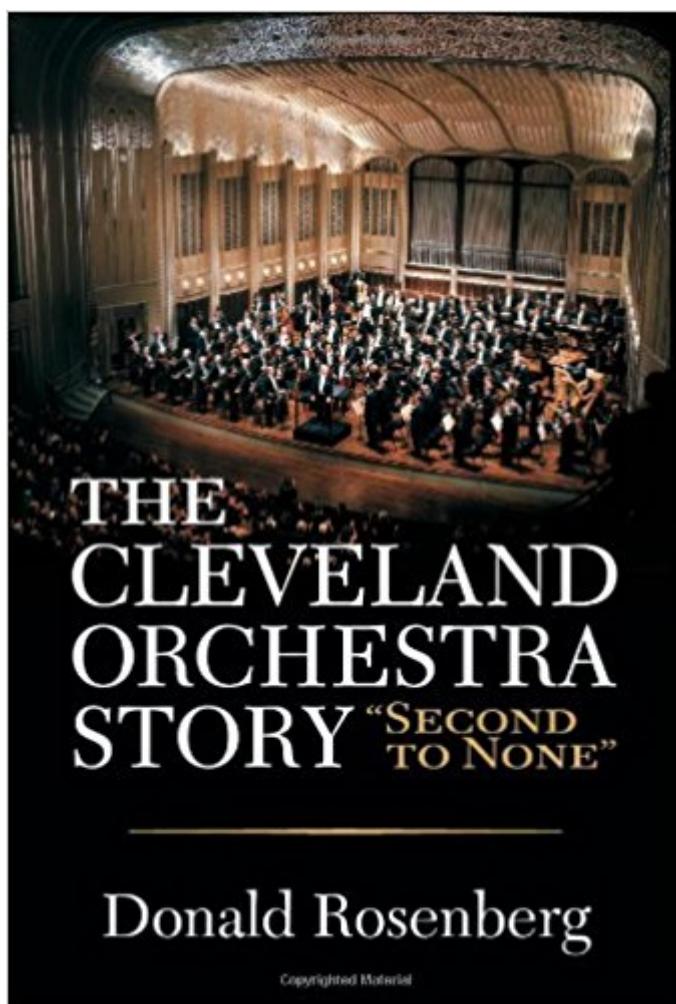


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The Cleveland Orchestra Story: "Second To None"



Synopsis

“One of the very best books ever written about a symphony orchestra.”
Tim Page, 1997 recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism for his writings on music for the Washington Post. How did a late-blooming midwestern orchestra rise amid gritty Big Industry to become a titan in the world of Big Art? This groundbreaking book tells the complete story of the people and events that shaped the Cleveland Orchestra into a classical music legend. It is a story of indomitable founders like iron-willed impresario Adella Prentiss Hughes (the first woman to manage a symphony orchestra) and shrewd, wealthy patrons like industrialist John L. Severance. Of dedicated musicians and driven conductors like colorful Artur Rodzinski (who packed a loaded pistol during every performance) and authoritarian genius George Szell, who drilled into his orchestra the awesome precision for which it is still renowned (and who even told his players how to dress and the cleaning ladies at Severance Hall what brand of toilet paper to stock). These musicians, maestros, managers, and patrons fought relentlessly to earn and maintain a reputation for near-perfect performance in a true virtuoso performance. Donald Rosenberg taps the most authoritative sources and tells a complex, sweeping success story in very human terms, with an eye for its telling details and a feel for its true drama. Told with plenty of anecdotes and intriguing behind-the-scenes details.

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Customer Reviews

Among America's great symphonic institutions, the Cleveland Orchestra is not only one of the best,

