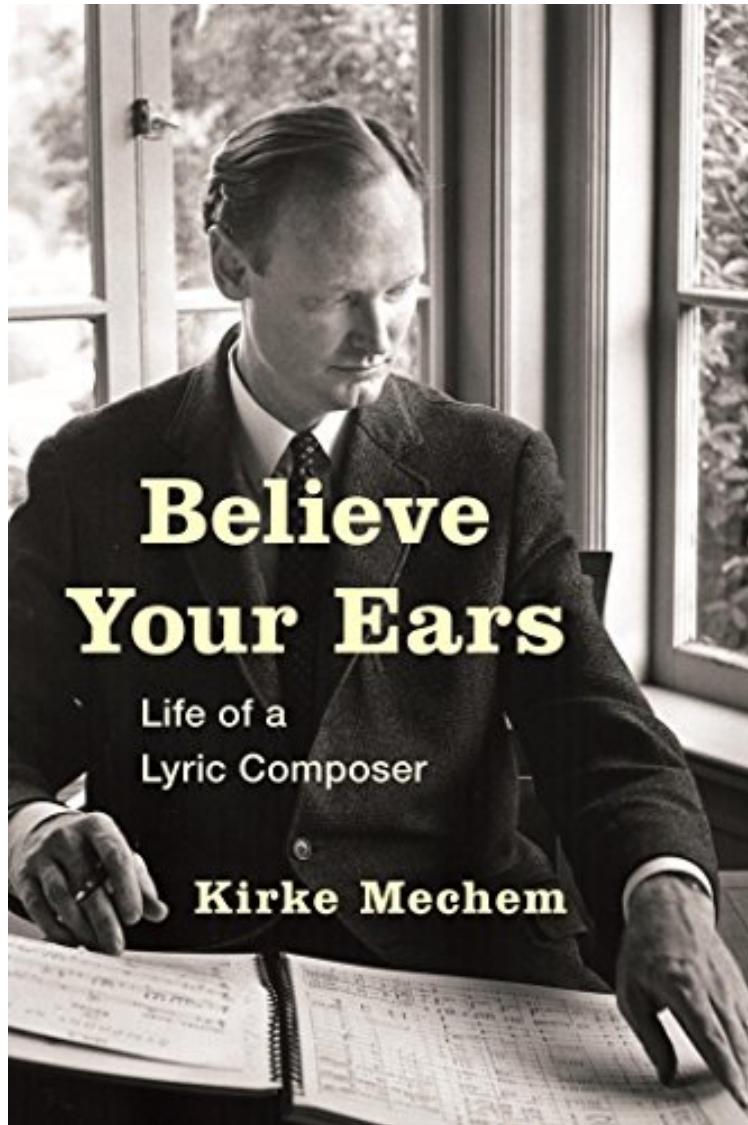


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## **Believe Your Ears: Life of a Lyric Composer**

*Kirke Mechem*  
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**Kirke Mechem : Believe Your Ears: Life of a Lyric Composer** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Believe Your Ears: Life of a Lyric Composer:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An amazing and telling story of lifeBy LINDSEY PHILPOTTAn amazing and telling story of life, well-lived! I am biased, of course, because I got to meet this wonderful composer, sang one of his works with a superb 100+ chorale - and then he also signed my copy!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Check it outBy Bill LokkeSuperb insights into the composing process; personal but persuasive, written in a delightfully engaging style.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy corrickbrownlearned a

lot of things ....thanks.

Believe Your Ears is the memoir of composer Kirke Mechem, whose unorthodox path to music provides a fascinating narrative. He wrote songs and played music by ear as a newspaper reporter, a touring tennis player, and a Stanford creative-writing major before studying composition and conducting at Harvard. He describes his residencies in San Francisco, Vienna, London, and Russia, and gives detailed attention to his choral music, operas, and symphonies. He writes that "the twentieth century gave us much brilliant music"; but shows how atonality came to dominate the post-war period. His lyric style belongs to no particular "school"; avoiding the trends, "isms", experiments, fads, and lunacies of the period. He encourages younger composers who are trying to bring back beauty, passion, and humor; even entertainment; to classical music. He asks music lovers to believe their own ears, not the lectures of "experts". Believe Your Ears is addressed to all who love classical music. Along the way, readers will meet Dimitri Shostakovich, Wallace Stegner, Billie Jean King, the Grateful Dead, Richard Rodgers, Benjamin Britten, Bill Tilden, and Aaron Copland; a who's who in Mechem's storied career.

