rentine Renaissance, in the generation preceding Leonardo, was itself initiated by the towering figure of Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa, the second most influential figure in the Church after the Pope himself. Leonardo was a very active public figure in the politics of his day, in association with the likes of Cesare Borgia, Niccolò Machiavelli, and others. Yes, towards the end of his long life, Leonardo came under suspicion as the Inquisition came into power in Italy, and he abandoned Italy for France, where he spent his last three years; but even there, he was an honored guest at the court of King Francis I, and lobbied incessantly for his proposed canal projects, armament improvements, and other inventions and projects conceived in his fertile mind—exactly as he had in his previous career in Milan and Florence.

In fact, if there is any "secret" embedded in Leonardo, take the famous *Mona Lisa,* where the wild natural landscape behind her is not so "wild": it is, in fact, in process of being man-formed, and represents the layout of one of Leonardo's favorite water projects, the dam and canal constructions aimed at the diversion of the River Arno, which was to have given Florence access to the sea. The project had been started and stopped in fits, over more than two decades.

When it comes to the central role played in Brown's novel by what he calls Leonardo's "sacred geometry," which, supposedly, Leonardo was forced to furtively embed into his notebook studies using mirror writing and codes, and hide in his works of art—guess what? In 1509, Leonardo published a *book* on the topic, together with his collaborator, Luca Pacioli, called *The Divine Proportion*. It's all there: everything that appears in Brown's fervid mind as "revelations" about the "secrets" of Leonardo's geometric construction of the *Virtruvian Man* (the figure inscribed, spread-eagle, in a circle); the not-so-"magical" Fibonacci Number Series; and the design of Golden Mean proportions, so integrally related to the construction of the pentagram (the figure coveted by lovers of esoteric "secrets").

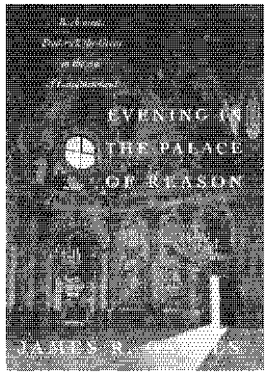
In a March 2003 interview, Brown promised that his character Robert Langdon would, in future books (a *Da Vinci Code* sequel is expected soon), be looking at "numerology cults," among which he includes the Pythagoreans:

"Aha, the Kabbalists! Yes, they are fascinating—as are the Pythagoreans. Without a doubt, Langdon will be exploring these more closely in the future. . . . [*The Da Vinci Code*] also drops a hint as to the identity of another ultrasecret numerology sect that fascinates me, but I can't reveal their name here without ruining much of the surprise of the next book."

So much for the pits of Hollywood and the *New York Times* Bestseller List. Luckily, the LaRouche Youth Movement is demonstrating daily the possibility of re-experiencing, from the inside, the actual cultural tradition that created modern civilization.

—Judy Hodgkiss

A Not-So-Mysterious Train Wreck



Evening in the Palace of Reason: Bach Meets Frederick the Great in the Age of Enlightenment
by James R. Gaines
New York, Harper Collins, 2005
353 pages, hardbound, $23.95

In 1747, the 62-year old Johann Sebastian Bach visited Prussia's 35-year old King Frederick II (the Great), and extemporized in three voices upon a fascinating thematic subject proferred by the King. Upon returning to Leipzig, Bach developed the same thematic subject into a full six-voice canon. Within two months, he sent to Frederick his *Musical Offering,* which included the original three-voice extemporization; the full six-voice realization; ten intervening puzzle canons; and a dessert for the King, a flute sonata based upon the preceding work. Bach had not only plumbed the depths of the musical idea, but he had taken the trouble to display in the ten canons how his mind reworked the material. He offered this musical gift as an appropriate pedagogy for one who was to rule.

This suggestive historical event offers the too rare opportunity of examining the power of a master of ideas, displayed in his intervention upon a young, powerful ruler. This reviewer, several years ago, was drawn to this same subject, when I examined Bach's explicitly pedagogical canons as marvelously crafted epistemological weapons to organize and recruit the mind and heart of a talented but emotionally backward ruler ("Thinking Through Singing: The Strategic Significance of J.S. Bach's 'A Musical Offering,'" *Fidelio,* Winter 2000). So, by way of disclosure: I do not claim to be, nor would wish to be, a neutral commentator here.

