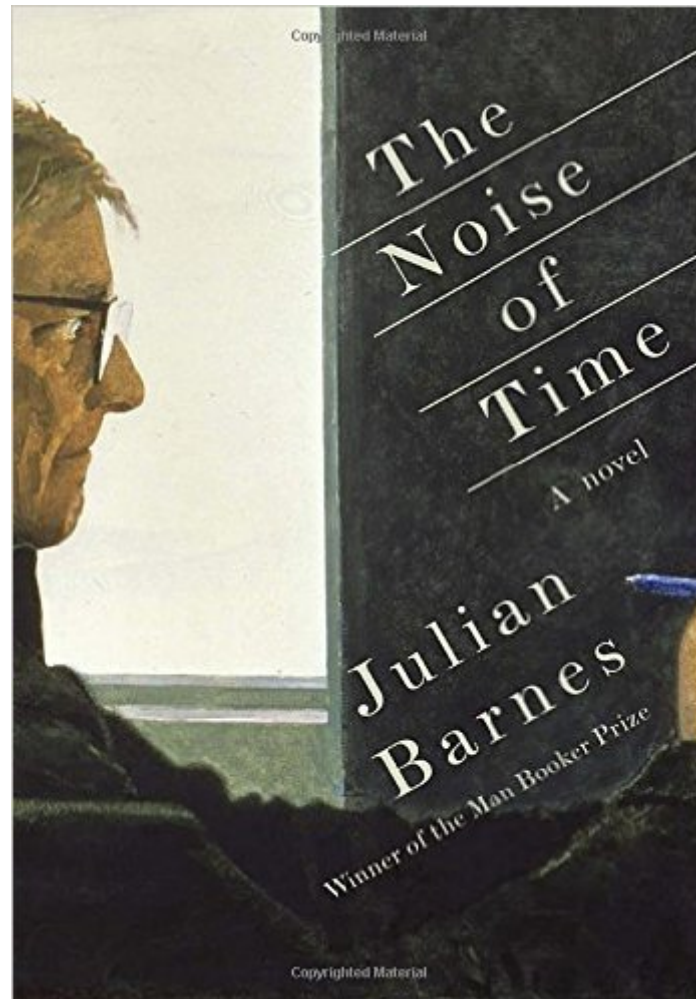


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The Noise Of Time: A Novel



Synopsis

A compact masterpiece dedicated to the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich: Julian Barnes's first novel since his best-selling, Man Booker Prize-winning *The Sense of an Ending*. In 1936, Shostakovich, just thirty, fears for his livelihood and his life. Stalin, hitherto a distant figure, has taken a sudden interest in his work and denounced his latest opera. Now, certain he will be exiled to Siberia (or, more likely, executed on the spot), Shostakovich reflects on his predicament, his personal history, his parents, various women and wives, his children—and all who are still alive themselves hang in the balance of his fate. And though a stroke of luck prevents him from becoming yet another casualty of the Great Terror, for decades to come he will be held fast under the thumb of despotism: made to represent Soviet values at a cultural conference in New York City, forced into joining the Party and compelled, constantly, to weigh appeasing those in power against the integrity of his music. Barnes elegantly guides us through the trajectory of Shostakovich's career, at the same time illuminating the tumultuous evolution of the Soviet Union. The result is both a stunning portrait of a relentlessly fascinating man and a brilliant exploration of the meaning of art and its place in society.

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Customer Reviews

When I was about halfway through *The Noise of Time*, a friend—who has served as the artistic director of opera of a well-known school and is intimately familiar with Shostakovich's works asked, "Whom do you think Julian Barnes wrote this book for?" you or me? (I greatly appreciate classical music but am far from an expert). My natural inclination was to say, "Why, you, of

course. • After finishing, a good part of me still believes that. I have since listened to Shostakovich on YouTube and realize without hearing his works being performed, it is not easy to understand why Barnes chose Shostakovich as the face of his novel. There is genius in his work but it is definitely not the optimistic and harmonious work that the Party craved. But upon finishing the book, I realized that not knowing that much about Shostakovich's work was oddly freeing, because the book transcends a study into one composer. Indeed, its main theme may be summed up here: "A soul could be destroyed in one of three ways: by what others did to you; by what others made you do to yourself; and by what you voluntarily chose to do to yourself." The three parts of this book – the first, following the denouncement of Shostakovich's opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk as "muddle instead of music"; the second when Stalin requests the composer to represent the USSR at the Congress for World Peace in the U.S.; and the third under the Krushchev regime when Shostakovich betrays his principles and officially joins the Party – illustrate what Julian Barnes has set out to do. And that's to explore how one serves his art yet makes allowances for the noise of history that threatens the artist's integrity. The artist, Julian Barnes suggests, must believe in something.

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