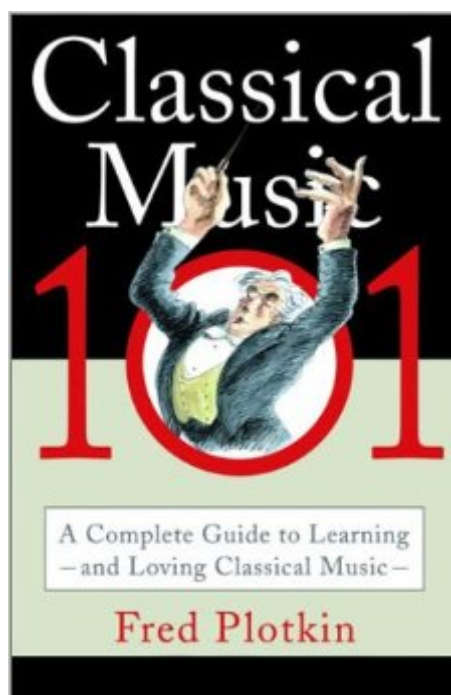


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# Classical Music 101: A Complete Guide To Learning And Loving Classical Music



## Synopsis

A Paperback Original. The author who has taught tens of thousands of people to love opera now introduces readers to the rich and soul-stirring world of classical music. For anyone who is aching to discover classical music, this comprehensive and accessible book is the ideal teacher. Writing in the clear and highly entertaining prose that made *Opera 101* the standard text in its field, Fred Plotkin -- music expert, teacher, lecturer, and famous author -- presents classical music in a way that respects both the reader and the art form. In *Classical Music 101*: --The reader will discover how to become an expert listener, which is essential for learning to love classical music.--A thousand years of music are explored, with emphasis on great works in all styles. Significant composers will be profiled in depth, including Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, and many more.--Important musicians, such as pianist Emanuel Ax, singer Marilyn Horne, and conductor James Levine, speak about their art in interviews. *Classical Music 101*, the newest addition to a highly successful series intended for readers who don't consider themselves dummies or idiots, will help the person drawn to the finer things in life (and readers who don't know how to approach them) discover the glories of music.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Classical Music 101" is a great book, but there are a few caveats, which I will get to at the end of my review. First off, this book examines--culturally and commercially--the place that classical music holds in today's world. Next, it breaks down classical music into its constitutive elements: how

individual instruments produce sound; how the individual sounds of instruments come together in various orchestral formats; what role the conductor plays; and how the elusive art of active listening can be perfected. There is specific scrutiny of several representative musical works, a discography of recommended recordings, and an appendix listing concert venues all over the world. The best aspect of the work is how it attacks, frequently and energetically, the question of why classical music matters. Plotkin has some great answers, and they are heartfelt rather than pat. The whole work is suffused with Plotkin's great knowledge and attention to detail. There are all manner of fascinating "insider" details--such as why the number of classical recordings continues to wither while record-company profits go up--that are the icing on this detail-rich cake. There are some warnings, however. First, the typeface is troublingly small. People who have a hard time reading fine print should avoid this book. Second, this is a book is NOT a quick, breezy read (think "Classical Music for Dummies"), so if you don't want to work a little, skip it. Plotkin asks you to think and reflect, which is great--but there are less challenging classical-music guides on the market. In the end, I believe the attentive reader of this book will be richly rewarded. Plotkin might easily make you into a lifelong classical music fan.

At its core this book teaches you how to listen to classical music. The general format of the book is giving some theory and history, and then has you listen to a piece of music. The author then explains the music and also tells you what to listen for. For example the book starts off by developing your listening skills. You'll learn about various instruments in the orchestra and then listen to a few recordings. Then the author teaches you how to interpret the music, and how to form your own ideas about it. Once the foundation is laid, you'll learn how to listen to symphonies by various composers. After that you'll focus on music for a specific instrument - piano, strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion. The last section of the book is about how to listen to vocal music and how to feel music. One thing to beware of is that you will need access to the music to get the full benefit of the book. I personally used the online music service Rhapsody which had most pieces of music. Another thing is this book is not a quick read, so be prepared to spend a lot of time listening to music. If you are a beginner to classical music I highly recommend this book.

As in his "Opera 101", Plotkin gives us a book that is helpful to the expert as well as the novice. And as in "Opera 101", "Classical Music 101" would be a good textbook for high school or University classes. Mr. Plotkin is at once studious and entertaining in his prose and one gets the impression that he is not a classical music snob. It seems very important to him to share his love of this music

with others who may not have had the chance to know it. This book has great depth as well as breadth. For the person who wants to "get to know" classical music better, or at all, Mr. Plotkin leads the reader on a gentle and illuminating tour.

This is certainly an acceptable book on listening to classical music for beginners, and Mr. Plotkin obviously knows a great deal about the subject. However, the author's introductory promise not to treat us like "dummies" or "idiots" (references to other guidebooks he wants to distance himself from), are not wholly kept. I found much value in the content of the book, but the tone of the writing is unbearably "dick and jane-ish" - to the point that I sometimes just had to put the book down and walk away for a while. In particular the lecture on listening is profoundly didactic. I also was disappointed that there was not more attention paid to the technical terms used for different aspects of classical music. There is definitely no succinct glossary of terms. If you want to know this stuff, I encourage a hunt and peck journey on wikipedia. One very good feature of the book is an extensive list of concert halls, internet resources, and other bits of ephemera of interest to the classical music novice. Overall, it's a decent book to own, but I didn't like it enough to recommend.

This is the most disappointing book about classical music I've ever read. At first glance the book seems promising; dedicating numerous pages to one musical composition, while other books settle for much shorter comments. This builds up an expectation for a thorough analysis of the musical piece; but it turns out to be an "optical illusion". The book is wordy, tedious, shallow, and soporific. For example a total of 16 pages (145-160) are dedicated to Beethoven's 7th Symphony. In this chapter you get a 5 pages long list of conductors which has nothing to do with the 7th symphony; for "dessert", Mr. Plotkin, portrays an ordeal the Philadelphia Orchestra went through while choosing a director out of 634 candidates. The author also doesn't forget to list all past directors too. What does it have to do with B's 7th Symphony and how does it contribute to the understanding of the 7th Symphony? Not only it's a waste of time and space but it also distracts the reader's attention off the main subject. In Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" (pages 121-2) it doesn't get any better, you get a journalistic gossip reportage-like of the temperature outside and inside of the concert hall; the author does not forget to mention the audiences' disappointment of previous performances which took place that evening. The Rhapsody is commented in a "grand total" of few lines out of 2 pages... You'll be better informed by reading the CD's inserts of the music you're listening to and the following books although old but contain valuable and interesting information: "Listener's Anthology of Music" by Lillian Baldwin (1948). The enlarged edition "The

Enjoyment of Music" by Joseph Machlis (1970). There are newer editions of the latter book written by different authors, which I haven't seen yet. 2 Stars gained for recommended CDs list and for the contact info of concert halls.

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