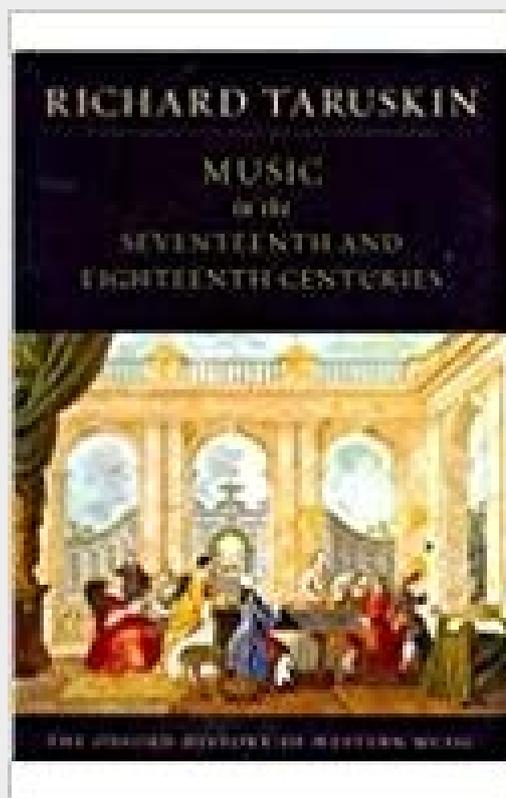


Oxford History of Western Music: 5-vol. set (The Oxford History of Western Music) by Richard Taruskin



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ISBN: 0199842132

ISBN13: 978-0199842131

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Book title: Oxford History of Western Music: 5-vol. set
(The Oxford History of Western Music)

Pages: 4176

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (February 3, 2011)

Language: English

Category: Humanities

Size PDF version: 1295 kb

Size ePUB version: 1655 kb

Size FB2 version: 1263 kb

Other formats: lrf azw mobi lit

The universally acclaimed and award-winning Oxford History of Western Music by one of the most prominent and provocative musicologists of our time, Richard Taruskin. Now in paperback, the set has been reconstructed to be available for the first time as individual books, each one taking on a critical time period in the history of western music. All five books are also being offered in a shrink wrapped set for a discounted price. Each book in this magnificent set illuminates - through a representative sampling of masterworks - those themes, styles, and currents that give shape and direction to each musical age. The five titles cover Western music from its earliest days to the sixteenth century, the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the nineteenth century, the early twentieth century, and the late twentieth century. Taking a critical perspective, Taruskin sets the details of music, the chronological sweep of figures, works, and musical ideas, within the larger context of world affairs and cultural history. He 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. He also describes how the context of each stylistic period - key cultural, historical, social, economic, and scientific events - influenced and directed compositional choices. Moreover, the five books are filled with helpful illustrations that enhance the historical context of musical composition, as well as musical examples, black-and-white pictures throughout, suggestions for further reading, and indexes. Laced with brilliant observations, memorable musical analysis, and a panoramic sense of the interactions between history, culture, politics, art, literature, religion, and music, these books will be essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand this rich and diverse tradition.



Reviews of the **Oxford History of Western Music: 5-vol. set (The Oxford History of Western Music)** by Richard Taruskin

1. Drelajurus

"Anonymous IV" has a right, of course, to dislike Richard Taruskin's magnificent Oxford History of Western Music, and to express that opinion - however unfathomable it may seem -- on amazon.com.

But inaccuracies, especially at the core of so damning a response to a new book, must not remain unchallenged.

Let's start with Anonymous IV's insinuation that Taruskin lacks expertise in music before 1800. (According to Anonymous IV, Taruskin's "superficial" and "sketchy" first two volumes summarize "the extent of what the author knows about music before 1800"; he is "obviously... on home turf" only in the 19th and 20th centuries.)

