The Book and Lyrics

THAT WEEK WITH THE BACHS

November 19th to the 25th, 1731

A CHAMBER MUSICAL

seven days in seven scenes
during which seven members of the Bach family collaborate
to create the seven movements
of
Cantata 140

Music by Johann Sebastian Bach
Book and lyrics by William Kinsolving

Vocal Arrangements by Bradley Greenwald

As of 05/01/2022

CHARACTERS

THE FAMILY

Johann Sebastian Bach, 46, irascible and fractious, ever-battling for the truth of his faith, but with a guileful humor seeping through his musical obligations, his conflicted family, his financial burdens and Leipzig's obdurate failure to value his work. (Bass/Baritone)

Anna Magdalena Bach, 30, his radiant young second wife, stepmother to four, mother of another four, grieving for four others who died in infancy, and for her singing career cut short by her marriage. (Soprano)

Catharina, 23, Sebastian's oldest child from his first marriage, affably accepting her role as housekeeper, spinster, and an intimate friend to Anna, her stepmother only seven years older than she. (Soprano)

Wilhelm Friedemann, 21, Bach's musically brilliant oldest son and favored child. He suffers that entitlement, and faces his future with the dread that he's expected by all to be his father's successor. (Bass)

Carl Philipp Emanuel, 17, prematurely pragmatic, currently at law school at Leipzig's university, the family observer, already composing and eager to gain his father's favor, or at least more attention. (Tenor)

Johann Gottfried Bernhard, 16, youngest surviving child of Bach's first wife, deeply conflicted in his fraught adolescence about his role in the family and his future as a Bach. (3 octaves, tenor/baritone)

Gottfried, 7, Anna Magdalena's first surviving child, mentally hindered yet musically adroit as he confronts a life that confuses him in a family who treat him with love and empathy. (Boy soprano)

Elisabeth, called "Lieschen," 5, a precocious and lovely child, who enjoys being adored. She is not inclined to musical participation, more driven to getting exactly what she wants. (Avoids singing)

Regina, 3, and Christiana, 8 months, neither seen, remaining upstairs in a nursery, both sickly.

ASSOCIATES, FRIENDS, AND CITIZENS OF LEIPZIG

Gottfried Zimmerman, owner of the coffee house where secular music is performed, the home of the Collegium Musicum, made up of university students. Bach conducts it, his escape from church duties.

"Picander" (Christian Frederich Henrici), local poet and Bach's favorite collaborator/librettist in both secular and church music. Something of a dandy and a rebel, he eschews wigs for his own flowing mane.

Councilor Adrian Steger, the venomous critic on the Leipzig City Council who opposed Bach's candidacy, became convinced that, "He does nothing," and now insists that Bach honor his teaching duties rather than spending time (and money) on trivial church music.

Christian Weiss, Rector of Thomaskirche and member of the Leipzig Lutheran Consistory, a zealously orthodox prelate who objects to Bach's less-than-pious mien, as well as to the power and inspiration of Bach's music, particularly when it eclipses his sermons.

Gottfried Reiche, an achingly shy Leipzig trumpet virtuoso, for whom Bach expands works featuring that instrument, resulting in Reiche becoming a local idol and the object of many women's lustful attention.

Georg Philipp Telemann, a national, if not international star, dear and admired friend of Bach, godfather to Emanuel. Aside from his own genius, he embodies all of the sophisticated social graces that Bach lacks, even while suffering his own grotesque domestic troubles.

Ludwig Krebs, a brilliant pupil of Bach's, and most trusted with scores, the major copyist of BWV 140. Although younger (18), he is awkwardly attracted to Catharina.

The Continuo, a non-speaking role for the accomplished clavierist who accompanies (perhaps conducts) the musical numbers from one or another clavier, the numerous keyboard instruments on stage.

Copyists, Students, Singers, and Musicians of Leipzig, who fill out both the Chorale - not only its singing duties but acting and dancing needs as well - and the Baroque Chamber Ensemble. Period instruments in the latter are not required but would be a profound enhancement.

THE BOOK AND LYRICS

SIZE

The following script is for a chamber musical -- "chamber" indicating a degree of intimacy, whether in a large or small production. Diversity in casting is encouraged, surpassed in importance only by the need of very fine singing and acting.

The script calls for a "Chorale." It may be a group of either 4 or 8 singer/actors, equally divided in each of the four choral parts. All must take on various roles, and all will be dancing to the manifold choreography that Bach's music suggests.

The "Ensemble" may be a single pianist. (A complete piano/vocal score is included elsewhere on this website.) A larger production may include a group of any size, from a quartet to a 10-12 instrument baroque orchestra, including 2 violins, 1 viola, 1 cello, 1 double bass, 2 recorders/flutes, 1 oboe, 1 bassoon, and 1 trumpet, plus The Continuo (claviers).

8 Bach family members appear on stage, 2 of whom are children. The other named characters add another 7 parts (to be played by members of the Chorale, double-cast when necessary). A total cast of 16 multi-talented performers (or 12 if the Chorale is a quartet) will serve. They and the musician(s) of the Ensemble are on stage throughout.

FLOW

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach described his childhood home as a "beehive" and a "dovecot," indicating the constant movement of family, copyists, students, musicians and townspeople through the apartment in the Thomasschule, the boys' school where the family lived. (See below: "THE SET.") Therefore social interaction with all of Leipzig seldom involves invitations or even a knock on the door. The apartment is a public space through which all of Leipzig seems to ebb and flow.

As a result, the Copyists enter and leave at will; the Continuo, Ensemble and/or Chorale materialize from nowhere, then disappear with the same alacrity. In other words, a fluid and tiding concept of style – always open to soaring – is most desirable.

Rendering by Eliot Curtis

THE SET

Bach and his family lived in a timbered and stuccoed apartment of small rooms in a building housing the boys' school where he was employed. Adolescent riot was easily heard through the walls.

The set need not be historically exact; the rendering at the front of the website is for a larger production. Upstage-center stairs lead to a hallway between family quarters, the off-stage nursery and Sebastian's composing room. On stage level is a large "family room." To stage-left is a kitchen, and to stage-right a small receiving room.

Through the Designer's magic, the size of the rooms seems both claustrophobic, and at the same time, open from one to another with an unbroken sense of space. Lighting, as ever, is vital. Windows are shuttered; when they are opened, the darkness is offset.

The furniture is utilitarian, some elegant, most having succumbed to family wear. Required are desks and tables - a dining room table is prominent - flat surfaces on which are seen clutches of quills along with sand and pounce shakers for drying ink. Throughout are a variety of claviers: harpsichord, clavichord, lautenwerck, spinet, organ, etc.

COSTUMES

In a phrase, costumes are "of the period." The males suffer and/or preen in appropriate wigs when occasion demands. The females dress as attractively as the tight Bach budget and Lutheran standards allow.

THE ACTORS AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Other than he who plays Gottfried Reiche, skill on a musical instrument is not required. Even so, should an actor have had sufficient instrumental training, her or his skill should be used with alacrity. Most useful: Sebastian and Emanuel being familiar with a keyboard. Bernhard's trumpet blasts may be perfected in rehearsal.

DANCE

Scholars have identified myriad opportunities for dance in Bach's work, including the Allemande, Sarabande, Anglaise, Bourrée, Entreé, Gavotte, Minuet, Passepied, Polonaise, Scherzo and Gigue. The Choreographer may apply any and all in her/his own interpretations.

J.S. Bach's Compositions in THAT WEEK WITH THE BACHS

At the end of each scene, a movement of: Cantata 140, BWV 140

ACT ONE

1. "Leipzig!" to the Brandenburg Concerto #4, III, BWV 1049.
2. "Sebastian's Prayer" to the Orchestral Suite #2 in B-minor, BWV 1067, "Badinerie."
3. "A Quiet Rage" to the Harpsichord Concerto #5, II, Largo, BWV 1056.
4. Concerto in D for Trumpet and Organ, Allegro, BWV 972.
5. "Crisis!" to the Organ Toccata from BWV 565.
6. "Schnaps" to the Flute Sonata in B-flat Major, II, BWV 1031.

ACT TWO

7. "Friday" to the Violin Concerto in E major, III, "Allegro Assai," BWV 1042.
8. "Opera" to the Concerto for Violin and Oboe in D Minor, II, "Adagio," BWV 1060.
9. "Odd," to the Concerto in D Minor, II, "Adagio," BWV 974.
10. "Fool," to the Orchestral Suite No. 3, II, "Air," BWV 1068.

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Monday

(*When the audience enters, the set is visible in dawn darkness. On stage, Emanuel, 17, seen in candlelight, works at a harpsichord, upstage. As the houselights dim, The Continuo enters with his score. He indicates the audience to Emanuel. As Emanuel comes down center, the Continuo and the Ensemble take their places up-stage.)*

EMANUEL
Welcome! That week with the Bachs, in 1731, November 19th to the 25th, started as always, with crises, music, dreads and joys, …

(Moaning in a terror, Gottfried, aged 7, slack-jawed, oddly uncoordinated in his bedclothes, lurches down the stairs into Emanuel's arms.)

EMANUEL
Gottfried, it's all right. What's the matter?

GOTTFRIED
When I wake, I can't remember where I am. I'm alone, lost again!

EMANUEL
You're not alone. We're in Leipzig! *(Laughs)* We're <u>all</u> lost in Leipzig…

(The Ensemble begins "Leipzig!" to the <u>3rd Movement of the Brandenburg Concerto #4.</u> The family enters, singing, swinging shutters back, lighting fires, harmonizing with each other, and most vital, instigating a rapport with the audience. All are concerned with God, family, and coffee.)

BERNHARD
Leipzig is a boring and suppressing place!

EMANUEL
Leipzig, a splintered family's perfect base.

BERNHARD
No breathing space!

SEBASTIAN
Leipzig is our burden and God's will.

WILHELM
Leipzig? Only coffee makes it possible.

THE MEN
ONLY COFFEE MAKES IT POSSIBLE!

ANNA AND CATHARINA
Leipzig! The week begins. And they're groggy!
For the men cannot commence, the day won't flow
until we make them their coffee!
Could they survive without us? NO!

SEBASTIAN
Although my life is constant vexation,
And obstruction,
And endless altercation,
I always listen for
The voice of God in human form.
God is the great creative storm.

THE FAMILY
"*Vox est anima verbe*:"
"The voice is the soul of the Word"!

SEBASTIAN
That's what Martin Luther said.
A way the believer and God are wed.

THE FAMILY
He also said:
"Music's a sermon without words!"

GOTTFRIED
Without words!

SEBASTIAN
God creates the music for me to find.
My sacred music flows from God's mind.
But here in Leipzig?
In Leipzig they're all deaf to music!
There aren't enough musicians!
There's never enough time! Always a catch!
The ambition of the Lutherans?

THE FAMILY
They chat!

SEBASTIAN
They eat! They come late! They sleep! They scratch!
But do they fear God's wrath?

THE FAMILY
NO!

