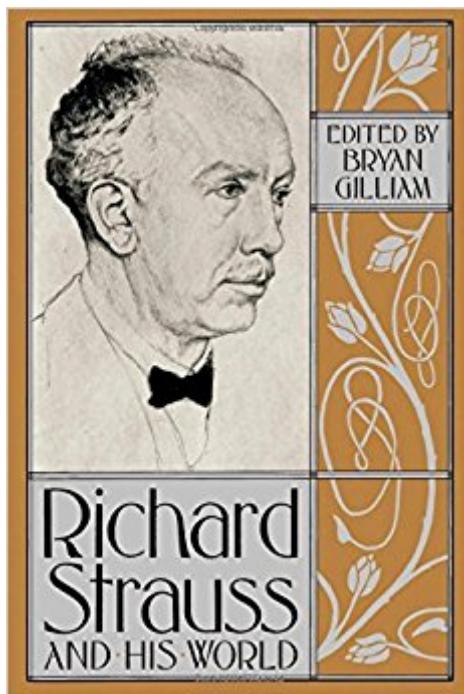


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Richard Strauss And His World



Synopsis

Strongly influencing European musical life from the 1880s through the First World War and remaining highly productive into the 1940s, Richard Strauss enjoyed a remarkable career in a constantly changing artistic and political climate. This volume presents six original essays on Strauss's musical works--including tone poems, lieder, and operas--and brings together letters, memoirs, and criticism from various periods of the composer's life. Many of these materials appear in English for the first time. In the essays Leon Botstein contradicts the notion of the composer's stylistic "about face" after Elektra; Derrick Puffett reinforces the argument for Strauss's artistic consistency by tracing in the tone poems and operas the phenomenon of pitch specificity; James Hepokoski establishes Strauss as an early modernist in an examination of Macbeth; Michael Steinberg probes the composer's political sensibility as expressed in the 1930s through his music and use of such texts as Friedenstag and Daphne; Bryan Gilliam discusses the genesis of both the text and the music in the final scene of Daphne; Timothy Jackson in his thorough source study argues for a new addition to the so-called Four Last Songs. Among the correspondence are previously untranslated letters between Strauss and his post-Hofmannsthal librettist, Joseph Gregor. The memoirs range from early biographical sketches to Rudolf Hartmann's moving account of his last visit with Strauss shortly before the composer's death. Critical reviews include recently translated essays by Theodor Adorno, Guido Adler, Paul Bekker, and Julius Korngold.

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Customer Reviews

A valuable late-summer festival at Bard College in upstate New York, devoted each year to a different composer, has produced several noteworthy collections of papers. This volume on Strauss appeared just before the 1992 festival. When the book was first published, Timothy L. Jackson's thoughts on the Four Last Songs got the most attention. Jackson argues, quite persuasively, that the four songs were originally five, with the orchestral song "Ruhe, meine Seele!" to be heard before "Im Abendrot." His analysis extends all the way to details of orchestration, but the best proof is in the hearing. Several recordings (such as Jessye Norman's with Kurt Masur) allow listeners to program the songs in this order, and the sequence is revelatory. Elsewhere, Leon Botstein contributes the "keynote address," taking up the odd disjunction of the composer's life versus his music. He demolishes the idea of Strauss having stylistic shifts. (Botstein, as president of Bard College, is known to consider Elektra one of the essential texts for a liberal-arts education.) Michael Steinberg takes on Strauss's behavior during the Nazi era. Like Kirsten Flagstad, Karl Boehm, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Strauss will always be linked to his politics. James Hepokoski offers a look at Macbeth, Strauss's first tone poem. In general, the lesser-known works such as Intermezzo and the Burleske for piano and orchestra come up more than you would expect, with correspondingly less on Don Juan or Ariadne auf Naxos. Two chapters offer selections from the composer's correspondence, nicely translated by Susan Gillespie. The most interesting is that with Josef Gregor, the librettist for Daphne. The essays are quite fine individually; taken together they offer nothing less than a wholesale reevaluation of the composer. Focusing on the "middle period" after Elektra, editor Gilliam asks for a separation of style from historical era, and it is the key to a much deeper understanding of the music. --William R. Braun

This timely, important Festschrift stems from the current postmodernist reappraisal and widespread acceptance of Strauss's oeuvre. The book is in four parts: original essays by six musicologists; selected correspondence of Strauss, newly translated; four memoirs of Strauss, two appearing in English for the first time; and critical reviews, which give a cross section of the reception accorded to Strauss's music during his lifetime. Outstanding in this fine collection is Leon Botstein's essay "The Enigmas of Richard Strauss: A Revisionist View," which may well become a classic. In replacing the 19th-century view of historical necessity in music, which culminated in Schoenberg's "emancipation of the dissonance," with a completely different paradigm exemplified by Strauss, Botstein argues brilliantly for a new way of considering the music of our century. Highly recommended for serious music collections.- E. Gaub, Villa Maria Coll., Buffalo, N.Y. Copyright 1992 Reed Business

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