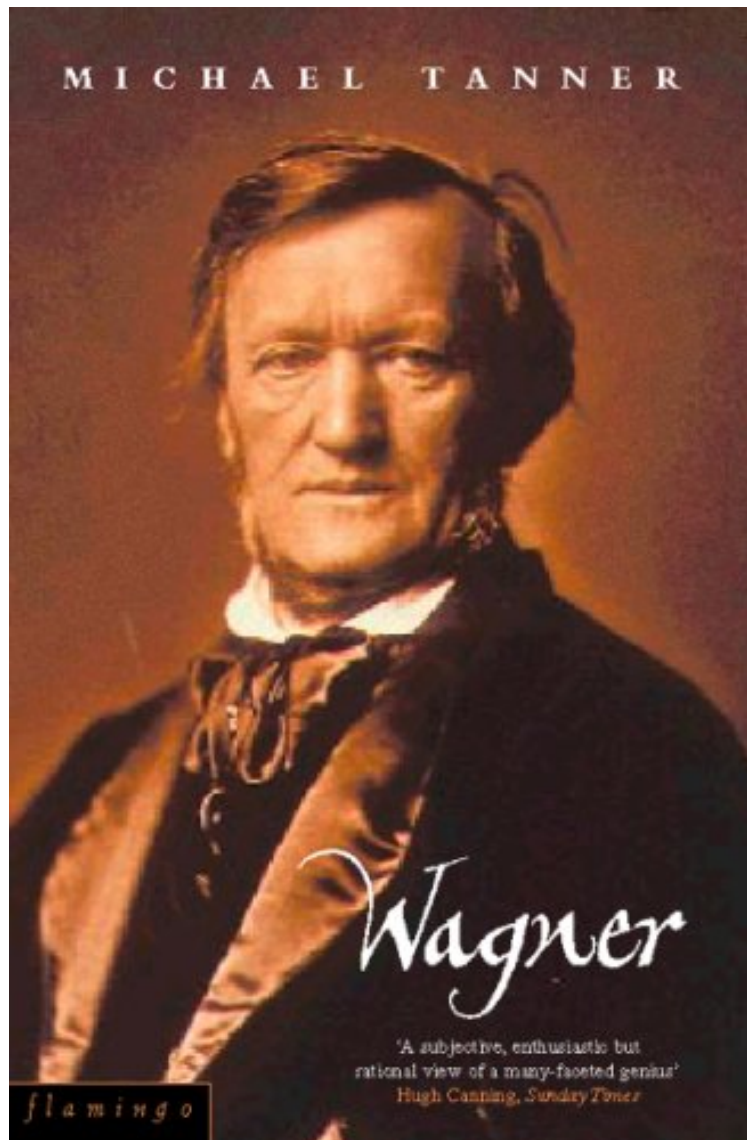


## Wagner

*Michael Tanner*

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**Michael Tanner : Wagner** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wagner:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A novel approach to analyzing Wagner's works By Caldog For the Wagner enthusiast a must read, if you can get past the verbosity. Here is no musical analysis; this volume has nothing in common with the numerous leitmotif anthologies that have been written (and recorded) since the composer's day. Rather it is a view of the music dramas in terms of the psychological and philosophical motivations of the characters. Serious Wagner scholars may challenge Tanner's conclusions whereby he views all the works as coming out of a

common theme - hero and rescue, and the role of art. Tanner sees the operas from *Das Rheingold* on as working through the pessimistic lenses of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Oddly, there is no mention of "Die Sieger," Wagner's prose sketch of a Hindu/Buddhist drama which closely matches Parsifal. Rather Tanner views Parsifal entirely in Christian terms, ignoring the subtle Buddhist themes. Indeed Wagner became interested in eastern religion, vegetarianism and antivivisectionism. Tanner makes no mention of this, and gives scant attention to Wagner's devotion to the Greek dramatists. Since Wagner was a gifted composer it seems unlikely that his operas can be given a just account without fully describing his use of music to fill out the psychological and philosophical aspects of the dramas. Other reviewers have commented on the incomprehensible style in which this book is written. Did Tanner attempt to imitate Wagner's prose with some choice Anglicanisms thrown in for good measure ("vouchsafe" - really?). Occasionally sentences seem to sag under their own weight defying common rules of grammar. In much of the Wagner literature, there is often a rather shallow discussion of the dramas in terms of character and message. Tanner seeks to remedy this, and hopefully others will follow his path as well.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Three Stars  
By Tanya Patterson  
An interesting overview of other Wagnerians view point re Richard, who still remains an eclectic personality to day.  
2 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Laboriously tortured English  
By Purple Wizard  
While the concepts in this book are edifying, the language in which it is written is, at times, almost incomprehensible. One wonders whether the author first wrote this in German and then translated it into English, and then while translating added parenthetical asides that hadn't occurred to him in the original writing.

