



# The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650-1815

By John Spitzer, Neal Zaslaw

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This is the story of the orchestra, from 16th-century string bands to the "classical" orchestra of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Spitzer and Zaslaw document orchestral organization, instrumentation, social roles, repertoires, and performance practices in Europe and the American colonies, concluding around 1800 with the widespread awareness of the orchestra as a central institution in European life.

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### **Bibliography**

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"It should be said straight away that this book has been worth waiting for. Not only is it handsomely produced...and well illustrated, it is also beautifully written...it is extraordinary that this long-awaited book is the first comprehensive account of its origins and development...this book is a fine achievement, and will surely remain the standard work on the subject for a long time to come. Anyone interested in 17th and 18th-century music will get a lot out of it, and it will be required reading for everyone interested in that fascinating institution, the orchestra." --*Early Music*

"...the first comprehensive account of its origins and development.... It should be said straight away that this book has been worth waiting for.... it is not a history of a series of musical institutions, but is also concerned with the musical effect of orchestras and with questions of orchestral performance practice."--*Early Music*

"...provides an invaluable documentation of the first phases of an emerging musical institution.... This volume is set to become a standard reference work. It is encyclopedic in its coverage and many of its recurring concerns are rich in interest..... It would be more than the work of two lifetimes to retrieve all the information the volume reproduces from European archives.... this is a major piece of scholarship."--*The Journal of the Royal Musical Association*

"Spitzer and Zaslaw have produced an illuminating and detailed account of the orchestra between 1650 and 1815 that will surely captivate those readers who wish to gain a broader understanding of music-making during that period; devotees of the present-day orchestral scene will also gain a deeper knowledge of the institution that still plays such a vital role on the international stage."--*Music and Letters*

"The authors...expertly and indefatigably [cover] such a vast and complex field. Their combined labors have resulted in the most comprehensive, accurate, and insightful account ever written of the orchestra's early history. *The Birth of the Orchestra* is an important book that belongs in every serious music library. It contains much that will be of interest to students of performance practice, church music, opera, the concerto, the symphony, and the social history of music. Orchestral musicians as well will read it with excitement and pleasure, learning from it more about the early history of their venerable institution than they can from any other single source."--*Current Musicology*

"Musicologists John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, of Peabody Conservatory and Cornell University, respectively, have...created a hefty tome that will remain an indispensable resource for years to come...if God is in the details, this book is divine...Spitzer and Zaslaw serve up a rigorous, meticulously documented text

that consolidates the rapidly growing body of international research on the early history of the orchestra."--*Symphony*

"This book is extremely well organized, clearly written, and well-larded with illustrative matter...it is exhaustively documented and ultimately a very good read. It belongs in every music library and I heartily recommend it."--*Notes*

"To get directly to the point, the book delivers everything it promises: It is a treasure trove for any orchestra musician who wants to come to terms with the history of that institution to which he has dedicated his professional life, or anyone who seeks an introduction to this subject, and an orientation toward further investigation of particular aspects of the topic."--*Das Orchester*

"This long-overdue book was worth the wait. It is authoritative, detailed, well written, and thorough. In addition to covering famous individual orchestras, Spitzer and Zaslaw look at the changing makeup of the orchestra itself. They explore the orchestra's development by country --Italy, France, Germany, England-- drawing on (and carefully documenting) a broad array of sources, including electronic databases, unpublished doctoral dissertations, and German, French, and Italian language sources."--*Choice*

## About the Author

**John Spitzer** studied with Reuben Brower and Barrington Moore at Harvard, where he received his first degree. He studied musicology and ethnomusicology at Cornell University with William Austin, James Webster, Sotiros Chianis, and Bell Yung. He held a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh (1983-84), then taught at the University of Michigan (1984-87). From 1987 to 2005 he taught at the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. In 2004 he joined the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He has published scholarly articles on the history of the orchestra, American song, authorship, and authenticity, as well as music reviews and articles in newspapers, magazines, dictionaries, and encyclopedias.

**Neal Zaslaw** holds degrees from Harvard, The Juilliard School, and Columbia University. He is the author of more than 65 articles on baroque music, historical performance practices, Mozart, and the early history of the orchestra, as well as numerous books, including *Mozart's Symphonies: Context, Performance Practice, Reception* (Oxford, 1989), *The Classical Era from the 1740s to the End of the 18th Century* (Macmillan, 1989), and most recently, *Mozart's Piano Concertos: Text, Context, Interpretation* (University of Michigan Press, 1995). A member of the Akademie für Mozart-Forschung of the Mozarteum and the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, Zaslaw has taught at Cornell University since 1970.

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