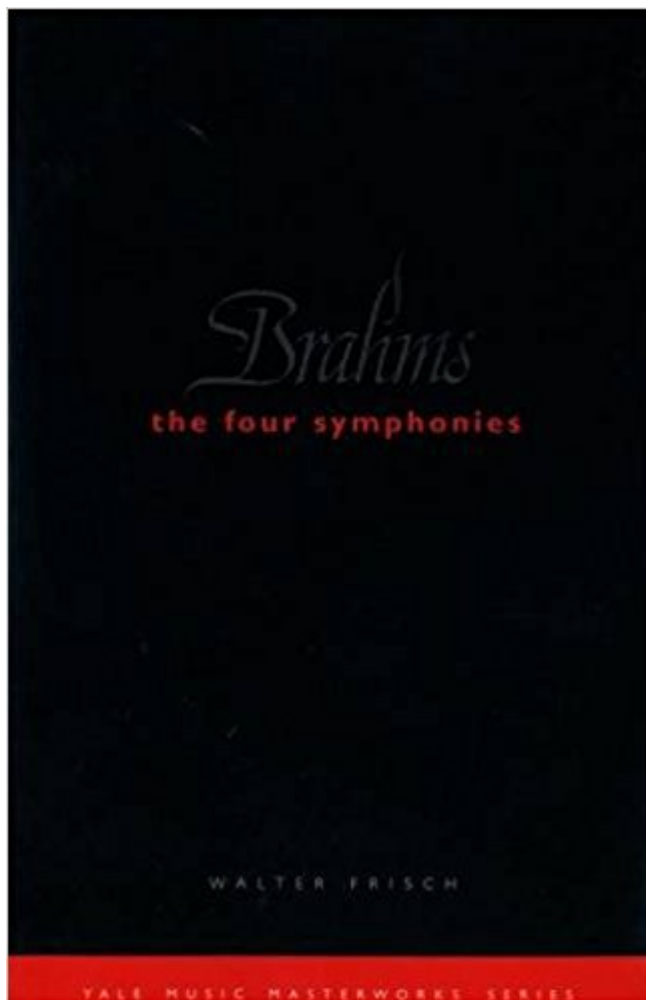


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Brahms: The Four Symphonies



Synopsis

This book is the definitive guide to Johannes Brahms's four symphonies. It presents an engaging and thorough treatment of the genesis, structure, reception, and performance history of these internationally admired and frequently performed works. Walter Frisch provides a sensitive analytical commentary on the symphonies as well as a consideration of their place within Brahms's oeuvre, within the symphonic repertory of his day, and within the broader musical culture of nineteenth-century Germany and Austria. Frisch also pays particular attention to the evolution of performance style since Brahms's symphonies were first heard. The book begins with an investigation of the different ideologies of the symphony in the decades leading up to Brahms's First. Brahms's early development as a composer is also examined. Frisch then devotes a detailed chapter to each of the four symphonies, including an in-depth analysis of each movement. A separate chapter treats the reception of Brahms's symphonies, and the book concludes with a history of the performances of the symphonies in the concert hall and in early recordings.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This book is both rich and concise....Frisch notes that there hasn't been a book on Brahms's symphonies published in English since 1939; this superb book was worth the wait, and is not likely to be superseded any time soon. Brahms lovers should not miss it."

I am always amazed how books that actually tell you something somehow go out of print. There has not been a single decent analytic study of the complete Brahms Symphonies since Julius Harrison's Survey in 1939. That work is written in a period style that tells the student of these symphonies very little. This is symptomatic of a problem with English music literature in general. There are not enough general purpose guides to single pieces of music. The density of Brahms's symphonies is such that many details can be easily overlooked without guidance. Walter Frisch is one of the foremost English-speaking experts on Brahms's music. One can try to work out all the thematic ideas of the symphonies without a guide. I have conducted three of these works myself, and before reading this work, I had missed several details that now redefine how I interpret them (for example, I was never able to articulate reason for the magical of the second movement of the Third Symphony, until I read Frisch's comments on how the tonic chord can be the dominant of the subdominant.) This last comment is music-speak. Regrettably, it is only comprehensible by a small percentage of the concert/recording audience. For those fortunate enough to know German, there are several good guides on individual pieces of music in that language. Otherwise, the closest thing one has in English is the Cambridge Music Handbook series. The problem with that series is that many of the entries are not analytic enough (ie. they fail to provide a measure by measure breakdown of the piece) and the books are overpriced for what they provide ... Luckily, Rheinhold Brinkmann's Late Idyll is still available for the reader. He restricts his discussion to the Brahms 2nd symphony, but it is a wonderful work indeed. Frisch attempts a similar approach with all the symphonies. It could use more detail, but I'm sure he was limited to a certain length by his editors.

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