



# Modern Music and After - Directions Since 1945

*Paul Griffiths*

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This fully revised new edition re-establishes Paul Griffiths's survey as the definitive study of music since the Second World War. The disruptions of the war, and the struggles of the ensuing peace, were reflected in the music of the time: in Pierre Boulez's radical re-forming of compositional technique and in John Cage's move into zen music, in Milton Babbitt's settling of the serial system, and in Dmitry Shostakovich's unsettling symphonies, in Karlheinz Stockhausen's development of electronic music and in Luigi Nono's pursuit of the universally human, in Iannis Xenakis's view of music as sounding mathematics and in Luciano Berio's consideration of it as language. The initiatives of these composers and their contemporaries opened prospects that have continued to unfold. This constant expansion of musical thinking since 1945 has left us with no single history of music. We live' as Griffiths says, among many simultaneous histories'. His study accordingly follows several different paths, showing how they converge and diverge.

### Modern Music and After - Directions Since 1945 Details

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## From Reader Review Modern Music and After - Directions Since 1945 for online ebook

### Amber H. says

Overall, a good overview of modern music (music since 1945). The first half was particularly well written, great detail given to Boulez, Stockhausen, and Cage. However, as the book continued on (moving away from those composers), it seemed to lose some of its momentum.

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### Elias B says

comprehensive but at times needlessly complicated in style

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### Ian says

Recommended

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### Ryan says

Despite the heinous omission of developments in America outside of the realm of the serialist/minimalist persuasions, this is probably the authoritative history of at least Europe's musical development after WWII. Griffiths has his biases, and they are well known, but he writes about what he knows better than anyone else.

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### Justin Evans says

Perfect for my purposes, in this case, learning about some music that I might like to listen to, and learning a (very) little about some music with which I'm already familiar. Griffiths is hamstrung by the actual history of modernist music, and the time in which he was writing the book: the story starts out comprehensible and gripping (post-war composers go to work to invent a new musical language etc...), and then, thanks to any number of events both aesthetic (e.g., discovering the problems with music derived from serialism) and social (e.g., the strong links with pre-war music in the Soviet republics, since liking pre-war music was a protest rather than a conservative gesture), that unified story falls apart.

Or did it? I suspect that in a hundred years much of the chaff will have been winnowed out and a book like this will have a discrete, easy to follow narrative all the way through. On the other hand, it'll leave out a bunch of interesting stuff. I wish Griffiths had said a bit more about all the indie-punkish types combining minimalism, noise, composition and generally dark-toned cover-art, but then I've never read anything that does say much about them. As ever, classical music buffs treat album centered music poorly. Griffiths seems to regard the latter as more or less reactionary (McCartney), which it sometimes is. But sometimes it's really great.

Nice bonuses include Griffiths' prose, the way he's willing to discuss the social implications and motivations to musical change, and his points in the later chapter about how changes in media have aesthetic effects. Soon we'll be able to download individual pieces rather than having to download albums including one piece we want to hear and some guff in which we have no interest. One day.

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## John says

An intelligent overview of recent classical music, but not for the ordinary reader. That is due to the nature of the subject. The works of most of these composers are so complex and technical that Griffiths cannot simplify the works and still explain them. So it's quite worthwhile for someone who has been following 20th century music, especially the works of Ligeti, Cage, Stockhausen, Nono, Berio, etc. In fact, we should be thankful tht Griffiths stays informed about what is happening in that world, because, well, most people could care less, as we see from classical music concert programs.

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## Christopher says

MODERN MUSIC AND AFTER is Paul Griffiths' survey of the art music scene from 1945 to 1995, a time when music had first gone from limitless optimism for "progress" after World War II, to the disappointment of the late 1960s, and finally to the thousand forking paths of the 70s and later. I found the work interesting as a quick read, though certainly not a useful reference work.

The initial hero of Griffiths' work is Pierre Boulez, who in post-war Paris was certain that the twelve-tone method of Schoenberg and (even more so) Webern was the future of music, and by relentlessly publishing and composing Boulez was trying himself to make it turn out that way. After speaking something about the French composer's post-war worldview, the author presents the 1950s development of the Darmstadt school, when Boulez was joined at the forefront by Stockhausen and Nono, with important contributions by Cage and Barraque. At the same time, the "classic modernism" of Babbitt and Carter was flourishing. The 1960s and 1970s is shown as six waves, these being the use of quotation, music theatre, politics, virtuosity and improvisation, computer music, and minimalism. Ligeti, Xenakis, Cardew, Reich, Messiaen get the most attention here. The chapter on the 1980s and 1990s gets the title "Many Rivers" and discusses Schnittke, Rihm, Part, Kurtag, Gubaidulina, Ferneyhough, Feldman, Birtwistle, and Berio among others.

As is probably inevitable in such a work, some important people are left out. Per Norgard, whose infinity series is one of the most innovative concepts of contemporary music, is missing, as is Magnus Lindberg, who established himself as Finland's foremost young composer with "Kraft" in 1986. Lutoslawski is simply inexplicably absent. Sofia Gubaidulina scandalously gets only about a page. However, Griffiths was prescient in including Tan Dun, who was little known then but is increasingly popular now. Another failing of the book is that for reasons of space, most composers only get a few paragraphs, and really, if you already own recordings of a given composer's work, the musicological essays in the CD notes are probably more substantial than anything you'll find here.

MODERN MUSIC AND AFTER is worth flipping through for any fan of contemporary music, but I think that it works better as a historical document than as a useful resource for said fans to learn more about the music they love.

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## Ryan Edwards says

Griffiths seems to be at his strongest when elucidating the technical intricacies and aural pleasures to be found in the works of these great composers, which lands this survey of post-war music somewhere in the "academically pleasurable" category. It would be safe to assume that those looking to pick up a book on Boulez, Stockhausen and co. would be somewhat musically literate, and therefore the assumed knowledge is not too much to ask in this case, though the force of Griffiths' writing is enough to keep any enthusiast of the avant-garde engaged.

More than enough to whet my appetite for new sounds, and illuminate much of the Darmstadt years and intermingling of composers (thanks the more narrative driven first third), though I would love to see some more attention paid to some of the composers mentioned later in the book, who read less like historical figures and instead subjects of brief liner notes for a record. Also, where is Per Nørgård?

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## Chris Gunnell says

This book was okay, I guess. It had some really interesting sections, but the actual NARRATIVE of the book was lacking. Some people (Boulez and Stockhausen in particular) come up a lot and are the "main characters," of the book, but about halfway through, the book sort of collapses into a bunch of secondary composers and the reader (or at least I) didn't really know who I should be remembering for later sections. The book also focused on the more "uptown," composers (serialism, Darmstadt, etc) and only treats "downtown," composers (Reich, Zorn, Glass) in passing, in their relation to the main composers of the book.

tl;dr Read *The Rest is Noise*; if you were interested by the sections on Boulez and Stockhausen, read this book.

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