

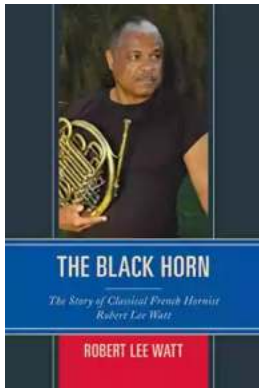
# **The Extraordinary Life and Legacy of Classical French Hornist Robert Lee Watt: A Pioneer in African American Cultural History**

When we think of trailblazers in the world of classical music, names like Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach often come to mind. However, there are numerous remarkable individuals who have made significant contributions to this genre, yet have remained relatively unknown to the general public. One such individual is Robert Lee Watt, a prominent African American French horn player who has not only shattered racial barriers but also left an indelible impact on the cultural landscape. In this article, we dive into the extraordinary life of Robert Lee Watt and explore his immense contributions to classical music.

## **Early Life and Musical Journey**

Robert Lee Watt was born on September 2, 1942, in Washington, D.C. His passion for music was ignited at a young age when he heard the majestic sound of the French horn for the first time. Determined to learn and master this instrument, Watt started playing the horn in junior high school and continued his musical journey at Howard University, one of the few historically black colleges with a strong music program at the time.

Watt's exceptional talent and dedication earned him a full scholarship to Juilliard School of Music in New York City, where he studied under the guidance of the renowned horn virtuoso, James Chambers. Despite facing numerous challenges as one of the few black students in a predominantly white institution, Watt's passion and resilience propelled him forward, allowing him to graduate with honors and become the first African American French hornist in a major symphony orchestra.



## The Black Horn: The Story of Classical French Hornist Robert Lee Watt (African American Cultural Theory and Heritage)

by Robert Lee Watt (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 15252 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 301 pages

X-Ray for textbooks : Enabled



### The New York Philharmonic Years

In 1964, Robert Lee Watt landed a groundbreaking position as the first African American musician in the renowned New York Philharmonic orchestra. This milestone not only marked a significant moment in Watt's career but also broke down racial barriers in the classical music world. For the next 37 years, he played an integral role in the New York Philharmonic, establishing himself as a highly respected and celebrated musician.

Watt's exceptional skills as a French hornist were widely recognized, and he became known for his flawless technique, expressive interpretations, and captivating stage presence. He performed under the baton of legendary conductors like Leonard Bernstein, Zubin Mehta, and Lorin Maazel, leaving audiences spellbound with his powerful and emotive musical renditions.

### Championing Diversity and Representation

Throughout his career, Robert Lee Watt not only focused on his own musical achievements but also dedicated his time and efforts to promoting diversity and equal representation in the classical music industry. He actively mentored aspiring musicians, particularly those from underrepresented communities, inspiring and guiding them on their own musical journeys.

Watt strongly believed that classical music should be accessible to all, regardless of their background or ethnicity. He actively worked towards breaking down barriers and challenging the systemic racism that often pervades the field. His efforts paved the way for countless aspiring musicians of color, shattering stereotypes and opening doors for a more inclusive and diverse future in classical music.

## **A Legacy That Transcends Boundaries**

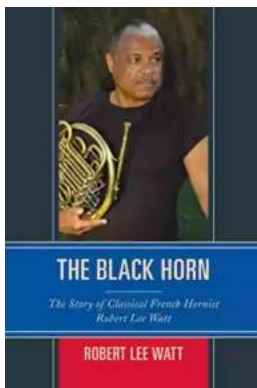
Robert Lee Watt's impact and influence extended far beyond the concert halls. His passion for music and dedication to his craft earned him numerous accolades and recognition throughout his career. He received the prestigious Sphinx Medal of Excellence for his outstanding contributions to classical music, was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Miami's School of Music, and was a recipient of the NAACP Image Award for his commitment to cultural diversity.

