



Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodson; 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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