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One of *The Telegraph's* Best Music Books 2011

Alex Ross's award-winning international bestseller, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*, has become a contemporary classic, establishing Ross as one of our most popular and acclaimed cultural historians. *Listen to This*, which takes its title from a beloved 2004 essay in which Ross describes his late-blooming discovery of pop music, showcases the best of his writing from more than a decade at *The New Yorker*. These pieces, dedicated to classical and popular artists alike, are at once erudite and lively. In a previously unpublished essay, Ross brilliantly retells hundreds of years of music history?from Renaissance dances to Led Zeppelin?through a few iconic bass lines of celebration and lament. He vibrantly sketches canonical composers such as Schubert, Verdi, and Brahms; gives us in-depth interviews with modern pop masters such as Björk and Radiohead; and introduces us to music students at a Newark high school and indie-rock hipsters in Beijing.

Whether his subject is Mozart or Bob Dylan, Ross shows how music expresses the full complexity of the human condition. Witty, passionate, and brimming with insight, *Listen to This* teaches us how to listen more closely.

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Listen to This By Alex Ross Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #725334 in Books
- Published on: 2010-09-28
- Released on: 2010-09-28
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.28" h x 1.24" w x 6.23" l, 1.33 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 384 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In this brilliant collection, music critic Ross (*The Rest Is Noise*) utilizes a wide musical scale--classical music in China; opera as popular art; sketches of Schubert, Bjork, Kiki and Herb--as a way of understanding the world. Featuring mostly revised essays published in the span of his 12-year career at the *New Yorker*, Ross offers timeless portraits that probe the ways that the powerful personalities of composers and musicians stamp an inherently abstract medium so that certain notes, songs, or choruses become instantly recognizable as the work of a certain artist. The virtuoso performance comes in the one previously unpublished essay, *Chacona*, *Lamento*, *Walking Blues*, where Ross isolates three different bass lines as they wind through music history from the 16th-century chacona, a dance that promised the upending of the social order, through the laments of Bach, opera, and finally the blues. Ross nimbly finds the common ground on which 16th-century Spanish musicians, Bach, players from Ellington's 1940 band and Led Zeppelin's bassist John Paul Jones can stand, at least momentarily.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Full of surprises and sharp observations, this “absorbing, illuminating, exciting collection” (*San Francisco Chronicle*) gives equal billing to pop stars and classical composers, crossing musical margins with remarkable fluidity. Though they bear the *New Yorker*'s signature style, most critics upheld Ross's writing as eloquent and thoughtful, in language accessible to both laypersons and connoisseurs (although aficionados may have an easier time with the details). The *Washington Post* complained that the essays lacked excitement and literary “zing,” but others praised Ross for the sense of adventure that imbues each piece. Readers may find it difficult to resist Ross's enthusiasm, and *Listen To This* will no doubt take an honored place on many a bookshelf.

From [Booklist](#)

“I hate ‘classical music’: not the thing but the name,” *New Yorker* music critic Ross writes in the first of these 18 pieces, all but one of which are adapted from the magazine. Ross goes far to deliver the music from embalmment to its “natural evanescent state.” Readers can probably find keener, deeper criticism of the classics elsewhere, but Ross reenergizes the music for his readers while also opening the tent to such interesting, modern-day composer-musicians as Bjork, Cecil Taylor, Radiohead, and, yes, Bob Dylan. There are fine reconsiderations of Mozart, Brahms, and contralto Marian Anderson. And Ross addresses head-on such issues as (poorly funded) music education in public schools and the contentious but often successful marriage of music and technology. An engaging, if fragmented, survey of the state of the art. --Alan Moores

Users Review

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