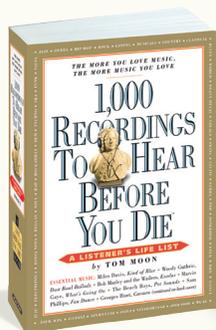


*THE MORE YOU LOVE MUSIC,
THE MORE MUSIC YOU LOVE*

TOM MOON'S LISTENING GROUP GUIDE



A COMPANION TO
The New York Times Bestseller
1,000 RECORDINGS TO HEAR
BEFORE YOU DIE™

A Note *from* Tom Moon:

Dear Reader,

During the nearly four years I spent researching *1,000 Recordings to Hear Before You Die*, I listened to music in all kinds of situations—on trains and airplanes, in state-of-the-art recording studios and small apartments, and, most often, while sitting in front of the computer. Yet every month or so, I'd tear myself from the research to go listen to music in a different way, with a group of friends and music-industry professionals who are connected by our voracious appetites for music.



This gathering, which we informally call “Music Music Music,” usually happens at someone’s house. We rotate hosting duties. People bring wine and at least one thing to play. Over the course of an evening, we travel all over the musical world—from AC/DC to Erik Satie, from Sinatra to Stravinsky, from high opera to garage rock. The idea is to encounter new and unfamiliar music, and to listen in ways that sharpen our ears and enhance our appreciation.

What I’ve learned from these evenings is that no matter how much music you think you know, no matter how many times you’ve heard a particular piece of music, there’s always more to learn—if, that is, you listen in an active way. That’s what we do in our group: Often whoever’s playing DJ will preface a selection by saying “Listen closely to the bassline here,” or gesture, conductor-like, to call attention to a specific moment of greatness that’s about to happen. That leads to incredible conversations (and also incredible arguments!), and these lead to new perspectives on music—what you like, what you don’t like, what you want to explore further.

Music is endless. We now have galaxies of sound at our fingertips, waiting there for discovery. But often that discovery happens when we’re alone, or doing three things at once, or on the run; we don’t spend time savoring and “processing” what we’ve heard. That’s a shame. Because as anyone who’s ever stayed up late in a college dorm with a group of friends knows, exploring music can be an incredible group activity, a profoundly enriching shared journey.

What follows is a brief guide to developing and facilitating those journeys in a group setting. The listening group has been an extraordinary learning experience for me, and it’s my hope that it can be for others, too.

Happy exploring,



Tom Moon

1,000 Recordings to Hear Before You Die

WHY *a* LISTENING GROUP?

Music is like the air we breathe—it’s easy to take it for granted. Often we are exposed to brilliant, life-changing pieces of music and they don’t register at all, or we regard them as pleasant ambient background. We miss their essential message. One could argue that the noise of modern life has “numbed” us to the infinite, atom-level joys of music—perhaps because we are bombarded with sound, there’s rarely a time when we devote full attention to music. We think more about screening it out than taking it in, and as a result, don’t listen deeply even when we are listening.

And these days, many people encounter music alone, at the computer or in transit. As a result, we don’t talk about it. And unless we happen to reside in a dormitory, we don’t always get to share it.

I’ve found that gathering together to listen, in a book-group–style setting, can be transformational. It can change your relationship to music, activating long-neglected curiosities. It can expand your horizons, moving you out of the comfort zone of a “favorites” playlist. It can put you in touch with elements of music you never noticed before—helping you savor the way a singer slows down just a hair near the end of a tune, or illuminating the counter-melodies and subthemes bubbling beneath Beethoven’s surfaces. It can clarify your sense of what moves you, and also what leaves you cold. And it can provide a “blueprint” for future listening, recordings, and artists to add to your life list.

WHAT’S *the* GOAL?

In a sense, the primary goal is similar to that of a book group—to explore ideas. To spend a few minutes listening, with minimal distraction, to music that someone considers essential. The selections featured in *1,000 Recordings to Hear Before You Die* offer excellent starting points—included are works regarded by scholars and musicians as fundamentally important to the understanding of music. Among these Hallmarks of World Culture are Pablo Casals’s interpretation of the Bach cello suites; Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue*; Bob Dylan’s *Blonde on Blonde*. Of course, there are almost 1,000 more.

