

**CLASSICAL MUSIC  
BOOK OF THE YEAR**



**Fryderyk Chopin**  
A Life and Times  
by Alan Walker  
Faber £30

At last, the definitive biography of Chopin has arrived. This substantial new study is a masterpiece, indispensable to specialists and general music lovers alike. It overflows with revelatory information, deft characterisation and pertinent, readable explorations of the music. All this is set against a minutely detailed depiction of his world. Walker's style is elegant, literary and empathetic, while his unflinching love for the music shines from every page.



# Bravura performances

Stylish composer biographies head *Jessica Ducher's* roundup

**CLASSICAL MUSIC**

**Handel in London**  
by Jane Glover  
Macmillan £25

The conductor Jane Glover conjures an impression of Handel's 18th-century London that seems baroque in every sense: flamboyant, fervid, seething with intrigue. The German composer's long relationship with the British capital is his only love affair – there's little here about his personal life – but Glover captures the finely balanced symbiosis between him, his singers, their audiences, their royal patrons and the city.

**Schumann The Faces and the Masks** by Judith Chernaik  
Faber £20

Chernaik tells Schumann's tragic story in a book full of fresh, thoughtful writing. The "masks" are the multiple personalities in his music; and his courtship of Clara Wieck, her father's determination to separate them, and their eventual marriage are brought convincingly to life. But the

crunch point is his mental collapse and incarceration in an asylum: Chernaik presents many details from the medical records, to heartbreaking effect.

**How Shostakovich Changed My Mind** by Stephen Johnson  
Notting Hill £14.99

Writer and broadcaster Stephen Johnson chronicles his lifelong fascination with Shostakovich's music in the light of his own struggles with bipolar disorder. Strangely, anguished music can be the most comforting: using a delicate, self-deprecating style and references encompassing everything from Greek drama to the Moomins, Johnson explores the way Shostakovich provides catharsis, transforming the personal "I" into the collective "we". Profoundly moving.

**Speaking the Piano**  
by Susan Tomes  
Boydell Press £19.99

Drawing on her long experience, pianist Susan Tomes investigates, with crystalline clarity, some of the

**Fryderyk Chopin** Walker's love of his music shines out

interferences that disrupt the flow between players and their music. The text is studded with gems of insight, encapsulating elusive matters that often defy articulation, including difficult topics such as unconscious biases against female teachers, or why some performers ham up their playing for the YouTube generation. A must-read for anyone who plays or loves the piano.

**Music Lessons** The Collège de France Lectures  
by Pierre Boulez  
Faber £30

In these lectures from 1976 to 1995, Boulez shows himself to be a philosopher as well as a composer and conductor. His laser-sharp analyses drill into profound issues about the study and composition of music – such as the conflict between creative process and historical research, or the impossibility of "authenticity". Chewy, intensely rewarding, it leaves one marvelling at this penetrating, questing intellect. ☛

# What lies ahead

Our future survival emerges as a question in *Rob Kingston's* select

**SCIENCE**

Back in February, the surreal sight of Elon Musk's shiny red Tesla convertible floating through space with a mannequin at the wheel gave the world the surest sign yet that the rocket game has changed. **The Space Barons: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and the Quest to Colonize the Cosmos** (PublicAffairs £17.99) is a meticulously researched account by the Washington Post writer Christian Davenport of the ambitions and rivalries of the billionaires bidding to boldly take private enterprise where no government space programme has gone before.

Their vision might just save mankind, if Michio Kaku is correct. In **The Future of Humanity** (Allen Lane £20), he asks how mankind can avoid destruction, either self-inflicted or visited on us by a supervolcano or asteroid. In short, we need to leave Earth or face extinction. Terraforming and colonising Mars sounds challenging enough, but Kaku doesn't stop there, pondering the far-off possibilities of journeys to distant stars, suspended animation and even immortality.

For now, though, stopping the planet and getting off is not an option. If that thought depresses you, you need **The Consolations of Physics** by Tim Radford (Sceptre £14.99), a poetic work that celebrates the

power of science deep into the unexplored: trapped here on Earth, we explore its secrets: physics, philosophy, theology, Radford shares the joy of curiosity and co-

What fires that first place? Ji insightful Radio Scientific has all than 100 scientists what makes their of a planned coll tie-ins, **The Life Explorers** (Weir features advent physical (palaeo Richard Fortey's Arctic for fossils' (mathematician Cheng "stretchi out of her skull" Buckley, produc series, distils the skilfully into pri

Chad Orzel o fine example of passion in **Brea Einstein: The 1 of Everyday O** (Oneworld £12. about quantum you almost cert think about it b had your morni does: he's a phy with a knack fo how the quantu there in front o as you wake up of your toaster sensor in your : camera and ev the shape of the let you smell the

**SCIENCE BOOK OF THE YEAR**

STEPHEN HAWKING



**Brief Answers to the Big Questions**  
by Stephen Hawking  
J Murray £14.99

The physics world lost one of its greatest minds with the death of Stephen Hawking in March. His final book may not wrap the universe up as neatly as he hoped ("At one point,"

he writes, "I see the end of it does a fine job" FAQs. The great though, comes shifts his focus his outlook is le optimistic, but was so reliant c to communica dismissing the artificial intellig be "potentially mistake ever".