but one of the youngest. Founded by the formidable impresario Adella Prentiss Hughes in collaboration with the city's industrial and political leaders, it made its public debut in 1918. This book tells the story of the Cleveland's rise from modest beginnings to a position of undisputed preeminence among international orchestras. Its first guide and mentor was the Russian-born violinist and conductor Nikolai Sokoloff. His contribution to its growth and expansion has been overshadowed by the great, often colorful maestros who succeeded him: Artur Rodzinsky, Erich Leinsdorf, Lorin Maazel, and, currently, Christoph von Dohnányi. However, it was the imposing, authoritarian George Szell who, in his 24-year tenure, left the strongest imprint on the orchestra, developing its matchless technical perfection, transparency, and balance, and forging it into "his instrument" as a world-class group. Donald Rosenberg follows the orchestra's triumphs and tribulations--musical, personal, financial--in a rehearsal-by-rehearsal, concert-by-concert, recording-by-recording, dollar-by-dollar account, listing every program, every conductor, every soloist, in exhaustive, frequently exhausting detail. He describes the behind-the-scenes squabbles and intrigues; the conductors' strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies; the hiring and firing of players; the incessant labor conflicts between musicians and management, and, sadly, between musicians and their own union. Abundant quotes from both local and, later, worldwide newspaper reviews and commentaries reveal the extraordinary influence of the press on internal and public policy, which Rosenberg, himself the music critic of a Cleveland newspaper, casually takes for granted; his own opinions and preferences come through clearly, if obliquely. His writing is lively and informative, though it occasionally lapses into repetition and even contradiction. The book includes copious notes, the orchestra's discography, the premieres it has performed, and--best of all--the names of its members through the years. So many of them have gone on to making successful careers as soloists, chamber musicians, orchestral leaders, and prestigious teachers that the list induces constant shocks of recognition: proof that the Cleveland Orchestra, though rooted in the seemingly inhospitable soil of a Midwestern industrial city, has always attracted and nurtured outstanding musical talent. --Edith Eisler

Manages to be both crammed full of facts and a good, fast-paced read . . . it's about as comprehensive and entertaining a history of a great musical organization you're likely to encounter. (T.J Medrek The Boston Herald 2000-09-29)A meticulously researched, in-depth, eloquently told account, and quite possibly the finest of its kind ever written, at least in English . . . A gripping story that the reader, once engaged, can put aside only with the greatest difficulty . . . Fascinating anecdotes, quips, stories, facts and events are found on nearly

every page . . . Will fascinate not only Cleveland Orchestra fans but anyone interested in how a great orchestra is created and how it operates on a daily basis. (Robert Markow Schwann Opus Magazine 2001-06-01)A fascinating history of the tangled but sometimes fruitful relationship between politics and the arts in America—•a story written with admiration, respect and affection, but also with a candor and detail . . . Highly detailed and informative, but written with ease and authority and dramatic immediacy . . . A frank, detailed account of how an important performing company operates in a large American city. (David critic The Plain Dealer 2000-10-08)[A] fascinating and carefully researched history. (Richard Dyer Boston Globe Online (boston.com) 2000-10-01)Absorbing. (Alex Ross The New Yorker 2000-10-09)Much more than a history of one of the finest U.S. orchestras . . . Donald Rosenberg has written a fascinating account of music, musicians, politics, unbridled egos, and business that engages the reader like a good mystery novel . . . thoroughly researched, well documented, and very well written. (Timothy J. McGee Library Journal 2000-11-15)It is ambitious, but Mr. Rosenberg, an engaging and often eloquent writer, succeeds in making this a human story. The result is a readable, colorful and fascinating chronicle that is an indispensable addition to any orchestra lover's library. (Janelle Gelfand Cincinnati Enquirer 2001-02-04)Absorbing reading, not merely a reference piece. Nor is it a lazy view of the subject from the rear of the balcony . . . Irresistible, tremendously informative and a just plain good read. And yes, it should be in the library of every lover of symphonic music and certainly every collector of books on music. Period! (B.L.C New Music Connoisseur 2001-03-28)A tour de force and will be the standard for many years. Rosenberg never loses sight of the human element in the orchestra's history . . . It is long, but it is a wonderful read. (Wil Hoffman The Weekly Villager 2001-03-23)A gripping, complex, sweeping, highly recommended story of true drama and high achievement . . . "Must" reading for anyone who has admired this American music institution as well as the men and women who made it possible. (Midwest Book Review 2001-03-01)Although [t]his history weighs in at an impressive 550 pages, it never seems overlong. This is mainly because of the many larger-than-life characters that crowd the pages, and the skillful way in which Rosenberg balances all the myriad factors that have determined the growth of one of America's finest orchestras . . . Rosenberg writes in an easy, readable style. It is the best kind of American critical writing: clear and to the point. His account is well structured and finely edited. (David Patmore International Record Review 2001-03-01)It is a story well worth the telling and he tells it well . . . The story of what can happen to an orchestra when a community decides it wants a winner. (The Toronto Star 2001-03-03)Portrays fascinating details in a balanced account . . . This book is a must for music lovers. Before reading this work, I never realized the struggles,

