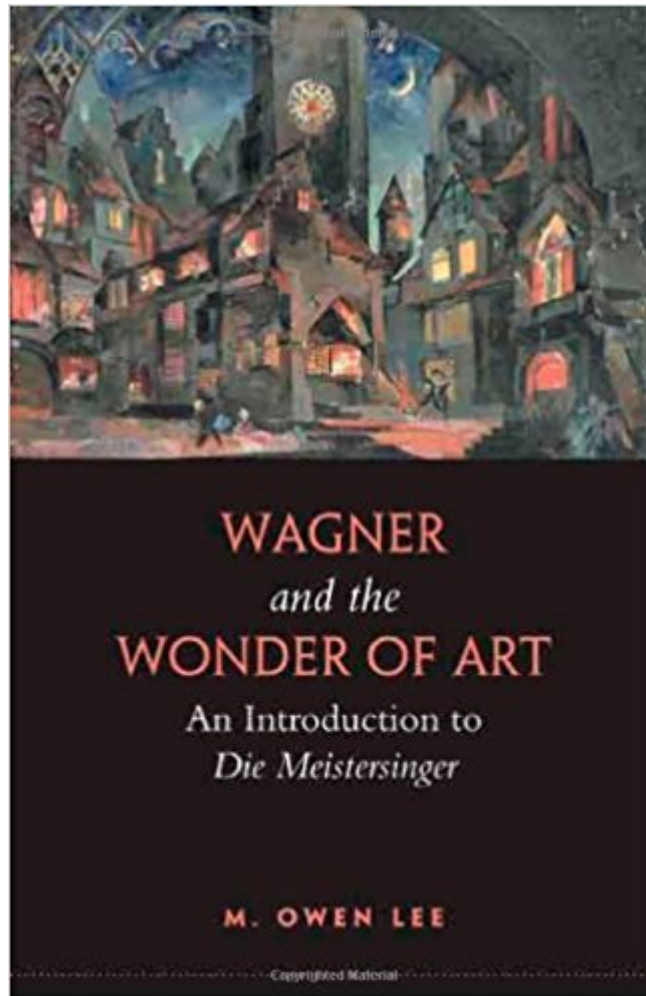


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Wagner And The Wonder Of Art: An Introduction To Die Meistersinger



Synopsis

Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* has always called forth superlatives from those who have fallen under its spell. Toscanini wanted to lay his baton down for the last time only after he had conducted a performance of it. Paderewski called it 'the greatest work of genius ever achieved by any artist in any field of human endeavour.' H.L. Mencken declared, 'It took more skill to plan and write it than it took to plan and write the whole canon of Shakespeare.' And yet Wagner's many-splendoured comedy has come under severe criticism in recent years for what has been called its 'dark underside,' its 'fascist brutality,' and its 'ugly anti-Semitism.' In *Wagner and the Wonder of Art*, renowned opera expert M. Owen Lee addresses that criticism. He also provides an introduction to the opera and an analysis that will surprise even those veteran operagoers who may not have explored the work's intricate structure and the emotional drama at its centre. The book includes the on-air commentary that Father Lee gave during the first radio broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera after the events of 9/11. He thought it necessary, after attempting to refute the charges leveled against Wagner's opera, to say something about its truthfulness, its life-affirming music, its insight into the madness that can destroy human lives, and its witness to the importance of art for the survival of our civilizations.

Book Information

Paperback: 152 pages

Publisher: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division; 1 edition (December 15, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802095739

ISBN-13: 978-0802095732

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.4 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #435,715 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #23 in Books > Arts &

Photography > Performing Arts > Dance > Ballet #29 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Composers > Wagner #88 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Forms & Genres > Ballet & Dance

Customer Reviews

'Reading *Wagner and the Wonder in Art* is the next best thing to attending a performance of *Die Meistersinger* with Father Lee himself. This book amply demonstrates the author's passion for

Wagner's great comedy and how it speaks (sings) to humanity today. Only a formidable mind could have written such an insightful and thoroughly enjoyable book.'-Christopher Purdy, Executive Director, WOSU Public Media

M. Owen Lee, CSB, is a Catholic priest and Professor Emeritus of Classics at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. He is a commentator for the Texaco Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts and the author of a number of books on opera, including *A Season of Opera: From Orpheus to Ariadne* (UTP 1998) and *Wagner: The Terrible Man and His Truthful Art* (UTP 199).

