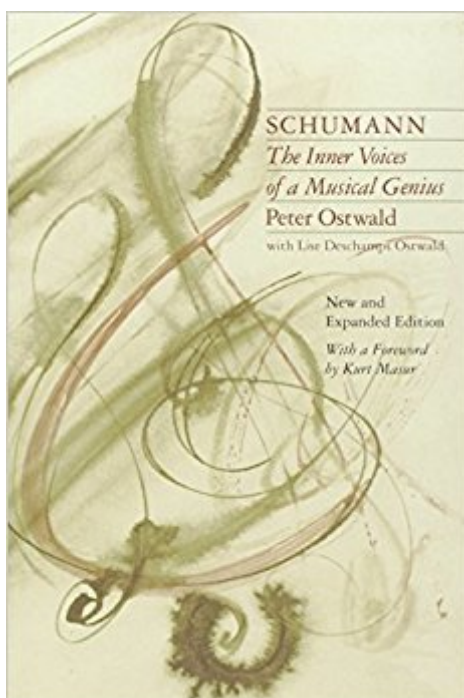


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Schumann: The Inner Voices Of A Musical Genius



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 Endenich, fulfilling her husband's original intent.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Schumann is a remarkable piece of work. Soberly and objectively, it unearths information that no previous Schumann researcher in English at least has come near duplicating. Harold C. Schonberg, The New York Times

"Peter Ostwald, a San Francisco psychiatrist who is also a trained musician, has dug deeply . . . and applied his professional knowledge to the fashioning of a fascinating, perceptive psychobiography of the nineteenth-century Romantic master. Arthur Hepner, Boston Globe

"Ostwald . . . offers new insights into one about whom the musical world has never ceased wondering. Robert Commanday, San Francisco Chronicle

PETER OSTWALD, M.D. (1928-1996), was a professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco, a musician, and an author of numerous books. His widow, LISE DESCHAMPS OSTWALD, is a concert pianist and was his long-time assistant.

Finally an answer to what was wrong with Schumann's brain.

A well-written biography by the troubled soul that was Robert Schumann.

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.]

Oswald 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 Oswald does a remarkable job. Oswald's thoughts on musical expression and meanings therein are original, and not extensions of Suzanne Langer's (or other philosophers') interpretation. That Oswald 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.

Oswald 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. Ostwald 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, Ostwald'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! Ostwald 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.

While there is much interesting information in this book about one of my favorite composers, the book is tedious to read. Every event, decision, feeling of Schumann is analyzed in psychological terms, and never insightful in any way.. each of the (TOO FREQUENT) observations breaks the flow of the story, and they never provide insights that we wouldn't have drawn ourselves, and this finally distracts so much that the reading becomes tedious. For example, what is the point of telling the reader about the psychological effects of a death of a sister or father? I'm a human being, I know this all too well, just tell the story of this great composer.. the only point of reading this ultimately is to make the music come alive for me. There is not much discussion of Schumann's music, what is there is not deep enough to provide any deepening of appreciation or understanding of the music. Regret I didn't get the other newer biography (but more expensive)

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