



The Symphony: A Listener's Guide

By Michael Steinberg

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Enriched by biographical detail, historical background, musical examples, and many finely nuanced observations, this volume is a treasury of insight and information. Readers will find illuminating discussion of the complete symphonies of Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms, Sibelius, and Mahler, as well as of the most loved symphonic works of Schubert, Bruckner, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, and others. We learn how to listen more sharply for Haydn's humor, to Mozart's singular combination of pathos with grace, and to the evolution of Beethoven's musical ideas in his nine symphonies. This remarkable range and variety of composers are illuminated by Steinberg's deft, inviting, and intensely personal essays, which give such a vivid portrait of each composer's personality that the reader gets an immediate sense of how the work is a direct expression of the person from whose soul and brain it has sprung. Tracing the ways in which composers have dealt with the musical challenges that have engaged them throughout the centuries, Steinberg takes us through the revolutions of expression, sound, and form that have shaped the symphony's remarkable history. Whether beginners or veterans, music lovers will listen to the symphony with enlivened interest and deeper understanding with Steinberg's masterful guide in hand.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Anyone compiling a guide to the symphony faces two problems: impartiality versus personal enthusiasm and detailed musical analysis versus help for the newcomer. Michael Steinberg succeeds brilliantly at the task, as he has with his guide to the concerto. He has pared this vast repertory down to 118 entries (Franck and Bizet being the surprising omissions), thus keeping room for music by Schmidt, Hartmann, Harbison, Piston, and Tippett. Many of the chapters have helpful general introductions; the brief one on Mendelssohn and the longer one on Schubert are ideal. The Mahler chapter is superb, with consideration of the original version of the First Symphony and the unfinished Tenth Symphony framing a chronological discussion of the works. Steinberg includes all texts and translations of vocal movements and places even isolated works (such as Górecki's wholly atypical Third Symphony) in context. Absent is the clubby tone that infects classical music programming on public radio, and readers will not need to follow scores to understand Steinberg's points. There are some great but peripheral tidbits in the footnotes, as well as frequently trenchant quotations from various composers' letters. Best of all, Steinberg has clear concerns and enthusiasms: orchestral seating plans for the violins and the reasons that repeats in first movements are so often disregarded become refrains. The descriptions of William Schuman's Sixth Symphony and Bohuslav Martinu's *Fantaisies Symphoniques* may send readers rushing to listen, and the overly familiar Beethoven *Eroica* and Schubert "Unfinished" are once again fantastical, odd, and fresh in these pages. In Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony, we read, "the oboe is the sweetest and most seductive of tour guides." Steinberg might well have been describing himself. --William R. Braun

From Library Journal

Critic, lecturer, and program annotator Steinberg describes 36 composers and, movement by movement, 118 symphonies, including all the standard repertory regularly programmed by North American orchestras as well as a few by less well known composers such as Gorecki, Harbison, Martinu, and Sessions. The writing varies from formal and factual to chatty, with candid asides and stories relevant to the composer, the composition, or an important performance. The information is on the level of good program notes (the origin of most of it), although reader familiarity with some basic musical technical terms is assumed. A well-written, informative introduction to the repertory for most music collections. ?Timothy J. McGee, Univ. of Toronto

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From [Booklist](#)

Here's a treat for those addicted to reading the program notes before the concert begins. They will find that Steinberg has done for symphonies what Milton Cross did for operas. These essays, based on program notes Steinberg wrote for the Boston and San Francisco orchestras during the past 20 years, combine insight into a composer's personality and times with thorough analysis of the music, and their coverage ranges from the complete symphonies of cornerstone composers Beethoven, Brahms, and Mahler to selected symphonies of such moderns as Copland, Sessions, Harbison, Tippett, and Piston. They offer both the concertgoer and the audiophile the chance to study a symphony from a point of view that is more personal than that of most recording liner notes. Many a reader will keenly anticipate Steinberg's next volume, which will give concertos similar treatment. *Alan Hirsch*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Diana Sturgill:

Now a day those who Living in the era wherever everything reachable by talk with the internet and the resources within it can be true or not require people to be aware of each info they get. How individuals to be smart in having any information nowadays? Of course the correct answer is reading a book. Reading a book can help folks out of this uncertainty Information mainly this *The Symphony: A Listener's Guide* book since this book offers you rich details and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred percent guarantees there is no doubt in it you probably know this.

Nyla Gomez:

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Mindy Munson:

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Julie Gooch:

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