



The Wagners: The Dramas of a Musical Dynasty

Nike Wagner

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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.



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