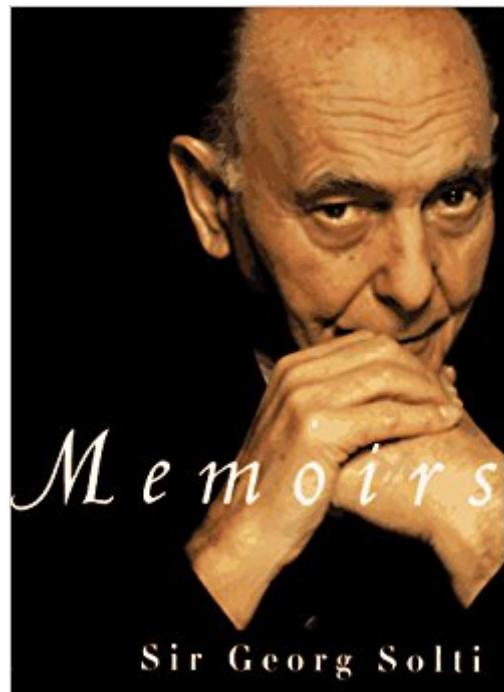


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Memoirs



Synopsis

One of the great music makers of our time has written a memoir as rich in event and adventure as it is in its reflections on, and insights into, music. Sir Georg Solti, in these pages, relives an unparalleled musical life. He tells the story of a musical education that began in his native Budapest when his mother recognized and helped foster his talent. It continued with his studies at the rigorous Liszt Academy with Dohnányi, Kodály, Bartók, and Weiner, and a performance he heard of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, conducted by Erich Kleiber, that forever set his destiny. He recounts his prewar experience coaching opera in Budapest, his exile in Zurich during World War II, and his work as music director of the Bavarian State Opera and life in postwar Munich. He then moves on to similar posts in Frankfurt and in London at Covent Garden. We watch as he continues his journey through the top ranks of the musical world and becomes, in 1969, director of the Chicago Symphony, a post he holds with brilliance and renown for twenty-two years. We follow him from 1991 on as he pursues for the first time the challenges and joys of the freelance conductor, working in Salzburg, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, New York, and St. Petersburg. Solti expresses his feelings and thoughts about Richard Strauss, Igor Stravinsky, and other great composers. He writes about conducting, and about Wagner's Ring cycle as well as operas by Mozart and Verdi, and symphonies by Mahler, Beethoven, and Bruckner. We see him continuously developing as an artist, constantly probing the composer's intentions: He describes how he found new insights into Beethoven's Ninth Symphony upon returning to it after many years, and how he approached new recordings of the Mozart operas and Wagner's Die Meistersinger ("This time I would come to it with my heart as well as my head"). His memoirs are filled with both hilarious and touching scenes of rehearsal and performance, as well as with stories of musical controversies. He speaks about the great musicians he has worked with, among them Toscanini, Walter, Furtwängler, Klemperer, Nilsson, Hotter, Domingo, and Rostropovich. Throughout, he reveals the pleasure of interpreting the composer's design, and the satisfying act of making a score come to life. Writing these memoirs, Solti has created yet another splendid musical event.

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Customer Reviews

"I have had an enormously lucky life," confides Solti in the epilog of this immensely satisfying memoir. And we, the beneficiaries of his musical genius, have been even luckier. To fans of Sir George, this splendid volume of reminiscences will confirm his status as one of the preeminent conductors of this century. Solti's graciousness, warm-hearted generosity, and bonhomie shine forth from every page. The first six chapters are named after significant cities in the maestro's life; here, Solti's early years as an assistant in the opera houses of Hungary through his lengthy, triumphant tenure as conductor of the Chicago Symphony are lovingly recounted. Chapter 7, "The World," reflects the author's status as an international citizen. In the final chapter, "Music, First and Last," Solti comments at length on his favorite composers and their works with many anecdotal asides. Because Solti died a few months after completing these memoirs, his enthusiastic plans for future recording projects and programming will not be realized, making this autobiography his final accomplishment. Highly recommended for all music collections. ?Larry A. Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, Pa. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A behind-the-scenes look at the life and thoughts of one of the 20th century's greatest conductors. If memoirs are biography lite, then this one is successful indeed. A selective recollection of Sir Georg Solti's rise to musical fame, it's an entertaining if not particularly probing walk through this man's impressive musical life. Solti, who died last month at the age of 84, was born in Hungary but lived much of his life in Switzerland, where he relocated at the beginning of WW II. Solti describes his climb through the ranks, beginning his career as a *pianist*, or opera coach. Eventually, through hard work and determination, he became the conductor of the Royal Opera at Covent Garden in England and finally of the Chicago Symphony, which he directed for 22 years and where he arguably set a musical standard for professional orchestras that still stands

today. The book includes some introspection, such as Solti's admission that early in his career he neglected to really listen to a group before trying to stamp his own personality on it. The book is best when Solti describes his musical philosophies and what it means to be a conductor. Conductors, he writes, ``should always remember our role as interpreters; we are there to serve with the best of our technical abilities the wishes of the composers, who are the creators. The thrill comes when we as interpreters become partners with the composers at the moment the scores comes to life in a performance.'' Conductors and musicians will find Solti's discussion of Beethoven's various symphonies especially illuminating. Unfortunately, these pithy parts are too infrequent, leaving a reader at book's end still wondering exactly what makes Solti tick. An adequate rendering by a man renowned in the musical world for his excellence. (16 pages photos, not seen) (First printing of 50,000) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

A well-written, rather breezy account of the Maestro's life, from birth to his retirement from the Chicago Symphony. A little too much detail on his childhood years--who hasn't read all that can be read about Europe before WW II?--and not enough detail on what made his performances of opera and symphonic works so special. I could have done with more detail on how and why he phrases certain passages the way he does, his choice of tempo, etc. Also, I would have enjoyed his views on how to build a successful program and season. Over all, a good read.

This book is somewhat self-serving to the late Sir Georg, but it also brings a touching amount of humanity to one of the brightest recent stars of the classical music universe. These "intimate" memoirs are specially interesting given the high status awarded to great conductors and the general perception that they are autocratic geniuses. Georg Solti does not display false modesty here, yet he does reveal sufficient elements of his ordinary life for us to understand how he developed his extraordinary artistic talent, and how he was eventually able to craft such a wonderful career by working on what he loved most: music.

Wonderful book! You can buy new, hardcover editions from the Chicago Symphony's gift store. Check them out on-line at [...]

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