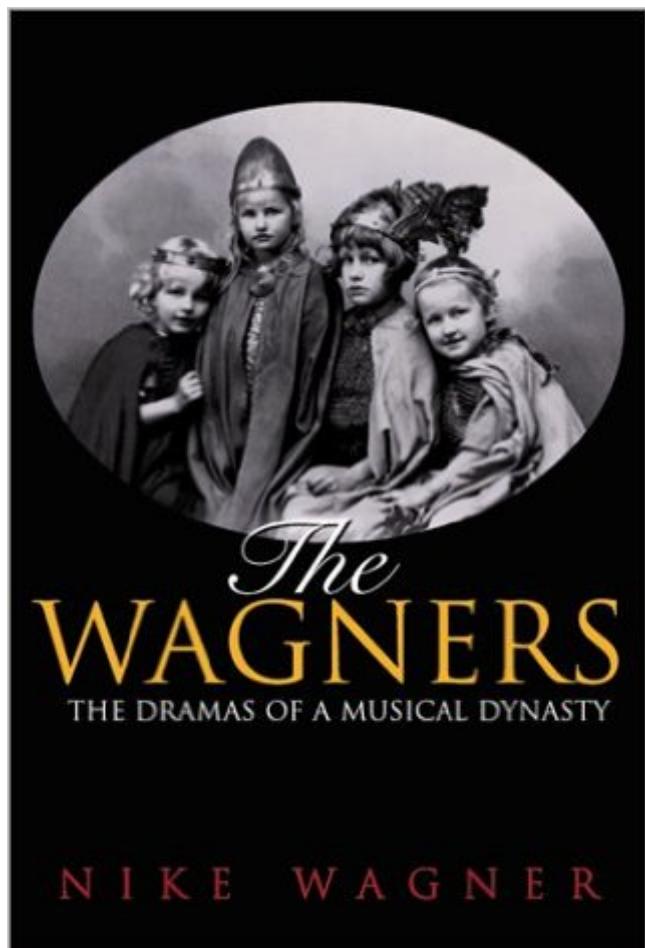


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The Wagners: The Dramas Of A Musical Dynasty



Synopsis

In this virtuoso piece of cultural history, the great-granddaughter of Richard Wagner narrates the Wagner family's turbulent history. In the process, she shares her considerable insights into the operas and gives an inside account of the internecine struggles that have surrounded the Wagner family jewel: the Bayreuth Festival. Nike Wagner draws on history, biography, and psychoanalysis to interpret both her family's history and her great-grandfather's operas. She focuses on Bayreuth, revealing how this showcase for Wagner's sublime art so readily served the Third Reich. With clear, often ironic eyes, she examines her family's extraordinary role in German culture--and its connections to right-wing ideology. Particularly fascinating is the tug-of-war between Nike's visionary but enigmatic father, Wieland, and her astute but aesthetically stodgy uncle, Wolfgang. It was Wieland Wagner who inaugurated a daring new style of Wagner production--characterized by absence of scenery, spare acting, and dramatic lighting--that led to a wider revolution in how operas are produced. But Wolfgang Wagner, now entering his eighties, has controlled the Festival and quarreled with family members since Wieland's premature death in 1966. The author concludes with a look at the current contenders for this family throne, herself among them, and presents her vision for the Festival's future. Wagnerites will need this book on their shelves. As an example of cultural journalism at its finest, it will also appeal to readers interested in German cultural history or those simply drawn to the melodrama that is the Wagner family story.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Some of Richard Wagner's genius descended to his son Siegfried Wagner, whose vastly under-rated music I am currently, delightedly, discovering. I wish Siegfried had composed more. But the only aspect of Richard Wagner's talent that reached as far as his grandchildren and great-grandchildren is that for writing self-serving autobiographies. In fact a minor literary genre has been established: memoirs by people who are famous only for being a descendent of Richard Wagner. Thus we have *Shadow over Bayreuth* by Friedelind Wagner, *Acts* by her brother Wolfgang ["it may be called *Acts*, but it sure aint Gospel"], the book by Gottfried Wagner that has so far been published under three different titles, and counting, and Nike's *The Wagners: The Dramas of a Musical Dynasty*. The only Wagner descendent with an interesting story to tell, and a ghost writer who told it well, was Friedelind. But then she appears to have been a genuinely likeable, if extremely difficult, human being, who inherited some of her grandfather's courage and directed it against the Nazis, in the certainty (I think utterly justified) that he would have approved. The remainder of the Wagner memoirs are marked principally by petulance, the tone tending to waver between the whiny and the snarky. Of these, Nike's book is the least bad. So what can we say about Nike's book, beyond that it is better than Gottfried's or Wolfgang's books? The most interesting section is the family history, which from my point of view contains a few, all too few, anecdotes or glimpses of the last Wagner descendants to be at all interesting in their own right: that is, Siegfried Wagner and his daughter Friedelind.

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