Even after retiring from the New York Philharmonic in 2004, Robert Lee Watt continued to inspire and educate aspiring musicians through masterclasses, workshops, and lectures. His autobiography, "The Black Horn," further immortalizes his remarkable journey, providing invaluable insights into the challenges and triumphs he faced as an African American in the classical music world.

Today, his legacy lives on in the countless musicians he mentored, the aspiring players he inspired, and the audiences he captivated with his exceptional musical prowess. Through his talent, determination, and unwavering commitment to diversity, Robert Lee Watt has forever emerged as an enduring icon in African American cultural history.

The story of Robert Lee Watt is a testament to the power of perseverance, talent, and determination. He defied social norms, broke down racial barriers, and left an indelible mark on the classical music world. His journey serves as an inspiration to aspiring musicians, reminding them that with passion and dedication, they too can create an impact and bring about positive change.

Robert Lee Watt's contributions to African American cultural history go far beyond his musical achievements. He opened doors for generations of musicians, challenging the status quo and championing diversity in an industry often plagued by racial inequality. He remains a true cultural icon, whose legacy continues to inspire and shape the future of classical music.



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The Black Horn: The Story of Classical French Hornist Robert Lee Watt tells the story of the first African American French Hornist hired by a major symphony in the United States. Today, few African Americans hold chairs in major American symphony orchestras, and Watt is the first in many years to write about this uniquely exhilarating—and at times painful—experience.

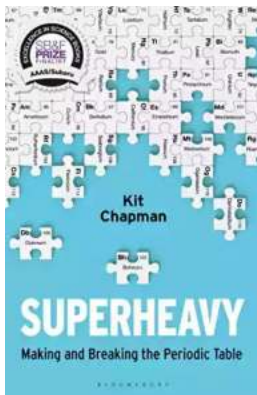
The Black Horn chronicles the upbringing of a young boy fascinated by the sound of the French horn. Watt walks readers through the many obstacles of the racial climate in the United States, both on and off stage, and his efforts to learn and eventually master an instrument little considered in the African American community. Even the author's own father, who played trumpet, sought to dissuade the young classical musician in the making. He faced opposition from within the community—where the instrument was deemed by Watt's father a “middle instrument suited only for thin-lipped white boys”—and from without. Watt also documented his struggles as a student at a nearly all-white major music conservatory, as well as his first job in a major symphony orchestra after the conservatory canceled his scholarship.

Watt subsequently chronicles his triumphs and travails as a musician when confronting the realities of race in America and the world of classical music. This book will surely interest any classical musician and student, particularly those of color, seeking to grasp the sometimes troubled history of being the only “black horn.”



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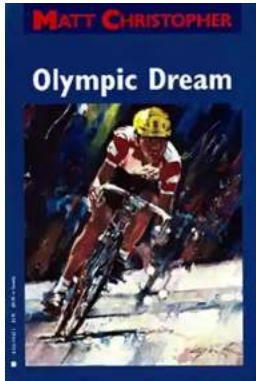
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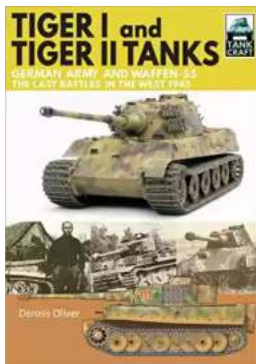
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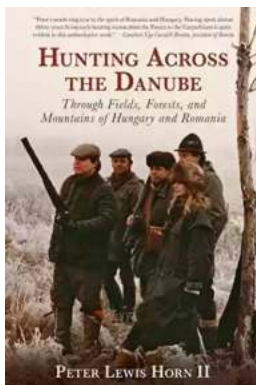
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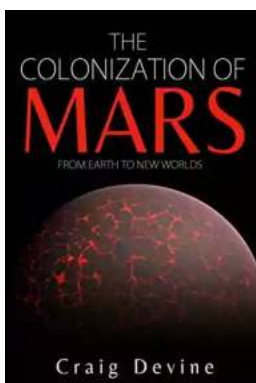
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