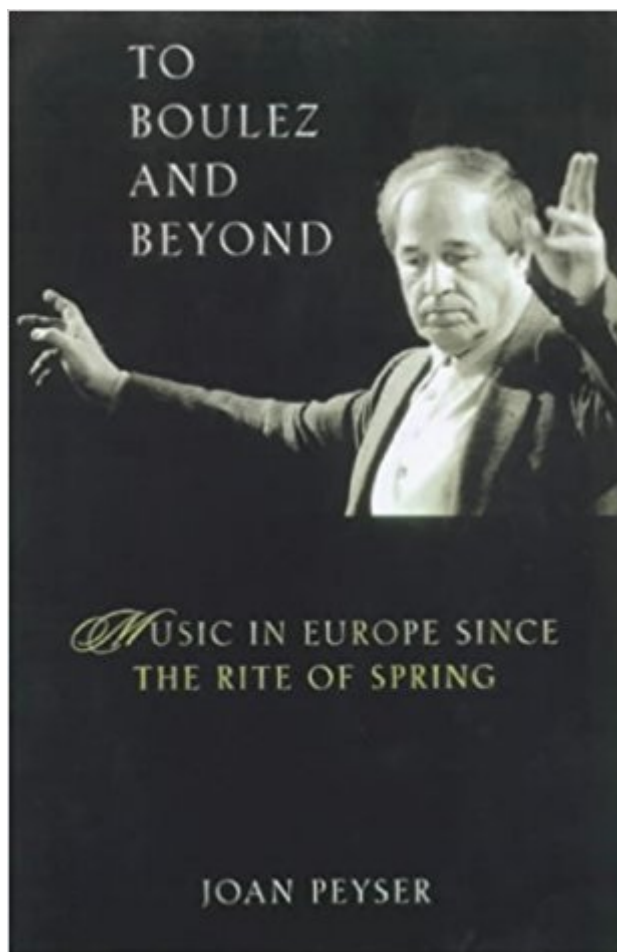


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To Boulez And Beyond: Music In Europe Since The Rite Of Spring



Synopsis

Beginning with Stravinsky and "The Rite of Spring," this book traces the course of classical music from the early twentieth century to the present day and beyond, as it moves into the twenty-first century. This elucidating text covers the major figures in music of the past hundred years, from Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Varese, and Webern to Boulez, Cage, Henze, and Stockhausen. Describing a dramatic revolution against music traditional and a new artistic sensibility, this book offers a guided tour and a concise analysis of the major trends in classical music.

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Customer Reviews

Good for Schoenberg fans. Great, like a Living Bible, for Boulez fans. Disappointing quick-chapter coverage of Edgard Varese. For history students of the Schoenberg | Boulez lineage from a strictly personality profile perspective, it's good; four stars from a not-much-about-the-music PoV. As others have pointed out, the subtitle was hype and the book's structure is choppy (two stars for overall content and structure). Hence my three star vote. I wish I liked the Schoenberg > Boulez lineage, because this would be a book I could enjoy far more.

Joan Peyser's book TO BOULEZ AND BEYOND: Music in Europe Since the Rite of Spring has a rather deceptive title. I assumed that it would be an overview of contemporary music, profiling various composers. Instead, Peyser's book is divided into two halves. The first is a history of the work of Stravinsky and of the Second Viennese School, exploring how they each contributed to

European music. The second half is a gushing (but that's okay, I admire him myself) biography of Boulez alone, that only goes to the 1970s in significant detail and has only a few anecdotes from the 1980s and 1990s. These two parts are entirely incongruous, and as other reviewers have commented, this is a freakish abortion of a work that inexplicably got published. There is a brief and unsubstantial foreward by Charles Wuorinen that relates only to the first half; I suspect he had no idea what sort of book he was contributing to. About the only thing I found worthwhile about the book are the many stories about Boulez's rocky tenure in New York. Many biographies of Boulez mention that he faced challenges and angered people, but don't go into significant detail. Here there is all kinds of juicy detail that Boulez fans will enjoy. Otherwise, the work is poor. There is no real musicological analysis here, it's all simple historical writing. The typesetting is poor and the entire enterprise has a self-published feel about it.

In contrast to a previous reviewer, I found this volume interesting and well worth reading, if hardly up to its subtitle of *Music in Europe Since the Rite of Spring*. I think what happened was that Peyser intended to update her Boulez biography of 1975 (she says as much), had already started a book about music since the Rite, and finally gave up and combined the two in an unfortunate mishmash, adding bits and pieces of scattered information about other composers as it seemed appropriate to her. It is, however, simply untrue to say that Peyser makes Boulez out to be a saint. That she seems to have some personal feelings for him does not detract from her biography or its assessment of his music, which is certainly not always positive. That she would at least like to have a bias in Boulez's favor I wouldn't deny. Peyser's book does bring Boulez--an infamously private man--to life, and does actually help in approaching his music, whatever the flaws of the book may be. It would be a great buy in paperback. Do not look for any technical information, however: while not a Boulez expert, I might recommend Peter Stacey's *Boulez and the Modern Concept* as an approach for those familiar with some music theory.

This work is the combined result of two previous books by Peyser, the first a study of Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Varese; the second a biography of Pierre Boulez up to the mid-seventies. Although Peyser has edited her work to eliminate some overlapping material, and has added a short chapter on Boulez' last three decades, there is still a feeling of jerry-rigging and overall incompleteness that cannot be avoided, and one is left craving for more material on Boulez' latter life and composers from the late seventies on. No matter. These flaws pale in comparison to the value of the work itself -- a lucid, emphatic, and highly readable account of modernism in music. Avoiding serious technical

discussion that would alienate anyone but a composer, Peyser casts her subjects in a dramatic light, detailing their works in terms of impact, emotional content, and the challenges they either met or failed to overcome. Of course special attention is paid to Boulez, who emerges as a complex, thorny, enigmatic and passionate figure -- very much like his music, in fact. As Boulez is notoriously private, her objective and highly researched biography is doubly valuable, and some of the anecdotes are simply priceless. Highly recommended to any enthusiast of modern atonal or experimental music.

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