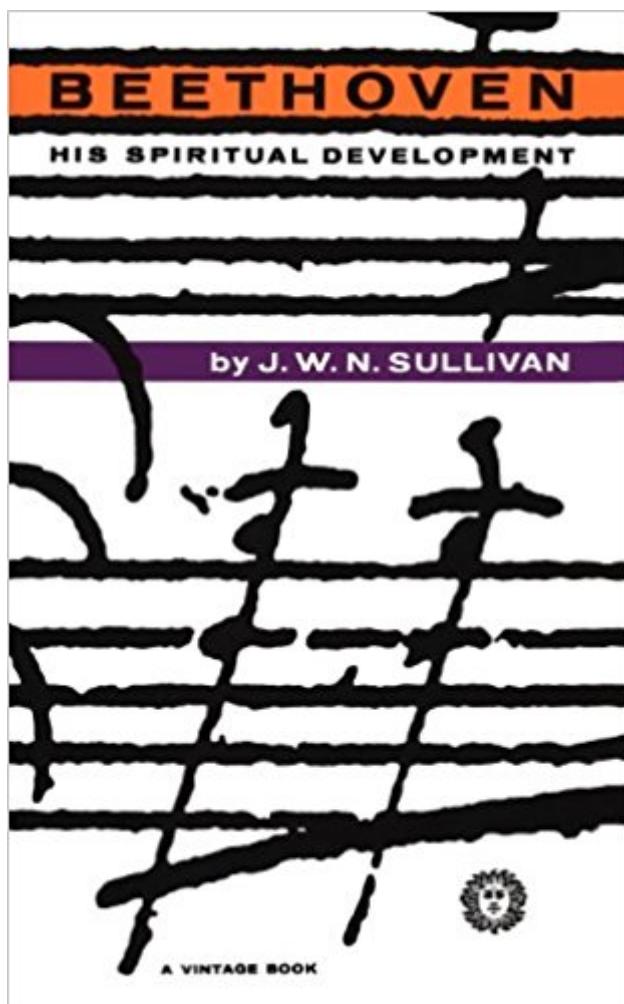


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Beethoven: His Spiritual Development



Synopsis

From the Author's Preface:"I believe that in his greatest music Beethoven was primarily concerned to express his personal vision of life. This vision was, of course, the product of his character and his experience. Beethoven the man and Beethoven the composer are not two unconnected entities, and the known history of the man may be used to throw light upon the character of his music."Clifton Fadiman has said of this classic study:"It is the most interesting book on music that I have ever read and it is not written for musical experts; rather for people like myself who like to listen to music but can boast no special knowledge of it. It deals not only with music, on which I do not speak with authority, but with human life in general, about which you and I speak with authority every day of our lives."

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Customer Reviews

Great men, especially creative artists whose work lives after them, engage people's imagination for centuries. Beethoven, as man and composer, has inspired innumerable books both by his contemporaries and later writers, and it is proof of his endlessly fascinating, controversial nature that they all throw a different light on some aspect of his life and work. Since J.W.N. Sullivan wrote his book in 1927, much new information about Beethoven, his character, his illnesses, and his relationships has come to light, but it is still a valid contribution to the literature on the composer. Sullivan's basic theory is that Beethoven's greatness lies in his extraordinary perceptions, his heightened experiences and "states of consciousness," and his ability to organize and synthesize

these into a musical expression of a "view of life." He asserts that Beethoven's initial despairing, then defiant struggle against his suffering--especially his deafness and resulting isolation--gives his middle-period works their heroism, and that his ultimate acceptance of it as necessary to his creativity marks the peak of his "spirituality" and gives his latest works their unparalleled sublimity. Like many biographies, the book reveals more about the author than the subject. Sullivan, who is not a musician, offers some interesting, if sometimes extravagantly extramusical, analyses of Beethoven's works (though elsewhere he decries injecting "meaning" into music). He sees Beethoven's late fugues as outbursts of "blind and desperate energy," another battle with hostile fate; many musicians see them as another battle with counterpoint. He also makes subjective, high-handed value judgments: he detests Wagner and dismisses Bach as too religious, while Haydn and Mozart are too shallow to equal Beethoven's struggle-generated "spirituality." The book also brings up questions about beauty and greatness in art, the relationship between moral character and genius, and the impact of a man's personal experiences upon his creativity--all age-old but forever timely. --Edith Eisler

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Suchet does an excellent job telling the story of Beethoven with sufficient detail to inform the reader while not being so pedantic as to cure insomnia. I got a good sense of the composer, his life and times as well as a sense of the evolution of music that he engendered.

This book was absolutely phenomenal! I could not put it down since day 1. Very nice and precise. Good to be determined and in suspense as well, an author who paints someone like Beethoven and having me as if I traveled back in time to see him. Cheers, Mr. Suchet. Great job.

Great book on the maestro.

A Beethoven treatise that proposes to elucidate the forces and state of mind that shaped the composer. Mostly it succeeds. However, I found it choppy and repetitive in parts and this kept me from being pulled along as I have been by some others on this topic.

Came as promised.

Ever listen to Beethoven and wonder who was that mad man who wrote this stuff. How could a mind create such beauty and the Ninth Symphony? This book attempts to answer that question and in a somewhat entertaining and relatively non-intellectual way. I could see that the writer genuinely loved Beethoven, or at least the life of Beethoven. I recommend this book for anyone who loves the music, knows that Beethoven was kinda wacky and depressed and wondered how could a depressed and deaf mind write such an uplifting joyful work.

"Liebhaber," as used by Jan Swafford in his biography of Beethoven, is German for "music lover" and is the primary audience for this book, as author John Suchet makes clear from the outset. That being said, after the massive tome of Swafford's 'Anguish and Triumph,' this biography seemed rather slight and lightweight. Suchet's approach, "reaching the music through the man, rather than the man through the music," was fine but the absence of pretty much any musical analysis was very noticeable. Ultimately, this is probably the better book for someone who doesn't read music or play an instrument, even if there is rampant (though admitted) speculation given the paucity of primary sources for Beethoven's life. Still, for someone who is a musician (me), this pales in comparison to the Swafford book I read just before this.

Beautifully written and remarkably informative, this book is a great read, filled with wonderland insights of Beethoven and his music.

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