frustrations, infighting and financial worries of the courageous men and women who made this orchestra happen and develop into what it is today. (Eva Richter Music Clubs Magazine, National Federation of Music Clubs 2001-04-01)

Certainly anyone who loves the Cleveland Orchestra or George Szell's work will want to have this, although most of the famous Szell-as-heartless-martinet stories have been widely told elsewhere. I enjoyed the section on the orchestra's early years, which were much more unfamiliar; it really is amazing how an orchestra like this has survived and even thrived in a "mid-market" city like Cleveland. Great photos, too, including Artur Rodzinski with his goats. However, I felt the book ultimately depended too much on lists of tour cities, lists of works played at concerts, and endless excerpts from contemporary newspaper reviews. I would have liked less time in the archives and more time interviewing musicians (in Cleveland and elsewhere) on what Szell (and Maazel, and Dohnanyi) really did in terms of working with the orchestra, the details of what they asked for and how the "sound" evolved over time. I guess that's hard to accomplish in the same book where you need to mention every time the orchestra went to New York, but it would have made for a more interesting read. Still, anyone who enjoys orchestral biographies (as I do) will want it.

Bought this for my flute playing wife and having been in the orchestra chorus for a few years I was privileged to share the stage with the orchestra members and to be recognized by some of the same folks while attending the Cleveland Institute of Music for a few years.

Excellent

Excellent book and was very well written!

Excelent work!

Been waiting to find this book at a good price...interesting to read since I experienced some of the later events!

I've been a fan of the Cleveland Orchestra for many years but have heard them live only once, at the Hollywood Bowl during a West Coast tour in mid-70's. It was an unforgettable experience - I had never heard an ensemble play with such clarity and precision. Rosenberg's history nicely blends

details about the musicians, managers, performances, and the music itself. Others have summarized many of the topics covered. I was particularly impressed by the sacrifices of the musicians, who did not have a full-year contract until the late 60's, despite being acknowledged as one of the 2 or 3 finest orchestras in the world. Many had to work odd jobs to keep their bills paid (still the case for most smaller market orchestras). And arrogant union leaders wouldn't allow the musicians to have a representative present during contract negotiations with management until well into the 70's. Three separate collections of photos allow one to associate names with faces, and I find this helpful when listening to recordings. There's Myron Bloom heading up the wonderfully precise horns; and Josef Gingold playing a beautiful violin solo; and Robert Marcellus with his definitive performance of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. Most of these fabulous performances are available as digitally re-mastered CD's on Sony's budget Essential Classics series. More recent, equally outstanding performances are led by soon to retire current conductor, Christoph von Dohnanyi, who has maintained and enhanced the orchestra's reputation. There are no better values in recorded orchestral music. Anyone who loves orchestral music should enjoy this book. I recommend it most highly.

The Cleveland Orchestra has long deserved a comprehensive history, and Donald Rosenberg has filled that need admirably. The great achievement of the book is to make one understand how challenging it is to *manage* a symphony orchestra, and Rosenberg's careful attention to the nuts-and-bolts business of creating, running, and improving the Cleveland Orchestra makes one aware of just how remarkable an achievement it is that Cleveland is one of the finest orchestras in the world. For example, at the time George Szell was raising the Cleveland to a position at the very top of the hierarchy of American orchestras, the CO ranked 11th in terms of pay among American orchestras. My one disappointment with the book was that I would have liked to have seen more sustained reflection on the musical and artistic qualities that have distinguished the orchestra over its history. Much of the book is written in relatively short sections, and I began to yearn for a more continuous narrative that could cut deeper. But make no mistake, this book is essential reading for any fan of the Cleveland Orchestra, and anyone interested in how a great cultural institution can be created.

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