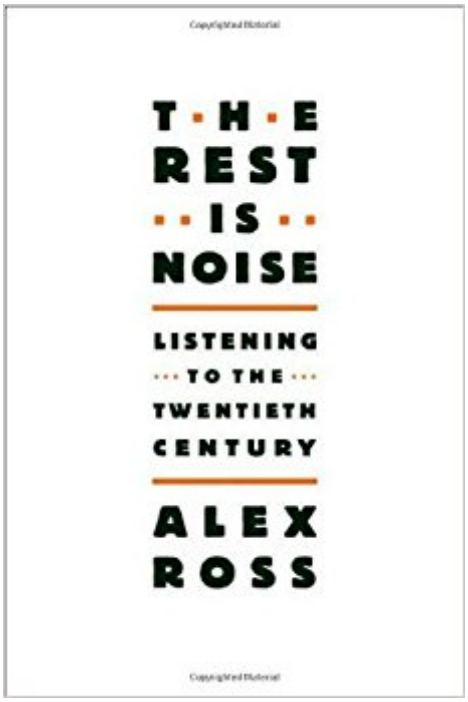
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The Rest Is Noise: Listening To The Twentieth Century



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Synopsis

Winner of the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award for CriticismA New York Times Book Review Top Ten Book of the YearTime magazine Top Ten Nonfiction Book of 2007Newsweek Favorite Books of 2007A Washington Post Book World Best Book of 2007In this sweeping and dramatic narrative, Alex Ross, music critic for The New Yorker, weaves together the histories of the twentieth century and its music, from Vienna before the First World War to Paris in the twenties; from Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia to downtown New York in the sixties and seventies up to the present. Taking readers into the labyrinth of modern style, Ross draws revelatory connections between the century's most influential composers and the wider culture. The Rest Is Noise is an astonishing history of the twentieth century as told through its music.

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Customer Reviews

Anyone who has ever gamely tried and failed to absorb, enjoy, and--especially--understand the complex works of Schoenberg, Mahler, Strauss, or even Philip Glass will allow themselves a wry smile reading New Yorker music critic Alex Ross's outstanding The Rest Is Noise. Not only does Ross manage to give historical, biographical, and social context to 20th-century pieces both major and minor, he brings the scores alive in language that's accessible and dramatic. Take Ross's description of Schoenberg's Second Quartet, "in which he hesitates at a crossroads, contemplating various paths forming in front of him. The first movement, written the previous year, still uses a fairly conventional late-Romantic language. The second movement, by contrast, is a hallucinatory Scherzo, unlike any other music at the time. It contains fragments of the folk song 'Ach, du lieber Augustin'--the same tune that held Freudian significance for Mahler. For Schoenberg, the song

seems to represent a bygone world disintegrating; the crucial line is 'Alles ist hin' (all is lost). The movement ends in a fearsome sequence of four-note figures, which are made up of fourths separated by a tritone. In them may be discerned traces of the bifurcated scale that begins Salome. But there is no longer a sense of tonalities colliding. Instead, the very concept of a chord is dissolving into a matrix of intervals." Armed with such a detailed aural roadmap, even a troglodyte--or a heavy metal fan--can explore these pivotal works anew. But it's not all crashing cymbals, honking tubas, and somber Germans stroking their chins. Ross also presents the human dramas (affairs, wars, etc.) behind these sweeping compositions while managing, against the odds, to discuss C-major triads, pentatonic scales, and B-flat dominant sevenths without making our eyes glaze over. And he draws a direct link between the Beatles and Sibelius. It's no surprise that the New York Times named The Rest Is Noise one of the 10 Best Books of 2007. Music nerds have found their most articulate valedictorian. --Kim Hughes --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review. Ross, the classical music critic for the New Yorker, leads a whirlwind tour from the Viennese premiere of Richard Strauss's Salome in 1906 to minimalist Steve Reich's downtown Manhattan apartment. The wide-ranging historical material is organized in thematic essays grounded in personalities and places, in a disarmingly comprehensive style reminiscent of historian Otto Friedrich. Thus, composers who led dramatic livesÃ¢â ¬â •such as Shostakovich's struggles under the Soviet regimeÃ¢â ¬â •make for gripping reading, but Ross treats each composer with equal gravitas. The real strength of this study, however, lies in his detailed musical analysis, teasing outÃ¢â ¬â •in precise but readily accessible languageÃ¢â ¬â •the notes that link Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story to Arnold Schoenberg's avant-garde compositions or hint at a connection between Sibelius and John Coltrane. Among the many notable passages, a close reading of Benjamin Britten's opera Peter Grimes stands out for its masterful blend of artistic and biographical insight. Readers new to classical music will quickly seek out the recordings Ross recommends, especially the works by less prominent composers, and even avid fans will find themselves hearing familiar favorites with new ears. (Oct.) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

When most people think about classical composition, they think of Mozart, Beethoven, Bach and other old composers. However, even in the 20th century, classical composition is alive and well.

