FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Masters of the Renaissance: Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and More

Jim Weiss
Greathall Productions
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"What a joy it is to be a modern man living in the 15th century!" exclaims Cosimo diMedici in this audiobook, voiced by the author. DiMedici became one of the richest men in Europe (aside from a few kings) during the 1400s.

Weiss created and tells the stories of this famous family and the numerous artists, including sculptor Donatello and architect Brunelleschi, whom they supported in Florence, Italy, the birthplace of the Renaissance.

This is the most recent CD released by Greathall Productions, the company Weiss (a storyteller for twenty-five years) and his wife, Randy, started seventeen years ago. Their abundant collection (called "intelligent entertainment for the thinking family") includes topics in literature as diverse as American Tall Tales, Greek Myths, and Romeo and Juliet. This selection—geared for ages seven to adult—has titles divided into fifteen sub-categories, ranging in length from three minutes to ten minutes.

Weiss begins by describing a dinner party hosted by Lorenzo diMedici, "the unofficial ruler of the city of Florence" in 1492, as listeners are introduced to a fourteen-year-old boy who's observing the other guests. The boy is Michelangelo, a young artist taken under wing by diMedici.

Weiss then backtracks a bit, introducing Lorenzo's grandfather, Cosimo, the man who brought books to Italy's city-states. This was amazing for the time: "Most medieval Europeans never saw a book in their lifetime, never went beyond their immediate village or castle." Cosimo also gave away two-thirds of his fortune to charity, others less fortunate, and the church.

The relationship between the church and the diMedici family is portrayed as antagonistic, as Weiss describes the Easter Sunday attack on the two diMedici grandsons, Lorenzo, twenty, and sixteen-year-old Giuliani.

Weiss's many inflections are evident in the variety of characters he assumes. Especially intriguing is the gravely voice he inhabits as Verrachio, the short-tempered man who tutors Leonardo (born in the town of Vinci). In portraying the elderly archbishop, he affects a struggle

to catch his breath.

Also interesting are the quick bits of trivia tossed in: for example, Leonardo da Vinci could bend iron horseshoes by hand and Michelangelo died at the age of eighty-nine on the very day Galileo was born.

The CD entices listeners to learn more about the people and times discussed; Weiss suggests heading to the nearest library for further information. While there could have been more noticeable pauses between the different sections, it’s not an inconvenience, since the stories flow chronologically.

Art and history during this time of “rebirth” are vibrantly brought to life and it’s a joy, even in the 21st century.