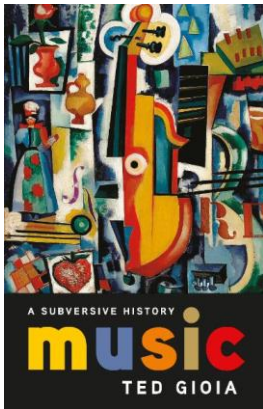




## We Read – A Subversive History of Music

by [Ted Gioia](#), 2019, Basic Books, 462 pages



“A sweeping and enthralling account of music as an agency of human change.” Booklist (starred review and selected as one of the 10 best art books of 2019).

From the book - “In the heart of the atom we find vibrations of extraordinary speed – up to one hundred trillion times per second – creating a tone some twenty octaves above the range of our hearing.”

Even if you think you have had enough of music history or just don't prefer to give it much thought, [A Subversive History of Music](#) may still be for you. I highly recommend it for your 2022 reading list. It is the kind of book you can keep on your “reading table” and pick-up now and then. Ted Gioia is also the author of the well-known [History of Jazz](#), the third edition, released in 2021.

“Above all, I hope to show how music can topple established hierarchies and rules, subverting tired old conventions and asserting bold new ones.” Ted Gioia

Stating the obvious from the title itself, this book provides an alternative and intriguing view of music history, one with particularly rich perspective on the impact of music on social change. The overall premise of the author is that – “music history is too ‘cleansed’ when the real history of music is not respectable. Far from it. Neither is it boring.” He readily attests that traditional music history is often boring.

“Put another way, music is not just a soundtrack in the background of life, but has repeatedly entered the foreground, even altering social and cultural currents that would seem resistant to something as elusive and intangible as a song. It almost seems like magic, and maybe it is.” Ted Gioia

Fear not, while the book length of 462 pages or the span and depth of the work or the heavy-weight intellectual that Ted Gioia is, may make you feel like taking on the book would be daunting, the content is in fact very accessible, with the writing style nuanced but not tedious. For me, the read is slow but sure, energizing, curiosity peaking, and ah-hah inducing.

As Gioia suggests, and I agree, you can read the book chapter to chapter or pick a chapter of interest and start there. However, there is a cumulative, weaving effect that one might lose touch of if skipping around. The chapters are all a reasonable length, with rich, tightly presented content. There is no endless intellectual waxing and waning, just well researched and presented content. There are fascinating “little” cliff hangers with each chapter. For example, chapter four ends with – “Tracing this thread back to its origin brings us to the very first composer in the history of music – or at least the first whose name has survived. And what a fascinating composer she is, although she appears in few music history books, and has virtually no name recognition even among music scholars.” Following this, the title of chapter five is “Bulls and Sex Toys.” Take heart, the epilogue is titled – “This Is Not a Manifesto.” 😊

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