SEBASTIAN
Their noses blow!
And even the Town Council is my foe.
I wrote them. And their response? The status-quo:

THE FAMILY
Silence! Disdain!
They're all obtuse, and so inane.
Their disregard of music? Blasphemous!
But what have we, defending us?

GOTTFRIED
Our family!

ALL
Thank God! Our family!
Going back six generations of the Bach family.

GOTTFRIED
It's God's music.
Six generations of God's music.

ALL
A family trust!

(Sebastian exits upstairs.)

BERNHARD
A trust that might destroy us!
Even the Pater Familias!

ANNA AND CATHARINA
God's trust binds us together. It's the glue…

BERNHARD
"God's trust is glue"? I'm sick of you.

(*Sebastian returns, singing with Elisabeth in his arms. She is dressed all in red. Bernhard finds a trumpet, and Gottfried locates his triangle.)*

ALL
Carpe Diem! We'll survive Leipzig with our own joys.

ANNA
As mother to all, I will live and die in Leipzig
with all this love, and with all this noise.

EMANUEL, BERNHARD, WILHELM
She's not mother to all!
Such presumption! What gall!

ANNA
Your choice, not mine.
Life and love should combine.

ANNA AND CATHARINA
Struggle and sadness bind us to God;
And music, and death;
With each living breath,
Love binds us 'til we're beneath the sod!

THE FAMILY
But we're alive here in Leipzig!

ANNA AND CATHARINA
The grave awaits us all who live in Leipzig.

THE FAMILY
And so we live, our fates unfurled,
A family crying, and shouting, and singing to the world:
The word of God? Here!.
Made manifest: Here!
And we aspire – here --
To write the most inspiring music you've ever heard!

(*The Movement ends. At the audience's applause, Elisabeth hurries to center and happily curtsies, then rushes back to her mother. All drink coffee and go about their work, talking over each other.*)

SEBASTIAN
More coffee, please. Catharina,

CATHARINA
Papa needs coffee as his creative elixir….

EMANUEL
Papa, I've composed…

ANNA
No, it's his aphrodisiac!

CATHARINA
Anna! You're shocking!

ANNA
Oh, I wish I were….

SEBASTIAN
Wilhelm, I may have another place for you to apply if you'll stop feeling sorry for yourself about Halle…

WILHELM
Once again, the people I met in Halle expected me to be another you. When I wasn't, they had little interest. I'm sorry,…

SEBASTIAN
Above all other things, learn and know that the world is ungrateful. You're destined to carry the Bach name forward to new acclaim! Now, the music director at the Sophienkirche in Dresden died. This will take strategy and patience….

WILHELM
Not my strongest traits, are they? I should change my name and not be such a bother.

SEBASTIAN
You're Sebastian Bach's eldest son! We persevere as God demands.

EMANUEL
(*getting ready to leave*)
Papa, do you know…?

SEBASTIAN
Don't interrupt, Emanuel. Be off. Law school doesn't wait for your arrival. Wilhelm, I've made an appointment….

(*Gottfried reflects sunbeams from a shiny triangle onto the wall.)*

ELISABETH
What are you doing?

GOTTFRIED
Bending the light, so I can….

ELISABETH
"Reflecting" you mean.

GOTTFRIED
… so when I hear the note, I SEE it! See it shiver?

ELISABETH *(grabbing triangle)*
"Vibrate," you mean. Let me have that.

GOTTFRIED
No! N-o-o-o-o! It's mine!

(*A general uproar ensues, with Gottfried and others chasing and yelling at Elisabeth who is delighted with the hunt. She's caught but won't give up the triangle, so the struggle and yelling continue. Bernhard lets loose with a piercing note on the trumpet as an accompaniment.)*

ANNA
Bernhard! Not until the school bell rings!

BERNHARD
You don't make my rules, Anna.

EMANUEL
Papa, I think you'd better know this.

SEBASTIAN AND WILHELM
What? For God's sake?!

EMANUEL
Next Sunday is the twenty-<u>seventh</u> Sunday after Trinity.

WILHELM
A legal curly-cue? Emanuel, you'll be a rousing lawyer. Ahem, ahem. *(Waves away boredom, heading upstairs)* Now I must try to compose something before this school's fifty urchins awake. Why do we live in a school? Will the Council ever give us a house? Why not down on the River Pleisse! We live in a cave of clamor! (*He exits.)*

EMANUEL
I'll be no lawyer, Wilhelm! I compose as well, so beware: The second son is nipping at your heels.

SEBASTIAN
You study law so that if you play at court, you won't be a servant but a gentleman. What about the twenty-seventh Sunday…?

EMANUEL
Easter came early this year in the church calendar, so there's an extra Sunday after Trinity. The first time in decades. You never composed a cantata for it.
(*At the mention of the word "cantata," everyone gets very still.)*

SEBASTIAN
I composed three cycles of cantatas for each and every Sunday of the…

CATHARINA
Yes, Papa, how we remember! (*The family groans.)* We grew up with that, hundreds of cantatas, sometimes two a week -- for three years!

EMANUEL
There hasn't been a twenty-seventh Sunday after Trinity since we came to Leipzig. Therefore you never composed for it.

SEBASTIAN
God gave me that task. I vowed to fulfill it.

EMANUEL
Papa, you don't have to create a new one. Just use an old cantata, no one remembers them all. (*A gaff.)* Oh dear. I'm late. I have to go.

SEBASTIAN
Wait! Are you so sure I didn't do a cantata for the twenty-seventh…?

EMANUEL
Yes! Why would you compose for a Sunday that was never there?

SEBASTIAN
It's a holy vow. I must do it. God turns away from us for doing less.

ANNA
Oh, Sebastian, not another cantata!

CATHARINA
It turns the house inside out, Papa! The whole family goes mad!

SEBASTIAN
Without God, I'll go mad! Emanuel, call in on Picander, tell him I need him. (*With relief, Emanuel exits.)* Bernhard, bring me the lectionary.

BERNHARD
Let me bring you Dante! Here's an idea, Papa: "The Second Circle Cantata"! (*Glancing at Anna)* All those winds of lust blowing around…

SEBASTIAN
Get the lectionary! In my composing room! Hurry, before school starts.

CATHARINA
Papa, have you forgotten what it was like? You came to hate cantatas.

SEBASTIAN
Never "hate," just fatigued after 300 of them. It'll be easy now.

ANNA
"Easy"? "Easy"! We didn't have eight children in the house, two infants mortally ill,…" (*Reminded, she hurries upstairs to the nursery.)*

CATHARINA
(*Following to the stairs.)* Papa, it won't be easy. It'll be chaos, …

(She's met by Wilhelm coming down, Bernhard with the lectionary, then Anna carrying an infant in swaddling as Gottfried and Elisabeth fight over the triangle. When he takes it, she dramatically falls and shrieks.)

WILHELM
NOT another cantata! No, no!

BERNHARD
Wait 'till you hear the chosen text!

ANNA
Regina has a fever, Christiana the croup! Please, Sebastian!

CATHARINA
You're asking God for crazed pandemonium, Papa.

(*O.S., a thunderous bell tolls, releasing the O.S. energy and explosion of fifty students heard through the walls, their roars filling the Bach apartment. Bernhard blasts another riff on his trumpet. The family continues its cantata objections. Sebastian turns around, as all noise fades, lights focus on him down-center, confronting God.*

(Sebastian sings "Papa Bach's Prayer" to the "Badinerie," BWV 1067.)

SEBASTIAN
What, dear God, am I to do,
taking care of all these children?
How am I to create for You,
with their bellowing, caterwauling,
with the infants always bawling,
and their screaming tears? Appalling!
Every day in every way I dare to say, it's very bad!

Am I damned to all this noise,
Never having any blessed silence?
Do You know how vile are boys,
Banging pans in gross percussion,
thinking shouting is discussion,
blasting brass that cause concussion!
It's too much to deal with such a devil's touch! It drives me mad!

I suppose You'll curse my courtship,
Think my marriage is priapic.
You gave me a wife to worship!
Marriage is a sacrament and childbirth is an act of God!
The fault is Yours, and Your purpose flawed!

Ach, dear God, forgive my raging. It must be because I'm aging.
That is the reason, don't You see,
I've no time to be assuaging.
I race death, the contest wag'ring
That my life can do what it-must-do for Thee.

There they go with their rampaging!
I've no chance of disengaging.
Here am I in hellfire bathing,
When I should compose the airs that drill
the words of Luther's text through wax-filled ears,
which is indeed Your will!

Am I losing faith, I wonder. Is my music all a blunder?
That is what reason does to me,
Blasting faith with human thunder.
I race death, a frantic fumbler.
Can my life e'er do what it must do for Thee?

(Bernhard re-enters, reading the lectionary and guffawing.)

BERNHARD

Oh Papa, this is wonderful!!

SEBASTIAN

That's holy scripture, Bernhard, chosen for each Sunday service. It's not a subject for your amusement. Read it with respect.

BERNHARD

But the scripture's outrageous: "Then the Kingdom of Heaven is like ten virgins,…" You're going to make a cantata out of that?

SEBASTIAN

Ah, Mathew 25. God willing, it ought to be possible to do everything.

BERNHARD

This'll be a challenge: "… ten virgins, who took up their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom." Mein Gott! Ten virgins for one man?

SEBASTIAN (*playing on a clavier)*

You mock the most vital symbol of Luther's church! It's the entrance of Christ into the Christian heart, a spiritual, a symbolic marriage between Christ as bridegroom and the believer as the bride.

BERNHARD

And in that symbolic marriage, we get ten virgins to choose from?

SEBASTIAN (*playing chords.)*

… Some of us had fifteen.

BERNHARD

Papa! Fifteen?? Io! Io! *("Huzzah, huzzah!")*

SEBASTIAN

I was very young… *(He plays the first choral phrase of Cantata 140.)*

BERNHARD

That's … quite good! *(Sings the phrase in "la,la,la," Sebastian accompanying, until Bernard works in:)* "… with twenty-six virgins!"

SEBASTIAN

Ah, Bernhard, you're blessed with a sublime voice! Three golden octaves!

BERNHARD

What matters that? You say the only male singers with a decent career are castrati.

SEBASTIAN

Well,…

BERNHARD

No!

SEBASTIAN

No. Read some more Mathew.

BERNHARD *(dramatically)*

"… Five of the virgins were foolish and five were wise. Those who were foolish took no oil with them." Oh, silly virgins! "At midnight there was a cry: 'Behold the bridegroom is coming!'… The foolish virgins hurried away to buy oil, but the bridegroom came, and went into the marriage feast with the five wise virgins." Oh, clever virgins! "Watch therefore, for you do not know the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."
(*Bach has been accompanying the reading with increasing fervor.*)
Papa, that's magnificent! (*He "la-la's" the last phrases.*)

SEBASTIAN

If you'd practice to play claviers properly, you'd be a decent musician!

BERNHARD

… No, Papa, I'll never be that. And fortunately, I know it. My dear Mama gave you Wilhelm and Emanuel to be your musical heirs. I pity them that fate, but at least they both have real talent. I don't. And if Gottfried and Elisabeth are any indication, you won't be as lucky with whoever else Anna drops…. Me? I play the organ because it's loud. But that's all. Why play claviers that go "ping" and can't be heard?

