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Ludwig van Beethoven; Wolfgang Mozart

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A quite outstanding musical duo jointly published by Moonlight and the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, each book has its own accompanying audio CD introducing the reader to the music of two great composers. Voake's line and wash artwork beautifully evokes the eighteenth-century world of Vienna and Bonn, while photographs include contemporary portraits of composers, their studios and scores, as well as modern-day orchestras and performers.

The books divide into two parts: the first concentrating on the childhood and early life of Mozart and Beethoven, and including practical activities; the second part focusing more on the music itself. Each book and CD is so successfully integrated that, although each can stand alone, together they provide an inspired introduction to the composer and his music. The narrator's text on the CD is that of the book itself, and introduces each musical excerpt. These display an ambitious selection - ranging from Mozart's 'A Little Night Music' and 'Ah vous dirai-je, Maman', with its nursery rhyme echoes, to excerpts from 'The Magic Flute', the 'Coronation' Mass and the Requiem. The examples on Beethoven's disc are similarly wide-ranging, beginning with the Seventh Symphony, and including examples of chamber music (the Septet), a piano sonata, the Horn Sonata and ending with the Finale from 'Fidelio'. Really clear descriptions of different types of musical forms, for example what distinguishes a work for a chamber ensemble from a concerto or a symphony, are all accompanied by appropriate musical examples. The individual excerpts are relatively short, but certainly long enough to give a flavour of each piece and to whet the appetite, with full details given of the recordings, artists and performers.

These little books, originally created by French publisher Gallimard, are deceptively simple and could be enjoyed by a wide age range. Given the woeful lack of support for music teaching in schools, this excellent series should be a mandatory purchase for any primary school library or music room.

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/ludwig-van-beethoven>
- [2] <http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/wolfgang-mozart>
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