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CONCERTS



WORLD OF OPERA
Wagner's 'Rienzi'
January 18, 2008
▶ Hear the Opera

With *Rienzi* Wagner took the extravagant style of French Grand Opera and made it his own, in the process creating a spectacular drama that's also the longest opera he ever composed.



WORLD OF OPERA
Wagner's 'Die Walkuere'
October 12, 2007
▶ Hear the Opera

Legendary tenor Placido Domingo sings the heroic role of Siegmund in *Die Walkuere*, the second installment in the Washington National Opera's new production of Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelungen*.

STUDIO SESSIONS



FROM THE TOP
Wagner, High Notes, and a Ghost in Atlanta
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This week, the Atlanta Symphony Hall at the Woodruff Arts Center in Georgia hosts *From the Top's* vound musicians, including the Atlanta

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PERFORMANCE TODAY

Clarinetist Anthony McGill's Take on Debussy

March 27, 2006

▶ [Hear McGill's Performance](#)

Clarinetist Anthony McGill has had a pretty good career so far: school at a top conservatory, a position with the Cincinnati Symphony, now principal clarinetist of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. We hear McGill in a recital at his alma mater, the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, playing Debussy's "Rhapsody No.1."



PERFORMANCE TODAY

Debussy's Erotic 'Epigrams'

March 7, 2006

Debussy's Six Antique Epigrams are based on erotic poetry from the sixth century B.C. Nude dancers performed at Debussy's one and only performance of them in 1901. We hear them performed at Music from Salem in New York. Nina Tichman and David Breitman play piano four hands.



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July 26, 2005

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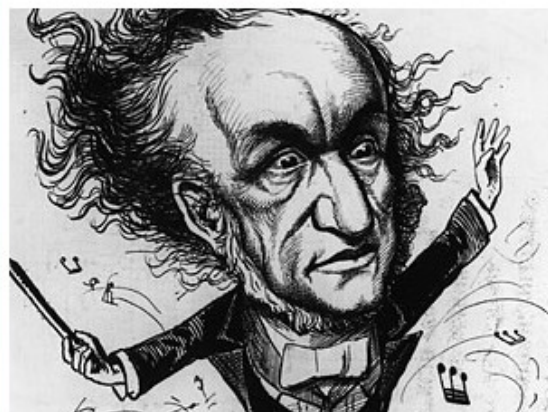
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The Self-Help Guide to Wagner

By Tom Huizenga and Katie Daugert

Hear the Complete Profile of Wagner and His Music

[46 min 45 sec] + add to playlist



Enlarge *Hulton Archive/Getty Images*

Richard Wagner was a larger-than-life figure, and his innovations as a composer changed Western music forever.

NPR.org, May 29, 2008 - Love him or hate him, if you're a fan of classical music, and especially opera, you have to contend with [Richard Wagner](#), the controversial composer who made sweeping changes in the arts. His life, music, and legacy continue to inspire and confound listeners and critics.

Wagner's music contains the loftiest aspirations of humankind, yet it was also the soundtrack to tragedy. His mammoth operas have inspired composers, authors, directors, and even dictators.

He's the one who decided it would be a good idea to turn the house lights down and watch a drama

in the dark. He built a radically new theater at Bayreuth, Germany, to his obsessive specifications. He exploded the length, breadth, and height of music-theater, changing it forever.

But Wagner's creative genius has been tainted by his

TOP 5 WAGNER

See and hear a [list of Wagner recordings](#), recommended by William Berger, author of *Wagner Without Fear*.

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A GUIDE TO SURVIVING WAGNER

Hear sections of the Wagner profile with NPR's Lisa Simeone and author William Berger.

Demystifying Wagner

[19 min 27 sec]

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Wagner's Unusual Background

[12 min 36 sec]

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Wagner's Dark Legacy

[14 min 46 sec]

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Enlarge AFP/Getty Images

In 1872, Wagner began to build a radically new theater at Bayreuth, Germany, in which his operas are still performed today.

WAGNER ON STAGE

Watch excerpts from two Wagner operas from the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Ring Cycle: 'Siegfried'--Act 2

But Wagner's creative genius has been tainted by his personality — by his overzealous references to militarism and nationalism, as well as his overt anti-Semitism. It's not surprising that his works would later be adopted by Adolf Hitler to symbolize his notion of the Third Reich. Wagner's music, to this day, is taboo in Israel.

Wagner for Dummies

In his book *Wagner Without Fear*, William Berger tries to demystify some of the anxiety the mere mention of Wagner's name generates.

"You don't have to be a complete lunatic, you don't have to sign your life over in order to appreciate Wagner," Berger says. "If he's going to ask you to sit in the theatre for five or six hours, I would ask people to believe that he's got that much to say. So we're dealing with a difficult artist but a truly unique one."

"The entire human experience can be found in his music," Berger adds. "With Wagner, you don't just get the signs of a journey; you go through that journey."

Lord of the Ring

Loyal "Wagnerheads," as fans are sometimes called, seem unfazed by the length of his extra-long operas — especially the full 18-hour *Ring Cycle*, the series of four operas designed to be heard over four consecutive days. Some even travel the world, scoring tickets to wherever the *Ring Cycle* is performed.

The Ring of the Niebelungs (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*), as it's officially called, is populated with gods and goddesses, water-spirits, dragons, giants, dwarves, and objects from the powerful golden ring to a magic helmet that makes its wearer disappear, like Harry Potter's invisibility cloak. Wagner's story is drawn from Norse mythology, Germanic folk poetry, and his own head. He creates an entire universe, from the formation of the world to its fiery end.

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▶ 'Siegfried Idyll' (Vienna Philharmonic, Georg Solti, conductor)

[18 min 20 sec]

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given that Wagner was resolutely anti-Semitic.

"There was the basic material for a Nazi fetish in Wagner's art right from the start," Berger says. "There was the xenophobia and anti-Semitism; without any doubt, it's there."

Even a few of Wagner's operatic characters have been singled out as examples of his anti-Semitism. The unlikable Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger* and the greedy Alberich in *The Ring Cycle*, some theorists say, were given perceived Jewish characteristics by Wagner and thus portrayed in a denigrating way.

Because of the music's Nazi connections, Berger says it's no surprise that Israel has kept an informal ban on Wagner performances. But at the same time, Berger adds that it's important not to let the music be controlled by its dark connotations.

"I think it's imperative to reclaim this music," Berger says, "and not let something as powerful as this music be appropriated permanently by the Third Reich. Ultimately, this is the lesson we take from Wagner for all art. We cannot let anything be defined for us by any demagogues."

"The ability of art to inspire, but also the limits of art to make us good or bad — that's still up to us, and I think that lesson is profoundly illustrated by Richard Wagner."

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Good afternoon Katie Daugert (kdaugert@npr.org)

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