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Beethoven: Symphony No. 9 (Cambridge Music Handbooks)

Nicholas Cook
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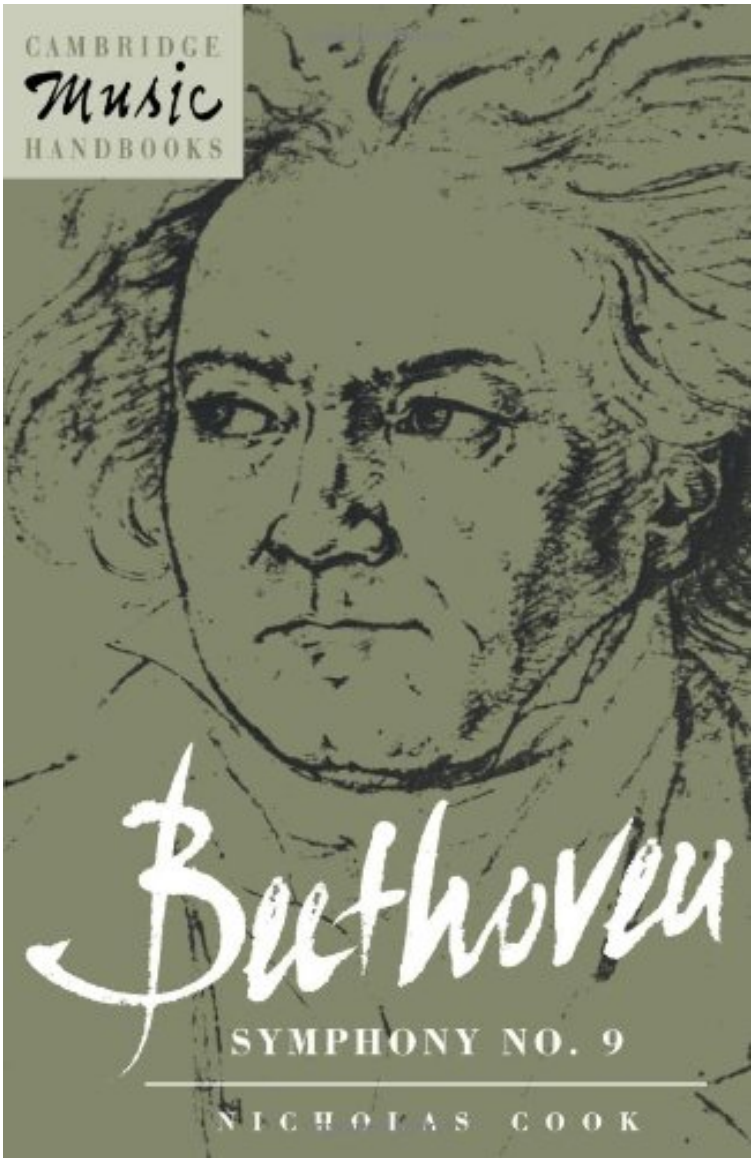

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Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is acknowledged as one of the supreme masterpieces of the Western tradition. More than any other musical work it has become an international symbol of unity and affirmation. Yet early critics rejected it as cryptic and eccentric, the product of a deaf and aging composer. Nicholas Cook's guide charts the dramatic transformation in the reception of this work. The story begins in Vienna, with the responses of listeners at the first performance, and ends in contemporary China and Japan, where the symphony has acquired diametrically opposed interpretations. The account embraces many of the major figures of nineteenth- and twentieth-century music, among them Wagner and Schenker. Including an account of the sketches, an examination of the performance tradition, and a suggested new interpretation, this book opens up new dimensions in our understanding of Beethoven's last symphony.

"A key problem with the Ninth, Cook notes, is that we've heard it so often that we no longer truly hear it. This book is an antidote; by examining the difficulties the work has caused auditors right from its premiere, Cook undermines our facile familiarity." Bernard D. Sherman, FanfareFrom the Back CoverBeethoven's Ninth Symphony is acknowledged as one of the supreme masterpieces of the Western tradition. More than any other musical work it has become an international symbol of unity and affirmation. Yet early critics rejected it as cryptic and eccentric, the product of a deaf and ageing composer.