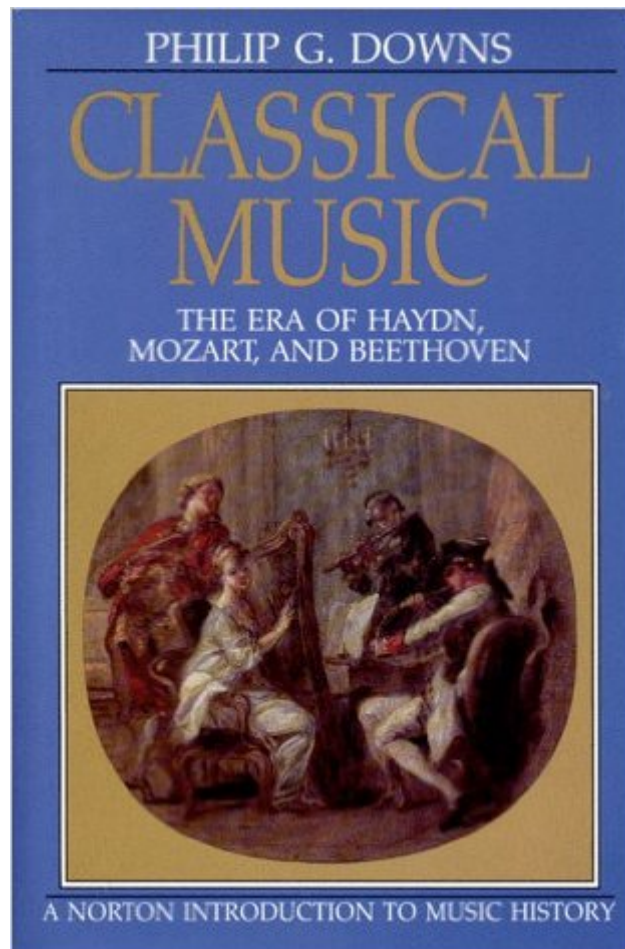


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Classical Music: The Era Of Haydn, Mozart, And Beethoven (The Norton Introduction To Music History)



Synopsis

In this, the fourth volume in the Norton Introduction to Music History series, Philip Downs traces the rise and decline of the "Classical" style from the birth of Haydn (1732) to the death of Beethoven (1827). He demonstrates the enormous diversity and constant change that characterized every aspect of music during this period. By dividing his text into twenty-year spans, Downs is able to trace the development of musical style. Within each span he looks at the social conditions and daily life of the musician, and the aesthetics and audience preferences in structures, performing combinations and styles. The lesser composers, or Kleinmeister, are observed, since they are the most accurate mirrors of their times. Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven receive full biographical scrutiny at each stage of their development. Copious music examples and abundant illustrations are also provided.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Downs' book comes from the Norton Introduction to Music History Series. I've read the others (excluding Hill's book on Baroque Music not yet released), and while it's good, it's unfortunately the weakest of the lot. The book is geared for graduate study in music, and is a little too heady for beginners (by the way, the book's title refers only to Western music in the Classic Period, c.1760-1830). Downs takes a chronological approach to the subject, but begins with a boring introduction on Eighteenth-century philosophy and musical aesthetics. This really is a shame,

because the rest of the book (if you make it through) happens to be much better. Downs covers the early emergence of Classic music out of the Baroque, and then follows with two short chapters on the first halves of Haydn and Mozart, respectively. After another interlude on music and other aspects during the Classic Period, Downs resumes with Haydn, Mozart, adds some Beethoven, and then leads the transition into the nineteenth century. Despite the boring beginning, Downs' writing style is still very rigorous and scholarly. He makes many references to the book's sister, the Norton Anthology of Classical Music, and provides the most in-depth analyses of the entire Norton Series. I feel bad giving the book three stars, but the other books by Atlas, Plantinga, Morgan and Hoppin are all better. Reinhard Pauly's book is also out there, but it's shorter and I haven't read it. Norton also published Charles Rosen's book *Classical Style* in 1999, which may be in response to this volume. I must say, however, that on information alone, this book is very good and can be a great reference.

Downs *Classical Music* is intended for upper-level undergrads and graduate students in music. I use it in my 500-level class because the historical account is very comprehensive, including substantial references to sources that would otherwise have to be assigned as outside reading. The book begins with a detailed account of the late Baroque and Pre-Classic era, information that students have often forgot from their introductory courses. The analyses of works are generally good. There are some drawbacks that need to be addressed. First, the accompanying Anthology contains a wide variety of works, but almost no complete works. Students are deprived of complete sonatas, symphonies, concerti and other longer works. Also there is no set of recordings to accompany the Anthology. Many works in the Anthology require real digging to find a recording. Finally, the last chapter gathers all of Beethoven's works together as a kind of afterthought. Right now I can't find a more informative text for my students.

Downs does a fine job of showing the setting of the big three in the era, hence is not just about those composers. Rather, it's about all aspects of the era, what came before and was going on during their time. It's all there, musical tastes, performance and compositional styles, etc.

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