

DOVER · THRIFT · EDITIONS

MUSIC

A Book of Quotations



EDITED BY

Herb Galewitz

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DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
Mineola, New York

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EDITOR OF THIS VOLUME: HERB GALEWITZ

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Bibliographical Note

Music: A Book of Quotations is a new work, first published by Dover Publications, Inc., in 2001.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Music: a book of quotations / edited by Herb Galewitz.

p. cm.—(Dover thrift editions)

9780486110769

1. Music—Quotations, maxims, etc. I. Galewitz, Herb. II. Series.

PN6084.M8 M86 2001

780—dc21

00-06584

Manufactured in the United States of America

Dover Publications, Inc., 31 East 2nd Street, Mineola, N.Y. 11501

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Music, the greatest good that mortals know, And all of heaven we have below.

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Note

Where words fail, music speaks.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

MUSIC is a language all its own, and its charm lies in what it communicates to different people. The same piece of music can open up a wellspring of various emotions, depending on the musician, the listener, and an almost infinite number of other factors. To some, music is a necessary, vital force, affecting one's current mood and state of mind, while to others, it is merely "background noise."

Music has been universally found to have an astounding, positive impact, whether it be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Plato determined that "music is to the mind as air to the body." Oliver Wendell Holmes testified to music's spiritual benefits, advising, "Take a music bath once or twice a week for a few seasons. You will find it is to the soul what a water bath is to the body." As a remedy for any ailment, music has healing powers as well, considered by John A. Logan as "the medicine of the mind," and "the medicine of the breaking heart" to writer Leigh Hunt. Music also offers up refreshment from life's daily grind; as Berthold Auerbach states, "Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life."

Quotations from musicians, singers, and composers fill out this collection with witty advice and serious contemplations of music as art. The book encompasses a multitude of musical styles and themes, including classical music, jazz, and opera. Here you'll find biting criticisms, loving praise, and humorous comparisons. Nearly everyone has an opinion on the topic of music, and the following is a selection of over 400 quotations, ranging from the most profound discourse to some highly facetious remarks. Music as an art has no equal, and its dynamic power is as timeless as these memorable observations. The quotations are arranged alphabetically by the author's name.

Music, the greatest good that mortals know, And all of heaven we have below.

Nothing is capable of being well set to music that is not nonsense.

Music is the only sensual gratification which mankind may indulge in to excess without injury to their moral and religious feelings.

JOSEPH ADDISON

The music teacher came twice each week to bridge the awful gap between Dorothy and Chopin.

GEORGE ADAMS

When Jack Benny plays the violin, it sounds as if the strings are still back in the cat.

FRED ALLEN

The lady came home from the opera and yet quarreled with her maid.

PETER ALTENBERG

On opera:

Like a husband with a foreign title; expensive to support, hard to understand, and therefore a supreme social challenge.

CLEVELAND AMOROSO

Definition of a true musician: One who, when he hears a lady singing in the bathtub, he puts his ear to the keyhole.

MOREY AMSTERDAM

Where words fail, music speaks.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
And so she makes music wherever she goes.

ANONYMOUS (nursery rhyme)

Jazz is not a craze... its significance is that it is one of the greatest landmarks of modern art.

GEORGE ANTHONY

Music exalts each joy, allays each grief,
Expels diseases, softens every pain,
Subdues the rage of poison, and the plague.

JOHN ARMSTRONG

All music is folk music. I ain't never heard a horse sing a song.

When you got to ask what [jazz] is, you'll never get to know.

Every time I close my eyes blowing my trumpet, I look right into the heart of good old New Orleans.

LOUIS ARMSTRONG

No good opera plot can be sensible, for people do not sing when they are feeling sensible.

W. H. AUDEN

Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.

BERTHOLD AUERBACH

The sole end and aim of all music should be nothing else but God's glory and pleasant recreation.

It's easy to play any musical instrument: all you have to do is touch the right key at the right time, and the instrument will play itself.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Rugged the breast that music cannot tame.

JOHN CODRINGTON BAMPFYLDE

Competitions are for horses, not artists.

BÉLA BARTÓK

I love Wagner; but the music I prefer is that of a cat hung by its tail outside a window, and trying to stick to the panes of glass with its claws.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Is there a heart that music cannot melt?

JAMES BEATTIE

There are two golden rules for an orchestra... start together and finish together. The public doesn't give a damn what goes on in between.

