

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

# PROFESSORIAL LECTURE SERIES

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## Mrs Bach and the Cello Suites

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**Professorial Lecture Series**

**Mrs Bach and the Cello Suites**

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**Monday 23 April 2012**

## Mrs Bach and the Cello Suites

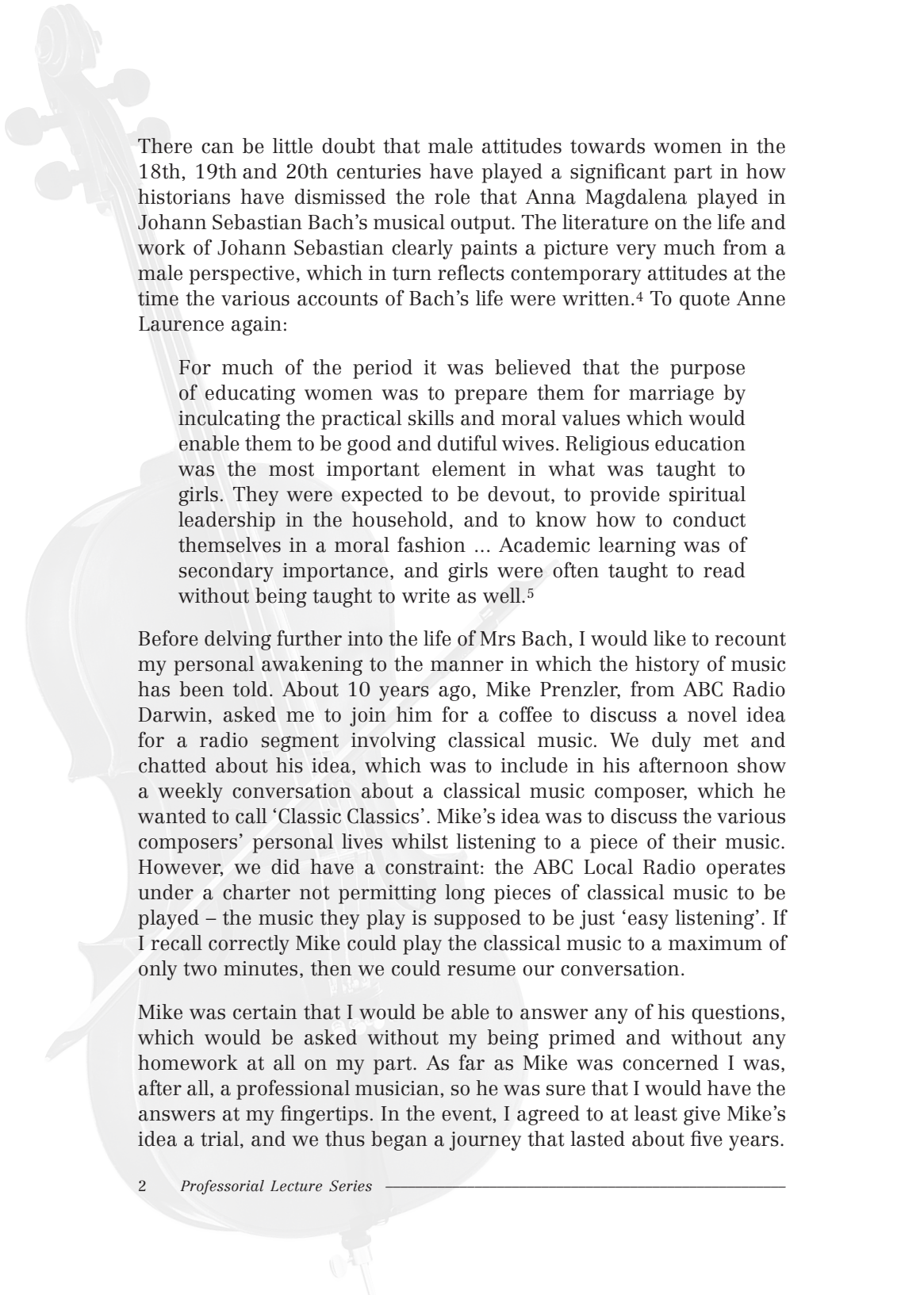
The words ‘hidden from history’ are aptly used by feminist writer Anne Laurence to describe the legacy of 18th Century women. Among these invisible women stands Anna Magdalena Bach<sup>1</sup> – her accomplishments and contributions to music eclipsed by that of her great husband Johann Sebastian Bach.

This story is about Mrs Bach, her relationship to the Six Cello Suites historically attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach, and how this remarkable woman has been ‘hidden from history’.

Historian Anne Laurence says that [women] are hidden [from history] ... because of modern prejudices; and because of the absence of records’.<sup>2</sup> Olwen Hufton, another feminist author goes further saying:

The conspicuous absence of women from the historical record, unless they belong to a few small categories – queens, consorts, famous mistresses of yet more famous men, courtesans or saints – meant that history is unbalanced ... pointing either to a grave sin of omission or to a flagrant suppression of the evidence, and hence to a distortion of the record by historians of former times.<sup>3</sup>

This absence of women from their rightful place in historical records interests me greatly. I am not in the strictest sense a professional historian, but – perhaps because my father was a passionate amateur historian – a love of history and a passion to understand the past is in my genes. In addition, my father was a senior police detective, so sleuthing it would seem forms part of my make-up. You see, I like proof, I like evidence. And I am certainly not someone who will accept a given position on any topic just because someone tells me it is so. Maybe it was this particular personal characteristic that drew me to my first passion, science – or more specifically astrophysics. When I was about eight, I was certain that astrophysics was going to be my career: I definitely had no intention of becoming a professional musician!



There can be little doubt that male attitudes towards women in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries have played a significant part in how historians have dismissed the role that Anna Magdalena played in Johann Sebastian Bach's musical output. The literature on the life and work of Johann Sebastian clearly paints a picture very much from a male perspective, which in turn reflects contemporary attitudes at the time the various accounts of Bach's life were written.<sup>4</sup> To quote Anne Laurence again:

For much of the period it was believed that the purpose of educating women was to prepare them for marriage by inculcating the practical skills and moral values which would enable them to be good and dutiful wives. Religious education was the most important element in what was taught to girls. They were expected to be devout, to provide spiritual leadership in the household, and to know how to conduct themselves in a moral fashion ... Academic learning was of secondary importance, and girls were often taught to read without being taught to write as well.<sup>5</sup>

Before delving further into the life of Mrs Bach, I would like to recount my personal awakening to the manner in which the history of music has been told. About 10 years ago, Mike Prenzler, from ABC Radio Darwin, asked me to join him for a coffee to discuss a novel idea for a radio segment involving classical music. We duly met and chatted about his idea, which was to include in his afternoon show a weekly conversation about a classical music composer, which he wanted to call 'Classic Classics'. Mike's idea was to discuss the various composers' personal lives whilst listening to a piece of their music. However, we did have a constraint: the ABC Local Radio operates under a charter not permitting long pieces of classical music to be played – the music they play is supposed to be just 'easy listening'. If I recall correctly Mike could play the classical music to a maximum of only two minutes, then we could resume our conversation.

Mike was certain that I would be able to answer any of his questions, which would be asked without my being primed and without any homework at all on my part. As far as Mike was concerned I was, after all, a professional musician, so he was sure that I would have the answers at my fingertips. In the event, I agreed to at least give Mike's idea a trial, and we thus began a journey that lasted about five years.

