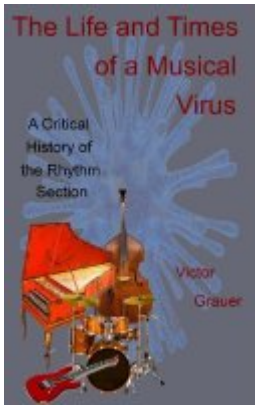


# V. Grauer, *The Life and Times of a Musical Virus : A Critical History of the Rhythm Section*

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V. Grauer, *The Life and Times of a Musical Virus : A Critical History of the Rhythm Section*, Amazon Digital Services, 2014, 155 p.

It's a necessary ingredient in just about all forms of popular music, from rhythm and blues to rock to disco, country, reggae, music for films, TV shows, commercials. We hear it so often we've almost ceased to hear it, even at its loudest, crudest, and most insistent. Familiarity breeds contempt. So it's all too easy to take the rhythm section for granted.

According to composer Victor Grauer, that would be a mistake. Grauer's relatively brief but pithy new e-book argues that this humble band-within-a-band, usually consisting of a bass instrument, rhythm keyboard or guitar, and (optional) percussion, has far greater significance in the history and development of music, both popular and classical, than anyone has ever assumed.

In one form or other, the rhythm section underlies just about every popular genre one can think of, and is consequently heard in literally every corner of our "globalized" world. It can certainly be characterized as a "musical virus," since it's so infectiously "infected" so much of the music we know and love, from just about any tradition, and in so profound a manner. So where did it come from ? And what does it mean ?

Tracking his subject to its roots, Grauer takes us back to Bach and the so-called "baroque" period, where a remarkably similar practice, known as basso continuo, also went viral, to dominate just about all musical performances of that era in every corner of the Western world. According to Grauer, the origins of the continuo lie in still earlier developments in the popular dance music of the towns and aristocratic courts of Europe, dating to the 16th century — and the musical revolution that followed, where, as he demonstrates, it was a key factor in the birth and development of the tonal system itself.

Especially meaningful is Grauer's concluding demonstration that this deceptively unobtrusive practice is part and parcel of the ideology underlying some of the most important political, social and economic issues in the world of today. Intimately associated with the spread of globalized "free market" capitalism, the hugely successful rock rhythm section has taken over the music industry, posing a challenge to traditional cultures and cultural diversity generally.

This book is not an academic tome, but a lively, informal guide intended for all music lovers, be they students, teachers, musicians, fans, or curious onlookers. Musicologists should find it thought provoking as well, though it contains little in the way of academic jargon, technical discussion or music notation. Laced with a liberal helping of musical examples, easily accessible via youtube links, The Life and Times of a Musical Virus will take the reader on a journey from the courts of Renaissance Europe to the jazz clubs, rock concerts, and viral Internet videos of today, in a search for musical origins and meanings.

**Victor Grauer**, based in Pittsburgh, PA, is a composer, musicologist, film maker, media artist, poet and dramatist. He holds a Bachelors Degree in Music Composition from Syracuse University, a Masters Degree in Ethnomusicology from Wesleyan University, and a Ph. D. in Music Composition from the State University of New York at Buffalo. For several years he worked as noted folklorist Alan Lomax's musicological assistant, on the Cantometrics Project, based at Columbia University. His creative work has been presented at leading arts institutions