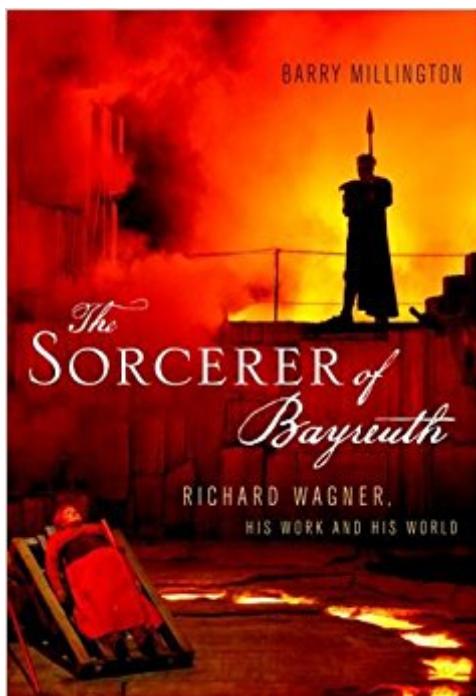


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The Sorcerer Of Bayreuth: Richard Wagner, His Work And His World



Synopsis

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) is one of the most influential - and also one of the most controversial - composers in the history of music. Over the course of his long career, he produced a stream of spellbinding works that challenged musical convention through their richness and tonal experimentation, ultimately paving the way for modernism. This book presents an in-depth but easy-to-read overview of Wagner's life, work and times. It considers a wide range of themes, including the composer's original sources of inspiration; his fetish for exotic silks; his relationship with his wife, Cosima, and with his mistress, Mathilde Wesendonck; the anti-semitism that is undeniably present in the operas; their proto-cinematic nature; and the turbulent legacy both of the Bayreuth Festival and of Wagnerism itself. Making use of the very latest scholarship - much of it undertaken by the author himself in connection with his editorship of *The Wagner Journal* - Millington reassesses received notions about Wagner and his work, demolishing ill-informed opinion in favour of proper critical understanding. It is a radical - and occasionally controversial - reappraisal of this most perplexing of composers. The volume's arrangement - unique among books on the composer -combines an accessible text, intriguing images and original documents, thus ensuring a consistently fresh approach. Bringing new insights to an endlessly fascinating subject, *The Sorcerer of Bayreuth* will charm anyone interested in music and in the wider cultural life of the 19th century and beyond.

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Customer Reviews

"Few, if any, Wagner scholars could cull such a cornucopia of vital anecdotes, observations, and pictures as has Barry Millington in this compact treatment of Wagner and Wagnerism." --Joseph Horowitz, author of *Wagner Nights: An American History* and *Moral Fire: Musical Portraits from America's Fin-de-Siecle*"Barry Millington has now written the book that many opera lovers have sought: a discussion of Wagner the man and his works in clear English, not too involved, not lost in musicological terms but covering all that an intelligent operagoer needs. All in all, this is a book that enlightens generally, contains much of Millington's own personal reactions to Wagner, and is marvelously readable." --Speight Jenkins, General Director, Seattle Opera"An admirably succinct and thoughtful treatment of Wagner." --*Wagner Notes*"Outstanding...The entire musicological and theatrical communities will profit greatly from Millington's careful and revealing research. This book will stand in perpetuity as one of the great biographical works on the composer and will be of immense benefit to present and future researchers on this 'sorcerer of Bayreuth.'" --*The Wagnerian*"In the venerable tradition of Ernest Newman, Millington here adroitly manages to restore balance and sanity and sharp focus to the endless debate about the most controversial artist of the last two centuries...An admirably succinct and thoughtful treatment of Wagner "and all that."" --*Wagneriana*"Readers at every level will appreciate this excellent book...Highly recommended." --*Choice*"Millington succeeds brilliantly..." --*Revista de Libros*

Barry Millington is chief music critic for the London Evening Standard and the editor of *The Wagner Journal*. He has written and edited, or co-edited, seven books on Wagner, including *The Wagner Compendium* (1992), *The Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion* (1993), and the *New Grove Guide to Wagner and his Operas* (2006). In addition to his writing, he has also acted as dramaturgical adviser to several international music festivals.

An interesting biography of Richard Wagner. As a amateur musician, I was especially impressed with the discussion of operatic works. I became enthralled with "Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg" sixty years ago in college. I had never suspected that Beckmesser was Jewish until I read "The Sorcerer of Bayreuth." I used this as an analogy when I was involved in a program at the college where I taught involving student presentations. Faculty had to write criticisms of the presentation. When I mentioned Becknesser student response was "who is Beckmesser?" I thoroughly enjoyed the book. I am sure that it represented some bias on the author' part, but then this is a criticism of most biographer's. Wagner was definitely an anti-semitic. I recall reading somewhere that he conducted Mendelssohn wearing gloves which he disposed of after the concert, If he were that

much of a rabid anti-Semite, why did he conduct Mendelssohn in the first place? .The book is an interesting account of Richard Wagner in all his imperious glory. I recommend the book to all Wagnerites and suggest further that they take much of the narrative with a grain of salt.

