



WE READ: A Column Dedicated to Enriching the Lives of Flutists Through the Review of Literature with a Musical Focus

by BJ Nicoletti



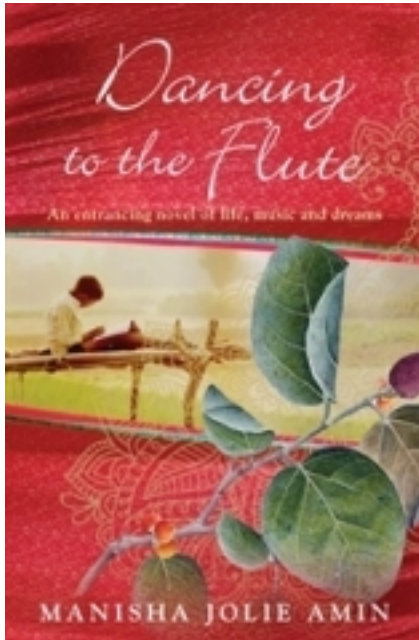
This newsletter's non-fiction selection is **Year of Wonder: Classical Music to Enjoy Day by Day, 2018**, by Clemency Burton-Hill. The book is a collection of one-page, rich, accessible, and warmly colorful insights on a classical composition and composer. Written for anyone with any level of experience who enjoys listening to or playing classical music. It delivers an inspiring

introduction to less familiar pieces and composers as well as the more familiar favorites.

Drawing from the last several centuries, the content gives a sense of music history along with a step into that time and place. The form, tone, and color of the book can have the effect on the reader of helping us feel the turn of the seasons. This book makes an enduring contribution to the personal library of any classical music aficionado, one that can be, as a good friend and enjoyed for years to come. The iTunes and Spotify music subscription services have well curated playlists for each month of the **Year of Wonder** features.

On day three of 2019, I met Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), a nun from the medieval era who was a composer, artist, poet, botanist, scientist, philosopher, healer, and early leader of women. From this introduction came a self-directed, personally inspiring journey through her music and life story. Who will you meet?

In the next GPFS Newsletter, watch for two new book reviews, a fiction and non-fiction selection: [Illuminations: A Novel of Hildegard von Bingen](#) by Mary Sharratt; and, [Debussy, A Painter in Sound](#) by Stephen Walsh.



The fiction selection for this newsletter is [Dancing to the Flute](#) by **Manisha Jolie Amin, 2012, 305 pages**. This book carries the reader to India through the story of a young street urchin, Kalu, who initially plays a rolled-up leaf as a flute. His love of and talent for playing lead to challenging and maturing life circumstances that took him on a journey from the street to a very different life and personal identity. This is a coming of age story through the learning of the flute. We “listen to” Kalu grow from an early love of music to a more mature player of Indian music. Along this journey, his friendships, caregivers, and mentors illuminate his path through their own life stories. Early in the story, he acquires a humble tin flute which he uses to play and play until one quiet day, hiding in a small cave underneath a tree, he is magically gifted a rosewood flute seemingly by a cobra enchanted with his playing.

By the end of the book, the brave and beautiful little flutist we first meet on the streets of India has played Eastern music in the world’s great Western cities. Yet he finds himself on the streets of these great cities choosing to play his music to those unknowing strangers who most need the curative effect of his music.

An interesting aspect of the form of the book parallels the form of the “raag,” a melodic framework for improvisation in Indian classical music: **Aalaap** (slow and meditative, no rhythm, an introduction to various notes); **Antara** (rhythm and melody arrive, melody is primary focus, other musicians may join in, tempo gradually increases); the **Bol Bandh** (rhythm is primary focus, melodies are “broken up and regrouped”); and, **the ending** (approach can vary by school and musician). Kalu’s flute teacher, Guruji describes the ending as “...the release of breath that the audience makes as the last note dies away.” It is in the spirit of the “raag” that this reader most took away from the novel a much deeper appreciation for Indian classical music both in how it is very different from most aspects of Western classical music, what we can feel and take from it, and its meditative and restorative powers. The book also brings the reader to the heart of India – sights, smells, sound, culture. I longed for a happy outcome for this little flutist. As we can in our own life and musical journey, I cherished and embraced all his relationships along the way. I encourage you to “go to India” and meet Kalu and Guruji.