

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

Working, as of 1/1/2024

CHARACTERS

THE FAMILY

(ages are historical, but should not limit casting)

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 appreciate 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, struggling against a life that seems fated for her: spinster. She is an intimate friend to Anna, her stepmother, only seven years older than she. Prematurely wise, she observes the family with acuity. (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, pragmatic, bemused and cool, he is 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 late first wife, deeply conflicted in his fraught adolescence about his role in the family and his future as a Bach. (Tenor)

Gottfried, 7, Anna Magdalena's first surviving child, mentally hindered and physically impaired, yet musically adroit as he confronts a life in a complex 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 music)

Regina, 3, and Christiana, 8 months. Neither are 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, Bach’s 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 (and perhaps conducts) the musical numbers from one or another clavier, the numerous keyboard instruments on stage.

Copyists, Students, Singers, and Musicians of Leipzig, who make up 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 fine enhancement.

PRODUCTION

Diversity in casting is a given, equal in importance to very fine singing and acting.

The presentation of this musical in San Francisco in February, 2023, was a work-in-progress “concert” version -- by necessity shortened -- with a cast of 8, many double-castings, and a piano. (For the video, see: <https://vimeo.com/811047563/d6a1494f89>)

The full script that follows calls for a “Chorale.” It may be a group of either 4 or 8 or even 12 singing actors, equally divided in each of the four choral parts. Some must take on various acting roles, and all will be dancing to the manifold choreography that Bach’s music suggests.

The “Ensemble” can be a quintet, or up to a baroque orchestra of any size desired, that includes at least 2 violins, 1 viola, 1 cello, 1 double bass, 2 recorders/flutes, 1 oboe, 1 bassoon, and 1 trumpet, plus The Continuo (who plays multiple claviers).

8 Bach family members appear on stage, 2 of whom are children (one who doesn’t do music). The other named characters add another 7 parts (each to be played by a member of the Chorale). If the Chorale numbers 8, a total cast of 16 multi-talented performers (or more, if the Chorale is larger) will serve. They and the musicians of the Ensemble are on and off-stage throughout, very much part of the action.

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. Therefore social interaction with all of Leipzig seldom involved invitations or even a knock on the door. The apartment is a public space through which all of Leipzig seems to ebb and flow.

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 single set need not be historically exact. 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. Whatever might have been elegant has long-since 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 the space are a variety of claviers: harpsichord, clavichord, 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

Skill on a musical instrument is not required. Even so, should an actor have had instrumental training, that skill should be used with alacrity. Most useful: Sebastian and Emanuel being familiar with a keyboard. If a trumpet virtuoso is to be had, use her/him. Otherwise, a recording will do. 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, Entrée, Gavotte, Minuet, Passepied, Polonaise, Scherzo and Gigue. The Choreographer may apply any and all.

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

(Words in red are recent edits in lyrics to be applied to the score.)

(Scene 1: Monday)

(As the audience enters, the set is in dawn darkness. When the houselights dim, Catharina comes down the stairs with a candle and a book and crosses to the kitchen, where she sits to read.

(The Continuo enters from the receiving room with his score and candle, crosses the stage to the kitchen. He greets Catharina, and lights kitchen candles from his own, indicating the audience. Catharina comes down center with her book, as the Continuo and Ensemble take their places in an extended space up-stage.)

CATHARINA

Welcome, to Leipzig, 1731, and to the wild consternation of that week with the Bachs. The reason for it? An instant, infuriating need for a new cantata. Creating it became a crucial time for the family, each of us abruptly realizing all too much, about ourselves, about the others, about what our lives were to be. You'll see. That Monday morning, we had no idea. The week began with chores, music, ... hopes, and joys.

(Gottfried, aged 7, speech-impaired, oddly uncoordinated, lurches down the stairs in his bedclothes into Catharina's arms.)

CATHARINA

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!

CATHARINA

You're not alone, for here I am. And we're here together in Leipzig!
(Scoffs) Well yes: we're all lost in Leipzig...

(The Ensemble begins "Leipzig!" to the 3rd Movement of the Brandenburg Concerto #4. The family enters, singing, lighting fires, harmonizing with each other, and most vital, instigating a rapport with the audience.)

WILHELM

Leipzig is a boring and suppressing place!

BERNHARD

Leipzig, a town one leaves in greatest haste.

EMANUEL

No breathing space!

SEBASTIAN

Leipzig is our burden and God's will.

WILHELM

Leipzig? Only music makes it possible.

THE MEN

ONLY MUSIC 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 all **make our music!**
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, **its** human form.
God is the great creative storm!

THE FAMILY

"Vox est anima verbi."
"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!

(The family reacts with delight at Gottfried's contributions.)

SEBASTIAN

God creates the music for me to find.
The 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.

SEBASTIAN

And 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

You're 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!

(At the audience's applause, Elisabeth hurries to center and happily curtsies. The rest of the family begin their daily routines.)

SEBASTIAN

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

WILHELM

The people I met in Halle expected me to be another you. When I wasn't, I became nothing but a Bach wart.

