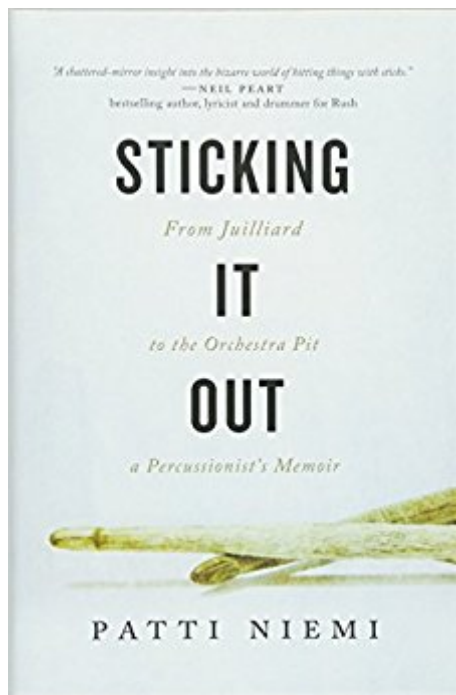




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# Sticking It Out: From Juilliard To The Orchestra Pit, A Percussionist's Memoir



## Synopsis

A vivid look inside the elite and cutthroat classical music world When Patti Niemi was 10 years old, all the children in her school music class lined up to choose their instruments. Boy after boy chose drums, and girl after girl chose flute — that is, until it was Patti's turn. From that point onward, Niemi devoted her life to mastering the percussive arts. Cymbals, snare drum, marimba, timpani, chimes: she practised them all, and in 1983, she entered Juilliard, the most prestigious music conservatory in the world. Set against the backdrop of a rapidly changing New York City in the 1980s, *Sticking It Out* recounts Niemi's years mastering her craft and struggling to make it in a cutthroat race to a coveted job in an orchestra. Along the way, she has to compete with friends, and face her own crippling anxiety and reliance on prescription medication, while confronting the delicate, and sometimes perilous, balance of power between teachers and their students. Niemi's memoir brings us inside a world that most of us never get to see: gruelling practise schedules, intimate musical relationships, and long moments at the back of an orchestra spent sweating and counting before a big cymbal crash.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's an eye-opening tale of demanding teachers, gruelling practice schedules, severe performance anxiety and bias against girl drummers — a funny, poignant first-person account of the fierce commitment it takes to succeed in classical music. — *San Jose Mercury*; One of the funniest-ever classical-music books

. . . and certainly among the best written. Philadelphia Inquirer; A shattered-mirror insight into the bizarre world of hitting things with sticks. Neil Peart, bestselling author, lyricist and drummer for Rush; By turns reflective and dramatic, poignant and hilarious, Sticking It Out offers an irresistible portrait of the artist as a young percussionist. In deft and swiftly drawn narrative strokes, Patti Niemi charts the formation of a career in music; the endless hours in the practice room, the stomach-churning anxiety of auditions, the blend of competitiveness and camaraderie that shapes relations among up-and-coming musicians; and she does it with wit and personality to burn. She is as adept at writing as she is at standing in a corner and banging on things. Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle; Sharp like a flam, resonant like the end of a roll, Sticking It Out is everything you want a music memoir to be . . . funny, honest, and memorable. Kevin Smokler, author of Practical Classics: 50 Reasons to Reread 50 Books You Haven't Touched Since High School; Patti Niemi's oft-hilarious memoir shatters images of percussionists as fearless aggressors who drive and pound their way through life. Instead, it presents the image of an emerging artist pounded by fear and insecurity. As she tells her tale with disarming candor, Niemi opens the door on the mental and artistic challenges facing all aspiring classical musicians in an era of shrinking avenues for professional practice. After she takes us through the wringer, as it were, she enables us to breathe a huge sigh of relief, if not make a joyful racket, as she lands her gig with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra. Brava! Jason Victor Serinus, journalist, Opera News, San Francisco Classical Voice

Patti Niemi has played percussion in the San Francisco Opera Orchestra since 1992. She graduated from the Eastman School of Music Preparatory Department in 1983 and earned a BM from the Juilliard School in 1987. Niemi was a member of the New World Symphony in Miami from 1988 to 1992.

