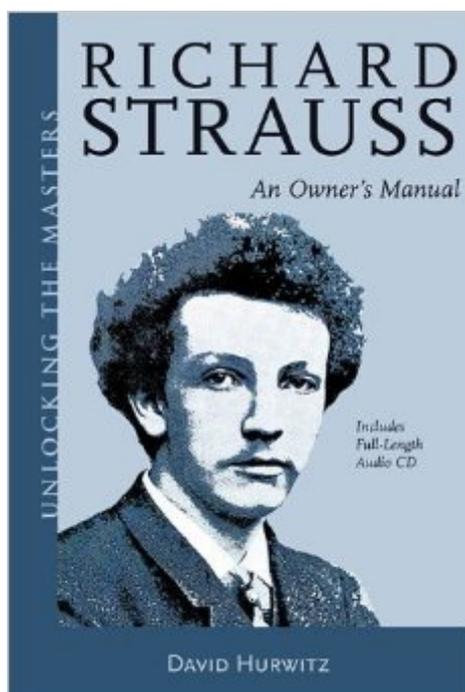


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Richard Strauss: An Owner's Manual (Unlocking The Masters)



Synopsis

The life and music of Richard Strauss (1864-1949) span what was arguably the most turbulent period in human history, encompassing the Franco-Prussian War, the unification of Germany, and two world wars. He was one of the very last composers to have started his career in service to the old European aristocracy, but near the end of his life, the continent lay in shambles, and he faced financial ruin even as he remained Germany's greatest living composer. Virtually from the day they were written, Strauss's tone poems from the late nineteenth century—works such as *Don Juan*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, and *Death and Transfiguration*—have been repertory standards. So have the operas *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*. And yet a tremendous quantity of very good music, both early and late, has only recently come to the attention of musicians and music lovers alike. This owner's manual, accompanied by a full-length CD, surveys all the major works with orchestra: symphonies, concertos, tone poems, operas, ballets, suites, and songs. Many of them will be new even to listeners familiar with the popular pieces, part of a vast legacy of immaculately crafted, beautiful music that deserves to be rediscovered and treasured.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a very useful survey of the music of the German composer Richard Strauss, whose 150th anniversary of his birth year (1864) is celebrated in 2014. I stress that it is a survey of the music: most of the books about Strauss focus on his biography, or specifics of his output (e.g., Mann's

book on the operas). The only book I think you can compare this one to is Norman Del Mar's combination biography and exhaustive discussion of the music: That book will probably never be supplanted for what it does. But I compare that three volume work to this one on purpose, because this one makes some good additions and challenges to Del Mar's central theses. Hurwitz' argument is that, basically, Strauss was a classical era oriented composer throughout; that there is a marked continuity in his career, and that his music composition did not suffer a series of interlocking curves of rise and fall (central premise to Del Mar). Another point he makes is that Strauss, as an operatic composer, was primarily a composer of comic operas, something which, knowing all of Strauss and having listened to him for 50 years, I must confess I never really gave much thought about. I think Hurwitz goes a long way to proving both of his points, and it reminds of me Strauss' long ago and somewhat tongue in cheek remark that Salome and Elektra (his two most advanced operatic works) should be conducted like "fairy music." There are three other good things about the book. First, Hurwitz discusses all of the orchestral and concertante works, as well as all of the operas, in brief summaries that eschew the typical "and here Strauss launches into one of the most sublime / unforgettable / brilliant passages, etc." type of analysis.

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