GENERAL

norton recorded anthology of western music volume 2

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Introduction

When it comes to exploring the rich tapestry of Western classical music, few resources are as widely respected as the **Norton Recorded Anthology of Western Music**. This series has become a staple in university libraries, conservatories, and the homes of music lovers worldwide. While the first volume offers a sweeping overview of the earliest compositions, **Volume 2**takes listeners deeper into the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and early 20th century periods, presenting a curated selection that showcases both canonical masterpieces and lesser known gems.

In this article, we dive into what makes *Volume 2*a must have for students, educators, and enthusiasts alike. From its historical context and composer highlights to recording quality and accessibility, we'll cover everything you need to know to appreciate and utilize this anthology in your musical journey.

Historical Context of the Norton Recorded Anthology of Western Music

The Norton Recorded Anthology of Western Music (NRWM) was conceived in the early 1970s as a response to the growing demand for high quality, pedagogically useful recordings. The project was spearheaded by music scholars who recognized that the existing commercial recordings often prioritized commercial appeal over educational value. By collaborating with leading conductors, orchestras, and recording engineers, the anthology aimed to provide a definitive, scholarly collection that would serve both academic curricula and the broader listening public.

Volume 1, released in 1973, covered the earliest music from medieval chant to the late Baroque. Volume 2, which followed in 1975, expanded the narrative into the Classical, Romantic, and early modern eras. Each volume was accompanied by a companion book that offered detailed analytical commentary, historical background, and performance practice insights. Together, the volumes form a comprehensive resource that traces the evolution of Western music from its roots to the cusp of contemporary trends.

Overview of Volume 2: Scope and Themes

Unlike the introductory nature of Volume 1, **Volume 2**takes a more focused approach. It is divided into four main sections that correspond to the major stylistic periods:

- Baroque (1600–1750) – Highlighting the transition from the late Baroque to the early Classical styles.
- Classical (1750–1820) – Showcasing the rise of the symphony, sonata, and chamber music.
- Romantic (1820–1900) – Featuring the emotional depth and expanded orchestration of the 19th century.
- Early 20th Century (1900–1945) – Presenting the avant garde and modernist experiments that shaped the 20th century soundscape.

Each section contains a carefully selected set of pieces that not only exemplify the style but also illustrate key thematic developments, such as the shift from homophonic to polyphonic textures, the expansion of the orchestra, and the increasing emphasis on programmatic content.

Key Composers Featured in Volume 2

Below is an in‑depth look at some of the most prominent composers represented in this anthology, grouped by period.

Baroque

- Johann Sebastian Bach – Known for his intricate counterpoint, Bach's works on this volume include selections from the Brandenburg Concertos and the Well‑Tempered Clavier.
- George Frideric Handel – The anthology features excerpts from Handel's Water Music and the Messiah, offering listeners a glimpse into the grandeur of Baroque oratorio.
- Antonio Vivaldi – Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" is included, providing a perfect illustration of programmatic violin concerti.

Classical

- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – Mozart's symphonies and piano concerti are highlighted, showcasing the balance and clarity that define the Classical era.
- Ludwig van Beethoven – Beethoven's early symphonies and piano sonatas appear, illustrating the transition from Classical restraint to Romantic passion.
- Franz Joseph Haydn – Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony and string quartets are featured, underlining the importance of wit and structural innovation.

Romantic

- Frédéric Chopin – The anthology includes Chopin's nocturnes and polonaises, highlighting his lyrical piano writing.
- Johannes Brahms – Brahms' symphonies and chamber works demonstrate the depth of Romantic harmony.
- Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky – Tchaikovsky's ballets and symphonies illustrate the emotive power of large‑scale orchestration.

Early 20th Century

- Igor Stravinsky – Stravinsky's "Firebird" and "The Firebird Suite" are included, showcasing his rhythmic innovation.
- Arnold Schoenberg – The anthology presents Schoenberg's early atonal works, providing insight into the genesis of twelve‑tone technique.
- Claude Debussy – Debussy's impressionistic piano pieces, such as "Clair‑de‑Lune," are featured, illustrating the shift toward tonal ambiguity.

