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Julian Johnson, Julian Johnson

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Julian Johnson, Julian Johnson : Who Needs Classical Music?: Cultural Choice and Musical Value before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Who Needs Classical Music?: Cultural Choice and Musical Value:

3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. highly recommendedBy WitoldVery intelligently written, at times slightly uneven in quality and occasionally redundant. In my case, I was glad to find someone who shares many of my thoughts (and knows how to put them in writing so well). Probably the best book on the subject. It doesn't contain much preaching or educational "advice". The writing is dense and initially seems very complex, but it is not. It is a

rather straightforward read. Some personal preferences of the author are a little too obvious (e.g. dislike of Romanticism etc.). 1 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Rather repetitive and dry. By Erico Stern I awaited this book with much anticipation, but I have been somewhat disappointed by its contents and style. - I found it repetitive, as well as very dry, condescending and pseudo-highbrow. - It certainly has its interesting points, but these are far in between and repeated over and over again. - 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A PERCEPTIVE AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING COMMENTARY ON "MUSIC-AS-ART," NOT AS "IMMEDIATE PLEASURE" By Steven H Propp Julian Johnson is a lecturer in music at the University of Oxford; he has also written Classical Music: A Beginner's Guide (Beginners Guide (Oneworld)), Mahler's Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies, and Webern and the Transformation of Nature. He wrote in the Introduction to this 2002 book, "This book is about the value of classical music... it is about its apparent devaluation today and the consequences of its current legitimization crisis... It addresses questions not just about music but about the nature of contemporary culture... my main point is that while some classical music can and does function as popular culture, its ... makes a claim to a distinctive value because it lends itself to functions that, on the whole, popular music does not... classical music is distinguished by a self-conscious attention to its own musical language." (Pg. 3) He adds, "Central to my argument is the distinction between the process by which value is conferred on music and a broader sense of values... My suggestion is... that we frequently identify with music whose value-position objectively contradicts that which we claim in other spheres of life---such as ethics, politics, or education." (Pg. 7-8) He asserts, "Music-as-art, at its best, is thus redemptive: it gives back to us a sense of our absolute value that a relativist society denies... The enactment of musical artworks requires a letting go of the immediacy that runs counter to the everyday. But its reward is that we are thus enabled to participate in a process which the everyday prevents... Music-as-art ... [involves] us in a process by which that self comes to understand itself more fully as a larger, trans-subjective identity. In this way the value of music-as-art is essentially ethical." (Pg. 9) He contends that "Classical music... cannot be understood in the terms of popular culture. It is concerned with details of its musical language and inner musical form to a degree that popular music is not." (Pg. 46) He points out that "Live performance ensures that we accord a certain primacy to the musical work by forcing us to give in to its temporal processes. Recorded music reverses that equation by allowing us to subordinate the music to the demands of other activities..." (Pg. 54) Later, he observes, "Only recently have we collectively reduced music to the question of immediate pleasure alone, such that choosing between different musical types is no more significant than choosing between different flavors of ice cream." (Pg. 86) Still later, he argues, "music's place in cultural history is eclipsed by the overwhelming insistence on its function as personal pleasure---a problem that French, history, or geography do not face." (Pg. 118) On a political level, he notes, "Why is participation in classical music elitist? Because only parents with sufficient financial capital and a certain educational background are likely to fund and encourage their children to participate in it. State education policy thus reinforces the social divisions it pretends to oppose." (Pg. 119) He says, "The spiritual element of music is therefore not some mystical essence or secret ingredient ... by thinking the material elements of the world, it spiritualizes them." (Pg. 71) He concludes, "Not only does music offer the possibility of transcending daily life: it offers... a reshaping of those categories... When we leave the musical work and return to daily life, we have tasted a different way of being, a different perception of the world. Potentially, this leaves us marked by the experience. It subsequently produces an altered perception of the world." (Pg. 129) This is an excellent meditation and consideration of many issues affecting classical music, and will be of keen interest to anyone similarly concerned. (If you like this book, see also Why Classical Music Still Matters)

During the last few decades, most cultural critics have come to agree that the division between "high" and "low" art is an artificial one, that Beethoven's Ninth and "Blue Suede Shoes" are equally valuable as cultural texts. In *Who Needs Classical Music?*, Julian Johnson challenges these assumptions about the relativism of cultural judgements. The author maintains that music is more than just "a matter of taste": while some music provides entertainment, or serves as background noise, other music claims to function as art. This book considers the value of classical music in contemporary society, arguing that it remains distinctive because it works in quite different ways to most of the other music that surrounds us. This intellectually sophisticated yet accessible book offers a new and balanced defense of the specific values of classical music in contemporary culture. *Who Needs Classical Music?* will stimulate readers to reflect on their own investment (or lack of it) in music and art of all kinds.

"You will often cheer out loud! I did...more profound than can be communicated in a book review. I read this twice. Like all my favorite books, I will read it again and again. Nothing is more relevant to classical music devotees."--*American Record Guide*"[A] heartfelt and finely reasoned appeal....wise, perceptive and inspiring book."--*The Economist*"[A] soberly argued defense of classical tradition as uniquely valuable in its own right, and hence worth sustaining as a cultural option open to all. *Who Needs Classical Music?* is neither a last-ditch lament nor an aggressive counter-attack....Every page -at times, every sentence-is loaded with implications for further thought deserves the widest attention." --*BBC online*"[A] sophisticated yet accessible defense of classical music's value."--*Choice*About the

Author Julian Johnson is Professor of Music at Royal Holloway, University of London. He was awarded the Dent Medal of the Royal Musical Association for "outstanding contributions to musicology."