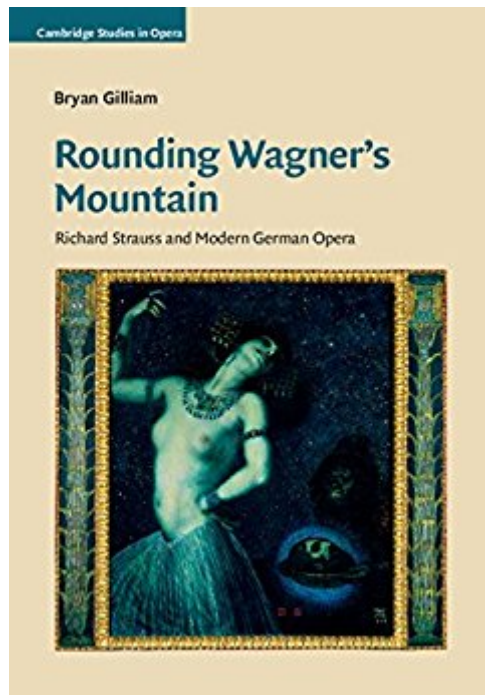


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Rounding Wagner's Mountain: Richard Strauss And Modern German Opera (Cambridge Studies In Opera)



Synopsis

Richard Strauss's fifteen operas, which span the years 1893 to 1941, make up the largest German operatic legacy since Wagner's operas of the nineteenth century. Many of Strauss's works were based on texts by Europe's finest writers: Oscar Wilde, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Stefan Zweig, among others, and they also overlap some of the most important and tumultuous stretches of German history, such as the founding and demise of a German empire, the rise and fall of the Weimar Republic, the period of National Socialism, and the post-war years, which saw a divided East and West Germany. In the first book to discuss all Strauss's operas, Bryan Gilliam sets each work in its historical, aesthetic, philosophical, and literary context to reveal what made the composer's legacy unique. Addressing Wagner's cultural influence upon this legacy, Gilliam also offers new insights into the thematic and harmonic features that recur in Strauss's compositions.

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Customer Reviews

There are a few (very few) books about opera that stand head and shoulders above any others in

their field, books that have been viewed as virtually definitive when it comes to their subject: Ernest Newman's four volume THE LIFE OF RICHARD WAGNER, Norma del Mar's three volume RICHARD STRAUSS, and Julian Budden's three volume THE OPERA OF VERDI. To that elite group must now be added Bryan Gilliam's ROUNDING WAGNER'S MOUNTAIN, RICHARD STRAUSS AND THE MODERN GERMAN OPERA. I cannot think of a book about Richard Strauss, written in English in the last 50 years that comes close to what Gilliam has done here. Certainly no one who cares deeply about Strauss's operas, either professionally or personally (or both), can afford to not ponder at length what Gilliam says here. It is not a light read, but it is an engrossing one. Gilliam does not recycle what most other writers in English have said about Strauss. He thoroughly refutes the still-prevalent notion that Strauss wrote "good" modern (meaning filled with dissonance) music in SALOME and ELEKTRA, then turned his back on what he "ought" to have been writing as a serious German composer, and settled for writing crowd pleasing music that would make him lots of money with DER ROSENKAVALIER and spent the rest of his life spinning notes for easy success. Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's and Max Stirner's godless, life-affirming individualism, Strauss believed that the only religion for a new century was the act of artistic creation, writes Gilliam in the Preface. Strauss the nonbeliever, the practitioner of Bergsonian "vitalism", was indifferent to post-Wagnerian notions of redemption through music. But Strauss was most definitely interested in responding, through music, to the rapidly changing world in which he lived.

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