SEBASTIAN

You're needlessly cruel to Anna! Why? She's endlessly loving to you.

BERNHARD

Papa, our Mama died when I was five. I miss her so, to this day. She'll <u>never</u> be replaced, - as you <u>so quickly</u> did with Anna! How could you have forgotten Mama so easily? Her eldest child, Catharina was only seven years younger than your new young wife! Even God must have been appalled!

(*Sebastian is stunned. Anna and Catharina come downstairs in time to hear the last line. Picander enters in full flowing finery, followed by Krebs, The Continuo, and then from all directions the Chorale, Ensemble, and the rest of the family -- to all a familiar social invasion.)*

PICANDER

Io, Io, Sebastian! We'll have a fine time with the virgins! Emanuel told me all! I read the Mathew: one great plod, isn't it? BUT: there's old Nicolai's faithful Lutheran hymn that gets us past the Consistory's censorious damnation, letting us have our way with the virgins! The hymn has a banal text that I, Picander will make thrilling, even a bit voluptuous! You'll scramble my thrilling words as usual – my cross to bear -- to fit your music, in order to give us something sublime!

SEBASTIAN

Ah, so Picander, <u>you</u> don't mind doing another cantata, do you?

PICANDER

We <u>all</u> "mind"! (*A loud affirmation from all.)* But what to do with the only twenty-seventh-Sunday-after-Trinity in recent history hanging before us like some dangling ganglia?... "Hanging dangling ganglia." I'll use that somewhere.... I brought Krebs along to start the copying.

LUDVIG KREBS

Hello, Catharina. (*She smiles at him but attends to Elisabeth.*)

PICANDER

Someone give us an A, tenors over there. Sebastian, we need more tenors!

(*Picander arranges the Ensemble. Sebastian gets to one of the claviers, strikes an A, and prepares to conduct. The <u>First Movement of Cantata 140</u> begins. The usual restlessness of the Chorale during the instrumental lead-in casually leads to dancing. Throughout the Movement's orchestral interludes, the dancing exhilarates.)*

ALL

Sleepers, wake! Now is the hour!
The watchman calls us from his tower.
Awake, Jerusalem!
Midnight strikes, hear it sounding,
loud cries the watch with call resounding:

Where are you, O wise maidens?
Good cheer, the Bridegroom comes!
Arise and take your lamps, arise!
Hallelujah!
Yourselves prepare
now to marry!
He bids you to His wedding feast!

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 2: Tuesday

(As the lights come up, Anna and Catharina are working in the kitchen. Sebastian, muttering instructions, hurries downstairs from the composing room and hands out manuscript to Krebs and other copyists. Gottfried shows off his triangle, Elisabeth enjoys being adored by the grown-ups. Sebastian sits at a clavier to correct the scores in stacks of manuscript before him. On stage-left, Emanuel and Bernhard lend a hand with the copying, or line manuscript paper with a rastrum. O.S. upstairs a clavier is being played.
(Ludwig Krebs steals into the kitchen for coffee and Catharina.)

ANNA
Come in, Ludwig. Coffee?

LUDWIG
I seem to have a great need…

CATHARINA
You do, Ludwig. This is your third cup this morning.

LUDWIG
Oh. Um, is there a limit?

CATHARINA
Yes, if you make one mistake copying, no more coffee.

ANNA
Ludwig doesn't make mistakes. He's our best copyist.

LUDWIG
Except for you, Frau Bach.

(Anna waves away the compliment, and leaves the two of them, she wandering out into the main room. She passes Sebastian, looks over his shoulder. He senses her there, gestures for her to look at his sheet of music, and for her to sing a phrase. She does, stunningly, as the copyists turn to listen. Sebastian scowls and leans in to make changes.)

SEBASTIAN

No time for gawking! Back to it!

(Anna takes a piece of the score to be copied, finds a place to work and sits down. O.S., an infant's cry is heard from the nursery. Wearily, Anna rises. Catharina hears the cry too, and beats her mother to the stairs. Anna continues to work copying, as Krebs hurries back to his place.)

SEBASTIAN

Who put this *recitative* into G-sharp minor? Come along, who?

(A scared student copyist raises his hand but Krebs holds it down.)

KREBS

Is that a mistake, Herr Bach?

SEBASTIAN

Of course it's a mistake! G-sharp minor signifies death! It's G-sharp major! I know you didn't do it, Ludwig, just fix it! And no tempi!

(Bernhard and Emanuel are copying at a table down-stage.)

BERNHARD

Wilhelm-the-favored-son practices while we sweat over copy paper.

EMANUEL

His absence saves time. Wilhelm can make a real mess on the page.

BERNHARD

He does it on purpose. Ah, the joy of cantata concocting! Don't other families have picnics down on the River Pleisse, play games together…?

EMANUEL

You're suffering again, Bernhard. Why do you enjoy it so much?

BERNHARD

Because I know things: that no one cares about all this music, that Papa's considered only as a performer, and that you're as miserable as I am. My misery enjoys your company, though your act is a fraud.

EMANUEL

Fraud? No. I just allow Reason to clarify my present as the second son, then plan future joys and passions when I flee these restricting walls.

BERNHARD

You think you're so damn superior! You just want Papa's attention!

EMANUEL

Yes, and by God, one day I'll get it.

ANNA

Boys! Not now. Do your work.

BERNHARD

We're not your concern, Anna. Why not look after your own defective children so they won't keep dying.

(Anna, devastated, looks to Emanuel for support.)

EMANUEL

(Giving none, he shrugs) Bernhard, another a useless thing to say.

SEBASTIAN

All of you come up here. Second movement, Bar 48! You're all making the same mistake! Come, hurry!

(As sons and copyists gather around Bach at his clavier, Anna comes down stage. The Continuo accompanies her as she sings "A Quiet Rage," to the Harpsichord Concerto #5, II, BWV 1056.)

ANNA

Why? Tell me why a child must die,
be so sick, or live short years -- a pain-filled sigh.
I give birth to death, or hear them crying.
Ten years married, four children dead,
his brain lost, a girl demanding red!
Upstairs, two more dying.

ANNA *(continues singing)*
I look, I look for logic,
witless if you've faith in God!
Is God involved? Is such cruelty allowed?
It is! My soul is, yes: chaotic.

Why? I just don't know! I just don't know.
I lurch through woe. Why? Why? No reason.
Birth gives hope, before it bludgeons me low.
I cling to the only faith I know:
In a man, not God, who lost my trust so many deaths ago.

(As the copyists and sons go back to their work, Elisabeth spies and rushes to greet Gottfried Zimmerman, a man long familiar "mit schlag," listening in the receiving room. He lifts the little girl and twirls her.)

ZIMMERMAN
Ah, Lieschen, you look so lovely in green.

ELISABETH
It's red! You know that, Herr Zimmerman, it's always red!

ZIMMERMAN
It is? No, I could swear it was purple last time I came.

ELISABETH*(rushing upstairs)*
It's red! I'm Little Red Riding Hood! And I have a new dress!

ANNA
Herr Zimmerman, you're outrageous! You only encourage her.

ZIMMERMAN
And she loves me for it, as the occasional female is inclined to do.

ANNA
Ah. Do you use flattery as a weapon on females of all ages?

ZIMMERMAN
Of course: but it's a velvet weapon. For instance: You still have the most beautiful coloratura in Saxony.

ANNA
That song was not meant to be heard.

ZIMMERMAN
I've heard your song for years, dear Anna, often sung in silence.

SEBASTIAN
Zimmerman! Good! Saves me coming to tell you I can't rehearse the Collegium Musicum this week, I have to have a new cantata for Sunday.

ZIMMERMAN
Another cantata?!

EMANUEL, BERNHARD
Hear, hear!! Aaargh!

ANNA
There's coffee in the kitchen, Herr Zimmerman.

ZIMMERMAN
As good as mine?

ANNA*(a proclamation)*
Any coffee made by human hands is pond scum compared to the ambrosia for the gods created at Zimmerman's Coffee House!

ZIMMERMAN
A truly perspicacious wife you have, Sebastian. May we talk?
(They remove to down-stage. Copy-work continues as Emanuel listens.)
I came to warn you.

SEBASTIAN
Don't tell me: banning schnaps at the Coffee House?

ZIMMERMAN
That happens the day after the end of the world. You're to be visited.

SEBASTIAN
Nothing new in this little riot we call home.

ZIMMERMAN
Officially. By both the Church Consistory and the City Council.

SEBASTIAN
How do you know this?

ZIMMERMAN
If the proprietor of the best coffee house in Leipzig has any wit, he hears of the city's affairs -- from glory to garbage.

SEBASTIAN
And so, grotesque authority descends again, into my daily vortex of confusion! … Lately, I'm forced to wonder if God now joins these officious pomposities, instead of standing with me against them. … Zimmerman, our children, God allows so many to die! Anna and I die too, with each one …

ZIMMERMAN
The death of a child is beyond human understanding. Accepting that is an unfortunate insistence of faith.

SEBASTIAN
I know, I know. … What do these worthies want of me now?

ZIMMERMAN
The usual. Quote: *(imitating:)* "It's 1731! Bach's been in residence for eight years! We want him to give more credit for his work to Leipzig, with less indulgent expenditure to create it. And why isn't he teaching in the school which he was brought here to do?" Unquote.

SEBASTIAN
"Indulgent"?! They starve me of musicians, of time, without knowing what music is! I write down music for the glory of God! And because of them, neither God nor I have ever – ever! – heard the music as I've written it -- unless I find a viola or a decent organ with good lungs and play it myself! I've no time to teach here, and I pay for those who take my place with money I don't have! And in church? No time to rehearse or enough funds to pay the musicians. We need tenors! What "credit to Leipzig" do they want? I've written oceans of music they don't care two whits about! Who do they want? An angel?

ZIMMERMAN
Telemann is mentioned.

SEBASTIAN
Those swine. My mentor, dearest friend. He's godfather to Emanuel! They use him to flail me! You wait: they'll remind me once again that I'm in Leipzig only because the grand Telemann turned them down.

ZIMMERMAN
Being idolaters of eminence, they suck at his fame. He's here now.

SEBASTIAN
Telemann? In Leipzig?

ZIMMERMAN
He came to the coffee house last night, will see you soon, here to find patrons to fill his subscription list to publish his "Tafelmusik."

SEBASTIAN
What? Hamburg wouldn't fill it? He's a god in Hamburg!

ZIMMERMAN
Hamburg could easily fill it. He wants patrons far and wide, in every court and city to gain wider interest, Paris, London – Handel bought in.

SEBASTIAN
Handel? Our Teutonic Anglophile, now oozing all over British royalty?

ZIMMERMAN
The very same, foresworn never to return to us. But Handel's one of Telemann's two hundred subscribers … at eight thalers each.

SEBASTIAN
Eight thalers! That pays for a full orchestra at a court concert! Or a month of food. … Two hundred subscribers! How does he do it?

