

Western History in Musical Perspective

John Huber

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Drawing a clear line through history and buttressing key moments with references to musical inventions, Western History in Musical Perspective is a knowledgeable text.

With specific focus on Western development, musicologist John Huber's history book *Western History in Musical Perspective* charts the evolution of humanity through the lens of culture.

Huber asserts that human beings and culture evolved together and influenced each other, as when primitive tools used to manipulate sound in pleasing ways became music. The book claims that every recorded civilization included music with specific applications. Across four sequential chapters, it charts how created instruments and vocal music shifted and transformed as human beings spread across the globe and established nations. These chapters are light on information about culture and musical references, though; they function more as a summary of the growth of human civilizations than anything else, overshadowing the fascinating points raised in the aural history chapter that follows them.

Indeed, the bulk of the book's musical examination of history takes place in the meaty fifth chapter—an aural history of Western culture. Condensed summaries follow, including a chapter that represents musical evolution via a catchy collection; these winnow out the core message for general accessibility beyond the preceding wealth of dates, figures, and details.

The chapter that focuses on aural history is standout work, drawing a clear line through history and buttressing key moments with references to the inventions of particular musical instruments and the creations of new musical forms. There are edifying considerations of how music changed in response to society-wide changes too, with Huber arguing that music first centered faith before moving on to nature and human vices. The book's perspectives regarding how human beings express themselves are fascinating.

The prose is scholarly and dense, making use of specialized terms that may hold lay audiences at a distance. Footnotes are relegated to massive sections that hinder general readability, though the bibliography itself is extensive and credible. Intriguing developments are hinted at, and references are included for those who wish to investigate further, beyond the bounds of this volume. And though the focus is on Western civilizations, the book makes space to acknowledge corollaries in Eastern civilizations as well. Occasional enthusiastic interjections prevent the book from maintaining a truly authoritative tone, though.

Western History in Musical Perspective is an esoteric cultural textbook that's concerned with how music and instruments shaped human societies.

JOHN M. MURRAY (February 8, 2024)

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