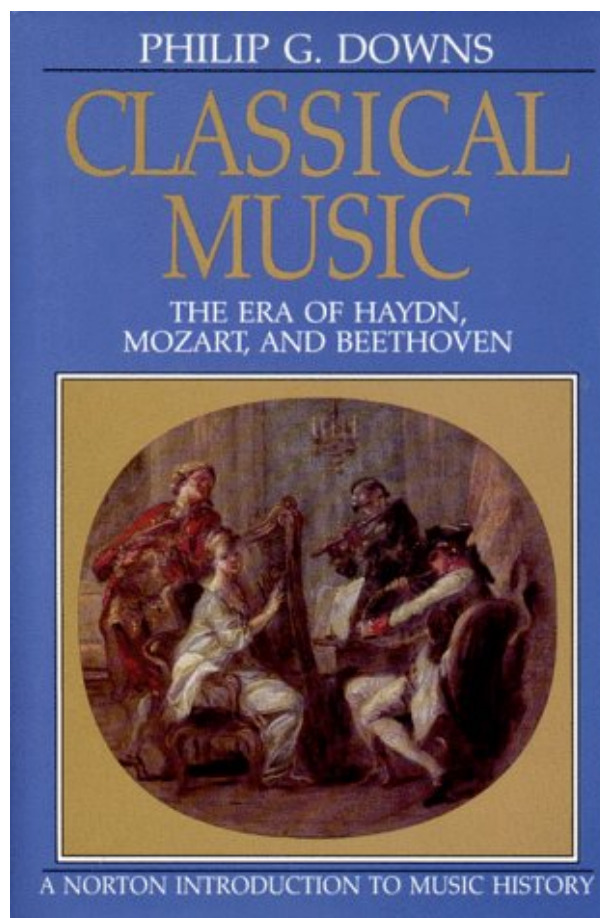


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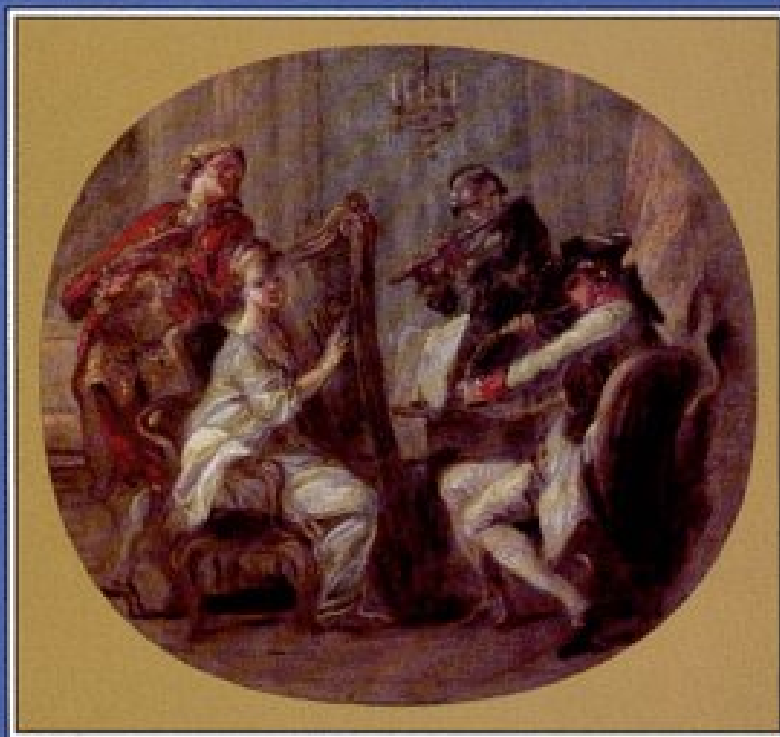
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The latest volume in the Norton Introduction to Music History series focuses on the rise and decline of the Classical style, which flourished from the middle of the eighteenth century to the second decade of the nineteenth. The author demonstrates the enormous diversity and constant change that characterized music and musical life during this period. Downs eschews the usual stylistic labels, such as Rococo and High Classic, and instead organizes the text into short time spans. Within each, he looks to the social conditions and daily life of the musician, the aesthetics and audience preference in structures, performing combinations, and performing styles. The minor composers, or *kleinmeister*, are carefully observed, since they most accurately mirror their times. On the other hand, the giants, who left their mark on music for all time, receive full biographical scrutiny at each stage of their development. The book begins with the transition from the Baroque up to 1760 and the burgeoning new style that developed in the next two decades. The author then focuses on the early years of Haydn and Mozart before giving full treatment to the last twenty years of the eighteenth century, which saw the Classical style reach its apogee. Downs returns to the mature Haydn and deals with the last decade of Mozart's life, and finally considers Beethoven's musical origins and accomplishments. He concludes by documenting the eighteenth-century heritage at work in the early nineteenth century. Copiously illustrated, with abundant music examples, this fascinating survey provides invaluable insights into the period that produced some of the most astonishing music ever written.

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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.

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Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Just a little drier than the other Norton books

By Tobin Sparfeld

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.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A very comprehensive source

By Matthew C. Steel

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.

6 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

An excellent source

By A Customer

This book is excellent for both students and teachers who are studying the Classic Era of music history. This source goes along well with other Norton publications such as the Romantic Era and the Norton Publication that spans from Ancient music to the Baroque. I have all of these sources and it has enriched my knowledge in the area of music history a great deal!

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