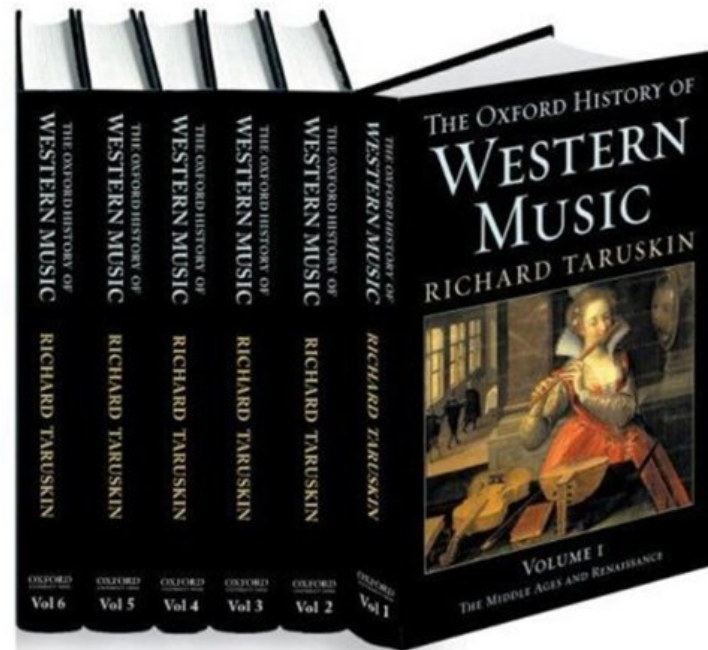


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The Oxford History of Western Music (6 Volume Set)

Richard Taruskin

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Richard Taruskin : The Oxford History of Western Music (6 Volume Set) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Oxford History of Western Music (6 Volume Set):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Music History for the readerBy Books n' music fanComprehensive and highly entertaining, too. A wonderful counterbalance to the dry and bland versions of the same thing.11 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Interested in 'Classical Music'? A MUST READ!By David HicksThis 6-volume history is both entertaining and highly idiosyncratic. For a 'survey', that's an unusual combination, but in this case the idiosyncracies are a great advantage. The reader is treated to a comprehensive tour of Western music, from a cultural perspective infused with brilliant social and political insights. For example, the extended discussion of 'Romanticism' and 'The Folk', with all the psycho-social baggage attendant to the latter is a stunning tour-de-force. You won't agree with all of Taruskin's observations: the charm he finds in Mozart's 'Magic Flute' (with its high dose of 'Das Volk') falls flat with me. Mozart wrote several operas head and shoulders above that one, to my ears. But one need not agree with Taruskin to find the journey wondrously edifying.As history, Taruskin's work is surprisingly readable. I learned more about the history of Europe in the Middle Ages from Volume I than I ever could have from a straight history book.In the end, the achievement of these books is awe-inspiring. If you love 'Classical Music' (Taruskin is at his best taking that loaded phrase apart) you will find Taruskin's large-scale meditation on the subject both a challenge and a delight.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. ExcellentBy Carolyn HolsteinI learned so much from this book. Every page is packed with fresh information. I liked that the author was not rigid in his opinions either.

The Oxford History of Western Music is a magisterial survey of the traditions of Western music by one of the most prominent and provocative musicologists of our time. This text illuminates, through a representative sampling of masterworks, those themes, styles, and currents that give shape and direction to each musical age. Taking a critical perspective, this text sets the details of music, the chronological sweep of figures, works, and musical ideas, within the larger context of world affairs and cultural history. Written by an authoritative, opinionated, and controversial figure in musicology, The Oxford History of Western Music provides a critical aesthetic position with respect to individual works, a context in which each composition may be evaluated and remembered. Taruskin combines an emphasis on structure and form with a discussion of relevant theoretical concepts in each age, to illustrate how the music itself works, and how contemporaries heard and understood it. It also describes how the context of each stylistic period--key cultural, historical, social, economic, and scientific events--influenced and directed compositional choices.