I've been slow getting into *Meistersinger*. It's probably my second to least favorite of the Master's works. But I've been collecting some classic recordings and researching the opera to see what the fuss is about. Father Lee's short book was terrific! Insightful in the way it explains the structure and importance in this long work, he also tackles a number of the controversies surrounding *Meistersinger* (e.g., German nationalism, anti-semitism). I listened to the opera fresh after reading the book, and I must say I was hooked. A must read for anyone who considers Wagner great....or who doubts it.

M. Owen Lee has a great love of music and of opera, as well as a tremendous gift for communicating his passion in print. His book, *"Wagner and the Wonder of Art"* is for anyone. Anyone who loves opera will find this book a delight. Anyone who has no concept of opera will find reasons to fall in love with the genre. Anyone who hates opera will find ample reasons to change their mind. Anyone who has no concept or opinion of opera will find reasons to fall in love with the genre. Those who dismiss Wagner as an obviously deeply flawed individual will gain useful new insights and perspective, especially with respect to how the composer's expresses his own realization of his faults through this opera. The book is compelling and comparatively short, concise enough to be read in one sitting (as if you could put it down even if you wanted to). A masterwork.

Written by a renowned Wagner scholar, who happens also to be a Jesuit priest, this slim volume of essays on the composer and *"Die Meistersinger"* offers remarkable insight into the structure of Wagner's only comic opera and enlightens readers as to why it is a masterpiece. M. Owen Lee convincingly responds to well-known challenges of certain post World War II critics who believe to have discovered antisemitism in the opera itself.

Ever since attending Die Meistersinger at the Met, I considered it the Sistine Ceiling of opera. But not until reading Owen Lee's masterly book--one can read it all in much less time than the opera takes to perform!--did I fully appreciate the genius of Wagner, his opera, and the art form. This is quite simply the best book I have ever read about music and drama. It is life-enhancing. It is a treasure.

A terrific introduction--concise but fully informative, musically sensitive (and all music-guides are not necessarily musical), and theatrically aware--and quite beautifully written. It is exceptionally sane on recent controversies.

M. Owen Lee used to give the best programs of anyone on the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts, and virtually all of his books are equally enjoyable. I probably have all of his books and always enjoy reading them.

To a good portion of music fans, Wagner's reputation rests solely on two works: Der Ring des Nibelungen and Tristan und Isolde. Indeed, there are many who seem to believe the "Ride of the Valkyries" encompasses his entire style of composition. However, those who have explored Wagner's work a little further realize what treasures are to be found in his other music dramas. In fact many Wagnerians, myself included, consider Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg to be our favorite among the bunch and know it deserves to stand right alongside The Ring and Tristan as a genuine masterpiece. Father Lee is another who holds that opinion, and this book is a testimony to his love for Die Meistersinger. Father Lee is one of the most discerning and concise writers on Wagner, as anyone who has read his book on The Ring, *Wagner's Ring: Turning the Sky Round*, can attest to. As good as that book is, *Wagner and the Wonder of Art* is even better. Where as in *Turning the Sky Round* Lee devotes a chapter to each of the operas of the Ring, here he devotes an entire chapter to each ACT of Die Meistersinger. You can imagine how many more details he is able to cover. Not only does he provide an eloquent synopsis of the plot, he also discusses this opera in the context of other great comedies in Western Civilization, the many layers of metaphor in the work, and so much more. This is a wonderful book for those who are looking to explore Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg for the first time, as well as those who are already enchanted by it and want to gain even greater insights into this great work of art.

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