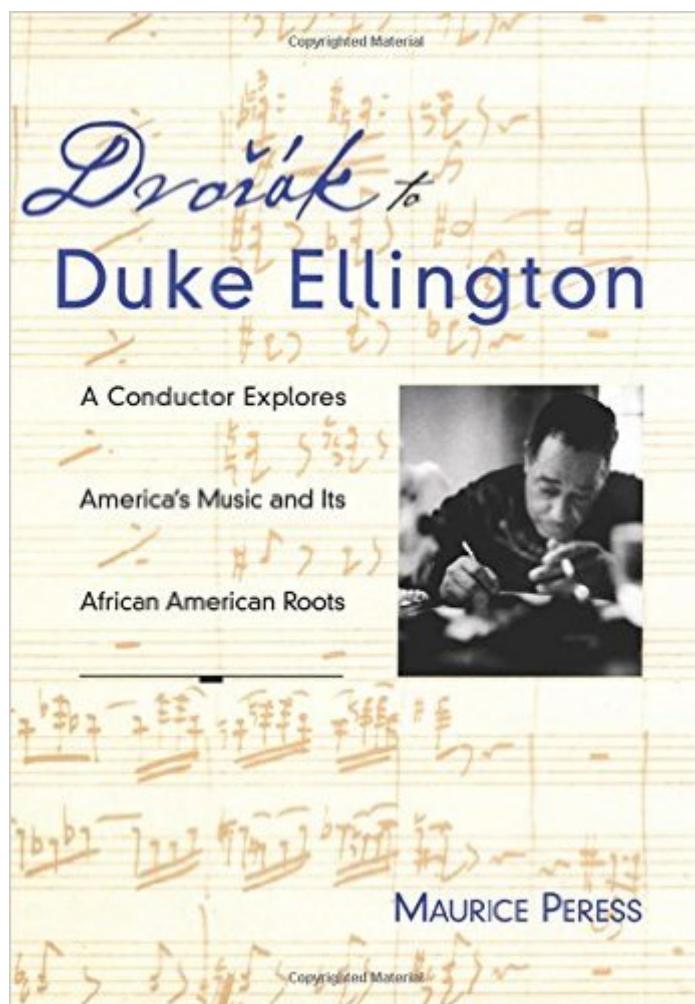


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Dvorák To Duke Ellington: A Conductor Explores America's Music And Its African American Roots



Synopsis

Drawing upon a remarkable mix of intensive research and the personal experience of a career devoted to the music about which Dvorák so presciently spoke, Maurice Peress's lively and convincing narrative treats readers to a rare and delightful glimpse behind the scenes of the burgeoning American school of music and beyond. In Dvorák to Duke Ellington, Peress begins by recounting the music's formative years: Dvorák's three year residency as Director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York (1892-1895), and his students, in particular Will Marion Cook and Rubin Goldmark, who would in turn become the teachers of Ellington, Gershwin, and Copland. We follow Dvorák to the famed Chicago World's Fair of 1893, where he directed a concert of his music for Bohemian Honor Day. Peress brings to light the little known African American presence at the Fair: the piano professors, about-to-be-ragtimers; and the gifted young artists Paul Dunbar, Harry T. Burleigh, and Cook, who gathered at the Haitian Pavilion with its director, Frederick Douglass, to organize their own gala concert for Colored Persons Day. Peress, a distinguished conductor, is himself a part of this story; working with Duke Ellington on the Suite from Black, Brown and Beige and his "opera comique," Queenie Pie; conducting the world premiere of Leonard Bernstein's Mass; and reconstructing landmark American concerts at which George Antheil's Ballet Mecanique, George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, James Reese Europe's Clef Club (the first all-black concert at Carnegie Hall), and Ellington's Black, Brown and Beige, were first presented. Concluding with an astounding look at Ellington and his music, Dvorák to Duke Ellington offers an engrossing, elegant portrait of the Dvorák legacy, America's music, and the inestimable African-American influence upon it.

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Customer Reviews

Peress's 'Dvorak to Duke Ellington' is necessary reading for any serious Duke Ellington fan or any student of the lineage of jazz. Despite long passages spoken in highly technical musical terminology (which will be manna for composers out there), Peress brings so many interesting anecdotes to light, so many fresh insights into Ellington's working methods to composing, laypersons too will gain profound wisdom into the infrastructure that later brought BeBop, hardBop, Modern, R&B, Blues and Rock & Roll into reality. For Duke lovers, it is heartening to see Peress discover (tearfully) what we already had known: his music is a gift to world history. Peress's nuanced details as to how Duke scored his sobering emotional analyses of Black Culture is particularly stunning, he having access to rare Ellington family archives and an insiders association with the Duke. And Duke was a poet - literally. YES! I was completely taken aback at how much is owed to Antonin Dvorak, the Czech emigree, for shaping the jazz juggernaut, or more specifically, the jazz orchestral juggernaut. I am not sure that the limber modern Jazz idiom as we know it, or the Gershwin orchestral phenomenon, would have garnered legitimacy without Dvorak's extra-ordinary cheerleading of our indigenous arts such as Ragtime, sharecropper tunes, and gospel songs. There is an argument intrinsically proffered in the book that Dvorak might have assisted in the abolition of minstrelsy itself. Peress only missed a few related facts. For instance, he did not cover the Harlem Renaissance leadership and its muscular shaping of the Jazz and Blues idioms. Those gentlemen (Dubois, et.al) also marketed the Duke heavily, and deserve a mention in this book.

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