

Composer's Book List

This is a version of the booklist I give to my students at Stevenson College. All opinions expressed are my own, and facts have not been checked!

Many of these are personal choices based on a tour of my own bookshelves; each category is roughly in order of usefulness, as I see it. No book can really tell you how to find your own music; everyone is different. You must make up your own mind which books are worth buying for you.

Not the set books

Binns, Christopher **Composing, a Student's Guide** Nelson 1996 £8.00

This is one of only *two* practical, up-to-date guides to elementary composition published, as far as I can tell. If there were to be a set book to go with the composition course, this would be it; there is a lot of very good material here. I strongly recommend that you have a look at it, and buy it if you think it will be useful to you.

Cole, Bruce **The Composer's Handbook** Schott 1996 £30.00

The other possibility; much more expensive! I don't really like the approach taken; I find it too conservative and conventional. Some very good material, though.

Composing & Arranging

Garcia, Russel **The Professional Arranger Composer, Book 1 & Book 2 (2 vols)** California ?date

Very good book, rather spacey & Californian in places. Mainly focused on writing & arranging for jazz ensembles, but much of the material is more widely applicable. Book 1 is the most useful, but Book 2 has one of the most straightforward & useful treatments of serialism I have seen. Unfortunately probably not in many libraries, and probably hard to get (and pricey, I think).

Stewart, Dave **Inside the Music** Miller Freeman 1999 £8.99

This book has come out last year; I found a copy in McCormacks in Glasgow & just had to buy it. Basically full of lots of really good ideas to use in writing music, without any hangups about history, or what is 'right' or 'wrong'. Lots of great-sounding chords to try out, rhythm ideas, a bit about computers... a really great little book. Recommended.

Cope, David **New Music Composition** Schirmer, New York 1977

Distinctly outdated, but lots of good, way-out ideas. Probably out of print, but in a few libraries. Cope has also written another composition book recently **Techniques of the Contemporary Composer**; I haven't seen it, but have heard good things about it.

Smith Brindle, Reginald **Musical Composition** OUP 1986 £8.95

OK; too much serialism for me. See also **The New Music (2nd edition)** by the same author (below)

Schoenberg, Arnold **Fundamentals of Musical Composition** Faber 1967 £12.99

I don't like this book; I find it dense and off-putting, especially as it is concerned exclusively with the Classical style. Other people find it useful & recommend it. Make up your own mind.

Orchestration

Adler, Samuel **The Study of Orchestration** Norton, NY 1982 £23.00

Used by many universities. Comprehensive, accurate, reliable, up-to-date. Currently *the* standard work on orchestration.

Piston, Walter **Orchestration** Victor Gollancz, London 1988 £9.95 (£21.50 hardback?)

Excellent reference book. If you can find the paperback version, then much cheaper than Adler. Covers the same ground in adequate depth.

Blatter, Alfred **Instrumentation / Orchestration** Wadsworth 1997 £30 ish

Very like the Adler, in many ways. Well worth consulting.

Stiller, Andrew **Handbook of Instrumentation** <http://www.npcimaging.com> \$49.95 (CD-ROM version)

For the hardcore composer, a uniquely thorough look at the possibilities of every imaginable instrument, including some obscure possibilities.

Jacob, Gordon **Orchestral Technique** OUP 1982 £15.99

Extremely useful arranging book; accurate & reliable. Used to be cheap, but now at a silly price for such a small book. Look out for it second-hand.

Forsythe, Cecil **Orchestration** Dover, New York 1982 £14.95

Reprint of 1935 edition. A classic work; fascinating background reading. Needs to be treated with caution, given developments since 1935.

General, 20th Century

Persichetti, V. **Twentieth Century Harmony** Norton, New York 1961

I find this book indispensable. The first sentence of chapter one is required reading for any composer working in the twentieth century.

Kennedy, Michael **Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music** Oxford 1996 £8.99

A good dictionary of music is a really worthwhile investment, and this is a *great* dictionary of music. Don't even look at anything else.

Karolyi, Otto **Introducing Music** Penguin 1965 £ 9.99

I learnt most of my grade seven theory from this little book; very good!