.com The history of "history"--our changing perspectives on the act of narrating and trying to "recapture" the past--encompasses the most profound seismic shifts in modern consciousness. Once seemingly commonsensical, the science-aspiring ambition of historiography to recount the past "as it actually was" (to borrow Leopold von Ranke's famously misunderstood phrase) now betrays anachronistic naivete, if not a dangerous arrogance masquerading as objectivity. And the business of cultural history provides a particularly fascinating--and contentious--index to the larger issues at stake. The very urgency of the debate over "how" to tell the story (and indeed what the story is) continues to intensify in proportion to the uncertainty of our times. Considering its official title (bearing an impressive imprimatur from Oxford University Press, the vanguard of scholarly reference works), Richard Taruskin's grand opus might appear at first glance to eschew the more-heated arenas of debate involving cultural history. Quite the contrary: Taruskin throws down the gauntlet at once and passionately joins in the fray. In the process, he strips the story of music's development in the West (i.e., Europe and America) of its deceptively innocuous trappings and received ideas, thrusting it into the spotlight of contemporary critical inquiry. The result, virtually a priori, is a highly controversial reexamination of a narrative that will cause even the most open-minded music lover to do a number of double-takes. What's extraordinary about Taruskin's achievement is how immensely engrossing, insightful, provocative, fresh, and downright brilliant the "history of Western music" becomes in his weaving of it. But why yet another sweeping history when the New Grove Dictionary of Music has been recently overhauled (in an edition to which Taruskin prolifically contributed), and when long-standing classic texts such as Paul Henry Lang's *Music in Western Civilization* continue to be reissued? The heart of the matter lies in the very ambition behind this new history. First, some of the fun factoids: at nearly 4,000 pages (along with an additional resource volume containing master index, chronologies, and bibliography), The Oxford History of Western Music weighs nearly 20 pounds and took a decade to write. In other words, this isn't history-by-committee. Its perspective from the point of view of one massively learned individual is at once the work's chief strength and its Achilles heel. Taruskin's powerful voice echoes the kind of "old-fashioned" synthesis, with its attempt at an "overarching trajectory," of such pioneering cultural historians as Jacob Burckhardt or perhaps even the epic sweep of Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*--an antidote to the curse of ivory-tower specialization. But, more crucially, Taruskin arms that voice with the toolkit of contemporary historiography to pursue a critical rethinking of how Western music turned out as it did, and where it is today. His singular viewpoint anchors Taruskin's attempt to show that "the literate tradition of Western music is coherent at least insofar as it has a completed shape." It's important to realize, as Taruskin early acknowledges, that his work is meant not as a stock-taking "survey" but as a history. That is, it involves an unfolding both of that larger coherence and of many smaller narratives that are its tributaries: not of the artwork (or composer) alone, but those of its production, its social and political context, and its (often-changing) reception as integral components of musical "meaning." Taruskin's aim is to filter out the distorting perspectives of "historicism" (the myth of purposeful, goal-oriented evolution through history) and aestheticism (which considers the artwork as a "pure," timeless entity). Along the way, this means smashing rows upon rows of icons and legends (not surprisingly, the bulk of these stemming from the 19th-century Germanic tradition, but also comprising a good deal of 20th-century received ideas about Stravinsky, Soviet composers such as Shostakovich, and various postwar "elitisms"). Inevitably, Taruskin doesn't prove immune to resorting to some legends of his own. In an extraordinary overview of Wagner, for example, he persuasively debunks the routine citation of *Tristan und Isolde* as pointing toward the coming "collapse of tonality," demonstrating how such thinking is the epitome of "the historicist tendency to write history backward with an eye toward giving the present a justification." Yet he's also capable of reducing the Wagner of the Ring to an obsession with a "cult of strength" in what is an otherwise deeply insightful discussion of "the Wagner problem." In terms of the larger stakes of this history, Taruskin's strongly argued debating points (and debunkings) at times veer in more eccentric directions, especially when it comes to such pivotal figures as Stravinsky, who gets a particularly intense thrashing. And regardless of Taruskin's theoretical stances, the reader must be alert to alarming occasional lapses of "mere" fact (how, one wonders, could an editorial team of over 40 not notice the claim that *Carmina burana* is scored for eight soloists in their fact checks, or fail to ensure that the endnotes match actual citations in the text?) Other tics, such as the author's fondness for scare quotes, may leap out depending on one's particular allergies. Despite its imperfections, Taruskin's work is undeniably a stunning and stimulating achievement.