ZIMMERMAN
Telemann is very … sleek.

SEBASTIAN
Yes, he always has been … a quality I, too, possess -- in my hangnail.

ZIMMERMAN
It shouldn't be required of you. Telemann is glorious and delightful, of course. But you are massive, beyond human musical experience. If you'll allow yourself to explore beyond Leipzig's finicky boundaries….

SEBASTIAN
You mean give up making God's music in order to compose entertainments for a certain coffee house I know? I give you sixty concerts a year with the Collegium Musicum! With lots of new music!

ZIMMERMAN
A good start! But Sebastian, compose for a new age! Music changes. We're at a tipping point between an old and new culture, from traditions of counterpoint to what's happening in Italy, in France, the opera.

EMANUEL
(leaving his copying and joining in)
Papa, he's right. The *galant* style is simplifying the very nature….

SEBASTIAN
Galant is all romance, melody. I dabble with it, but it's light amusement and full of emptiness. Opera? It took a wrong turn after Monteverdi.

ZIMMERMAN
I've heard that romance and melody are popular pleasures.

SEBASTIAN
My purpose is more than simple, barren pleasures. That's *galant*! I stand as God's creature, finding His music of transcendence, mystery!

EMANUEL
Papa, you like Caldara, Scarlatti, Telemann. They're moving toward ….

SEBASTIAN
Let them do what they must! As will I! … Who are they sending?

ZIMMERMAN
From the Council, Adrien Steger, and for the Consistory, the Rector, Christian Weiss. There are rumblings about asking you to leave Leipzig.

SEBASTIAN
That old threat! Well, no matter how much contempt each has for me, they detest each other more! When are they coming?

ZIMMERMAN
Tomorrow. Remember, they're deeply provincial, able to regard you only as a performer, on the organ, or conducting. They're simply unable to recognize your brilliance as a composer. Yes, you're wasted here, and you're known far beyond Leipzig for your genius at the great Ducal courts of Saxony, at Dresden and Hamburg! But please: stay in Leipzig.

ANNA
Sebastian, ask them about our having a house at last. Be diplomatic…

SEBASTIAN
With a garden, for you to grow your yellow carnations! I'm always diplomatic! And I'll demand more tenors! Bernhard…

EMANUEL
Papa, I've written something I'm eager for you to hear.

SEBASTIAN
Not now, Emanuel. We have a cantata to do. Bernhard, here's the cantata's second movement, a *recitatif* for tenor. Read through it ….

EMANUEL
I work before dawn, a minuet with hand-crossing, like Couperin, that…

SEBASTIAN
I've no time for Couperin imitations, Emanuel.

EMANUEL
I don't imitate!… I'm proud of the work, Papa.

SEBASTIAN
And I'm proud of your doing it. Bernhard ….

BERNHARD
Can this be serious? Jesus Christ as "a lusty mountain roebuck"?

PICANDER *(entering from nowhere)*
Don't be so literal, Bernhard! Picander is having a little fun. I'm a poet! It's allegorical! Mystical! And all that really matters: It rhymes! Your father, in spite of himself, does reveal a certain musical ease with lust…

(Sebastian is startled. Bernhard sings the Second Movement of Cantata 140, during which Elisabeth rushes downstairs in a new red outfit and presents herself to Zimmerman. Bernhard recognizes an opportunity and as he sings, draws them both into a brief dance.)

BERNHARD
He comes, He comes,
the Bridegroom comes,
O Zion's daughters,
hear His voice!
He hastens to your mother's dwelling
and there you shall rejoice!

BERNHARD *(continues singing)*
The bridegroom comes as is a roebuck,
Yea, like a "lusty mountain roebuck(!)"
Fleet and fair.
His marriage feast he bids you share.
Arise, be of good cheer!
Embrace your loving Bridegroom.
Look! See you, here He comes to greet you!

(When BERNHARD finishes singing, Elisabeth rushes to take his bow. Should the audience hesitate to applaud, she stamps her foot to insist.)

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 3: Wednesday

(In the dark is heard the trumpet solo from the Concerto in D for Trumpet and Organ, "Allegro," BWV 972. Lights come up. Gottfried Reiche is tearing through the movement on trumpet. The Continuo accompanies at the organ. The family is listening, Sebastian in admiring concentration. (A group of Leipzig women have been allowed to watch from the doorway. Reiche ends with the startling high note. The women swoon and call encomiums, trying to approach him. Profoundly shy, he retreats, aghast, while Anna and Catharina intercept and direct the women out.

BERNHARD
If I learn the trumpet, Herr Reiche, will women wish to ravish me as they do you?

SEBASTIAN
Reiche, I can't compose anything that you can't play! That was brilliant!

REICHE
Thank-you, Herr Bach. I'm sorry, they follow me, no matter what I say…

ANNA
Herr Reiche, having a wife would put a stop to that.

(Reiche gasps, retreats further, awkwardly stumbling into Catharina.)

REICHE
Oh! Fraülein, please forgive… (*Tongue-tied, he stops.)*

CATHARINA

It's my pleasure, Herr Reiche.

SEBASTIAN

We've had our amusement so back to work. We have three days before Saturday's full rehearsal. Reiche, next Wednesday come to Thomaskirche. We'll work with the organ there at ten. *(Reiche flees.)*

EMANUEL

Papa, where's the cantata's Third Movement?

SEBASTIAN

I'm copying that myself. It's a duet, … in *galant* style, so we'll see, won't we? Copy the Fourth Movement Chorale. And check the harmonies!

CATHARINA *(drawing Anna aside)*

Anna, I must finally tell you this: I'm deeply in love with Herr Reiche.

ANNA

What?! Impossible! Why?

CATHARINA

Why? When he plays like that, I can feel my insides exploding!

ANNA

Catharina, no woman dares to fall in love with a trumpet player!

CATHARINA

Oh. … Yes, "Impossible." I won't ask why. Lost to love, a spinster I.

(Both despairing, Catharina hurries upstairs, Anna goes to the kitchen.
(Councilor Steger and Rector Weiss arrive in the receiving room, struggling to see who shall enter first. Each is in the attire of his office. Steger's elaborate medallion of authority contrasts with Weiss' severe iron cross and chain. The Councilor carries a ceremonial staff, the Rector a stark verge. Once inside, no one takes notice of them. One, then the other pounds on the floor with his staff.
(All exit except Sebastian and the Continuo, still at the organ.)

SEBASTIAN

Ah, Councilor Steger, Rector Weiss! Oh, I mean, Rector Weiss, Councilman Steger. Welcome to our dreadfully humble home.

STEGER
Not dreadful at all, Bach. Crowded, as always, with so many children.

WEISS
A situation easily remedied by a modicum of self-control over one's carnal appetites.

SEBASTIAN
Mein Herren, Luther instructs us that we must never be angry on our own behalf, but only on behalf of one's work, or for God. The size of my family is a matter only between my wife and me. Therefore, your presumptuous innuendo will not be subject to my wrath! If you want that, why not start with why you came today?

STEGER
I speak for the Leipzig City Council!

WEISS
I speak for the Leipzig Lutheran Consistory!

SEBASTIAN
I gathered that. Therefore: speak!

STEGER
It's about your music: It confuses the congregation with its complexity.

SEBASTIAN
I gathered that as well.

WEISS
You've stubbornly lost sight of music's proper purpose in the service: to inspire a quiet piety in the congregation, and an eager anticipation of -- The Sermon, the zenith of the service of worship!

STEGER
All those notes are extravagantly wasteful! People want a simple tune, something memorable to attract travelers to Leipzig, the new "Athens on the Pleisse!"

WEISS
That's disgraceful nonsense, Steger! No part of the holy service is to be abused to gain vulgar public attention or tawdry commercial profit. That spawns the sin of greed!

STEGER

Greed? How many collections do you take each Sunday? How much do you charge for your *capellen*, those thirty private cabins you allow, built over the pews for a huge fee so rich families won't have to smell the riff-raff? That, Rector Weiss, is greed!

SEBASTIAN

Wait! Music in church has a single purpose: to praise God, to encourage and enthrall those who listen to consider His glory.

WEISS

Your music is too loud! We've heard that you're composing a new Cantata for Sunday. We expect gentle melodies! Or else you should go!

STEGER

That's one objection: Your music is also too expensive! For Sunday, you must reduce the choir, the musicians, everything. Otherwise: Away!

SEBASTIAN

My music is created for God, the centuries-old counterpoint of canon and fugue. It's beyond human experience. It's on the walls, in the air. When I hear it, I copy it out and present it. If the compositions are loud, that's to overcome the roar of your congregation gossiping, calling across the nave to each other, haw-hawing even during your prayers! But *mein herrin*, when performed, or someone sings it, this music seems so -- divine! Do you ever sing? You should try. Then you'd know.

WEISS

I never sing. I preach!

STEGER

I find singing a pathetic revelation of one's inner turmoil.

SEBASTIAN

Life without singing is a parched oblivion! Are you even alive? Well, you must be, for you're here to harass and goad me about money, scorning my music as a distraction from your sermons! Wouldn't it be a miracle that instead, we could sing together, music of some great, mighty …

(On the word, the organ bursts forth with the first phrase of the Toccata from BWV 565. Sebastian is not surprised. But when Weiss and Steger then sing, and sing very well, that is the miracle.)

WEISS
You digress! This is a crisis!

STEGER
Yes it is: a grave crisis!

STEGER AND WEISS
Take this noise as a warning!

SEBASTIAN (*speaking, astounded.*)
You hear it! All over the walls!

STEGER AND WEISS
You're incorrigible!

WEISS
Your melody's the key!

STEGER
And your polyphony destroys the tune.

SEBASTIAN
You call this a "Tune"?

STEGER
Your blaring chaos offends the flock!

WEISS AND STEGER
The sonorities that mock!

SEBASTIAN
"Mock"? Mock what?

STEGER
The sacrifice of Him who freed,…

WEISS AND STEGER
Our rotten soul's from hellfire's need!
'Til death, we fear, we moan,
So miserable and alone.

SEBASTIAN
"Alone"? With God here?

WEISS
God's presence isn't yours to deem!
Saint Augustine said, "When the singing entertains me
more than moves me,
I wish the song had never come to me."

STEGER AND WEISS
You entertain! Blaspheme!
The Council hired you to teach!

SEBASTIAN *(singing)*
Music is God's word, beseech…!

WEISS AND STEGER
As you know, Herr Telemann…

SEBASTIAN
… and I practice what I preach!

STEGER AND WEISS
Telemann could not be obtained…

SEBASTIAN
You were happy I said 'Yes.'

STEGER AND WEISS
Our enthusiasm waned.

SEBASTIAN
If you wanted second best…

STEGER AN WEISS
You behaved as if by right you reigned!
Admit it!

SEBASTIAN
No! Enough!

STEGER AND WEISS
Admit it!

SEBASTIAN
I've explained…

STEGER AND WEISS
Admit it!

SEBASTIAN
No!

STEGER AND WEISS
Admit it, here and now, you're at best flawed!

SEBASTIAN
I will admit I'm nothing more than a servant of God.