The discussion that follows can be as important as the music. Sometimes it is helpful to have to formulate a response to art—the act of putting your reaction into words can help you discover what exactly you’re picking up, and how you feel about it. It’s a challenge to describe something as abstract as music (see “Do You Need to Be Educated About Music to Participate?” below), to go beyond the “thumbs-up, thumbs-down” reaction. But it’s worth the effort: As the discussion evolves, it will yield insights you might not have encountered on your own.

WHO'S INVOLVED?

Listening groups should be open to anyone who's curious about music. In researching the book, I came to believe that the more you love music, the more music you love—and for that, all you need is an open mind. A listening group can be made up of all

adults or all students, all experts or all novices, people with a deep love for only opera and people who live for rock of the 1970s and total omnivores who are interested in everything. Ideally, the group itself would have a range of affinities.

DO YOU NEED TO BE EDUCATED ABOUT MUSIC to PARTICIPATE?

It's not necessary to know the technical terms of music to talk about music. Your vocabulary as it is will suffice. You don't need to know what, exactly, to listen for, either—the group is a place to share thoughts, and describe what you're hearing, and perhaps most interestingly, to ponder connections with other pieces of music. There are no wrong answers where music is concerned, so any sort of description is welcome. Here are some questions that may help you frame thoughts on a selection:

- Does this music sound like something else I've heard? Are there clear antecedents and influences connecting this piece to earlier works? What are they, and do others in the room hear them too? Is it necessary to be familiar with those other works to appreciate this one?
- What's the "big idea" or main theme?
- Does this piece describe a particular mood or state of being?
- What is the overall tone? Somber? Celebratory? Reflective? Agitated?
- Where is the apex/climax of the piece? Is there a "turning point" moment when things change? What happens leading up to that?
- What element of music—melody, harmony, rhythm, lyrics—captivates you about the piece? What, specifically, are you paying attention to as the music plays?
- How important are the words/text?
- After each entry in *1,000 Recordings* are listening suggestions within the artist's catalog and then suggestions for going further, listed as "Next Stop" and "After That." When this music ends, what's a logical piece to play next?

WHAT'S *the* FORMAT?

There are obviously many ways to structure an evening of listening. One key question to resolve is the number of participants. The group should be small enough so that everyone can be engaged in the conversation; in our group, we've discovered it can be tricky with more than 12 people.

Because the goal is to encounter—and then talk about—a variety of music, it is wise to consider the length of the selections. Listening can be demanding; expecting even a group of music-obsessives to stay focused during a 20-minute free-jazz journey or an extended movement from a symphony might be asking too much. Shorter pieces or excerpts keep things moving.

An easy way to launch a group is to have a single facilitator (who may also be the evening's host) select the evening's program, and get the ball rolling with some general comments about his/her choices. This "leader" acts as DJ and guide, setting up each piece with some background information. (Ideally, this would include the year of recording, where it fits in an artist's career, important milestones, etc.) The hosting responsibility would rotate so that each member would get the chance to facilitate.

Alternatively, the group might decide to explore a different "theme" or genre of music at each session. With just a bit of

advance planning, this can be a terrific way to explore—it's also a great way to learn about the personalities and tastes of people in the group. Each member brings in a recording or two that upholds the theme, and is prepared to talk about it briefly—again, offering the basic context (artist(s), date of recording, etc.) and other observations that can help others appreciate the work. The *1,000 Recordings* website (www.1000Recordings.com) offers basic "first step" exploration guides for some genres, including jazz and classical, as well as a wide range of further-inquiry suggestions. In addition, below are a few possible theme ideas—there are certainly many more.

POSSIBLE THEMES

The Occasions indexes in *1,000 Recordings* offer some suggestions for thematic journeys—great driving music, great music for romance, etc. Below are some other possible themes.

