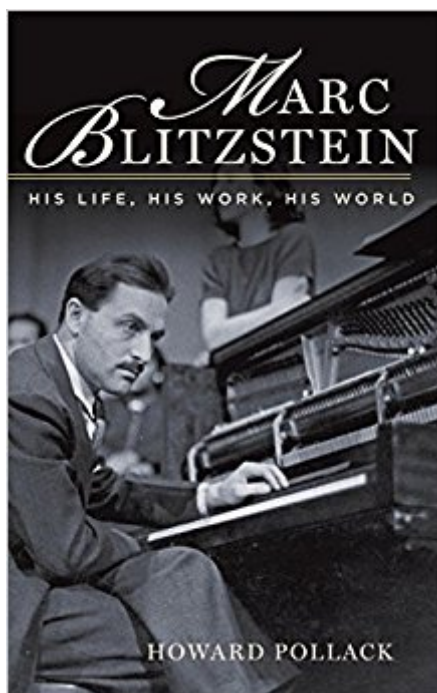


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Marc Blitzstein: His Life, His Work, His World



Synopsis

A composer and lyricist of enormous innovation and influence, Marc Blitzstein remains one of the most versatile and fascinating figures in the history of American music, his creative output running the gamut from films scores and Broadway operas to art songs and chamber pieces. A prominent leftist and social maverick, Blitzstein constantly pushed the boundaries of convention in mid-century America in both his work and his life. Award-winning music historian Howard Pollack's new biography covers Blitzstein's life in full, from his childhood in Philadelphia to his violent death in Martinique at age 58. The author describes how this student of contemporary luminaries Nadia Boulanger and Arnold Schoenberg became swept up in the stormy political atmosphere of the 1920s and 1930s and throughout his career walked the fine line between his formal training and his populist principles. Indeed, Blitzstein developed a unique sound that drew on everything contemporary, from the high modernism of Stravinsky and Hindemith to jazz and Broadway show tunes. Pollack captures the astonishing breadth of Blitzstein's work--from provocative operas like *The Cradle Will Rock*, *No for an Answer*, and *Regina*, to the wartime *Airborne Symphony* composed during his years in service, to lesser known ballets, film scores, and stage works. A courageous artist, Blitzstein translated Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* during the heyday of McCarthyism and the red scare, and turned it into an off-Broadway sensation, its "Mack the Knife" becoming one of the era's biggest hits. Beautifully written, drawing on new interviews with friends and family of the composer, and making extensive use of new archival and secondary sources, Marc Blitzstein presents the most complete biography of this important American artist.

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Customer Reviews

"This comprehensive book about the life and music of the sadly neglected composer Marc Blitzstein is, as well, an invaluable guide to the workings of American arts during the composer's lifetime."

--Edward Albee, playwright "Marc Blitzstein was a friend, from the moment we first met in 1946 until he died eighteen years later. Now he lives again in Howard Pollack's pages. As a composer he was one of a kind, with his whistleable tunes encased in wise formality, and his bodily presence, so happy and so sad." --Ned Rorem, composer / author "A timely and invaluable study of a composer we need to know more about. I marvel at Howard Pollack's capacity--as with his biographies of Copland and Gershwin--to digest and synthesize a wealth of information, copiously gathered."

--Joseph Horowitz, author of *Classical Music in America: A History* "A strong biography." *Playbill* "A brilliantly researched new biography." --*Jewish Daily Forward* "Beautifully written, drawing on new interviews with friends and family of the composer, and making extensive use of new archival and secondary sources, Marc Blitzstein presents the most complete biography of this important American artist." --*Newreads* "Now, Pollack has made Blitzstein happen, just as he succeeded in his comprehensive studies of Gershwin and Copland." --*Jewish Herald Voice* "[An] exceptionally

