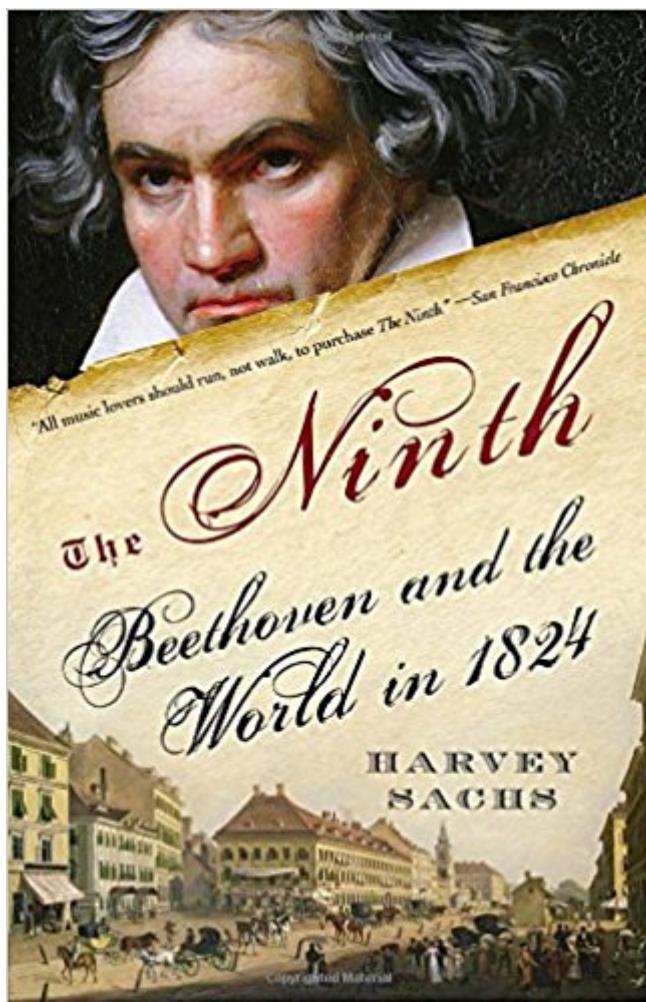


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The Ninth: Beethoven And The World In 1824



Synopsis

The premier of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in Vienna on May 7, 1824, was the most significant artistic event of the year and the work remains one of the most precedent-shattering and influential compositions in the history of music. Described in vibrant detail by eminent musicologist Harvey Sachs, this symbol of freedom and joy was so unorthodox that it amazed and confused listeners at its unveiling yet it became a standard for subsequent generations of creative artists, and its composer came to embody the Romantic cult of genius. In this unconventional, provocative book, Beethoven's masterwork becomes a prism through which we may view the politics, aesthetics, and overall climate of the era. Part biography, part history, part memoir, *The Ninth* brilliantly explores the intricacies of Beethoven's last symphony how it brought forth the power of the individual while celebrating the collective spirit of humanity.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Beethoven wasn't always a cultural icon. At least one critic attending the 1824 premiere of his Symphony No. 9 in D Minor likened what he heard to a hideously writhing wounded dragon. Just why the composer and his works endure is the question behind this absorbing book by music historian Sachs (Toscanini). Through detailed musical analysis and condensed readings of cultural politics and 19th-century history, Sachs ponders what role so-called high culture played, plays, and ought to play in civilization. Using the year 1824 and the premiere of the Ninth as ground zero, Sachs reviews the literary, artistic, and social movements of the time, noting how Beethoven's

innovative symphony (the first with a vocal score) and its themes of equality and redemption no doubt challenged the resurgent conservatism among Europe's monarchies. Sachs places Beethoven alongside Pushkin, Byron, and other prominent romantics, whose talents he finds linked to a common quest for freedoms—political, artistic, and above all of the mind and spirit. After first presenting the Ninth as a Viennese social event and then as emblematic of Beethoven's artistic process, Sachs shines with a close reading of the Ninth's musical score, interpreting its techniques and emotive narrative. Readers will want a recording nearby. In the book's last chapter, Sachs deals with the impact and legacy of Beethoven's masterwork and explains what makes his music universal. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The aspect of The Ninth that most consistently impressed critics is Sachs's explanation of this musical masterpiece in a way that is accessible to all readers. They disagreed somewhat on the value of the work's attempt at historical and cultural contextualization, however. A few reviewers found that Sachs overreaches a bit by providing commentary on Beethoven's life from various perspectives, setting him in his historical context, analyzing his music, and then also examining his wider impact. But on the whole, reviewers praised The Ninth as an excellent introduction to the symphony and the man who created it. As the Washington Post noted, "it will send readers to their CD players." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Since Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was first presented, there have been many books and papers about this composition. This Sachs book may not be the last word on the subject, but it is still an accessible, lovingly written paean to the symphony and its *zeitgeist*. Sachs writes in a lively, engaging style. Sometimes his sentences may be long, but the train of thought is still easy to follow. The prose does not become stuffy and off-putting to readers who are just coming to this music. Sachs lays out the book in four clear parts. He begins by giving us the background of the symphony and Beethoven's own life story. He then devotes the second chapter to showing how the yearning for freedom was a key theme for artists in 1824. The likes of Pushkin, Delacroix, Heine and Lord Byron were all howling in despair at the post-Napoleonic repression that was holding sway. Though this chapter may not be connected to the Beethoven focus, it still shows us that artists were exploring the themes that Beethoven was exploring. The third chapter is given over to a blow-by-blow account of the symphony, and Sachs ends with an exploration of the influence of the music. Although I enjoyed this Sachs paean to the Choral Symphony, it would be good if he could

