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# Secret Lives Of Great Composers: What Your Teachers Never Told You About The World's Musical Masters



## Synopsis

True tales of murder, riots, heartbreak, and great music. With outrageous anecdotes about everyone from Gioachino Rossini (draft-dodging womanizer) to Johann Sebastian Bach (jailbird) to Richard Wagner (alleged cross-dresser), *Secret Lives of Great Composers* recounts the seamy, steamy, and gritty history behind the great masters of international music. You'll learn that Edward Elgar dabbled with explosives; that John Cage was obsessed with fungus; that Berlioz plotted murder; and that Giacomo Puccini stole his church's organ pipes and sold them as scrap metal so he could buy cigarettes. This is one music history lesson you'll never forget!

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Sometimes, there comes a point in reading a book when the reader stops reading for new information and starts noticing all the errors. This is one of those error-prone books that could have used a proofreader. French-born George Sand is not an English novelist. (p. 86) Puccini's Turandot is not "Turnadot." (p. 156 and p. 158) Madame Butterfly is not a slave. The author has her confused with Liu. (p. 153) Rossini's Barber of Seville is only two acts long. ("...hissed and jeered every act." p. 60) SpellCheck cannot catch homophones the way a human can, so we get incredibly bizarre errors. There are multiple uses of "lead" as the past tense of "lead." The book gives us juicy stories about composers from Vivaldi to Glass, but the heavy sarcasm of the author's voice gets very old very fast. This is the sort of thing that might be enjoyed just one chapter or two at a time. Some of the material is old and well-known (Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Bernstein). Other material touches on

semi-fresh ground, to me at least, such as Ives and Elgar.

This is an interesting book but sometimes fiction. For instance, with Aaron Copland, just about every other source has some disagreements with the "facts" presented in this book. These are all the errors I found just on page 232.1) his sister started teaching him at 11 not 82) he worked in the Berkshires, not the Catskills (both summer camp locations frequented by Jewish families and the Catskills would have made sense for a family from Brooklyn but the Berkshires explains his later collaboration with the Boston Symphony)3) it would be nice if he was writing piano pieces at age 8 but that was 3 years before any lessons and no other sources claim this4) and a grammar error - extraoneous "and" If you are trying to make sure you present the facts, check every single bit of information.

As a musicologist I think this book gives a glimpse into the more human side of the composers in question. Too often their lives read like a hero story, and usually not a particularly good one at that. This doesn't do the music any favour, I believe, since most of us are human enough to be more interested in music made by a person whose life story we can identify and, at least to a certain degree, sympathise with (this, I believe, can work the other way around too; Wagner's music is given a fascinating sheen because the character who made it is so utterly repulsive). While perhaps not always pleasurable, these anecdotes show how composers also were men, who, for all of their pockmarks, is far more interesting than the marble statues their mothers would not have been able to recognise. I would certainly recommend this book to everyone interested in classical music, middle school teachers desperate for something to make the pupils pay attention in music classes, and, perhaps most importantly, as a gift to your local conservative who upholds the classical tradition as a moral alternative to corrupt popular culture.

Artists, authors and now composers. The dryly humorous series continues, telling you things that would have made music class much more interesting had the teacher only known. It, albeit unintentionally I'm sure, humanizes its subjects and blows the dust off of their histories. Wagner in pink lingerie indeed....

I was looking for some interesting stories to tell my students about various composers that wasn't something out of a history book. This is exactly what I was looking for. The stories brought these people to life. Not only were there interesting stories (sometimes racy, but all entertaining), but

interesting quotes, and I especially liked how the author listed a most famous work of each composer and where you might have heard it (whether it be a recent movie, TV show, cartoon, etc.). An enjoyable read.

excellent stories. It raised up my interest for those composers. It makes me realize that they are real human beings instead of some plain word on the textbook and the name on the scores. But I would always read the history of this composer from other textbooks as well to know more formal history of this composer at all aspects. I would also recommend reading it while listening to the music from each composer online. So it is a slow process. If you read the book really quick, don't stop and reflecting it, it would just be some funny stories that can be reached everywhere and you will get bored really quick.

My review of this book will be short -- this was a well written and especially insightful study of things great composers did and didn't do that you never hear of (some really outrageous, others informative but not so far out) -- being a great admirer and lover of Classical Music, this was an outstanding book for my library -- I enjoyed it so much that I ordered more copies to send and share with my sons and some friends -- well written and the drawings and visual sketches were delightful and as outrageous as things you find out through the written text -- Thomas Seawell

Easy to read bio compilation. Anecdotes and music references give excellent must hear examples from each composer. Baseball card style capsule stats are also handy.

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