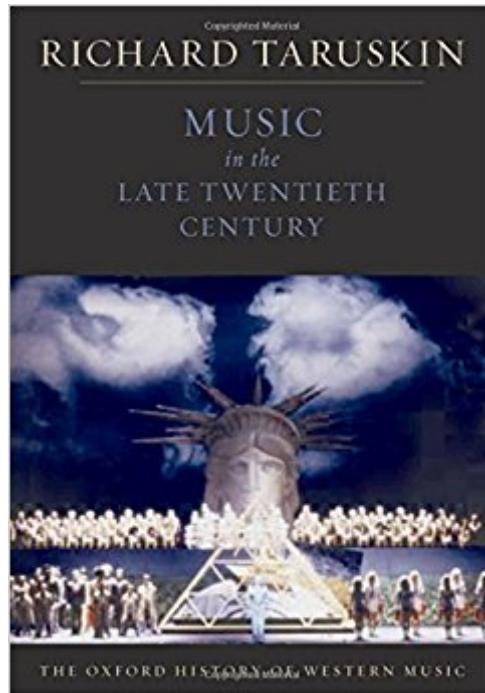


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Music In The Late Twentieth Century: The Oxford History Of Western Music



Synopsis

The universally acclaimed and award-winning Oxford History of Western Music is the eminent musicologist Richard Taruskin's provocative, erudite telling of the story of Western music from its earliest days to the present. Each book in this superlative five-volume set illuminates-through a representative sampling of masterworks-the themes, styles, and currents that give shape and direction to a significant period in the history of Western music. Music in the Late Twentieth Century is the final installment of the set, covering the years from the end of World War II to the present. In these pages, Taruskin illuminates the great compositions of recent times, offering insightful analyses of works by Aaron Copland, John Cage, Milton Babbitt, Benjamin Britten, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass, among many others. He also looks at the impact of electronic music and computers, the rise of pop music and rock 'n' roll, the advent of postmodernism, and the contemporary music of Laurie Anderson, John Zorn, and John Adams. Laced with brilliant observations, memorable musical analysis, and a panoramic sense of the interactions between history, culture, politics, art, literature, religion, and music, this book will be essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand this rich and diverse period.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Praise for Richard Taruskin's Oxford History of Western MusicR, 6-volume set "Most of the news in classical music takes place on stage or on disc. But at the moment, one of the biggest stories (in more ways than one) is taking place on the printed page." --The New York Times "Erudite,

engaging, and suffused throughout with a mixture of brilliance and delirium." --Washington Post

"Readers will profit from his sharp analysis and unabashed opinions... Taruskin has succeeded in writing a stimulating overview of Western society, setting a standard that will not be surpassed for a very long time..." --Library Journal

"Taruskin's chef-d'oeuvre, however, is a feast of contrarian ideas, with enough spice to sting the palate of anyone with a stake in telling the old stories in the old way. It aims for nothing less than the revaluation of practically everything you thought you knew about classical music....Taruskin's magnum opus is a must-read, and in its way, a real page-turner of detective non-fiction. It's a cinch to become the most discussed music title of the year, if not of the decade."-- The Globe & Mail

"The book is nothing short of spectacular" - New Music Box

"There's plenty to keep you amused and enlightened - it's very good reading." - American Record Guide

"Rather than assemble an overview, Taruskin has written a critical, subjective history in which he examines the influence of key figures, works, and musical ideas against the backdrop of world affairs and cultural history."-Berkeleyan

"Musicians, students, historians, and other readers wishing a detailed narrative about the career, patronage, musical influences, reception, and creative production of western composers, as well as the development of musical styles will find this a fascinating and satisfying resource." --Reference and Research Library Book News

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Richard Taruskin is professor of musicology at the University of California, Berkeley. In addition to this work, Taruskin is also the author of such books as *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (1985), *Text & Act* (OUP, 1995), and *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (1996). He is a frequent contributor to the *New York Times*, *New Republic*, and many other scholarly journals.

My sole objections to this politically oriented history might have been averted with a different title:

"Richard Taruskin's Perspective on Music in the Late Twentieth Century," perhaps. As it is, I was perplexed that there was not one mention of Witold Lutoslawski, for example, nor more than a listing of Aaron Jay Kernis, Michael Torke, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, among others, collectively, as "neotonalists," in one sentence. Granted there was a lot to compress into 528 pages of text, but the author allowed himself space to flesh out Steve Reich's and Phil Glass's early lives, for example, and composers fleeing repression or persecution from an Eastern bloc country had a much better chance of being discussed than those with quieter political lives. I had recently read Hans Stuckenschmidt's "Twentieth Century Music" and was hoping to find the same disciplined, concise summary of important composers and collectives, but for more recent years, and from an American perspective, perhaps. Initially, I wrote to Taruskin, thinking perhaps the fault was in an inadequate index, and heard back, "I refused to write a telephone directory." All of which is to say: there are few competitors for the history of this period, and maybe none at this price range; but be advised of these faults. Taruskin's biases show through many an ostensibly objective analysis, though analyses there are. I was impressed with the examination of Elliott Carter's methods, for example, in spite of the author's making it clear he thought Carter's prominence was undeserved. In short, there are many virtues to be found here that other reviewers address.

I've read quite a bit of Richard Taruskin over the years and though I don't always agree with his commentaries, he remains perhaps the most insightful of contemporary music historians. For those looking for a routine chronicle of facts, names and compositions of the late 20th century, this is not for you. What Taruskin goes for (and he explains this in the book's introduction), are the underlying/overarching rationales and ideological premises behind the motivations and intentions of composers, theorists, academics and other historians. And he does this with astonishing detail. In various essays in his book "The Dangers of Music," he alludes to how "the liberatory vibe of the dialectic," affected the thinking of composers and theorists in the post-WW II era. In this book he emphasizes the influence of the Cold War on the mid-century modernists and their creative endeavors. Ideology played heavily into the aura-of-the-era and it's fascinating to get a glimpse into that particular aspect of modern music and those who created it. References to musical cognition and psycho-acoustics vis-a-vis the research of Fred Lerdahl (Columbia University) and Ray Jackendoff (Tufts University) has long been an important narrative to Taruskin and he includes a synopsis of their contributions in the context of how indeterminacy has affected the appreciation (or lack of such) of modern music. The opening chapter on Boulez, Adorno, Ligeti, the Darmstadt conferences, et.al., is rich in what might be little-known to the casual observer of modernity. This

might seem to be highly esoteric to some readers, but for those seeking more than just "facts," Taruskin's contextualizations are supported by copious details and references by those who were charting the course for contemporary music---Boulez, Cage, Stockhausen, Xenakis, Babbitt, Berio, Ussachevsky, IRCAM, the Minimalists, Harry Partch, Elliot Carter, Bang on a Can, Tan Dun, Zappa, Queen and Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Beat Poets, Brian Eno, Laurie Anderson, the Beatles, Ravi Shankar, Arvo Pärt---Taruskin covers a lot of territory. The information provided is quite daunting, but it's a fascinating read.

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I liked the easy but academic reading and the focus in the second half of the 20th century. It begins with Darmstadt after the II War and in ten chapters reaches the end of the millennium. It continues the History of Western Music (Burkholder, Grout, Palisca) that I appreciate very much. I am pleased because it contains no biographical anecdotes but focuses on compositions, analyzing its most characteristic features. I think that the lack of musical examples is its weak point, but it's a very interesting and thorough work. It contains scores but its reading is not essential just obviously enriching. In summary: a highly recommended book. PS: I don't like that notes are not found at the foot of page but at the end of the book!

Good reference text, clearly written.

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