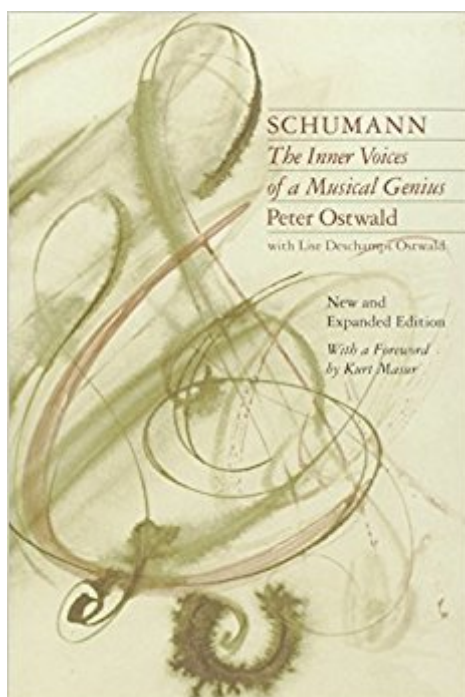


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Schumann: The Inner Voices Of A Musical Genius



Synopsis

After obtaining access to long sought-after archival material about the final years of Robert Schumann, Lise Deschamps Ostwald, the author's widow, is finally able to detail the composer's last years at the mental institution in Enderich, fulfilling her husband's original intent.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ostwald has written a careful and insightful biography. Not only are effects of mental illness in musical creativity explored, but there are a number of interesting philosophical issues raised about mind and its functioning. The subjective experience of creativity, musical or otherwise, is impossible to communicate fully, but Ostwald does a remarkable job. Ostwald's thoughts on musical expression and meanings therein are original, and not extensions of Suzanne Langer's (or other philosophers') interpretation. That Ostwald himself is a pianist as well as psychiatrist allows an intimate understanding of musical cognition, and this in conjunction with his psychiatric training makes for an unusual analysis. This is not light reading, but definitely in range of an interested reader. It is thought-provoking and fascinating. I highly recommend it.

Ostwald isn't a normal biographer. He is concerned with more than the 'facts'. His focus is on the complex relationship between Schumann's music, his life, his mental state and his relationship with Clara. But to this end he has done a major service to our understanding of Schumann by going well

beyond the published sources. Oswald has translated hitherto unpublished diaries and correspondence that reveal a Schumann who is considerably more complex than he appears in biographies up to this. Certainly, Oswald's interest in the psychiatric elements of Schumann's life results in a certain amount of terminology, but this is not jargon; there is a chapter which reviews Schumann's illnesses using current American diagnostic guidelines, so this is hardly psychobabble! Oswald is also a tireless advocate of the less-well-known Schumann, for which he also deserves credit. And finally, the chapter on Schumann's final illness is haunting and chilling. He died a much more wretched death than we supposed. Strongly recommended.

The late Peter Oswald's biography is still the most insightful, intelligent and accurate account of Schumann's life and his illness. Dr. Oswald undertook a very careful study of all the factual material available and drew the most realistic, sensible and compelling conclusions about Schumann's life. Schumann, like other composers, was long regarded as schizophrenic while some writers are still recycling the old notion that he suffered from syphilis and that it was the cause of his mental decline. Schumann was, as Oswald rightly claims, bipolar. The signs of his illness were in place long before he might have contracted syphilis and even that possibility is in doubt. Oswald brought Schumann scholarship into the 20th century and debunked a lot of misconceptions about the composer, his illness and his relationships. Highly recommended.

Peter Oswald and his wife Lise Deschamps Oswald have dedicated enormous time and energy to illuminating Schumann's music in the light of his life events and psychological condition. They have succeeded wonderfully with this book. They bring insights to Schumann's life and music that do not exist anywhere else - it is the result of a decades long labor of love, by a musician psychiatrist. I am grateful to them both for this creation. I also recommend their book on Glenn Gould highly. [nb: I didn't know Peter and have never met Lise. But much of them comes through in the Schumann and Gould books. Ich hätte sie so gerne gekannt.]

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