STEGER AND WEISS
NO! You are the servant to US!
Your place we'll not discuss!

(The toccata ends. The two authorities exeunt, struggling to exit first.

(Anna appears.)

ANNA
No yellow carnations?

SEBASTIAN
No. And no tenors! They threaten me, take away funds, want my music as vapid overtures for their pious pronunciamientos! *(They embrace.)* Ah my dearest Anna, I have so failed God. And I have so failed you.

ANNA
You are magnificent, so God will survive. And you haven't failed me, but tell me how you think you have.

SEBASTIAN
I stole you away from a happy life, singing in grand ducal courts, adored by all,… and I brought you to Leipzig. Our future is in peril; my work imprisons you in this nest of children, confusion, and aching sadness…

ANNA
… and joy, happiness, family, and music, <u>your</u> music that pleases me - and surely God - through almost every moment of the day.

SEBASTIAN
… "Almost"?

ANNA
On occasion, one of the children does something delightful, too.

SEBASTIAN
I don't deserve you, Anna.

ANNA
No. But what would you do without me?

SEBASTIAN
Stop having children. Those two said that's our trouble.

ANNA
Did they suggest how you might solve that? Brick me up in the cellar?

SEBASTIAN
That's exactly what they suggested.

ANNA
Ah! And knowing your delight in defiance, how did you respond?

SEBASTIAN
I said it would cause irreparable damage,… to my hands.

ANNA
Your hands?!

SEBASTIAN
My bare hands, tearing down the brick wall after one night without you.

ANNA
You'd let a whole night pass?

(He retrieves sheet music from a clavier. The Continuo takes his place for the Cantata 140's Third Movement. The Ensemble and members of the Chorale materialize to dance. Emanuel and Bernhard wander in as well.)

SEBASTIAN
Sing with me. I've used that facile *galant* style, all melody and sentiment, and with every note I fear God and hell. But it suits us.

ANNA, as "Soul"
I seek thee, my life.

SEBASTIAN, as “Jesus”
Behold me, thy life.

ANNA, “Soul”
I’m waiting with lamp ever burning.

(During the repetitions of phrases, Anna enjoys the dance, but Sebastian looks appalled. When Anna twirls away from him to join the dancers, he approaches the musicians anxiously, looking over their shoulders at their music. He sings his part with growing fury.)

SEBASTIAN, “Jesus”
The doors open wide to welcome my bride.

(Anna turns back, expecting to rejoin him, but sees Sebastian’s disgust. She moves toward him to finish singing.)

ANNA, “Soul”
The doors open wide to welcome Your bride.
Come Jesu!

SEBASTIAN, “Jesus”
Behold Me, I am thy salvation!

(On his last sung note, as the Ensemble continues, Sebastian grabs the sheet music from a music stand, then from another, reaches for the Continuo’s score but the Continuo protects it. Sebastian tears up the sheets he has, moves downstage deeply aggravated, his eyes to heaven, sinking to his knees as the music ends. Anna goes to embrace him.)

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 4: Thursday

(Occasional chords on a clavier drift down from upstairs.)

(At the top of the stairs, Wilhelm appears in the darkness wearing a grand dressing gown, carrying a lit candle in a holder. He makes his way downstairs, careful to be quiet, then goes directly to an upright container of walking sticks and canes. Reaching in, he retrieves a bottle of schnaps and places it on a nearby table with the candle holder. Stealthily going to a breakfront, he finds a glass and returns to the chair

next to the schnaps. He pulls the cork, sits grandly to imbibe – not in a gulp – but with a stately consuming, after which he fills the glass again. (Catharina comes downstairs. With dexterity, Wilhelm puts the bottle behind him, leans back, then hides the glass inside his dressing gown).

CATHARINA

Couldn't sleep? Pity. Today's rehearsal will be endless.

WILHELM

My nightmare is Papa discovering another lost Sunday-after-Trinity. My mind swells with counterpoint, impossible tessituras, and explodes!

CATHARINA

(*going to the breakfront for a glass, which she presents)*

Lucky are those that have something for the mind to do.

WILHELM

Mine always has too much to do. I can't stop it. … What?

CATHARINA

I see a cork on the table. No one should drink alone.

WILHELM

(Filling her glass) You are my truest friend, and I'll always be yours. (*He toasts her.*) But when I'm feeling particularly alone and you don't appear, these spirits for suffering silence are soothing.

CATHARINA

One can survive silence without schnaps.

WILHELM

Ah, but that's when silence lets our devils dance, as I know you know.

CATHARINA

My devils don't need schnaps. … You heard about Papa's rage?

WILHELM

He's becoming passé, composing his old logical mathematical constructions in the face of the new simple passion.

CATHARINA

He prefers to be passé, fearing God will turn away from him. Anna told him that his music was for this world, that God has other concerns. …

WILHELM

Complexity over simplicity, formula over feeling, complicated counterpoint over natural whimsy – that's the conflict of composing these days, a battle he doesn't want to fight.

CATHARINA

Poor Papa. *(They drink.)* … You come down here almost every night.

WILHELM

You've always slept as if waiting for an excuse to wake.

CATHARINA

I know. I've been that way since I heard my first child's cry,…. Yours!

WILHELM

Children's cries in the night are a mother's duty, not a daughter's.

CATHARINA

So they say. But how exhausting! Momma was dutiful unto her death. And now poor Anna, mind-numbing tasks all day, and at night….

WILHELM

Anna doesn't work so hard. She has you! She also presumes to be something that she's not: our "mother".

CATHARINA

… You brothers are still blinded by the shock of Momma's dying. Anna works! She has a vicious grief! And like you, a self-destroying fear of the future, hers for the two upstairs, for death if another child comes.

WILHELM

That's what she chose! Very different than mine, which I didn't choose.

CATHARINA

Very different. But no less painful. And with schnaps? Dangerous.

WILHELM

(Waving away the warning) Ahem, ahem. Would that you had been born male, Catharina. <u>You'd</u> be the eldest son. How lucky you are.

CATHARINA

"Lucky"? To be a woman with one single choice: to wait for a man to gaze upon me with favor? Or not? That's not lucky. That's cursed.

WILHELM
I'd love to have no choices! A day, an hour, not having to decide what to practice, what to compose, in hopes of being worthy of, … You say, "dangerous" about my schnaps. Tell me, dear: What other magic potion is there when facing the hopeless expectations of Papa -- of the world!?

CATHARINA
No magic needed: You play and compose for yourself, not Papa, or the world! You have your own unique, incomparable talent, Wilhelm. And: you can beguile, enthrall those who can help you. Poor Papa cannot.

WILHELM
You mean, be servile before those who think themselves my betters.

CATHARINA
You know what every artist has to do: make a graceful grovel to those who can advance your talent. Papa won't do it. He can't do it. That's why we're in Leipzig! But you can! You're brilliantly gifted, you know it. And you can decide to leave Leipzig, to actually find your own life! You can choose to go to: … Dresden! Dear God! What … luxury!

WILHELM
Remember this: Wherever I go, there'll always be a place for you.

(She kisses him, puts her glass down and goes upstairs. Wilhelm pours himself another glassful, as The Continuo takes his place at the harpsichord with a glass that Wilhelm fills, then clinks. "Schnaps," is sung to Sonata in B flat Major, 2nd Movement, BWV 1031.)

WILHELM
Here am I, Bach's eldest son,
wondering who else I'd be,
if the world wasn't waiting
for me to be as great as he.

Knowing I'm better than most
Doesn't help me at all.
I'm not compared to "most," but to
Papa, my downfall.
Hopeless, bleak and doomed, making my life impossible
Without my sacrament, my holy ritual,
of schnaps!

(He drinks, refills his and the Continuo's glass, then as he sings, returns the bottle to its hiding place.)

WILHELM (*continues singing*)
So I drink, condemned to see,
with no hope myself to be,
Except those brief glimpses that come at night,
before the light, I climb the height, to glimpse who might
quite rightfully be me!
Dear God, my plea:
Let me just be he.

(He toasts God, then hurries upstairs with his glass and candle holder.)

(In morning light, Gottfried comes downstairs, tapping on his C-triangle. The family's morning routine begins as shutters are thrown back and coffee is made in the shafts of bright early daylight.

(Gottfried goes over to a clavier, searches for and finds a C, strikes his triangle C and then the clavier C. Pleased, he sees Catharina's empty glass nearby, goes over to ping it with his triangle wand, and gets, say, an F-sharp. He returns to the clavier and finds that note. Triumphant, he rushes back and forth, playing the C, C, and the F-sharp.

(Elisabeth comes down, watching her brother.)

ELISABETH
What are you doing?

GOTTFRIED
I'm writing a canta-tata-tah!

ELISABETH
That's not a cantata. That's three notes!

GOTTFRIED
Wait. Pour something in the glass.

(Looking around to be sure they are alone, Elisabeth goes to the cane holder and retrieves the bottle of schnaps.)

ELISABETH
Quick! Use this, then we can drink it!

(Gottfried first pings the empty glass, then pours schnaps into it and pings it again, by chance getting a perfect A. He gives the bottle back to Elisabeth, pings the glass, then his triangle, and rushes to the clavier.

In that moment, a ROAR of the entire cast as they flow on from every direction, filling the room, vocalizing, tuning for rehearsal. Sebastian appears, looking exhausted, shouting instructions, the brothers shouting at each other, distributing new vocal scores, the women demanding theirs (of which there are none), setting up the musicians, the Ensemble calling for music stands, Picander pounding on the floor with his foot emphasizing beats, arguing loudly with the tenors of the Chorale.

(Caught with the bottle, Elisabeth fakes a faint flat down on top of it in the middle of the melee. Gottfried ignores everything, searching for his new note on the clavier. Bernhard impatiently lifts Elisabeth up, deposits her on the stairs, sees Gottfried's A-glass and downs it as the bottle begins to roll. Emanuel spots it, and puts it back in the cane holder.)

SEBASTIAN
Silence!! Every second we waste means more mistakes in the church!

(Quiet comes quickly in light of what they all have heard of Sebastian's strange fury the previous evening.

(Abruptly, Gottfried strikes his A on the harpsichord. This distracts from the tension and he gets considerable approbation from all as the Ensemble tunes to it. Sebastian is moved and gives the boy a hug. Then Anna proudly leads Gottfried away.)

SEBASTIAN
I've spent the night making this Fourth Movement pure, uncontaminated by anything but what might please God!

EMANUEL *(aside to Bernhard)*
Diving back into the comfort of harmonious quicksand.

SEBASTIAN
Who is speaking?!

EMANUEL
What I heard of the Third last night didn't seem so, … polluted.

SEBASTIAN
It was vile! If I had time to redo it, I'd burn it! No wonder composing is so difficult for you!

EMANUEL
No more difficult than hearing something new is for you – even when you composed it so beautifully yourself.

SEBASTIAN
It wasn't beautiful! It was pretty – the worst quality that music can have! And shallow – not worthy of passing notice! Your judgment is ….

ANNA
We must get to the church!