As a classical music enthusiast for most of my life, I confess I never gave much thought to what a musician endures to earn a seat in a preeminent orchestra. After reading Patti Niemi's "confessional," I will be thinking about those precarious and rigorous steps every time I take my seat for a concert in Eastman Theatre! Niemi not only takes us behind the scenes in the life of an aspiring musician, she gets us to feel her struggles and doubts. Sticking It Out is insightful and entertaining, a double-barreled victory. I can't wait to read more from this author!

This is necessary reading for anyone interested in how classical musicians get themselves established professionally, in this case, as an orchestral percussionist. The author takes on some touchy subjects like dependence on anxiety-controlling medication and her uninformed response to inappropriate romantic attention from a teacher. At times it reads like a whiny criticism of her conservatory's shortcomings, with the obligatory side dish of why-I-hate-and-love NYC. The writing is clear and admirably free of musician-speak, impeccably edited. A friend described this as a minus-the-sluttiness alternative to "Mozart in the Jungle," the basis for the TV show of the same name and a book with equal numbers of laudatory and scathing reviews. Niemi's approach is partly confessional but admirably un-lurid, and it benefits from the wisdom of hindsight, notably in her attitude towards competition for jobs that seem more prestigious.

Ms. Neimi wins this job as well. An accurate description of the business. Orchestra jobs are hard to win and hard to keep. I read this book in one sitting, it is good idea to swallow this pill whole, and take seriously her tale. Great book.

I pre-ordered this as soon as I could. I'm currently a student going through music school, trying to make my way, and the premise of this book really caught my eye. It's always cool, reading about another person's experiences that can mirror your own current state. Patti writes with a biting sense of humor, but always completely steeped in realism. She writes in a way that borderlines the type of speech that would be expected around a big dinner table. She doesn't really hold back on the troubles that plagued her in Juilliard, nor the awesome successes that she experienced through those years. If you're a music student, or any student, rather, and are going through some rough times, you might wanna pick this book up and crack it open. In some ways, her experiences may mirror yours exactly. In others, they might be much worse than what you're going through. All in all, it's a great read, and for all the negativity and sadness that occurs in that story, there's also a great touch of humor and positivity to keep you turning the pages. Go get it!

Sticking It Out is a remarkable and rare kind of book: a musician's memoir without a trace of either self-aggrandizement or self-pity. Instead, Ms. Niemi offers sharp and refreshingly candid recollections of her long arc from student to professional. Her evocation of Juilliard as an industrial factory of brutal self-actualization is somewhat chilling, and anyone who has put in the isolated hours needed to pursue an orchestral career will recognize themselves in these pages. The occasionally ribald humor is spot-on for the world she's showing us, but there isn't a trace of snark,

and no scores to be settled--- just bracing generosity, delivered in a concise, crisp style that leaves room around the edges for a reader to see herself in the story as well. A singular achievement.

This book is very well written and takes the reader on a fascinating journey of a woman in the male dominated world of orchestral percussion. It enlightens the reader to the very complex and difficult process of landing a job in the highly competitive world of professional orchestras while entertaining with humor, insight and wisdom. This is a great read!

What a testament given by Patti whom I once played with back in high school. I remember her intensity and determination back then, and was captured superbly in her story for how her musical ambitions unfolded in life. Gave me a glimpse for how the experience might have been for me if I chose that career path, and I thank Patti, battle scars and all, for giving me a chance to live the musical life vicariously through her story. No way could I have lasted like she did! True grit!

Patti Niemi hits the nail on the head in characterizing the back-breaking anxiety that comes with preparing for professional auditions as an orchestral musician. She paints a sometimes grim, sometimes warm portrait of a young musician and the militaristic attitudes and rituals that come with it. As a young musician, it is so great to read on paper exactly what I have been going through for the past few years.

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