

# The Queen's Musician

by Martha Jean Johnson



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Fiction - Historical - Personage

344 Pages

Reviewed on 10/31/2024

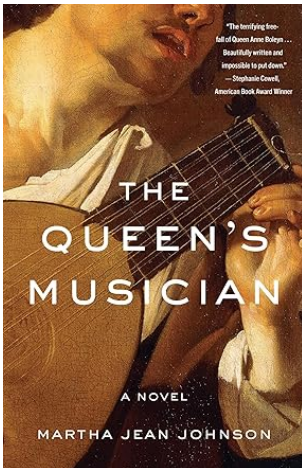
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## Book Review

**Reviewed by Jamie Michele for Readers' Favorite**

The Queen's Musician by Martha Jean Johnson follows Mark Smeaton and Madge Shelton in King Henry VIII's court during Anne Boleyn's rise and subsequent downfall. Mark receives a lute from Cardinal Wolsey and gains prominence as a royal musician, while Madge prepares for her cousin Anne's arrival. Madge juggles her romantic feelings for Mark against the pressure to marry Sir Henry Norris. Anne's failure to produce a male heir leads to suspicion and inevitable betrayal. Mark is coerced by Thomas Cromwell into falsely confessing to treason involving Anne, while Madge, torn between her loyalty to Mark and court expectations, seeks to support him during his imprisonment. Their joint fates unfold in one of the most savage moments in history, and the impending consequences of the queen's declining favor.

Martha Jean Johnson does well in recreating a fictional account of Smeaton's story in The Queen's Musician, breathing fresh life into the old tumultuous court of King Henry VIII. Johnson's character development shines as she reaches into the vulnerability of womanhood through Madge, a conduit in this case for her cousin, and Mark's dead-man-walking lead into the dangerous machinations of Thomas Cromwell. I should clarify that I am a sharp critic of Tudor literature, so much so that I had an engagement party at Hampton Court and was married at Hever Castle. Johnson pays attention to historical detail without allowing it to turn encyclopedic, and even though we know how it all ends, the author makes us want to carry on reading regardless. Overall, this is a heartfelt and thoughtful tale of the fragility of love. Very highly recommended.



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### Author Biography



Martha Jean Johnson is a writer of fiction and non-fiction and the author of four books on politics and public opinion. *The Queen's Musician* is her debut novel. She also reviews trends in historical fiction and discusses her own love of reading and writing in her biweekly blog, *Historical Magic*.

During a long public policy career, she analyzed and reported on American public thinking, working with noted social analyst and public opinion pioneer, Daniel Yankelovich. She has published articles in *USA Today* and *The Huffington Post* and appeared on CNN, MSNBC, and PBS. She is the author of a series of nonfiction paperbacks on major political issues, co-authored with Scott Bittle and published by HarperCollins.

Now based in Jersey City, NJ, she holds degrees from Mount Holyoke College, Brown University, and Simmons College.