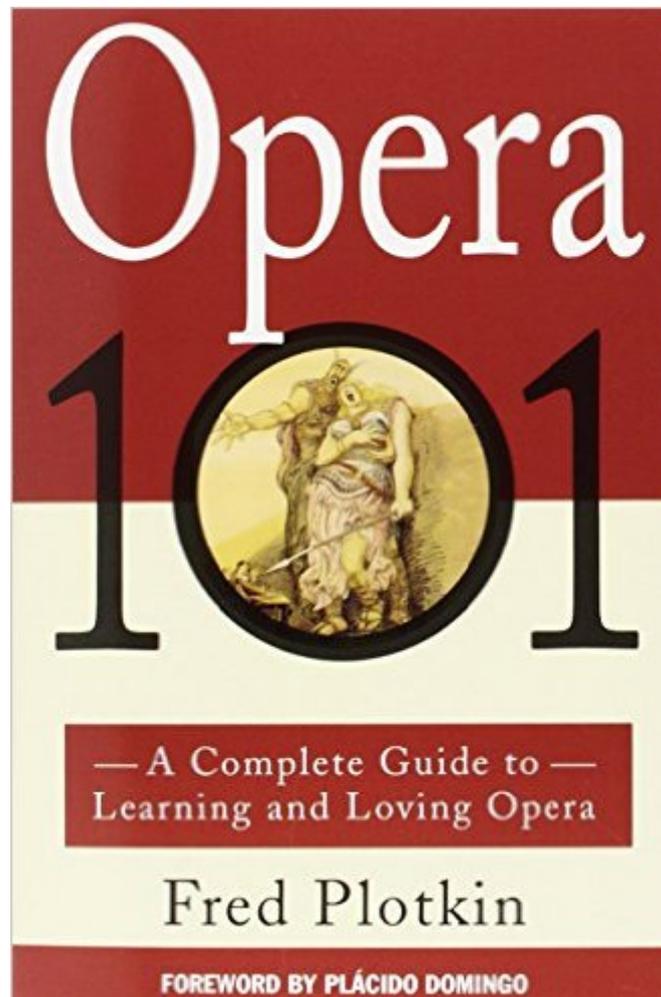# Opera 101: A Complete Guide To Learning And Loving Opera

Synopsis

Opera is the fastest growing of all the performing arts, attracting audiences of all ages who are enthralled by the gorgeous music, vivid drama, and magnificent production values. If you've decided that the time has finally come to learn about opera and discover for yourself what it is about opera that sends your normally reserved friends into states of ecstatic abandon, this is the book for you. Opera 101 is recognized as the standard text in English for anyone who wants to become an opera lover--a clear, friendly, and truly complete handbook to learning how to listen to opera, whether on the radio, on recordings, or live at the opera house. Fred Plotkin, an internationally respected writer and teacher about opera who for many years was performance manager of the Metropolitan Opera, introduces the reader (whatever his or her level of musical knowledge) to all the elements that make up opera, including: A brief, entertaining history of opera; An explanation of key operatic concepts, from vocal types to musical conventions; Hints on the best way to approach the first opera you attend and how to best understand what is happening both offstage and on; Lists of recommended books and recordings, and the most complete traveler's guide to opera houses around the world. The major part of Opera 101 is devoted to an almost minute-by-minute analysis of eleven key operas, ranging from Verdi's thunderous masterpiece Rigoletto and Puccini's electrifying Tosca through works by Mozart, Donizetti, Rossini, Offenbach, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner, to the psychological complexities of Richard Strauss's Elektra. Once you have completed Opera 101, you will be prepared to see and hear any opera you encounter, thanks to this book's unprecedentedly detailed and enjoyable method of revealing the riches of opera.

Book Information

Customer Reviews

This book is in effect a great "do it yourself" course on opera.The first chapter is a history of opera. The second discusses the mechanics of opera - the various types of singers and concepts involved in opera. Next is a chapter on the mechanics of attending an opera, buying tickets, what to beware, etc.The real heart of the book, though, is the eleven chapters covering eleven different operas. As you progress through them, you learn about new concepts such as the use of music to evoke emotion, french opera, grand opera, etc. By carefully choosing the sequence, Plotkin is careful to reveal opera's mystery in a way that will bring listeners in rather than turning them off. Plotkin also suggests a particular recording for each opera as a way of introducing different singers and conductors as well. In contrast to others, Plotkin uses the entire opera - not merely highlights.As a companion, I'd suggest Denis Foreman's A Night at the Opera, which is a highly informative, although highly opinionated, reference guide to all the major operas.

Opera 101 should be the perfect book for you if you know you want to learn more about opera but are having trouble "getting" it. The book is written by an opera expert in a light but intelligent style, and it assumes that the reader comes to it with nothing more than a genuine desire to learn and some money to spend on recordings. After a short intro chapter, Fred Plotkin begins with a 90-page history of opera that even seasoned opera-goers (of which I am one, I suppose) should find instructive. Plotkin then provides an excellent chapter on opera singers and the nuts-and-bolts of attending an opera. Almost all of the rest of the book is taken up with in-depth "lessons" on eleven key operas, each chosen to expand the reader's understanding in a certain direction. Although each of these lessons is designed for you to use while studying a particular recording of each opera, they are highly instructive if you have a recording other than the one Plotkin recommends, or even if you have no recording available at all. I would recommend this book to any serious beginner.

Having read about a dozen books that tout themselves as introductions to opera, I found "Opera 101" to be perhaps the most intriguing of the bunch. In an ever-so-slight way, it is at times a bit preachy and a bit overobvious. You will feel occasionally like you are in a high-school music appreciation class, or reading an operating manual. On the other hand, Plotkin leaves absolutely nothing out, and no stone unturned, and for that he is to be commended. Every possible question is answered, and answered thoroughly. In addition, the appendices are chock full o' valuable

information (a list of all the major and mid-major opera houses all over the world; books for further reading; recommended CD recordings and DVD filmings; etc.). And you have the feeling at all times that Ploktin knows what he's talking about.This is the PERFECT book for any adult who knows absolutely zilch about opera but who wants to learn it all, and learn it all out of a single source.

If you want to develop an interest or feed your growing interest in Opera, this is a terrific book. Plotkin believes that the more you know before you go to the theatre, the more you will get out of your experiences of live opera. I had never attended an opera without supertitles before reading this book, but feel comfortable doing so now. Good information on popular operas and obscure operas, retired singers and current singers, what to look for and what to listen for. Doesn't talk down to the reader. Published in 1994 so some resources (phone numbers of opera companies) out of date.

I've found this book extremely helpful, and a opera-lover friend of mine looked it over and agreed that it looked like a worthy introduction to the subject (though he would have chosen La Boheme as the first opera rather than Rigoletto).The reviewer whose complaint centers on the need to have the recording playing and libretto in front of you while reading is, I believe, misinterpreting the function of the book. It does not present itself as a book with summaries of many great operas and shouldn't be criticized for not being one. The chapters on the 11 operas it introduces you to are in depth, track by track, introductions so he can point out things to listen for, etc. His descriptions of certain passages as sensuous, etc. are indications of how he interprets the music. He often repeats that the listener needs to find/feel their own emotional reactions to the music, whether or not they agree with him.I'm only on my second opera now (I'm spending a great deal of time with each on before moving on), but have found this book a very interesting and helpful introduction.

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