



Media Centre

The Secret Life Of JS Bach

Reverend Richard Coles returns to his childhood musical hero, Johann Sebastian Bach. He was the ultimate musical brain, the untouchable god with unimaginably lofty preoccupations. Or was he? Coles explores a different Bach, with some unexpected twists.

Tuesday 24 September
11.30am-12 noon
BBC RADIO 4

Long before the world of pop beckoned, and when the priesthood was an unimagined future calling, Rev Richard Coles had an unusual teenage passion. By his bed stood the bust of the greatest composer the world has ever known – Bach. This was a man with a gigantic musical brain, an untouchable god, a super-human with a daily life and unimaginable preoccupations.

In this programme, Coles sets out to meet another Bach, the hot, young talent whose daily life as a church organist was punctuated as much by petty quarrels and hard graft as it was the call of the Romantic muse. He clammers inside the technological marvel which is an 18th-century German organ and discovers that the principles of physics, architecture, metallurgy and acoustics were every bit as prominent in Bach's armoury as his musicianship.

He hunts for clues as to why the young Bach might have been the prickly hot-head he appears to have been. There's the intriguing theory that a disrupted childhood and chaotic education may have left him with a personality that may now be considered to be characterised by clinical paranoia.

Coles gets as close to meeting Bach in the flesh as he possibly can thanks to the pioneering work of scientists in Dundee who have recreated the composer's image in 3D using the very latest forensic techniques. Is this meeting a realisation of lifelong fantasies, or is the Bach we uncover the very last person Coles would like to appoint as parish organist?

With contributions from organists John Butt, Jon Cullen and Tim Rishton, psychologist Tamar Pincus, musicologist Ruth Tatlow, and forensic scientist Caroline Wilkinson.

Presenter/ Reverend Richard Coles

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