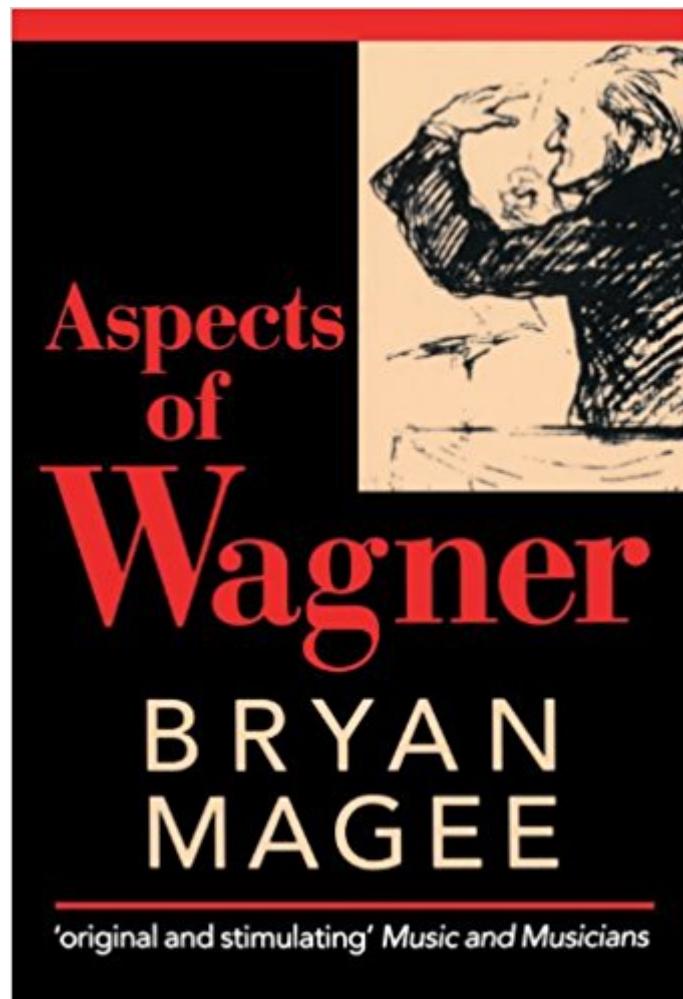


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# Aspects Of Wagner



## Synopsis

Many music lovers find Wagner's operas inexpressibly beautiful and richly satisfying, while others find them revolting, dangerous, self-indulgent, and immoral. The man who W.H. Auden once called "perhaps the greatest genius that ever lived" has inspired both greater adulation and greater loathing than any other composer. Bryan Magee presents a penetrating analysis of Wagner's work, concentrating on how his sensational and deeply erotic music uniquely expresses the repressed and highly charged contents of the psyche. He examines not only Wagner's music and detailed stage directions but also the prose works in which he formulated his ideas, as well as shedding new light on his anti-semitism and the way in which the Nazis twisted his theories to suit their own purposes. Outlining the astonishing range and depth of Wagner's influence on our culture, Magee reveals how profoundly he continues to shock and inspire musicians, poets, novelists, painters, philosophers, and politicians today.

## Book Information

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'you can do no better than rush out and buy Aspects of Wagner, one of the most stimulating books on music and opera it has been my privilege to read.'Classical Music`this set of essays makes an ideal introduction to Bayreuth's favourite son'Washington Post`the best short book on Richard Wagner in English'New Statesman and Society`One of the best, most illuminating, and shortest, discussions of Wagner's work ever written...one of the most stimulating books on music and opera it has been my privilege to read'Classical Music`This 20-year-old instant classic, pithy, thoughtful,

illuminating, now gains a new chapter on - oddly enough - the least discussed side of Wagner, the music itself.'Christopher Grier, London Evening Standard`the intensely readable style as well as the interest of the subject-matter holds the attention from beginning to end ...Magee's book remains one which no-one who ventures to give an opinion on Wagner should have failed to read.'S. A. Music Teacher`Each of these essays offer much that is thought-provoking, examining not only the musical works but also the prose works in which Wagner formulated and set out his ideas on art literature, poetry and the theatre. It is good to have a new edition of this highly readable little volume, which was first published in 1968.'`Altogether, among the millions of pages written about one of the most complex minds in European history, this little book makes a contribution both original and thought provoking, quite out of proportion to its size.' Sir Charles MackerrasFrom reviews of the first edition...`The revised edition of this brief but near-classic analysis of Wagner's work has not lost its most distinctive quality; usually for a book of this kind, it demands to be read at one sitting - or even, one admirer has insisted, in a single bathtime.'Independent

In this penetrating analysis of Wagner's work Bryan Magee examines both Wagner's music and detailed stage directions, together with the prose works in which he formulated his ideas.

