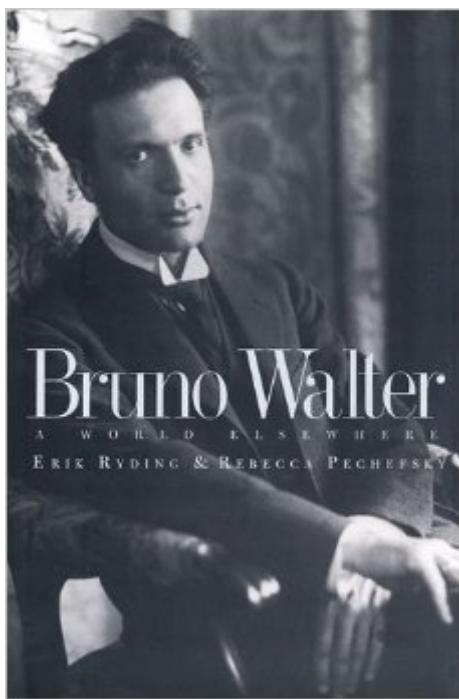


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Bruno Walter: A World Elsewhere



Synopsis

Bruno Walter, one of the greatest conductors in the twentieth century, lived a fascinating life in difficult times. This engrossing book is the first full-length biography of Walter to appear in English. Erik Ryding and Rebecca Pechefsky describe Walter's early years in Germany, where his successes in provincial theatres led to positions at the Berlin State Opera and the Vienna State Opera. They then tell of his decade-long term as Bavarian music director and his romantic involvement with the soprano Delia Reinhardt; his other positions in the musical community until he was ousted from Germany when the Nazi Party came to power in 1933; and his return to Vienna, where he was artistic director of the Opera House until he was again forced out by the Nazis. Finally they trace his career in the United States, where he led the New York Philharmonic and other orchestras and in his last years made numerous recordings with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble created especially for him. Ryding and Pechefsky are the first biographers to make extensive use of the thousands of unpublished letters in the Bruno Walter Papers, now in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. In addition to interviewing more than sixty people who knew Walter, they examined countless reviews to assess the popular and critical impact he had on his time. Authoritative and even-handed, this biography sheds new light on Walter, one of the great formative influences in musical interpretation.

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Customer Reviews

I probably qualify as a representative of the tribe of general readers, being mostly an interested amateur in what this book covers. As such, I found "Bruno Walter: a World Elsewhere" a very

satisfying window into an era of music (and my childhood) that I was heretofore only vaguely aware of. In other words, it helped me fit together and fill out a picture of the musical and political and social history of the twentieth century, and that alone made it worthwhile. But aside from that, it was simply great fun to read personal vignettes about so many eminent musicians, composers, conductors, and others. I found the book entertaining reading too, I mean to say--a dandy thing, in the summer (or any other time as well)! While I may be an amateur as far as the contents of the biography go, I am also a professor and teacher of writing, and it was gratifying to find a biography written so smoothly that reading it was a pleasure, which is by no means the rule in scholarly biographies. There are notes and indeces aplenty for the scholars, but these should not dissuade the general reader--they do not get in the way in the least. Add to this the fact that the volume is a handsomely designed one, with splendid pictures and an attractive typeface, and you have a book truly worth owning--or giving, for that matter.

Finally, a full-length biography of Bruno Walter in English that devotees of his work can savor. Walter was widely recognized in his time as one of the master conductors, but his lack of flashiness, and sometimes fake air of saintliness, are off-putting to our star-obsessed age, so he hasn't received the recognition he deserves. SONY is sitting on a large back-catalog of important mono recordings by him that may never see the light of digital distribution -- or perhaps the imminent changes in music distribution wrought by the internet will eventually make it all available. Meanwhile, this very well-done, comprehensive biography will have to do. My biggest complaint is the lack of a complete discography as an appendix to the book - referring people to websites won't cut it yet, as too many folks still don't have regular internet access. Apart from that failing, this is a model of what an arts biography should be, a well-researched life, a serious consideration of issues of personal performing style, and decent pictures.

To say that the book "Bruno Walter: A World Elsewhere" is both a godsend and a delight would be an understatement--I cannot say enough good about this work. "A World Elsewhere" is a detailed and concise look at the conductors' life and career from birth until death--and in English. (My definite language of choice) It offers a style that is smooth and a pleasure to read and obviously involved a lot of meticulous research. I have been an admirer of Bruno Walter for many years, and this biography is the perfect companion to my collection of Walters' recordings. It is an even-handed, multi-faceted depiction of the conductors' experiences. In reading "A World Elsewhere", I have learned much about the man that has enabled me to understand his life better; although the book

does not go into a lot of detail about Bruno Walter's connection with Anthroposophy, it has still inspired me to investigate this movement further. "A World Elsewhere" is a definite "must read" for anyone who admired Bruno Walter- a great conductor whose involvement with music touched and enriched many people's lives, and still does today. Doug Rea

Amazingly interesting book!

Dr. Bruno Walter (1876-1962) was born to an upper middle class home in Berlin. He was a child prodigy composing and conducting with such ensembles as the Berlin Symphony. Walter became the assistant to the genius Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) winning the admiration of the prickly man of music. Walter's music room was all of Europe and the great concert halls and recording studios heard his majestic music making in operas, symphonies and chamber music. He composed until 1910 forsaking creative composition to become a peerless conductor of works by Mahler; Beethoven; Brahms; Bruckner; Wagner; Verdi and the other gods in music's pantheon. Walter had seen and experienced tragedy. His younger daughter Greta was murdered by her husband; he lost his homeland as the Nazis conquered Austria and expelled him and other Jewish geniuses from the Reich; he had extramarital affairs but was a decent, honorable and serious man. Walter loved literature becoming friendly with Thomas Mann the great novelists; he enjoyed reading, writing on music and was a strong but understanding conductor. He and Toscanini were friends. This is a book for those who are familiar with classical music. The book is very detailed and one almost feels like he/she has seen a review of every concert conducted by Walter! While this can become tedious to the general reader the overall effect is one of respect for Walter. In a time when classical music is a minority taste the co-authors have done their homework producing a well written and researched biography of Dr. Walter.

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