SEBASTIAN

The first rule of creating art: Accept that the world is never grateful for what you do. We do our music in spite of the world. The music director at the Sophienkirche in Dresden died. It'll take strategy

EMANUEL

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 dare 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-seventh Sunday after Trinity, and....

WILHELM

So what?! *(Heading upstairs)* *Mein Gott*, this place! I have to rush to compose something brilliant before this school's fifty urchins awake. Why do we live in a school? Will the Council ever give us a house? "The 27th Sunday!" Emanuel, you'll be, oh such a thrilling lawyer!

EMANUEL

No lawyer will I be, dear brother. Beware the second son's rising to the top, like sweet rich cream.

WILHELM

Or like pond scum! *(He exits)*

SEBASTIAN

What's all this about the twenty-seventh Sunday...?

EMANUEL

Easter came early this year, so there's an extra Sunday after Trinity, the first time in decades. You never composed a cantata for it.

SEBASTIAN

Nonsense! I did cycles of cantatas for every Sunday of the liturgical year!

CATHARINA

Papa, we remember! (*The family groans.*) We grew up copying them -- three hundred cantatas! -- never any time for anything else!

SEBASTIAN

God gave me that task. You suddenly wanted to read about the Greeks.

CATHARINA

I still do! You know that, so I can....

EMANUEL

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

CATHARINA

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

SEBASTIAN

Without God, I'll go mad! I'll do it quickly. I'll need Picander. Emanuel, on your way, call in on him, tell him to come now. (*With relief, Emanuel exits.*) Bernhard, bring me the Lutheran lectionary. I wonder if it even has a selection for the 27th,... In my composing room! Hurry, before school starts. (*Bernhard goes.*) A cantata will be easy now.

ANNA

"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, then Bernhard coming down with the lectionary, and Anna with an infant in swaddling as Gottfried and Elisabeth fight over the triangle. 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 for pandemonium, Papa.

(O.S., a thunderous bell tolls, releasing the O.S. explosion of fifty students heard through the walls, their roars filling the Bach apartment. Bernhard blasts another riff on his trumpet. The family loudly continues their cantata objections until Sebastian slowly turns toward the audience. All noise fades. He comes 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.

SEBASTIAN *(continuing)*
 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?

(During applause, Bernhard re-enters with the lectionary, guffawing.)

BERNHARD
 Papa, the lectionary choice of scripture for the 27th Sunday is:
 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's possible to do everything.

BERNHARD
 This'll be a challenge: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like ten virgins, who
 took up their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom." *Mein Gott!*
 Ten virgins for one man?

SEBASTIAN *(playing chords.)*
 ... Some of us had fifteen.

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

SEBASTIAN
 That's where I lost count... *(He plays a choral phrase of Cantata 140.)*

BERNHARD
 That's ... very good, Papa! *(Sings the phrase in "la,la,la," Sebastian
 accompanying, until Bernhard works in:)* "... with twenty-six virgins!"

SEBASTIAN

Ah, Bernhard, you're blessed with a sublime voice! Forget the trumpet.

BERNHARD

But you say the only male singers with a chance of a career are castrati.

SEBASTIAN

Well,...

BERNHARD

No!

SEBASTIAN

No. Read some more Mathew.

BERNHARD (*summarizing*)

"... Five of the virgins were foolish and five were wise. The foolish took no oil with them. At midnight, a cry: 'The bridegroom is coming!'... The foolish virgins hurried away to buy oil. But the bridegroom came and went in with the five wise virgins."

(*Sebastian has been accompanying the reading with increasing fervor.*)
Papa, that's magnificent! (*He "la-la's" the last phrases.*)

SEBASTIAN

If you'd practice your 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. You surely won't get much music from whoever else Anna drops.

SEBASTIAN

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

BERNHARD

Papa, our Mama died when I was five. She'll never be replaced, - as you so quickly did with Anna. How could you have forgotten Mama so easily? Even God must have been appalled.

(*Sebastian is enraged. Anna and Catharina come downstairs in time to hear the last line.*)

SEBASTIAN

You don't know of what you speak!

(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, Picander-the-Poet has arrived! Sebastian, we'll have a fine time with the virgins! Emanuel told me all, so I read the Mathew: One great plod, isn't it? BUT: there's old Nicolai's Lutheran hymn based on the same text! That gets us past the Consistory's censorious damnation! The lyric has a banal rhyme scheme that I, Picander, will make thrilling, even voluptuous! You, Sebastian, will mangle my words to fit your music as usual, which I suffer gladly in order for you to give us something sublime!

SEBASTIAN

So Picander, you don't mind doing another cantata, do you?

PICANDER

We all "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 there. Sebastian, we need more tenors!

(Sebastian strikes an A on a clavier, then conducts as he sings along with the First Movement of Cantata 140. The usual restlessness of the Chorale during the instrumental lead-in casually leads to dancing. Throughout the 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!

ALL (*continuing*)
 Arise and take your lamps, arise!
 Hallelujah!
 Yourselves prepare now to marry!
 He bids you to His wedding feast!