It's impossible to describe adequately the sheer artfulness of his method, whereby he can distill a multiple series of investigations into a few wonderfully insightful sentences. Ever the master contrapuntalist, Taruskin weaves his various levels of discourse into a meaningful whole. There is true virtuosity in his ability to toggle from social history to in-the-trenches musicological analysis, zeroing in with his uncanny intuition to the most rewardingly illustrative points. His method of the exemplifying metonym--using just a few examples to wring out maximum insight, like the linear perspective of Renaissance artists--becomes a tour de force in his examination of figures such as Du Fay, D. Scarlatti, J.S. Bach, Beethoven, Schoenberg, or Britten. Taruskin's scope moreover is as radically reorienting as the Big Bang theory when it comes to the relative proportions he accords the narrative of Western music. Beginning with the advent of "literate" musical culture in Carolingian times, he devotes a great deal of attention to what was long thrown together as the "pre-Bach" era. Even more radically, around 40% of the total text is devoted to music of the 20th century (two of the five volumes of the history proper). Within this span, amid all its mind-boggling diversity, a number of centripetal themes emerge: the interdependence of "absolute" and "program" music, the interplay of oral and folk with literate musical cultures, the power of myth, and the possibility for musical "meaning." Taruskin's journey is endlessly fascinating, and his work makes an enormous contribution to the field. For all the controversy it's destined to generate, it will become impossible to ignore. Perhaps its surest mark of success is the sense of urgent importance and connectedness with which this history invests the cultural matter of music. Wherever you dip in, Taruskin invites an open conversation that leaves plenty of new, revealing perceptions in its wake, but probably more questions than when you started. Indeed, there's a sense that Taruskin would consider his work to have failed if the reader were only to nod in assent to all he has to say. --Thomas May From Publishers Weekly Starred . The daunting task of connecting the most abstract of art forms to society, economics, politics and philosophy is admirably accomplished in this monumental six-volume narrative history. The work is a single interpretive synthesis by musicologist and critic Taruskin, author of *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (1996), covering the Western classical tradition from medieval Gregorian chant to the contemporary avant-garde, with two regrettably scant chapters on 20th-century jazz and pop. He traces evolving performance and compositional conventions from the earliest written records, focusing on the elaboration of the Western system of tonality, its solidification in the Bach-to-Beethoven canon and its subsequent broadening into dissonance and tonal indeterminacy. He also follows the shifting social and ideological functions that elevated composers from lowly court servants to the alienated geniuses of romantic and modernist myth and transformed music from an adjunct of church ritual to a marketplace commodity, a vehicle for nationalist aspirations and a secular religion of art-for-art's-sake. Taruskin analyzes thousands of musical scores by all the major and many minor composers--the musically inclined should peruse the books at the piano--and his close readings of the esthetic and psychological effects of compositions come as close as one can to putting music's ineffable qualities into words. His account of the larger historical framework is erudite but accessible and stylish, conversant with everything from Aristotelian philosophy to psychoanalysis but wary of reading anachronistic interpretations into the past. The result is a judicious but richly stimulating history, valuable both to scholars and to ordinary readers who want to listen with new ears to the music they love. Photos. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "The Oxford History of Western Music has to be the music publishing event of the year and one of the most significant since the appearance of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* in 2001. This is the magnum opus of one of the most remarkable American scholars of his generation." --Toronto Star "...not a work of reference, any more than was Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* or Spengler's *Decline of the West*. It is a visionary addition to our understanding of our culture." --Roger Scruton, *Times Literary Supplement* "Nearly 4,000 pages long, Taruskin's multi-volume history of Western music expresses the magnificence and melancholy of its age.... Taruskin's book, singular in every possible way, will take its place on the short list of compendiums, going back to the ninth century, that have reviewed the musical world from a position of supreme authority. Like them it will change things. Like them it will last." --The Nation "By the middle of Volume 2 of his entertaining, provocative, and massive Oxford History of Western Music (five volumes, plus a sixth with indices and a chronology), Professor Richard Taruskin reaches the repertory familiar to all music lovers--Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, with the Romantics from Chopin to Tchaikovsky and Wagner following in the next volume." --The New York of Books "The best part--indeed the glory--of his overstuffed six volumes is the analyses of a high number of printed examples (the public he has in mind is, of course the undergraduates who take a general introductory course in the history of music and his aim to replace the textbooks that now dominate this lucrative field). His analyses are generally both cogent and entertaining, written in a rambunctious style that conveys technical information with great lucidity." --The New York of Books "A magisterial survey of the traditions of western music, Richard Taruskin's narrative masterclass sets the details of music, as well as the chronological sweep of figures, works and musical ideas, within the larger context of cultural history and world affairs. This Oxford history is authoritative, opinionated and controversial, which is not surprising given that all six volumes are written by one man -- and the most prominent and provocative musicologist of our time at that." --The Economist "Like Leavis on English, Wittgenstein on philosophy, Aries on academic history...such, I predict, will be the impact of Richard Taruskin on musicology." --The Times Literary Supplement "This impressive achievement was ten years in the making.... There's no

doubt in my mind that The Oxford History of Western Music is an important model of music historiography for some years to come."--The American Record Guide"A towering achievement... It's not just a musical history, but also a social history, because one of Taruskin's main themes is the importance of political climate (wars, totalitarian regimes, revolutions) on composers and the music they wrote."--The Seattle Times"If you want to know how brilliant Richard Taruskin's Oxford History of Western Music is, just open the first of its five long volumes, and start reading right from page one. I found myself on the edge of my seat."--The Wall Street Journal"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 the decade." --Globe and Mail"Likely to become the standard issue. Its ideas, a 1643 halftones, maps and music examplesy cultural attitudes, will percolate across music studies and other cultural histories."--The Charlotte Observer"Taruskin doesn't just give us the facts of music history; he "performs" them the way a great musician does a score. Suddenly there is a coherent, irresistible narrative full of delightful, sometimes disturbing surprises that leave you thinking for days. Suddenly, music history lives and breathes." --Tamara Bernstein, CBC