

From Psalm to Symphony: A History of Music in New England

By Nicholas E. Tawa

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Beginning with the Pilgrim and Puritan settlers on the rockbound wilderness of Massachusetts Bay, New Englanders have left an enduring imprint on America's musical landscape. Now musicologist Nicholas E. Tawa examines for the first time New England's rich heritage of music making over a span of 350 years.

In this sweeping chronological account, Tawa traces the region's fascinating history of art music from the psalm and hymn singing of the early colonists, to the works of native composers, to the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He chronicles artistic developments within the context of the geographical, economic, cultural, and political currents that influenced and defined the area's musical experiences, and he describes how ongoing societal transformations and evolving forms of music have both enriched and reinvented a New England identity.

Focusing on the people who wanted, produced, and listened to music, Tawa's eloquent narrative underscores how musical life in New England has played a significant role in shaping the nation's music. He highlights the region's preeminence in music publishing, its outstanding contributions to the improvement and manufacture of instruments, its commitment to music education, and its leadership in establishing first-rate musical institutions. Also featured are New England's many gifted and skilled composers, including William Billings, John Knowles Paine, Arthur Foote, Amy Beach, Charles Ives, Frederick Shepherd Converse, Randall Thompson, Walter Piston, Gunther Schuller, and John Harbison.

This highly readable and informative volume will appeal to music aficionados, historians, and general readers alike.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

In this aptly titled book, Tawa (music, emeritus, Univ. of Massachusetts), a prolific author on American music, narrows his focus to art music in the New England (primarily Boston) area. Against a backdrop of societal forces and philosophical ideals many of which have been prevalent since Colonial times he deftly chronicles the interactions of composers, musical organizations, and patrons. Complementing this overall organization are chapters devoted to individual composers, whose lives and works are discussed in a refreshing light. The author elucidates a transcendental or spiritual thread common to New England composers and their audiences. That this basic philosophical outlook is constant and yet subject to personal interpretation is demonstrated remarkably well in this staunch defense of art music. One finds a bold honesty and ring of truth in Tawa's final chapter, an uncompromising critique of the current state of art music in New England. Of value to musicians but accessible to nonmusicians, this work is essential for all American music collections and every library in New England. Teresa M. Neff, Massachusetts Inst. of Technology, Cambridge

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Review

“This monograph is a valuable addition to the growing library of works on American music history. It will be particularly useful as a source for musicians interested in locating and championing excellent, infrequently heard American works for concert programming, from piano solos and art songs to symphonies, tone poems, oratorios, and operas.”—*Notes: Journal of the Music Library Association*

“Against a backdrop of societal forces and philosophical ideals, many of which have been prevalent since Colonial times, [Tawa] deftly chronicles the interactions of composers, musical organizations, and patrons. . . . Of value to musicians but accessible to nonmusicians, this work is essential for all American music collections and every library in New England.”—*Library Journal*

About the Author

Nicholas E. Tawa is Professor of Music, Emeritus, at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. He is the author of numerous articles and books on American music history, including *Arthur Foote: A Musician in the Frame of Time and Place*, *American Composers and Their Public: A Critical Look*, and *High-Minded and Low-Down: Music in the Lives of Americans, 1800-1861*.

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