



A Concise History of Western Music

By Paul Griffiths

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Engaging, clear and informative, this is the story of western music - of its great composers and also of its performers and listeners, of changing ideas of what music is and what it is for. Paul Griffiths shows how music has evolved through the centuries, and suggests how its evolution has mirrored developments in the human notion of time, from the eternity of heaven to the computer's microsecond. The book provides an enticing introduction for students and beginners, using the minimum of technical terms, all straightforwardly defined in the glossary. Its perspective and its insights will also make it illuminating for teachers, musicians and music lovers. Suggestions for further reading and recommended recordings are given for each of the 24 short chapters.

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A Concise History of Western Music By Paul Griffiths Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Cambridge's target audience for its new book is "students and beginners," and this may explain why the book, unlike other single-volume music histories, is devoid of demonstrative score samples. It does not, however, explain the book's spotty approach, which may confuse those same beginners. After a brief mention of music in the ancient world, Griffiths jumps to the early Middle Ages in Europe, addressing the fundamental importance of music notation. From this point, Griffiths leads a tour through 1100 years of music-making, addressing simultaneous developments in many areas of Western culture, including politics, literature and mathematics. The effectiveness of this approach becomes questionable as the volume enters the Baroque era, when the number of composers and the variety of styles expand rapidly. Though the text is filled with Griffiths's typically excellent, thought-provoking observations—he's written for *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*—his writing from this point meanders, like a casual conversation. One can learn about trends and ground-breaking works here, but trying to get a picture of Schoenberg's career and development, for instance, is difficult. The method also leads to some chapter misnomers: the author's discussions of Verdi, Bizet and 19th-century Russian Nationalists are in the chapter, "New Germans and Old Vienna." For these reasons, the volume will be more useful to seasoned readers than to novices. A glossary is welcome and helpful, as is a list of recommended readings and recordings.

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From [Booklist](#)

Centered on the conceptualization of time in music, Griffiths' precis traces a course of development from ancient Greece and Babylonia to the present. Western music began with single-part chants, to which multiple lines (polyphony), instruments, and rhythms were quickly introduced. Time in music changed from the even-valued pitches of chant to complex rhythmic patterns, from the unmeasured to the finely divided line. By the sixteenth century, ensembles of performers were the norm. Griffiths cites most major composers in each of the commonly accepted musical periods (baroque, classical, romantic, etc.), describing their contribution to the advancement of musical concepts and how the culture influenced their creativity, and also how composers experimented to progress from humanistic motivation to the complex use of technology to create music. Concluding with the ups and downs of the last 40 years, Griffiths suggests that to survive, music of the future will continue to depend on composition, performance, and listening. A well-written must for classical-music listeners and teachers. *Alan Hirsch*

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Review

"Centered on the conceptualization of time in music, Griffiths' precis traces a course of development from ancient Greece and Babylonia to the present...A well-written must for classical-music listeners and teachers."

-Booklist

"One of the UK's most eloquent and intelligent writers on classical music, Griffiths' A Concise History of Western Music (concise maybe, but substantial enough to merit every one of its 350 pages) is a joy."

-The Book Depository

"Hidden behind the deadpan title is an extremely rich and thoughtful text: a concise history, as it says on the tin, but also a warm meditation on the philosophy of music...Each chapter culminates in a subtle cliff-hanger, and the whole thing reads exquisitely."

-Guardian

'Anyone who can write a concise history of music deserves a medal...Paul Griffiths, adept at clear, succinct presentations, manages to reduce the millennia and centuries to just 300 pages; and, to make matters easier, he gives the terms without which the story cannot be told a brisk and lively explanation and encourages the reader to read, listen further and think...an original and a stimulating book.'

-Methodist Recorder

"...(an) elegant and highly readable style...thought-provoking, compelling and remarkably comprehensive narrative...this is easily one of the most thought-provoking, enjoyable and stimulating reads on Western music to have been published in the past ten years."

-BBC Music Magazine

"The book is clearly laid out, with page - heading summaries making it valuable for academic study."

-International Record Review

"...attention to the ways of the different musics of the past and present 'proceed through time' is the main novelty of this book...A Concise History of Western Music [is] new and distinctive. This is an adroit and knowing book..."

-Joseph Kerman, The New York Review

Users Review

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The book A Concise History of Western Music can give more knowledge and also the precise product information about everything you want. Why then must we leave the good thing like a book A Concise History of Western Music? A few of you have a different opinion about publication. But one aim in which book can give many information for us. It is absolutely correct. Right now, try to closer along with your book. Knowledge or information that you take for that, you are able to give for each other; it is possible to share all of these. Book A Concise History of Western Music has simple shape but the truth is know: it has great and massive function for you. You can appearance the enormous world by available and read a guide. So it is very wonderful.

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