Initially, the plan was that Mike would select a piece of music from his own extensive collection of CDs, including the *Reader's Digest* collection, and we would simply chat about the composer over about 15 minutes. Of course, what Mike had thought would be a 'piece of cake' turned out to involve a great amount of research each week. Why? Because, whilst I knew much about the particular music he wanted to talk about, it very soon became apparent that often I knew not a great deal about all the composers' personal lives and the driving forces behind many of the compositions. For example, I could discuss at length Beethoven's life and music – because, like so many musicians of my generation, Beethoven had been an obsession when I was a young musician, and, therefore, I had read everything I could about him. But I knew very little about Shostakovich's private life, whilst I knew much about the musical structure of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. I knew in great depth the social context for the Fifth Symphony composition itself; that is, I knew he had written the symphony after being criticised for his Opera *Macbeth*, but I didn't appreciate how close he had come to being sent to the Soviet Gulags or to losing his life if he had got the Fifth Symphony wrong, as far as Stalin was concerned at least.<sup>6</sup>

As the weeks with Mike went by, I began to realise that the history of music has often been distorted and biased towards the composer, and heavily romanticised. And this drove me to want to present to the listeners a more realistic human picture of the famous composers we spoke about. Often Mike would tell a tale about a certain composer's prowess, and I would contradict what he had to say, having looked beyond the *Reader's Digest* version of history! Eventually, my wife Erna, who listened to these programs in her dental surgery, said to me 'You have to stop destroying people's images of their musical heroes. People like to believe these things'.

The problem was that the more I investigated, the more I realised that the truth about the great composers had been subverted in a desire to present composers as superhuman beings; when in reality they were just as flawed as any of us. And their lives were often sanitised, as was the case with Tchaikovsky and his brother Modest. Their homosexuality was kept hidden by the Communist Government in the USSR for well over half a century after Tchaikovsky's death, as it was believed that revelation of the truth would tarnish his image.



Let me give you a few similar examples taken from the lives of famous composers.

Whilst we are all happy to know that Beethoven was eccentric and bad tempered, we might not want to know that he would sit by the window whilst composing and when the need overtook him he would spit out onto the street below. But worse than that, he often would mistake the mirror for the window, and his spittle would hit the mirror instead.<sup>7</sup> He had unpleasant personal habits, such as he often would not change his clothes for weeks, and so of course he would start to smell rather badly. His friends would creep into his room at night and remove the stinking clothes and replace them with clean clothes. And he had no sense of morality with regard to money, often simultaneously selling his compositions to two or more publishers.<sup>8</sup>

What about Wagner? He was an unabashed anti-Semite. I recall hearing one biographer saying on BBC radio that he had started his journey of writing a biography of Wagner because he loved Wagner's music so much, but as he delved into Wagner's life he came to dislike the person of Wagner to a point where by the time he had finished his book he could not stand to hear Wagner's music anymore.

Another thing that leapt out of my investigations was that many of the great composers were greatly influenced and encouraged by their mothers and/or by a female friend. In the case of Tchaikovsky, for example, there was Nadezhda von Meck, the widow of a railway magnate who had made contact with Tchaikovsky not long before his disastrous marriage to Antonina Miliukova, his former student. For about 13 years von Meck became his patroness, and her generous support of 6,000 roubles a year finally gave him the financial freedom to focus exclusively on composition – but the deal was that they should never meet. They wrote to each other often, however, and on one particular occasion he wrote very honestly: '... in my relations with you there is the ticklish circumstance that every time we write to one another, money appears on the scene.'<sup>9</sup>

Whilst many of the achievements of 18th Century women are 'hidden' from history, it is a well-recognised fact that women of this period played musical instruments, particularly the keyboard, in the home environment. For example, as Nicholas Cook tells us:

... Practically every Jane Austen heroine plays the piano; it was a standard social accomplishment ... The point, then, is not that women did not play music, but that they played it at home ... With few exceptions (the main one being the opera house), they were amateurs, performing for friends but not for money.<sup>10</sup>

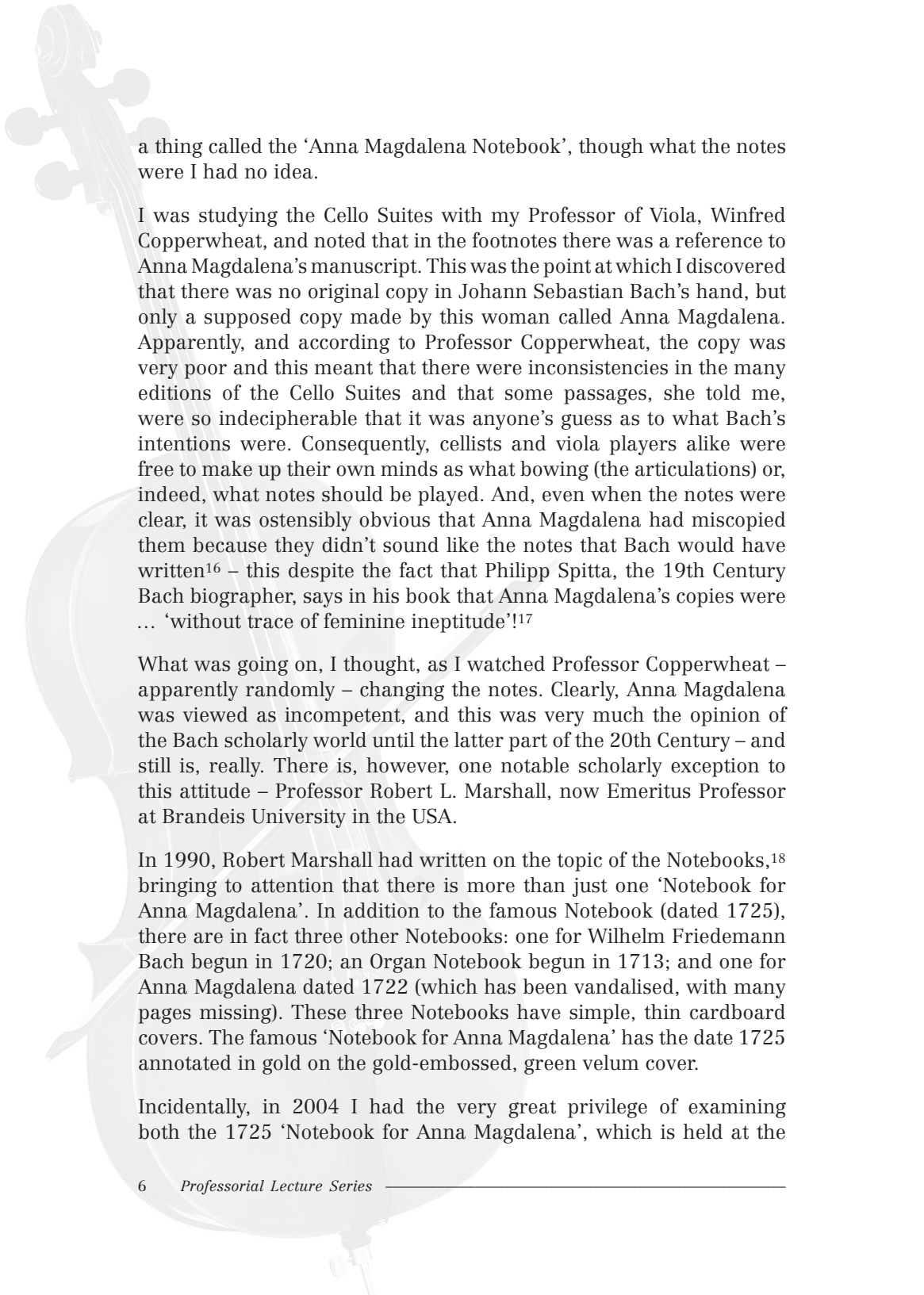
The question is did these women compose as well as play? The answer to this query is simply 'yes'. Thanks to researchers such as Mary Mageau, there are now many known female composers from the 18th Century, as well as other centuries for that matter.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, it would be untrue to say that those women who had musical talent to compose were given due recognition for their skills. For example, Felix Mendelssohn would not let his sister Fanny publish any of her music under her own name, but insisted that her music was published under his name.<sup>12</sup> And then there is Gustav Mahler who would not let his wife Alma compose any more music once they were married – this, despite the fact that Alma had introduced him to the composing circle in Paris!<sup>13</sup> And I mustn't forget to mention Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's elder sister, Maria Anna (usually known as Nannerl) – we simply have no idea what she might have done to help her young brother with his compositions. And, of course there is his wife Constanze who is also known to have assisted Amadeus.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, I would like to mention Sir Edward Elgar, the greatest of the English composers. His wife Alice was so closely involved in his compositions that he signed the first draft of *The Black Knight* as follows: C. Alice & Edward Elgar.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that later editions made no reference to Alice.

