



# Wagner and the Wonder of Art: An Introduction to Die Meistersinger

*M. Owen Lee*

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Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* has always called forth superlatives from those who have fallen under its spell. Toscanini wanted to lay his baton down for the last time only after he had conducted a performance of it. Paderewski called it 'the greatest work of genius ever achieved by any artist in any field of human endeavour.' H.L. Mencken declared, 'It took more skill to plan and write it than it took to plan and write the whole canon of Shakespeare.'

And yet Wagner's many-splendoured comedy has come under severe criticism in recent years for what has been called its 'dark underside,' its 'fascist brutality,' and its 'ugly anti-Semitism.' In *Wagner and the Wonder of Art*, renowned opera expert M. Owen Lee addresses that criticism. He also provides an introduction to the opera and an analysis that will surprise even those veteran operagoers who may not have explored the work's intricate structure and the emotional drama at its centre. The book includes the on-air commentary that Father Lee gave during the first radio broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera after the events of 9/11. He thought it necessary, after attempting to refute the charges leveled against Wagner's opera, to say something about its truthfulness, its life-affirming music, its insight into the madness that can destroy human lives, and its witness to the importance of art for the survival of our civilizations.

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