



# Richard Wagner: A Life in Music

*Martin Geck*

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Best known for the challenging four-opera cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung*, Richard Wagner (1813–83) was a conductor, librettist, theater director, and essayist, in addition to being the composer of some of the most enduring operatic works in history, such as *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Tristan and Isolde*. Though his influence on the development of European music is indisputable, Wagner was also quite outspoken on the politics and culture of his time. His ideas traveled beyond musical circles into philosophy, literature, theater staging, and the visual arts. To befit such a dynamic figure, acclaimed biographer Martin Geck offers here a Wagner biography unlike any other, one that strikes a unique balance between the technical musical aspects of Wagner's compositions and his overarching understanding of aesthetics.

Wagner has always inspired passionate admirers as well as numerous detractors, with the result that he has achieved a mythical stature nearly equal to that of the Valkyries and Viking heroes he popularized. There are few, if any, scholars today who know more about Wagner and his legacy than Geck, who builds upon his extensive research and considerable knowledge as one of the editors of the *Complete Works* to offer a distinctive appraisal of the composer and the operas. Using a wide range of sources, from contemporary scholars to the composer's own words, Geck explores key ideas in Wagner's life and works, while always keeping the music in the foreground. Geck discusses not only all the major operas, but also several unfinished operas and even the composer's early attempts at quasi-Shakespearean drama.

*Richard Wagner: A Life in Music* is a landmark study of one of music's most important figures, offering something new to opera enthusiasts, Wagnerians, and anti-Wagnerians alike.

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