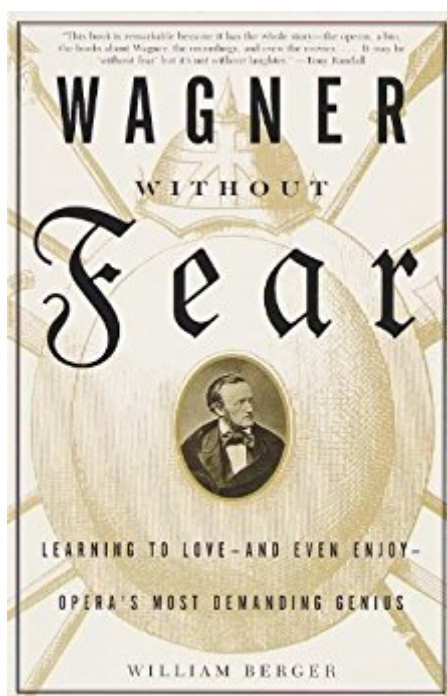


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Wagner Without Fear: Learning To Love--and Even Enjoy--Opera's Most Demanding Genius



Synopsis

Do you cringe when your opera-loving friends start raving about the latest production of Tristan? Do you feel faint just thinking about the six-hour performance of Parsifal you were given tickets to? Does your mate accuse you of having a Tannhäuser complex? If you're baffled by the behavior of Wagner worshipers, if you've longed to fathom the mysteries of Wagner's ever-increasing popularity, or if you just want to better understand and enjoy the performances you're attending, you'll find this delightful book indispensable. William Berger is the most helpful guide one could hope to find for navigating the strange and beautiful world of the most controversial artist who ever lived. He tells you all you need to know to become a true Wagnerite--from story lines to historical background; from when to visit the rest room to how to sound smart during intermission; from the Jewish legend that possibly inspired Lohengrin to the tragic death of the first Tristan. Funny, informative, and always a pleasure to read, *Wagner Without Fear* proves that the art of Wagner can be accessible to everyone. Includes:- The strange life of Richard Wagner--German patriot (and exile), friend (and enemy) of Liszt and Nietzsche- Essential opera lore and "lobby talk"- A scene-by-scene analysis of each opera- What to listen for to get the most from the music- Recommended recordings, films, and sound tracks

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Customer Reviews

I'm just getting into Wagner's music having seen The Ring performed twice by the Seattle Opera and a couple of other Wagner Operas. I found this book in the Seattle Opera store, took a look at it and decided to buy it to read it on my Kindle while I was enjoying this years cycle of The Ring. I was not disappointed. I suppose that some individuals take offense to sections that describe when to eat and go to the bathroom and highlight some of the challenging spots to be prepared for when attending a Wagner Opera. But this book wasn't written for the Wagner experts. It was written for the novices and the individuals who want to explore Wagner's Operas in more detail but are, quite frankly, concerned. That is why the book is called "Wagner Without Fear". It helps the novice to get prepared for and enjoy a Wagner Opera. And the book does an excellent job of preparing the newbie to Wagner Operas. This must be a reason why the Seattle Opera has copies of it for sale because that organization does an excellent job of performing Wagner's Ring. And personally, I found the book quite helpful. In November, I'm seeing Parsifal and I'm a little leery but the book provides a good guide for preparation and thanks to the book, I will enjoy that opera, I'm sure. I highly recommend this book for anyone who is interested in Wagner's Operas but has some concerns.

American humorist Mark Twain wryly observed, "Wagner's operas are not as bad as they sound!" With wit, warmth, expertise and instructions on rest room breaks this book will entertain you! Berger is a musician and linguist who is able to explain the byzantinian plots of Wagnerian opera with simplicity, conciseness and humor. As an opera fan with a general knowledge of Wagner I found the book useful. Useful because: 1. He has a good plot synopsis of each major Wagner opera 2. He gives a brief but adequate sketch of the life of the titanic German anti-semitic genius. 3. Berger includes the best books, CD's and videos for the neophyte as well as the experienced fan of a titanic but flawed genius. Relish Berger's witty style as you learn more about a great artist. Highly recommended.

By all accounts Richard Wagner was an antisemitic bigot who practiced the art of adultery, seduction and other nefarious activities in nineteenth century Europe. He was also a musical genius who revolutionized the staid world of opera. William Berger gives the reader a guide written in a popular, witty yet erudite style which enchants as it entertains. Berger provides us with plot summaries of the

major Wagner operas while adding chapters dealing with everything from a bibliography of valuable books on Wagner; a chapter on Wagner on CD's and even when to plan for bathroom breaks during interminable evenings of Wagner watching in the theatre! I found his description of the ambience at Bayreuth to be a fascinating glimpse of the mecca for all true Wagnerites making the pilgrimage to the shrine of the Master. This book will be a welcome addition to newcomers to the art of Wagner as well as seasoned operagoers. I will keep this book on my shelf for easy access while whiling away Saturday afternoons tuned in to the Met or enjoying an evening of Tristan and Isolde on my Bose radio. Berger is readable and opinionated. This book comes highly recommended by this reviewer.

I've gone to the opera all my life, and this year I'm finally getting around to watching a Ring Cycle. The literature on Wagner is so broad, where to start? I got this book after hearing Will Berger on the RadioLab episode "The Ring and I," and it's better than I expected. The first 60 pages are a biography of what a...umm..."character" Wagner was. Each chapter that follows is a synopsis and analysis of each opera. The writing style is very down-to-earth and even hilarious at times. If you're obsessed with the man, this book will likely fall short and you'll find something to complain about. But if you're looking to learn more about his operas and understand just what it is you're seeing and listening to, this book is your first stop. Highly recommended.

I was never really much of a Wagner fan, but this book really helped me understand and appreciate Wagner's music dramas. The biographical material is very helpful (Wagner was a genius but not a very nice guy). The plot summaries of his operas are very useful. Berger has a wry sense of humor, and understands that Wagner needs to be taken with a bit of tongue in cheek. It's kind of like Anna Russell, only longer. I find myself referring to this book frequently.

For those new to the world of Richard Wagner, this book provides a delightful overview. Starting with an introduction to the Wagner phenomenon (in which no one is ambivalent...you either love Wagner or hate him), proceeding through a biographical sketch, then on to studies of the major operas, CD and book recommendations, and much more, this book will serve as an excellent springboard to deeper studies. I would have liked to have seen more discussion of leitmotiv, simply because it is so integral to understanding Wagner, but that information is certainly available in more detail elsewhere...particularly on the Cooke CD. Perhaps the best thing about this book is that it avoids the snobbery that is so often found in Wagner discussions...it even serves as a guide to understanding the different types of Wagner fans and their diverse (to put it mildly) opinions. This

book reveals that Richard Wagner was one of the world's great geniuses, despite his many bizarre and distasteful characteristics...but then again, perhaps it merely confirms the old adage that the line between genius and insanity is precariously thin. This book is highly recommended.

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