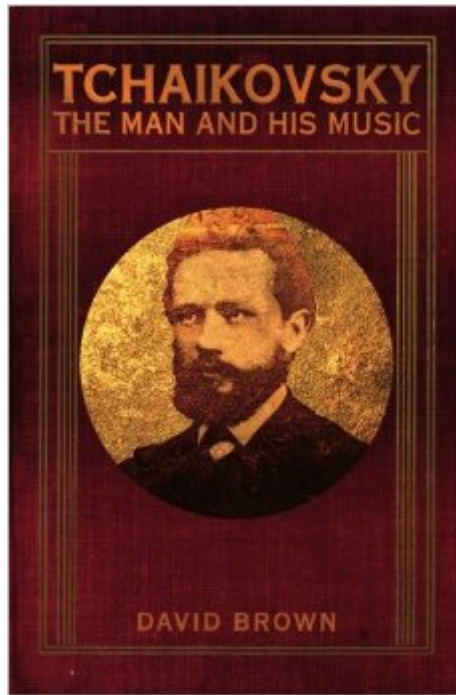


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Tchaikovsky: The Man And His Music



Synopsis

A masterful exploration of the relationship between Tchaikovsky's life and his music. In this distinctive new work on Tchaikovsky, David Brown uniquely combines a lively biography of Russia's best-loved composer with a chronological guide to his music, ranging from the popular symphonies, concertos, operas and ballets like *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*, to some lesser-known pieces. Brown skillfully guides the reader through Tchaikovsky's music within the context of his life, and the result is an edifying journey through some of the greatest and most moving music ever composed. As for Tchaikovsky himself, he emerges as a man dogged with bouts of depression but capable of great kindness, devoted to his family, unstinting with his time and money, even on behalf of virtual strangers. It is no wonder that when he died, he was given a state funeral, nor that the massive crowds lining the streets delayed the procession to the cemetery by five hours.

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Customer Reviews

This is a beautifully written and comprehensive biography of Tchaikovsky. The book is written in a very conversational yet authoritative style, and draws the reader in to what Tchaikovsky may have been thinking during his compositional periods. Clearly the author is extraordinarily knowledgeable about his subject, having written a four volume biography years earlier. This is a far more manageable read, yet conveys the essentials. By juxtaposing Tchaikovsky's life with his compositions, it is much easier to understand the meaning behind so many of his recondite works. I particularly enjoyed the in-depth analyses of his compositions, as well as the author's editorial

comments about their quality. Although it seems there is little about Tchaikovsky that he doesn't like, the author uses a rating system to point the reader to the most important of works, such as the late symphonies, the violin and first piano concertos, and the ballets (especially *Sleeping Beauty*). I was left wishing how interesting it would have been to talk to the composer in person: he was a complex man who divulged his soul through his music. Understanding the background of the Tchaikovsky works, and understanding his state of mind against the backdrop of the tribulations of his personal life when composing, vastly enhances the listening of his music; in this regard Tchaikovsky is almost unique because the man, his life, and his music become inseparable. All the book lacked for me were recommendations for specific recordings that the author felt were exalted. Nevertheless - Bravo!

I feel like the author had readers like me in mind when he wrote this biography. I have more passion for music than knowledge of it. I buy classical CDs and attend concerts, but generally, I let the music roll over me rather than try to analyze it. Tchaikovsky's music is my favorite of all, and I thought I'd like to learn a little more about both the composer and the works. Between the author's credentials and the 425 page length, I was afraid I'd immediately be over my head, but that never happened. The book is written in such a way that you can learn when and what was going on in Tchaikovsky's life when he created a piece and what makes each piece great; yet you can pass over more detailed musical descriptions and return to the biography if and when you wish. I want to quickly say, however, for more musically knowledgeable readers than myself, there is plenty of discussion and intellectual opinion to recommend this work, and so it is not a beginners book by any stretch. In summary, due to David Brown's style, the book is easily accessible and a very enjoyable (and quick) read about a genius who had a fascinating life; yet you will learn so much you will feel like you took a course by the time you are done. I am now enjoying Tchaikovsky's music more than ever.

The author has arranged his material between biography facts and technical musical information. This is very helpful when you are not a technical musician, since you can skip over or just glance at the technical part

I first heard of this book via Cincinnati's One City, One Symphony program of outreach. The speaker at the session I attended was so enthusiastic and well versed on the two artists that were being featured that I had to ask about his source material. I enjoy learning the inspiration of music

and this was very informative.

I came across Brown's "Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study" when I was in college during the mid 1980's. I read the first two volumes (which I remember as being pretty massive), but that's all the library had, and they only covered about half of his life. I've since learned the next two volumes were published later. When I saw this more condensed book, I decided to go ahead and download it. As others have mentioned, the book is fairly easy to read if you're truly interested in the subject matter, but the author doesn't go into much historical depth regarding the world during Tchaikovsky's lifetime. What you get is the facts about him, excerpts from diaries and letters, and the author's own opinions. At times the book seems like a Tchaikovsky Music Appreciation course, with Brown giving star ratings and recommendations for individual works, as well as pretty detailed analysis, which I have to admit I mostly skipped over. Unless you're actually listening to the music while reading, the words come across like extended CD liner notes. However, most of the book is interesting and even intriguing. I'm no musicologist, but still a huge fan of Tchaikovsky, and I learned a few things, such as the fact that he wrote almost twice as many operas as he did symphonies. Even though the book ends as suddenly as its subject's life, Brown's theories surrounding his cause of death will leave you asking some questions of your own.

For lovers of Tchaikovsky who wish to have a well written guide to his major work, this book is a great start. It provides insight into the creation of the music, its reception, and its place in its time and the legacy that it has given the world. It is a well documented, researched, and organized guide. Brown's knowledge of Russian culture and its music lend authority to his analysis. Having said this I would then like to point out its defects. This is in appearance an adaptation of his more massive work on the composer in four volumes. The focus is definitely on the music, and not the personal life of this composer. As a gay man I can assure anyone reading this that if they want to understand the core of Tchaikovsky as a creative mind one must embrace his homosexuality head on and acknowledge it as an influence in his character and creation. While Brown in no way disputes this truth, he explores it no more than he does the very brief period of his childhood. As I read this book I find it increasingly inferior in its psychological analysis. Very little of his relationships outside of his friendship with his patron Nadezhda von Meck and his tragic marriage to Antonina Ivanovna Milyukova, are explored. I find it a very weak rendering and it is very bold for any serious lover of his music to find this not to be the case. No one who is honest can say that I exaggerate the importance of a biography when it lacks a full account of a personal life. I get the sense Mr. Brown is very

uncomfortable with discussing the more than ample evidence of Tchaikovsky's sex life. I recommend this as a listening guide, not as a biography.

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