SEBASTIAN
Yes, we must. But this Movement involves only the Watchmen, so no female voices are needed, only you men who can sing tenor. And no trumpet, Herr Reiche. You may all go do whatever else you have to do.

(The women and basses express considerable disappointment, and begin to exit together with Reiche. But as the orchestration of the Fourth Movement of Cantata 140 begins, Anna turns and defiantly begins to dance, soon joined by Catharina and the rejected women of the Chorus, who won't let Reiche escape.

(Sebastian sees what Anna is doing and is not pleased. He takes no time to object, as long as they don't distract from his music. They try not to.)

THE MALE COMPANY (tenors)
Zion hears her watchmen's voices,
Their gladd'ning cry her soul rejoices.
The shadows of her night depart.
Her Friend comes in heavenly splendor,
With graceful strength and mercy tender,
The daystar riseth in her heart.

(With purpose, Anna matches Catharina with Reiche. Catharina uses the dance to best advantage, even when Krebs tries to cut in. Reiche loosens up, enjoys the dance and regards Catharina anew. She is surprised, then instantly determined.)

THE MALE COMPANY (tenors)
Now comes thy worthy One,
Lord Jesus, God's own Son.
Hosanna!
We follow all, to find that hall,
To our Lord's table we are called!

END OF ACT I

Intermission

ACT TWO

Scene 5: Friday

(Lights come up quickly. The Bachs and Continuo are in place, as is the Ensemble, the first violin clearly visible. The family is intensely copying, correcting, and assembling scores of the Cantata. The school bell rings, releasing student pandemonium. The family perseveres, singing "Friday" to the Violin Concerto in E-Major, III, "Allegro Assai," BWV 1042.

ALL
God be praised! It's finally Friday!
Two more days until it's Sunday!
Then endless pray'rs that make a brain hazy!
Eternal sermons that drive us crazy!

SEBASTIAN
A war between Doubt and Faith I'm fighting.
Creative madness, that's my life.
Daily trials, they come like lightning,
blasting me! My storms run rife!

ALL
God be praised! It's finally Friday!
Two more days until it's Sunday!
They make the service bland and so boring!
It brews an atmosphere filled with snoring!

BERNHARD
What hope of gladness can we have?
This melodic blight is no salve.
The only thing to save my mind
is getting out of here, I find!

ALL
God be praised! It's finally Friday!
Two more days until it's Sunday!
And we with music find the work taxing
the day that God is Himself relaxing!

CATHARINA
You'll go very soon, you'll see,
leaving us, not regretfully.
Here? A tiny possibility.
Yes, a chance at love for me!

ALL
God be praised! It's finally Friday!
Two more days until it's Sunday!
And after church, what's there to discover?
The day is done, leaving us to hover.

WILHELM
I'll posture and preen to mask my sham,
To show them what a Bach I am!

ANNA
You'll soon see a woman dare
To challenge what a wife must bear!

EMANUEL
How long will Bach tradition last?

WILHELM
That is the specter of my dreams

BERNHARD
Is he the peak? All glories past?

E/B/W
Our fate, it seems.

ALL
God be praised! It's Friday! Please end it!
This whole week? To Hell we'll send it!
We never question if we do God's will.
We don't risk that with these pages to fill!

(Anna goes upstairs as Elisabeth, as ever in red, rushes down in time to steal a bow. The family passes out sheet music to the Ensemble as they leave, discussing and arguing phrases. Elisabeth turns and runs into a man, until then unobserved amongst the flow of family and musicians. He is elegantly bewigged and luxuriously dressed. Bemused, he guides

the girl on her way and turns back to the sheet music that has been mistakenly thrust at him in the muddle.
(Emanuel is the first to recognize him and hurries to tell Sebastian, already working at the clavichord.)

EMANUEL

Papa! Herr Telemann is here!

SEBASTIAN

Well, go greet him. He's your godfather, a help in your future. Go! Go!

EMANUEL

Welcome, Herr Telemann. We, and all Leipzig are honored by your visit. *(He bows.)*

TELEMANN

Thank you, Emanuel. I see that my godson has grown in physique as well as grace. May I hope that your talent has flowered as well?

EMANUEL

I think it has. I've composed a minuet, quite complex, with hand-crossing, such as is used …

SEBASTIAN

His talents astound, Georg. But you must hear what Wilhelm is up to! The family's place in German music will have its seventh generation!

TELEMANN

Emanuel, if I may, I'll hear your minuet before I leave. And Sebastian, your place in music is assured, not only in Germany but the world.

SEBASTIAN

Oh Georg, you do blandishments so well. Wait! Where'd you get that page? What part's it for?

TELEMANN

The Continuo.

SEBASTIAN

Ach! Emanuel, take this and go find him/(her). (S)He's vital to the fifth movement!

(Emanuel exits. Telemann and Bach both look around, finding they are alone. They hug each other.)

SEBASTIAN
How kind of you to interrupt your eight-thaler quest to come see us!

TELEMANN
Am I interrupting what I gather is yet another cantata? From a quick glance: a bit of Vivaldi's melodic style, but in the *galant* mode, and that *recitativo* more a veiled erotic aria, with more operatic effects than have ever found their way to my Hamburg Opera House. Bravo, Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN
God revealed it all! Even that *galant* piffle which I'll surely excise, yes, even the erotic. If God leaves some operatic detritus about, I use it.

TELEMANN
You don't still believe you only stumble over your music in the ethos, that you're uninvolved in its creation? Sebastian, that defies logic.

SEBASTIAN
Logic isn't the only explanation of life, Georg. You might consider faith.

TELEMANN
Debating religion with logic is like howling into the blind whirlwinds of delusion. Tell me of your splendid wife. Is she here?

SEBASTIAN
She is, as splendid as ever. I'm incomplete, half-alive when I go play elsewhere without her. Of course, I've ruined her life, bringing her to Leipzig, away from singing at court, overwhelmed with children, her career quashed by their births and deaths. She's upstairs with our two youngest daughters, both of mortal expectation. I don't deserve her.

TELEMANN
I've heard she's very proud and happy to be Frau Bach. How lucky you are, Sebastian. And what of the Council and the Consistory?

SEBASTIAN
They regard me as a hired dancing pig, and would much prefer you.

TELEMANN
Well, they wouldn't pay me, would they?

SEBASTIAN
No, not if the piddling sum they pay me is any example. It's penury!

TELEMANN
They're hopeless. How long have we known each other, Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN
From before the beginning of anything else that matters.

TELEMANN
Without doubt, born at the same time, within shouting distance, both our careers careering around Saxony, then beyond …

SEBASTIAN
Georg, you've seen the world; I'm ill-travelled. And, you're older.

TELEMANN
At our age, four years don't count. We so seldom see each other, but our tandem musical progress allows a kind of otherworldly intimacy between us. You know me in ways no one else can. It allows me to tell you things that ….

SEBASTIAN
You know, they try to make us rivals. Our rapport so disappoints them.

TELEMANN
Yes, people rush up and think if they insult you, they complement me, and visa-versa I'm sure … You've heard about my wife, Maria.

SEBASTIAN
Rumor and gossip, both of which I ignore.

TELEMANN
What Maria does is neither, alas. Her gambling losses will make me a pauper, and her rapacious lust will make me a fool. No one man, surely not a mere determined spouse, can satisfy her hourly need for satisfaction. Yet during all her years of spread-legged concupiscence, she's borne nine children that she dares assure me - are mine!

SEBASTIAN
Georg, eight thalers for a subscription will guarantee you're no pauper, and your music prevents your ever being regarded as a fool.

TELEMANN
You're very kind, Sebastian, but when she lets me hear her loud, shameless rutting in the next room, I regard myself the fool.

SEBASTIAN
That's appalling.

TELEMANN
It is. I'm not sure what to do.

SEBASTIAN
Why not drag her into the street by her hair and leave her to rut there, close to the appropriate gutter?

TELEMANN
Oh, they'd love that in Hamburg! But she'd get all the sympathy. The public, the court, even my own circle all deduce from her lascivious need that there must be something wrong with me. I assure you -- as any number of ladies at court will do, I perform the requirements nobly.

SEBASTIAN
Ahh, Hamburg: always the preferred cesspool for wanton proclivities. But you don't deserve her, Georg.

TELEMANN
No, but there she is! We're so alike, Sebastian. Music is our escape and defense, a cherished isolation even though lost in a chattering world.

SEBASTIAN
"Isolation"? Not in this rampage I call a home! What do you do for quiet, Georg, lock the nine children in the cellar?

TELEMANN
The servants control them, and Sebastian, you thrive on chaos.

SEBASTIAN
Not at all. Chaos finds me out. "Servants." We have one, on occasion.

TELEMANN
Sebastian, you have to make some money! If you'll write an opera, I'll put it on in Hamburg before the Duke. Once produced, other houses will pick it up. Opera is very lucrative!

SEBASTIAN
I don’t hear opera. It’s too new. I’m too old.

TELEMANN
Nonsense! Your *Saint John’s Passion* is more opera than oratorio! Handel has written twenty-some operas so far, and he was born the same year you were! I’ve written, oh I can’t keep track, at least thirty -- and he and I have servants!

SEBASTIAN
I can’t hear my music in an opera house. I need a church!

(*They sing a duet, “Opera,” to the Concerto for Violin and Oboe in D Minor, II, “Adagio,” BWV 1060.)*

TELEMANN
I will give you a church
like you have never seen before!

(*In the style of baroque theatre, a drop falls behind the duo in front of the set. Pictured is a highly fashioned extravaganza of worship with no Christian obligation, influenced by Mt. Olympus rather than Golgotha.)*

SEBASTIAN
You will give me a church
like I have never seen before?
Then I'll need heaven, too…

TELEMANN
Then you'll have heaven, too.

(Clouds with rainbows on stiff flats drop down from above and are shoved on from the wings.)

SEBASTIAN
Then I'll need heaven,
and a church like I have never seen!

TELEMANN
In op'ra, there is always more,
in op'ra you'll get ev'rything you want, and more.

SEBASTIAN
More? Then I want angels
who will sing the glory of God.
I want a church, and heaven,
and angels singing of the glory of God.

TELEMANN
Whatever you desire.
Angels and more,
and anything you want,
a church, and heaven,
singing of the glory of God.
No more Bible stories,
Bible stories are boring.

SEBASTIAN
What? No Bible stories?

(From the clouds, female members of the Chorus, costumed as naiads in bizarre wigs and revealing baroque finery, enter dancing, contributing to the spectacles that Telemann describes.)

TELEMANN
Yes, no more Bible stories,
Bible stories are boring,
but the Greek gods and goddesses,
the Greek gods!

SEBASTIAN
They are not boring!
You said I'd have a church
like I have never seen, and heaven,
angels singing of the glory of God!

TELEMANN
They all commit the best debauches,
and seductions and *incest*.
The people love the lust of orgies,
they love them best,… and Bacchanalias!

SEBASTIAN
God forbid my claim to fame
would ever be salacious arias.

TELEMANN
I have the perfect name:
The "Bach"-analias!
They put the Borgias all to shame.

