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Bach's Goldberg Variations

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Celenza, Anna Harwell. *Bach's Goldberg Variations*. Illustrated by JoAnn E. Kitchel. Charlesbridge, 2005. ISBN 1570915105. \$19.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fiction; Historical fiction;

Subject: Bach, Johann Sebastian, 1685-1750--Juvenile fiction; Goldberg, Johann Gottlieb, 1727-1756--Juvenile fiction; Goldberg Variations--Juvenile fiction; Music--Juvenile fictions;

Musicians--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Celenza's book is a fictional account of how Bach's monumental piece, *The Goldberg Variations*, got its name. In the autumn of 1737, Bach invites Count Keyserlingk, a Russian ambassador living in Dresden, to hear a young orphan named Johann Gottlieb Goldberg play the organ. Keyserlingk is so taken with Goldberg's talent that he offers to take him in. Given a position as a servant in the Count's household, Goldberg also receives music lessons from Bach, but is forced to practice at night. One night the Count, who is unable to sleep, discovers Goldberg practicing the harpsichord. Impressed by the boy's talent, he orders him to learn a new piece each week. When the Count tells Goldberg to learn a piece that incorporates all of the musical styles he has learned so far, the boy turns to his mentor, Bach, for help.

Celenza has a Ph.D. in musicology and has written several books on music for children. What is appealing about this text is how clearly and concisely she explains the development of *The Goldberg Variations*. In an author's note, Celenza explains that the main characters in her story did exist, and offers more information on the history of *The Goldberg Variations*. Kitchel's vibrant ink and watercolor illustrations are cartoon-like in style. A CD of *The Goldberg Variations*, as performed by pianist John Kamitsuka, is included.