(The company disperses during applause, leaving Catharina at center.)

CATHARINA

The next day, Tuesday, is a “copy day.” Papa composes, we try to make exact, neat copies for the singers and instrumentalists, and often fail. The family falls back into the old cantata routine that we’d hoped we’d never have to experience again.

(Scene 2: Tuesday)

(The stage gives way to daylight and the bustle of cantata manufacture. Anna and Catharina work in the kitchen. Sebastian sits at a clavier correcting scores with stacks of manuscript before him. On stage-left, Emanuel and Bernhard are busy copying at a table down stage, lining manuscript paper with rastrums. Gottfried shows off his triangle; Elisabeth enjoys being adored by the grown-ups. O.S. upstairs, a clavier is being played. Ludwig Krebs steals into the kitchen.)

ANNA

Come in, Ludwig.

LUDWIG

I seem to have a great need... of water.

CATHARINA

You do. This is your third cup this morning.

LUDWIG

Oh. Um, is there a limit?

CATHARINA

Life is about limits, Ludwig. If you make a blot copying, no more water.

BERNHARD

Ah, the joy of family 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 admit things that everyone else buries: that we're born to hopelessness, that music is no escape, that no one cares a fig about Papa's music, that he's regarded as a musical sausage maker.

EMANUEL

It's hardly sausage. He brilliantly composes the past, but refuses to consider the future.

BERNHARD

I also know that you're as miserable as I. So my "suffering" enjoys your company -- even though your façade of wit and calm is such a fraud.

EMANUEL

Fraud? No. Unlike you, I allow reason rather than feelings to clarify the present. I can see what my triumphs will be when I flee these restricting walls. In your indulgent suffering, you just see the walls.

BERNHARD

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

EMANUEL

Yes, and I'll get it, because one fine day, he'll want mine!

ANNA

Boys! Not now. Do your work.

BERNHARD

We're not your concern, Anna. You have enough to do with your own defective children.

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

EMANUEL

(He gives none.) Bernhard, what a useless thing to say.

SEBASTIAN

All come up here! Bar 48! You're all making the same mistake! Hurry!

(Anna comes down stage. The Continuo accompanies her as she sings "A Quiet Rage," to the Harpichord 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.
 I look, I look for logic,
 hopeless if your faith's in God!
 If God's involved, why is cruelty allowed?
 Help me! 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, who'd been listening to Anna 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, I always wear red!

ZIMMERMAN

No, you were so lovely in 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, flattery in any color only encourages her.

ZIMMERMAN

And she loves me for it.

ANNA

Is flattery your weapon of choice on females of all ages?

ZIMMERMAN

Yes, but it's such a velvet weapon. For instance, you still have the most beautiful voice 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.

ANNA

There's coffee in the kitchen, Herr Zimmerman.

ZIMMERMAN

As good as mine?

ANNA(*a proclamation*)

Any coffee made by human hands is bilge water 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. Emanuel listens in.*)
I came to warn you. 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

I'm the proprietor of the best coffee house in Leipzig.

SEBASTIAN

What does grotesque authority want of me now?

ZIMMERMAN

The usual. You've been in residence for eight years, so you must give more credit for your work to Leipzig, with less expenditure to create it. They ask why you aren't teaching in the school, which you were brought here to do.

SEBASTIAN

They starve me of musicians, of time! Neither God nor I have ever – ever! – heard the music as I've written it! I've no time to teach here, and I pay for those who take my place with money I don't have! What do they want? An angel?

ZIMMERMAN

Not quite: Telemann is mentioned.

SEBASTIAN

They are swine. He's my dearest friend, godfather to Emanuel! They'll remind me 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's 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 latest batch of work, ... 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

He always has been ... a quality I, too, possess in my hangnail.

ZIMMERMAN

Sebastian, you need exposure to the world! ... If you'll open yourself to new music, compose for a new age, the world will respond! Music is changing everywhere else. You've said so yourself, in Italy, in France. And the opera!

EMANUEL

Papa, he's right. The *galant* style is simplifying the very nature....

SEBASTIAN

"*Galant*"?! It's a momentary craze, nothing but romance, melody.

ZIMMERMAN

Romance and melody are very popular!

SEBASTIAN

I dabble with *galant*, but it's a shallow amusement. Opera? It took a wrong turn after Monteverdi.

EMANUEL

But new music is finding a greater simplicity, allowing passions to

SEBASTIAN

My purpose is more than simple, raw emotion. That's *galant*!

EMANUEL

Papa, Caldara, Scarlatti, even 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 so provincial, unable to comprehend you as a composer, only as a performer, of which they think there are many.

ANNA

Sebastian, ask them about our having a house at last. Be diplomatic. Don't lose your temper....

SEBASTIAN

With a garden, for you to grow your yellow carnations! I'm always diplomatic, calm! Perhaps God has given them insight to understand what I'm doing here. Or, perhaps He's testing me, to see how much I can take of their blinkered minds, how deep is my faith, what consequences I must suffer for not giving into rage.... But I'll demand more tenors!

EMANUEL

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

SEBASTIAN

Not now, Emanuel. Bernhard, here's the Second Movement...

