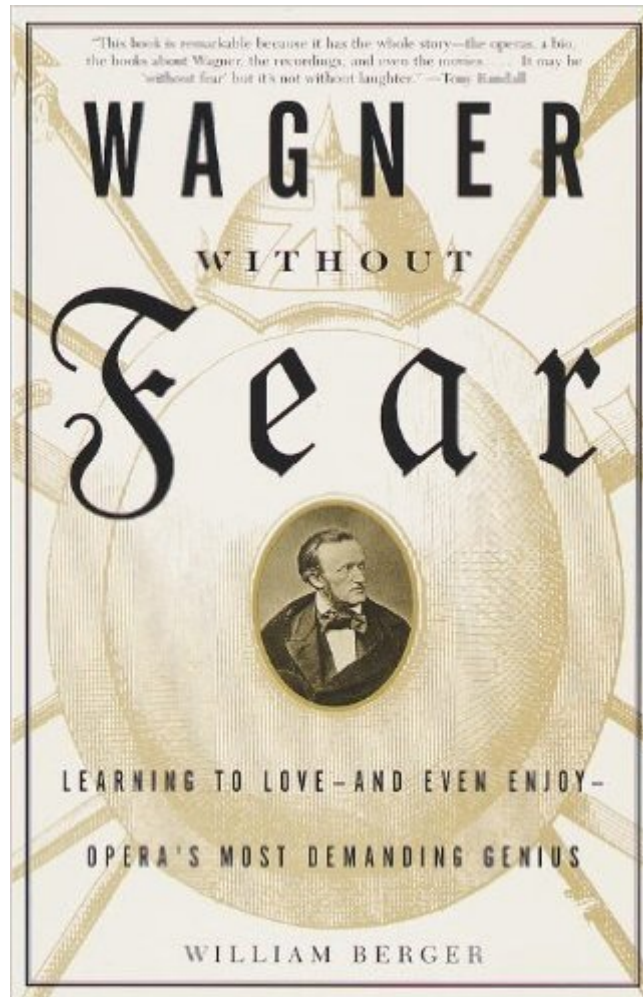


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Wagner Without Fear: Learning To Love--and Even Enjoy--Opera's Most Demanding Genius



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

It was with some reluctance and trepidation that I approached William Berger's book, "Wagner without Fear." From the title alone, I erroneously thought that this was another of the poorly written

books flooding the market that reduce Wagner to generalities, and which ill-serve both newcomers to Wagner's music and seasoned Wagner enthusiasts, like me, who collect multiple recordings of his music and attend every possible performance of the operas. The book, however, is excellent; in fact, I found it one of the most useful and well-written books on Wagner that one could buy. Mr. Berger writes superlative pages on what opera is, and on the background of Wagner's life, with perceptive pages on the composer's time in Munich and Bayreuth. He writes a brilliant and witty summary - the best I have read - on each of the mature operas from "Der fliegende Holländer" to "Parsifal" Mr. Berger provides helpful pronunciation tips, backgrounds and analyses of characters, discussion of motifs, and comments, in italics, after each section of the summary. The book concludes with "Wagner Issues," a particularly useful discussion of Wagner's anti-Semitism, his bizarre beliefs, the Nazi abuse of his music, and various other material that is accurate and fascinating. Having been a pilgrim to Bayreuth, I was interested in what he had to say about the Wagnerian shrine and how to survive in the town during the annual Festspiele. Wagnerians constantly battle about the "best" CD performances of the operas, but it is difficult to find fault with Mr. Berger's recommendations. Finally, he includes a commendable discussion on The Ring Cycle, including engaging information on the problems of staging it. There is a helpful annotated bibliography and a lucid glossary.

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