Perhaps Anonymous IV cannot imagine a musicologist being on home turf in more than one period. But Taruskin is just such a rare being: a formidable scholar of 19th- and 20th-century Russian music, he is equally celebrated in the realm of early music. His influential book, *Text and Act* (1995), contains numerous essays on pre-19th-century music. And even the brief author's biography on the back cover of that book informs us that Taruskin has published "numerous editions of Renaissance music, including a complete edition with commentary of the sacred music of [the 15th-century composer] Antoine Busnoys," and that while teaching at Columbia University, Taruskin had a distinguished performing career in early music. (Among other activities, he conducted the Cappella Nova, a New York-based choir specializing in medieval and Renaissance music; as a viola da gambist he recorded and toured with the Aulos ensemble.)

Anonymous IV's whining that Taruskin "rushes through more than 1000

years of music history" is no less mystifying. Hello! Taruskin devotes 1,612 pages to the first 1000 years of notated music in the Western world - rather more than the 843 pages in which Grout/Palisca, to which Anonymous IV repeatedly compares Taruskin, covers the entire history of Western music.

But most importantly: if Anonymous IV has indeed read Taruskin's History of Western Music, he/she will have found, in its opening paragraphs, (pp. xxi and xxii), a clear statement of the book's aim. It is not, Taruskin explains, a survey à la Grout. Rather, it is "an attempt at a true history" - that is, an attempt "to explain why and how things happened as they did" - in short, not the usual laundry list that has too often passed for music history. To compare Taruskin to Grout on this count is rather like faulting a cognac for not being a beer.

Taruskin fulfills his stated aim exhilaratingly. His book is a towering achievement of scholarship and intellect; a challenge to complacency; a joy to read.

As to the accusation that Oxford's production of Taruskin's book is shoddy: well, I do not know what Anonymous IV has been doing with his/her copy. I have been reading mine, for some weeks now, and have had no problem whatsoever with its binding.

2. Unnis

Music history with a distinctive point of view, as is true of everything Taruskin writes. It's a work in the magisterial tradition, exhibiting a humanity and a command of material that goes far beyond anything I've ever encountered.

It's also a delight to read; charmingly written and clearly argued. If you love music and love thinking about music, you should have this on your shelf.

3. Kulalbine

Mr. Taruskin's work in this book series is awesome. This series is one of the most ambitious musicological undertakings in recent memory. His insights are outstanding, and he has a flair for theoretical analysis that balances between historical context and theory near-seamlessly.

I always find bad reviews more helpful than good ones, so instead of gushing over how good these books are, let me give you some other points that might help you decide if you want to fork over the cash.

- These are not traditional textbooks in the way of Grout or Stolba. There are no diagrams, pictures, timelines, margin notes, et al. What the book does have is text, and lots of it, and many, many musical examples.
- The books seem to be written in the manner of a lecture: there is lots of talking and musical examples, just as you would get if you sat down in one of Taruskin's classes. Also, the chapters are all nearly the same length regardless of subject matter, which is another reason why I think they are similar to the experience of sitting in one of Taruskin's lectures.
- Taruskin's style can be kind of like this: "Sit down and I'll tell you a story." As a result, you won't find a chapter called "Mendelssohn" and another called "Webern". He weaves in and out of these composers as he likes, so besides the general index, you may find it time-consuming to find a specific topic in the set if you are doing research.
- There are no indices in the individual volumes; only the last book has the indices.

On the whole though, an awesome set of books, and the price is definitely worth it.

4. artman

I initially purchased only the volume on early music for a history seminar in my graduate program and was thoroughly impressed into the detail that Taruskin provides. He presents music within the context of history itself. I enjoyed the writing style and decided to pick up the rest of the books as one complete set.

5. Kelerana

very inclusive. Great for studying all the different eras in music. Much larger and more detailed than the one we used in college.

6. Obong

Taruskin makes reading about gregorian chants and opera easy. Im only on book 2 of 5, but so far so good.

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