That which penetrates the ear with facility and quits the memory with difficulty.

If an opera cannot be played by an organ-grinder—as Puccini's and Verdi's melodies were played—then that opera is not going to achieve immortality.

I would give the whole of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos for Massenet's Manon and would think I had justly profited by the exchange.

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

Music is the mediator between the spiritual and the sensual life.

Music should strike fire from the heart of man, and bring tears from the eyes of woman.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Popular music is popular because a lot of people like it.

To me "God Bless America" was not just a song but an expression of my feeling toward the country to which I owe what I have and what I am.

On "There's No Business Like Show Business":

I wrote it as a so-called "throwaway" to cover a stage wait. No one visualized what the song would eventually become, especially myself.

There's no such thing as a new melody. Our work is to connect the old phrases, so that they will sound like a new tune.

IRVING BERLIN

Every composer knows the anguish and despair occasioned by forgetting ideas which one has no time to write down.

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Music... can name the unnamable and communicate the unknowable.

I'm not interested in having an orchestra sound like itself. I want it to sound like the composer.

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

THE BIBLE (Old Testament; Job 38:7)

The Fiddle: An instrument to tickle human ears by friction of a horse's tail on the entrails of a cat.

AMBROSE BIERSON

Music wasn't made to make us wise, but better natured.

JOSH BILLINGS

How nice the human voice is when it isn't singing.

The opera always loses money. That's as it should be. Opera has no business making money.

RUDOLPH BINNS

Debussy is like a painter who looks at his canvas to see what more he can take out; Strauss is like a painter who has covered every inch and then takes the paint he has left and throws it at the canvas.

ERNEST BLOCH

On hearing George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess:

Oh well, he did not know how to write an opera. There is no continuity, only a series of numbers.

NADIA BOULANGE

Music is our fourth great material want—first food, then raiment, then shelter, then music.

CHRISTIAN NESTELL BOVE

Chamber music—a conversation between friends.

CATHERINE DRINKER BOWE

When you see a lovely woman for a long time, a woman who is at once gracious and tender and pure, you cannot help being inspired by the spectacle.

Passion is not natural to mankind; it is always an exception, an excrescence.

JOHANNES BRAHM

God is its author, and not man; he laid the keynote of all harmonies... and he made us so that we could hear and understand.

JOHN G. BRAINAR

Music hath charms to soothe the savage beast.

JAMES BRAMSTO

It is cruel... that music should be so beautiful. It has the beauty of loneliness and of pain: of strength and freedom. The beauty of disappointment and never-satisfied love. The cruel beauty of nature, and everlasting beauty of monotony.

The old idea... of a composer suddenly having a terrific idea and sitting up all night to write it is nonsense. Nighttime is for sleeping.

BENJAMIN BRITTE

For there is music wherever there is harmony, order, or proportion.

Sure there is music even in the beauty, and the silent note which Cupid strikes, far sweeter than the sound of an instrument.

For even that vulgar and tavern music, which makes one man merry, another mad; strikes in me a deep fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of the first Composer; there is something in it of divinity more than the ear discovers.

SIR THOMAS BROWN

Who hears music feels his solitude peopled at once.

ROBERT BROWNING

Life can't be all bad when for ten dollars you can buy all the Beethoven sonatas and listen to them for ten years.

The Beatles are not merely awful.... They are so unbelievably horrible, so appallingly unmusical, so dogmatically insensitive to the magic of the art, that they qualify as crowned heads of antimusic.

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

Music, once admitted to the soul, becomes a sort of spirit, and never dies.

EDWARD GEORGE BULWER-LYTTON

The best music should be played as the best men and women should be dressed—neither so well nor so ill as to attract attention to itself.

To know whether you are enjoying a piece of music or not you must see whether you find yourself looking at the advertisements of Pear's Soap at the end of the libretto.

SAMUEL BUTLER

A thousand hearts beat happily; and when
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,
Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again,
And all went merry as a marriage bell
But hush! hark! a deep sound strikes like a rising knell.

There's music in the sighing of a reed;
There's music in the gushing of a rill;
There's music in all things, if men had ears:

Their earth is but an echo of the spheres.

LORD BYRON (GEORGE GORDON)

Nobody dreams of music in hell, and nobody conceives of heaven without it.

S. PARKES CADMAN

When we separate music from life we get art.

