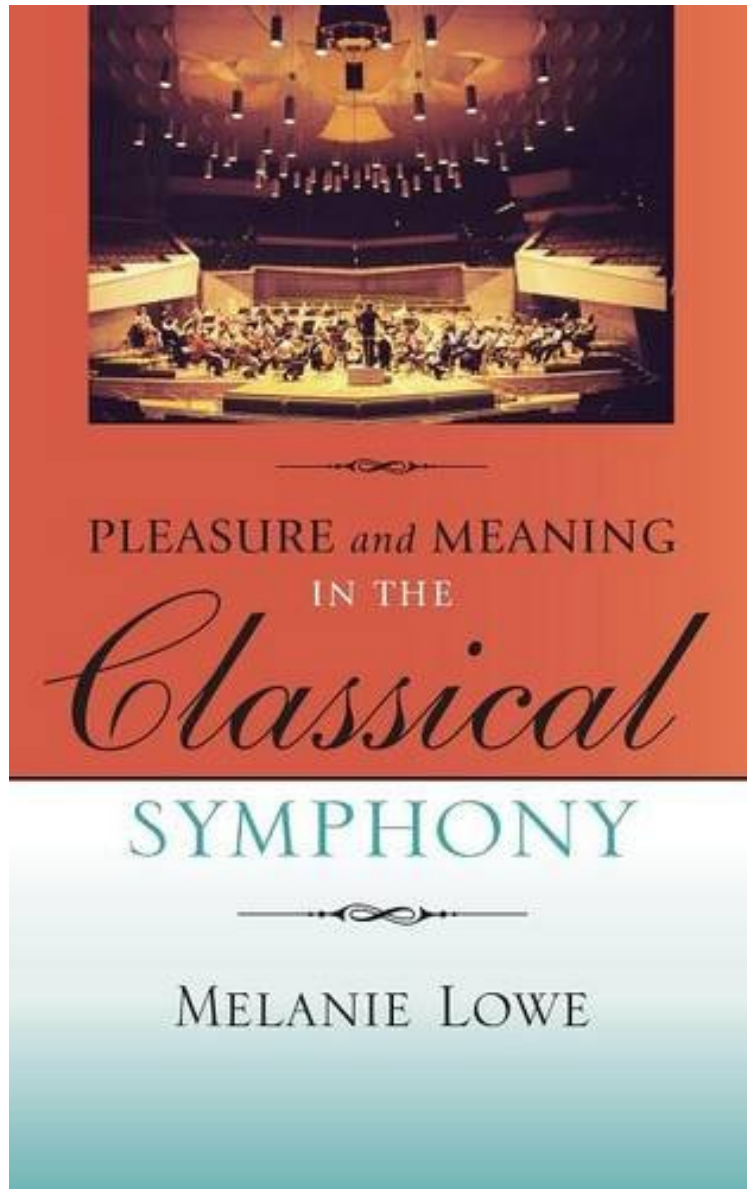


## Pleasure and Meaning in the Classical Symphony (Musical Meaning and Interpretation)

Melanie Lowe

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**Melanie Lowe : Pleasure and Meaning in the Classical Symphony (Musical Meaning and Interpretation)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Pleasure and Meaning in the

## Classical Symphony (Musical Meaning and Interpretation):

Classical music permeates contemporary life. Encountered in waiting rooms, movies, and hotel lobbies as much as in the concert hall, perennial orchestral favorites mingle with commercial jingles, video-game soundtracks, and the booming bass from a passing car to form the musical soundscape of our daily lives. In this provocative and groundbreaking study, Melanie Lowe explores why the public instrumental music of late-eighteenth-century Europe has remained accessible, entertaining, and distinctly pleasurable to a wide variety of listeners for over 200 years. By placing listeners at the center of interpretive activity, *Pleasure and Meaning in the Classical Symphony* offers an alternative to more traditional composer- and score-oriented approaches to meaning in the symphonies of Haydn and Mozart. Drawing from the aesthetics of the Enlightenment, the politics of entertainment, and postmodern notions of pleasure, Lowe posits that the listeners' pleasure stems from control over musical meaning. She then explores the widely varying meanings eighteenth-century listeners of different social classes may have constructed during their first and likely only hearing of a work. The methodologies she employs are as varied as her sources, from musical analysis to the imaginings of three hypothetical listeners. Lowe also explores similarities between the position of the classical symphony in its own time and its position in contemporary American consumer culture. By considering the meanings the mainstream and largely middle-class American public may construct alongside those heard by today's more elite listeners, she reveals the great polysemic potential of this music within our current cultural marketplace. She suggests that we embrace "crosstalk" between performances of this music and its myriad uses in film, television, and other mediated contexts to recover the pleasure of listening to this repertory. In so doing, we surprisingly regain something of the classical symphony.

The ingenious execution of the book offers deep insights into the musical vocabulary of the late eighteenth century . . . [A] stimulating study. (*Eighteenth-Century Studies*). . . Combining close analysis of a group of Haydn's late symphonies with occasional reference to those of Mozart and imagining Haydn's contemporaries hearing the symphonies for the first (probably only) time, Lowe shows how the gestures, structure, thematic choices, and instrumentation of Haydn's work could lead to signification in the minds of his listeners. . . . The book offers a reasoned answer to the question of musical meaning. Not everyone will accept Lowe's conclusions, but no one can claim she does not present them clearly and forcefully. . . . Recommended. (Choice) About the Author Melanie Lowe is Assistant Professor of Musicology in the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University.