- *Guilty Pleasures*
- *Defend a Genre*
(disco, rockabilly, etc.)
- *OVERRATED/UNDERRATED*
Discuss the contribution of a single artist, or several
- *Lost Classics/Favorite Obscure Works*

THE DISCUSSION

Once your group has settled on a format, it's important to spend a minute talking about the conversation—about how you relate to the music and each other. While it's possible to spend whole evenings analyzing the merits of a single recording, listening groups work best when the conversation moves briskly. That doesn't necessarily mean someone must serve as a moderator, just that participants should have some awareness about the "pace" of the evening. Comments should be short, respectful, and to the point, and should be aimed at observing the salient features of a work (see "Do You Need to Be Educated About Music to Participate?" above). In our group, the person playing the selection is expected to have some information about it, and as a result serves as the "guide" for that part of the evening. Often the discussion goes to music that's in some way related to whatever we've been hearing. That's when the conversation can become really interesting—someone will suggest

a recording that makes a logical segue, music that aligns in some obvious, opaque, or cosmic way with what's just been played. Once you begin thinking this way, it can be like a game of connect-the-dots. Here, the "Next Stop" and "After That" suggestions after each entry in *1,000 Recordings* can be helpful.

Listening is work. It can be a tall order to process and discuss five or ten different pieces of music in an evening. Breaks are good. So are off-topic conversations.

Since the goal of the listening group is discovery, it's helpful to keep a record of what was played. If a single person is choosing the evening's music, he or she can write it down. In our group, we initially designated a "secretary" at the beginning of each gathering, but that turned out to be a lot of work. Lately, we've passed around a notebook to log the evening's playlist—each person notes the artist, song, and album he or she played. These lists then circulate via e-mail within a few days.

website

www.1000recordings.com

The book's website contains a blog and other resources that may help inspire Listening Group discussions. One of the recurring features is devoted to investigating unfamiliar genres. Log on to find "Five First Steps Toward an Exploration of Classical Music" (posted in Tom Moon's blog archives, August 2008) and much more. Enjoy!

SUGGESTIONS *for* AN EVENING OF LISTENING

The dynamic of a listening group depends on the passion and experience of its participants—and also the depth of the libraries of those involved. No two groups will visit the same musical realms, or have the same conversations. The list below, largely drawn from the pages of *1,000 Recordings to Hear Before You Die*, is designed to illustrate how a thematic evening might unfold. In our group, several of the participants are active in the music business; these folks usually bring in a new release or two, and these selections are a great way to “kick-start” a conversation. I’ve started with one of those, by a little-known group, to illustrate one path of inquiry.

LISTENING ACROSS THE TIMELINE:

Exploring the Eternal Nature of the Blues

It’s been said that the blues reside at the center of the American experience. And on the big evolutionary chart of popular music, there are solid, well-established lines of connection between the blues and jazz, and the blues and rock and roll; some of rock’s most cherished recordings are direct descendants of the blues. Those who love rock know this on some level; it’s “assumed” knowledge, something you know even if you haven’t spent time charting the evolution. That’s our objective with this necessarily general suggested playlist: to establish links and commonalities between music of different eras and genres.

RECORDING: Hill Country Revue: “Highway Blues” from *Hill Country Revue: Make a Move* (2009)

This is a most recent example of music that interpolates blues and rock. It’s from the “hill” country of rural Mississippi. The songwriter and several of the musicians, all in their twenties, are related to the late great bluesman R. L. Burnside (see *1,000 Recordings*, page 133); they’re “carrying on” Burnside’s tradition of mixing traditional blues with forthright, amped-up rock rhythm.

DISCUSSION: While this is playing, it probably won’t take long for someone to mention the Allman Brothers. What’s similar? What’s different here? Is it important to “know” the basic blues timeline to appreciate this? Like the best work of the Allmans, this is great driving music; what are other things on the “road trip” playlist? (Suggestions can be found in the Occasions indexes of *1,000 Recordings*, page 916.)

RECORDING: The Allman Brothers Band: “Whipping Post” from *Live at Fillmore East* (1971)

We’re tripping back some thirty years, and though the form of this tune isn’t the typical 12-bar blues, it’s impossible to miss the essential “root,” the spirit of the blues, in the singing and, perhaps more overtly, in the playing of slide guitar genius Duane Allman.



THE ALLMAN BROTHERS

DISCUSSION: Compare this with Hill Country Revue. How have rockers changed the approach to the blues since the late '60s/early '70s? This is often mentioned among the all-time great live performances in rock. What, specifically, contributes to that? The intensity of the rhythm section? The guitar solos?