New music: new listening. Not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for, if something were being said, the sounds would be given the shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of sounds.

JOHN CAGE

If you can sell green toothpaste in this country, you can sell opera.

SARAH CALDWELL

The blues were the gateway to freedom for all American Negroes.

E. SIMMS CAMPBELL

A lot of people are singing about how screwed up the world is, and I don't think that everybody wants to hear about that all the time.

MARIAH CAREY

Music is a kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the infinite, and impels us for a moment to gaze into that.

See deep enough and you see musically.

All deep things are song. It seems somehow the very central essence of us, song; as if all the rest were but wrappers and hulls.

Music is well said to be the speech of angels; in fact, nothing among the utterances allowed to man is felt to be so divine. It brings us near to the infinite.

THOMAS CARLYLE

My idea of Heaven is to be able to sit and listen to all the music by Victor Herbert that I want to.

ANDREW CARNEGIE

I invariably play some Bach to start the day. But on the piano, not the cello, and usually preludes and fugues. It is like a benediction on the house.

The cello is like a beautiful woman who has not grown older, but younger with time, more slender, more supple, more graceful.

For me, Bach is like Shakespeare. He has known all and felt all. He is everything.

PABLO CASALS

There can be no mischief sure when there is music.

MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

On opera:

A magic scene contrived to please the eyes and ears at the expense of understanding.

In a garden where there are no birds, a croaking toad is a nightingale.

FYODOR CHALIAPIN, *singer*

If you love music, hear it; go to operas, concerts, and pay fiddlers to play to you; but I insist upon your neither piping nor fiddling yourself. It puts a gentleman in a very frivolous contemptible light.

LORD CHESTERFIELD

Music is a prophecy of what life is to be, the rainbow of promise translated out of seeing into hearing.

MRS. CHILDE

Military justice is to justice as military music is to music.

GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

Music indeed! Give me a mother singing to her clean and fat and rosy baby.

WILLIAM COBBETT

Dialogue is just lyrics that don't rhyme.

NAT "KING" COLE

The best sort of music is what it should be—sacred; the next best, the military, has fallen to the lot of the devil.

Swans sing before they die—'twere no bad thing
Should certain persons die before they sing.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Indeed Musick, when rightly ordered, cannot be prefer'd too much. It composes the Passions, affords a strong Pleasure, and excites a Nobleness of Thought.

JEREMY COLLIER

O Music! sphere-descended maid.
Friend of Pleasure, Wisdom's aid!

WILLIAM COLLINS

Someday we may have as many followers as the harpsichord.

EDDIE CONDON, *jazz musician*

Music alone with sudden charms can bind
The wand'ring sense, and calm the troubled mind.

Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast,
To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.

WILLIAM CONGREVE

Without music, life is a journey through a desert.

PAT CONROY

Cocktail music is accepted as audible wallpaper.

ALISTAIR COOK

Is there an American way of performing Schubert as distinguished from an Austrian way? It seems to me that there most definitely is.

So long as the human spirit thrives on this planet, music in some living form will accompany and sustain it and give it expressive meaning.

Composers tend to assume that everyone loves music. Surprisingly enough, everyone doesn't.

AARON COPLAND

To sing man's melody is only a vain show of art. God cannot take delight in praises where the man of sin has a hand in making the melody.

REV. JOHN COTTON

Extraordinary how potent cheap music is.

NOEL COWARD

How soft the music of those village bells
Falling at intervals upon the ear
In cadence sweet!

WILLIAM COWPER

I think popular music in this country is one of the few things in the 20th century that have made great strides in reverse.

BING CROSBY

If there were a conservatory in Hell, if one of its talented students were instructed to write a program symphony on "The Seven Plagues of Egypt," and if he were to compose a symphony like M. Rachmaninoff's, then he would have fulfilled his task brilliantly and would bring delight to the inhabitants of Hell.

CESAR CUI, *review*

It is far better to be the first musician in Elmira than one of 10,000 in New York.

WALTER DAMROSC

Music was known and understood before words were spoken.

CHARLES DARWIN

Adding once more the music of the tongue
To the sweet speech of her alluring eyes.

SIR JOHN DAVIES

I think that one of the greatest dangers that faces people in this country is the tyrants who would come in and solve your crimes by putting a rock festival in every park.

