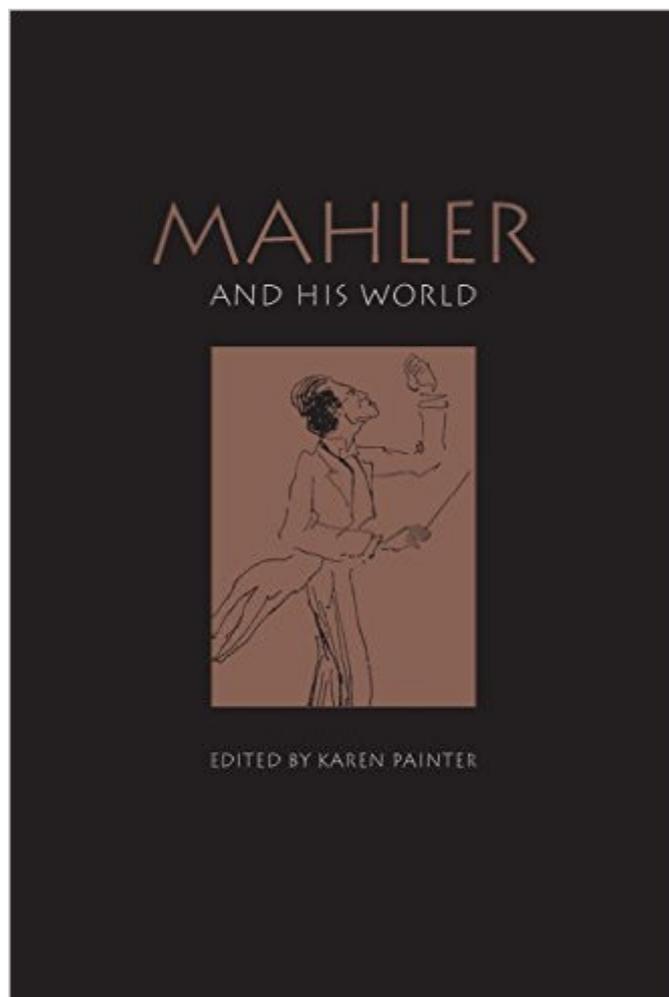


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Mahler And His World (The Bard Music Festival)



Synopsis

From the composer's lifetime to the present day, Gustav Mahler's music has provoked extreme responses from the public and from experts. Poised between the Romantic tradition he radically renewed and the austere modernism whose exponents he inspired, Mahler was a consummate public persona and yet an impassioned artist who withdrew to his lakeside hut where he composed his vast symphonies and intimate song cycles. His advocates have produced countless studies of the composer's life and work. But they have focused on analysis internal to the compositions, along with their programmatic contexts. In this volume, musicologists and historians turn outward to examine the broader political, social, and literary changes reflected in Mahler's music. Peter Franklin takes up questions of gender, Talia Pecker Berio examines the composer's Jewish identity, and Thomas Peattie, Charles S. Maier, and Karen Painter consider, respectively, contemporary theories of memory, the theatricality of Mahler's art and fin-de-siècle politics, and the impinging confrontation with mass society. The private world of Gustav Mahler, in his songs and late works, is explored by leading Austrian musicologist Peter Revers and a German counterpart, Camilla Bork, and by the American Mahler expert Stephen Hefling. Mahler's symphonies challenged Europeans and Americans to experience music in new ways. Before his decision to move to the United States, the composer knew of the enthusiastic response from America's urban musical audiences. Mahler and His World reproduces reviews of these early performances for the first time, edited by Zoë Lang. The Mahler controversy that polarized Austrians and Germans also unfolds through a series of documents heretofore unavailable in English, edited by Painter and Bettina Varwig, and the terms of the debate are examined by Leon Botstein in the context of the late-twentieth-century Mahler revival.

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Customer Reviews

Published last year (2002) were two significant resources on Gustav Mahler. One of these - a paperback edition of Donald Mitchell's "The Mahler Companion" - has already been appraised by me, and found to be a superb "companion." The other is this Festschrift volume, edited by Karen Painter, the "published" part of the 2002 Bard Music Festival celebrating Mahler. The Mitchell and Painter books are similar in some respects, in that both contain essays by expert Mahlerians incorporating good historical/musicological research. But there are also differences, making the books complementary. Where the Mitchell book is broad, with chapters covering all of Mahler's works, the Painter book is more tightly focused, with fewer essays on a narrower range of topics. Part of the appeal of this Painter book is the inclusion of reprints of a vast array of historic criticism that provides an understanding of how Mahler was perceived and received during his lifetime. Painter's book is worth having for Leon Botstein's lead-off essay ("Whose Gustav Mahler?") alone. A virtuosic work, it earns separate commentary later. But first, briefer comments about some of the book's other strong points. The first section (CONTEXT AND IDEOLOGIES) contains two fascinating essays that are closely related: Charles S. Maier's "Mahler's Theater: The Performative and the Political in Central Europe, 1890-1910" and Karen Painter's "The Aesthetics of Mass Culture: Mahler's Eighth Symphony and Its Legacy." The thrust of the Maier essay leads naturally into the Painter one. Working backwards, there are two well-known facts regarding Mahler's Eighth Symphony.

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