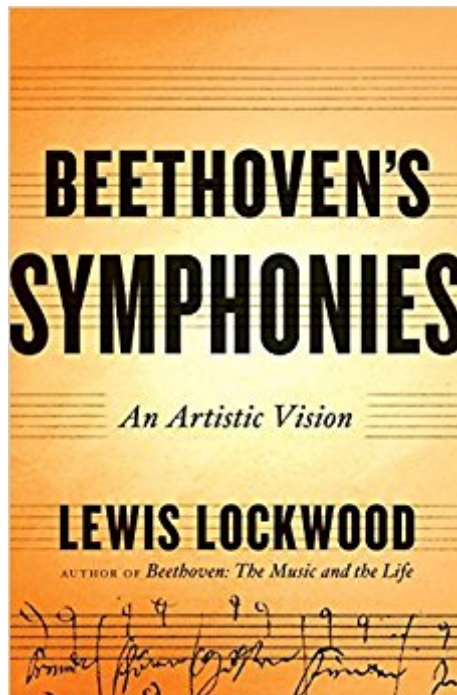




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Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision



Synopsis

An exploration of the unswerving artistic vision underlying Beethoven's symphonies, from one of the world's leading scholars of the composer's works. More than any other composer, Beethoven left to posterity a vast body of material that documents the early stages of almost everything he wrote. From this trove of sketchbooks, Lewis Lockwood draws us into the composer's mind, unveiling a creative process of astonishing scope and originality. For musicians and nonmusicians alike, Beethoven's symphonies stand at the summit of artistic achievement, loved today as they were two hundred years ago for their emotional cogency, variety, and unprecedented individuality. Beethoven labored to complete nine of them over his lifetime—a quarter of Mozart's output and a tenth of Haydn's—yet no musical works are more iconic, more indelibly stamped on the memory of anyone who has heard them. They are the products of an imagination that drove the composer to build out of the highest musical traditions of the past something startlingly new. Lockwood brings to bear a long career of studying the surviving sources that yield insight into Beethoven's creative work, including concept sketches for symphonies that were never finished. From these, Lockwood offers fascinating revelations into the historical and biographical circumstances in which the symphonies were composed. In this compelling story of Beethoven's singular ambition, Lockwood introduces readers to the symphonies as individual artworks, broadly tracing their genesis against the backdrop of political upheavals, concert life, and their relationship to his major works in other genres. From the first symphonies, written during his emerging deafness, to the monumental Ninth, Lockwood brings to life Beethoven's lifelong passion to compose works of unsurpassed beauty. 10 illustrations; 10 music examples

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Customer Reviews

“No one brings Beethoven’s music to life as vividly as Lewis Lockwood. A towering achievement.” - Alan Gilbert, music director, New York Philharmonic
“Lockwood has given music lovers a great gift. By looking at historical context—who listened to Beethoven, what he read and how the symphonies were planned, the reader gets a unique view of the creative process of one of our greatest musical minds.” - Yo-Yo Ma
“This remarkable book is much more than a guide to Beethoven’s symphonies. By granting us access to the composer’s workshop, Lockwood reveals a faltering human being whose unfaltering artistic resolution remains one of the great stories of the human spirit.” - Scott Burnham, Scheide Professor of Music History, Princeton University
“Lockwood elegantly imparts an enormous amount of fascinating detail, placing each symphony in the context of Beethoven’s work in other genres and concert activity. What a pleasure to read!” - Emanuel Ax, pianist
“The preeminent Beethoven scholar traces the composer’s lifelong engagement with the symphony, illuminates afresh the familiar Ninth, and reminds us why these monuments claim listeners’ attention today as much as they did two hundred years ago. A masterful achievement.” - R. Larry Todd, arts & sciences professor, Duke University
“This book contains a lifetime of love and admiration for the bedrock of classical music: Beethoven’s symphonies. Lockwood’s balanced approach and deep knowledge make for a majestic voyage of discovery through these familiar masterworks.” - David Robertson, music director, St. Louis Symphony

Lewis Lockwood taught at Princeton and Harvard universities, where he is Fanny Peabody Professor of Music Emeritus. His *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* was a Pulitzer Prize finalist. He resides in Brookline, Massachusetts.