This leads me very nicely into the central topic – the matter of Mrs Bach and the Cello Suites. By coincidence, the year before Mike Prenzler, from ABC Radio Darwin, had contacted me, I had finally decided to investigate, via a PhD candidature, what I had come to see as the mystery of origin of the Six Cello Suites, something that had niggled at me for over three decades.

I first came across Anna Magdalena's name when I was a student at the Royal Academy of Music in London in 1971. I knew essentially nothing about her, apart from the fact that she had been Bach's wife – I didn't even know that she was his second wife. I had also heard of



a thing called the ‘Anna Magdalena Notebook’, though what the notes were I had no idea.

I was studying the Cello Suites with my Professor of Viola, Winfred Copperwheat, and noted that in the footnotes there was a reference to Anna Magdalena’s manuscript. This was the point at which I discovered that there was no original copy in Johann Sebastian Bach’s hand, but only a supposed copy made by this woman called Anna Magdalena. Apparently, and according to Professor Copperwheat, the copy was very poor and this meant that there were inconsistencies in the many editions of the Cello Suites and that some passages, she told me, were so indecipherable that it was anyone’s guess as to what Bach’s intentions were. Consequently, cellists and viola players alike were free to make up their own minds as what bowing (the articulations) or, indeed, what notes should be played. And, even when the notes were clear, it was ostensibly obvious that Anna Magdalena had miscopied them because they didn’t sound like the notes that Bach would have written<sup>16</sup> – this despite the fact that Philipp Spitta, the 19th Century Bach biographer, says in his book that Anna Magdalena’s copies were ... ‘without trace of feminine ineptitude’!<sup>17</sup>

What was going on, I thought, as I watched Professor Copperwheat – apparently randomly – changing the notes. Clearly, Anna Magdalena was viewed as incompetent, and this was very much the opinion of the Bach scholarly world until the latter part of the 20th Century – and still is, really. There is, however, one notable scholarly exception to this attitude – Professor Robert L. Marshall, now Emeritus Professor at Brandeis University in the USA.

In 1990, Robert Marshall had written on the topic of the Notebooks,<sup>18</sup> bringing to attention that there is more than just one ‘Notebook for Anna Magdalena’. In addition to the famous Notebook (dated 1725), there are in fact three other Notebooks: one for Wilhelm Friedemann Bach begun in 1720; an Organ Notebook begun in 1713; and one for Anna Magdalena dated 1722 (which has been vandalised, with many pages missing). These three Notebooks have simple, thin cardboard covers. The famous ‘Notebook for Anna Magdalena’ has the date 1725 annotated in gold on the gold-embossed, green velum cover.

Incidentally, in 2004 I had the very great privilege of examining both the 1725 ‘Notebook for Anna Magdalena’, which is held at the



German State Library in Berlin, and the 1720 'Notebook for Wilhelm Friedemann' held at Yale University in the USA. In the case of the 1720 'Notebook for Wilhelm Friedemann' – because it is still in its original form – opening it was like being hurled through a time tunnel. I was touching something that Johann Sebastian, Anna Magdalena and Wilhelm Friedemann had touched: it was quite extraordinary.

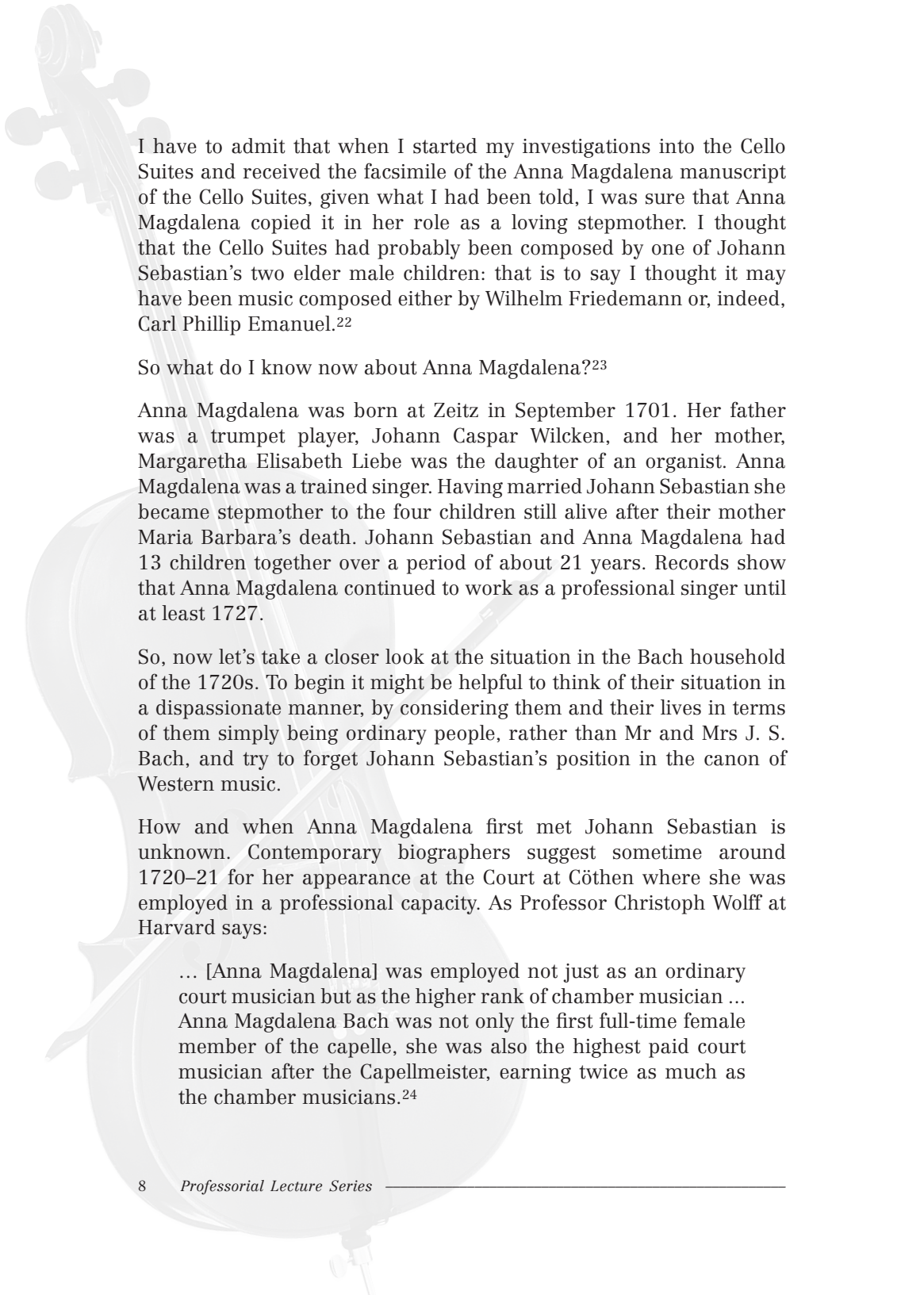
Anyway, I digress. What Professor Marshall says in his article is that he was sure that Anna Magdalena must have been very talented as a musician, because she was actually a professional musician.<sup>19</sup> This is in sharp contrast to most others who, dismissive of Anna Magdalena's talent, see her role as only that of copyist of her great husband's music, and whose perspective aligns with that of cellist Dimitri Markotvich, who said in an article:

I would like to make a point clear about Anna Magdalena's musical knowledge ... in spite of a nice voice [she] was musically inexperienced and had no knowledge of string playing.<sup>20</sup>

When I contacted Professor Marshall to ask what instrument he thought Anna Magdalena played, besides the keyboard that is, he wrote to me:

... As I recall, she was the daughter of a professional trumpeter, and so it is altogether conceivable, more than likely, in my opinion, that she played other instruments as well, but exactly which ones they would have been can be only a guess. The best guess, surely, is the violin.<sup>21</sup>

Some years later, in 2008, I asked Professor Marshall via email if I could quote him in my book *Written By Mrs Bach*, which I had been commissioned to write by HarperCollins ABC Books. By this time my research had received much attention in the international media, and I was viewed very much as pariah by the Bach scholarly world. Professor Marshall was so concerned about his reputation amongst Bach scholars that he denied having said he thought she may have been a violinist. Subsequently, I sent him a copy of his email. He replied that he couldn't imagine why he had said such a thing and he didn't want me to quote him in my book. Anyway, I didn't quote him in my book, so this is just between us!



I have to admit that when I started my investigations into the Cello Suites and received the facsimile of the Anna Magdalena manuscript of the Cello Suites, given what I had been told, I was sure that Anna Magdalena copied it in her role as a loving stepmother. I thought that the Cello Suites had probably been composed by one of Johann Sebastian's two elder male children: that is to say I thought it may have been music composed either by Wilhelm Friedemann or, indeed, Carl Phillip Emanuel.<sup>22</sup>

So what do I know now about Anna Magdalena?<sup>23</sup>

Anna Magdalena was born at Zeitz in September 1701. Her father was a trumpet player, Johann Caspar Wilcken, and her mother, Margaretha Elisabeth Liebe was the daughter of an organist. Anna Magdalena was a trained singer. Having married Johann Sebastian she became stepmother to the four children still alive after their mother Maria Barbara's death. Johann Sebastian and Anna Magdalena had 13 children together over a period of about 21 years. Records show that Anna Magdalena continued to work as a professional singer until at least 1727.

So, now let's take a closer look at the situation in the Bach household of the 1720s. To begin it might be helpful to think of their situation in a dispassionate manner, by considering them and their lives in terms of them simply being ordinary people, rather than Mr and Mrs J. S. Bach, and try to forget Johann Sebastian's position in the canon of Western music.

How and when Anna Magdalena first met Johann Sebastian is unknown. Contemporary biographers suggest sometime around 1720–21 for her appearance at the Court at Cöthen where she was employed in a professional capacity. As Professor Christoph Wolff at Harvard says:

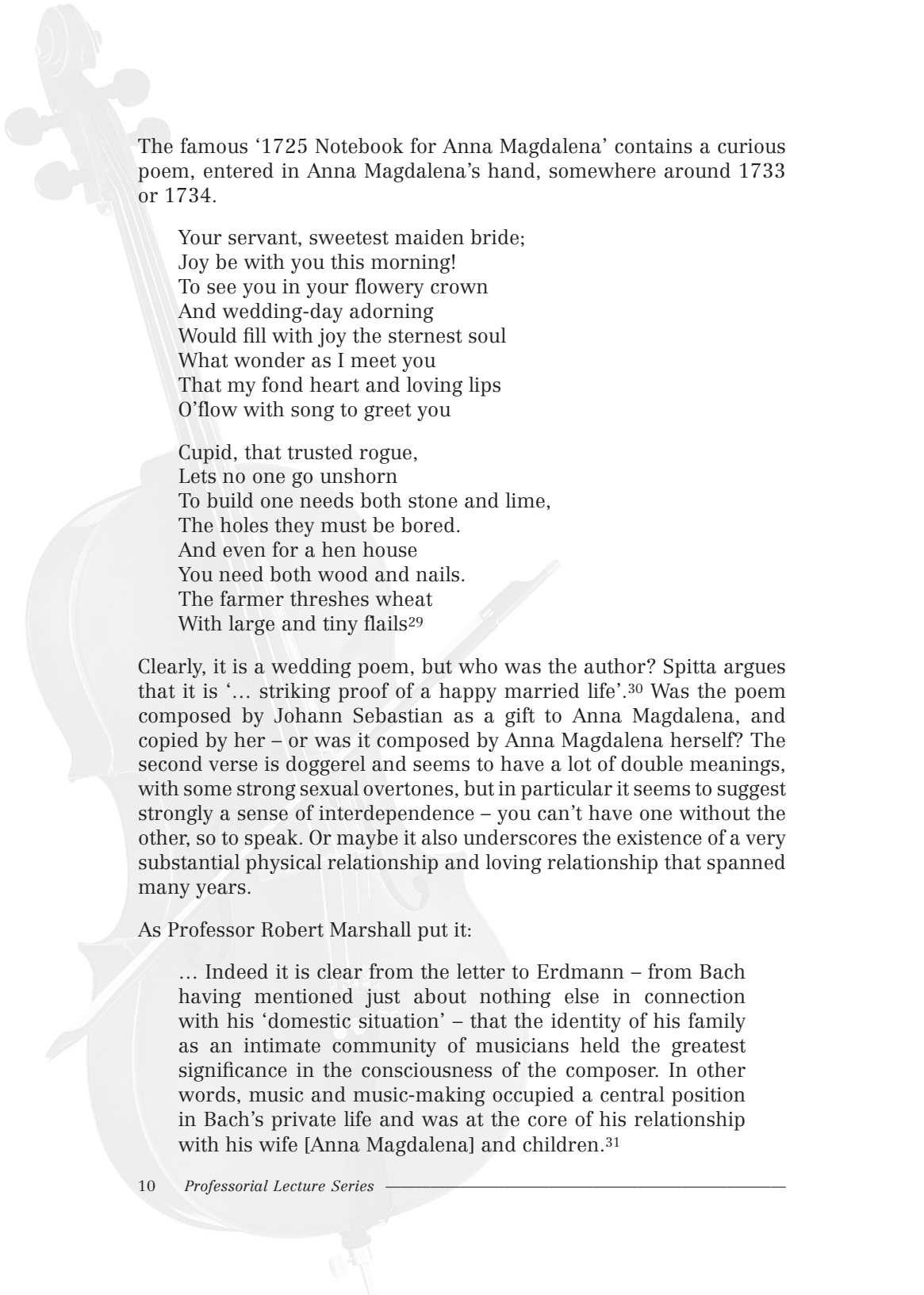
... [Anna Magdalena] was employed not just as an ordinary court musician but as the higher rank of chamber musician ... Anna Magdalena Bach was not only the first full-time female member of the capelle, she was also the highest paid court musician after the Capellmeister, earning twice as much as the chamber musicians.<sup>24</sup>