researched, detailed, and important study of this fascinating, complex, and still relatively unknown composer who well deserves a book of this quality." --*Notes* "In this comprehensive, sensitive, and beautifully written biography, Howard Pollack scrutinizes every part of Blitzstein's complex personal as well as public life, sustaining his well-deserved reputation as our foremost biographer of American classical composers." --Judith Tick, Matthews Distinguished University Professor, College of Arts, Media, and Design, Northeastern University "Pollack has already told us everything we need to know about Copland and Gershwin. Now he scrutinises Blitzstein in the context of his entire cultural and political scene in fascinating and impeccably researched detail." --Peter Dickinson, Emeritus Professor of Keele and London Universities "A thorough biography." --*DC Theatre Scene* "Now, Pollack has made Blitzstein happen, just as he succeeded in his comprehensive studies of Gershwin and Copland". --*Jewish Herald Voice* 26 "Beautifully written, drawing on new interviews with friends and family of the composer, and making extensive use of new archival and secondary sources, Marc Blitzstein presents the most complete biography of this important American artist." *Newreads* "The fluidity of prose, moving between established fact and new interviews and critical ideas, is remarkable, making for a book that is rivaled only by Pollack's biography of Aaron Copland...A momentous achievement indeed...Highly recommended."

--*Choice* "An eventful and rewarding voyage of immersion into the life and work of an important American composer." --*New Music Connoisseur* "Especially valuable..." --*Dance Chronicle* "Howard

Pollack's new biography offers a veritable breath of fresh air, for it introduces clearly and exhaustively the multifaceted qualities of this enormously inventive and surprisingly prolific composer...With its detailed discussion of musical sketches and compositions, its insightful use of archival sources, its ethnographic approach based on new interviews with Blitzstein's friends and family, and its wonderfully selected collection of photographs, Pollack's biography significantly deepens our knowledge of a charismatic composer."--Journal of the Society for American Music"Those interested in twentieth-century music, American music, musical theater, LGBTQ history, Jewish composers, music informed by considerations of politics including race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, and leftist musicians and artists are in Pollack's debt for this magnificent, richly detailed study. It will, I trust, prompt many more performances, critical editions of scores, and greater analytical engagement with Blitzstein's music, generating fresh views on a remarkable composer and person."--Journal of the American Musicological Society

Howard Pollack is John and Rebecca Moores Professor of Music at the University of Houston and author of, among other books, John Alden Carpenter: A Chicago Composer; Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man; and George Gershwin: His Life and Work.

As one who has spent a lifetime musically trawling the same professional and aesthetic waters as Blitzstein (music-theater, the Curtis connection, the unstable tonality gambit, and so forth) he has served as an example (both positive and negative) for me over the years. In light of that, from Eric Gordon's wonderful book to this irresistible and crucial one by Howard Pollack, I've followed the literature about MB closely. This book should be required reading for every young composer thinking about a career writing music theater, any artist devoted to the proposition that good art can effect positive social change. (Blitzstein was a shining example of that.) It should also be required reading for contemporary conductors, who sometimes abrogate the normal order of things by directing the creative efforts of the living composers with whom they collaborate. (Blitzstein brooked none of that.) I find it an essential addition to the literature, and am grateful to Howard Pollack and to Oxford for creating it and bringing it out.

One of the most pleasurable biographies I have yet read. Comprehensive, thoughtful, and provocative, this book led me into the world of one of my favorite, albeit often overlooked, composers. My gratitude to Mr. Pollack for his work. Blitzstein had been given a fine tribute in this offering.

No matter how well you think you know Marc Blitzstein or how much you like his music, you will find out so very much in this book and come to love and respect him even more for his wonderful contribution to music.

Wonderful biography about a gifted composer, written by a gifted biographer. I always want more photographs in biographies, but that's just me...

A superb full biography of the artist: both good life-drama & top-of-the-ladder musical scholarship. A first-rate companion to Eric Gordon's biography of Blitzstein of thirty years ago

At a brisk 500 pages, Howard Pollack has done it again. In addition to his comprehensive biographies on John Alden Carpenter, Aaron Copland and George Gershwin (as well as a wonderful early book on Harvard composers), Pollack has created a true masterpiece with "Marc Blitzstein: His Life, His Work, His World." What I love most about Pollack's work is his ability to appeal to both scholars and laymen alike: his assessment of Blitzstein's contributions to American music as well as his social conscientiousness during an integral time in American history is impressive and masterfully crafted. Pollack's portrayal of Blitzstein, a significant composer who has, unfortunately, fallen into obscurity amidst our rapidly changing society, makes us contemplate what other American treasures have been cast into the shadows of our all-to-quickly depleting cultural memory. We can only hope that Howard Pollack continues writing books about other forgotten gems of American music, but regardless of his subject, Pollack's work is not to be left unread: it's just too darn good.

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