



## The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy

By Bryan Magee

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A profoundly searching investigation that reveals for the first time the philosophical foundations of Wagner's art

Richard Wagner's devotees have ranged from the subtlest minds (Proust) to the most brutal (Hitler). The enduring fascination of his works arises from his singular fusion of musical innovation and theatrical daring, but also from his largely overlooked engagement with the boldest investigations of modern philosophy.

Now, in this radically clarifying book, Bryan Magee traces the Wagner's involvement in the intellectual quests of his age, from his youthful embrace of revolutionary socialism, to a Schopenhauerian rejection of the world as illusion, to the near-Buddhist resignation of his final years. Mapping the influence of ideas on Wagner's art, Magee shows how abstract thought can permeate musical work 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, an account of 19th century opera, and an insight into 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 notorious difficulties, was "perhaps the greatest genius that ever lived.

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## Editorial Review

From *Library Journal*

Magee, a British writer on philosophy, music, and theater criticism and a former member of Parliament, has made a remarkable contribution to the already extensive literature on the life and works of Wagner. His central thesis that Wagner's intense study of philosophy had a profound influence on his compositions is lucidly presented in 17 chapters, each rich with historical detail and intellectual discourse. The chapters proceed in rough chronological sequence; we first read of the young Wagner as a left-wing revolutionary and end with his mature, complex relationship with Nietzsche. In the central part of the book, Magee provides an overview of Schopenhauer's philosophy and reveals the extent to which Wagner completely overhauled his own values in order to embrace that thinker's world view. Readers to whom all this may appear somewhat arcane and daunting will be pleasantly surprised by the eminently readable nature of the book. Magee's text is not only illuminating but also highly personal and enormously engaging. The lengthy appendix, in which he tackles head-on the thorny issue of Wagner's anti-Semitism, is a brilliant, balanced discussion and is alone worth the price of the book. Throughout, Magee cites myriad secondary sources but includes no bibliography. Despite this omission, this work is highly recommended for all public and academic libraries. Those readers already passionate about Wagner's works will find new reasons to appreciate them, and those who have avoided his music will find the book a revelation and may be inspired to rethink their phobia.

Larry Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, PA

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From [Booklist](#)

Because of Wagner's reputation as a proto-Nazi, many music lovers avoid his work-- or enjoy it as a guilty pleasure. Yes, Wagner did indulge in odious anti-Semitism, and, yes, Hitler adored his music. But Magee convincingly demonstrates that Wagner kept his anti-Semitism out of his music and that most Nazi leaders regarded the composer's works as antithetical to their movement. The young Wagner advocated the radical politics of the left, and when he subsequently abandoned the revolution, he did so not to embrace the politics of the right but rather to repudiate all political thought in favor of metaphysics. Those metaphysics bear the distinctive marks of Schopenhauer, credited by Magee with inspiring the composer to otherwise unattainable operatic feats (in, for instance, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal*). Yet unlike any other creative artist, Wagner contributed as much to philosophy as he took from it, decisively shaping his friend Nietzsche's views through sheer strength of character. A carefully researched account of a fiery personality who transmuted daunting ideas into compelling art. *Bryce Christensen*

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Review

"Magee has opened up Wagner's intellectual world like no one before him."--*Literary Review*

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get because their hobby is usually reading a book. Consider the person who don't like studying a book? Sometime, person feel need book after they found difficult problem or perhaps exercise. Well, probably you should have this The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy.

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