

# classical music

**I**t's not rock 'n' roll, but you may like it. While many don't give a second thought to classical music, they are missing something great.

Although we may have gleaned a few facts from movies such as *Amadeus* and from sitting through the kids' recitals, many of us believe classical music is difficult to comprehend. There are too many confusing numbers after titles.

But Ted Libbey, the host of NPR's *Performance Today*, is helping us better understand classical music. The second edition of his book, *The NPR Guide to Building a Classical Music Collection*, provides insight into what recordings are best for neophytes and what to listen to as you journey through this rich artistic form.

I know what you're thinking: "It's not my cup of tea," or "I just don't get it." Well, think about listening to classical in a different way. Think of those hard days at work, struggling to get the golf course ready for your members or a tournament. When dusk hits and it's time to go home, what music would you rather relax to — The Beastie Boys or Beethoven?

Classical music can soothe, as well as alternately challenge and inspire. Some recordings contain heartbreak and fear while others capture sheer joy. And best of all, with someone like Mozart, the music can be mischievous, cheeky and downright funny. But more than anything, the music is a welcome respite from our increasingly stressful world.

In the *NPR Guide's* introduction, Mstislav Rostropovich, music director of the National Symphony Orchestra



in Washington D.C., speaks passionately about classical music: "In order to feel its warmth and beauty, you have to shed your emotional insulation, just as if it were a coat, and prepare to listen with your heart."

While I have used Libbey's book to expand my musical horizons, I've also had the pleasure to make the acquaintance of Paul Horsley, program annotator and musicologist for the Philadelphia Orchestra and a contributing classical music writer to *The New York Times*. Horsley has a way of talking about classical music that is encouraging, not snooty. Here are his Top 10 selections for classical music novices:

1. Arvo Pärt: *Fratres* (version by I. Fiammighi) — Proof that the remix was not the invention of New York DJs.
2. Bruckner: *Symphony No. 9* (versions by Haitink, Walter, Wand, Skrowaczewski) — As background music for lovemaking, it rivals Sinatra.
3. Mikolay Górecki: *Symphony No. 3 (Symphony of Sorrowful Songs)* — This symphony is partly a memorial to World War II and the Holocaust.
4. Messiaen: *Quartet for the End of Time* (version by Tashi) — He often stated that the purpose of his art was to express faith. Yet the intense delight it

IT CAN SOOTHE WITH ITS GENTLE STRAINS AFTER A HARD DAY'S WORK. YOU JUST HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO LIKE IT

BY MARK LUCE

contains is both smaller and larger than mere religious experience.

5. Beethoven: *Symphony No. 7* (any version) — At times warmly cheerful, at times gravely serious, it is one of those works in which every detail seems exactly right.
6. Mozart: *The Four Horn Concertos* — Mozart at his coolest.
7. Schubert: *Die schöne Müllerin (The Lovely Milleress)* — It's not for sissies.
8. Bach: *Jauchzet Gott, Cantata No. 51* — There's almost no bad Bach, and this one advanced the idea of "prima donna."
9. Mahler: *Symphony No. 4* — Fifty years ago, no one's Top 10 list would have included a work by Mahler. Now anyone's collection is incomplete without it.
10. Copland: *Fanfare for the Common Man, Appalachian Spring, Rodeo, El Salon Mexico* (several discs contain all four pieces, or at least three) — Copland's music remains some of the most American-sounding of all.

Remember, it doesn't hurt to just listen, feel and relax when it comes to classical music.

---

Mark Luce, a freelance writer based in Lawrence, Kan., can play Chopsticks on the piano.