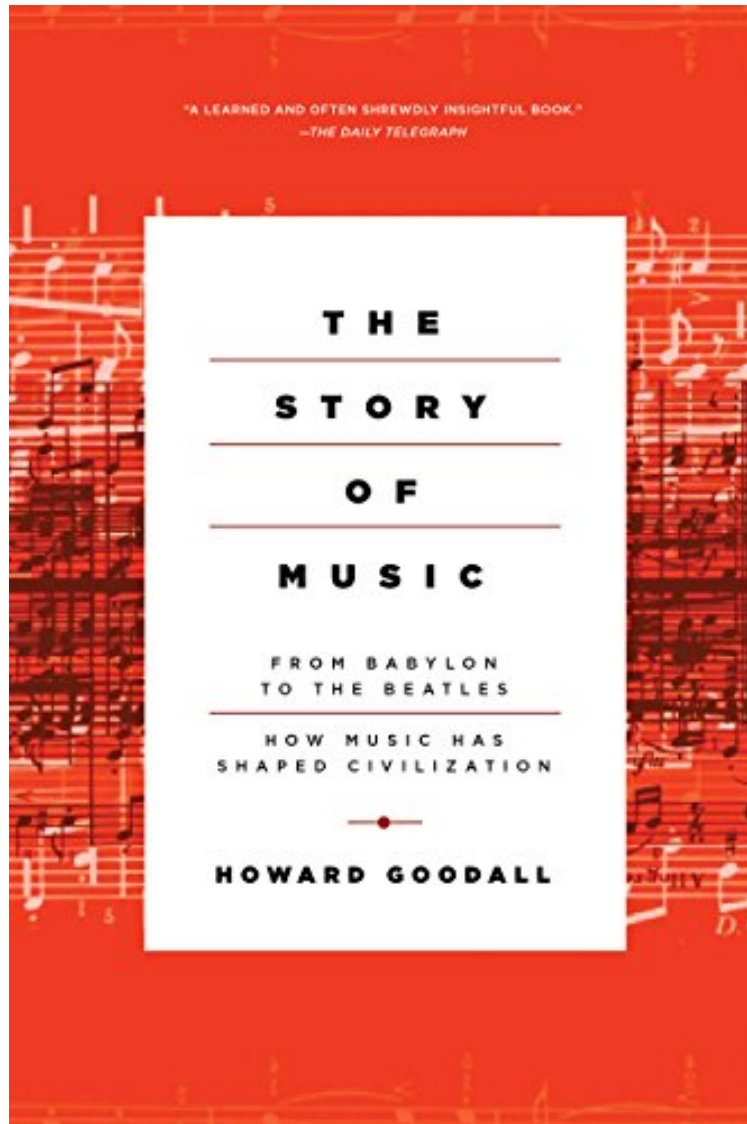


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The Story of Music: From Babylon to the Beatles: How Music Has Shaped Civilization

Howard Goodall

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Howard Goodall : The Story of Music: From Babylon to the Beatles: How Music Has Shaped Civilization before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Story of Music: From Babylon to the Beatles: How Music Has Shaped Civilization:

18 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Fills a lot of holes, leaves some open (for this musical ignoramus anyway) By Steve Kohn Let it first be clear that Mr Goodall's clipped toenails have more musical talent than all of me

