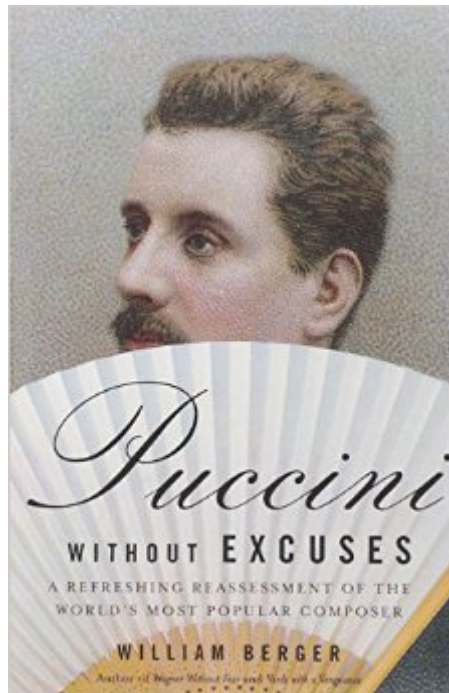


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Puccini Without Excuses: A Refreshing Reassessment Of The World's Most Popular Composer



Synopsis

Puccini is the most beloved composer of opera in the world: one quarter of all opera performances in the U.S. are of his operas, his music pervades movie soundtracks, and his plots have infiltrated our popular culture. But, although Puccini's art still captivates audiences and the popularity of such works as *Tosca*, *La Bohème*, and *Madama Butterfly* has never waned, he has long been a victim of critical snobbery and cultural marginalization. In this witty and informative guide for beginners and fans alike, William Berger sets the record straight, reclaiming Puccini as a serious artist. Combining his trademark irreverent humor with passionate enthusiasm, Berger strikes just the right balance of introductory information and thought-provoking analysis. He includes a biography, discussions of each opera, a glossary, fun facts and anecdotes, and above all keen insight into Puccini's enduring power. For anyone who loves Puccini and for anyone who just wonders what all the fuss is about, *Puccini Without Excuses* is funny, challenging, and always a pleasure to read. INCLUDES: _ Why Puccini's art and its message of hope is crucial to our world today _ How Anglo audiences often miss the mythic significance of his operas _ The use of his music as shorthand in films, from *A Room with a View* to *Fatal Attraction* _ A scene-by scene analysis of each opera _ A guide to the wealth of available recordings, books, and videos

Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: Vintage (November 8, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1400077788

ISBN-13: 978-1400077786

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (18 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #614,436 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in Â Books > Humor &

Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Composers > Puccini #424 in Â Books > Arts &

Photography > Music > Theory, Composition & Performance > Appreciation #438 in Â Books >

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Customer Reviews

This is an amazing book, at least an amazing book for me, because of what it's done for me. I must admit right now that I'm not a major opera fan, not that I don't like it, and not that I haven't listened to

quite a bit of it over the years - it's just that my musical tastes lean more toward Louis Armstrong's Hot Fives and Charlie Parker's Reboppers. But Berger's book was so informative and so entertaining and, best of all, so enthusiastic, that the bug he is trying to infect us with regarding the operas of Giacomo Puccini has infiltrated my system and sent me reeling. Berger is a radio host on NYC's PBS station (which I unfortunately have never heard), and his book reads exactly like what a well-informed, passionate d.j. would sound like as he waxed fervently about his musical loves. The book reads as if it were spoken and meant to be heard. This is a delightful and most enjoyable aspect of the book. As he recounts the story behind each opera, Berger interrupts himself with commentary, as if speaking over the performance at hand or hitting the pause button on the CD player. And his comments are highly personal, though not arbitrary or off-the-wall, meant to keep us on target and focused, but not school-marmish. He "speaks" to us like an old friend sharing what he knows and feels. The book is a fairly thorough account of the man and his music: we get a brief biographical sketch, the operas (8 of them) in detail, recommended recordings, dvds, and books, Puccini in the movies, a glossary of opera terms and how they apply to Puccini's work, and more. And everything, even the glossary, has the Berger stamp of authority and Alan to it.

William Berger has written a book for operatic neophytes (as he did in his previous books 'Wagner Without Fear' and 'Verdi with a Vengeance') who want to learn more about opera in general and about Puccini in particular, and yet who have little background with which to understand a full-length book about the life and works of a single composer. I am no operatic neophyte, but I learned much from this book and was completely engaged throughout, even when I was disagreeing with some of the author's points. Make no mistake, Berger has a charming, informal, chatty style that sweeps the reader up into Puccini's world. My only real complaint about the book is that Berger seems to protest too much about Puccini's worth. He takes up the cudgels against those pedantic critics and musicologists who cast aspersions on Puccini's artistic value. It strikes me that the neophyte is not all that interested in this battle in the first place and that this is a battle long since won anyhow. No matter, Berger gets in plenty of blows for Puccini, probably more than Puccini actually needs these days. The book has several sections. After a somewhat tendentious introduction, we get a chatty yet informative life and times chapter which also includes a description of what was going on in the wider world of opera and classical music during Puccini's life. There are fascinating comments about, say, the relationship between Puccini and Toscanini in this section. Then we get a chapter by chapter discussion of each of the mature operas, beginning with *Manon Lescaut* and ending with *Turandot*. Each opera's chapter has an exhaustive discussion of each scene of the stage action,

followed by really quite wonderful ruminations on the musical and production issues of each scene.

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