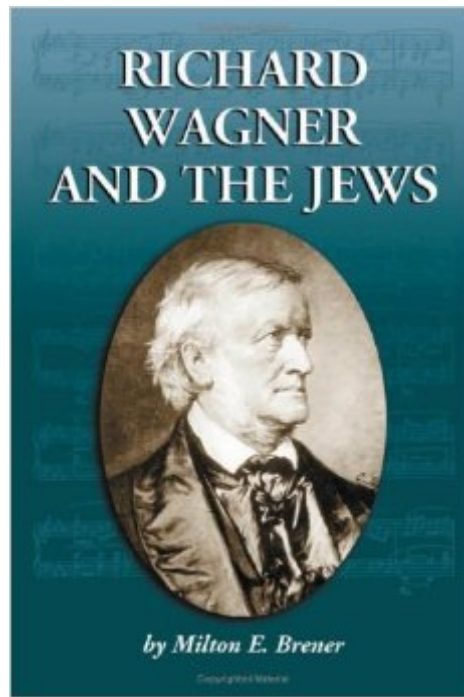


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Richard Wagner And The Jews



Synopsis

It is well known that Richard Wagner, the renowned and controversial 19th century composer, exhibited intense anti-Semitism. The evidence is everywhere in his writings as well as in conversations his second wife recorded in her diaries. In his infamous essay "Judaism in Music," Wagner forever cemented his unpleasant reputation with his assertion that Jews were incapable of either creating or appreciating great art. Wagner's close ties with many talented Jews, then, are surprising. Most writers have dismissed these connections as cynical manipulations and rank hypocrisy. Examination of the original sources, however, reveals something different: unmistakeable, undeniable empathy and friendship between Wagner and the Jews in his life. Indeed, the composer had warm relationships with numerous individual Jews. Two of them resided frequently over extended periods in his home. One of these, the rabbi's son Hermann Levi, conducted Wagner's final opera--Parsifal, based on Christian legend--at Wagner's request; no one, Wagner declared, understood his work so well. Even in death his Jewish friends were by his side; two were among his twelve pallbearers. The author's website: miltonbrener.com The contradictions between Wagner's antipathy toward the amorphous entity "The Jews" and his genuine friendships with individual Jews are the subject of this book. Drawing on extensive sources in both German and English, including Wagner's autobiography and diary and the diaries of his second wife, this comprehensive treatment of Wagner's anti-Semitism is the first to place it in perspective with his life and work. Included in the text are portions of unpublished letters exchanged between Wagner and Hermann Levi. Altogether, the book reveals astonishing complexities in a man long known as much for his prejudice as for his epic contributions to opera. The author's website: <http://miltonbrener.com> email: mebrener@aol.com

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Customer Reviews

Despite a few notable exceptions, Milton Brener's *Richard Wagner and the Jews* is nearly the only book that deals fairly with the famed opera composer's anti-Semitism; and as such, this book is a welcome corrective to some of the more shrill anti-Wagner screeds of the last few decades. Brener does not intend to excuse Wagner; he merely comes closer than most in explaining him. Besides being probably the greatest artist who ever lived, Wagner was also a bundle of contradictions. However, this bundle of contradictions never seemed to be able to realize that he was just that. Indeed, Wagner did possess anti-Semitic attitudes, but his anti-Semitism was of a different stripe than that espoused by the Nazis. Wagner called for Jewish assimilation within the German population, which certainly did not conform with later Nazi policy. Like many a 19th-Century anti-Semite, Wagner seems to have seen Jewishness as almost an abstract, metaphysical concept. Of course, that does not excuse him. He did indeed say vile things about Jews, and he needs to be held accountable for those attitudes, but to simply (and wrongly) call him a proto-Nazi is not only intellectually dishonest, it wrongly stains the reputation of an artist who created stupendous, deeply human works-of-art. As Brener also points out, there is nothing inherently anti-Semitic in any of Wagner's great works of art. Unfortunately, some writers, such as Robert Gutman, seem to have a compulsion to find even the most tenuous, implausible Anti-Semitic connections in Wagner's work. It is simply impossible to find such links. There is not the slightest overt connection to anti-Semitism in any of Wagner's works, and if there are any such covert links, then one would have had to have entered the composer's mind to see them.

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