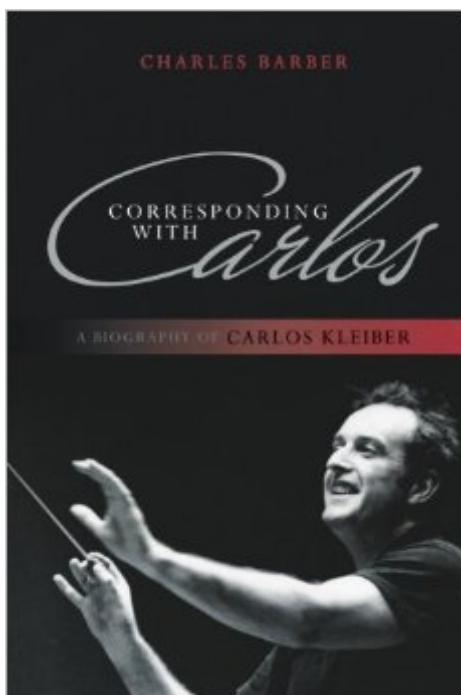


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# Corresponding With Carlos: A Biography Of Carlos Kleiber



## Synopsis

Drawing heavily on their 15-year correspondence, this book is the first English-language biography of Carlos Kleiber ever written. Charles Barber offers unique insights into how Kleiber worked. This biography considers Kleiber's singular aesthetic, his playful and often erudite sense of humor, his reputation for perfectionism, his much-studied baton technique, and the famous concert and opera performances he conducted. It explores the great conductor's musical lineage and the contemporary contexts in which he worked, and it repudiates myths that inevitably crop up around genius and reflects on Kleiber's contribution to modern musical performance.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This has been a long time in the oven, but the pie is truly worth waiting for - and delicious! For Kleiber aficionados this book is pure GOLD. This is no ordinary biography. Because of Kleiber's reclusiveness and unwillingness to give interviews to the press or potential biographers, the details of his early life are somewhat sketchy, the whole decade of his twenties and the dawn of his early career and the exact process by which he acquired the skills to go along with his great talent remain elusive. Barber offers the first English language attempt at a formal discussion. So far so good.....What is special about the book are the insights into Kleiber's psyche we can derive from the extensive correspondence that he and Barber kept up over many years. Barber as a student conductor had access to videos and recordings at Stanford University which he would shoot off to CK and these would provoke discussion of their contents, frequently to both insightful and very

funny effect. These letters, faxes and postcards to Barber (as well as others to certain musicians and impresarios) portray Kleiber's complex personality in a way that enables the reader to understand the conductor as much more than the received wisdom of "weird, enigmatic, cancel-prone, skittish and indecipherable." Finally this is a chance to understand more about the man - which is what Biography is about. There are numerous hysterically funny descriptions of fellow conductors and their perceived foibles, there is the well-known debunking of Celibidache, with a good deal more detail than I have seen before. The overarching themes in Kleiber's correspondence are his perpetual self-doubt, relentless self-criticism and search for perfection in performance.

First, viewed with a critical eye, my impressions about the book were a bit mixed, sort of like the book's narrative itself. The author, himself a conductor, is obviously a vigorous fan, so a neutral biography seems to be out of the question from the start. But who can blame him. There are many of us who love Carlos Kleiber as a medium of divine music, as well as his imperfect nature. It is not difficult to imagine him thinking similarly about Beethoven. The man's resting place in Slovenia which at every occasion provides a meditative journey of tranquility is perhaps the best indicator of Carlos' enigmatic and tormented character which nevertheless continues to inspire. In any case, I do think that the author did a great job. Bravo, Maestro! His correspondence with Carlos is a treasure and he well knows it. But regardless of that the price of the book should not necessarily be in a class of Carlos' conducting fees. So, this is not a definite bio of Carlos Kleiber and the question is whether we're ever going to get one, considering the secretive nature of his being. But this book is fun, a lot of fun, many well known and less known anecdotes of the fascinating man and his world. His character simply radiates from the pages. There are many humorous treats which will be devoured by Kleiber's fans. I definitely propose watching, reading and listening to the sources mentioned in the book, and the read is an even bigger pleasure. The author did a good but limited effort with the bio part of the research, vastly inferior to say Osbourne's Karajan bio (a must read!) although the way I see it, this part, by no means a minor feat, is to be viewed merely as a prelude to the letters themselves. These are a treasure, that's for certain.

It's been a long wait, but finally we Kleiber addicts have been given a biography that amply rewards our patience. Well, not 'given', exactly. It's a pricey book, but after only an hour with it I ordered two more copies for gifts. If you are a fellow Kleiber nut, this book is cheap at the price. If you've never quite understood why some of us go a bit strange on the subject, then you need this book even

more than we nuts do. Kleiber was simply the best conductor of the twentieth century, and that's a provable fact -- sort of. Here's the evidence. First, he was the highest paid conductor per concert. Any outfit would pay him almost any price thinking (correctly) that they had a bargain. That is, if he didn't cancel. He could get away with cancelling, and the cancellees would still come creeping back to him. He could demand fifteen or twenty rehearsals, and get them. Any other conductor would have to make do with maybe three. But not Kleiber. The result was perfection, or as near as mortals get. But not just perfection; Kleiber could find something new and astonishing in the most thoroughly trodden works (Beethoven's Fifth!) and present the new insight not only perfectly, but also convincingly. It seemed he had a Fountain of Youth reserved for tattered old music scores; he would swish them in the Fountain and they would come out new and shiny. This was why people shelled out the (very) big bucks and endured all the foibles. Whatever the price, Kleiber came cheap. Much like this book. "Corresponding with Carlos" is not quite a hagiography, though Dr. Barber definitely worships at the shrine. But I must insist: it's a very fine shrine, as good as you can get.

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