EMANUEL

It's a minuet with hand-crossing, like Couperin uses in his ...

SEBASTIAN

I've no time for Couperin imitations, Emanuel.

EMANUEL

I don't imitate!

SEBASTIAN

Bernhard, it's a *recitativ* for tenor

BERNHARD

Can Picander be serious? He has Jesus Christ, portrayed 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 mating! And most important of all: It rhymes! Perhaps you haven't noticed, but your father, in spite of himself, reveals 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. He draws her into a dance.)

BERNHARD

He comes, He comes, the Bridegroom comes,
O Zion's daughters, hear His voice!

To lead you to your mother's dwelling, and there you shall rejoice!
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.)

(As Catharina comes down-center, Gottfried Reich plays the trumpet solo from the Concerto in D for Trumpet and Organ, "Allegro," BWV 972.

CATHARINA

About this third day, Wednesday, I shan't comment, for that trumpet allegro began a cruel, lightning-strike occasion for me. It had nothing to do with the Cantata, the family, or anything else – only about a chance to realize more life than the times offered me, as you shall see.

(Scene 3: Wednesday)

(Lights come up on Gottfried Reiche tearing through the solo on trumpet. The family is listening, Sebastian sitting in admiring concentration.)

(A group of Leipzig women have been allowed to watch from the doorway. When Reiche ends, 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, the women follow me, no matter ...

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 flees.)*

EMANUEL

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

SEBASTIAN

I'm copying that myself. I composed a duet, ... in *galant* style, so we'll see, won't we? Copy the Fourth Movement, the Chorale.

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. 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, the latter at the organ.)

SEBASTIAN

Councilor Steger, Rector Weiss. 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 self-control over one's carnal appetites.

SEBASTIAN

Mein Herren, the size of my family is a matter between my wife and me. Your repulsive innuendo is beyond your duties! Start with those!

STEGER

I speak for the Leipzig City Council!

WEISS

I speak for the Leipzig Lutheran Consistory!

SEBASTIAN

Therefore: speak!

STEGER

Your music confuses the congregation with its complexity.

SEBASTIAN

How can you tell? They never listen to it.

WEISS

Music's purpose in church is to inspire anticipation of -- The Sermon!

STEGER

All that music of yours: so wasteful! People want a simple tune, something easy, praising Leipzig, our "Athens on the Pleisse!"

WEISS

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

STEGER

Greed? How many collections do you take each Sunday? What about those thirty huts built over the pews for a huge fee so rich families won't have to smell the riff-raff? That, Rector Weiss, is grasping greed!

SEBASTIAN

Wait! Music in church has a single purpose: to encourage those who listen to consider the glory of God.

WEISS

Yes, but your music is so loud! We hear 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 too costly! For Sunday, you must reduce the choir, the musicians, everything. Otherwise: Away!

SEBASTIAN

God puts music out on the walls, in the air. When I hear it, I copy it down and present it. It's loud to overcome the roar of your congregation gossiping, calling across the nave to each other, haw-hawing -- all during your prayers! But *mein herrin*, when sung, the music is -- divine! Do you ever sing?

WEISS

Never. I preach!

STEGER

Singing is like a pathetic howling of digestive 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! Wouldn't it be a miracle if we could sing together, some great, mighty, ...

(On the word, the organ bursts forth with the Toccata from BWV 565. Sebastian is not surprised. But when Weiss and Steger 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

Your **release is forming!**

WEISS

Bad melody's the key!

STEGER

And your polyphony **confuses me.**

SEBASTIAN

I'm not surprised.

STEGER

Your blaring chaos offends the flock!

WEISS AND STEGER

With 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"? **But God's 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

I'm better than second best...

STEGER AN WEISS

You behaved as if by right you reigned!

SEBASTIAN

No! Enough!

STEGER AND WEISS

Admit it!

SEBASTIAN

I've explained...

STEGER AND WEISS

Admit it!

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

SEBASTIAN

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

STEGER AND WEISS

NO! You are the servant to US!

Your **faith** we'll not discuss!

(The toccata ends. The two authorities exeunt. Anna enters.)

ANNA

No yellow carnations?

SEBASTIAN

No. And no tenors! They threaten to take away funds, want music as vapid overtures for their pious blather! *(They embrace.)* Ah my dearest Anna, I am failing God. And I have so failed you and the children.

ANNA

Sebastian, you are magnificent, and God will survive. How have you failed the children?

SEBASTIAN

They're flailing with their futures, I can't seem to help them, Wilhelm and Emanuel, where will they go? Bernhard doesn't even care. Catharina wants to teach Greek and the only way for her to do that in the face of all male faculties is to become a nun. And you, worst of all.

ANNA

Catharina demands more than the world allows her. We must help her try. And you haven't failed me, but do 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, the cruelty of my older sons...

ANNA

... and joy, happiness, yes: family, and music, your music that pleases me -- and surely God -- almost every moment of the day.

SEBASTIAN

... “Almost”?

ANNA

On occasion, one of the children does something delightful, too. And your sons are my challenge, soon to be resolved.

