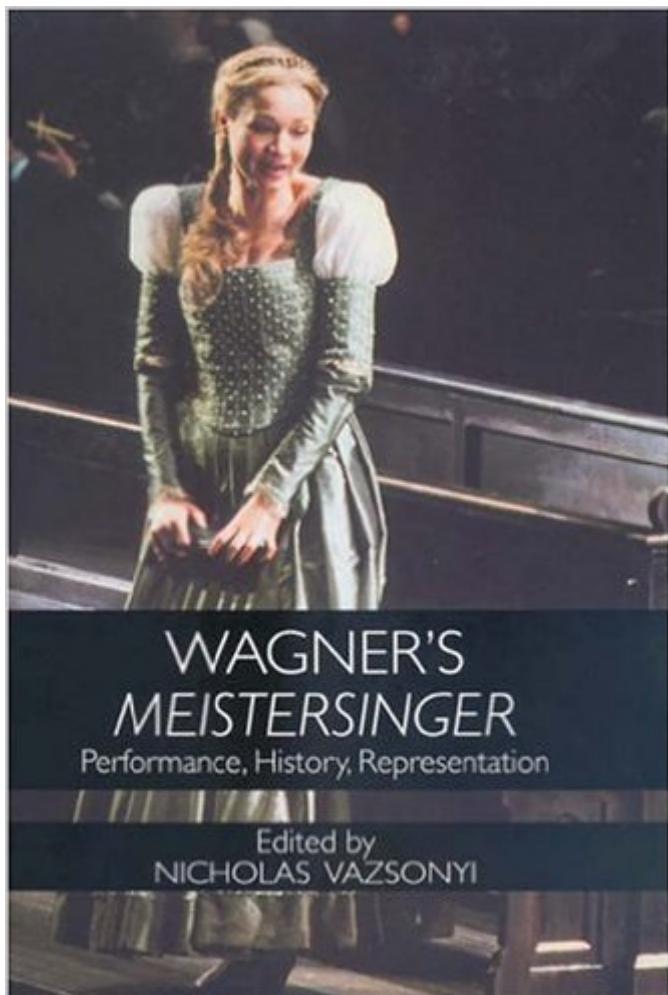


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Wagner's Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation



Synopsis

Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* has been one of the most performed operas ever since its premiere in 1868. It was adopted as Germany's national opera ("Nationaloper"), not least because of its historical coincidence with the unification of Germany under Bismarck in 1871. The first section of this volume, "Performing Meistersinger," contains three commissioned articles from internationally respected artists - a conductor (Peter Schneider), a stage director (Harry Kupfer) and a singer (Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau), all experienced in the performance of this unusually demanding 5-hour work. The second section, "Meistersinger and History," examines both the representation of German history in the opera and the way the opera has functioned in history through political appropriation and staging practice. The third section, "Representations," is the most eclectic, exploring in the first place the problematic question of genre from the perspective of a theatrical historian. The chronic issue of Wagner's chief opponent, Eduard Hanslick, and his musical and dramatic representation in the opera as Beckmesser, is then addressed, as are gender issues, and Wagner's own utterances concerning the opera. Contributors: Nicholas Vazsonyi, Peter Schneider, Harry Kupfer, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Hans Rudolf Vaget, Lutz Koepnick, David B. Dennis, Klaus Van Den Berg, Thomas S. Grey, Lydia Goehr, Eva Rieger, Peter HÄ¶lyng. Nicholas Vazsonyi is associate professor of German and comparative literature, University of South Carolina.

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Customer Reviews

For a Wagnerite who had to miss Bayreuth this season, this was an entertaining set of essays, to

read on the beach while the grandchildren built Valhalla in the sand. To continue the seaside metaphor, I think this book is best looked-at like one of those fascinating rock-pools - full of diverse creatures, some interesting, some mundane, some frankly grotesque, and a few surprises. There are a "critic's dozen" essays (like a "baker's dozen" but slightly less than expected, rather than more). The book is organized into three sections - Performing, History and Representation. The first section, including essays by Peter Schneider, Harry Kupfer, Fischer-Dieskau and Lydia Goehr, gives fascinating insights into the challenges of performing Wagner: Schneider's description of practicalities (such as reigning-in the Meisters, to avoid drowning out Walter at the end of Act 1), Kupfer's very clear understanding of the characters, and the dynamics linking them, and then back to practicalities, where Fischer-Dieskau describes the physical difficulties presented by the role of Sachs. The History section is much more of a mixed bag. The first essay is rather, er, academic in nature. If you find it amusing to read essays plagued by three-fold structure (here it comes, here it is, there it goes), rampant neologisms, malicious use of nouns as verbs, strangely irrelevant illustrations and gratuitous use of the word 'paradigm', then you'll have a field day. If you can suppress the desire to strangle the author, so much the better. The second essay in this section is the outcome of an in-depth study of how Nazi propaganda used Wagner's works; the author had to plough through several hundred extremely unsavoury publications.

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