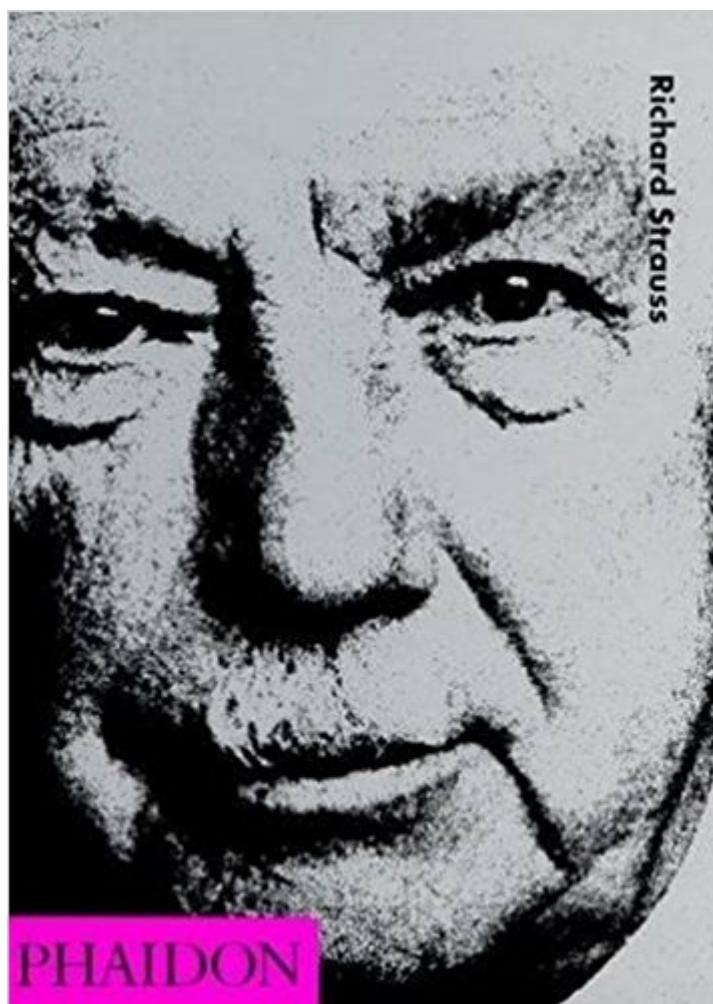


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# Richard Strauss (20th Century Composers)



## Synopsis

This revealing biography examines the life and works of the influential German composer Richard Strauss (1864-1949), whose evocative tone poems and beautifully crafted operas have been somewhat tainted in the public's imagination following claims that the composer was a Nazi sympathizer. Strauss's compositions also courted controversy, in particular his setting of Oscar Wilde's outrageous play *Salome*. In this book Tim Ashley delves beneath Strauss's public persona, in order to further understand the truth behind the myths, and the ways in which the composer's personality and private life influenced his often sublime music.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Recent scholarly writing on Richard Strauss who remains among the most popular of 20th-century composers, if not necessarily the most critically respected, has debated two issues: his dubious relation with the Nazi party and the break in his style, around 1910, from modernist experimentation to a conservative, nostalgic mode. Among the strengths of Ashley's biography is that he absorbs the latest scholarship into his concise, linear narrative and incorporates abundant anecdotes and revealing quotations. Ashley is evenhanded on the political question, wisely rejecting Strauss's declaration, "I am an apolitical composer." Strauss's anti-Semitic outbursts are revisited and, ultimately, a Strauss emerges who, while not an enthusiastic collaborator, passively acquiesced to the Nazis. Ashley thoroughly covers Strauss's compositions, as well, devoting thoughtful comments

to forgotten as well as familiar works (though the composer's songs deserve more attention than they receive). Particularly interesting are Ashley's comparison of the two versions of the opera *Ariadne auf Naxos* (he makes the unfamiliar first version seem far more intriguing) and his argument that *Friedenstag*, usually seen as a pacifist opera, is in fact complicit with fascist ideology. Ashley risks glibness, however, in his judgments often merely stated instead of argued of the success or failure of various works. As an introduction for readers interested in Strauss the man, his works and his times, Ashley's book will serve admirably. Illus. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This book, written to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Strauss's death, is a remarkably clear-eyed and intelligent assessment of one of this century's most important and problematic composers. British music critic Boyden is no sycophantic apologist: all of Strauss's flaws and excesses, both personal and musical, are soberly laid bare. According to Boyden, Strauss was guided not by any particular aesthetic position but solely by egotism, pragmatic and moneymaking considerations, bourgeois nationalistic values, and an unrepentant Nietzschean worldview that ultimately led to his uncritical acceptance of Nazism. Boyden proceeds chronologically through Strauss's output, with fascinating digressions into the social and intellectual milieu that underlie each work. One of his intriguing theses is that Strauss did not beat a retreat from the precipice of modernism (as is usually presumed) because he never embraced modernism in the first place. This book contains no musical examples and skirts detailed analyses of individual pieces, yet it is so rich in background information and perceptive observations that one doesn't mind. Highly recommended. ALarry A. Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, PA Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a fascinating, impressively researched, balanced biography of Richard Strauss. The author clearly appreciates Strauss's music, but refuses to either gloss over or demonize Strauss's personal flaws, anti-Semitism, or involvement with the Nazis. (Strauss was not a party member; his involvement with the Nazis was in part because of career pragmatism, in part because of his interest in composers' rights, and, well, in part because he agreed with their cultural agenda.) He was a great composer and an outstanding conductor, but hardly a hero. Until reading this, my knowledge of Strauss was limited mostly to various album notes and a few encyclopedia articles. I'd heard that some biographies trash him, and some are basically a whitewash. I'm glad I chose this one. It gives a comprehensive view of his influences and his life. Other composers had spectacular flaws; Strauss's reputation has probably suffered disproportionately. Be warned: this is a thesis. You

will experience the horror of endnotes. I don't know why Northeastern University Press didn't turn these into footnotes; perhaps some editor there has a fetish for turning back and forth between pages. Given that some chapters have over 50 endnotes, you're forced to either ignore them, read them all at once out of context, or place a post-it on the appropriate endnotes page and flip back and forth. Pointlessly annoying. Although this is not always a fast read, especially because of the endnotes, toward the end it does become a page-turner. The epilogue, with the author's conclusions, is impressive. If you love Strauss's music and want to know more, this is worth buying.

M. Brian Kelly

In a fairly straightforward biography emphasizing the composition and production of Strauss's music, this book also looks unblinkingly at his anti-Semitism (which diminished after the birth of his two adored half-Jewish grandsons) and at his confused and confusing involvement with Hitler's Third Reich. The music is lovingly and skilfully described. This is the portrait of a man who is utterly devoted to his art and his family, and who is all too human when confronted with the political pressures bearing on them.

The only reason there is a star is because will not accept none (let alone negative ones, which this pretentious poison deserves). This book was written with a sledgehammer, with an agenda as relentless in its distortion as tiresome in its smugness. Not for serious people who crave facts - all of them - without the varnishings of post-modern judgementalism. Those looking for a biography of such a complicated creative genius living through worse than complicated times will have to look elsewhere.

This book is a snore and a half because it does not depict the composers life in a realistic view. The auther must have read an encyclopedia exert and then thought he knew enough about him to write a book, because the book can be summerized into 1 scentence and that scentence would be Richard Struass was a great composer. All in all I am very disappointed in this book.

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