Mr. Gaines chose a rather different path. In his book, Bach and Frederick II were strangers in the night, exchanging glances, but nothing more. Bach inserted angry, moralizing messages into his *Musical Offering,* with no regard as to whether the King heard them; meanwhile, Frederick simply could not listen to someone of his father's generation. To this end, Gaines spares no sophistical trick, nor forswears outright invention. If he needs Frederick to rebuke Bach for not producing on the spot a six-voice realization of the musical subject, and needs Bach to fume over the insult, then he simply invents it out of whole cloth. *Let the reader beware.*

In short, this work is a tortured travelogue ending in a train wreck. Bach and Frederick are doomed to crash, and the

222 pages prior to the crash are merely reconstructions after the fact to prove that it was inevitable. Suppose that Gaines were to treat his own work in the same fashion that he treated the work of Bach and Frederick. First, he would have the reader imagine Gaines as a young boy, fascinated with a toy train set—or, actually, with the elaborate possibilities for train wrecks. Then, a quick reference to an aborted musical career and to success as a wordsmith for the gossipy *People* magazine, and *voilà!*—Gaines' life and his book have been explained.

However, although Gaines may deserve such treatment, this level of explanation doesn't account for the singular curiosity here—that Gaines has ventured into waters in which he has no demonstrated capacity to swim. How did he get there? Did someone throw him in? This odd scene—comparable to, say, choosing Barbara Walters to cover the 1787 Constitutional Convention—may well provide some clinical insight, as they say, into modern times.

The Canons, and the Secret of Bach Revealed

Bach composed a masterful, multiply-connected, six-part fugue for the Prussian King. More importantly, he provided the King and his Prussian court with ten canons that isolated partial modes of the geometrical musical pathways, so that Frederick could unpack, or look inside, the marvelous workings of the seemingly impossible six-part fugue. Bach provided a pedagogy whereby the King, or any human, could augment his mental and emotional powers. On one level, such a project by Bach is fully coherent with *both* (a) educating a human to figure out, e.g., the complexities of non-linear plasma configurations for fusion processes, and (b) expecting that same human to enjoy, in an emotionally mature fashion, the expansion of his or her mental powers. If humans mean to avoid train wrecks, they'll take up the challenge. Nobody said it wasn't hard work.

For Gaines, however, the secret to the *Musical Offering* is Bach's lifelong capacity to paint pictures with musical phrases. The "Royal Theme, of course, is itself darkly minor," and Bach uses keys with lots of flats; hence, Bach must have had a negative message for Frederick. As such, "we may be excused for wondering if he is working to let the King's glory shine forth [as Bach had explicitly stated–DS], or digging a deep, dark pit for it." Perhaps it were better to wonder whether Gaines is investigating a genius's attempt to educate a ruler, or whether he is simply digging a deep, dark pit under any such extraordinary event.

Remarkably, the musical canons are never actually dealt with in Gaines' book. He does pick out two of them, but only to twist Bach's accompanying word-clues. In the augmentation canon, Bach wrote, "As the notes increase, so may the fortunes of the King." It isn't complicated: The power to connect the musical line with its own doubly-extended musical line, is equated to how the King should grow the kingdom. Gaines is deaf to this, finding instead that the canon is "so relentlessly melancholy." (Perhaps when Gaines tries to concentrate, only melancholy ensues.)

When Bach composes another canon that repeats, but always one whole-step higher than before, he clues Frederick: "As the notes ascend, so may the glory of the King." In a remarkably brief canon, Bach circumnavigates tonal space twice as fast as in his famous *Well-Tempered Clavier*—working through the space in six whole-steps, instead of twelve half-steps. Gaines treads over this powerful musical accomplishment, and announces that, since the canon has reached an octave higher, it was just like going nowhere! So, Bach was really just mocking the glory of Frederick. Gaines concludes: "All sorts of the loveliest ripe fruit seem to drop and shrivel in the fallen world of the *Musical Offering*."

It doesn't get prettier. Before the last canon, Bach challenges the King to seek solutions: "Quaerendo invenietis." Gaines' translation? (Hold on!) Bach is referring to the injunction, "Seek and ye shall find," which apparently doesn't mean, "Work through the ten canons." Instead, ten canons mean the Ten Commandments, which can also be ignored, if one only seeks God's mercy. It seems that God reserves his mercy for those who are clever enough not to work. This paradoxical God would just have us supplicate for mercy, as a substitute for (as George W. Bush famously whined) "hard work." It does appear that Gaines has practiced what he preaches, and has strenuously avoided working on, or attempting to solve, the canons. And, he probably is in some need of mercy.

Finally, Gaines offers us his completed translation of Bach's *Musical Offering:*

Johann Sebastian Bach plays the organ for Prussia's King Frederick II.

"All of the oddities contained in the work were of a piece, and this is what they say: Beware the appearance of good fortune, Frederick, stand in awe of a fate more fearful than any this world has to give, seek the glory that is beyond the glory of this fallen world, and know that there is a law higher than any king's which is never changing and by which you and every one of us will be judged. Of course that is what he [Bach] said. He had been saying it all his life."