IF you're a Wagner Junkie like me, you'll love this book. Dr. Millington, a leading Wagner scholar, shares details of Wagner the man and the artist that you won't find anywhere else. (My personal favorite is RW's pink silk underwear fetish.) The writing is deft and appealing and the volume reads like a good novel. There is an average of one picture per page, again, things that you won't see elsewhere. One of most fascinating and interesting books I've read this year.

A basic, clearly written, well illustrated introduction to Wagner for those who wish to familiarize themselves with him, his works and his heritage including a brief but relatively up-to-date description of the Wagner Festival at Bayreuth and its history, good and bad. Those who want to learn more should check contemporary Wagner bibliographies. There are lots and lots of books. After all, he was one of the supreme geniuses of the 19th century and continued to wield tremendous influence in a number of areas, not just music.

I very much enjoy Millington's writings about Wagner. He brings a broad perspective to the composer and his work, but sees him in a realistic light, He brings readability to a subject that is often cloaked in hyperbole or musico-academic jargon.

A wonderful book for Wagner enthusiasts! A visually stimulating trip through Wagner's world. Plenty of good information for those looking for a simple one volume presentation of the man and his music. A great book to have for the bicentennial celebration!

This book is a good mix of biographical material and analyses of the operas. It is well written and easy to read.

Barry Millington is one of the world's leading scholars on Wagner but this book is not at all academic or off-putting. There are hundreds (thousands?) of books on Wagner but I can't think of a better overall look at his life and works. And immediately on its release it has become the next book to get for those studying Wagner and the first book to get for those new to Wagner. Why so? First, it is so readable and entertaining that the scholarship flows through easily and it does not seem like work to

read. While its structure more or less coincides with Wagner's life chronology, it is not a "this happened and then that happened" linear biography. Rather, Millington organizes his approach to Wagner by using a wide range range of themes. For example, many people dislike Wagner and his music because both were appropriated by the Nazis. But the chapter detailing this is not "in 1939 this happened and in 1943 that happened" but, rather a clever chapter detailing "how" the spread of the Wagner cult happened. And Millington does not let Wagner off the hook for this later appropriation. All the themes were there for Hitler and Company to use and the Wagner family completely cooperated with that use. (I am no relation by the way.) Next, the illustrations are numerous and beautiful. I doubt there has ever been such a beautiful biography or history. Seeing, for example, playbills, paintings of stage scenes, drawings of Wagner and his critics, and numerous other topics really come to life. Much of the art is lavish and sumptuous, for example a beautiful reproduction of Fantin-Latour's painting of the "Prelude to Lohengrin" or the photo of the temptation of Tannheuser from the 2010 Covent Garden production of that work. And there are numerous other wonderful illustrations, drawings, caricatures, paintings, photographs, and other art. Finally, Millington is able to include recently discovered art, recent stage production, and up-to-date research findings. I am not an academic but Millington is, and he is well aware of, and fairly presents, the controversies then and now swirling about Wagner. Overall, this book is a sensuous delight, as is the music of Wagner, but in reading it we become educated about Wagner, about the issues and controversies of his times, about his unique theories of opera, about those who influenced him, and most importantly about him, warts and all. His ego was incredible--he wanted an opera house designed by him, only for his operas, with those productions to be micromanaged by him. But he worked 40 years and got exactly what he had wanted in the form of his theater in Bayreuth. He was not a nice person, we probably wouldn't want him as a friend (nor would he probably tolerate "the likes of us"--anybody other than a sycophant--as friends), he was a womanizer (but, we learn from Millington, not really as bad a womanizer as his reputation) and he was a horrible anti-semit. We learn this, and so much more, in Millington's fair and nuanced approach. I highly recommend this for those first coming to Wagner as well as those Wagnerites wishing to learn more. This is absolutely the finest book on Wagner I have seen.

Millington gives us gold in this detailed, yet lucid account. Biography and music are entwined skilfully. The paintings, photos and drawings on every page do far more than entertain, although each is of interest to a Wagner fan. They support the text. Many are stills from previous productions, up to 2011. Millington's chapters and structure works well. As a Ring fan, I actually wanted more on

these four operas, but I am being greedy. I'm going to the Melbourne Ring in December 2013. I am savouring every page

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