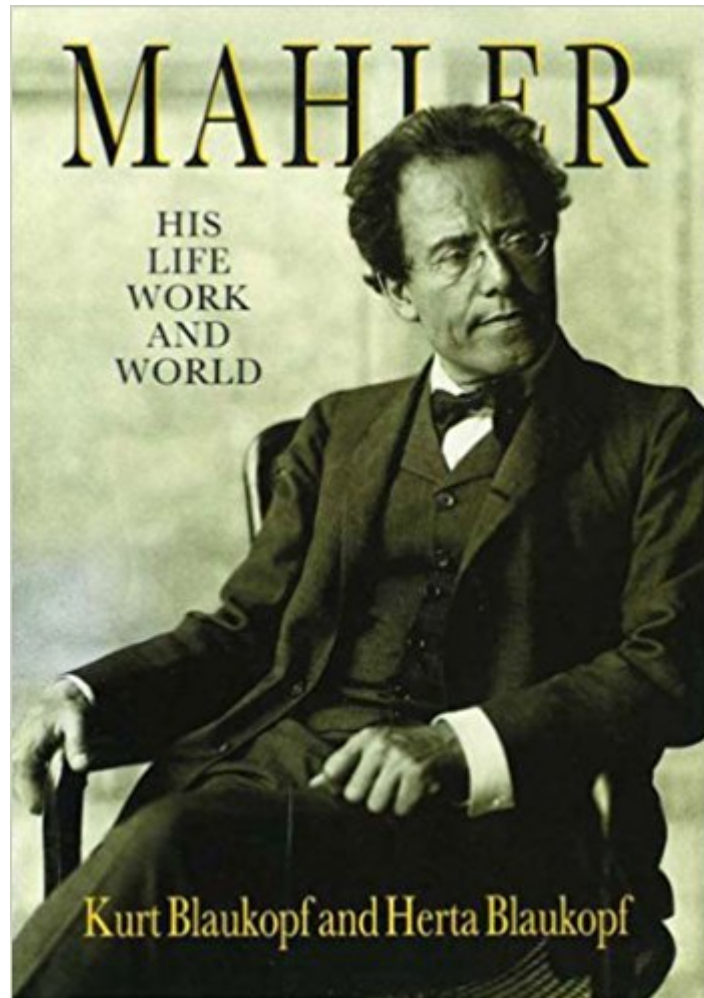




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Mahler: His Life, Work And World



Synopsis

Mahler was born in 1860 in an outpost of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and became one of the greatest conductors and composers of his time, acclaimed throughout Europe and America. This biography assembles a wealth of contemporary material from letters, diaries, concert programmes and reviews.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Vivid social history and a first-rate collection of significant documents. -- Library Journal

Kurt and Herta Blaukopf have supplemented the contemporary evidence with background information that helps to set the scene. The result is a highly readable and informative presentation of Mahler as he saw himself and as he was seen by his contemporaries.

A FEW INTERESTING CORRESPONDENCES OTHERWISE PRETTY BORING! I DID NOT UNDERSTAND IT WAS A BOOK OF LETTERS AND OTHER CORRESPONDENCES. HAD I BEEN AWARE WOULD NOT HAVE BOUGHT IT.MY FAULT ---IF YOU LIKE A RANDOM COLLECTION OF LETTERS, ETC, THEN BUY THIS BOOK. IF NOT BEWARE.

I cannot improve upon the excellent review previously posted, except to add that the book includes a nice year-by-year biographical section near the beginning of the book, AND dozens of

photographs, including an illuminating silhouette sequence of Mahler conducting. This gives us a rare look back in time, at what those watching Mahler in action were able to see.

It's a great story about Mahler, his time, and his life. If you use this book together with some CD's you get an opportunity to learn about his music AND to understand it. How wonderful Helmut

Having been an aficionado of Mahler for over 50 years there was nothing much in this book I didn't know, but it was interesting and enjoyable nonetheless, particularly because of the heavy use of quotes from actual letters and documents. I found particularly poignant the telling of Mahler's last days at the NY Philharmonic and his troubles with its board's women's auxiliary and then, finally, his last trip home to Vienna and his death

