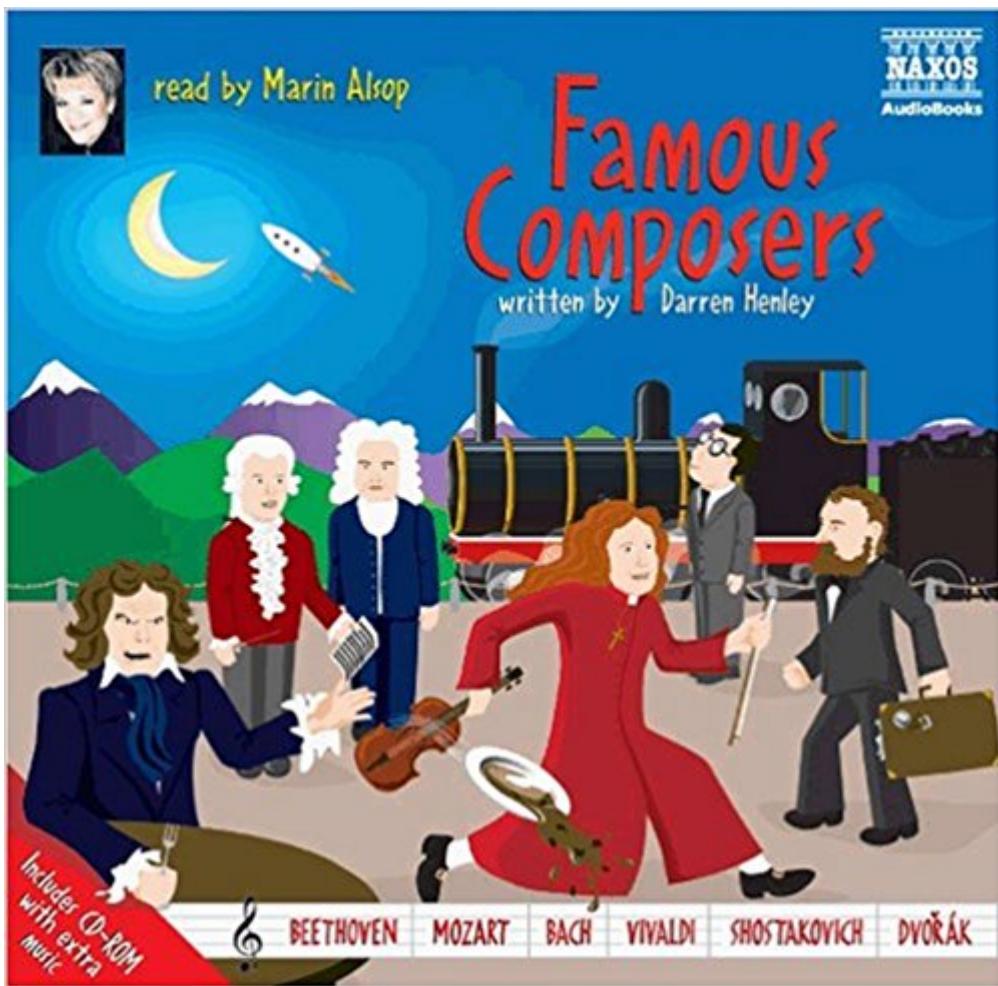


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# Famous Composers



## **Synopsis**

Book by Henley, Darren

## **Book Information**

Audio CD

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## **Customer Reviews**

Vivaldi, Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Dvorak, and Shostakovich make up this delightful introduction to FAMOUS COMPOSERS, an Audie-nominated production filled with re-enactments, musical excerpts, and facts on the six composers. Adult or child can certainly gain an understanding about the composers' lives, as well as the relevance of their music. Some information may elude the listener, such as particular music cues in each excerpt, but one can't help walking away with a better appreciation of music overall. While the accents seem unnecessary, the reenactments prove to be a good vehicle for educating listeners. Marin Alsop reads the text in a light and welcoming voice that creates an enjoyable atmosphere for learning. L.E. 2006 Audie Award Finalist © AudioFile 2006, Portland, Maine-- Copyright © AudioFile, Portland, Maine

This is a delightful audible book on the lives of 6 famous composers for grades 3-6. Along with a biography of the artist there are samples of the composers works to introduce young people to classical music. The composers are: 1. Vivaldi 2. Bach 3. Mozart 4. Beethoven 5. Dvorak 6. Shostakovich. Each section explains the challenges and eccentricities of the famous composer and it will keep children entertained. Marin Alsop does a wonderful job of narrating along with the occasional sound effects thrown in for good measure. I recently took a classical music course for

adults and it awoke in me a new love of classical music and I believe this book could do the same for young people.

My 10-year-old son LOVES listening to these CDs, and I have to admit that my husband and I both enjoy them as well. Many hours in the car have been pleasant because my son is engaged in listening. The accounts of each composer are tastefully done and give quite a bit of interesting detail into the composer's life and personality. We have checked them out from our library many times and my son would now like us to purchase them because he enjoys listening to them so much. I only wish they would make more as there are many more composers still to study.

This is clearly a presentation intended for children, but it is not indicated what age group is being targeted. The narration assumes no sophistication on the part of the listener, nor does it attempt to broaden or encourage more focused listening skills on the part of the child. Among the musical selections played are the most un-Shostakovichian work of the composer's, the variations on "Tea for Two" and the Romance from the film *Gadfly*, evidently in an attempt to sweeten the presentation. A portion of the Second Piano Concerto is played, and then the child is asked if the quote of the song, "What Do We Do With A Drunken Sailor" was heard in the score. Why in the world would a child be familiar with this somewhat esoteric World War II era song? A recording of the song outside its compositional context should have been played, which would have made the concerto example more meaningful. But this opportunity was overlooked. At the end of the presentation, it is pointed out that one of Shostakovich's songs, "Motherland Hears", was the first to be sung in space. Fine. But we never hear a note of the song. Instead, a Russian translation of some of its verses is presented. One has to wonder how this translation would benefit a child's understanding of the music of Shostakovich. It again points up the lack of thought that went into this hastily assembled, ultimately condescending script. The narration, which provides a very cursory overview of Shostakovich's life and troubles with authorities, is dumbed down to the point that would embarrass a seven year old (and in the process, the speaker mispronounces the name "Mtsensk" as in the composer's well-known opera). As Leonard Bernstein had shown in his well-known series of lectures, young people are capable of far more musical sophistication and absorption than this ill-conceived production assumes. I would be embarrassed myself to present it to a child of any age.

My kids (4 and 7) enjoy listening to this CD. We have listened to it several times already. They frequently request it in the car. The best part is that my husband and I enjoy it also!

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