This is a short book of 6 essays, less than 90 pages of text. Yet it covers Wagner's career as composer and dramatist and traces his enormous influence on music after him. It is very well written, as might be expected from an Oxford philosopher, novelist, Member of Parliament, BBC personality and - above all else, he says (elsewhere) - music lover. Among the subjects he covers in this short compass, is Wagner's notorious anti-Semitism, which has played a significant role in his acceptance or rejection over the years, especially when it was put about that his music really turned Hitler on. Of course Wagner was long dead by then - he died six years before Hitler was born - and cannot be blamed for what use others made of his music. But it seems still to be an issue today, and Magee confronts it directly. Magee quotes Wagner (p. 24): "Mendelssohn has shown us that a Jew can have the richest abundance of specific talents, be a man of the broadest yet most refined culture, of the loftiest, most impeccable integrity, and yet not be able - not even once, with the help of all these qualities - to produce in us that deep, heart-seizing, soul-searching experience that we expect from art." Now, Mendelssohn was Christian - he was baptized while quite young - and therefore could only be deemed Jewish by race, and Magee correctly notes that Jews do not possess the genetic characteristics of a race. In a way, Jews are defined by anti-Semitism, and there was surely enough of that in 19th century Germany - and that really is the point, not that

someone of Jewish heritage could not achieve the highest level of art, but that in Germany someone of Jewish heritage would not be accepted by the arbiters of great art. In other words, Wagner's opinion of Mendelssohn's art says more about Germany, and indeed about Wagner, than it does about Mendelssohn - or about great art. We have an example of Jewish accomplishment in music in a country where the air is not suffused with anti-Semitism, and it demonstrates that where Jews are accepted, their achievements are not inferior to that of people of other heritages. I mean of course the United States and Irving Berlin (God Bless America, White Christmas, Easter Parade), Jerome Kern (Show Boat), George Gershwin (Porgy and Bess), Richard Rodgers (Oklahoma, Carousel, South Pacific), Leonard Bernstein (West Side Story), Stephen Sondheim, and more. Indeed, even in Germany, during Wagner's life, the poet Heinrich Heine, like Mendelssohn a Christian of Jewish heritage, attained the highest and deepest levels of German art, many of his poems so embedded in German culture and spirit, that they seem like folk art, as the Nazis called them - they couldn't ban all the songs Schubert and Schumann among others set to Heine's verse so they attributed them to "Unbekannte Dichter" (unknown poet). Indeed, Wagner got his inspiration for The Flying Dutchman, his first successful opera, from a novel by Heine. In other words, Wagner knew better. But in the end, I would argue, it doesn't really matter. Wagner was a great composer and should be judged by musical not moral standards, especially as I cannot find a bar of anti-Semitism (if music can be anti-Semitic) or for that matter an anti-Jewish word in the entirety of Wagner's artistic output. It is past time to drop the issue and judge Wagner by the same standards one would judge Bach (who incidentally set some viciously anti-Semitic texts, like the St. John's Passion), Mozart, Beethoven, Verdi or Puccini. I for one prefer La Bohème to Das Rheingold, and I would do so were Wagner a rabbi. All these essays are enjoyable, informative, and even inspiring - that is, if you don't know Wagner, Magee may well inspire you to make his acquaintance; and you can only be richer for that. Highly recommended.

This is another great book from Professor Magee which is a must read for any Wagnerian. Although less than 100 pages, it is insightful and scholarly. In the intelligent opinion of true scholars that know what they are talking about (something rare nowadays) Wagner is the greatest genius who ever lived. This book offers further proof, although no further proof is needed. Do not miss it!

terrific little book; a must for Wagnerians and might be's

Wonderful insight to a very complex artist. Read with the Tristian Chord by the same author.

Read it!! Assigned as a college text long ago, I now give it to many musician friends (and others). Thought-provoking, insightful, brilliant!

Even though this book is years old, the ideas remain fresh and challenging. Questions of pacing in performance (maybe the dreaded longueurs are not necessary), and origins of Wagner's anti-Semitism (an interesting twist on the privilege of the cultural outsider). An easy read, something to discuss at intermission.

Very good.

This penetrating essay on Wagner's works is deceptively brief. Magee's analysis is brilliant and right on target. He manages to say in a few well chosen words what other books ramble on about for pages. This book is well written, authoritative, and masterful. I can't recommend it highly enough.

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