

Review from British Music Society Journal, March 2018

SO WHAT DOES A CONDUCTOR DO?

The people, the places, the music making

by Nicholas Braithwaite

Self-published, 2017 available from amazon.co.uk <<http://amazon.co.uk>>

ISBN978-0-646-97145-2

Unlike music theorists and historians professional conductors may or may not have advanced university degrees. Instead each has his or her own personal trek throughout the world of music performance first as an audience member, second as a rehearsal or behind-the-scenes observer, and then as a rehearsal and performance director.

But how does all of this happen? He answers his own question, "How do you become a conductor?" with the simple words "...by whatever path you can". Nicholas Braithwaite maps his own career for us in an entertaining, informative, and eye-opening autobiography.

Braithwaite is the son of conductor Warwick Braithwaite, studied at the RAM and at Festival masterclasses in Bayreuth, was associate conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and was a resident conductor at Sadler's Wells Opera where he conducted Richard Wagner's *Der Ring das Nibelungen*. He was principal conductor of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra from 1987 to 1991. He has made recordings with the London Philharmonic, London Symphony and Philharmonia orchestras among others. His opera leadership includes performances with the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Welsh National Opera, Hamburg State Opera, Norwegian Opera, State Opera of South Australia, Opera Australia and New Zealand Opera.

The first nineteen chapters of the book are laid out rather chronologically as a whole from his early years through the 1990s. The final chapter is an epilogue of sorts centering around what traits are representative of great conductors; in it he provides descriptive remarks about several conductors he respects and many he has observed including: Haitink, von Karajan, Kempe, Tennstedt, Maazel, Furtwängler, and Walter. Often biographical data can be dry, but Braithwaite writes in a most human-interest manner drawing us into the living, study, and concert spaces along with him as if we were there.

The nearly-forty colour photographs add another meaningful dimension to his personal writing style from family sittings to special venues such as the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, the RAM, and the Wiener Staatsoper to photos of Wagner family relatives, various friends in the music world, and several world-class conductors. This volume provides us with a truly fascinating perspective of his sixty-year journey which makes the book difficult to put down.

John Dressler