

municipal ledgers, the great composer comes off as an “aggressive businessman whining about maltreatment and underpayment,” though in fact he lived a rich professional, social, and family life and earned considerable recognition. Ten of his 20 children died before adulthood, but four lived to become famous musicians in their own right.

Bach was born in Thuringia in present-day Germany, lost both parents by the time he was 10, and by 18 was employed as a professional organist. In 1723 he was named cantor and music director at a school and four churches in Leipzig, where he struggled to stage his compositions using mostly student singers and musicians.

In more than a thousand compositions, Bach perfected the contrapuntal (or counterpoint) style, in which two or more independent but

EXCERPT

Beyond the New South

The Old South hurtled into the New within a single generation, and then—carried headlong by its own momentum—hurtled still faster into the New South as the commerce of corporate homogeneity swept across the region.

—RICK BASS, author, in *Southern Review*
(Winter 2008)

harmonically related melodic parts are played at the same time—a challenging proposition that music teachers sometimes describe to beginning students as akin to patting their heads and rubbing their stomachs at the same time. He changed the way music was played. Before Bach, the thumb had been only rarely used in keyboard playing, but he pioneered its far greater use (along with that of the little finger) to hold down a key

while the other fingers played around it. This made it possible to produce both dominant melodies and elaborate flourishes at the same time. It also made the music harder to play.

During his 27 years in Leipzig, Bach volunteered to compose a new church cantata of his own almost every Sunday for a period of five years. He continually recycled material, changing instrumentation, adding and deleting.

Two of his greatest works, the Mass in B minor (1748–49) and the *Christmas Oratorio* (1734–35), were “tweaked from mostly secular existing gems,” Fromm writes.

In Bach’s day, words mattered more in the Lutheran Church than music. This was liturgical music, after all. Today the words seem pietistic—even “deadly,” Fromm says, while the music is almost universally regarded as inspiring and astonishingly inventive.

OTHER NATIONS

An Energy Cold War?

A SURVEY OF RECENT ARTICLES

AMERICANS ARE TOO ACCUSTOMED to sparring with the Russian bear to allow it to fade quietly into the ranks of demographically challenged second-tier nations. Now

the former Evil Empire roams the earth again as “corporate Russia,” fueled by oil and gas revenues, steered by a semi-authoritarian government with global ambitions, and equipped with a foreign-policy instrument called Gazprom.

It’s easy to see how such a threatening new poster child of energy aggression emerged, writes Andreas Goldthau, a RAND Corporation fellow, in *Policy Review* (Feb.–March 2008). Russia owns 27 percent of the world’s gas reserves (with energy giant Gazprom controlling most of that), and accounts for 22 percent of global gas production. It is home to 6.2 percent of international oil reserves and produces 12 percent of all crude oil. High prices for

energy have enabled an inefficient industrial nation to achieve a \$1 trillion economy that is growing by almost seven percent a year.

Russia has soaked its dependent foreign customers during frigid winters, sidled up to China in conflicts with the West, and used the government-dominated Gazprom to curtail gas flow to Ukraine and Georgia when democratic movements threatened the pro-Russia old guard in those countries. But all the aggressive posturing is nothing more than a “well-crafted piece of Russian PR,” Goldthau asserts. Russian leader Vladimir Putin has “limited ability” to use oil as a weapon because the Russian economy is as dependent on oil revenue as its customers are on its oil.

Moreover, Russia’s accessible energy supplies are gradually running out and Gazprom has been slow to develop reserves, in part because of the vast amount of capital this would require. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the company has coasted along on “legacy” gas from fields opened up and transmission lines built in the last two decades of the Soviet era, notes geographer Matthew J. Sagers in *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (Nov. 2007). But in recent years Gazprom’s output has been essentially flat even as demand increased, and its most promising reserves are on the Yamal Peninsula, a landmass above the Arctic Circle where conditions defy imagination. Winds can rise to a steady 90 miles an hour there, wind-driven water up to 33 feet deep covers low-lying coastal land several months of the year, and solid ground gives way to

friable sand that offers little support for drill pads, pipelines, and other infrastructure. The estimated cost of opening up the area is \$31 billion, if all goes perfectly according to plan.

Gazprom’s challenges are hardly limited to the technical realm, write B. Kuz’man, its chief personnel manager, and two colleagues in *Problems of Economic Transition* (Sept. 2007). In recent years, the company has been forced to sell natural gas at “dumping prices” inside Russia. Even so, nonpayment has been a big problem; the Russian Ministry of Defense is one of the “persistent” deadbeats. Gazprom’s interests are subordinated to socioeconomic and state problems, Kuz’man says. Until 2004 it was responsible for recreation centers, hospitals, airports, railroads, hotels, and farms that occupied almost as many of its workers (31 percent) as the transportation of gas (33 percent).

Nonetheless, rising energy prices have boosted the Russian state budget and fueled Russian aggression, according to Charlie Szrom and Thomas Brugato of the American Enterprise Institute in *The American* (Feb. 22, 2008). Citing an “aggression index” they compiled, the authors found that the higher the price of oil over the past seven years, the more likely Russia has been to sell arms to terror-sponsoring states, conduct threatening military exercises, and interrupt energy supplies to neighbors.

For Russia, Szrom and Brugato conclude, today’s high-priced oil and gas have supplied “liquid courage.”

OTHER NATIONS

A Tipping Point for GM Foods?

THE SOURCE: “Genetically Modified Rice, Yields, and Pesticides: Assessing Farm-Level Productivity Effects in China” by Jikun Huang, Ruifa Hu, Scott Rozelle, and Carl Pray, in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Jan. 2008.

SCIENTISTS HAVE BEEN WORKING on genetically modified (GM) plants for 25 years, but the developing world has rejected virtually every bioengineered food crop. Rice is one of the world’s great staples, for example, but only Iran markets a GM version. Now China may be poised to join it. And if China goes, competitive pressures may force the rest of the world to follow.

Time was when the ability of scientists to engineer seeds to fend off insects and disease was touted as the salvation of a hungry world. But that dream has collided with consumer concerns about “Frankenfoods,” strong antibiotechnology activism, and governments’ fears of trade retaliation. GM corn and soybeans are widely grown for animal fodder in the United States and Canada, but fierce opposition from these countries’ trading partners has checked growth. Industrial crops such as GM cotton and corn, however, are commonly harvested in other countries, including China and South Africa.

In China, four versions of GM insect- or disease-resistant rice have made it to the third and final stage of safety trials required by Beijing, write Jikun Huang and Ruifa Hu, of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Scott Rozelle and Carl Pray, of