Kirke Mechem's intriguing memoir is set within the context of contemporary music development. Mechem tells not only his own fascinating story but also that of art music in general. Reading the book is like listening to Mr. Mechem talk; its conversational tone is easy to digest, and yet the content is detailed and stimulating. Having performed many of Kirke Mechem's choral works, some with him present for rehearsals, I was eager to learn even more about him and his music. Written with insight and wit, the book is a must-read for choral and opera enthusiasts, for aspiring composers, and for all fans of this remarkable and prolific composer. (Hilary Apfelstadt, director of Choral Activities, University of Toronto, former president, ACDA) For decades, Kirke Mechem's beautiful, important work has been a cornerstone in the musical experience and education of countless young singers, conductors, and composers, myself included. Having been always filled with admiration for his inventive, stylish, fun, and dramatic work, I was delighted to read about the man behind the music in this heartfelt, engaging, personal, and generous book. Mechem's journey as an American composer is filled with adventure and possibility. So is his music, which has touched and inspired performers and audiences around the world. (Jake Heggie, composer of the operas "Dead Man Walking" and "Moby Dick.") Fascinating reading, especially to us Americans. I couldn't put it down. Mr. Mechem offers such a clear look into the profound travails an American composer must face; self-discipline, deep cultural education, craftsmanship, the peculiar complexities of our American cultural politics and above all the incredible courage required to swim against the currents of popular trends. (Kent Nagano, directeur Musical Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal; general music director of the Hamburg State Opera and chief conductor of the Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra) Woven through this memoir is a revealing commentary that contextualizes the development of styles and trends in the world of contemporary classical music. Honest, colorful, musically acute, and most of all, wonderfully engaging; just like Kirke's music! (Stephen M. Sano, director of Choral Studies, Stanford University) Believe Your Ears by Kirke Mechem is one of the most inspiring books I've ever read. A sensitive, gracefully-worded, and remarkably entertaining journey that is both an engrossing biography and a detailed examination of his work. This book should be read by everyone interested in music and great writing. (Bill Theisen, director of Opera, University of Iowa School of Music) A refreshing, entertaining and affirming book. . . I have dog-eared many pages to share with my general ed students as well as music majors. I highly recommend this book to students and colleagues alike. (Lou De La Rosa, president, California Chapter American Choral Directors Association) In this engaging new memoir, [Mechem] traces his development from boyhood . . . to his current status as the 'dean of American choral music.' . . . [Mechem's] a wonderful writer, one who encourages young composers to restore beauty to their work and readers to reject trends and believe their own ears. -- San Jose Mercury News Kirke Mechem, American composer of song, symphony, choral works and opera, emerges as a compelling memoirist in his new book, Believe Your Ears: Life of a Lyric Composer. -- National Opera Association Newsletter An entertaining and informative memoir; it doesn't speak to the reader like an academic tome. . . . He keeps the story light with interesting anecdotes and side stories. . . . Very valuable is the final chapter "Coda," where he goes into great detail about tonality and atonality in the 20th century and explains both systems for the average reader. His is a life well-lived, we learn-- one which crossed paths with many of the great minds and talents of the last 100 years. These include Benjamin Britten, Billy Jean King and Randall Thompson, to name a few. . . . [A] well-written page-turner that will appeal to everyone, but especially to the opera educator who wants to know a little more about his opera compositional process; the choral conductor looking to learn about Mechem's choral works, and the composer wanting to gain some practical knowledge. (The Opera Journal) The distinguished composer of more than 250 works, including classic choral works and the well-received opera *Tartuffe*, as well as *John Brown* and *The Rivals*, Kirke Mechem tells a story that combines the autobiography of a boy from Kansas who stumbles into an exceptional career in music with a fascinating first-person history of classical music in the 20th century. As a musician, teacher, observer -- and a great tennis player to boot -- Mechem embodies the persistence and kindness for which he has long been held in high regard. (Opera America) Forgive composer Mechem's lack of affection for atonality. Then forge into this impassioned memoir and

follow an improbable path that led to his catalogue of over 250 works. His three-act *Tartuffe* is a signature piece, but 'genre-defying' is a more accurate term to describe his work than are 'choral' or 'opera'...the payoff is a lively read and the author is clearly (and charmingly) devoted to his muse. (San Francisco Classical Voice) For those unfamiliar with Mechem, *Believe Your Ears* is a superb introduction to the composer and his work. The author has an engaging 'voice' and is honest in both his successes and his missteps.... The narrative draws the reader in and makes a compelling argument in favor the relevance of traditional tonality. However, the strength of this [book] is not its ability to convince opponents.... Its value lies in its ability to stimulate honest discussion about the state of classical composition and its direction moving forward. (Pan Pipes (Journal of Sigma Alpha Iota) . . . The central theme of the book is the trajectory of classical music in the second half of the twentieth century, and the conflict between tonality and atonality. [Mechem's] lyric style belongs to no particular "school" except the tradition of beauty found in great art. . . . Of special interest will be the three appendices, which include "The Text Trap," a reprint of a Choral Journal article from November 2005, and most especially the Coda. . . . *Believe Your Ears* is highly commended to conductors, opera lovers, and composers for the generous insight and practical approaches Kirke Mechem offers, not only into his own works, but especially the world of music composition in the twentieth century. About the Author Kirke Mechem is the composer of some 250 published titles, most notably four operas and many orchestral and vocal works that have graced the stages of opera houses and symphony halls throughout the world. He is commonly referred to as the "dean of American choral music." His opera *Tartuffe* has been performed more than 400 times in six countries. From *AudioFile* . . . entertaining and informative. [Mechem] keeps the story light with interesting anecdotes and side stories. . . . Very valuable is the final chapter "Coda," where he goes into great detail about tonality and atonality in the 20th century and explains both systems for the average reader. His is a life well-lived, well worth learning; one which crossed paths with many of the great minds and talents of the last 100 years. These include Benjamin Britten, Billy Jean King and Randall Thompson, to name a few. . . . a well-written page turner that will appeal to everyone, but especially to the opera educator who wants to know a little more about his opera compositional process; the choral conductor looking to learn about Mechem's choral works, and to the composer wanting to gain some practical knowledge. — The *Opera Journal*