SEBASTIAN

No matter how much music I give them, they’ll never comprehend what I’m doing. I must leave, even with no place to go. To allow these fools to ruin God’s music is blasphemy. I’ll finish this cantata, and we’ll go.

ANNA

Where? We have eight children. Sebastian, you always say: “We do our music in spite of the world.” Look at all you’ve composed here.

SEBASTIAN

In spite of how they try to destroy it! I’ll find a place for us. You don’t deserve to be in this trap, Anna. And I don’t deserve you.

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

How did you know? 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?

(They kiss, after which he retrieves sheet music from a clavier. The Continuo and the sons come in for the Cantata 140's Third Movement. The Ensemble take their places and the Chorale prepare to dance.)

SEBASTIAN

Sing with me. I've composed this Movement in that facile *galant* style, all melody and romantic pish. 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 increasingly upset.)

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

(When Anna twirls away to join the dancers, he approaches the musicians anxiously, looking over their shoulders at their music. He sings his part with growing fury, ridiculing it. (Anna turns back, expecting to rejoin him, but sees Sebastian's disgust. She moves toward him to finish singing, exulting in the music.)

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 dances, 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, moves toward the stairs in a rage. Anna goes to him but he pushes through her, tearing up music. The dance breaks up and in the

confusion, Anna follows Sebastian up the stairs and off, with the Ensemble and Choral exiting.

(Catharina watches as they all go, then addresses the audience.)

CATHARINA

Music has many hells – and they come to musicians in myriad ways. My brilliant brother Wilhelm was anointed with his Hell at birth, and sadly, he shaped it into his own destructive monument....

(Scene 4: Thursday)

(Occasional O.S. chords on a clavier drift down from upstairs. Catharina crosses to the shadows and watches as, at the top of the stairs, Wilhelm appears wearing a grand dressing gown, carrying a lit candle in a holder. Coming downstairs, he goes to a container of walking sticks and canes, retrieves a bottle of schnaps and places it on a nearby table with the candle holder. At a breakfront, he finds a glass and returns to the schnaps. He pulls the cork, pours, and sits grandly to imbibe.)

(Catharina goes to the breakfront for a glass.)

CATHARINA

Can't sleep? Pity. Thursday is rehearsal day, remember? Exhausting.

WILHELM

I had a nightmare: Papa discovered another Sunday-after-Trinity. My mind swelled up with impossible counterpoint and exploded!

CATHARINA

(They drink.) ... I hear you coming down here almost every night.

WILHELM

Ha! 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

That's a man's rule who's never done the duty.

WILHELM

Would that you had been born male, Catharina. You'd be the eldest son. How lucky you are.

CATHARINA

“Lucky”? To be a woman with the single choice of waiting for a man to gaze upon me with favor? Or not? That's not lucky. That's cursed.... I've never told you this, but many nights, I've packed a satchel, dressed as a man, and stood at my bedroom door, ready to run away, to work in a hospital, sing in a chorus, teach Greek history! My hand was on the latch. My greatest sadness is, I didn't go.

WILHELM

I knew you wanted to teach, told you why it was impossible. But I never knew that you,... Why didn't you tell me? I'd have helped you.

CATHARINA

The fantasy could live and grow in my dark room, but outside of it, . the light was too bright, I saw too much. But I still hope to teach, somehow, perhaps abroad,... another fantasy perhaps.

WILHELM

I wonder if I'd have gone with you.... (*They drink*) So tell me, dear: How else do I dissolve the weight of the hopeless expectations of Papa, and the world, except with schnaps?

CATHARINA

Play and compose for yourself, Wilhelm, not for Papa, nor the world! You have your own incomparable talent. And: you can beguile, enthrall those who can help you. Poor Papa is terrible at it.

WILHELM

You mean, I must be servile to those who think themselves my betters.

CATHARINA

You know what every artist has to do: make the graceful grovel to those who can advance their talent. Papa won't do it. He can't! That's why we're here in Leipzig. But dear Wilhelm, you can. You're brilliantly gifted, you know it. You can leave Leipzig, to 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 glass as The Continuo takes his place at the harpsichord with a glass. Wilhelm fills it; they clink. "Schnaps," is sung to the 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, **I make this** 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 – **here is the key: there's** 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, **hear** 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 A-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 an A, strikes his triangle A and then the clavier A. 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 A, A and the F-sharp. (Elisabeth comes down the stairs, 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.

(Elisabeth goes to the cane holder and retrieves the bottle of schnaps.)

ELISABETH

Quick! Use this, then we can drink it!

(Gottfried pours schnaps into it and pings it again, getting a perfect A. He gives the bottle back to Elisabeth, and rushes to the clavier.

(In that moment, a ROAR of the entire company as they flow on, vocalizing, tuning for rehearsal. Sebastian appears, looking exhausted, shouting instructions, the brothers distributing vocal scores, Picander pounding on the floor, arguing loudly with the tenors of the Chorale.)

SEBASTIAN

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

(Gottfried strikes his A. He gets considerable approbation from all as the Ensemble tunes to it. Sebastian is moved and gives the boy a hug.)

