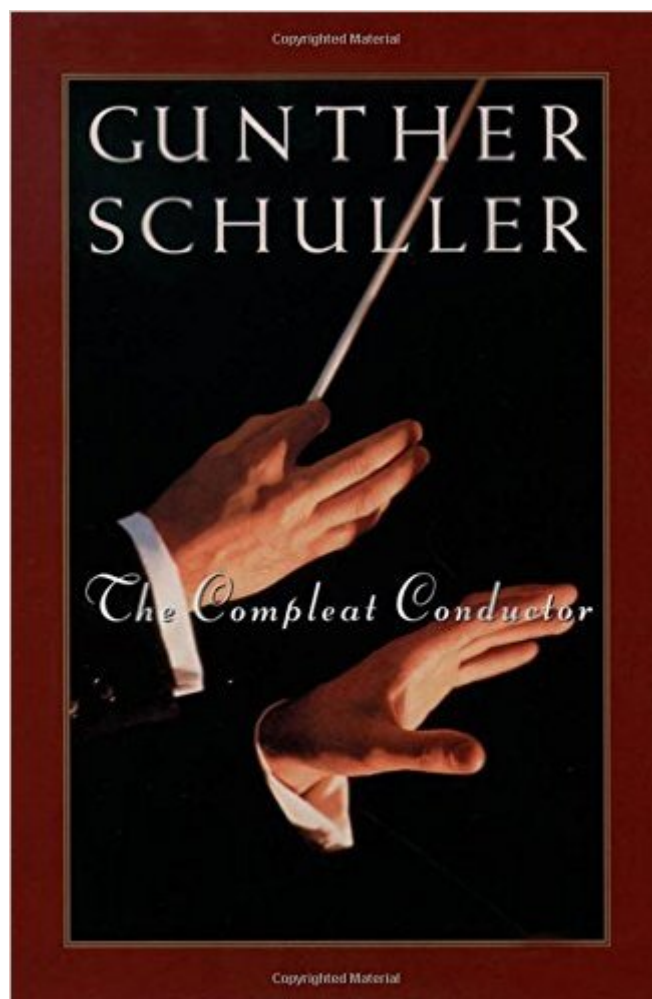


The book was found

The Compleat Conductor



Synopsis

A world-renowned conductor and composer who has lead most of the major orchestras in North America and Europe, a talented musician who has played under the batons of such luminaries as Toscanini and Walter, and an esteemed arranger, scholar, author, and educator, Gunther Schuller is without doubt a major figure in the music world. Now, in *The Compleat Conductor*, Schuller has penned a highly provocative critique of modern conducting, one that is certain to stir controversy. Indeed, in these pages he castigates many of this century's most venerated conductors for using the podium to indulge their own interpretive idiosyncrasies rather than devote themselves to reproducing the composer's stated and often painstakingly detailed intentions. Contrary to the average concert-goer's notion (all too often shared by the musicians as well) that conducting is an easily learned skill, Schuller argues here that conducting is "the most demanding, musically all embracing, and complex" task in the field of music performance. Conducting demands profound musical sense, agonizing hours of study, and unbending integrity. Most important, a conductor's overriding concern must be to present a composer's work faithfully and accurately, scrupulously following the score including especially dynamics and tempo markings with utmost respect and care. Alas, Schuller finds, rare is the conductor who faithfully adheres to a composer's wishes. To document this, Schuller painstakingly compares hundreds of performances and recordings with the original scores of eight major compositions: Beethoven's fifth and seventh symphonies, Schumann's second (last movement only), Brahms's first and fourth, Tchaikovsky's sixth, Strauss's "Till Eulenspiegel" and Ravel's "Daphnis et Chloe, Second Suite." Illustrating his points with numerous musical examples, Schuller reveals exactly where conductors have done well and where they have mangled the composer's work. As he does so, he also illuminates the interpretive styles of many of our most celebrated conductors, offering pithy observations that range from blistering criticism of Leonard Bernstein ("one of the world's most histrionic and exhibitionist conductors") to effusive praise of Carlos Kleiber (who "is so unique, so remarkable, so outstanding that one can only describe him as a phenomenon"). Along the way, he debunks many of the music world's most enduring myths (such as the notion that most of Beethoven's metronome markings were "wrong" or "unplayable," or that Schumann was a poor orchestrator) and takes on the "cultish clan" of period instrument performers, observing that many of their claims are "totally spurious and chimeric." In his epilogue, Schuller sets forth clear guidelines for conductors that he believes will help steer them away from self indulgence towards the correct realization of great art. Courageous, eloquent, and brilliantly insightful, *The Compleat Conductor* throws down the gauntlet to conductors worldwide. It is a controversial book that the music world will be debating for many years to come.

Book Information

Paperback: 592 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press (December 10, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195126610

ISBN-13: 978-0195126617

Product Dimensions: 9.2 x 1.8 x 6.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (14 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #189,705 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #21 inÂ Books > Arts &

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Customer Reviews

This is a very bizarre book indeed. Schuller's ideals are laudable in themselves: don't tamper with scores and don't let your ego get in the way of what the composer is saying. But his attempts to prove his point are flawed in almost every way, mainly because he constantly breaks the rules that he set out himself to start with. He obsessively analyses recordings of a number of famous great works with the score in hand, and points out the innumerable sins, blunders and stupidities that in his view virtually every conductor allows himself in virtually every bar. For some reason the author presumes he is just about the only one who knows how it should be done, or cares about doing it well, or even more amazingly: knows what the composer actually meant. E.g.: Changing anything in a score is a mortal sin, because the composer knows best - only Schuller knows better, pointing out where the composer 'forgot' something or is 'obviously' wrong, and changing instrumentation, tempo or dynamics accordingly. For some unspecified reason (a personal hotline to the hereafter maybe?) the author is the only conductor allowed to make such decisions; be sure he will hurl accusations of incompetence or arrogance at others who do the same thing! These inconsistencies are an inevitable result from the assumption that scores are fairly unambiguous and composers well nigh infallible. Of course, they aren't and they aren't. Schuller claims objectivity, but his methods wouldn't hold their own against even the mildest scientific criteria. How can one realistically compare recordings from the '30s to state of the art CD-sound from the '90s? Can one really, objectively and consistently, judge the difference between pp and ppp?

This book was recommended to me during a conducting workshop. The teacher, an extremely knowledgeable musician and gifted and hardworking conductor, hated this book upon FIRST reading, and as he explored the concepts and analyses further found more enlightenment and wisdom. You can tell the folks who didn't like this book are writing off the cuff. In *The Compleat Conductor*, Gunther Schuller gives us his philosophy and a short history of conducting, and then goes into some real detail analyzing eight great classical works and how even the greatest maestros can fail the composer's wishes and ideals. Schuller is VERY straightforward and covers all of his bases well, and defends his points and decisions and pickiness. A quote: "The secret of great artistry and true integrity of interpretation lies in the ability to bring to life the score for the listener (and the orchestra) through the fullest knowledge of the score, so that the conductor's personality expresses itself WITHIN the parameters of the score." Schuller maintains that composers like Beethoven and Brahms were very explicit in their desires, and that their music doesn't need all of the extra bells and whistles conductors use to manipulate an audience, and in fact a good number of conductors in the process ignore the finer points of the music. Quote again: "...all those deviations from the score do not necessarily make the performance 'more natural,' 'more human.' They may create that illusion--or delusion; they may fool the unknowing, unwary listener into thinking that it was 'exciting,' 'moving,' 'authentic,' when in reality the excitement was superficial and the work was grossly misrepresented." There are points in the book where Schuller then recommends changing this and that in various scores.

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