Anyone considering this book should know that "Life, Work and World" is a collection of documents from Mahler's life. The documents---letters, newspaper articles, quotes, etc.---are in chronological order. The documents are prefaced with short comments from the authors. This is a good collection that does tell the Mahler story dispassionately in its own way, but it is not a "biography". You might also want to know that the documents themselves are often quite short, some only in excerpts. So the book is more like a mosaic than anything else. Norman Lebrecht's "Mahler Remembered" also collects Mahler documents, and also in chronological order. It is, however, a better read because Lebrecht selected the most interesting letters and articles, presenting them in full. He also offers more commentary to go with them. Kurt Blaukopf did write an outstanding traditional biography of Mahler, which is simply titled "Mahler", first published in the 1960s, translated into English by Inge Goodwin. It is a thoroughly well-researched and insightful read, worth seeking out. This is all old hat, of course, for long-time Mahler students, but those new to Mahler books should know the differences before buying.

This brand-new paperback edition of the 1991 revised English translation of a 1976 indispensable "classic" is superior to virtually any combination of individual Mahler biographies that come to mind. I hope I'm able to explain why in this review, and to further explain how it is that a book on Mahler can be a "page turner." The music of Gustav Mahler has been the centerpiece of my musical listening for virtually all of my adult life, in excess of 40 years now. It's fair to say that it started for me, as it did for others of my generation, with the recordings of Bruno Walter in the late '50's and Leonard Bernstein and others throughout the '60's. It's also fair to say that Mahler's music

engenders intense personalization on the part of a listener who is drawn in, to the extent that there is a never-ending desire to know more about the man, his creative processes, his quite obvious contradictions, and the bipolar way in which his contemporaries, his critics, his musicians, and audiences and critics ever since his death, have characterized the man and the music. I have yet to read a Mahler biography or critique that is not in one way or another colored by the thoughts and opinions of the biographer, starting with the first Mahler biography I read about 30 years ago, by his widow, Alma Werfel-Mahler. Each has had a "pitch," an agenda, which has left rather an incomplete, and often judgemental, picture of this complex human being. Perhaps, had I read all of them in an attempt to weigh matters in the balance, I would have been satisfied in having reached a reasonably accurate overview. Kurt and Herta Blaukopf, in their "Mahler: His Life, Work & World," have done something quite different and remarkable. As a result of reviewing what must have been millions of words by and about the man and his music, incorporating the most up-to-date research on the availability of these materials, and selecting and incorporating those pieces that illuminate the man, his music, his life, and the times in which he lived, a gripping yet balanced portrait of Mahler, from birth to the first posthumous performance of his "Das Lied von der Erde," conducted by Bruno Walter on November 20, 1911 (six months after his death). Along the way, we follow him through success and failure, appointments gained and appointments lost or surrendered, works that came relatively easily and works that resulted only from Herculean struggle, through his own words and the words of friends, associates, subordinates, superiors, acquaintances, rivals, and critics (who, it is clear to see from the selections chosen for this volume, were clearly on one side or the other in the matter of the worth of his music). In several instances, the juxtaposition of critical reviews by admirers and detractors, published the same day but in different papers, lead one to ask "Were these two critics at the same concert?" The pages literally fly by. When, in the last year of his life he experienced his greatest triumph (the first performances of his Eighth Symphony) in the face of mortality, the narrative becomes absolutely gripping, despite its being comprised of nothing more than what is in the written record. The last dozen or so entries are simply heartbreaking in their poignance as the end approaches, a fellow composer places a valuation on his estate as testator, and, six months after Mahler's death, Anton von Webern corresponds to Alban Berg about the text to the final poem in "Das Lied von der Erde" and how, in planning for the two of them to travel to Munich to hear this as-yet-unplayed music, in the premiere conducted by Walter, he knows that they will "...expect to hear the most wonderful music that there is. Something of such magnificence as has never yet existed." And of course Webern was absolutely correct in his assessment. The Blaukopfs note in their Preface that "The biographer who seeks to portray an artist is unable to

resist colouring the picture with his own ideas. Documentation, on the other hand, is more disciplined: it provides the reader with the factual components of Mahler's life and identifies their sources. Each individual can then fit these pieces together to form their own Mahler portrait." At barely 250 pages, this book is a treasure for the Mahlerite. It could have been twice or three times as long and still have been the page-turner that the Blaukopfs have created from the private papers and public records of Gustav Mahler. Every Mahlerite should have this volume in his or her collection. Bob Zeidler

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