Taylor, Eric **The AB Guide to Music Theory, Parts 1 and 2** ABRSM 1989

You need to know this stuff; you really do! These books are well written, accurate, and, particularly the second volume, contain some ideas which might be of practical use in composition, as well as just the boring theory stuff.

The Essential Music Reference Library *Alfred* £19.95

This is a collection of four (or maybe five, or maybe three) books from the publisher Alfred, who seem to be quite confused about what titles are actually in the set! Anyway, all of the individual books are excellent in different ways, and worth looking out for. Here are the titles in the series, as far as I can make out, at about £5.50 each;

Tom Gerou, Linda Lusk **Essential Dictionary of Music Notation**

?Author **Essential Dictionary of Instrumentation**

Lindsey C. Harnsberger **Essential Dictionary of Music**

Dave Black, Tom Gerou **Essential Dictionary of Orchestration**

L. C. Harnsberger **Essential Dictionary of Music Definitions** (maybe out of print?)

Kevin M. Mitchell **Essential Songwriters Rhyming Dictionary**

Levine, Mark **The Jazz Theory Book** *Advance* £35

Jazz theory is now extensive, well-worked out, standardised, and highly relevant to all forms of contemporary composition, both popular and serious. A serious alternative to the classical approach, for creative people who like to be different.

Lawn & Helmer **Jazz Theory & Practice** *Alfred* £29.95

Similar to the Mark Levine book above, but seems to be hard to get.

Schwartz & Godfrey **Music Since 1945** *Schirmer* 1993 £ 29.99

Best of several similar, recently-published texts; maybe now back in print again.

Pratt, George **The Dynamics of Harmony** *OUP* 1984 £14.99

I've included this book on this list as, in my view, it is by far the best treatment of conventional harmony available, much better than books like those by Warburton and Lovelock. Whether it is of any use in composing *contemporary* music is another question!

Toch, E **The Shaping Forces in Music** £8.95

Classic text, often cited by American writers. Worth looking at least once in your life.

Morgan, Robert P. ed. **Anthology of Twentieth-Century Music** *Norton NY* 1991 £23.50

Excellent of extracts from C20th scores, with analyses. Expensive, but worth looking out for in libraries.

Smith Brindle, Reginald **The New Music (2nd edition)** *Oxford* 1987

I'm reading this at the moment and finding it quite good. Subtitled 'The Avant-Garde since 1945', that's mainly what it is; a survey of trends & ideas in contemporary music since the war.

Interesting and opinionated, with a good selection of musical quotations.

Nyman, M **Experimental Music** *Cambridge* £12.95 (*Reprint of Macmillan 1974*)

Historical survey. Interesting; just been republished, so that the spectacled hero of commercial minimalism can make even more money.

Music preparation & notation

Stone, Kurt **Music Notation in the Twentieth Century** *Norton, New York 1980*
Very good indeed, highly recommended, and now back in print. If you're serious about composition you will want to buy this book! Available from <http://www.npcimaging.com>

Miscellaneous

Mathieu, W.A. **The Musical Life** *Shambala Boston 1994 £9.99*

You probably won't find this beautiful, deep book in any music library; look out for it in alternative bookshops. Highly recommended. Also **The Listening Book** by the same author.

Cowell, Henry. **New Musical Resources** *1930; Cambridge 1996 £11.95*

Essential reading for dedicated contemporary composers. Groundbreaking ideas which influenced many composers in the second half of the century.

Jairazbhoy, N.A. **The Rags of North Indian Music** *Popular Prakashan Bombay 1995 (also previously published by Lok Virsa, Islamabad ?date, and Faber & Faber 1971)*

Excellent book for anyone interested in scales & modes; get it quickly while it's back in print again! ISBN 81-7154-395-2

Huber & Runstein **Modern Recording Techniques** *Focal Press 1997 £ 23.00*

Standard work in the field of sound recording. American slant, measurements in Imperial; ugh!

Johnson, Tom **The Voice of New Music** <http://www.tom.johnson.org/>

Now a free download in .pdf format, this is a fascinating collection of music reviews from New York's Village Voice magazine, between 1972 and 1982. It's written by Tom Johnson, who is a very interesting composer in his own right. A really 'happening' scene; I wish I'd been there!

JSVDW 10/9/02

<http://www.jsimonvanderwalt.com>