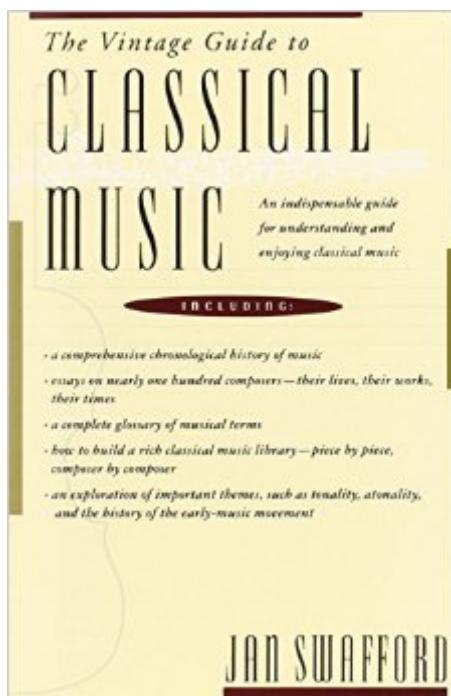


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The Vintage Guide To Classical Music: An Indispensable Guide For Understanding And Enjoying Classical Music



Synopsis

The most readable and comprehensive guide to enjoying over five hundred years of classical music -- from Gregorian chants, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to Johannes Brahms, Igor Stravinsky, John Cage, and beyond. The Vintage Guide to Classical Music is a lively -- and opinionated -- musical history and an insider's key to the personalities, epochs, and genres of the Western classical tradition. Among its features:-- chronologically arranged essays on nearly 100 composers, from Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300-1377) to Aaron Copland (1900-1990), that combine biography with detailed analyses of the major works while assessing their role in the social, cultural, and political climate of their times;-- informative sidebars that clarify broader topics such as melody, polyphony, atonality, and the impact of the early-music movement;-- a glossary of musical terms, from a cappella to woodwinds;-- a step-by-step guide to building a great classical music library. Written with wit and a clarity that both musical experts and beginners can appreciate, The Vintage Guide to Classical Music is an invaluable source-book for music lovers everywhere.

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Customer Reviews

I spend a fair bit of time (well, perhaps *too* much time) participating in classical music discussion boards on the internet. A frequent question that arises from people new to classical music is that of a good reference book to acquaint them with the field. Generally, what these newbies ask for is, in my experience, too much to expect from a single book: typically, they are looking for both composer information (and how a particular composer fits into the canon of classical music) and recommendations for specific recordings of works of classical composers. While I have a few such

books in my own library, these tend to date themselves quickly on the recommended-recordings side while remaining serviceable on the composer-description side. I have a better recommendation for those interested, which I provide in my concluding remarks. For now, I'll limit my comments to the composer-description (or, better, composer-contribution) side of the matter, and the strengths of Swafford's book. My experience with such books goes back to Aaron Copland's 1957 "What to Listen for in Music." This classic played a large role in getting me on my own journey in classical music, but it is now quite out of date; it doesn't even touch on the most recent half-century. (William Schuman updated this book, but even that fell well short of the mark for those interested in contemporary music.) This Swafford book is, I believe, the best of its kind for the purpose of setting out the "essential canon of classical music" and the composers (and their key works) who comprise it.

I've been around Western art music for most of my life, as a listener who loves it and an amateur pianist who enjoys playing it. While over the course of that life I've picked up a huge amount of facts and information, it was always in bits and pieces. So I recently found myself interested in finding a good basic book on the Western art music tradition to consolidate what I knew (or THOUGHT I knew) - the history, composers, concepts, etc. The Essential Canon of Classical Music and The Rough Guide to Classical Music 3 (Rough Guide Music Guides) are both informative and entertaining, but seem to have holes in their presentation that make them seem less comprehensive than I was looking for. Conversely, A History of Western Music is a joyous wealth of knowledge, but more dense and academic than I had the time or attention for at that point. Then I happened across Swafford's "Vintage Guide," and it was EXACTLY what I was looking for. His overview of the history and development of Western art music is deceptively accessible, being really easy to read and absorb while at the same time containing a wealth of information, much of which was surprising and new to me. His composer biographies are also entertaining, somewhat gossipy but never losing sight of the music these people produced.

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