According to Professor Robert Marshall, it is almost certain that Johann Sebastian was acquainted with the Wilcken family, because Anna Magdalena's father was a trumpet player of some repute and Johann Sebastian knew the Wilcken family. Furthermore, Johann Sebastian himself, in his capacity as Kapellmeister at Cöthen where he had been since 1717, was instrumental in recruiting Anna Magdalena to the Court at Cöthen.<sup>25</sup> However, it is very likely that Johann Sebastian had met her a long time before she was employed at the Cöthen Court. My own forensic research has shown that Anna Magdalena's writing appears on a document dated 1713, coincidental with the visit to Weimar to celebrate the Duke's birthday, where she appears to have completed a musical exercise in the form of a Perpetual Canon for Four Voices for Johann Sebastian, when she was just 12 years of age. So, indeed, it is very likely that Johann Sebastian was very well acquainted with Anna Magdalena quite some time before she moved to the Court at Cöthen. The unanswerable question is: was the Perpetual Canon for Four Voices an early lesson from Johann Sebastian in the art of composition?

Once she arrived at Cöthen Court, Johann Sebastian and Anna Magdalena clearly must have worked together very closely and developed their relationship, for Johann Sebastian and Anna Magdalena were married on 3 December 1721 – some 17 months after his first wife Maria Barbara died. Very interestingly, and some say curiously, they '... were married at home, by command of the Prince',<sup>26</sup> according to the Castle Church Register.

At this point, we should note that when Anna Magdalena married Johann Sebastian, his sister-in-law (that is, Maria Barbara's sister Friedelena Magdalena Bach) was living with them, and continued to do so until her death in 1729.<sup>27</sup> So, we know that Johann Sebastian already had female assistance with his four children by Maria Barbara, thus refuting the idea that Bach married for the reason of finding a child-minder or housekeeper.

The passion that Johann Sebastian had for his wife is possibly reflected in the fact that he had Anna Magdalena's portrait painted sometime around 1735. The painting of a portrait was a very unusual undertaking for a man in Johann Sebastian's rather lowly position and status as the Kantor at St Thomas' Church School at Leipzig.<sup>28</sup> Curiously, the portrait mysteriously disappeared after her death.



The famous ‘1725 Notebook for Anna Magdalena’ contains a curious poem, entered in Anna Magdalena’s hand, somewhere around 1733 or 1734.

Your servant, sweetest maiden bride;  
Joy be with you this morning!  
To see you in your flowery crown  
And wedding-day adorning  
Would fill with joy the sternest soul  
What wonder as I meet you  
That my fond heart and loving lips  
O’flow with song to greet you

Cupid, that trusted rogue,  
Lets no one go unshorn  
To build one needs both stone and lime,  
The holes they must be bored.  
And even for a hen house  
You need both wood and nails.  
The farmer threshes wheat  
With large and tiny flails<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, it is a wedding poem, but who was the author? Spitta argues that it is ‘... striking proof of a happy married life’.<sup>30</sup> Was the poem composed by Johann Sebastian as a gift to Anna Magdalena, and copied by her – or was it composed by Anna Magdalena herself? The second verse is doggerel and seems to have a lot of double meanings, with some strong sexual overtones, but in particular it seems to suggest strongly a sense of interdependence – you can’t have one without the other, so to speak. Or maybe it also underscores the existence of a very substantial physical relationship and loving relationship that spanned many years.

As Professor Robert Marshall put it:

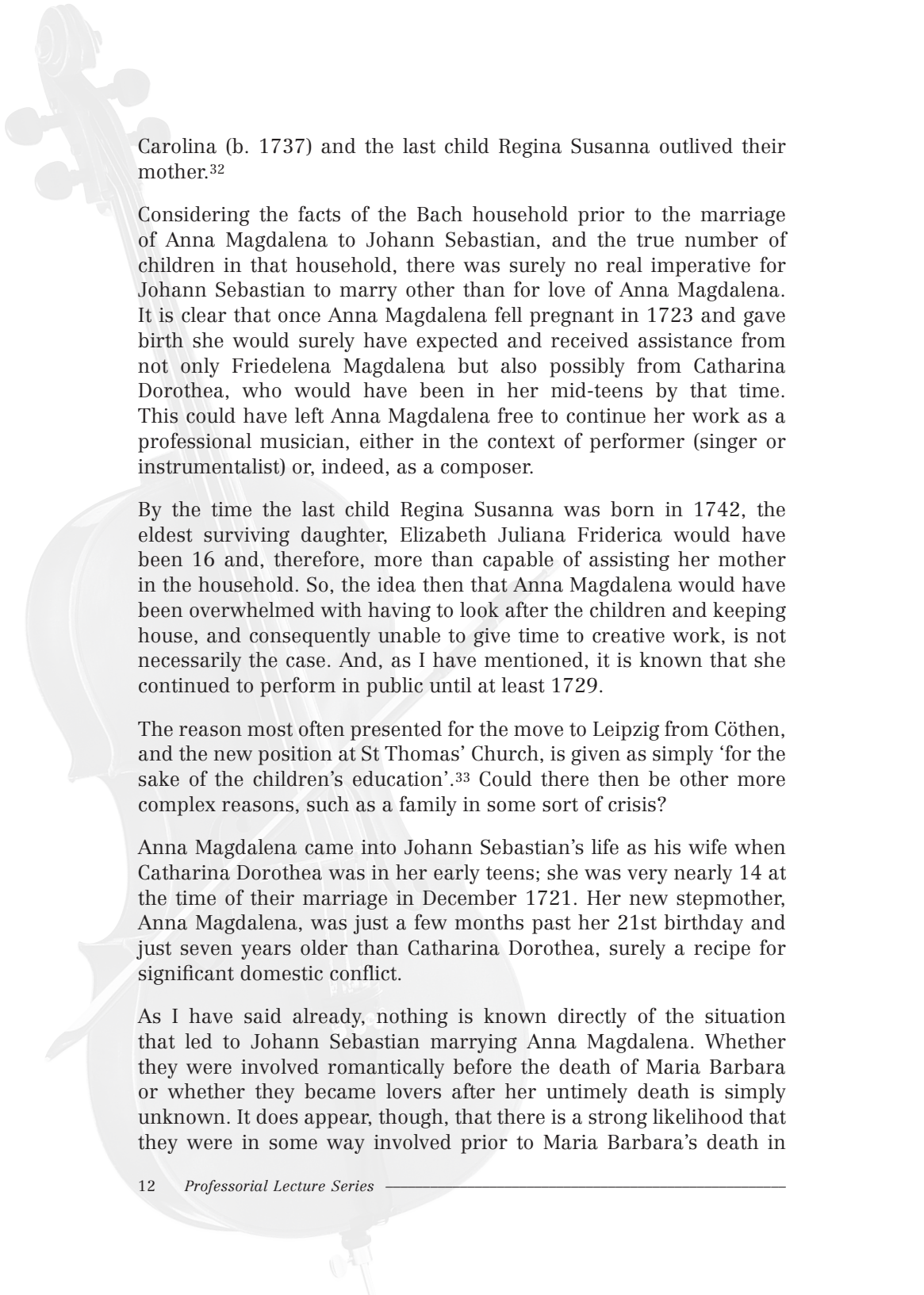
... Indeed it is clear from the letter to Erdmann – from Bach having mentioned just about nothing else in connection with his ‘domestic situation’ – that the identity of his family as an intimate community of musicians held the greatest significance in the consciousness of the composer. In other words, music and music-making occupied a central position in Bach’s private life and was at the core of his relationship with his wife [Anna Magdalena] and children.<sup>31</sup>

