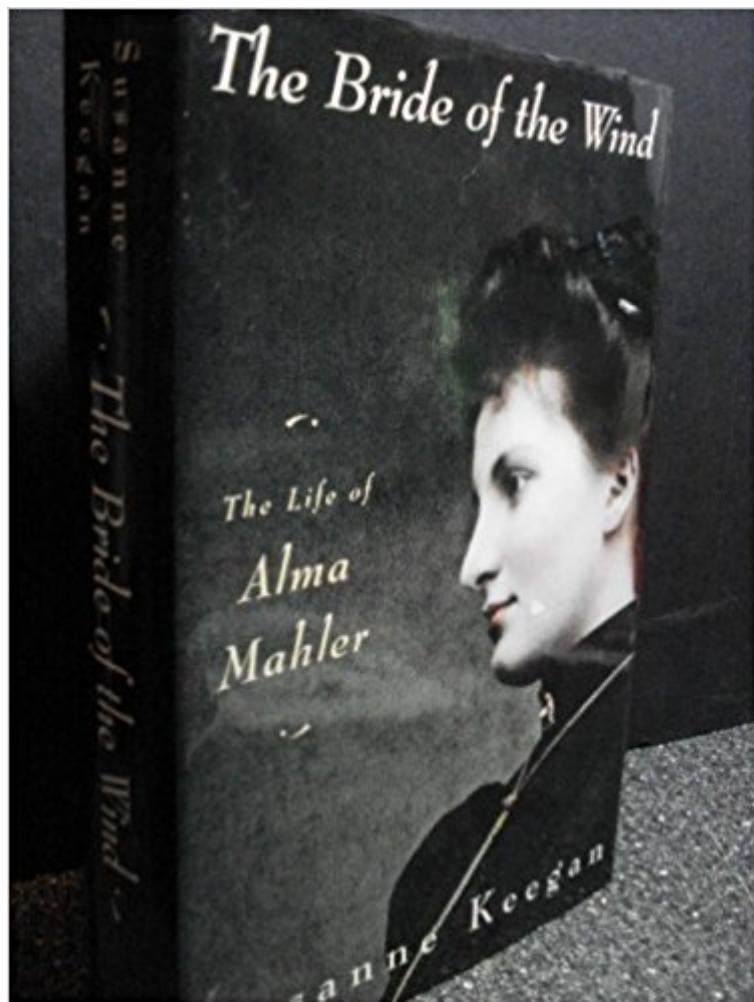


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Bride Of The Wind



Synopsis

A biography of the wife of composer Gustav Mahler, architect Walter Gropius, and novelist Franz Werfel discusses her own talent for music, her affair with Oskar Kokoschka, and her experiences through two wars.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Alma seems to exert an endless fascination on biographers, as she did on the notable men who were her husbands and lovers during her long (1879-1964) and turbulent life. Following Alma Mahler by Francoise Giroud (Nonfiction Forecasts, Jan. 20), this book is much more scholarly--and perhaps a mite less entertaining. It places Alma more firmly in her cultural context, with the turn-of-the-century Viennese scene more richly detailed, and Keegan, a British journalist, had the benefit of conversations with Alma's daughter Anna and her husband. No one ever quite elucidates the mystery of Alma's exotic personality, however--her odd mixture of sensitivity and coarseness, her swoons and intense practicality, her grandeur and pettiness. It is difficult to bring much fresh insight to bear on her relationships with spouses Gustav Mahler, Walter Gropius and Franz Werfel, and, foremost among her many lovers, Oscar Kokoschka; but Keegan tells the story reliably and thoroughly. If there is any fault to find it is that she makes rather too little of Alma's declining years in Hollywood and New York. Illustrations. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The woman described by one writer as possessing "colossal artistic understanding and intuitiveness" is vividly portrayed here by journalist Keegan. Mahler-Werfel lived in the center of the

