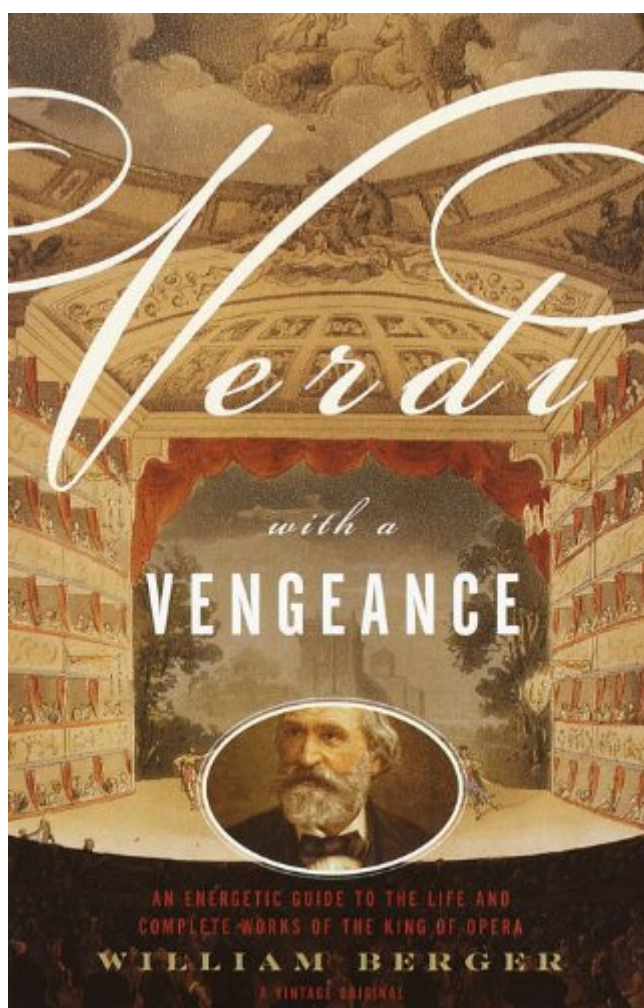


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Verdi With A Vengeance: An Energetic Guide To The Life And Complete Works Of The King Of Opera



Synopsis

Everything you could possibly know about Verdi and his operas, from the brilliant and humorous author of *Wagner Without Fear*. If you want to know why *La traviata* was actually a flop at its premiere in 1853, it's in here. If you want to know why claiming to have heard Bjorling's Chicago performance of *Il trovatore* is the classic opera fan faux pas, it's in here. Even if you just want to know how to pronounce *Aida*, or what the plot of *Rigoletto* is all about, this is the place to look. From the composer's intense hatred of priests to synopses of the operas and a detailed discography of the best recordings to buy, it can all be found in *Verdi with a Vengeance*. William Berger has given another improbable performance, serving up a book as thorough as it is funny and as original as it is astute, an utterly indispensable guide for novice and expert alike. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

William Beger's "*Verdi with a Vengeance*" is a triumph of music writing: accessible, informed and passionate. For the newcomer to the breadth of works by the great composer, this guide is a godsend, as Mr. Berger lays out the history of each opera, the story behind its plot and, most

important, what makes each one special. He doesn't preach, but his enthusiasm makes a reader -- and a potential listener -- hungry to hear and see the works he so vividly describes. Mr. Berger is a master of the telling detail: he lets you know what to look and listen for in particular arias, and how these moments affect the drama. "Verdi with a Vengeance" should also delight Verdi aficionados, since Mr. Berger is so familiar with all aspects of the composer's art, his research is so deep, that he reveals new aspects of the operas (and the Requiem). His prose is free of musicological jargon, though conversant with the language of music. Mr. Berger can describe economically the emotion music can convey, and he can give a sense of the intellect behind the notes. He is a writer of wit and nuance, masterfully evoking a mise-en-scene within an opera or limning the characteristics of hammy singers. This is a book both to be savored at length and dipped into for fresh insights before attending any performance of Verdi. It is a rare book that manages to be learned as well as breezy, humorous and deeply felt.

This short guide to Verdi's life and works is an indispensable gem for anyone wanting to learn more about Italy's greatest operatic composer! Berger gives a succinctly informative sketch of the complex composer's life. He adds chapters on Verdi books, CD's, Videos, staging of Verdi operas and a helpful glossary of operatic terms. The most helpful and longest part of the book deals with a brief synopsis of each opera in the Verdian canon from the obscure "Oberto" to the Master's final comic masterpiece "Falstaff." Berger lists the characters of each opera, makes witty comments on the big arias and scenes in each opera and also provides historical information on the production of each opera. I had earlier read Berger's excellent "Wagner Without Fear" and was so impressed with his writing that I eagerly turned to Berger's guide to Verdi. I understand he is now working on a similar guide to the life and operas of Puccini which will be received by this reviewer with gratitude. If you are a novice to operatic enjoyment or a seasoned Verdian this work will be a delight. I highly recommend it for your consideration!

Unlike another reviewer, what I really like about "Verdi with a Vengeance" is that it discusses ALL of Verdi's operas, even the early and/or less frequently performed operas. I especially like the "what to listen for" aspects, and also that it is informal and personal. I also like his discussion of different recordings and what he likes about them. I am a real Verdi-phile, and I love this little book. Only four stars because it's little and the discussions are brief. I could read a BIG book about Verdi.

This book is similar in format to the author's "Wagner Without Fear". Like the Wagner book, it

provides a lot of information in terms of biography, plot summary, musical overview, and selected recordings. Although a very good book, it is not quite up to the Wagner book in that it discusses many more operas (27 including the Requiem) than the Wagner book did (10) in roughly the same space. The plot summaries are still very good, though often there is not quite the same level of detail and (especially) commentary there was in the Wagner book. As a result, the book is more a (very good) set of plot summaries than its predecessor. In fairness to the author, this may be appropriate in that Verdi is a generally more accessible composer who often needs less in the way of commentary to be appreciated. It definitely is a good resource, though a reader interested in Verdi may find himself or herself going outside of the book more than they would if they were reading the Wagner book.

Viva Verdi! William Berger provides a useful guide to all of the Verdi operas from the obscure "Oberto" to the classic comedic masterpiece "Falstaff" which closed the operatic master's oeuvre. Berger's book is similar to the treatment he earlier applied to Richard Wagner in his "Wagner Without Fear." This means:

- a. Succinct but on target plot summaries of all Verdi's operas including the Verdi Requiem.
- b. Brief chapters on the staging of Verdi's operas; Verdi's works on CD and outstanding books on the Busseto genius for anyone wanting to know more about the King of Italian lyrical opera.

Berger's work is worthwhile reading for the operatic novice or the veteran opera fan who wants to brush up on the labyrinthal plot of "Il Trovatore" or explore how Verdi's music has been used as soundtrack for motion pictures. Berger's book on Verdi is a treat for everyone enjoying opera who also relishes good writing done with wit, charm and panache! I eagerly await a similar guide on Puccini which I have learned is in the works from the pen of Berger! Highly recommended!

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