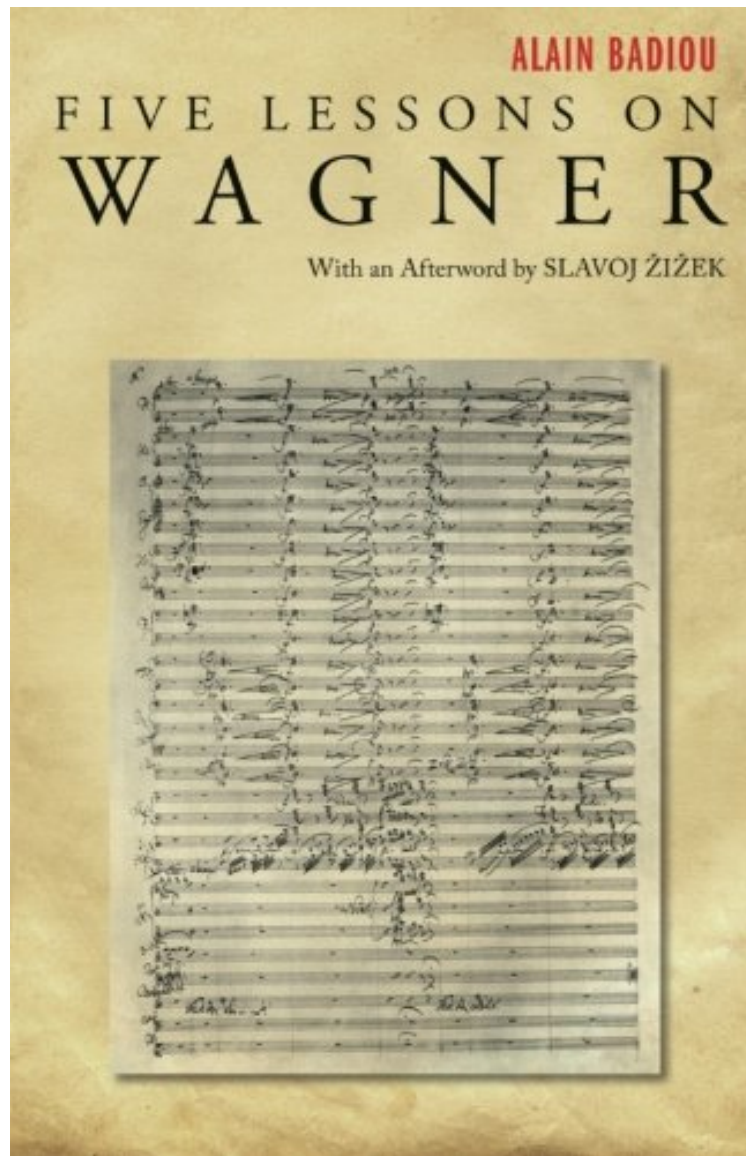


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Five Lessons on Wagner

Alain Badiou

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Alain Badiou : Five Lessons on Wagner before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Five Lessons on Wagner:

1 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CESAR MAYORAL FIGUEROAJust a must.39 of 42 people found the following review helpful. Exorcizing AdornoBy Duane M. JohnsonIf you love the music of Richard Wagner for no reason beyond its power and expressive beauty, then you may not want to read this book. But if you wish to read about the current state of the ongoing Wagner debate as written by Alain Badiou (b. 1937), one of

France's leading philosophers, then get this book and enjoy a thoughtful and well-written summary of what has been bouncing around in this man's head and in not a few others. It is hard to summarize the richness of this book. Badiou is a passionate devotee of Wagner's music, but he is also an academic philosopher, and if you are going to write about Wagner's significance in our day, then it means your inevitably having to deal with the lingering influence of Theodor Adorno (d. 1969), whose critical-theory opinions dating from the 1930s continue to dominate the intellectual scene whenever Wagner is up for discussion. Adorno's treatment of Wagner boils down to the thesis that the composer's music contained identifiable proto-fascist elements and that these elements combined to produce a totalizing political mythopoiesis: in short, the source of Wagner's seemingly damning association with Nazism could be found in the formal aspects of his music since these were often no more than the artistic reflection of what was interpreted as being the composer's own proto-fascist outlook. Badiou, however, is not content to write off Wagner in these terms. He, along with scores of other anti-postmodernist thinkers, knows that he has to confront Adorno head-on in order to see if there is something more to his beloved composer's works than what Adorno's own brand of Marxist-tinged ideological reductionism would have us believe. He proceeds on this course in a series of five 'lessons', and, in the second of these lessons, he gives Adorno his due by discussing that author's 'Negative Dialectics' in order to see if there is anything in the latter's philosophy which would predispose him to view Wagner in the positively rigid way that he does. The bulk of the book is Badiou's reexamination of these assumptions, and, in what I think is a model of clarity for the presentation and evaluation of what are some often substantial philosophical and aesthetic issues, Badiou arrives at a set of conclusions which rescues Wagner from the ideologizing treatment to which he has been subjected for so long by Nietzsche, Shaw, Adorno, and, most recently, by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. In a word, Badiou concludes that the key to Wagner's genius is that he was a composer who essayed 'possibilities': though the subject-matter for his operas often included mythological and/or nationalistic materials, there is in his treatment of them a continuously unfolding attempt to probe them as a series of open-ended hypotheses about human nature, action, belief, and society. The book also includes a thoroughly fascinating 'afterward' penned by Slavoj Žižek entitled "Wagner, Anti-Semitism, and 'German Ideology'", which, given its delightful length, practically amounts to a second book. Žižek had also provided the "Foreward: Why is Wagner Worth Saving?" for the Verso edition of Adorno's 'In Search of Wagner', and he is brimming with his own ideas about what makes Wagner's operas worth anyone's while. I recommend this book highly to anyone interested in reading a thoughtful yet critical appreciation of Wagner's works, one that lays to rest some long-standing intellectual orthodoxies while offering plenty of boldly provocative and, I think, thoroughly insightful ideas of its own. I have read this book twice already, and I plan to read it yet again in conjunction with some of the other works which the author mentions along the way.

For over a century, Richard Wagner's music has been the subject of intense debate among philosophers, many of whom have attacked its ideological some say racist and reactionary underpinnings. In this major new work, Alain Badiou, radical philosopher and keen Wagner enthusiast, offers a detailed reading of the critical responses to the composer's work, which include Adorno's writings on the composer and Wagner's recuperation by Nazism as well as more recent readings by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and others. Slavoj Žižek provides an afterword, and both philosophers make a passionate case for re-examining the relevance of Wagner to the contemporary world.

A figure like Plato or Hegel walks here among us! Slavoj Žižek (in praise of Alain Badiou) An heir to Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Althusser. New Statesman (in praise of Alain Badiou) Shaking the foundations of Western liberal democracy. Times Higher Education Supplement (in praise of Alain Badiou) About the Author Alain Badiou teaches philosophy at the cole normale suprieure and the Collge international de philosophie in Paris. In addition to several novels, plays and political essays, he has published a number of major philosophical works, including Theory of the Subject, Being and Event, Manifesto for Philosophy, and Gilles Deleuze. His recent books include The Meaning of Sarkozy, Ethics, Metapolitics, Polemics, The Communist Hypothesis, Five Lessons on Wagner, and Wittgenstein's Anti-Philosophy. Slavoj Žižek is a Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic. He is a professor at the European Graduate School, International Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, Birkbeck College, University of London, and a senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. His books include Living in the End Times, First as Tragedy, Then as Farce, In Defense of Lost Causes, four volumes of the Essential Žižek, and many more.