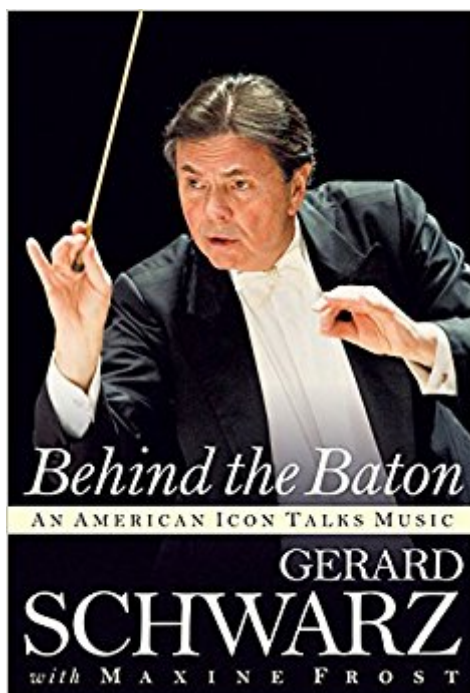


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Behind The Baton: An American Icon Talks Music



Synopsis

(Amadeus). To speak of Gerard Schwarz musician, conductor, festival organizer, gig hopper, educator, television personality, patron and proselytizer of the arts is to tell an exemplary American story. You could convey it exclusively in cliches, from his industrious emigre parents to his precocious childhood, from his ardor and diligence as a prodigy trumpeter to his meteoric rise as a conductor, from his unforeseen cross-country migration to the gradual construction of a world-class orchestra in a city formerly regarded as a cultural backwater, from the halls of New York City's High School of Performing Arts to the digital instructor's chair of the All-Star Orchestra's Khan Academy course series. You could simply recite the numbers: over 300 new works premiered, over 350 recordings in his discography, 14 GRAMMY nominations, five Emmy awards, six ASCAP Awards, and hundreds of other honors and laurels. You could dazzle and festoon and bewitch with talk of truth and beauty and the pursuit of ever-higher forms of artistic expression. Or you could tell it Jerry's way. Behind the Baton is a quintessentially Schwarzian memoir: intrepid, forthright, risible, subtly self-assured, and entirely unpretentious. It offers an intimate inside look at a man whose immense talent is rivaled only by his humility and work ethic a man who, for nearly fifty years, has strived to leave every orchestra and musician he touched better than when he found them. Whether you're a classical music aficionado, an orchestra initiate just cutting your teeth, or an everyday reader interested in the remarkable story behind an extraordinary man, Behind the Baton belongs on your nightstand.

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Customer Reviews

GERARD SCHWARZ (New York City) serves as Music Director of the Emmy-winning All-Star Orchestra series, which airs on public television. Schwarz is also Music Director of the Eastern Music Festival and the Conductor Laureate of the Seattle Symphony. The award-winning conductor is a renowned interpreter of 19th-century repertoire, in addition to his noted work with American composers. MAXINE FROST (Seattle) is a broadcaster, journalist and visual artist. Her art has been published frequently and exhibited in Europe. Maxine's drawings of composers have appeared in Berlin's underground art gallery.

Good read!

Interesting if selective account of Gerry Schwarz life/career. Could have used more editing - sometimes repetitive.

Wonderful history of an American music icon. Touching and inspirational.

Gerard Schwarz' memoir is utterly fascinating. It's a charmingly personal and engaging story, especially if you love art music, but you don't have to be a classical music aficionado to follow and enjoy it. It's also a historically significant book. Schwarz was a trumpet player before he became a conductor, and the accounts of his experiences in the orchestras of Boulez, Bernstein, Stokowski, Leinsdorf and Casals are simply wonderful. How many people can say they worked with any of these conductors, let alone all of them? I enjoyed the chapter when Leopold Stokowski asks young Jerry during an audition if he knows Mozart. His point is that trumpet players should know other repertoire. Jerry has been playing the piano since he was a child, so he says, Sure, I know some Mozart, would you like me to play it on the piano here? Stokowski just sails right past that. Jerry learns quickly that he should just nod and smile and say, Yes, Maestro, to whatever Stokowski is saying. Later during a rehearsal, the Maestro is attracted by the gleam of a beautiful new trumpet Jerry has. "He used to love shiny stuff." Stokowski sits down and gives Jerry a quick lesson in how to play his own instrument. "Play soft note," he says, as if he's not sure Jerry can do it. Playing soft is one of Jerry's specialties, but he does as he's told. There are a couple of other tests. Then Stokowski asks him what key the trumpet is in. Jerry knows Stokowski likes trumpets to be tuned to a certain key, so he fibs and tells him it's in the preferred key. Stokowski beams and says, "Good, I like that trumpet! Play that trumpet!" The day Jerry approaches him after a rehearsal in order to introduce him to his fiancée is hilarious and heartbreaking. "You're planning to get married?"

Stokowski thunders. "One piece of advice for you: never get married!" The breathtaking rudeness of that, with Jerry's future wife Lillo standing right there, is really astonishing, even when you account for the fact that so many conductors of that generation were apparently a lot of socially inept, egomaniacal schlubs. There are also stories of the other mentors who recognized Schwarz' talent, and his remembrances of them--especially Bernstein and Boulez--are humanizing, and bring them down to earth, revealing much about them as people and as teachers. Schwarz' transition from a student to soloist and ensemble player, and ultimately to a gifted and groundbreaking conductor, makes for a compelling reading experience. Students, teachers and music lovers of all kinds should enjoy this forthright and entertaining memoir.

Highly enjoyable. I've collected Schwarz's recordings since many years, and love his TV show, so it is quite interesting to learn about him as a person. This book is filled with interesting stories about music and musicians, including many famous personalities. The writing is straight-forward, and avoids the gossipy tone of some memoirs. The message that comes through is how much Schwarz loves music. That's uplifting.

Gerard Schwarz writes a compelling and detailed saga of his life in music, from his early days as a trumpet virtuoso and keen observer of the great maestros who came to the New York Philharmonic, to his years juggling music directorships in New York and Seattle (at one time there were six of them at once), plus a directorship at the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. In Seattle, where he made his greatest impact, Schwarz was responsible for amassing a huge and excellent discography that brought "America's Wagner Orchestra" to prominence -- and brought new attention to scores by great American symphonists like Howard Hansen and David Diamond. He was the major force behind the creation of Benaroya Hall, the city's acoustical gem, and made the Seattle Symphony the city's voice in times of celebration (the opening of a new sports arena, the visit of the Dalai Lama) and in sorrow (launching the "Rolling Requiem" worldwide performances in observance of 9/11). Schwarz's love of music and musicians is clear in this book. He is frank about the difficult times as well as the great ones, and he ends on a high note -- the creation of the All-Star Orchestra, which has brought together some of the country's best players for filmed performances that have been aired on PBS stations and are now available free online. His has been a musical life that matters, and the book is uplifting as well as entertaining.

I did receive my copy and I just finished reading it this morning. It was an absolutely fantastic read.

Jerry had a short, but memorable, career as a trumpet player and then as a conductor, composer and educator. His remarkable and inspiring story should be required reading for all aspiring young musicians. Bob Biddlecome, former bass trombone American Brass Quintet, retired bass trombone NY City Ballet Orchestra

A fascinating read! Lots of great insights into the life of one of America's greatest living conductors.

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