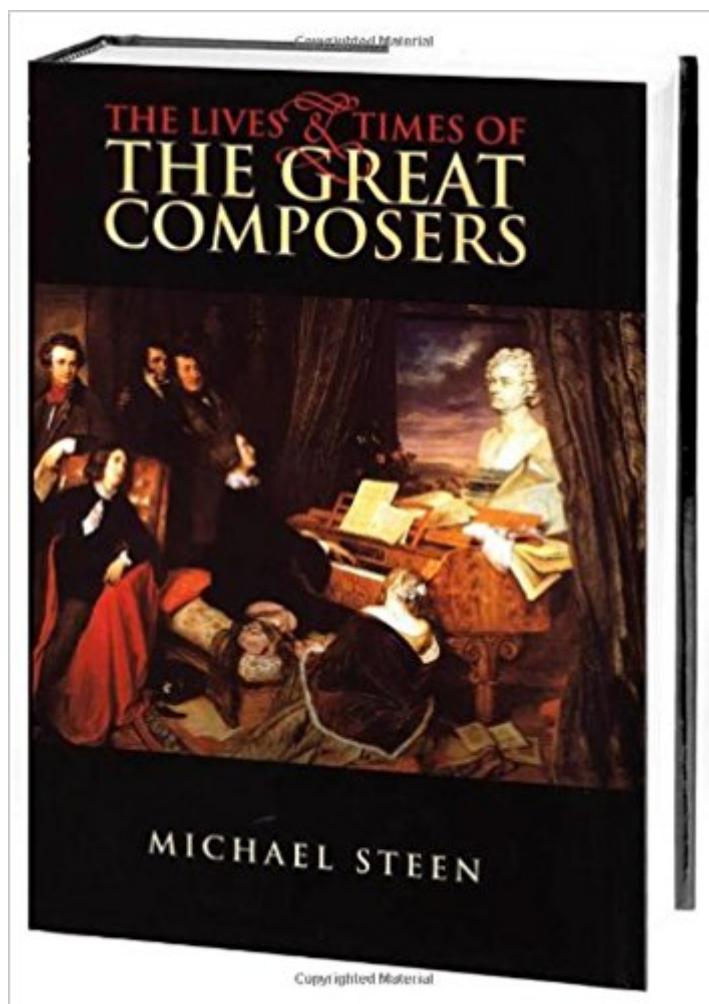


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# The Lives And Times Of The Great Composers



## Synopsis

A grand and panoramic biographical history of the giants of classical music, *The Lives and Times of Great Composers* is a new, unique, and lovingly constructed modern reference--and a beguiling read which you will return to again and again. Interlinked yet self-contained, each chapter distills the life of one or more composers, set against the social, political, musical, and cultural background of the time. Read the story of Bach, the respectable burgher, much of whose vast output was composed amidst petty turf disputes in Lutern Leipzig; or the ugly, argumentative Beethoven, obsessed by his laundry; or Mozart, the over-exploited infant prodigy whose untimely death was shrouded in rumor; or the ghastly death of Donizetti and Smetana. Read about Verdi, who composed against the background of the Italian Risorgimento, or about the family life of the Wagners; and Brahms, who rose from the slums of Hamburg to become a devotee of beer and coffee in fin-de-siecle Vienna, a cultural capital bent on destroying Mahler. Michael Steen paints a vivid portrait of the tumultuous times in which these brilliant, yet flawed, human beings labored--a tour of 350 years of European history. From Handel's London and the speculative financial frenzy of the "South Sea bubble"; to the courts of petty German princelings and the ornate and sleazy Dresden; to the astonishingly creative Vienna of Beethoven and Schubert; to the opera in 19th-century Paris and Bizet in the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune; to the Majorca of Chopin, to the Russia of Tchaikovsky and the Siege of Leningrad, just one of the many horrors which Shostakovich had to survive. We encounter, too, painters such as Renoir and Manet, literary figures like Zola, Proust, and Dostoyevsky, and religious leaders such as Pope Pius IX and Cardinal Newman. *Great Composers* paints in broad brushstrokes the culture of a continent far wider than music.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Well written, fascinating, and extremely useful, this volume serves as both a sociological study and a reference work. Highly recommended. "--Library Journal starred review

Michael Steen was born in Dublin. He studied at the Royal College of Music, was organ scholar at Oriel College, Oxford, and then spent 30 years in a successful career in the City of London. He is chairman of the Royal College of Music Society and has been co-opted a committee member of the Friends of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

A big book filled with information. It was entertaining and very interesting. I first read Schubert's life. After all, I like his *inpromptus*. It was a mistake: girls, parties, wine, night life, venereal disease, but I discovered later that the whole book did not treat only of sex. Composers have always been good at finding the most beautiful, romantic, and lush places in Europe: Austrian forests, Russian villages, lake Como and Bellagio, islands in the Mediterranean Sea - the nicest in Italy, and even Vatican - all were frequented by composers. Politics: they did not have Internet, but they were well aware of the political movements: invasion by the French armies, fall of Napoleon, revolutions in France every 20 years, invasions of Poland and of France, iron hand of Bismark, fall of various dynasties, and later dictators of communist Russia, etc. In fact, they were often directly impacted by politics. They had their own opinions which sometimes did not match the newly established government, and at all times, they needed sponsors, publishers, money, and concert halls. Some of them had to hide in order not to be arrested. I wonder if contemporary composers are confronted to the same problems.

It read like a novel- As most musically trained people know is that the evolution classical music spanned about 150 years. An also that these musician were isolated primarily from Italy to Western Russia to the Baltics. What this book also teaches is how many of these composers knew each other or their families or were their instructors or pupils or who's wife ran off with who's husband. Of course there is talk of their individual approaches to music but more from a listeners POV. Great read

I am not a professional musicologist, just a passionate amateur. I read a lot of musical biography and such, so I was pleasantly surprised to see just how much I learned from this book. It is a real joy to read, the sort of book one doesn't want to end. In my view, it is generally balanced and fair (though the chapters on Wagner and R. Strauss come close to assassination at times). Rather like Edward Gibbon, Steen lives out his sex life in his footnotes, which are often hilarious. The book is elaborately, even tediously, documented; but the source notes are in the back, so as not to distract from the text notes. This is not a book on music; it is a book on composers: biography not musicology. (As Steen explains in a humorous introduction, music is about cellos, biography about fellows.) I really enjoyed this book and recommend it highly. At the risk of sounding petty, I wish that so distinguished publisher as Oxford could have employed an editor to rid this otherwise fine work of numerous grammatical errors. But put down your red pen for a while and just have a good time with Steen's exploration of Western music.

This is a useful compendium that provides more information than you might suppose such a book might. The chapter on Berlioz, for instance, gives a vivid portrait of the composer. The book is an indispensable reference for any classical music lover.

My 14 yr. old daughter is in her 5th year of piano and is starting some classical music. She is also an avid reader so this was a good choice for a Christmas gift and she loves it. It is a big book but the smaller sections for each composer makes it an easy read! I recommend the seller-packed well and shipped fast!

The book came promptly from in excellent condition. I thumbed through it and decided I will treat myself to one when my next birthday rolls around! It is very interesting to learn about the composer's backgrounds and what was happening in their respective countries and their personal lives at the time they were composing. If my friend doesn't like it, I will gladly take it off her hands!

A wonderful comprehensive history of the times and of the great composers.

Excellent book. Great short biographies of the masters.

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