A fine, intellectually sparkling and always engaging little book; a welcome addition to any Wagner library.  
Hans Vaaget, *Opera Quarterly*  
Whilst no one would dispute Wagner's ranking among the most significant composers in the history of Western music, his works have been more fiercely attacked than those of any other composer. His supposed personal defects have provoked intense hostility which has translated into a mistrust and abhorrence of his music. Tanner's fascination for the relationship between music, text and plot generates an illuminating discussion of the operas, in which he persuades us to see many of Wagner's best-known works afresh. His passionate and unconventional analyses are accessible to all lovers of music, be they listeners or performers. Note that it has not been possible to include the same picture content that appeared in the original print version.

From *Library Journal*  
British academic philosopher Tanner has written on music for the *Times Literary Supplement* and is author of *Nietzsche*, a volume in the "Past Masters" series from Oxford University Press (1994). Nietzsche wrote a lot about Wagner, joining a flow of opinions that became a river long ago. Tanner quotes him here, mainly in order to argue with him and many others who find fault with the complicated, controversial German music dramatist. Opening by harshly explicating some Wagner criticism as "inane," "outrageously unfair," and "priggish," Tanner then spiritedly discusses all the operas in chronological order, focusing upon effects he feels their characters, stories, and music are meant to have on thoughtful members of the audience. When these effects are contradictory, Tanner self-consciously argues with himself. A short bibliographic essay provides leads to still more views. A warm-hearted, occasionally hot-headed defense of Wagner; recommended for balance.

By Bonnie Jo Dopp, Long Branch Community Lib., Silver Spring, Md.  
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From *Kirkus*  
Tanner, a Cambridge philosopher and opera critic for the *Spectator*, offers analyses of the plots of Wagner's operas, the intellectual themes projected by them, and an evaluation of the music that is (for most of us) their justification. Tanner's discussion of *The Ring* is superb and makes an otherwise very uneven book required reading. He often overstates (arguing, for instance, that *Tristan* is one of the two great religious works in Western music, along with the *St. Matthew Passion*), and he generally loads his analytical dice to minimize or even delete Wagner's faults. While almost all serious music lovers include Wagner on their shortlist of the ten greatest composers, Wagner is for Tanner far more serious business than merely music. For him the purpose of his art is to change our lives. That makes his life very important, and Tanner's selective treatment of it is regrettable. Except for a mention in the four-page chronology, Tanner doesn't note the twice published *Jewry in Music*, Wagner's ferocious demand for racial purity in German music. This omission explains the comparative shallowness of Tanner's discussion of *Meistersinger*, which is described as a study of human folly, whereas from the outset it was recognized as a specific and passionate statement of German nationalism, and a work happily and repeatedly embraced by the Nazis. So why did Barenboim conduct *Meistersinger* at Bayreuth this year, and Levine at the Met? Because the incandescence of Wagner's music transcends his personality. As Rilke (another dreadful man and magnificent artist) noted, in attempting to explain the emotions evoked by Parsifal, it drives us "to give joyous consent to the dreadfulness of life in order to take possession of the unutterable abundance and power of our existence." There is no question that Tanner, by fair means as well as foul, celebrates Wagner's power to achieve that. -- Copyright copy; 1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. "Tanner belongs in [the] tiny but distinguished company of committed Wagnerians who write extraordinarily well . . . His observations are consistently fresh and provocative, often as witty as they are arresting . . . His short book is a joy to read and worth dozens of longer ones." -- G. W. Bowersock, *Opera News* "Focused and concise. . . [A] wonderfully open-minded book." -- Rupert

Christiansen, Sunday Telegraph "[A] quietly magnificent study of one of the most controversial figures in modern music."--Virginia Quarterly "The most spirited and unapologetic book about Wagner to appear in a long time. . . . Fine, intellectually sparkling, and always engaging. . . . A welcome addition to any Wagner library."--Wagner Notes "[Tanner] provides a valuable study of the meaning and significance of Richard Wagner's music dramas. . . . Tanner leads the reader to understand Wagner's lifelong preoccupations, the common threads and themes that underlie his production."--Choice