In my opinion, Beethoven is the greatest music composer of all time, and his symphonies are all excellent. So, when I saw that this book was available from the author of a recent excellent biography on the life of Beethoven, I jumped at the opportunity to read and savored every minute. Each chapter of the book covers one of Beethoven’s symphonies. The coverage includes

the historical context around the symphony, when it appears that started to jot down themes for this symphony and when he finished the symphony (for example, Beethoven jotted down the well known popular theme for the Fifth in 1803 but finished it in 1808). Then, the author reviews the contents of each symphony in some detail. Although this can be technical, I found that it was useful and helped me to better appreciate each piece of music. Some specifics on this: the Second Symphony's 2nd movement is one of his best slow movements. This brought me back to a better appreciation of that symphony. The Seventh Symphony is mostly rhythmic, and the 2nd movement is one his popular (how true!). When asked at the end of his life, Beethoven mentioned that he liked his Third Symphony the best and this symphony is built around the 2nd or funeral march movement. (Personally, I like the Fifth Symphony better, but when pressed he still said that he liked the Third better). There are lots of interesting pieces of information on Beethoven and his symphonies in this book. I plan on reading each chapter again while I listen to each symphony on future plane trips. I highly recommend this book for anyone who loves Beethoven's music, however, you may want to read this author's biography on Beethoven first.

Unlike many others who will read this book, I am not a trained musician. But music, of all genres, has continually grown in importance for me. One of my life goals is to understand as much as possible of great works of music. This book has made an important contribution. The author writes of each of the nine symphonies in a clear and informative style. Avoiding obscure pedantry on one side and vague opinions and cliches on the other.

Very good companion when listening to LVB's 9 symphonies. I enjoyed the historical context the author provides--especially as it applies to Beethoven's life while composing. I only wish the musical explanations were more graspable for a layman, like myself. On the other hand, I'm sure it'll be great material for a expertly versed musician.

Nice book, terrible reprint paper.

Great book with helpful insight into Beethoven's symphonies! :)

Somewhat disappointing, this book seems oddly old-fashioned and disjointed. As the reviewer in the NYRB stated, Lockwood sometimes schematically analyses the music and sometimes uses historical and biographical information to elucidate the "meaning" behind each work. He often fails to

make a really intense connection between how the music is written and why it was written, and how it might have been influenced by extra-musical issues of a cultural, political and artistic nature, when describing each work. Yet his introduction-the best part of the book-does this amazingly well. Only in his analysis of the Eroica, which is less interesting and less fully developed than in his previous book, does he attempt to make this clear, and he completely misreads the meaning of the Finale, which is much less an emotional resolution of the symphony (as it is in the 5th). Instead it represents a historically grounded didactic pageant of how a hero's ideas and actions are viewed by posterity, finally resulting in their ultimate triumph. Lockwood seems to dismiss this idea in favor of the greater emotional, but much less interesting outpouring (and repetitiveness) of the finale to the fifth. Beethoven, who knew the Eroica was his masterpiece (not the fifth) before he wrote the ninth, would definitely NOT have approved. Of course, when it comes to Beethoven's symphonies, or any great music, unless one listens again and again, what point is there to read about it unless it furthers ones' understanding and appreciation. What could have been MUCH more interesting would have been to eliminate "the Life" and to focus more on the history of music and the culture of the times: the Enlightenment, the German Sturm and Drang movement, Goethe, Schiller, the French Revolution and its' ideals, and most importantly, the influence of ancient Greece and Rome on the artistic milieu of the period. (See Martha Walling Howard's "The Influence of Plutarch on the Literature of the Eighteenth Century" for example and Robert Rosenblums' "Transformations in Eighteenth Century Art"). Lockwood does this only in the introduction then seems to (mostly) drop the idea for an analysis of the structural details of each work. Like most of our still pervasive "Age of Analysis" formalism trumps real insights in artistic criticism. A shame.

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