipzig cantor is a sign from GOD, clear, yet inexplicable." *Zelter (in a letter to Goethe).*

"I expressed it to myself as if the eternal harmony were communing with itself, as might have happened in God's bosom shortly before the creation of the world. It was thus that my inner depths were stirred and I seemed neither to possess nor to need ears, still less eyes, or any other sense." *Goethe (after Schutz had played from the Welltempered Clavichord).*

"Could I let you hear, some happy day, one of Sebastian Bach's motets, you would feel yourself at the center of the world, as a man like you ought to be. I hear the works for the many hundredth time, and am not finished with them yet, and never will be." *Zelter (replying to Goethe).*

"Now there is something one can learn from. Bach is the father of all music. We are his children." *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.*

"The St. Matthew's Passion is the greatest and most important of German musical works. It is our duty not to rest until we have brought it to life again so that once more it might edify men's spirits." *Felix Mendelssohn, at age 20.*

"Bach is the greatest of preachers. He has captured pure religious emotion...the emotion of the infinite and exalted for which words are always an inadequate expression." *Albert Schweitzer.*

## Prelude

Johann Sebastian Bach. A musical genius. Some say, the greatest of all time. In his own day, however, Bach didn't see the effects of his life upon the world. He saw only what was immediately in front of him: misunderstanding, conflict, suffering.

He lived and died unheralded. After his death, some of his compositions were carelessly cast on the winds of fortune, to be rediscovered later by generations that would at last understand.

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Bach was the father of twenty children. Among them were four outstanding musicians, a mentally retarded son who lived to the age of thirty-nine, and twins who died shortly after birth. His first wife died unexpectedly when he was away on a trip. They had had seven children by this time. Bach then married young Anna Magdalena. She bore him thirteen more. Of his twenty children ten died before the age of five.

Johann Sebastian Bach found music in everything: a house full of squirming children, the anguish of death, a stubborn and rigid authority who blocked his way. They all fueled his work. The fever to compose burned in the good times as well as in the bad. The circumstances were like kindling, which continually fed his creative fire.

These fragments of music (captured and developed by the rigors of his discipline) emerged as extraordinary commentaries on life in all its radiance and shadow.

With dogged persistence, Bach plowed over vast unworked musical ground, composing volumes that would excite music lovers for all time...a staggering harvest of sound.

## (Prelude, continued)

This magnificent body of work, totaling nearly a thousand compositions, is Bach's legacy. It includes works for clavier and organ, along with hundreds of cantatas, chorales, concertos, chamber and orchestral works.

Bach often had to work with undeveloped local musicians. Because of this, he probably never heard many of his compositions performed with the brilliance that we hear them today.

Bach experimented in music with the tenacity of a scientist. His study of musical theory and counterpoint was so exhaustive in its scope that musicians who study his repertoire for a lifetime still don't come to the end of it. In stark contrast to some music which grows dull as soon as the notes are learned, musicians all over the world find that after practicing Bach's music for months or even years it is more engaging than ever.

He composed some music by sheer mathematics, using every conceivable combination of musical pattern within a theme. He used all of the twenty-four major and minor scales with equal facility. The more stops, manuals and pedals an organ had, the happier he was.

In his work, Bach always seemed to be aware of a divine audience. He implored divine help before beginning each page. At the top of each composition he wrote, "Jesus Help Me". On the opposite side after finishing the piece, he wrote *Soli Deo Gloria* (To God Alone Be The Glory).

The drive to compose was cut short only by death. His eyes and lungs tired long before his soul. *Here now is his story...*

**For an engrossing reading about Bach's life, we recommend the historical novel by RuthAnn Ridley, Sebastian.**

## (Epilogue, continued)

spent the remainder of his time in Leipzig studying everything he could find of Bach's compositions. He is quoted as saying, "Bach is the father of all music; we are his children."

Beethoven, too, had great admiration for Bach, and hunted down Bach's only surviving daughter, Regine Susannah, who was living in poverty. Beethoven gave her the proceeds of one of his own concerts.

But the real revival began some seventy-nine years after Bach's death, when twenty-year-old Mendelssohn risked his reputation by resurrecting Bach's St. Matthew's Passion. Mendelssohn's friend (who sang the part of Christ in the first public performance) was profoundly moved by the work and encouraged him. Mendelssohn remarked that "the St. Matthew's Passion is the greatest and most important of German musical works. It is our duty not to rest until we have brought it to life again so that once more it might edify men's spirits."

It was an instant success, and the revival began. In 1850, the Lutheran Bach Society was founded.

Charles Marie Widor, French organist and composer and teacher of Albert Schweitzer, said, "Bach is the greatest of preachers. He has captured pure religious emotion--the emotion of the infinite--and exalted [that] for which words are always an inadequate expression."

At present, Bach Festivals have sprung up all over the world. His contagious rhythms are celebrated by jazz groups and classical enthusiasts alike.

The seventy-nine years of silence after his death ensured that no one who had known Bach personally was still alive before the glory broke out--in keeping with his own desire "To God Alone be the Glory"--*Soli Deo Gloria*.

## Postlude: The Epilogue

Bach died of a stroke. The year was 1750. He was 66. Afterwards, Anna fell into obscurity and desperate poverty. Emanuel, the only son who could have supported them, made it clear there would be no help from him. Dorothea continued to live with Anna for many years, and never married.