EDWARD MICHAEL DAVENPORT

Had Wagner been a little more human, he would have been truly divine.

The idea of marketing a musical composition like a tub of lard or a barrel of beer is to me as sad as it is ridiculous.

On opera:

A form of entertainment where there is always too much singing.

CLAUDE-ACHILLE DEBUSSY

Sweet popular music is claptrap in the main, and the main is where it belongs.

The tuba is certainly the most intestinal of instruments, the very lower bowel of music.

PETER DE VRIESE

[Igor Stravinsky] is constantly on the move, seeking out at every step how to deny the very thing that he has been in his previous works.

SERGEI DIAGHILEV

Composers shouldn't think too much—it interferes with their plagiarism.

HOWARD DIETZ

It is safe to say that no man ever went wrong, morally or mentally, while listening to a symphony.

JUDGE JOHN J. DILLO

O Music! Miraculous art! A blast of thy trumpet and millions rush forward to die; a peal of thy organ and uncounted nations sink down to pray.

BENJAMIN DISRAELI

There is a spirituality about the face, however... which the typewriter does not generate. The lady is a musician.

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Crave the tuneful nightingale to help with her lay,
The ousel and the throstlecock, chief music of our May.

MICHAEL DRAYTON

The trumpets loud clangour
Excites us to arms.

What passion cannot music raise and quell?

So when the last and dreadful hour
This crumbling pageant shall devour,
The trumpet shall be heard on high,
The dead shall live, the living die,
And Music shall untune the sky!

JOHN DRYDEN

Music was invented to confirm human loneliness.

LAWRENCE DURRELL

It's not me. It's the songs. I'm just the postman. I deliver the songs.

He's singing all his own songs. That ain't no folk singer. Folk singers sing those old folk songs,

ballads.

BOB DYLAN

This world may consist of musical notes as well as of mathematical rules.

Never did Mozart write for eternity, and it is for precisely that reason that much of what he wrote is for eternity.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

'Tis God gives skill,
But not without men's hands: He could not make
Antonio Stradivari's violins
Without Antonio.

GEORGE ELIOT

You are the music while the music lasts.

T. S. ELIOT

I don't like to look back because it destroys my perspective of writing music.

Playing "bop" is like playing Scrabble with all the vowels missing.

It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.

DUKE ELLINGTON

And music pours on mortals
Her magnificent disdain.

Music is the poor man's Parnassus.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Jazz is the expression of protest against law and order, the bolshevik of license striving for expression in music.

ANNE SHAW FAULKNER

Jazz without the beat, most musicians know, is a telephone yanked from the wall; it just can't communicate.

LEONARD FEATHER

Oh, the brave music of a distant drum.

EDWARD FITZGERALD

The word jazz in its progress toward respectability has meant first sex, then dancing, then music.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Music comes first from my heart, and then goes upstairs to my head where I check it out.

ROBERTA FLACK

Composing is like making love to the future.

LUKAS FOSTER

I'd hate this to get out, but I really like opera.

FORD FRICK, *baseball commissioner*

Bach almost persuades me to be a Christian.

ROGER FRISVOLD

Give the piper a penny to play and two pence to leave off.

Music is nothing else but wild sounds civilized into time and tune.

THOMAS FULLER

Nobody really sings in an opera—they just make loud noises.

I make my reputation while the curtain is up, not while it is down.

Opera is when a guy gets stabbed in the back and instead of bleeding, he sings.

ED GARDNER

Jazz I regard as an American folk music; not the only one, but a very powerful one which is probably in the blood and feeling of the American people more than any other style of folk music.

Making music is actually little else than a matter of invention aided and abetted by emotion.

True music must repeat the thought and inspirations of the people and the time. My people are Americans and my time is today.

It sounds simple, of course, but personally I can think of no more mentally arduous task than making music.

GEORGE GERSHWIN

Music, in the works of its greatest masters, is more marvellous, more mysterious, than poetry.

H. GILBERT

Mozart is the human incarnation of the divine force of creation.

Music fills up the present moment more decisively than anything else, whether it awakens thought or summons to action.

Music in the best sense has little need of novelty; on the contrary, the older it is, the more one is accustomed to it, the greater is the effect it produces.

JOHANN VON GOETHE

Popular music... is a frankly commercial pursuit. It thus tends to establish formulas, to turn out a product of robots, by robots and for robots.

