



The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy

Bryan Magee

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Richard Wagner's devotees have ranged from the subtlest minds (Proust) to the most brutal (Hitler). The enduring fascination with his works arises not only from his singular fusion of musical innovation and theatrical daring, but also from his largely overlooked engagement with the boldest investigations of modern philosophy. In this radically clarifying book, Bryan Magee traces Wagner's intellectual quests, from his youthful embrace of revolutionary socialism to the near-Buddhist resignation of his final years. Magee shows how abstract thought can permeate music and stimulate creations of great power and beauty. And he unflinchingly confronts the Wagner whose paranoia, egocentricity, and anti-Semitism are as repugnant as his achievements are glorious.

At once a biography of the composer, an overview of his times, and an exploration of the intellectual and technical aspects of music, Magee's lucid study offers the best explanation of W. H. Auden's judgment that Wagner, for all his notoriety, was "perhaps the greatest genius that ever lived."

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