



The Concerto: A Listener's Guide (Listener's Guide Series)

By Michael Steinberg

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Michael Steinberg's 1996 volume *The Symphony: A Reader's Guide* received glowing reviews across America. It was hailed as "wonderfully clear...recommended warmly to music lovers on all levels" (*Washington Post*), "informed and thoughtful" (*Chicago Tribune*), and "composed by a master stylist" (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Seiji Ozawa wrote that "his beautiful and effortless prose speaks from the heart." Michael Tilson Thomas called *The Symphony* "an essential book for any concertgoer."

Now comes the companion volume--*The Concerto: A Listener's Guide*. In this marvelous book, Steinberg discusses over 120 works, ranging from Johann Sebastian Bach in the 1720s to John Adams in 1994. Readers will find here the heart of the standard repertory, among them Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, eighteen of Mozart's piano concertos, all the concertos of Beethoven and Brahms, and major works by Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt, Bruch, Dvora'k, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Elgar, Sibelius, Strauss, and Rachmaninoff. The book also provides luminous introductions to the achievement of twentieth-century masters such as Arnold Schoenberg, Be'la Barto'k, Igor Stravinsky, Alban Berg, Paul Hindemith, Sergei Prokofiev, Aaron Copland, and Elliott Carter. Steinberg examines the work of these musical giants with unflagging enthusiasm and bright style. He is a master of capturing the expressive, dramatic, and emotional values of the music and of conveying the historical and personal context in which these wondrous works were composed. His writing blends impeccable scholarship, deeply felt love of music, and entertaining whimsy.

Here then is a superb journey through one of music's richest and most diverse forms, with Michael Steinberg along as host, guide, and the best of companions.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Veteran music critic and program-notes writer Michael Steinberg offers up a sequel to his well-received collection of articles, *The Symphony: a Reader's Guide*. Over the years, Steinberg has written program notes for the likes of the San Francisco Symphony and the Minnesota Orchestra, so this new book might be subtitled, "Pieces of Music Orchestras Paid Me to Write About." Even though the selection of pieces is far from all-inclusive, the approach to the reader is friendly and non-snobby, and very little of the book is off-putting for those who have no musical training. Beethoven, Brahms, and Mozart are plentifully described and with a certain feeling for how to mix biographical incidents with musical matters to heighten a reader's interest. However, a lot of rarer composers are absent, as are some works by familiar composers, so readers might want to complement this book with another Oxford Press title, *A Guide to the Concerto* edited by Robert Layton, which, instead of focusing on individual works, contains essay-length overviews by such expert critics as David Brown and Michael Kennedy--whetting the appetite for hearing rarities as well as informing the reader about familiar works. Reading Steinberg, one would never agree with Glenn Gould (among other musicians), who dismissed the concerto form as artistically unsatisfying. Instead, one feels a sense of gratitude for so many good works written in the medium. --*Benjamin Ivry*

From Publishers Weekly

A former music critic for the Boston Globe, Steinberg (*The Symphony: A Reader's Guide*) here gathers some 122 essays, some of which began as notes to programs given by the New York Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony and the Minnesota Orchestra, among others. Now based in Edina, Minn., Steinberg generally focuses on the most-often played concertos by Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and other popular composers. Although this is not the book to open if you're looking for data on a rare item by the likes of Nikolai Miaskovsky or Vagn Holmboe, it is nevertheless a worthwhile introduction for readers shy of technical matters. Steinberg intersperses his essays with plenty of commentary about various concertos from musicians, who generally have more pertinent things to say than a good many musicologists. Although there are musical examples, they need not scare off readers who have never studied music. Inevitably, in a collection of articles such as this, there will be some painful omissions: thus, although Witold Lutoslawski's great Cello Concerto merits an article, none is devoted to his equally great Piano Concerto. Modern composers such as Henri Dutilleux, Bohuslav Martinu and Darius Milhaud are not discussed here, nor are there any entries about popular classical works such as Haydn's Cello Concertos. While this book not an all-inclusive or encyclopedic guide, this collection of articles has a relaxed, easy charm that will most likely win over readers unfamiliar with the subject.

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From Library Journal

Similar to Steinberg's earlier volume *The Symphony: A Listener's Guide* (LJ 9/1/95), these essays were originally written for the program books of the Boston Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, and other orchestras. The 117 concertos chosen represent an interesting cross-section of works by the most popular composers (Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart), some less popular ones (Schoenberg, Sessions), and a few surprises (Perle, Nielsen, Zimmerman). A wide range of material?facts about the composers' lives, notable circumstances surrounding the first performances of the work?punctuate his discussion of each composition. The entries are all clearly written, although it is assumed that the reader has a fairly good knowledge of the standard musical repertory, and technical information is included. For the amateur with a musical background, this is a valuable and very interesting collection. ?Timothy J. McGee, Univ. of Toronto

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Users Review

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Mark Fetter:

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