



Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodsong; Revised and Expanded Edition

Joseph Lanza

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It's campy, it's cool, empty, intrusive, trite, and treacly. It's Big Brother singing. Call it what you will -- elevator music, Moodsong ® easy listening, or Muzak ®. For a musical genre that was supposed to offend no one, it has a lot of enemies.

Musical cognoscenti decry its insipid content; regular folk -- if they notice -- bemoan its pervasiveness; while hipsters and campsters celebrate its retro chic. Mindful of the many voices, Joseph Lanza's *Elevator Music* sings seriously, with tongue in cheek, the praises of this venerable American institution.

Lanza addresses the criticisms of elites who say that Muzak and its ilk are dehumanized, vapid, or cheesy. These reactions, he argues, are based more on cultural prejudices than honest musical appraisal.

Says Lanza, today's so-called mood music is the inheritor of a long tradition of mood-altering music stretching back to the ancients; Nero's fiddle and the sirens of Odysseus being two famous examples. Contemporary atmospheric music, Lanza argues, not only serves the same purpose, it is also the inevitable background for our media-dominated age.

One of Lanza's premises, to quote Mark Twain, is that this music is "better than it sounds." "This book will have succeeded in its purpose," he writes, "if I can help efface...the distinction between one person's elevator music and another's prized recording."

Joseph Lanza is an author, producer, and music historian. His most recent book is *Russ Columbo and the Crooner Mystique*.

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From Reader Review Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodsong; Revised and Expanded Edition for online ebook

Ray Dinterman says

Not exactly "light" reading. But if you have ever wondered about the history of "Elevator Music" this books gives you all you need to know.

Padraic says

Read this. Liked it. Heard this week Muzak was filing Chapter 11. Made my week.

Tosh says

Joseph Lanza has written a very important cultural history book - the history of background music or the music you don't listen to while waiting in a store, subway station, etc. In other words Muzak. Who makes this stuff? Why?? And is it even an art? Great book!

Jack Tomascak says

Ultimately Lanza's argument surrounding the aesthetic and cultural worth of Muzak in its original form (that is, soft instrumental compositions or arrangements of popular songs heard in public spaces via a distant selector/curator) is understandable and interesting to hear -- as is his vision towards the proliferation of vaporwave. Just wish I didn't have to wade through an almost unbearably long tangent on mood music composers / hi-fi listening made for the home / the construction of easy listening as a genre, smack in the middle of the book to get there. The majority of the book otherwise covers programmed music in public spaces, Muzak as a company, etc. Easy listening as genre is brought up again in a brief chapter regarding New Age/space music -- the length spent on Vangelis and Hearts of Space is about as much as should be covered on Jackie Gleason, Martin Denny, etc in a book centered on the listening experience outside of the home as a means for shifting affect.

heidi says

For a Music and Technology class.

It helps to broaden one's definition of music; it gave me a nice slice of humble pie. My definition of art, and aesthetics was challenged, and once again I must work to redefine my personal definitions. sigh.

Mike S says

Pretty entertaining romp through the history of music made strictly for the purpose of alteration of mood. Starts with the 19th century's answer to Brian Eno, Erik Satie, and traces his influences through the birth of Muzak, the development of mood-altering music as home appliance, and an interesting discussion of fairly recently developments in the field.

Nick says

This book definitely addresses a gap in musicology.

Positive: The author understands the forms involved. He gets industry participants to talk. He gets behind the song selection, arrangement, delivery, performance, and production techniques and scientific rationale of mood/elevator/Muzak music. Excellent discography.

Negative: Book could use better editing. A chapter on the Nineties-centered mood music revival would have been nice, although one can guess the author's take on this sort of Muzak for hipsters by reading between the lines.