This must have been a loving and passionate relationship and, therefore, they married for these reasons, rather than the often suggested alternative that Johann Sebastian Bach needed to find a 'mother' for his four children. Why else but for love should Anna Magdalena have given up so much to marry a man 16 years her senior with four children? She was, after all, extremely successful, certainly in 18th Century terms. She had an independent high status as a chamber musician; she was highly paid and, logically, highly sought after. And, the understanding that this was indeed a passionate relationship is verified by the fact that Anna Magdalena gave birth to 13 children over the first 21 years of their married life.

The idea that Anna Magdalena would have been overwhelmed with child-minding and keeping house is refutable. It is very important to set aside, in the context of their domestic relationship, the popular myth that surrounds Johann Sebastian and his 20 children, namely that the household was full of screaming children. For whilst it is true that he did indeed father 20 full-term babies, it is not the case that they were all living under the same roof at one time.

The fact is that in that period a large proportion of children died early in life. We know that only four of the seven children born to Johann Sebastian's first wife Maria Barbara survived their mother, most famously Wilhelm Friedemann (b. 1710) and Carl Philipp Emanuel (b. 1714). The two other children were Catharina Dorothea (b. 1708), Johann Gottfried Bernhard (b. 1715). It is interesting to note that the great *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* did not list Catharina Dorothea, or any other of the female children, until recent times.

About 16 months after her marriage to Johann Sebastian in December 1721, Anna Magdalena gave birth to their first child, Christina Sophia Henrietta, in the spring of 1723: this child died at the age of three. Anna Magdalena's last child, Regina Susanna, was born in February 1742 (d. 1809). In the intervening years, she gave birth to 11 children. Three died more or less immediately: Ernestus Andreas (b. and d. 1727), Christina Benedicta (b. and d. 1730) and Johann August Abraham (b. and d. 1733). Christiana Dorothea (b. 1731) lived a little over a year, Christian Gottlieb (b. 1725) lived until he was three and Regina Johanna (b. 1724) lived to age four. Only six children Gottfried Heinrich (b. 1724), Elizabeth Juliana Friderica (b. 1726), Johann Christoph Friederich (b. 1732), Johann Christian (b. 1735), Johanna



Carolina (b. 1737) and the last child Regina Susanna outlived their mother.<sup>32</sup>

Considering the facts of the Bach household prior to the marriage of Anna Magdalena to Johann Sebastian, and the true number of children in that household, there was surely no real imperative for Johann Sebastian to marry other than for love of Anna Magdalena. It is clear that once Anna Magdalena fell pregnant in 1723 and gave birth she would surely have expected and received assistance from not only Friedelena Magdalena but also possibly from Catharina Dorothea, who would have been in her mid-teens by that time. This could have left Anna Magdalena free to continue her work as a professional musician, either in the context of performer (singer or instrumentalist) or, indeed, as a composer.

By the time the last child Regina Susanna was born in 1742, the eldest surviving daughter, Elizabeth Juliana Friderica would have been 16 and, therefore, more than capable of assisting her mother in the household. So, the idea then that Anna Magdalena would have been overwhelmed with having to look after the children and keeping house, and consequently unable to give time to creative work, is not necessarily the case. And, as I have mentioned, it is known that she continued to perform in public until at least 1729.

The reason most often presented for the move to Leipzig from Cöthen, and the new position at St Thomas' Church, is given as simply 'for the sake of the children's education'.<sup>33</sup> Could there then be other more complex reasons, such as a family in some sort of crisis?

Anna Magdalena came into Johann Sebastian's life as his wife when Catharina Dorothea was in her early teens; she was very nearly 14 at the time of their marriage in December 1721. Her new stepmother, Anna Magdalena, was just a few months past her 21st birthday and just seven years older than Catharina Dorothea, surely a recipe for significant domestic conflict.

As I have said already, nothing is known directly of the situation that led to Johann Sebastian marrying Anna Magdalena. Whether they were involved romantically before the death of Maria Barbara or whether they became lovers after her untimely death is simply unknown. It does appear, though, that there is a strong likelihood that they were in some way involved prior to Maria Barbara's death in

1720: my own research has placed Anna Magdalena firmly in Johann Sebastian's life in 1720 – perhaps even living in the Bach household.<sup>34</sup> Some interesting questions arise. For example, did Anna Magdalena accompany the Prince and his Kapellmeister Johann Sebastian Bach on the Prince's sojourn to Carlsbad in 1720? That was the year that Maria Barbara died mysteriously. Given the very odd circumstances surrounding her death and burial the question is: did Maria Barbara commit suicide?