have shortened some points and made them more concise. Also, there may be a small point that may be missing from the programme notes in the third chapter. It would be good if this book could say something about how the three instrumental movements contain hints of the Joy theme before it is presented formally in the finale. If the third chapter mentions this fact, it would allow prospective readers to know that the symphony is a tight-knit entity, and not four separate movements thrown together. Still, this is an enjoyable book about this all-important symphony. It can be read by both neophytes and experienced listeners. I fancy that it would be wonderful to add a CD recording as a companion purchase to this book. I daresay I could bundle this book with the Karajan or Gardiner cycles when gifting this book to any budding music lovers.

Beethoven = a name that signifies the very best most accomplished Music compositions of the past 300+ years (and perhaps All Time) => his Ninth Symphony representing the Best of the best! But as is documented in Harvey Sachs highly enjoyable & informative book = "The Ninth: Beethoven and the World of 1824" this milestone Symphonic Work, and of course Beethoven himself, did not exist in a historical vacuum - Ludwig Van Beethoven was profoundly impacted by the burgeoning philosophies of his Time and really became an integral part of the artistic milieu of free-thinking expressive 'Romanticism' pervading the Literary works of Byron, Heine, Pushkin, Stendhal, Delacroix, and other writers and philosophers like Goethe of course (although Sachs should have included substantially more discussion on Friedrich Schiller who wrote the words to 'Ode to Joy' after all = and Beethoven obviously received direct inspiration from Schiller's literary works!) - perhaps a longer book was needed. Harvey Sachs' book is certainly not the first (and not the most thorough) in terms of covering this philosophically artistic ground - but this relatively brief book (just over 200 pages) reflects a very good overview, introduction - and Harvey Sachs is a very good writer, who obviously possesses a deep connection to and has found authentic inspirations from the Works of Beethoven and the Ninth in particular! And Sachs does an effective job of conveying his enthusiasm for the Ninth - and also his understanding of its context & relevance to history! People will probably be writing countless books for Centuries to come on the veritable eternal well-spring of inspiration that Beethoven's Ninth continues to bring the human World. There is much about this great Work that is truly indescribable (and only completely conveyed thru the Music itself), that seems to contain within it, the following ==> Hope for a better more humane future + free-will & free-expression + indomitable spirit & resilience to persevere even thru the dark times + pure celebration/ rejoicing for just being alive! I really don't know of any other single Work of Music that inherently contains all these ideas (and even more) - you can perhaps find some of these similar

sentiments in certain Great Films or Theater pieces (though very rarely) - but not within any other single Symphony (or single purely musical piece + Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' of course!) Thanks to Harvey Sachs for writing this Book = it is a good launching-off point for further exploration - but be certain to also have a good Listen to the Ninth by anyone of the following eminent conductors: George Szell, Georg Solti, Herbert von Karajan, Bernard Haitink, Eugene Ormandy, Leonard Bernstein, Karl Bohm ==> and rejoice!post-note: I am sure that Beethoven and the Ninth in particular will continue to be relevant and inspirational for as long as any human beings exist, that still carry dreams of ==> a better more humane World for All - but with full preservation of our individual unique identities, and our creative free-will (ie. that which makes us fully human)!

For some, this book may reach too far. It not only deals with arguably one of the most influential and magnificent works of art ever created, Beethoven's 9th Symphony, but with the way the world was in the year of its premiere in 1824. I found the middle section that dealt with Beethoven's contemporaries Pushkin, Lord Byron and others interesting. The author draws connections between the thoughts of these men and how they were shaped (and influenced by each other) during their lifetimes. The section that deals with the analysis of Beethoven's 9th is excellent. Whenever an attempt is made to describe a piece of music with words, it has to be done carefully. There must be enough description and word painting to keep the reader interested and focused, but without the overly flowery language that is sometimes resorted to. The metaphors used to describe music have to be just right. Harvey Sachs gets it 'just right' the vast majority of the time. His is one of the better analysis of classical music that I've read. That he did it for a rich and complex piece of music like the 9th is remarkable. For a look at how Beethoven's 9th was a product of the time it was written and an excellent analysis of the work, this book is highly recommended.

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