Four sons became renowned musicians in their own generation, overshadowing their father for a time. Germany had its C. P. E. Bach (Carl Phillip Emanuel); England had Johann Christian Bach. But the family's musical skill died with the sons of Bach.

In the end, Gerner came to have a profound respect for the music of Sebastian (Bach was known by his middle name) and, much to everyone's surprise, attended the funeral. He even extended himself to help Anna in many practical ways in the days immediately following Sebastian's death.

Having failed in his attempt to visit his more highly esteemed contemporary Georg F. Handel early in life, Bach made one more attempt toward the end of his life. Sebastian invited Handel to visit him in Leipzig, but he never responded.

A perfectionist, often at odds with the world, Bach worked at subjecting himself to the spirit of his faith, seeking integrity and true nobility in all the affairs of his life.

The indefatigable diligence with which Bach had frequently passed days and nights without intermission produced over 60 huge volumes of music.

Thirty-nine years after Bach's death, when he was virtually forgotten, Mozart paid a visit to Leipzig. The Thomaskirche cantor surprised Mozart with a small performance of Sebastian's motet, "Sing Unto the Lord a New Song," taken from the Thomaskirche library. An eyewitness recorded that Mozart sat up in a kind of rapture and said, "Now there is something one can learn from." He

## Bach: Man of God

### Synopsis of the play

The play is constructed to express in dramatic form what Bach accomplished in music. That is the art of counterpoint. In counterpoint, two independent melodies are played at the same time, yielding an exquisite harmony. It would be as if one could play "Mary Had a Little Lamb" and "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" together in such a way that their combined harmony is pleasing.

In like manner, the play *Bach: Man of God* is written to be two stories in one. It is the story of Bach and the story of his second wife Anna, developed along side each other to make yet a third story...the story of their love. By all historical accounts, Anna was Bach's soul mate.

Bach's story begins in jail, both circumstantially and psychologically: shackled with oppressive authorities, countless interruptions and distractions, inadequate musicians, large family demands, a culture that has passed him by--preferring new and shallower musical forms. But as the play progresses, Bach grows freer. At the end he becomes totally free by finding that he is fulfilled working for God alone. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Anna, in contrast, begins free and carefree. Prince Leopold predicts a marvelous future for her. She progresses in the opposite direction, ending up in prison (for debtors) both physically and psychologically. Living in the shadow of Bach's first wife Barbara--rejected by their son Emanuel--navigating the premature deaths of seven of her children (all of whom died before the age of five)--copying Bach's music by hand (which numbered over 1,000 pieces). All this was only for futility, as far as Anna could see. For ten years after Bach's death she lived in an almshouse, ending with a pauper's funeral.

The combined story is a picture of love expressed within the pressures of ordinary life.

## Cast:

### *The Women--*

**DOROTHEA:** Bach's daughter from marriage to Barbara; full of mercy and good works; older; high school age. (ca. 60 lines)

**ANNA:** Bach's second wife; 17 years younger than he; beautiful, musical, sacrificial, deeply reflective, melancholic. (ca. 82 lines)

**HENRIETTA:** Prince Leopold's worldly wife. (14 lines)

**HOPEFUL:** a little girl about seven years old; Bach's harpsichord student who doesn't want to be studying music. (26 lines)

### *The Men--*

**BACH:** toward the end of his life. (ca. 200 lines)

**JAILER:** a man who thinks only of food; heavy, practical. (27 lines)

**PRINCE LEOPOLD:** confident, musical, debonair. (23 lines)

**FRIEDEMANN:** Bach's son from his first wife; supportive of his father, a close confidant to Bach; older; high school age. (44 lines)

**EMANUEL:** Bach's rebellious son from his first wife; slightly younger than Friedemann. (19 lines)

**PASTOR VETTER:** oppressive, inartistic, authoritarian. (25 lines)

**GORNER:** inadequate, bumbling organist musician, forgetful; filled with a sense of his own importance. (15 lines)

**ANNOUNCER:** another actor could double for this part which comes at the very end of the play. (6 lines)

**MOZART:** a *real* bit part -- could be assigned at almost the last minute -- just give him a wig and an old European style jacket. (4 lines)

## Scenes: [set]

Scene one – JAILED [jail]

Scene two - ANNA OVERLOOKED [palace with tea table]

Scene three - DREAMS (*Bach asleep in carriage*) [palace with bench]

Scene four - GARDEN ROMANCE (*garden*) [parlor with potted trees]

Scene five - A MOTHER NEEDED (*Bach's parlor*) [parlor]

Scene six - VETTER'S STING [church]

Scene seven - LESSONS (*Bach's parlor*) [parlor]

[Intermission]

Scene eight - DEATH OF ANNA'S BABY [in front of curtain ,stage left, or parlor]

Scene nine - LEOPOLD'S DEATH [in front of curtain ,stage right, or parlor]

Scene ten - BAD REHEARSAL AND WIG THROWING [church]

Scene eleven - STRUGGLE FOR HOLINESS (*Bach's parlor*) [parlor]

Scene twelve - HOPEFUL'S NEWS [church]

Scene thirteen - MADE FOR COMPOSING [in front of curtain ,stage right, or parlor]

Scene fourteen - PORTRAIT PAINTINGS [in front of curtain ,stage left, or parlor]

Scene fifteen - BLINDNESS DANCE [parlor]

Scene sixteen - ANNA'S FINISH (*in front of curtain and in jail*) [jail]

