



# Experiencing Beethoven: A Listener's Companion

By Geoffrey Block

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Experiencing Beethoven, music historian Geoffrey Block explores in layman's terms a highly representative body of about two dozen Beethoven instrumental and vocal works, offering listeners who know him well, or are just discovering him, an opportunity to grasp the breadth and depth of his musical genius. Experiencing Beethoven places the composer's works within the evolving context of his personal and professional life and social and cultural milieu. Block sheds light on the public and private audiences of Beethoven's music, from the concerts for the composer's own financial benefit to the debut of the "Eroica" Symphony at the palace of Prince Lobkowitz to the historic public premiere of his Ninth Symphony.

Experiencing Beethoven paints a portrait of the composer's youth in Bonn, his early triumphs and artistic maturation in Vienna, and—despite the challenges his music posed to his contemporaries—the recognition he received during his lifetime as the most acclaimed composer of the era. Block conveys the range and scope of Beethoven's achievement, from his heroic style to his lyricism, grappling throughout with the composer's power to communicate his idealistic musical vision to listeners in both his time and ours. Finally, *Experiencing Beethoven* explores why Beethoven's music continues to enjoy an unwavering appeal in an age saturated with a range of musical styles.

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## **Experiencing Beethoven: A Listener's Companion** By Geoffrey Block Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Review

Block's new entry in the series discusses perhaps the most iconic composer in the Western tradition. The literature on Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) is overwhelming, from biography to musical analysis, including books on single works. The author presents analysis of both familiar works (seven of the nine symphonies, seven of the piano sonatas, three string quartets, and two piano concertos), as well as lesser-known ones such as the Joseph Cantata, the Choral Fantasy, various songs, and Wellington's Victory. An interesting feature is the integration of descriptions of concert premieres with musical analysis (the first performance of the Choral Fantasy suffered an orchestral breakdown), which is accessible and provocative (the series is avowedly for the nonspecialist) though might have been enhanced with minimal musical examples. The book includes a glossary of musical terms, forms, and tempo descriptions. VERDICT For 'nonspecialist' listeners wishing to dive more deeply into an analysis of Beethoven's works and classical music generally. (*Library Journal*)

[*Experiencing Beethoven: A Listener's Companion*] tries to answer the age-old question of why we all keep coming back to Beethoven.... Part of the Listeners Companion Series, *Experiencing Beethoven* is a guide meant for the average person. You don't have to know classical music. Block includes a generous glossary to explain musical terms, and often explains concepts in the text before going on.... [F]or real understanding of why Beethoven is still so compelling, you need to dive deep into the notes. (*The News Tribune*)

Block presents brilliant, in-depth analyses of several Beethoven works in different genres, including symphonies and piano sonatas, his only opera, his songs, the late piano music and the Op. 131 String Quartet in C-Sharp Minor (admired so deeply by Wagner and Schubert). A detailed analysis of the sketches for that enormous quartet, for example, show Beethoven changing his mind five times about the structure of the work. Block's book is aimed at both the general reader and the Beethoven fan, and even those in that latter category may well add considerably to their store of knowledge about this titan of music. (*The Seattle Times*)

Fidelio, the Ninth Symphony, and the *C-Sharp Minor String Quartet, Op. 131*. This book rewards both the novice and seasoned listener who want to explore the beloved composer's genius. The author understands that Beethoven's music draws steady admiration from audiences almost two centuries later, and seeks to inform the curious listener in the 21st century. (*American Music Teacher*)

[T]here is much to recommend in this book, chiefly the enthusiasm, discernment, expertise, and deep understanding of Beethoven and his cultural milieu that its author brings to the table, as well his clear, forthright explanations. This book is a fine choice for anyone looking for an introductory guide to Beethoven's music; it would serve equally well for an undergraduate course for non-majors. (*Fanfare Magazine*)

### About the Author

**Geoffrey Block** is distinguished professor of music history at the University of Puget Sound. He is the author of *Ives: "Concord" Sonata* (1996), *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from "Show Boat" to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber* (1997; 2nd ed. 2009), and *Richard Rodgers* (2003), a co-editor and contributor to *Charles Ives and the Classical Tradition* (1996), the editor of *The Richard Rodgers Reader* (2002), and the editor of two series of books on the American musical.

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