SEBASTIAN

I've spent the night making this Fourth Movement pure, uncontaminated by the vagaries of current whims.

EMANUEL *(aside to Bernhard)*

Diving back into the quicksand of counterpoint.

SEBASTIAN

Who is speaking?!

EMANUEL

What I heard last night didn't seem so, ... polluted.

SEBASTIAN

If I had time, 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 yourself compose it so beautifully.

SEBASTIAN

It wasn't beautiful! It was pretty – Your judgment is

ANNA

We must rehearse this Movement and get to the church!

SEBASTIAN

Yes, we must. This Movement involves only the Watchmen, no female voices, only the men who can sing tenor. And no trumpet, Herr Reiche.

(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 members of the Chorus, who don't let Reiche escape.)

TENORS

Zion hears her watchmen's voices,
 Their glad'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 carefully uses the dance to best advantage. Reiche enjoys the dance and regards Catharina anew. She is surprised, then determined.)

TENORS *(continuing)*

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 ONE

(INTERMISSION)

ACT TWO

(Scene 5: FRIDAY)

(O.S., the school bell rings, releasing student pandemonium. Lights come up quickly. The Bachs and Continuo are in place, as is the Ensemble, the first violin clearly visible. The family is intensely correcting and assembling scores of the Cantata. Catharina comes to center.)

CATHARINA

It's Friday!

(They sing "Friday" to the Violin Concerto in E-Major, III, 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

My war between Doubt and Faith I'm fighting.
Creative madness, that's my life.
Daily trials, they come like lightning,
blasting me! **T**he 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 **dare not** 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. She 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.)

(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. My godson has grown in physique as well as grace! I presume 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, I'll hear your minuet before I leave. And Sebastian, your place in music is assured, not only in Germany but the world.

SEBASTIAN

Emmanuel, Herr Telemann and I must talk. *(Thus dismissed, Emmanuel retreats.)* How kind of you to interrupt your eight-thaler quest to come see us!

TELEMANN

Yet another cantata? From a quick glance, it has a bit of Vivaldi's melodic style, but in the *galant* mode, and that *recitativo* is more an erotic aria, like what's heard in my Opera House in Hamburg. Bravo, Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN

That *galant* is piffle which I'll surely excise. What you call "erotic"? If God leaves some operatic detritus about, I use it.

TELEMANN

You still believe you stumble over music lying about in the ethos, you being 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 howling into the whirlwinds of delusion. Tell me of your splendid wife. Is she here?

SEBASTIAN

She is, as splendid as ever. Of course, I've ruined her life, bringing her to Leipzig, away from singing at court. She's upstairs with our two youngest daughters, alas, both mortally ill. 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 their 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

Four years don't count. We so seldom see each other, but our tandem prowess means you know me in ways no one else can. It allows me to tell you things that,... well, 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 lechery, 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? 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. Everyone deduces 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 nobly.

SEBASTIAN

You don't deserve her, Georg.

TELEMANN

No, but there she is! As you'll agree, music is our escape, where we can be alone in the wailing world.

SEBASTIAN

"Alone"? 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

You have to make some money! Write an opera! I'll put it on in Hamburg before the Duke. 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, your exact age, has written twenty-some operas so far! 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,
With that 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!

(From the side 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

Whatever you desire. Angels and more,
and anything you want, a church, and heaven,
singing of the glory of God.
But not Bible stories, Bible stories are boring.

SEBASTIAN

What? No Bible stories?

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

Greek gods 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?
But think of what you could create:
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
But you must be grateful:
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, **but** 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

...**she** 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

No! God descends, not sordid Greeks!
Don't you see? I know you think me odd,
but op'ra must be yours,
it really must be yours.

TELEMANN

Yes, you stay in **a** church,
I'll stay rich and famous,
and we both can...

SEBASTIAN AND TELEMANN

Thank God!

(They bow to each other 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

No objection, but it's quite suggestive, and far from worship.

PICANDER

(appearing on cue from nowhere)

"Suggestive"? Nonsense! 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 – the Church -- and the "chosen bride" -- the believer -- with just a soupçon of basic human lust pen-e-trat-ing 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. 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. Once done, Reiche exits as Catharina stands in the light and the loveseat is drawn away.)

CATHARINA

Forgive my joy! I must calm down! ... Saturday comes,... a day of dreadful tension due to musical hopes breaking down, and raw relationships entangling and shattering...

(Scene 6: Saturday)

(The Ensemble and Chorale crowd on stage. Stress is obvious as the lights come up. Their parts are passed out by family members who answer questions and try to settle confusions.)

SEBASTIAN

We'll rehearse only the chorales and orchestral pieces, not solos or duets. No time allowed in the Thomaskirche for more ...

WILHELM

The final movement, the seventh, is a chorale, marked there...

EMANUEL

Where's the sixth movement?

SEBASTIAN

No worry, I'm writing another duet without any of your...

ANNA

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

BERNHARD

We're not your boys. When will you learn that?