RECORDING: Lonnie Johnson: "Guitar Blues" from *The Original Guitar Wizard* (2006, recorded in 1929)

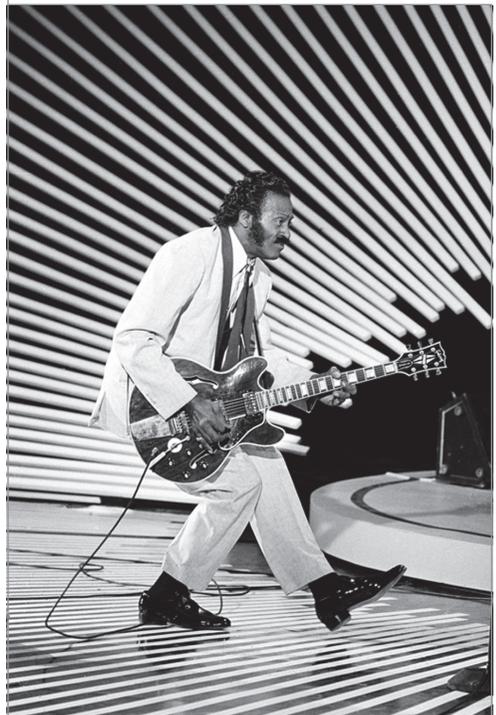
This selection helps illustrate the long sweep of the blues. It was recorded in 1929, at a time when most guitarists treated the guitar as a rhythm box, strumming endlessly. Lonnie Johnson approached it as a melody instrument, and here, in duet with another guitarist, Eddie Lang, he creates lines that have a stirring lyrical grace.

DISCUSSION: By the time of the Allmans, the guitar solo had become a well-established ritual; is it possible to detect elements of that ritual in Lonnie Johnson's playing here? Many consider Johnson the "father" of the blues guitar solo—what makes his playing distinctive?

RECORDING: Charlie Christian: "Seven Come Eleven" from *The Genius of the Electric Guitar* (2002)

On the big guitar timeline, there are only a few stops between Lonnie Johnson and Charlie Christian, the great jazz player who came to prominence with Benny Goodman's bands in the late '30s. Johnson opened up possibilities for the guitar as a solo instrument; Christian, a master known for his crisp technique, ventures further, delivering intricate lines that are still puzzling guitarists today.

DISCUSSION: Do the blues elements at work here resonate differently in a jazz context? How? Is Christian using the same basic elements as Johnson?



CHUCK BERRY

RECORDING:

Chuck Berry:
“Johnny B. Goode” or
“Little Queenie” from
The Anthology (2000)

Having heard a few of the important early guitar voices, we now zoom to an undisputed revolutionary: the great Chuck Berry, who channeled the steam-rolling beats of Chicago blues and the horn-section catcalls of big-band music into a blazing, divinely inspired rock and roll framework. Berry’s ’50s recordings stand among the great works of guitar innovation of the twentieth century.

DISCUSSION: What genre is this? We commonly think of it as “rock and roll,” but is Berry equally important to blues? This might be a good place to discuss the arbitrary nature of genre distinctions, and whether they help or hinder those listeners who are just beginning an exploration of music.

RECORDING: Led Zeppelin:
“Whole Lotta Love” from *II* (1969)

Music is a conversation across eras. It’s well established that rockers “borrowed” essential ideas from the blues, repurposing motifs and rhythm riffs for their own use. The second Led Zeppelin album offers all sorts of perspectives on this: The opening track, “Whole Lotta Love,” is a thin reworking of a song Willie Dixon wrote for Muddy



LED ZEPPELIN

Waters, “You Need Love/Woman You Need Love.” How thin? After legal action, the band settled out of court with Dixon. Another tune on the album, “The Lemon Song,” interpolates key ingredients from Howlin’ Wolf’s “Killing Floor.”

DISCUSSION: Did Led Zeppelin rip off the blues artists? Did they go beyond the limits of what might be considered “acceptable” creative borrowing? Or did they take the inspiration in a completely different direction?

RECORDING: Muddy Waters:
“You Need Love” from *His Best 1956–1964* (1997)

With Zep’s “Whole Lotta Love” fresh in your ears, check out the original tune, which was released as a single in late 1962. All of Waters’s trademarks—the swaggering sexuality associated with “Hoochie Coochie Man,” the steady-rolling rhythm, the stinging leads—are here.

