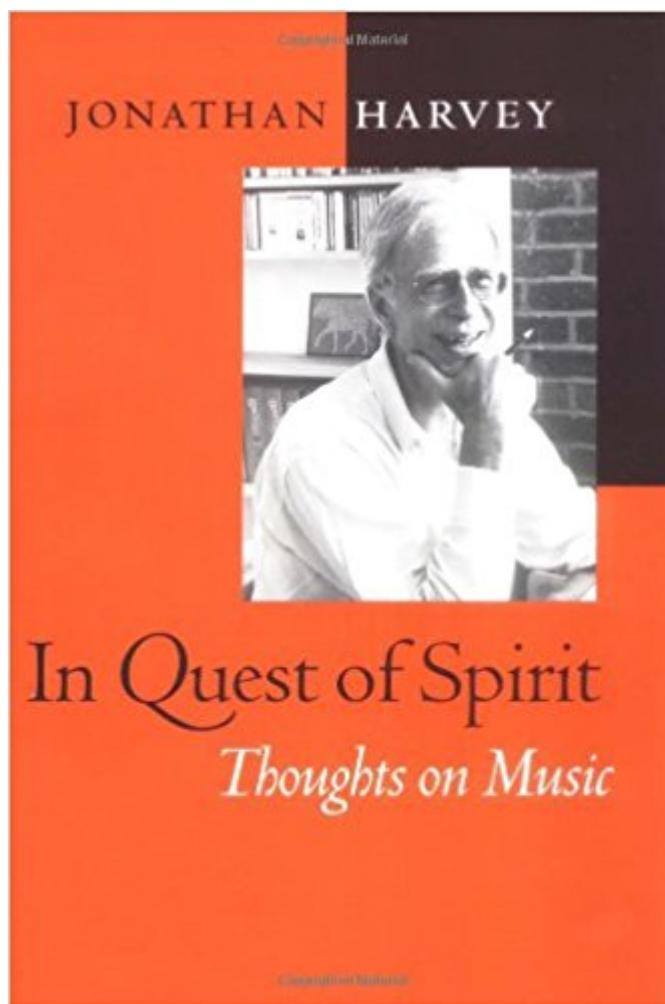


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In Quest Of Spirit: Thoughts On Music (Ernest Bloch Lectures)



Synopsis

The interests of the British composer Jonathan Harvey are wide and varied, embracing Christianity, Buddhism, eastern and western philosophy, aesthetics, science, and mysticism. All affect his musical thinking and are a part of this unusual and personal book, which is accompanied by a compact disc featuring works discussed by the author. Harvey explores aspects of music that he connects with spirituality: self-identity, ambiguity, unity, stasis, and silence. In the course of his explorations he offers corroborating statements about music and spirituality from sources ranging from Nietzsche to Oliver Sacks. The book and CD include samples of his own music as well as compositions by Mozart, Scriabin, Stockhausen, and others that help to illustrate the profoundness of what Harvey deems "the good listening experience." For Harvey, composing is his way of trying to live a life "skillfully" in the Buddhist sense. *In Quest of Spirit* is a window into his creative world and provides a sense of what music can mean at the moment of its inception.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An important contribution to a deeper understanding of the music of Jonathan Harvey, recognized as one of the leading composers active today. *In Quest of Spirit* offers important analytical guidance and intriguing interpretive insight into Harvey's compositions." Kent Nagano, Music Director and Conductor, Halle Orchestra, Opera de Lyon, and Berkeley Symphony

"An important contribution to a deeper understanding of the music of Jonathan Harvey, recognized as one of the leading composers active today. In Quest of Spirit offers important analytical guidance and intriguing interpretive insight into Harvey's compositions." (Kent Nagano, Music Director and Conductor, Halle Orchestra, Opera de Lyon, and Berkeley Symphony)

If you already know and appreciate Jonathan Harvey's music, you will almost certainly get a great deal out of this book. He gives very specific and revealing explanations of how some of his works came to be and what he has tried to achieve. If you don't know his music, but are drawn here by the general topic of music and spirituality, you need to know what sort of book this is, and what sort of music is on the CD. The book is more of a sketch than a thoroughly worked out study of this topic. Excluding the musical examples and footnotes, it is only about 88 pages long, and it covers a great many topics, so it can hardly be expected to do more than briefly scratch the surface of each of these topics. But in briefly scratching the surface, he does offer provocative hints at ideas that the reader can then research or think through in greater detail. These little hints at ideas are often very good--he has interesting insights into Wagner and Mahler, for example, and other 'traditional' composers...it's not all Stockhausen and IRCAM. But they are never more than just hints at ideas, except when he is talking about his own music, when he does get into more detail. This reads something like a journal of an artist...today I jot down this thought, tomorrow a different thought. The music on the CD is Harvey and other examples of what some have called, accurately I think, 'difficult listening.' This is avant-garde stuff, and make no mistake. I'm afraid that I am something of a philistine in this area, and sometimes I like the descriptions of the music more than the music itself. But that might change if I heard the pieces in their full development rather than these excerpts. At any rate, including a CD with the book was a wonderful thing to do. Since the CD consists of brief musical excerpts, it resembles the book in 'hinting at' musical ideas, and that's what it's intended to do. Having expressed my reservations, let me just add that Harvey comes across in this book as an astute listener and thinker, and he doesn't hide behind jargon or ambiguous language. There is a lot of candor in his discussion of his own work, and considerable insight in the nuggets of ideas that are sprinkled on every page. It's just that it's up to the reader to take these nuggets and develop them on your own.

Sometimes we need reminding that the nature of music has deep roots in a spirituality, even if for now that is an undefined one. Think of any composers and you will find some inner being at work, some compelling spectre, an illdefined, undefined entity which demands the pen to continue making

music, commanding it. Harvey here is a seminal figure which unites both these worlds, and has a grasp of the realms which interbreed, the spirit the abstract with the tangible, music, sounds and silences. This work is also pedagogical, like a lecture, Harvey brings us by steps through his work, and others, Stockhausen makes an entrance. Slowly then we begin to understand his own music, as well as those undefined particles on experiencing music, yet feel something has escaped us. Harvey defines many functional areas, sadly to say know very little, like spectralism. A means of defining the inner presence of harmonies, the particles which constitute a sound. This thinking emanates from IRCAM, the multi-million dollar institute in Paris, where Harvey has worked since the early Eighties. Spectralism has indeed become a fashionable movement in the cloistered parts of the new music scene in Europe. But for us it is indeed wonderful when a creator is able to reflect on their work, and with an affinity of articulation for it. Here Harvey runs through the concepts which animates his work and fosters this unity with the spirit. The concept of stasis seems to be an ubiquitous one from the bleak world of repetitive minimalism, now dead, to the music Harvey engages. Might I add World Music seems a frequent and powerful player here with Western composers, the use of alternate tuning, Asian instruments, and newly made ones as well have engaged a great dialogue between East and West. Stasis is simply like a drone in a simplified form, but there are other more sophisticated ways of maintaining a non-movement. I believe this non-movement is what engages the mind to reflection, quiets it in some circles. There is also a Compact Disc which accompanies the lecture, with musical excerpts.

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