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Music in the Age of Anxiety: American Music in the Fifties (Music in American Life)

James E. Wierzbicki

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Derided for its conformity and consumerism, 1950s America paid a price in anxiety. Prosperity existed under the shadow of a mushroom cloud. Optimism wore a Bucky Beaver smile that masked worry over threats at home and abroad. But even dread could not quell the revolutionary changes taking place in virtually every form of mainstream music.

Music historian James Wierzbicki sheds light on how the Fifties' pervasive moods affected its sounds. Moving across genres established--pop, country, opera--and transfigured--experimental, rock, jazz--Wierzbicki delves into the social dynamics that caused forms to emerge or recede, thrive or fade away. Red scares and white flight, sexual politics and racial tensions, technological progress and demographic upheaval--the influence of each rooted the music of this volatile period to its specific place and time. Yet Wierzbicki also reveals the host of underlying connections linking that most apprehensive of times to our own uneasy present.

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