Detailed Track Analysis: Notable Pieces

While the anthology offers a broad survey, certain tracks stand out for their pedagogical value and historical significance. Below, we examine three exemplary pieces in detail.

This concerto is celebrated for its energetic rhythmic drive and complex counterpoint. In the anthology, the recording emphasizes the interplay between the solo violin and the orchestral ensemble, making it an ideal study piece for advanced students of Baroque performance practice.

Beethoven – "Symphony No. 5 in C Minor"

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is a cornerstone of Romantic symphonic literature. The anthology's version captures the dramatic opening motif and the triumphant finale, providing a masterclass in dynamic contrast and thematic development.

Stravinsky – "Firebird" (Suite) – "Firebird Dance"

Stravinsky's "Firebird" is a masterful blend of folk motifs and modern orchestration. The "Firebird Dance" track showcases the use of exotic scales and rhythmic complexity, making it a valuable resource for students exploring 20th century orchestral techniques.

The Role of Volume 2 in Music Education

Educational institutions worldwide rely on **Volume 2** for a number of reasons:

- Curriculum Alignment – The anthology's repertoire aligns with standard university syllabi in music history, theory, and performance.
- Analytical Depth – Each track is accompanied by detailed commentary, enabling students to dissect form, harmony, and orchestration.
- Listening Skills – By exposing students to a wide range of styles, the volume cultivates critical listening and comparative analysis.
- Performance Preparation – For chamber ensembles and soloists, the anthology offers exemplary recordings that serve as models for interpretation and technique.

Recording Quality and Production Details

The production of **Volume 2**reflects the high standards of Norton's commitment to excellence. Recorded in the mid 1970s, the anthology benefited from state of the art studio technology and a meticulous mastering process. Key features include:

- High-Fidelity Stereo Capture – The recordings capture the full spectrum of orchestral timbres, providing an immersive listening experience.
- Balanced Dynamics – Dynamic range is carefully preserved, allowing subtle nuances to shine without distortion.
- Authentic Performance Practices – Conductors and soloists were chosen for their expertise in historically informed performance, especially in the Baroque and Classical selections.

These qualities ensure that the anthology remains a reliable reference for both academic study and personal enjoyment.

How to Access Volume 2: Formats and Availability

For many users, the question of how to obtain **Volume 2** is paramount. Below are the most common options:

While the original release was on vinyl, most modern editions are available on CD. These can be purchased from major online retailers or university music stores.

Digital Downloads

High resolution digital downloads (e.g., FLAC, MP3) are offered through platforms such as iTunes, Amazon Music, and the Norton website. These files provide the same audio quality as the CD, with the convenience of instant access.

Streaming Services

Some streaming platforms, such as Spotify and Apple Music, host curated playlists that include selections from the anthology. While not the full volume, these playlists allow listeners to sample key pieces.

Library Access

University libraries and public libraries often maintain a copy of the anthology in their music collections. Checking the catalog or requesting a loan can provide access for students and researchers.

Comparison with Volume 1 and Other Anthologies

While **Volume 1** offers a foundational overview of early Western music, **Volume 2** deepens the exploration into later periods. The two volumes complement each other by covering a complete historical arc. When compared to other anthologies, such as the *Oxford Music Online Collection* or the *American Music Series*, the Norton anthology stands out for its:

- Pedagogical Focus – Each track is paired with scholarly commentary, making it especially valuable for students.
- Balanced Repertoire – The anthology includes both well known masterpieces and lesser studied works, offering a well-rounded listening experience.
- Consistent Production Quality – Unlike some compilations that mix recordings from various eras and engineers, Norton's volume maintains a uniform sonic character.

Conclusion

The Norton Recorded Anthology of Western Music Volume 2 remains an indispensable resource for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of Western classical music's evolution. Its carefully curated selections, scholarly annotations, and superior audio quality make it a go-to reference for educators, performers, and avid listeners alike. Whether you're a student building a foundational repertoire, a teacher designing a curriculum, or a music enthusiast exploring new horizons, this anthology offers a rich, engaging, and educational listening experience that continues to resonate with audiences worldwide.

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