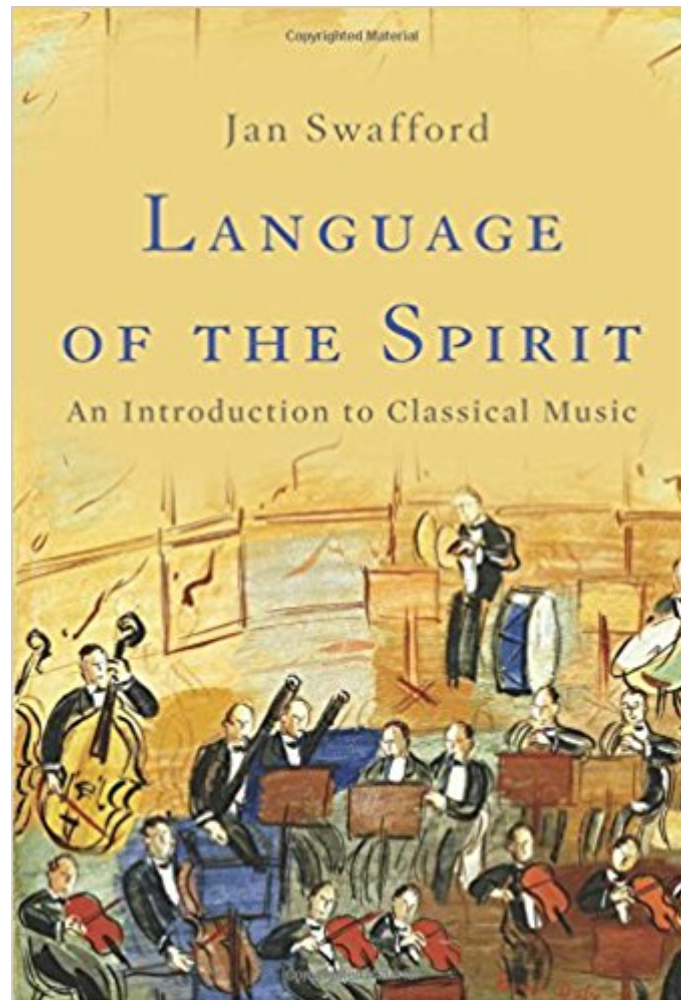




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Language Of The Spirit: An Introduction To Classical Music



Synopsis

For many of us, classical music is something serious-something we study in school, something played by cultivated musicians at fancy gatherings. In *Language of the Spirit*, renowned music scholar Jan Swafford argues that we have it all wrong: classical music has something for everyone and is accessible to all. Ranging from Gregorian chant to Handel's *Messiah*, from Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* to the postmodern work of Philip Glass, Swafford is an affable and expert guide to the genre. He traces the history of Western music, introduces readers to the most important composers and compositions, and explains the underlying structure and logic of their music. *Language of the Spirit* is essential reading for anyone who has ever wished to know more about this sublime art.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"*Language of the Spirit* includes an array of unpretentious, charming anecdotes, stories once universally known but (Mr. Swafford suspects) now need retelling. His book is perfect for people who are curious about classical music but feel somewhat intimidated by it."-Wall Street Journal

"This book distils [Jan Swafford's] experience of passing on his knowledge and experience to others, and making it enjoyable for them....Between the stories of the composers, Mr. Swafford slips in many interesting digressions.... Mr. Swafford entertains as he informs. But in the end, music to him is a thing unto itself, "a language of the spirit-its essence can't be captured in words."-Economist

"A compact, reader-friendly volume... Swafford is a witty and impassioned guide to the great composers and the great masterpieces... Equally important for an introductory

audience, he is intimately familiar with the rich layer of anecdotes that envelops the lives of the composers and enlivens every effective music history course... an upbeat, uninhibited romp through the repertoire."-Weekly Standard

"In this delightful primer to classical music, composer and music scholar Swafford (The Vintage Guide to Classical Music) conducts us breathlessly on a tour of the highlights of the history of classical music, from the beginnings of music up through the present....Swafford provides excellent suggestions for listening at the end of each chapter, and his entertaining and instructive book encourages us to listen to the breadth and depth of classical music for delight and pleasure."-Publishers Weekly

"A workable foundation from which readers can more deeply and broadly explore the music."-Booklist

"In Language of the Spirit, Jan Swafford achieves something very difficult: he captures the spirit of music in words. His series of short sketches of composers and their works ring true, and, more importantly, send you running to listen to the music for yourself."-Emanuel Ax, Pianist

"The genuine love of music is at the core of Jan Swafford's latest book. Unlike his previous works, which are primarily biographies, Language of the Spirit is a glimpse into Swafford's life. His is a journey into what music means on a highly personal level. It reminds those of us in the profession why we became musicians in the first place."-Leonard Slatkin, Conductor and Music Director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra

"Humbly and with great generosity of spirit, Jan Swafford opens the door to the world of classical music and encourages us to experience it through the emotions it evokes. He makes us realize that we are all equipped to approach this greatest of the arts, and helpfully gets us started off in the right direction."-Ted Libbey, author of The NPR Listener's Encyclopedia of Classical Music