SEBASTIAN
Well, my response to that is no!

TELEMANN
Your answer's no? Then tell me why not?

SEBASTIAN
I cannot compose orgies,
and I would never write
an op'ra celebrating lust,
on that I am resigned.

TELEMANN
Well, I think you've never tried.

SEBASTIAN
And Luther is my guide!

TELEMANN
There's nothing I can say to change your mind?

SEBASTIAN
Free from Greek gods,
in Leipzig I'll remain.

TELEMANN
In Leipzig you'll remain?

SEBASTIAN
Nothing you can say
will ever change my mind,
so here I will remain.

TELEMANN
There's no temptation good enough? You'll remain?
So here in Leipzig you'll remain.
The arias you could write for Leda and her swan!
Beating wings! Feathers! Hot dawn!

SEBASTIAN
Fornicating waterfowl singing a refrain
is not my domain.
I think I'll abstain.

TELEMANN
And we should be thankful.
Zeus was so prolific,
he straddled ev'ryone!

SEBASTIAN
If I were to be that prolific,
ev’ryone would think I'd gone insane.

TELEMANN
Ah, you will go insane
remaining where you are.

SEBASTIAN
Ah, yes, I would go insane
composing opera.

TELEMANN
Sebastian, I can say I know for certain
you're unhappy where you are.

SEBASTIAN
I know for certain
I belong in the church,
the church for me is heaven upon earth,
the angels are the voices singing in my choir.

TELEMANN
I know what you desire.
Thus: Antiope cavorting…

SEBASTIAN
Oh, not another Greek.

TELEMANN
…rutting with her satyr in the stars,
or better yet, Danae…

SEBASTIAN
My way
is hard for you to grasp…

TELEMANN
…who's flooded by, and gasping
in her golden rain…

SEBASTIAN
…and how can I explain
it to you…

TELEMANN
…and later drowns!
Death, with lovely music,
death, and pain!

(Being a baroque opera, a Deus ex Machina descends by winch from the flies, somewhat confused by what on Earth he's supposed to do.)

SEBASTIAN
…but here until my dying breath,
I remain.
I know you think me odd,
but op'ra must be yours,
it really must be yours.

TELEMANN
Yes, you stay in the church,
I'll stay rich and famous,
and we both can thank God!

SEBASTIAN
Thank God!

(Each thanks his Own as the Deus ascends, the naiads dance away, the clouds disperse, and the drop rises, revealing the family and copyists working at their jobs. Telemann finds Emanuel, gets him to a clavier and listens to his minuet. Sebastian joins Anna as she is working at the harpsichord with Wilhelm.)

SEBASTIAN
What's the matter?

ANNA
Wilhelm thinks Picador's lyric for the fifth movement is all romance.

WILHELM
I have no objection, but it's quite suggestive, and far from worship.

PICANDER
(appearing on cue from nowhere before Bach can explode)
"Suggestive"? Nonsense! Wilhelm, you know if I wish to write romance, I can do so with my toes. Sing it! You'll see. I'm righteously portraying the holy unity of the bridegroom and the "chosen bride" - the believer - with just a soupçon of basic human lust -- penetrating it!

(Catharina and Reiche come through the entrance, speaking intimately and laughing together, the rest of the world lost to them.)

ANNA
Wilhelm! Sing it to them! Go on.

(*As the Fifth Movement of Cantata 140 begins, Wilhelm gestures for a loveseat to be brought, allowing the couple to sit downstage to watch with their backs to the audience. He then gestures for the oboe to come play alongside of him as he sings.)*

WILHELM
So come thou unto me,
My fair and chosen bride,
Our faithful vows within eternity abide
Within my heart of hearts.

Art thou secure by ties that naught can sever,
Where I may cherish thee forever.
Forget beloved, ev'ry care.
Away with pain and grief and sadness.
For better or for worse to share
Our lives in love and joy and gladness.

(Lights go dark except for one allowing the silhouette of Catharina and Reiche as they lean toward each other to kiss.)

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 6: Saturday

(The blackout is a quick one, during which the Ensemble and Chorale crowd on stage. The lights come up as their parts are passed out by the older family members. They answer questions and settle confusions.)

SEBASTIAN

We'll rehearse only the chorales and orchestral pieces. They allow us no time in Thomaskirche for more …

EMANUEL

The final movement, the seventh, is a chorale, marked there in the corner, make sure you have …

ENSEMBLE MEMBER

Where's the sixth movement?

SEBASTIAN

No worry of yours, another duet.

ANNA

Our boys and I will copy the Seventh while you rehearse.

BERNHARD

We're not your boys …

(A slight reaction from the company, but they've heard it before.)

SEBASTIAN

Hurry now, I'll be in the north balcony in five minutes …

COMPANY MEMBERS

Five minutes!?

SEBASTIAN

Then six! It's just across the square! Shall I carry you piggy-back?

(SEBASTIAN leads the musicians out, leaving Anna alone with Wilhelm, Emanuel, and Bernhard, who purposefully ignore her as they start copying. Anna watches them a moment.)

ANNA

How long will you continue to punish me for your mother's death?

BERNHARD
As long as you keep trying to take her place.

ANNA
No one could ever do that, Bernhard. I know that and would never try.

BERNHARD
Then what are you doing here, Anna?

ANNA
Trying to make your father – and our family – happy.

WILHELM
But you see, you're not our family. You're just trying to be a Bach.

ANNA
I'm very proud to be a Bach's wife, Wilhelm. But I know who I am.

WILHELM
Yes, his second wife, sixteen years younger, young flesh taken when he was in mourning, and in crisis about his age.

ANNA
He asked me to be his wife. And so I am! None of you, with your misplaced fury at me, can ever change that – nor can you bring your mother back. You waste your time and your life being angry with that death, or trying to involve me with it. Death happens any day at all, often without reason, I can assure you.

EMANUEL
Yes, and every day, Anna -- perhaps no fault of yours -- but we see you collide with our memory of her. You're unaware when you do the things she used to do -- making his coffee his special way, lifting the pounce shaker together, those barely-noticed touches between you and Papa – but we notice them. Every time, it … sears us. When you first appeared in our lives, we were too little to object. But every time you taught us our clavier exercises, each note was like jamming a spoonful of bitterness down our throats. I suppose you couldn't have known that.

ANNA
Of course I couldn't. No one would tell me. Your father saw your cold silence to me and believed it would pass, as it should have! I believed I could overcome you with honest love. And mine for you was honest. …

ANNA (continuing)
But now, I've come to see that I'm lost to you. Instead, I'll do my best to stay away from you, without your father noticing. I'd never try to win him away from you, even if I could. But do not ever again refer to this … desolation between us in public. If you do, I'll reveal to all how you've treated me - for the entire decade of my marriage. The battle will be drawn. Then let the world decide whatever it will about us.

(She picks up her pages, ink pot, pounce shaker and quills, and moves to the stairs. At the first step, she turns back to them.)

Why do you suppose that Catharina, who knew your mother longer than any of you, who suffered as much at her death as you, came to accept me, love me so fully?

WILHELM
She was alone as a daughter, and suddenly she had an older sister.

BERNHARD
Another role we won't accept.

EMANUEL
Anna, you are our mother's replacement. When you were put in that role, we had to despise you for it.

ANNA
Emanuel, you've always seen things so clearly. If you knew that faultless blame, couldn't you forgive me for it?

EMANUEL
Perhaps. But reason is no match for emotion, … which I often regret.

(Anna nods sadly and goes up the stairs to the nursery. The three sons go back to work at their three desks. The Continuo and the Viola play the Concerto in D Minor, II, "Adagio," BWV 974, to which the sons sing.)

EMANUEL
Maybe our wrath is odd,
blaming her for that, done by God.

WILHELM
She whom we wound by spitting in her face.
Her love for us is such a waste.

BERNHARD
Ah, don't be deceived! She had her purpose:
a life of fame perceived!

EMANUEL
She's had more death than fame!

BERNHARD
You can call it what you will,
she is to blame.
Just by joining us, she kills
a second time: Our Mother!

TRIO
EMANUEL & WILHELM: Bernhard! Brother!
BERNHARD: She is to blame. Yes, when Anna came. She's to blame!

EMANUEL
You’re hysterical.

WILHELM
You make her more than what she was: poor!
And therefore, a bore. Ignore her.

EMANUEL
Don't strain to condemn her.

TRIO
BERNHARD: Do not be deceived, she had her purpose, a life of fame!
EMANUEL: I am not deceived. She's had more death than fame!
BERNHARD: Call it what you will, she deserves spitting in her face!
EMANUEL: Don't strain to condemn her, don’t strain to condemn her!
WILHELM: And we wound her by spitting in her face.

EMANUEL
Maybe our wrath is odd,
blaming her for what was done by God.

WILHELM
Loving us is such a waste.

EMANUEL
She who loves with such grace.

(Each of the brothers shakes sand or pounce on his page, then blows it off, rises and adds his sheet music to the stack on the harpsichord. They exit separately, closing shutters on their way.
(The lighting changes, indicating the end of the day.
(Gottfried, in pajamas, rushes downstairs to the bookcase and finds a story book. Anna with sheet music and Elisabeth in a red shift, follow.)

GOTTFRIED

I found it!

ANNA

Be careful! It was a dear gift from Herr Zimmerman when you were born. Why do we read this strange Cinderella story over and over?

GOTTFRIED

The pictures! In the black lines, the shapes, I see so many colors!

ELISABETH

And the evil step-sisters get their eyes pecked out by the birds!

ANNA

Lieschen, you used to like Little Red Riding Hood so much.

ELISABETH

All that happens to her is the wolf doesn't eat her. Cinderella becomes a princess! I'm Cinderella now. In my new red Christmas gown, I'll enter the ballroom, everyone bowing, the prince sees me …

GOTTFRIED

It's gold.

ELISABETH

What?

GOTTFRIED

Cinderella's dress is gold. The prince says so. It says he's "dazzled."

ELISABETH

… Mama, I have to have a gold dress!

ANNA

Maybe your fairy godmother will turn all your red rags into gold.

ELISABETH
You don't think I believe in that! Wait, I think, in the back of my closet… *(She runs back upstairs and off.)* That angel costume I had to wear once!

GOTTFRIED
Momma, may I please take the book, look at the pictures?

ANNA
Yes, but shall we try to read some words?

GOTTFRIED
…Thank you, Momma, but words aren't for me. We know that. But I see colors, fill in the spaces in the empty pictures, green, yellow,… like notes of music do, filling stillness. They make me … happy.

(He hurries upstairs and off. Anna sees the stack of sheet music on the harpsichord and after checking the page numbers, adds hers to them. (She sits at the harpsichord and studies them.
(As the Ensemble take their places, Sebastian enters, returning from rehearsal in a usual fury. He collapses into a settee. Anna joins him.)

ANNA
How did it go?

SEBASTIAN
It'll never be right! I'll never hear the music the way God intended it!

ANNA
You mean, the way God, in His generosity, allows you to compose it?

SEBASTIAN
Without God, I'd compose nothing. Don't mock my faith, Anna!

