



Richard Wagner And the Jews

Milton E. Brener

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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: unmistakable, 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 Included in the text are portions of unpublished letters exchanged between Wagner and Hermann Levi.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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