at my peak. Which makes me wonder how I can possibly pass judgment on anything he does. The second point is that this book is a companion to his 6-hour BBC series *The Story of Music*. I thought the series even better than the book, especially the episodes from 1650 forward, but at this writing, I can't find the series for sale anywhere, not at , not even at BBC.com. It's on YouTube in its entirety, but unlikely that will last forever. In this book, Goodall combines scholarship with his musical gifts, and his thoughts are often delightfully expressed. The book was enjoyable and educational from first page to last. But if I could sit down with the author, I'd ask him "Why didn't you spend more time telling us ..." -- How rock merged with folk to become so integral to the 1960s. (Civil rights, Vietnam War, women's liberation, drugs, rebellion against parental controls.) -- Why bebop, which is for me unlistenable, didn't sink into instant obscurity. -- Why rap/hiphop, again for me unlistenable, has become so inexplicably popular. -- Why Aram Khatchaturian isn't mentioned once, with the *Spartacus* and *Gayane* ballets having some of the most luscious melodies and orchestrations in the entire history of music. -- Why or how western classical music has spread throughout the world. (I'll never forget a concert by an excellent Incheon Symphony Orchestra in Seoul in 1989, every musician Korean, and the performance exceptional.) I can't argue with Mr Goodall's giving Stevie Wonder so many pages and so much praise, for Goodall the expert musician and I'm certainly not. I'll just say SW isn't represented by a single CD in my large collection, and I can think of many other musicians more influential, certainly more enjoyable. Likewise with Mr Goodall's respect for Cuban music that I don't understand, even knowing Goodall and Ry Cooder love it so. And his granting Steve Reich so much importance, which I'd give to his contemporary, the much more accessible Philip Glass. Enough negatives. What I did like about the book is how it helped me understand music evolving over time, and how some musicians fit their times and then influenced others. I've long loved Vivaldi, Mozart, Beethoven; I now better understand them and their place in music. I also enjoyed Goodall's observations, as for example, "Vast swathes of the music written in the sixty or so years after 1750 slavishly hung on these three master chords -- the same three, as it happens, that dominate rock and roll and its various twentieth-century offspring." Another: "Musicians and poets [of the Romantic period] saw the countryside as a roughly hewn wilderness, supplying countless images to convey the swirling emotional torrents of the yearning lover. Of course, none of them actually had to WORK the land. You observed peasants from the comfortable distance of your artistic nook but you wouldn't want to be one. They were more like present-day privileged Western students trawling the developing world and writing blogs about how the world's poorest people enabled them to broaden their horizons." Or: "Listening to Faure after Brahms, Liszt, Wagner or Tchaikovsky is comparable to someone spring-cleaning and redecorating a teenage boy's bedroom. Gone are the posters of death, psychological torment, superheroes and tragedy. The augmented piles of clothes have been put away, and the windows have been opened to dispel the diminished air." Or: "...the RITE OF SPRING is the twentieth century's most thrillingly explosive, iconic piece of orchestral music; it is still astonishing a hundred years later. It is a rebellion in sound. While Mahler had layered melody on melody, tangled together like a twisted knot [aha, now I see better why I don't enjoy him], and Debussy had manipulated blocks of adjacent sound melting into each other, Stravinsky went one step further, superimposing simultaneous rhythms on top of each other." We may not always agree with Mr Goodall's musical opinions, but no denying the pleasure reading them. I hesitate to post this review and display my ignorance for all to see. I offer it to those, amateurs like me, hoping to gain a broader view of music. You will not go wrong reading this book. I just wish the author had talked with me as he was writing it. (Ha!) 11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Bravo! By Chris Edwards What a superb book! I stumbled across Howard Goodall's BBC shows on YouTube and I was mesmerized. People interested in music come in a few different flavors. There are the kind who don't care about the technical or historical details, the serious listener. Then there are the academics who are quite tolerant of belaboring the details, usually of some very, very narrow area of expertise. Goodall drops down right between those to satisfy someone who is primarily interested in listening (and making?) good music but who also wants some context and understanding. The scope of this book is truly extraordinary. The book really gets going as (what we know of) music did, with the advent of a permanent record, i.e. notation, and western harmony. These things do seem to be major genesis events. I believe that the computer age is also such an epoch - what will result from such a low barrier to making music and an undreamed of access to it will be something quite exciting for the future. This leaves this book's scope as a good place to reflect. I'm sure there have been other books that attempted to tell this story but one of the reasons that it really worked so well for me only now is the internet. I read this book near my computer and my YouTube/Spotify play histories are now filled with some very odd, but very illustrative historical work. What a miracle of our age that I could listen along to the exact music that Goodall expertly was discussing. I highly recommend this as it enhances the value of the experience immeasurably. Goodall has a play list mentioned in the book, but I was looking up and playing everything he mentioned and then some. Well worth it. I discovered some wonderful music that I just had never known about before. (John Field? Irish? Who knew?) I am interested in music theory because I am interested in being a better musician. I'm not especially talented, so learning about technical things seems like a small way forward. I now am pretty sure that learning music theory effectively requires learning music history. A point Goodall makes often is that so much of musical terminology and organization is completely insane. Many classically trained music conservatory nerds are horrifically supercilious about the technical details of their business. They say things like, "Alto means high so of course it's the lowest of the

