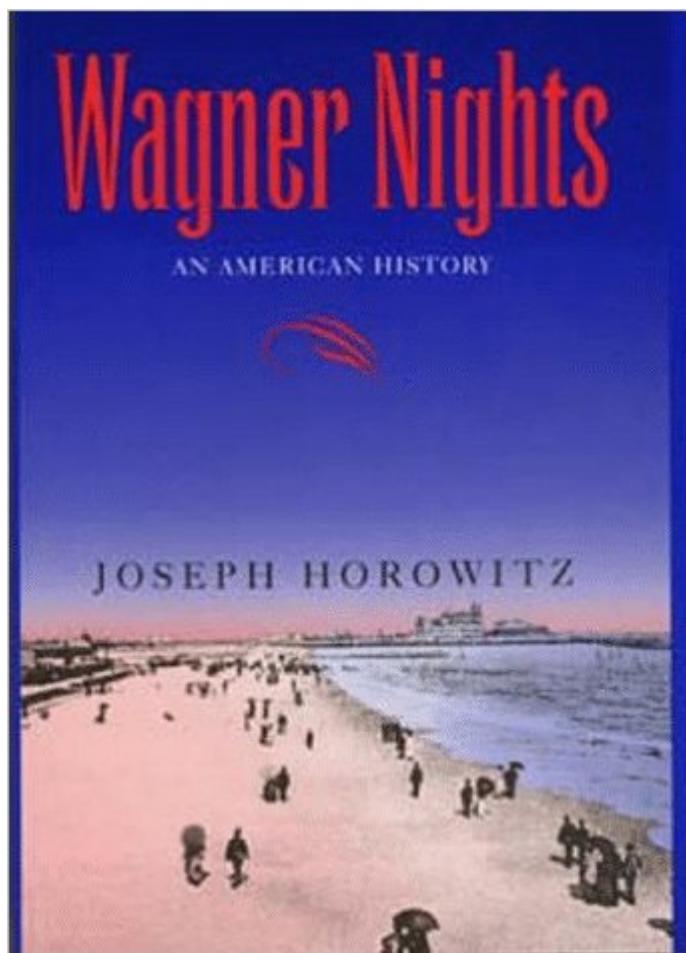


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Wagner Nights: An American History (California Studies In 19th-Century Music)



Synopsis

As never before or since, Richard Wagner's name dominated American music-making at the close of the nineteenth century. Europe, too, was obsessed with Wagner, but as Joseph Horowitz shows in this first history of Wagnerism in the United States; the American obsession was unique. The central figure in Wagner Nights is conductor Anton Seidl (1850-1898), a priestly and enigmatic personage in New York musical life. Seidl's own admirers included the women of the Brooklyn-based Seidl Society, who wore the letter "S" on their dresses. In the summers, Seidl conducted fourteen times a week at Brighton Beach, filling the three-thousand-seat music pavilion to capacity. The fact that most Wagnerites were women was a distinguishing feature of American Wagnerism and constituted a vital aspect of the fin-de-siècle ferment that anticipated the New American Woman. Drawing on the work of such cultural historians as T. Jackson Lears and Lawrence Levine, Horowitz's lively history reveals an "Americanized" Wagner never documented before. An entertaining and startling read, a treasury of operatic lore, Wagner Nights offers an unprecedented revisionist history of American culture a century ago.

Book Information

Series: California Studies in 19th-Century Music (Book 9)

Hardcover: 404 pages

Publisher: University of California Press (October 5, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520083946

ISBN-13: 978-0520083943

Product Dimensions: 1.2 x 6.5 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (4 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,675,704 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #139 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Composers > Wagner #706 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Classical #1270 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Forms & Genres > Opera

Customer Reviews

Joseph Horowitz, former music critic for the New York Times, may have overdosed on Wagner while writing this account, because his style is infested with the verbal equivalents of consecutive diminished-seventh chords. It seems that before writing this book, Dr. Horowitz learned a new word:

meliorist. That's a fine word, a superb word, an outstanding word! But like a child with a new drum, he bangs on it repeatedly and to an annoying degree. I am not exaggerating when I tell you that the word *meliorist* appears throughout the book at intervals of every five to ten pages, often even more frequently and often in the most annoying manner: usually as an adjective ("... an intriguing variant on the meliorist Wagner Americans adored," pg. 137; "The meliorist Wagner, moreover, resonated with an American religious dynamic . . .," pg. 190; "Notwithstanding the ingenious meliorist readings . . .," pg. 214; "... not a correct meliorist sermon . . .," pg. 229; "American Wagnerism, after all, was meliorist," pg. 255; and also on pages 280, 284, 294, 301, and to give the reader a break, "merely meliorist," on page 319), but also as a noun: "... whose meliorism attracted Anglicans, Catholics, and Presbyterians alike," pg. 188; "... the meliorism of Wagner," pg. 192. This book contains more instances and variants of *meliorist* than any in the history of the written word, and the few specimens given above are a fraction of the examples of its use. It seems as though *meliorist* occurs more often in this book than the Spear motif is heard in all all >14 hours of The Ring of the Nibelung. And to what purpose? The effect is to make most of the book redundant.

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