

Richard Wagner Ring Cycle, Leipzig | Small Group Tours Germany

Reading List

Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art

by M. Owen Lee

How is it possible for a seriously flawed human being to produce art that is good, true, and beautiful? Why is the art of Richard Wagner, a very imperfect man, important and even indispensable to us?

In this volume, Father Owen Lee ventures an answer to those questions by way of a figure in Sophocles – the hero Philoctetes. Gifted by his god with a bow that would always shoot true to the mark and indispensable to his fellow Greeks, he was marked by the same god with an odious wound that made him hateful and hated. Sophocles' powerful insight is that those blessed by the gods and indispensable to men are visited as well with great vulnerability and suffering.

Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art traces some of Wagner's extraordinary influence for good and ill on a century of art and politics – on Eliot and Proust as well as on Adolf Hitler – and discusses in detail Wagner's Tannhäuser, the work in which the composer first dramatised the Faustian struggle of a creative artist in whom 'two souls dwell.' In the course of this penetrating study, Father Lee argues that Wagner's ambivalent art is indispensable to us, life-enhancing and ultimately healing.

Richard Wagner: A Life in Music

by Martin Geck

Best known for the challenging four-opera cycle The Ring of the Nibelung, Richard Wagner (1813–83) was a conductor, librettist, theater director, and essayist, in addition to being the composer of some of the most enduring operatic works in history, such as The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser, and Tristan and Isolde. Though his influence on the development of European music is indisputable, Wagner was also quite outspoken on the politics and culture of his time. His ideas traveled beyond musical circles into philosophy, literature, theater staging, and the visual arts. To befit such a dynamic figure, acclaimed biographer Martin Geck offers here a Wagner biography unlike any other, one that strikes a unique balance between the technical musical aspects of Wagner's compositions and his overarching understanding of aesthetics.

Wagner has always inspired passionate admirers as well as numerous detractors, with the result that he has achieved a mythical stature nearly equal to that of the Valkyries and Viking heroes he popularized. There are few, if any, scholars today who know more about Wagner and his legacy than Geck, who builds upon his extensive research and considerable knowledge as one of the editors of the Complete Works to offer a distinctive appraisal of the composer and the operas. Using a wide range of sources, from contemporary scholars to the composer's own words, Geck explores key ideas in Wagner's life and works, while always keeping the music in the foreground. Geck discusses not only all the major operas, but also several unfinished operas and even the composer's early attempts at quasi-Shakespearean drama.

Richard Wagner: A Life in Music is a landmark study of one of music's most important figures, offering something new to opera enthusiasts, Wagnerians, and anti-Wagnerians alike.

The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy

by Bryan Magee

Richard Wagner's devotees have ranged from the subtlest minds (Proust) to the most brutal (Hitler). The enduring fascination with his works arises not only from his singular fusion of musical innovation and theatrical daring, but also from his largely overlooked engagement with the boldest investigations of modern philosophy. In this radically clarifying book, Bryan Magee traces Wagner's intellectual quests, from his youthful embrace of revolutionary socialism to the near-Buddhist resignation of his final years. Magee shows how abstract thought can permeate music and stimulate creations of great power and beauty. And he unflinchingly confronts the Wagner whose paranoia, egocentricity, and anti-Semitism are as repugnant as his achievements are glorious.

At once a biography of the composer, an overview of his times, and an exploration of the intellectual and technical aspects of music, Magee's lucid study offers the best explanation of W. H. Auden's judgment that Wagner, for all his notoriety, was "perhaps the greatest genius that ever lived."

Wagner

by Michael Tanner

While no one would dispute Wagner's ranking among the most significant composers in the history of Western music, his works have been more fiercely attacked than those of any other composer. Alleged to be an unscrupulous womanizer and megalomaniac, undeniably a racist, Wagner's personal qualities and attitudes have often provoked, and continue to provoke, intense hostility that has translated into a mistrust and abhorrence of his music.

In this emphatic, lucid book, Michael Tanner discusses why people feel so passionately about Wagner, for or against, in a way that they do not about other artists who had personal traits no less lamentable than those he is thought to have possessed. Tanner lays out the various arguments made by Wagner's detractors and admirers, and challenges most of them. The author's fascination for the relationships among music, text, and plot generates an illuminating discussion of the operas, in which he persuades us to see many of Wagner's best-known works anew--The Ring Cycle, Tristan und Isolde, Parsifal. He refrains from lengthy and detailed musical examination, giving instead passionate and unconventional analyses that are accessible to all lovers of music, be they listeners or performers.

In this fiery reassessment of one of the greatest composers in the history of opera, Tanner presents one of the most intelligent and controversial portraits of Wagner to emerge for many years.

The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung

by Roger Scruton

Richard Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung is one of the greatest works of art created in modern times, and has fascinated both critics and devotees for over a century and a half. No recent study has examined the meaning of Wagner's masterpiece with the attention to detail and intellectual power that Roger Scruton brings to it in this inspiring account. The Ring of Truth is an exploration of the drama, music, symbolism and philosophy of the Ring from a writer whose knowledge and understanding of the Western musical tradition are the equal of his capacities as a philosopher. Scruton shows how, through musical connections and brilliant dramatic strokes, Wagner is able to express truths about the human condition which few other creative artists have been able to convey so convincingly. For Wagner, writes Scruton, the task of art is to 'show us freedom in its immediate, contingent, human form, reminding us of what it means to us. Even if we live in a world from which gods and heroes have disappeared we can, by imagining them, dramatize the deep truths of our condition and renew our faith in what we are.' Love, death, sacrifice and the liberation that we win through sacrifice - these are the great themes of the Ring, as they are of this book. Scruton's passionate and moving interpretation allows us to understand more fully than ever how Wagner conveys his ideas about who we are, and why the Ring continues to be such a hypnotically absorbing work.

My Life with Wagner: Fairies, Rings, and Redemption: Exploring Opera's Most Enigmatic Composer

by Christian Thielemann

Over a distinguished career conducting some of the world's finest orchestras, Christian Thielemann has earned a reputation as the leading modern interpreter of Richard Wagner.

My Life with Wagner chronicles his ardent personal and professional engagement with the great composer, whose work has shaped his thinking and feeling from early childhood. Thielemann retraces his journey around the world with Wagner—from Berlin to Bayreuth via Venice, Hamburg, and Chicago—and combines his analysis with revealing insights drawn from his many years of experience as a Wagner conductor.

Thielemann discusses each of Wagner's operas in turn, and his appraisal is illuminated by a deep affinity for the music, an intimate knowledge of the scores, and the inside perspective of a world-class practitioner. And yet for all the adulation Wagner's art inspires, Thielemann does not shy away from unpalatable truths about the man himself, explaining why today Wagner is venerated and reviled in equal measure. My Life with Wagner is a richly rewarding read for admirers of a composer who continues to fascinate long after his death.