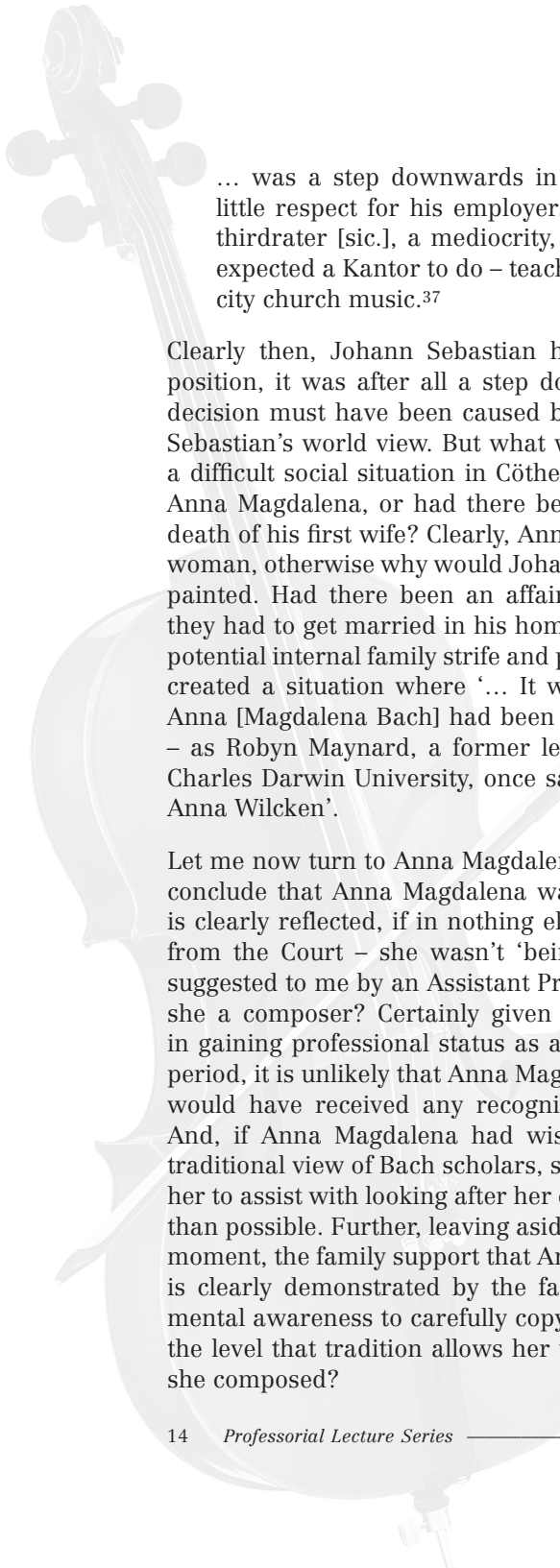
Whatever the actual situation, from the children's perspective, this new arrangement with a very young stepmother must have had a major effect on life in their home. Professor Wolff sums up the situation for Johann Sebastian's eldest son Wilhelm Friedemann as follows:

... The year 1720 also brought the death of Maria Barbara; this unhappy event, followed a year and a half later by Sebastian's marriage to Anna Magdalena, may have had bearing on Friedemann's later difficulties in life.<sup>35</sup>

The fact is that nobody has ever really investigated the possible effect that this union had on Catharina Dorothea or for that matter on Carl Philipp Emanuel or, indeed, on Johann Gottfried Bernhard, who was probably too young to remember his mother in any case. It is more than plausible that the household was not a happy place, with resentment of their new stepmother growing as time passed. If this were the case, then it would go a long way to explaining why, much later in life, Anna Magdalena was apparently abandoned by her stepchildren; and, indeed, why her role in Johann Sebastian's musical output was so under acknowledged from the very start of the Bach biography in Forkel's 1802 book – which was based to a great extent on information from Johann Sebastian's two eldest sons, Carl Philipp Emanuel and Wilhelm Friedemann.

It might also give additional explanation for Johann Sebastian's attempts to find employment elsewhere in larger centres where the household conflict might have been able to be alleviated somewhat through the schooling opportunities for his older children that did not exist at Cöthen.<sup>36</sup>

The position Johann Sebastian eventually gained was that of Kantor at St Thomas' Church – a position that as Professor Wolff puts it:



... was a step downwards in the social scale, and he had little respect for his employers. To the council, Bach was a thirdrater [sic.], a mediocrity, who would not do what they expected a Kantor to do – teach Latin, as well as organise the city church music.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly then, Johann Sebastian had other reasons for taking this position, it was after all a step downwards, and this extraordinary decision must have been caused by an important change in Johann Sebastian's world view. But what was that? Had he found himself in a difficult social situation in Cöthen because of his relationship with Anna Magdalena, or had there been some scandal surrounding the death of his first wife? Clearly, Anna Magdalena was a very attractive woman, otherwise why would Johann Sebastian have had her portrait painted. Had there been an affair? Maybe this would explain why they had to get married in his home, rather than in the church? This potential internal family strife and possible scandal might have indeed created a situation where '... It would be reasonable to argue that Anna [Magdalena Bach] had been purposely written out of history'<sup>38</sup> – as Robyn Maynard, a former lecturer in history and sociology at Charles Darwin University, once said in a lecture titled 'In search of Anna Wilcken'.

Let me now turn to Anna Magdalena as a musician. I feel it is safe to conclude that Anna Magdalena was very gifted as a musician. This is clearly reflected, if in nothing else, in the salary that she received from the Court – she wasn't 'being paid for sex after all', as was suggested to me by an Assistant Professor at Yale University. But was she a composer? Certainly given the difficulty women experienced in gaining professional status as a composer or anything else at the period, it is unlikely that Anna Magdalena, if indeed she did compose, would have received any recognition of her compositional output. And, if Anna Magdalena had wished to compose, contrary to the traditional view of Bach scholars, she had sufficient resources around her to assist with looking after her children for this to have been more than possible. Further, leaving aside the matter of composition for the moment, the family support that Anna Magdalena must have received is clearly demonstrated by the fact that she had the time and the mental awareness to carefully copy the music of Johann Sebastian to the level that tradition allows her to. So, what evidence is there that she composed?



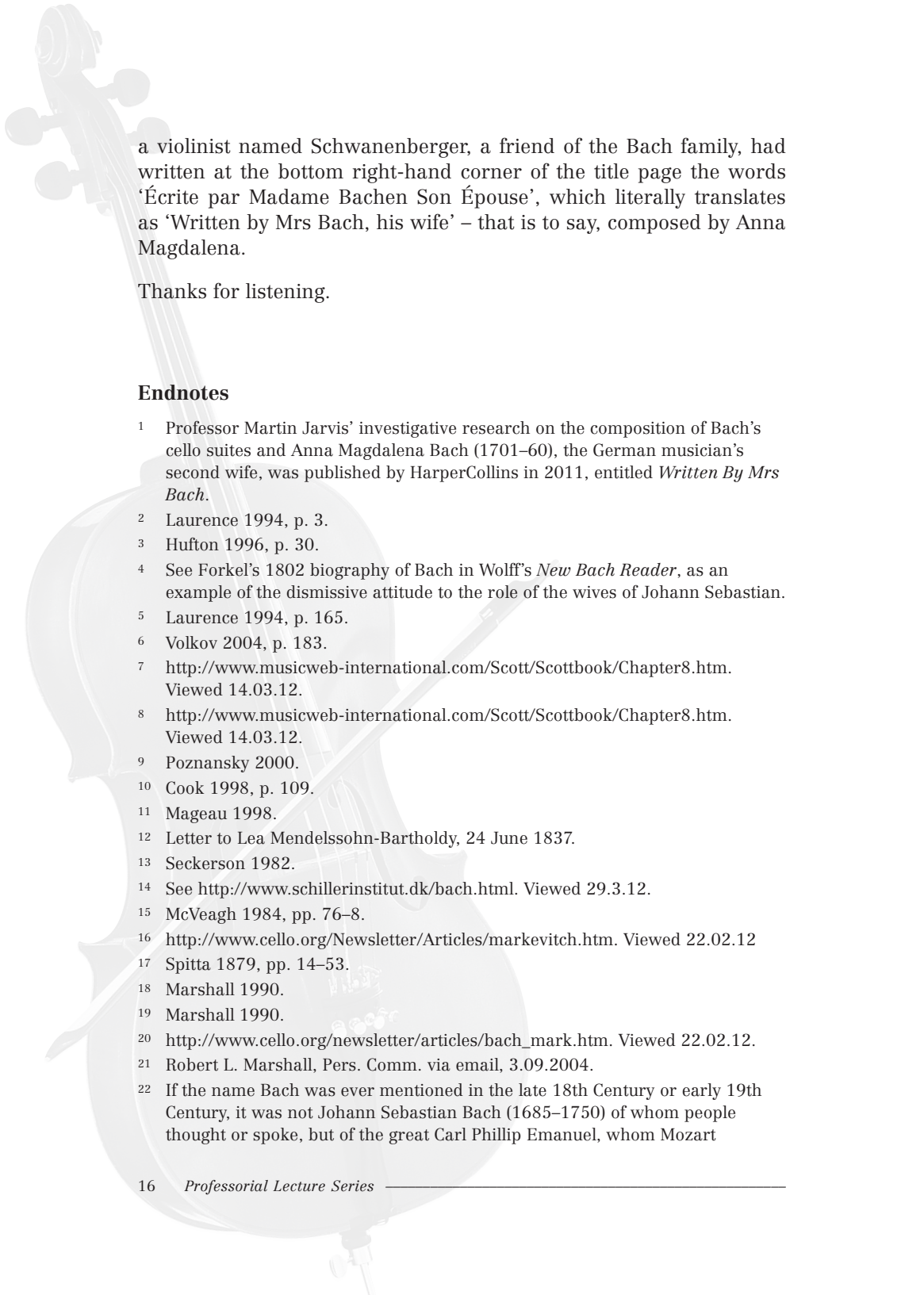
Earlier, I mentioned Bach's Perpetual Canon for Four Voices of 1713 as a possible compositional exercise for Anna Magdalena, but what actually sparked my curiosity about the music of Bach – and whether someone else may have been involved in the creation of his compositions – occurred in my early teens. It was when I was first playing some of his great music for violin, and one of my friends was playing some Bach arranged for clarinet: it was a Minuet from the '1725 Notebook for Anna Magdalena'. The clarinet arrangement sounded nothing like the complex music that I was playing on the violin, but somewhat childlike – as if it had been written by someone other than Bach and perhaps was a piece composed for a child studying the keyboard. Professor Marshall had stated in his article, referred to earlier, that Anna Magdalena was probably the music teacher for Johann Sebastian's children by his first wife and their own children.