DISCUSSION: This was recorded just seven years before “Whole Lotta Love.” Does it sound that way? Is Chicago electric blues such a “classic” sound that it’s impossible to tell the actual year—i.e., is there a difference between this track and works Waters recorded a decade earlier?

RECORDING: Kenny Burrell: “Chitlins Con Carne” from *Midnight Blue* (1963)
Stevie Ray Vaughan: “Chitlins Con Carne” from *The Sky is Crying* (1991)

We close with two versions of the boogaloo “Chitlins Con Carne,” selected to show how porous the line between “blues” and “jazz” can be. In the 1960s, many of the jazz greats (including Kenny Burrell) sought to fuse elements of blues and jazz and soul music into swinging and supremely acces-

sible sounds. Burrell’s original is part of that movement; when Vaughan, a blues guitarist, approached the song decades later, he explored it in a looser, almost psychedelic way.

DISCUSSION: Which has more “blues” in it—the Burrell version or the Vaughan? Is it possible to “hear” a connection between Charlie Christian, Chuck Berry, Kenny Burrell, and Led Zeppelin? After hearing the aforementioned, where would you go next?

SOURCES

There are many shops and online sites devoted to every musical sub-speciality; below are some retailers that I found useful in the course of researching the book.

GENERAL

amazon.com
itunes.com
bn.com
borders.com
tower.com
emusic.com

CLASSICAL AND OPERA

Arkiv Music
arkivmusic.com

DANCE, ELECTRONICA

Breakbeat Science
breakbeatsscience.com

611 Records
611records.com

HIP-HOP

UndergroundHipHop
undergroundhiphop.com

Fat Beats
fatbeats.com
406 6th Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10011
(212) 673-3883

JAZZ

Jazz Record Mart
jazzmart.com
27 East Illinois Street
Chicago, IL 60611
(800) 684-3480 or
(312) 222-1474

Downtown Music Gallery
downtownmusicgallery.com
342 Bowery
New York, NY 10012
(800) 622-1387

Other Music
(also rock, electronica,
world, avant-garde)
othermusic.com
15 East 4th Street
New York, NY 10003
(212) 477-8150

RARITIES

Dusty Groove
dustygroove.com
1120 North Ashland Avenue
Chicago, IL 60622
(888) 387-8947

GEMM
gemm.com

WORLD MUSIC

General

National Geographic World Music
worldmusic.national
geographic.com
World Music Institute
worldmusicinstitute.org
(212) 545-7536

Brazil

Modern Sound
modernsound.com.br

Reggae

Jammyland
jammyland.com
(212) 614-0185

Latin

Descarga
descarga.com
(800) 377-2647

African

Stern’s Music
sternsmusic.com

Arabic

Rashid’s Music Sales
rashid.com
(800) 843-9401

1,000 Recordings to Hear Before You Die Listening Group Guide

LISTENING GROUP NOTES

DATE: _____

SONG: _____

NOTES: _____

LISTENING GROUP NOTES

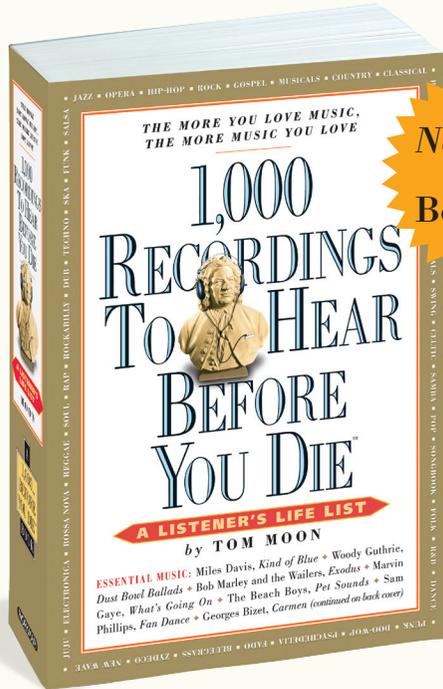
DATE: _____

SONG: _____

NOTES: _____

“When I hear music, I fear no danger.
I am invulnerable. I see no foe. I am related
to the earliest times, and to the latest.”

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU



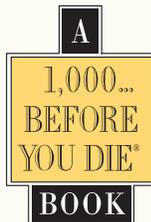
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Contact Selina Meere at 212-614-7505 or selina@workman.com
to share your experience, or for publicity information.

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