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More than any other composer, Beethoven left to posterity a vast body of material that documents the early stages of almost everything he wrote. From this trove of sketchbooks, Lewis Lockwood draws us into the composer's mind, unveiling a creative process of astonishing scope and originality.

For musicians and nonmusicians alike, Beethoven's symphonies stand at the summit of artistic achievement, loved today as they were two hundred years ago for their emotional cogency, variety, and unprecedented individuality. Beethoven labored to complete nine of them over his lifetime—a quarter of Mozart's output and a tenth of Haydn's—yet no musical works are more iconic, more indelibly stamped on the memory of anyone who has heard them. They are the products of an imagination that drove the composer to build out of the highest musical traditions of the past something startlingly new.

Lockwood brings to bear a long career of studying the surviving sources that yield insight into Beethoven's creative work, including concept sketches for symphonies that were never finished. From these, Lockwood offers fascinating revelations into the historical and biographical circumstances in which the symphonies were composed. In this compelling story of Beethoven's singular ambition, Lockwood introduces readers to the symphonies as individual artworks, broadly tracing their genesis against the backdrop of political upheavals, concert life, and their relationship to his major works in other genres. From the first symphonies, written during his emerging deafness, to the monumental Ninth, Lockwood brings to life Beethoven's lifelong passion to compose works of unsurpassed beauty.

10 illustrations; 10 music examples