A history of song, especially popular song, may contain, deeply imbedded, the history of a people.

America has more than one music, and that the authenticity of its various musics lies beneath geographical divisions and racial quotas.

ISAAC GOLDBERG

Women and music should never be dated.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

BENNY GOODMAN: I'm extremely sorry, Mr. Bartók, but it would be impossible to play what you have written for the clarinet unless I can acquire a third hand.

BÉLA BARTÓK: Very well, then—approximate!

On integrating Negroes into his band:

If a guy's got it, let him give it. I'm selling music, not prejudice.

BENNY GOODMAN

Mr. Presley has no discernable singing ability. His specialty is rhythm songs which he renders in an undistinguished whine; his phrasing, if it can be called that, consists of the stereotyped variations that go with a beginner's aria in a bathtub.

JACK GOULD, *music critic*

I know only two tunes. One of them is "Yankee Doodle"—and the other isn't.

ULYSSES S. GRANT

A jazz musician is a juggler who uses harmonies instead of oranges.

BENNY GREEN

The best way to get to knowing any bunch of people is to go and listen to their music.

WOODY GUTHRIE

On composer Richard Rodgers:

I hand him a lyric and get out of his way.

OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN

To my way of thinking, Bessie Smith was the greatest artist American jazz ever produced; in fact, I am not sure that her art did not reach far beyond the limits of the term "jazz."

The hysterical roars of the crowd which once had been sweet music to Benny Goodman's ears, first perplexed, then irked him. He wanted his music to be appreciated for its essential worth and not because of its fortissimo volume and crazy antics.

JOHN HAMMON

Wagner's star will continue to shine in the German operatic firmament—as long as all around is darkness.

Wagner's operatic style recognizes only superlatives, and a superlative has no future. It is the end, not the beginning.

EDUARD HANSLIC

Emotion, not thought, is the sphere of music.

REV. HUGH REGINALD HAWES

I occasionally play works by contemporary composers and for two reasons. First to discourage the composer from writing any more and secondly to remind myself how much I appreciate Beethoven.

If I don't practice one day, I know it: two days, the critics know it: three days, the public knows it.

The new technique of recording makes it possible to get all sorts of new sounds. But some of them were not meant for human ears. They were meant for hounds. . . I am old fashioned enough to believe that the musical side of the performance is what counts.

When people come to play music as they do to play bridge, civilization will have taken the longest stride forward since the beginning of time.

JASCHA HEIFETZ

Out of my own great woe,
I make my little songs.

When words leave off, music begins.

HEINRICH HEINE

Music helps not the toothache.

GEORGE HERBERT

Song—The licensed medium for bawling in public things too silly or sacred to be uttered in ordinary speech.

Perhaps it was because Nero played the fiddle, they burned Rome.

OLIVER HERFORD

Why should the devil have all the good tunes?

ROWLAND HILL

There's only one woman I know of who could never be a symphony conductor, and that's the Venus de Milo.

MARGARET HILLIS, *director of the Chicago Symphony*

Music is a strange bird singing the songs of another shore.

J. G. HOLLAND

Without Elvis, none of us could have made it.

BUDDY HOLLY

Alas for those that never sing,
But die with all their music in them!

Take a music bath once or twice a week for a few seasons. You will find it is to the soul what a water bath is to the body.

Those who have no ear for music must be very careful how they speak about that mysterious world of thrilling vibrations which are idle noises to them.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

For bells are Music's laughter.

THOMAS HOOD

Elected Silence, sing to me
And beat upon my whorled ear,
Pipe me to pastures still and be

The music that I care to hear.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

Her singing was mutiny on the high C's.

HEDDA HOPPE

Music is an incitement to love.

There is a fault common to all singers. When they're among friends and are asked to sing they don't want to, and when they're not asked to sing they never stop.

HORACE

False notes (at a piano concert) are human. Why does everything have to be perfect? You know, perfection itself is imperfection.

I am a general. My soldiers are the keys, and I have to command them.

VLADIMIR HOROWITZ

As we grow older we find our admiration increasing for the girl who can't play without the music she has left at home.

ED HOWARD

Music is making manifest to our dull ears the divine harmony of the universe, and through music, we read the universal.

The only one of the arts that can be prostituted to a base use.

An attempt to describe emotions that are beyond speech.

ELBERT HUBBARD

Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.

VICTOR HUGO

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