Rather than looking at classical music as a time period, it is more akin to a style of composing. The 20th century has been filled with fascinating classical compositions by huge personalities that deliberate tried to bend and break the rules of composition. As history marched on, the composers of our era were at the mercy of dictators, world calamities and shifting social trends. Out of all the periods of classical composition, the 20th century was the most complex and interesting. Music critic Alex Ross spent years researching the history of these 20th century composers and his research paid off with the wonderful book The Rest is Noise.This is another book that I found by looking at the reading lists of members of Radiohead. I think that this recommendation came from Colin Greenwood. The Rest is Noise is mainly a history book, charting the careers of many of the 20th century composers, ranging from early innovators like Schoenberg and Stravinsky to modern minimalists such as La Monte Young and Phillip Glass. Throughout the book, Ross makes an effort to show the cultural and historical events that cause the composers to write. Ross also spends the time to describe the pieces that he is writing about and gives the reader a musical breakdown of the pieces. A lot of the book spends time discussing why a composer such as Schoenberg was innovative and why his music sounds the way it does. I was really impressed by these parts, because I was able to better appreciate a lot of classical pieces that I enjoyed. I was able to understand why they had such a distinctive sound and why they were innovative. Ross does need a bit of outside study. I had to brush up on my musical theory to better understand why he was talking about, but that knowledge is not absolutely necessary to understanding the book. You can get by without it, but putting in a little work outside of The Rest is Noise really helps the reader understand what Ross is talking about.The history portions of the book were superb. Ross not only gives a good overview of the history of music but also a good overview of 20th century history. It was really fascinating to read about some of the untold stories that occurred during historical events, such as Richard StraussÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s actions in Nazi Germany or ShostakovichÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s problems in the Soviet Union. I was really able to understand why modern composers wrote the way that they did and what trials they went through for their music. Often times, it is hard to understand what they composers are going through when listening to classical music. We have been trained to listen to pop music were the singer tells us what he or she is thinking. Instrumental music can be a little tougher. Alex Ross does an excellent job helping the reader hear between the notes of the music and understand what the music actually means.I also enjoyed the sheer amount of music that Alex Ross discusses. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of classical composition and I was really thrilled to get some new pieces to listen to. I was especially happy to get a lot of recommendations for listening to post-war avant-garde music. That is such an odd genre to get into, and Ross does

job discussing how it came about and what music to listen to if one was interested in that period. In The Rest is Noise, Ross goes beyond the normal ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“textbookÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• pieces and really gets into some obscure stuff, and I was happy to discover some new avant-garde pieces that I have never heard before (even if I am still trying to figure out what they actually mean.) Even though Ross is very knowledgeable about music, his writing never felt pretentious. He even spent the time to discuss popular music, with sections devoted to The Velvet Underground and shout-outs to The Beatles, Sufjan Stevens, Radiohead and Sonic Youth. I was really glad to see that Ross was open-minded enough to recognize other genres as being great music.I would highly recommend The Rest is Noise. For people interested in classical music, it is a must read. Your knowledge and understanding of 20th century classical music will be broadened and become more complex. This is also a great book for people who just have a passing interest in that genre and want to gain more than just a passing understanding of classical composition. This is a great book.Full review on http://zacherybrasier.wordpress.com/2014/08/28/the-rest-is-noise-alex-ross/

Every page of this incredibly vivid guidebook to music requires that you read a subchapter and then spend a day or two just listening and then reread the subchapter. While that might sound like an unpleasant homework assignment to Some for those of us who are truly obsessed with the joys music provides it is the most profound pleasure. Many composers who I thought I knew and liked for the right reasons I have learned so much more about (some unpleasant-as in Virgil Thompson's casual racism) the chapter on how Shostakovich negotiated making art under Stalin is deeply complex and Sympathetic. This is a life changing book in that my experience of music will be enriched by Alex Ross unforgettable storytelling, deep research, willingness to explore the politics of the time and great descriptive musical analysis.

If you have even the slightest interest in 20th century classical music, this book is truly extraordinary. The author's research and knowledge base is just remarkable. The book feels like three lifetimes worth of effort. Every sentence matters, so it's a slow, but very satisfying read. I only just discovered that Ross is the music critic for the New Yorker.What really makes the book so special is Ross's ability to write about the pieces and composers in a way that even a non musical person like me can appreciate, explaining what each composer was trying to achieve, the musical tools they used in the context of the times, and how they were influenced by other composers, as well as how they were influenced by their contemporary artistic and political culture. There is naturally a lot of crossover in to jazz, folk, and even rock and roll. Ross is very analytical while

almost never being judgmental, and he puts everything in context. He writes with a clear and infectious enthusiasm that never feels overdone.

The writer seems very intelligent and very knowledgeable, and he's a good writer. But I had to give up reading the book because my bs meter kept going in the red, and the ratio of bs to interesting, good to know information, was too high. I have to admit that he's made me try harder to appreciate modern music (12-tone as opposed to mainly diatonic, and a higher level of dissonance in music). I'm getting there. I should also admit that I've been reading kind of a lot of science, which does not allow for any bs. Plus I simply disagree with his view on some composers and their music.

This book is as interesting and witty as it is informative. I had to buy it for a graduate music course and actually looked forward to doing my assigned reading every week. It's written simply enough for a non-musical person to enjoy and learn, but detailed and thought-provoking enough for graduate music students to discuss and debate. If you want a book that covers every composer in the 20th century with extreme detail and examples pulled from scores, then a textbook would be much better suited. Ross gives a voice to some of the lesser known composers and the context in which they worked. Wonderful read!

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