ANNA
I challenge it! I know who composes your music. Every note is yours!

SEBASTIAN
You'd have me create the music without acknowledging God?

ANNA
Not at all! But Sebastian, you are God's creation, … as we all are. Is it beyond your faith that God gives us life to see what we can do with it? That He might be so delighted with what you've done with yours?

SEBASTIAN
I could not do what I do without God!

ANNA
God is with you! Believe that. But Sebastian, God isn't a holy timidity needing acclaim for what a man may do, to assuage His petty need for applause. You've created your music, all of it! Let your faith accept that God is greatly pleased with you, His humble servant.

SEBASTIAN
You ask me to shred the basic conviction of my life!

ANNA
It's an old conviction, out of place in a life you make glorious with every note you write. Listen to your music – as God does! Bring your old "conviction" forward into this rushing tide of <u>your</u> creative originality.

SEBASTIAN
I hold fast to God with my music. I'm fighting to keep God in any life that's left to me.

ANNA
What if God's not the struggle? What if your fight is with the narrow minds of Leipzig? Sebastian, your instincts are so keen, I fear too keen. For instance, musical change is happening. You deny it out of a misbegotten fear of losing God. But your music is grappling with the future and finding it.

SEBASTIAN
No! I know what I do! The *galant* has too much of the base human passions in it for me. It doesn't work!

ANNA
Oh? I think I can say all your human passions - base or otherwise - are … magnificent! You use passion in your music with such intelligence. Instinct and intelligence! A perfect blend for passion!

SEBASTIAN
Anna, my musical view point has been in Bach family bones back to Buxtehude. I see "passion" – if at all! -- from a safe, analytic, almost a mathematical distance. This romantic *galant* draws passions from within, from the guts, from the … well. I can't do that.

ANNA
I have reason to be absolutely certain you can draw "passion from the … well." And besides that, you've just composed the proof! I just copied it! Come, now you sing this movement with me. You'll see, "it suits us." *(As the oboe leads into the 6th Movement of Cantata 140, Anna draws Sebastian into dancing until they sing.)*

ANNA (as "Soul")
My Friend is mine,

SEBASTIAN (as "Jesus")
And I am thine!

BOTH
True lovers ne'er are parted.

ANNA
Now I with thee, and thou with me,

SEBASTIAN
In flowery field will wander.

BOTH
In rapture, united forever to be!

(They finish dancing to the oboe solo in a low dip, that tests Bach's back.)

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 7: Sunday

(The shutters are thrown open. In early morning light, both Ensemble and Chorale flood into the house for musical corrections and coffee. Sebastian orders everyone about, the sons mark up music, Gottlieb is rushing about playing his triangle, and Anna, Catharina and the women are distributing coffee, singing a short reprise of a section of "Leipzig.")

ANNA, CATHARINA, FEMALE CHORALE
(*singing*)
Leipzig! Sunday begins in Leipzig,
which the men cannot commence, the day won't flow
until we make them their coffee!
Could they survive without us? NO!

SEBASTIAN
Have your coffee, then go directly to the church! They start at 7 even if there's an earthquake.

WILHELM
The mind being already dead at this abysmal hour.

BERNHARD
Then four hours of prayer. If Rector Weiss discovers some new sin, he adds a half-hour to his sermon.

EMANUEL
But after that, we're done with the cantata! *(Cheers from all.)* Papa, my exams are tomorrow. I need the time to study.

SEBASTIAN
You're excused. Bernhard sings well-enough for both of you. Ach, I left my sheets upstairs!

(He hurries up as, dramatically, Elisabeth appears at the top of the stairs, wearing gold taffeta. Her father reacts appropriately with a bow, as attention and plaudits grow. She takes her time coming downstairs.

(Reiche appears at the front entrance. He gestures to Gottfried. Reiche hands the boy an envelope, points toward Catharina, and departs. Gottfried delivers the envelope to Catharina, who opens it, unnoticed by anyone else, they being involved in the hum of coffee conversation.

(She cries out, letting the letter fall, covering her eyes with her hand. In silence, Anna picks the letter up, glancing at it. She reaches out to Catharina who allows her embrace but then gently steps away. The strings of the Ensemble take up their instruments, Krebs among them unobserved. The rest of the company exits, on their way to church. Standing alone, Catharina abruptly laughs. She sings "Fool" to the "Air" from the Orchestral Suite Number 3 in G Minor, BWV 1068.)

CATHARINA
Why was I such a fool
To think that I could believe
That I had a chance to find love and happiness?
Fool! I was a fool.
He writes he can't conceive
any "duty" beyond his horn, nothing less!

CATHARINA *(continues singing)*
Could I overcome
his cowardice to love?
Yes, but I'd rather waste my life alone.
Now I see my fate, dictated from above:

Days without end, without joy, heart of stone,
filled with family splint'ring,
passion ever wint'ring.
But e'en so, my life will be mine! Be mine, alone.

Yes, I was a fool
To think life was fair,
That God or fate offered love and happiness.
Yes, I was a fool!
Fate? God? A likely pair
To confuse our living and prolong our death.

Can I overcome
Life's hopelessness with love?
Yes, if I enjoy living life while numb.
Now I see my "fate," dictated from above:

Days without end, without joy, heart of stone,
Filled with family splint'ring,
Passion ever wint'ring,
But e'en so, my life will be mine, be mine alone.

(She puts on a wrap and hurries to go to church. The strings go to their usual places, as Krebs moves forward and offers Catharina his arm. She stares at him a moment, then takes his arm.)

CATHARINA
My dear, dear Ludwig, let me tell you of your future: You will marry a lovely young girl who is only 12 right now.

KREBS
I disagree. I've always been attracted to older women.

CATHARINA
Ludwig, never dare think that is a complement.

(They hurry to church as Sebastian rushes down the stairs. Anna, ready for church, meets him.)

ANNA

I need to tell you something.

SEBASTIAN

Now? God will wait but not the Rector.

ANNA

Now, so you can pray for me. I cannot. I wanted to tell you this last night, but you -- distracted me.

SEBASTIAN

That was entirely your doing, turning our holy duet into … a great reverberating overture to all that followed!

ANNA

An overture for "passions from the, … well!" Blame it on the *galant* that you composed. … I'm with child.

SEBASTIAN

You seem … happy.

ANNA

I'm very happy!

SEBASTIAN

In spite of …

ANNA

In spite of God and death ever lurking? Yes, yes, I'm deeply happy, … and once again, hopelessly so filled with hope!

SEBASTIAN

My dearest love, you are magnificent.

ANNA

No, no, that's how I describe you. Come. We must hurry.

(They rush away to church as the Ensemble and Chorale take their places. Emanuel starts to go upstairs, but hears the triangle. He finds Gottfried under the dining room table. Amused, Emanuel pulls him out.)

EMANUEL
So this is how you miss the sermon!

GOTTFRIED
Yes! Let's be lost again together! You play your minuet. I'll play my canta-ta-tata!

(They join hands and come downstage to the audience.)

EMANUEL
That week with the Bachs will end with the final notes of the Seventh Movement of Cantata 140, soon to be performed before the always indifferent congregation in the Thomaskirche. But even after such a week of family bitterness, family grief, financial precipice, infant mortality, destructive authorities, what slowly has emerged is -- the art.

GOTTFRIED
The Cantata-ta-ta!

EMANUEL
Yes! And after that desperate, exhilarating week, the family went on, each with a singular future.

(Elisabeth rushes to center stage in her very gold outfit. Each member of the family follows in turn.)

ELISABETH
I <u>never</u> learned to sing, and I played every instrument so badly that I seldom was asked to play at all. I married one of my father's best, most handsome students, a very nice organist. And I lived happily ever after!

GOTTFRIED
I saw <u>all</u> the colors! I heard all the music! Every note. The family never stopped making music! I didn't live "<u>ever</u> after," but I was so happy living until I was 39!

BERNHARD
Obviously I was never happy. I was hired as an organist, but gambled myself into ruin. I ran off to law school, was almost happy, but caught a mortal fever at 24, a useless, perverse death - just like my mother's.

EMANUEL

I fled Leipzig sooner than expected, and became what history calls me: the most "successful" child of Bach. True, if not based on skill and talent; my brother Wilhelm had all that, every creative talent needed to succeed my father. I was simply more pragmatic. And luckier. I became chief harpsichordist in Frederick the Great's royal court, whether in Potsdam, Berlin or Sanssouci, stayed for 30 years, then succeeded my godfather, Herr Telemann in Hamburg, composing, performing – all very grand, impressive -- but never at the level that my brilliant, … overwhelming father might appreciate.

WILHELM

"Every creative talent to succeed my father"? Ahem ahem, nonsense. Of course I gained renown as a composer, an organist, having learned my father's techniques – and tricks. But I wouldn't tolerate supervision by inferiors! I left various stifling positions, ending up giving music lessons in Berlin, selling my father's musical scores to avoid starving.

CATHARINA

I made myself useful in my shrinking world, fulfilling my fate as a spinster. This included being humiliatingly dependent on my mother, then on my brother Wilhelm who took me in, then on charity. But those few moments of happiness I had that week, I kept alive until the end.

ANNA

This child was christened Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach! He lived for 62 years, a wonderful composer, becoming the Concert Master at the Court of Bückeburg! Sebastian and I had 13 children in all, seven of whom died in infancy, including those two upstairs. That was my life: birth, death, singing occasionally, endlessly copying Sebastian's music. After he died, the Council eased out of paying me an adequate pension. I lived and died in penury. But no matter: I had loved, and was loved by: a profoundly "magnificent" man. That was enough.

(The Chorale is behind the family, the Ensemble in place. Sebastian enters. Taking Anna's hand, he turns to the audience.)

SEBASTIAN

When I died, they dropped me in a hole in the church yard, but never marked it! I was forgotten, as was my music, hardly performed for eighty years! Then that fine fellow Mendelssohn found - and in 1829, put on - my *Mathew Passion* in Berlin. So the world "discovered" me, full-blown! Io, io! You should have seen the Council and the Consistory

SEBASTIAN *(continuing)*
digging up the churchyard looking for my bones, desperately wanting to attract my enthusiasts to Leipzig! They found some bones, but are they mine? Who knows? Even so, they're laid out grandly under a slab in the Thomaskirche. So by all means, go gaze upon it! … And most bizarre of all? Some maligned scholars proclaim: that I was the "*galant* bridge from the Baroque to the Romantic composers!" What perfect irony! But all that really matters is: You have my music, whatever wasn't lost.
I thank God for my privilege to compose, … for giving me my family, each of whom I loved so dearly, they who put up with my driven, yet exhilarating - and ultimately divine – purpose! SO: LET US SING!

(He joins in the 7th Movement of Cantata 140 with the company.)

ALL
Glory now to Thee be given,
On earth as in the highest heaven:
With lute and harp in sweetest tone.
All of pearl each dazzling portal,
Where we shall join the song immortal
Of Saints and Angels 'round Thy throne.

No eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard
The joy we know. Our praises flow, *io, io!*
To God *in dulce jubilo!*

END