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Bach's Goldberg Variations



Synopsis

Johann Gottlieb Goldberg is a young servant in the employ of Count Keyserlingk. A talented musician, the boy secretly practices playing the harpsichord at night. When the count discovers Goldberg one evening, he challenges Goldberg to combine all the harpsichord music he's learned--and to throw in a riddle. In a panic, Goldberg turns to Johann Sebastian Bach for the perfect piece of music to appease the count. Stylized illustrations include elements from the baroque period. For families, teachers, and curious music lovers of all ages.

Book Information

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Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: 1 - 4

Customer Reviews

The legendary-like story behind Bach's immortal "Goldberg Variations" is told accompanied with fancy, often baroque-like illustrations with golden touches. The musically-talented orphan Johann Gottlieb Goldberg was taken in by a German Count. The Count directs him to play something new for him each week; and then later calls on him to do a "piece filled with dances and difficult runs...canons and something quite new...[and] a surprise that will trick me." To meet this demanding challenge, Johann has to turn to his mentor Bach, whose composition in answer to the Count's demand later came to be named after the orphan. The orphan Johann remains the focus of the tale, with Bach giving him musical information and guidance so that readers learn something about the technicalities and style of the "Goldberg Variations." Ages 4-7.

We have Celenza's Pictures at an Exhibition (Mussorgsky) and Farewell Symphony (Haydn), and the kids love them all. I find that this Goldberg Variations, however, lends itself better to reading WHILE the kids are listening to the CD (included) than the others do. Her Farewell Symphony makes a great story, but it is difficult to enjoy and appreciate the music at all while the story is in progress. By contrast, the Goldberg Variations themselves create a delightful backdrop to this engaging story. Warning: Don't expect to learn much about Bach himself in the course of the book; for that, turn to the Classical Kids CD "Mr. Bach Comes to Call."

My third grade music classes loved this story. The recording is high quality and the story well-written. I started with the author's note at the back of the book, as I think this helps kids understand the historical fiction genre a bit better. Great class material! The Rhapsody in Blue book is also excellent (I've used that with 6th graders) and the recording there is absolutely amazing!

The book tells the story of Bach's Goldberg Variations with the emphasis not on Bach but on a orphan who plays Bach's piece and on a count who listens to the orphan. The CD is a very helpful companion.

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