SEBASTIAN

Hurry now, we have to be in the north balcony in five minutes ...

(SEBASTIAN leads the musicians out, leaving Anna alone with Wilhelm, Emanuel, and Bernhard.)

ANNA

How long will you go on punishing 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! I met your father when I was the soprano soloist at the royal court of Prince Leopold in Kothen. Your father was the Kapellmeister. My life was full, complex and joyous, just as it has been since I married your father, although – different.

WILHELM

Yes, you were 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 at that death, or trying to involve me in it. Death happens any day at all -- often with no reason, I assure you.

EMANUEL

Yes, and every day, Anna, we see you collide with our memory of her. You're unaware when you do things -- those barely-noticed touches, private looks, between you and Papa: We see them. And every time, it ... sears us. When you first appeared in our lives, we were too little to object. But every time you sat with us, teaching 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. I believed I could overcome your aversion to me with honest love. And mine for you was honest. ... But I've come to see that I'm lost to you. So now, I'll do my best to stay away from you, to avoid your memories.... But you stay away from me as well. And no more snide, nasty remarks in public! If you do that, instead letting it pass, I'll respond in kind, and I assure you that you'll come out the worst for it. I fight hard, deep and long! Then let the world decide whatever it will about us! *(She moves toward the kitchen, but then turns back to them.)* Why do you suppose that Catharina, who suffered as much at your mother's death as you, came to accept me, love me so fully?

WILHELM

She was alone, a daughter in a household of men, and suddenly she had an older sister.

BERNHARD

Another role we won't accept.

EMANUEL

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

ANNA

If you understood that faultless blame, Emanuel, couldn't you forgive me for it?

EMANUEL

Perhaps. But reason is no match for emotion, a terrible truth I strive to overcome.... But I failed with you.

(Anna nods sadly and goes into the dark kitchen, puts her sheets on the table and sits, then lets her head fall on her arms. The Continuo and the Viola play the Concerto in D Minor, II, 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 adds his sheet music to the stack on the harpsichord. They exit separately.)

(Gottfried, in pajamas, rushes downstairs to the bookcase and finds a story book. Elisabeth in a red shift, follows. Anna hears them and with her music sheets, goes in to join them.)

GOTTFRIED

I found it!

ANNA

Be careful, Gottfried. That was a dear gift from Herr Zimmerman when you were born. Why do you like this strange Cinderella story so much?

GOTTFRIED

The pictures! In the black lines, the white spaces, I see the 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. But Cinderella becomes a princess! So: 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. Remember? The prince says so.

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, to look at the pictures?

ANNA

Yes, but let's try to read some of the words.

GOTTFRIED

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

ANNA

Oh, Gottfried, they make me happy, too...

GOTTFRIED

They do?

ANNA

Yes, very happy.... What if we buy you some paints!

GOTTFRIED

Oh, Mama! That would be... What color is happy, I wonder?!

(He hurries upstairs and off. Anna sits at the harpsichord and studies the sheet music she's been carrying.

(As the Ensemble take their places, Sebastian enters, returning from rehearsal in a usual fury. He storms about.)

ANNA

How did it go?

SEBASTIAN

The music will never be the way God intended it, or I can stand it! I'm going to write letters to six royal courts, asking for a position, almost anything, so that God's music might be heard once before I die!

ANNA

You mean, the music that God, in His generosity, allows you to find under a rock?

SEBASTIAN

Don't mock my faith, Anna!

ANNA

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

SEBASTIAN

It's God's creation! He allows me to hear it!

ANNA

No! You are God's creation, ... as are we all. And what if God gives us life to see what we can do with it? He might be so delighted with what you've done with yours.

SEBASTIAN

I could not do what I do without God!

ANNA

All right: Then God is with you! And he brought you to Leipzig! Believe that. But Sebastian, he has no need for your credit or applause. Those are human yearnings. If you've created cascades of glorious music, you mightt 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, the kind of myth we grow up blindly obeying, one of so many we must shatter! It's out of place in a creative life that you make glorious. Listen to your music – as God surely does, probably with great joy, and if you'll allow, even a little pride!

SEBASTIAN

That's pure vanity! God can turn away from us from such....

ANNA

Oh yes! God can turn away! For no reason! (*He's startled, then embraces her.*) And what do we do, my dearest love, if that happens? We go on, Sebastian, doing what we do, trying to do it better, always ready to let God find us again. But we can't be powerless when He seems to be, what? -- indifferent. Whoever knows what in this sad world

ANNA (*continuing*)

God is up to? Maybe He's shaking you into a new awareness. He knows your instincts are honed to a keen edge, ... and that musical change is happening, *galant* or romantic or whatever anyone chooses to call it. You deny it out of a misbegotten fear of losing God. But you're struggling with the future and -- in spite of yourself -- you're finding it.

SEBASTIAN

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

ANNA

Oh? I can say your base human passions work quite well!

SEBASTIAN

You're doing it again: You're shifting the mood!

ANNA

I only do it when the mood needs shifting.