"A perfect, lean compendium from a scintillating writer who knows profoundly where music comes from, and the geniuses who've made it best in the Western tradition. Composer and biographer on the grand scale, Jan Swafford has given us the last music book we'll ever need. The rest is listening!"-Chris Lydon, host of Radio Open Source

"Once again Jan Swafford's engaging enthusiasm for classical music has produced a book which will enhance his reputation and bring much enjoyment to all who read it. As an introduction to classical music this is a book that should be read by all, young and old, who have a curiosity about classical music but who were never fortunate enough to meet a mentor such as Professor Swafford. It should be required reading in all schools!"-John O'Connor, award-winning pianist and former Director of the Royal Irish Academy of Music

"Reading Jan's Swafford's Language of the Spirit is like taking a road trip through the land of classical music with your wickedly smart but charmingly self-deprecating best friend in charge of the map, stopping by must-see landmarks and hidden by-ways that are clearly personal favorites. Music to Swafford is not a dry, intellectual exercise, but rather an emotional experience touching on the full range of feeling of which humans are capable.

Slip a copy of *Language of the Spirit* into your pocket the next time you attend a symphony performance and consult it before the lights dim-Swafford will help you hear all the richness and depth of the music he so loves."-Elizabeth Lunday, author of *Secret Lives of Great Composers*

Jan Swafford is a preeminent composer and music scholar and the author of bestselling *The Vintage Guide to Classical Music*. A regular contributor to *Slate*, the *Guardian*, and the *Boston Globe* and a former professor of composition at the Boston Conservatory, Swafford lives in Medford, Massachusetts.

This is a wonderful book about classical music! It is better than wonderful. Disclosure: Jan Swafford is a friend of mine from the early 1970s. Back when he was teaching high school music, he developed a reputation for being a great writer. Not just good, but great. His career became teaching music at the college level (Harvard undergrad, Yale PhD), composing music, and writing. He has written biographies of Charles Ives, Brahms, and Beethoven, all well received, as well as a guide to classical music. But first and foremost he has taught music for nearly 40 years. This book is a highly readable, brief history of classical music. It gives short and fascinating biographies of the major composers from each era, and a listening guide to selected pieces from each composer. Even while not listening to the music, those guides are good reading. I suspect even serious, well-read music aficionados will enjoy this fast read. For those of us who like to casually listen to the classics, but know little about the music or composers, it is a real treat. This book would be a great way to begin a study of the classics at home, which is what I plan to do. Jan's enthusiasm is contagious. Highly recommended.

Good as an introduction generally, being a music lover and coming from Europe, we have already a deeper understanding of that kind of music, but I'll pass it on to someone who might enjoy expanding their knowledge!

A wonderful read!

Interesting book but more for the classical music novice. The author's likes and dislikes stood out a bit too much for my taste and so some very powerful composers as well as some excellent American composers (Gershwin anyone?) were left out. It appeared that he has an antipathy towards composers of "nationalistic" music--Smetana? Sibelius? If the book brings more people to

the appreciation of classical music, and I think it might, good. It IS very well written.

Wonderful book.

a gift

Language of the Spirit is a short and breezy survey of the Western musical tradition from earliest times to the present. The author is noted music teacher, author and guide to all things classical the inimitable Jan Swafford. I previously enjoyed his long and insightful works on Brahms and Beethoven as well as his Vintage Guide to Classical Music. The book gives thumbnail biographies of composers from Bach to today. Each major period of music is surveyed from Baroque to Classical, Romantic to atonality in the twentieth century. Short but vivid sketches are given of composers in each era, a reason for their importance and a brief commentary on some of their major works. Such composers include Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Wagner, Schubert, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, Ives, Ravel, Debussy, Richard Strauss, Mahler, Stravinsky and many others.. Operatic composers with the exception of Richard Wagner are given short shrift; the emphasis is on instrumental and orchestral music through the ages. A good work for people getting interested in the many faced world of classical music. A fun journey with an expert teacher as our guide. Recommended for music lovers of any age and level of musical knowledge.

This book is a summary of all of the beautiful music that makes up Classical today. The author starts with prior to Baroque and continues into the Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Modern periods of Classical music. During each period, he briefly (approximately 5 pages each) reviews each major composer including what he suggests to be their best music. During this review, he covers Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, Chopin, Wagner, Brahms, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Strauss, Debussy, and many others. He recommends that the reader listen to some of the pieces of music provided in the book. Many of them I have heard as a governing member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, but some I have not (especially the chamber music stuff). Some of the music I have on CD, so I took this opportunity to listen to them again. In most instances, his states are close to mine (I can't say he was right, because taste is personal). However, some music by modern composers were not enjoyable when I first heard them (and I don't intend on listening to them again unless the CSO plays them) - like Bartok's 2nd piano

concerto, and Three Piano Pieces of Op 11, Both of these pieces of music give me a headache, but maybe you will like them. I think that if you have any interest in classical music or are just wondering if you might have an interest, you should try out this book. If you haven't followed classical music, this is a good primer for you. Read the book and listen to the pieces of music that he recommends. Since I am a Beethoven, Brahms and Dvorak lover, I would recommend starting with them. You can't go wrong there. If you already follow classical music, like me, I think that you will still find this to be interesting.

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