Viennese artistic community in the early decades of this century, surrounded by the likes of Arnold Schonberg, Thomas Mann, Oskar Kokoschka, and her husbands Gustave Mahler, Walter Gropius, and Franz Werfel. To present this multifaceted personality and the turbulent society of her time, Keegan draws on a variety of factual sources, successfully weaving together a fascinating story that is well organized and well written. Recommended for libraries collecting books on European culture.- Timothy J. McGee, Univ. of TorontoCopyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"The Bride of the Wind" by Susanne Keegan, is a biography about the life of Alma Marie Mahler-Gropius-Werfel (born Schindler), focusing on the many creative geniuses with whom she associated during her life. This book does a solid job describing Alma's relationship with her immediate family while growing up in Vienna, Austria, during the late 19th century. Specifically, Alma had a close relationship with her father, Emil Jakob Schindler (a prominent landscape painter) and viewed him as her 'guiding star'. Alma had a stormy relationship with her mother, Anna von Bergen Schindler, who failed to give her daughter the exclusive admiration and love that she demanded; despite the fact that her mother was an excellent soprano singer, Alma chose to ignore her musical gifts. Alma also didn't get along with her younger sister, Grete. The biography postulates/explores a 'heroic model' (based on her relationship with her father) that served, throughout Alma's long turbulent life, as the basis for her selection of highly talented men with whom to associate. In accordance with this 'heroic model', Alma had high regard for 'masculine creativity'...some of the qualifications (but not the only ones) that were likely to endear a man to Alma included "...age, familiarity and intellect, ...occupancy of a public position of the highest importance and glamour." By contrast, according to Keegan, Alma had "little regard for female creativity" with the exception of herself; she did not want competition from her own gender. Alma had successive marriages to composer Gustav Mahler, architect Walter Gropius, and novelist Franz Werfel, and engaged in various romantic affairs (e.g., artist Oskar Kokoschka) and friendships with other great creative men. Interestingly, her association with (and eventual marriage to) Walter Gropius did not satisfy the 'age' criteria --- he was some seven years younger than Alma. Some of Alma's qualities (but not the only ones) that Keegan cites as having attracted and held the attention of so many outstanding men for so long include: her physical beauty, her charm, her outspokenness, her independence, her talent, et al. On the negative side, as pointed out by Keegan, Alma held (and often expressed) deeply-rooted anti-Semitic views; paradoxically, Keegan states, "she married two Jewish men (Gustav Mahler and Franz Werfel) and became a refuge from Hitler." Gustav Mahler felt obliged to convert to Christianity for the sake of his career as a

conductor/composer. Keegan raises the question as to why, in light of Alma's early promise as a composer, did she have such a meager output during her lifetime (i.e., only 14 songs). One of the pre-conditions (for marriage) posed by Gustav, and to which Alma agreed, was that she give up composing (at that time she was still developing as a composer). Keegan speculates that, even had Gustav encouraged Alma to continue composing, her ability to compose would still have been inhibited because she would have been overshadowed by Gustav's 'giant' stature. However, because Gustav explicitly forbade her to compose, Alma's ability to compose was completely extinguished, never to be resurrected again; she did, however, continue to play the piano. In addition to her association with Gustav Mahler (the major figure among her husbands/partners/friends), Keegan discusses in detail Alma's relationships with Walter Gropius, Oscar Kokoschka, and Franz Werfel, and the (overall) positive impact that Alma had on the work of these creative geniuses. In short, Alma inspired all, with the possible exception of Gropius (whose architectural endeavors did not particularly interest her). The experiences relating to Gropius, Kokoschka, and Werfel are told against the backdrop of the political climate in Vienna (and throughout Europe) leading up to (and including) World War I and World War II. The book is fascinating, educational, well-researched, and well-written.

Source notes, bibliography and index are excellent. Eight pages of photographs are valuable as well. The author has used many primary sources in her biography of this well detailed biography.

The *Bride of the Wind* by Susanne Keegan is the perfect biography for anyone wanting to avoid a stale representation of the illustrious Austro-German arts community in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth century. Written by a woman about a woman, this account contains insights and even some facts that a male biographer would have left out, yet these are the very facts which bring out the qualities of an historical figure which can affect his or her resurrection to the modern world. Most interesting for anyone intrigued in the enigmatic character of Gustav Mahler are the accounts of Alma's 12 years with him. Keegan sheds light on a side of Mahler most biographers gloss over for fear of blurring the importance of his music. However, one might find that after reading about Mahler from Alma's point of view (and with the help of Keegan's many intuitive insights), that one can dig deeper into the emotional maze that is his music than ever before. Susanne Keegan has made an accurate and insightful chronicle of a life that affected so many men of importance around her, a life which hitherto has, before this book, been left largely to mere speculation. She has done for Alma what Henri de la Grange has done for Mahler. Look for the

movie based on this book which will hopefully be coming out soon.

The Bride of the Wind, while scrupulously researched, fails to bring its subject to life. Alma Mahler must have been possessed of much charisma and fire to attract the geniuses that she did, but Keegan's dry account of Alma's self-absorption and reputed beauty left me wondering what she had missed, since the portrait does not accord with the events of the subject's life. (The movie of the same title, by the way, has the same flaw, though it at least paints an atmospheric picture of turn-of-the-century Viennese society, which the book also fails to do.) The book also bogs down with information about Austrian history and classical music that is far too inside-baseball to be interesting to a general reader.

This woman charmed many incredible people. The author does not seem excited to write the story of her life. It's okay and there is context.

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