SEBASTIAN

Anna, my musical instincts have been in Bach family bones back to Buxtehude. If I see "passion" – if at all! – I see it out there, from an analytic, even numerical distance. This romantic *galant* draws passions from within, from the guts, from the Well. I don't do that.

ANNA

Nonsense! You draw "passion from the well" – musically and otherwise – any time you want! You prove it upstairs and you prove it with what you've just composed! 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 an embrace. They dance 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. Even so, they make a mad dash up the stairs.)

(Catharina comes on to see them disappear, then turns to the audience as the lights change to early morning.)

CATHARINA

And finally,... finally Sunday comes, a day on which even God rests. But at the Bachs? Utter pandemonium!

(Scene 7: Sunday)

(Both Ensemble and Chorale flood into the house for musical corrections and coffee. Sebastian orders everyone about, the sons trade pages, Gottlieb is rushing about playing his triangle, and Anna, Catharina and the women are distributing coffee, singing a short reprise 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'll start at 7 even in an earthquake.

WILHELM

At this abysmal hour, the mind is dead.

BERNHARD

Four hours of prayer! If Rector Weiss discovers a new sin, he adds an hour to his sermon.

EMANUEL

But after that, we're done with the cantata! *(Cheers from all.)*

SEBASTIAN

Ach, I left my sheets upstairs!

(He hurries up as Elisabeth appears at the top of the stairs, wearing gold taffeta. Sebastian reacts with a respectful bow, as attention grows.)

(At the same time, 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 as they all exit on their way to the church. Anna waits in the entrance for Sebastian to join her.)

(Catharina cries out, letting the letter fall, covering her eyes with her hand. The strings of the Ensemble take up their instruments, Krebs among them unobserved, Anna watching from the entrance.)

(Standing alone, Catharina 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!

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.

CATHARINA *(continues singing)*

Must we women strive to
Melt men's terror of commitment?
Yes! They rush from the responsibilities of love!
So my waste of life will cling to memories' treacheries!

Days without end, without joy, long decline,
Filled with family splint'ring,
With passion ever wint'ring,
And now I know, my life will be mine, be mine ... alone.

(She puts on a wrap 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. You go on. I'll follow.

(Krebs goes and passes Anna, who goes to Catharina and embraces her. Catharina moves into the kitchen as Sebastian rushes down the stairs.)

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 pulsating overture to what followed!

ANNA

An overture for “passions from the well!” -- Sebastian, 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.

ANNA

Come. We must hurry.

(They rush away to church. Catharina starts to go upstairs, but hears the triangle. She finds Gottfried under the dining room table.)

CATHARINA

So this is how you miss the sermon!

GOTTFRIED

Yes! It works! Let’s be lost together again, Catharina, lost in Leipzig!

CATHARINA

Yes, yes, we’ll be lost in Leipzig...

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

CATHARINA

That week with the Bachs will end with 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 bitterness, grief, financial precipice, what slowly has emerged is -- the profound and eternal music.

GOTTFRIED

The Cantata-ta-ta!

CATHARINA

Yes! But then, the family went on, each one with a singular future.

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

ELISABETH

I never 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 all the colors! I heard all the music! Every note. Sometimes I saw the music with the colors, in the sky! The family never stopped making music! I didn't live "ever after," but I was so happy, alive 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. It's true, but not based on any "genius." My brother Wilhelm had all that, every creative talent needed to succeed my father. I was simply more realistic. And luckier. I became chief harpsichordist in Frederick the Great's royal court, whether in Potsdam, Berlin or Sanssouci, stayed for 30 years, then as fate would have it, I succeeded my godfather, Herr Telemann in Hamburg, composing, performing - all very grand, impressive -- but never, never at the level that my brilliant, ... overwhelming father might appreciate.

WILHELM

"Every creative talent to succeed my father"? Nonsense. Of course I gained a certain 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 to tone-deaf old ladies in Berlin, selling my father's musical scores to avoid starving, and... to provide for my schnaps.

CATHARINA

I fought against the ever-shrinking world of a spinster, but lost, never escaping my family's "splintering." This meant being humiliatingly dependent on my mother, then on my dear brother Wilhelm, then on charity. But those few days of joy I had that week, were alive in me until the end, ... although I did not ever again listen to the trumpet.

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

With her beside me, we stayed in Leipzig, to do our work "in spite of the world." I composed some of my best work, never giving up or giving in, finding what happiness we could. When I died in 1750, they dropped me in a hole in the church yard, but never marked it! I was quickly forgotten, as was my music, scarcely performed for eighty years! Then that fine fellow Mendelssohn found - and in 1829, put on - my *Mathew Passion* in Berlin. And the world "discovered" me, full-blown! Io, io!

You should have seen the Council and the Consistory digging up the churchyard looking for my bones, desperately wanting to attract my enthusiasts to Leipzig! They found some bones, laid out now grandly under a slab in the Thomaskirche. But are they mine? Who knows? ... And most bizarre of all? Some well-meaning scholars have proclaimed that I was the "*galant* bridge from the Baroque to the Romantic composers!"

But all that really matters is: You have the 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!

NOW: 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 júbilo!*

END