soprano registers. Duh!" and "Octave comes from the root word meaning eight which is why it's obvious there are 12 notes in the western scale." Refreshingly, Goodall, very bravely defends classical music (and others) as worthwhile and essential without pretending these defects don't exist. Goodall never backed away from clear explanations of complex musical topics. He assumes the reader is interested enough in music to sit down to read 324 pages of music history, but otherwise not extensively schooled in music theory. What I liked most was his very human perspective on things. Sometimes I'd be preparing myself for some complex technical detail whose importance I'd overlooked and he'd say something like this (which is my favorite sentence from the entire book): "The Beatles became the most famous and successful musicians of the twentieth century mainly because their songs were youthful, catchy and imaginative, and because everyone who heard them - millions of people across the planet - felt the world was a better place." Not only is that a nice way to put it, it's pretty much true. If you're interested in knowing why the music you love is the way it is or if you are interested in making music yourself that better integrates the vast western tradition, this book is highly recommended. If you can't picture yourself slogging through 324 pages about anything (which is somewhat understandable), I definitely recommend checking out Goodall's BBC programs on YouTube. 11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Interesting review of mostly classical music By Alan A. Elsner This book aspires to offer a complete history of music - but really it's 90 percent the familiar history of Western classical music from the Renaissance to the late 20th century - with a short bow to pre-history and a nod to a couple of the author's favored practitioners of jazz and rock n'roll. Still, it's an interesting read - if incomplete. Actually I found the early chapters on ancient music quite absorbing and would have liked to read more. The author's description of the way music notation evolved and its role in allowing music to become a developing and changing art was new to me and quite fascinating. He outlines how, in his words, music became "the soundtrack to the affairs of our hearts" - starting with the beginnings of opera in the early 17th century. But he could also have explored the insights that cognitive science has given us about how music affects the brain - and how music helps humans develop their intellectual and emotional ranges. This is entirely absent. Goodall also finally explains what a "well-tempered clavier" actually is and how the development of the keyboard led to the adoption of the western 12-tone octave. After a lifetime of playing Bach's Preludes and Fugues, I finally got it. (Although when I tried to explain it to my wife, I was soon foundering.) As we move through the centuries, the author's preference become clear. He deeply respects Bach - but loves Handel. He doesn't think much of Haydn whose melodies are not memorable - but adores Mozart who believed the point of music was to "bring pleasure." (The Beatles get top marks for the same reason). I think that's a bit simplistic - but I'm not a musicologist. However, listen to the G minor string quintet or the symphony number 40 - and pleasure doesn't really enter into it. He offers grudging respect to Beethoven as the man who turned music from after-dinner entertainment into an all-encompassing emotional experience - but one senses a lack of authorial enthusiasm for the great Ludwig. Goodall passes through Schubert (invented the three-minute song), Schumann (gentle), Chopin (Polish) and Brahms (conservative) in a couple of paragraphs each - but lavishes pages on Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner. He tries to resurrect Clara Schumann as a major composer. He has a bit of an annoying habit of taking single works and proclaiming that they "changed music forever." There is a tiresome discussion about whether Dvorak "stole" Native American and African American themes for his New World Symphony and whether it matters if he did - as if themes belong to any one person or nation. The final chapters on popular music are very weak. Goodall picks out a few musicians - the Beatles, Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder - for extensive praise, perhaps because they are in his mind closest to classic music - while entirely ignoring the Stones, the Who, Queen and many others who have extended the range of rock music. He brushes aside Bob Dylan in a couple of sentences. He really gives short shrift to musical theater, folk, country and many other genres while extolling the virtues of movie soundtracks which happens to be one form in which he works. And non-western music is excused at the start of the book as unchanging and lacking in the capacity to develop. In a short history like this, clearly an author gets to make choices about what to include and what not to include. And we do want our expert guide to be frank about his or her personal favorites. So this is one individual's short history of music - predominantly classical music - full of the author's prejudices. As such, it's a pretty good read.

A dynamic and expansive tour through 40,000 years of music, from prehistoric instruments to modern-day pop songs. Music is an intrinsic part of everyday life, and yet the history of its development from single notes to multi-layered orchestration can seem bewilderingly complex. In his dynamic tour through 40,000 years of music, from prehistoric instruments to modern-day pop, Howard Goodall leads us through the story of music as it happened, idea by idea, so that each musical innovation - harmony, notation, sung theatre, the orchestra, dance music, recording - strikes us with its original force. Along the way, he also gives refreshingly clear descriptions of what music is and how it works: what scales are all about, why some chords sound discordant, and what all post-war pop songs have in common. The story of music is the story of our urge to invent, connect, rebel and entertain. Howard Goodall's beautifully clear and compelling account is both a hymn to human endeavor and a groundbreaking map of our musical journey. 16 pages of color and BW photographs

From Booklist*Starred * Most of us take music for granted, and yet, as explained in this insightful exploration on the origins of music, someone had to come up with harmony and rhythm; someone had to create musical notation. Someone, somewhere, thought of them first. Though Goodalls primary focus is on Western music, that doesnt mean he ignores other musical cultures. He begins with what he calls the Age of Discovery (40,000 BCE to 1450 CE), exploring the musical origins of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, since music, he asserts, played an important role in ritual, communication, and language development. He moves on to the ancient Greeks, who believed studying music could produce nobler human beings. He discusses plainchant and polyphony, explains the huge implications of Gutenbergs movable-type printing on the dissemination of music as well as other landmarks in musical history, including the birth of opera; the invention of the piano; technological recording breakthroughs; the evolution of the blues, jazz, and rock n roll; and the worldwide popularity of hip-hop. Major musical figures are featured prominently, too, from Mozart to Beethoven, Wagner, Mahler, Stravinsky, and Brecht, on to Elvis Presley, the Beatles, Stevie Wonder, Paul Simon, and Stephen Sondheim. With playlists for each chapter, this is a masterful and illuminating whirlwind tour through thousands of years of musical history. --June Sawyers With playlists for each chapter, this is a masterful and illuminating whirlwind tour through thousands of years of musical history. - Booklist, STARRED REVIEW

A celebrated British composer and broadcaster surveys the evolution and cultural significance of music, from prehistoric caves to Coldplay...Cultural history with some attitude and considerable rhythm and melody. - Kirkus

About the Author Howard Goodall is an EMMY, BRIT, and BAFTA award-winning composer of choral music, stage musicals, film and TV scores, and a distinguished broadcaster. In recent years he has been Englands first ever National Ambassador for Singing, the Classical Brit Composer of the Year, and Classic FMs Composer-in-Residence. He was recently appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for services to music education. He lives in London.