



Chamber Music: A Listener's Guide

By James Keller

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Oxford's highly successful listener's guides--*The Symphony*, *The Concerto*, and *Choral Masterworks*--have been widely praised for their blend of captivating biography, crystal clear musical analysis, and delightful humor. Now James Keller follows these greatly admired volumes with *Chamber Music*. Approaching the tradition of chamber music with knowledge and passion, Keller here serves as the often-opinionated but always genial guide to 192 essential works by 56 composers, providing illuminating essays on what makes each piece distinctive and admirable. Keller spans the history of this intimate genre of music, from key works of the Baroque through the emotionally stirring "golden age" of the Classical and Romantic composers, to modern masterpieces rich in political, psychological, and sometimes comical overtones. For each piece, from Bach through to contemporary figures like George Crumb and Steve Reich, the author includes an astute musical analysis that casual music lovers can easily appreciate yet that more experienced listeners will find enriching. Keller shares the colorful, often surprising stories behind the compositions while revealing the delights of an art form once described by Goethe as the musical equivalent of "thoughtful people conversing."

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Editorial Review

Review

"Even after a career spent immersed in chamber music, I gained new and fascinating insights from James Keller's essays. This is a book that enlightens professionals as well as general music-lovers. I am happy we have it!" -- Menahem Pressler, Beaux Arts Trio

"Chamber music is beloved by all musicians, and a reference such as this is welcome and needed. James Keller has given us a beautifully written guide that in a single volume targets appropriate repertoire for musicians and music-lovers. He clearly adores chamber music and, in his writing, conveys that love with passion and authority in a way that will enrich any listener or performer." -- Renée Fleming

"James Keller's engaging essays do exactly what great program notes should: they transport us inside classical music's fascinating scenarios of creation. Choosing intelligently from myriad possible details, Keller weaves a story about each work that has the feeling of a suspense novel, where the thrilling final chapter will be our listening experience. When describing music he is the ideal tour guide, leading us on musical journeys with enthusiasm and authority. This will be a hard-to-put-down book for anyone, from the newly-curious to the seasoned expert. Keller has provided an essential volume that will take its rightful place among music's most authoritative sources." -- David Finckel and Wu Han, Artistic Directors, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

"A solid representation of musicians from a wide range of genres, time periods, and countries...*Chamber Music: A Listener's Guide* offers something to tempt even the most discriminating and academic individual."
--*New York Journal of Books*

"The brief overviews of the standard repertoire are excellent and will certainly serve the intended audience...Essential." --*Choice*

"Writing a good programme note is a difficult and delicate art, and this collection of short programme-note length essays shows James Keller has it down to a T...The book is a treasure trove of learning, which Keller deploys with a wonderful lightness of touch." --*BBC Music Magazine* ("Five Stars Book Choice")

"The mantle of America's leading program-note writer would appear to have passed to James Keller...The tone is always inviting, enthusiastic, sincere, and enlivened with touches of humor...Keller succeeds admirably in the often elusive aim of every good program-note writer of satisfying the needs of both the

novice and the expert...The book might well serve as the impetus for a yearlong project to become familiar with the entire repertoire he covers. This is recommendation enough to award Keller's work a standing ovation." --*Fanfare*

"You can trust Keller...In the end, reading Keller's engaging notes makes you want to hear the piece - a sure sign of good, descriptive music writing." --*Music Media Monthly*

"The essays are mostly historical, well written, and quite informative. Each composition is described in terms of its emotional content, with a minimal amount of technical jargon. This excellent guide is highly recommended for all lovers of chamber music." --*Library Journal Review*

"It's a valuable, friendly companion, whether you're onstage or in the audience...Keller provides authoritative historical backgrounds and absorbing analytical reports for each work...This is a book to desire." --*Strings*

About the Author

James Keller, longtime Program Annotator of the New York Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony, was awarded the prestigious ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for feature writing about music in *Chamber Music* magazine, where he has been Contributing Editor for more than a decade.

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Catherine Ng:

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