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Opera And Modern Culture: Wagner And Strauss



Synopsis

In this enlightening and entertaining book, one of the most original and sophisticated musicologists writing today turns his attention to music's most dramatic genre. Extending his ongoing project of clarifying music's various roles in Western society, Kramer brings to opera his distinctive and pioneering blend of historical concreteness and theoretical awareness. Opera is legendary for going to extremes, a tendency that has earned it a reputation for unreality. *Opera and Modern Culture* shows the reverse to be true. Kramer argues that for the past two centuries the preoccupation of a group of famous operas with the limits of supremacy and debasement helped to define a normality that seems the very opposite of the operatic. Exemplified in a series of beloved examples, a certain idea of opera—a fiction of opera—has contributed in key ways to the modern era's characterizations of desire, identity, and social order. *Opera and Modern Culture* exposes this process at work in operas by Richard Wagner, who put modernity on the agenda in ways no one after him could ignore, and by the young Richard Strauss. The book continues the initiative of much recent writing in treating opera as a multimedia rather than a primarily musical form. From *Lohengrin* and *The Ring of the Nibelung* to *Salomé* and *Elektra*, it traces the rich interplay of operatic visions and voices and their contexts in the birth pangs of modern life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Controversial. . . . Paradoxical. . . . The journey is unpredictable and often remarkable.” (Music & Letters 2010-07-14)

"Outstanding. Kramer's scholarship is as impeccable as his insights are at once original and consistently brilliant. The presentation is thorough, and the argument is well anchored in theory, history and musical detail. Kramer's discourse is crystalline and jargon free. The connections from one chapter to another are seamless. The story is, simply stated, a page-turner." *Richard Leppert, editor of Theodor W. Adorno's Essays on Music "Lawrence Kramer's Opera and Modern Culture is remarkable both for its imaginative exploration of important issues and for the rich array of the author's engagements with other thinkers. In particular, by decentering without dismissing the composer (who could dismiss Wagner?), he makes works of reception—productions of Salome on video, uses of the Lohengrin Prelude by Charlie Chaplin and W.E.B. Du Bois—central texts in the process of understanding the phenomenon of opera, rather than footnotes to an idea that he really does dismiss: 'the work itself.'"* *James Parakilas, author of Piano Roles: 300 Years of Life with the Piano and Introduction to Opera (forthcoming)*

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