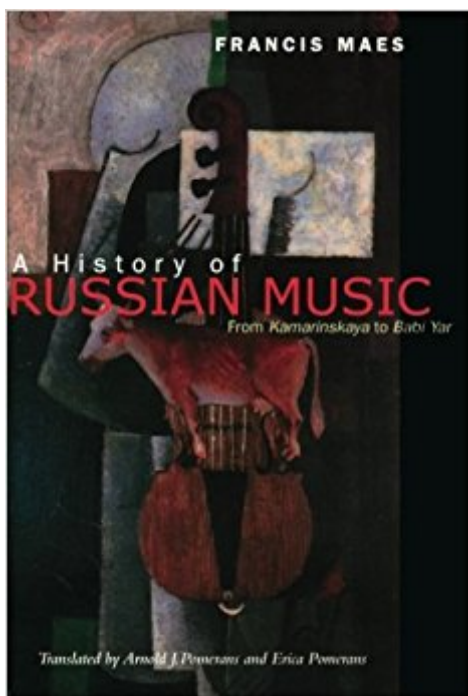


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A History Of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya To Babi Yar



Synopsis

Francis Maes's comprehensive and imaginative book introduces the general public to the scholarly debate that has revolutionized Russian music history over the past two decades. Based on the most recent critical literature, *A History of Russian Music* summarizes the new view of Russian music and provides a solid overview of the relationships between artistic movements and political ideas. The revision of Russian music history may count as one of the most significant achievements of recent musicology. The Western view used to be largely based on the ideas of Vladimir Stasov, a friend and confidant of leading nineteenth-century Russian composers who was more a propagandist than a historian. With the deconstruction of Stasov's interpretation, stereotyped views have been replaced by a fuller understanding of the conditions and the context in which composers such as Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, and Stravinsky created their oeuvres. Even the more recent history of Soviet music, in particular the achievement of Dmitry Shostakovich, is being assessed on new documentary grounds. A more complex conception of Russian music develops as Maes explores the cultural and historical milieu from which great works have emerged. Questioning and re-examining traditional views, the author considers the personal development of composers, the relationship of art to social and political ideals in Russia, and the ideologies behind musical research.

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Customer Reviews

Russian music scholarship has been completely overhauled over the last 20 years, largely through

the writings of influential musicologist Richard Taruskin (Berkeley). Now Maes, a Dutch writer who as a Fulbright scholar worked closely with Taruskin, presents an overarching view of Russian music history that draws upon and extends the new historical approach espoused by Taruskin. In brief, this school argues for a rejection of the 19th-century view absolutely equating Russian nationalism and folklorism with political and social progressivism. The new view, based on rigorous scholarship and unbiased musical analysis, reveals a far more nuanced and complex picture of Russian music. Originally published in Dutch in 1997, Maes's work is superbly translated here and proceeds from Mikhail Glinka to Dmitri Shostakovich in 14 chronological chapters, each rich in detail and illuminating in content. While no musical examples are presented, Maes does on occasion refer to specific terminology but always in ways that are clear to the lay reader. An excellent addition to all collections. Larry Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, PA Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Maes traverses the major periods of modern Russian music, from Glinka to Shostakovich. (Apparently, little Russian music before the nineteenth century is worth mentioning, though Prokofiev and Stravinsky incorporated folk themes and some religious music into theirs.) Glinka's *Life for the Tsar* began Russia's operatic tradition, but the royal family soon preferred Italian opera of the time. The later 1800s saw the rise of Balakirev, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Tchaikovsky, and Rachmaninoff, composing symphonic, chamber, and theatrical music within the Western classical tradition but influenced by Eastern tonalities. The revolution brought a new class of composers with it, among them Prokofiev and Shostakovich, who accommodated the Communist Party under Stalin by composing to satisfy the ever-changing political environment. Russian music has both adhered to tradition and advanced into modernism under the influence of politics, and Maes' brief analyses of many compositions bespeak composers buffeted by the political winds of their times. Glossing over lesser-known composers and stopping short of the post-Soviet period, the book is worthwhile for seeing how Russia's politics affected her music. Alan Hirsch Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a translation and it is difficult and challenging, as well as very technical writing about music. It isn't for the casual music enthusiast. I had to read it for a class in graduate music study and it was difficult to digest. The topic itself is tough, and compounded with a Dutch to English translation, it's not an easy read.

This book was required for my Russian Music History class, and so to save money, I bought it off . However, the great thing about this being our textbook is that it reads like a novel. It's very descriptive, gives all the information you might need on any particular major Russian composer, along with a lot of interesting background insight that helps the understanding of the music and composers even more. The history of Russia at the time of the composers is also included within and so this really is a great all around Russian Music History book. I'd recommend it to anyone needing information the topic.

"A History of Russian Music," by Francis Maes, could have been better titled: "Music's Place in the History of Russia and the Soviet Union." Though there are some basic definitions given (scattered on pages throughout), there is not one musical example of any of the folk song types listed. For example, no one will, after reading this book alone, understand what a "protyazhyana" is, other than a "drawn-out song." One could say the same about any of Kenny G's music. Analysis of the music is limited. The author obviously assumes the reader has no knowledge of music theory. For example, in a particularly pedantic passage, he acknowledges that his explanation of the octatonic scale "sounds complicated." If you are interested in "play by play" examination of opera plots, etc., then this is the book for you. For an actual understanding of Russian musical style, there are better sources. This book appeared to be a dumbed-down version of Richard Taruskin's scholarship - one will note Taruskin is the most cited author in the book. All in all, not bad for the musical novice, and a great look at how music fit in with the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, but lacks clarity and detail in its definitions, and is without the technical analysis required for scholarly research. More frustrating than helpful. Great cover art though.

The two copies I ordered arrived promptly and in pristine shape. The price was right, the service impeccable. Bravo to both and the bookseller! The book is a revelation: thorough, insightful, provocative and accurate. I recommend it as a must for anyone interested in Russian classical music.

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