When I became a student at the Royal Academy of Music in London in 1971, I first played the Prelude of the 1st Cello Suite, after my Professor of Viola Winfred Copperwheat had made various changes. This was when I became really concerned that this particular music was not written by Bach, at least as far as I knew his music – and this was the beginning of my journey of 34 years to find the true composer of the Cello Suites.

By the end of 2003, the first year of my PhD research, I had found 17 musical reasons why the Cello Suites were not likely to have been composed by Johann Sebastian – who had composed them I still did not know, but at that point, my sleuthing led me to Anna Magdalena.

In order to verify my suspicions via a completely new path, I studied Forensic Document Examination with Dr Bryan Found at La Trobe University in Victoria. I did this to investigate the manuscripts from a scientific perspective, and the forensic evidence that I collected, over the following two years or so, began to build in favour of Anna Magdalena's involvement in many Bach manuscripts where she should not have been – at least according to the history books tradition. As the musical, circumstantial and forensic evidence mounted, I finally concluded that Anna Magdalena must have been the composer of the Cello Suites.

The coup de grâce of my prolonged and intensive research came when I discovered that the first owner of the manuscript of the Cello Suites,



a violinist named Schwanenberger, a friend of the Bach family, had written at the bottom right-hand corner of the title page the words ‘Écrite par Madame Bachen Son Épouse’, which literally translates as ‘Written by Mrs Bach, his wife’ – that is to say, composed by Anna Magdalena.

Thanks for listening.

## Endnotes

- 1 Professor Martin Jarvis’ investigative research on the composition of Bach’s cello suites and Anna Magdalena Bach (1701–60), the German musician’s second wife, was published by HarperCollins in 2011, entitled *Written By Mrs Bach*.
- 2 Laurence 1994, p. 3.
- 3 Hufton 1996, p. 30.
- 4 See Forkel’s 1802 biography of Bach in Wolff’s *New Bach Reader*, as an example of the dismissive attitude to the role of the wives of Johann Sebastian.
- 5 Laurence 1994, p. 165.
- 6 Volkov 2004, p. 183.
- 7 <http://www.musicweb-international.com/Scott/Scottbook/Chapter8.htm>. Viewed 14.03.12.
- 8 <http://www.musicweb-international.com/Scott/Scottbook/Chapter8.htm>. Viewed 14.03.12.
- 9 Poznansky 2000.
- 10 Cook 1998, p. 109.
- 11 Mageau 1998.
- 12 Letter to Lea Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, 24 June 1837.
- 13 Seckerson 1982.
- 14 See <http://www.schillerinstitut.dk/bach.html>. Viewed 29.3.12.
- 15 McVeagh 1984, pp. 76–8.
- 16 <http://www.cello.org/Newsletter/Articles/markevitch.htm>. Viewed 22.02.12
- 17 Spitta 1879, pp. 14–53.
- 18 Marshall 1990.
- 19 Marshall 1990.
- 20 [http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/bach\\_mark.htm](http://www.cello.org/newsletter/articles/bach_mark.htm). Viewed 22.02.12.
- 21 Robert L. Marshall, Pers. Comm. via email, 3.09.2004.
- 22 If the name Bach was ever mentioned in the late 18th Century or early 19th Century, it was not Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) of whom people thought or spoke, but of the great Carl Phillip Emanuel, whom Mozart

- described as the ‘... Father, we are the children’, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/47823/Carl-Philipp-Emanuel-Bach>. Viewed 1.3.12
- 23 Taken from Christoph Wolff’s book *Bach: The Learned Musician* and the work of Robert L. Marshall.
- 24 Wolff 2000, p. 216.
- 25 Marshall 1990, p. 193.
- 26 Wolff 1998, p. 93.
- 27 Maria Barbara and her sister Friedelena Magdalena were Bachs in their own right – the sisters were second cousins of Johann Sebastian.
- 28 Spitta 1879, pp. 147–53.
- 29 Translation by Robert L. Marshall.
- 30 Spitta 1879, pp. 147–53.
- 31 Marshall 1990, pp. 193–4.
- 32 Wolff 2000, p. 396 (Table of Johann Sebastian Bach’s children),
- 33 Schweitzer 1911, p. 109.
- 34 Whilst this is speculative, it based on my research that shows that the title page of the ‘1720 Notebook for Wilhelm Freidemann’ is in the hand of Anna Magdalena.
- 35 Wolff 1980, p. 238.
- 36 Schweitzer 1911, p. 109.
- 37 Wolff 1980, p. 80.
- 38 Robyn Maynard (sociologist/historian at Charles Darwin University) 2004, ‘In search of Anna Wilcken’, a paper presented at Northern Territory Historical Society Colloquium.

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He holds a PhD in the field of Forensic Document Examination, as applied to the manuscripts of Bach.

Martin's research is well published and has been presented at universities, music institutions and conferences nationally and internationally.

Among his publications are *Written By Mrs Bach* (2011) and *The String Players' Pocket Dictionary* (2001). He has also researched and published on the subjects of 'Retrogressive Concatenation as a Means of Score Acquisition', the history and interpretation of the Kreutzer 42 Etudes for Violin, and community music.

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