"Of course that is what he said"?! But there is no need to quibble with Gaines' translation of Bach's message. Two pages later, we find out that not only did Bach not expect a listener to be challenged to actually solve the ten musical canons, but that Frederick was not supposed to hear or be moved by any such message! "But of course Bach had not put the message there to change Frederick anyway, as some sort of Salvation Army come-to-Jesus pitch; it was simply another declaration of faith in a lifetime of such declarations." "Of course"—evidently, that is what declamatory, arcane geniuses do with their lives. And, supposedly, Frederick obliged, because he could not listen to someone of his father's generation.

In real life, however, Frederick still remembered the thematic subject 27 years later. He sang it, unprompted, while relating the greatness of J.S. Bach to the Austrian diplomat, Baron von Swieten. (Frederick's uneven aesthetical education could allow him to not master the canons, and still be gripped by the subject—just as he suffered a weakness for the amoral Voltaire, while still summoning up the strength and flexibility of mind for his double-flanking victory at Leuthen.) Gaines simply can't handle the possibility of this recorded event: "Sang the Royal Theme? How would he have remembered it for so many years? A better question: Why? Any answer to these questions, suggestive as they are, would only be speculation."

Hatred of Hard Work

Watching Gaines tackling canons gives one the eerie sense that he is hearing Maynard G. Krebs howling in high-pitched protest, "Work!"—or watching Bush trying to be President. At one point Gaines has a Bush-speak moment, referring to canons whose composition is "conscious to the point of brain frying." Translated, this means: "composing canons is hard work and should not be tried at home." Gaines' music-as-image-painting associations, incompetent anywhere, are most ridiculous when applied to Bach's scientific pedagogicals.

So, the question remains, who threw him into these waters?

A clue to this mystery is that Gaines' Bush-speak moment came as he attempted to summarize, of all people, Gottfried Leibniz. While it is difficult to extract many patterns from Gaines' eclectic references to intellectual history—references calculated to impress cocktail parties amongst his Council on Foreign Relations buddies—one particular set of references involving Johannes Kepler, Andreas Werckmeister, and Gottfried Leibniz, deserves attention. In Gaines' circles, this is nothing other than key-and-code for Lyndon LaRouche and for various studies by his associates.[1] (For example, when Gaines cites Leibniz's "best of all possible worlds" as equivalent to Alexander Pope's "whatever is, is right," he makes himself the second author in history, after myself, to treat Bach in the context of the famous 1753-1755 Berlin Academy contest proposing this.) Suffice it to say, that some of the most inspired passages in the book occur in these sections, e.g., in the suggestions about Leibniz's monads—but the higher Gaines climbs, the further he falls. He just crashes into the ludicrous, making it his own personal train wreck.

Gaines' treatment of the Kepler/Leibniz/Werckmeister material is no worse than his treatment of the Bach canons, just more obvious to the non-musician. If Gaines' name-dropping is so transparent, then it becomes a fair question to ask, whether Gaines was the best that his new Council on Foreign Relations colleagues could offer to throw against LaRouche. Regardless, it is certainly timely to point out how much such people have to fear from the possibility of a great mind, such as Bach's or LaRouche's, having access to those who are situated to run the affairs of nations.

Reservoir of *Chutzpah*

A decade ago, Gaines became notorious as the *Time* magazine editor who ran an altered cover photo of the mug shot of O.J. Simpson. The alterations appealed to crude racial stereotypes, e.g., making the photo darker, angrier, more menacing. The NAACP's Benjamin Chavis criticized the *Time* cover for its portrayal of "some kind of animal." Gaines' public non-apology the next week claimed that he'd taken a common mug shot and had it "shaped into an icon of tragedy." Further, he suggested that "some African-Americans" might be "racist," in that they were arguing "that blacker is more sinister." Clearly, Gaines (a) likes to sound classy, and (b) has a vast reservoir of *chutzpah*—both of which qualities he has brought to this new effort.

That said, might we end with any redeeming features? I can offer two such points. First, 94 pages in, Gaines writes, properly, of Bach's marvelous *Actus tragicus:* "[W]e would be best served to put down this book, get out the score, put on the music, read the words and the music together; and after playing it through several times, consider the power of inspired (as well as rigorously educated and deployed) genius." An excellent suggestion, and here seconded—although it would be an improvement to organize some friends to sing and play through the work together. As such, one might even go beyond merely considering, and, instead, actually *develop* "the power of inspired (as well as rigorously educated and deployed) genius."

Second, don't miss the jacket photograph by Adam Woolfitt. It is well-composed, and very appropriate for Mr. Gaines' succinct, poetic, and foreboding title, *Evening in the Palace of Reason.* Who knew? This one picture turns out to be worth more than many thousands of words.

—David Shavin

1. See, e.g., Jonathan Tennenbaum, "Bach and Kepler: The Polyphonic Character of Truthful Thinking," *Fidelio,* Summer-Fall 2000 (Vol. IX, No. 2-3).