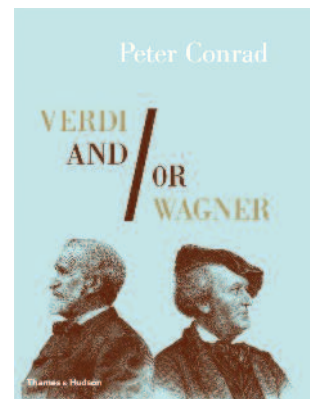


Verdi and/or Wagner

Peter Conrad

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Although Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner never entered into debate with each other, the world took them to be rivals, and their supporters formed mutually antagonistic teams to exchange insults.

The two greatest operatic composers of their time, were born in the same year, 1813, but in different countries. Verdi's melodies are a symptom of affection, giving voice to the passion and sensuality of Italy; Wagner's harmonies possess a nervous intensity, echoing the metaphysical dream-life of Germany.

Is it possible to love both composers or do we still choose one over the other for reasons of taste, ideology or nationality? Peter Conrad, who admits that they belong to separate parts of his own experience, probes their affinities and the differences between them. Both were hailed as 'master' by their own countrymen, and the elevated role of each artist helped define the identities of their emerging nations.

Today Italians honour Verdi as a godfather, though for Germans, Wagner is still a controversial composer with memories of the Third Reich. But for music lovers, their operas continue to attract a fervent following, perhaps because the composers express the contrast between light and dark in all of us.

'Peter Conrad is the writer who has helped me most to understand the nature of opera'.

John Mortimer

Author

Peter Conrad taught English literature at Christ Church, Oxford, from 1973 to 2011. One of the great cultural critics of our time, he has written books on a wide number of subjects including *Modern Times*, *Modern Places*; *A Song of Love and Death: The Meaning of Opera*; and *Creation*. His work appears in the *Observer*, the *New Yorker* and *The Monthly* (Australia).

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