



Wagner's Parsifal: The Journey of a Soul

Peter Bassett

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"Parsifal" was Richard Wagner's last opera, and many consider it his most beautiful and moving work. It is concerned with the belief that human salvation is to be achieved not through the satisfaction of worldly desires, but through compassion. The story reflects Parsifal's inner journey towards his own "enlightenment through compassion" and his consequent ability to ease the moral burdens of others. It is set amongst a Christian religious military order of knights at about the time of the Crusades. To convey the work's subtle and mystical ideas, Wagner wrote music that was decades ahead of its time and influenced many great composers -- Mahler, Bruckner, Debussy and Richard Strauss among them. Peter Bassett has made a special study of "Parsifal" looking particularly at the relationship between Wagner's sources and his text. It has become fashionable in recent times to interpret "Parsifal" in terms of twentieth-century politics and late nineteenth-century theories about race. The author shows that Wagner's text owes more to his sources than many people suspect, and he identifies important thematic connections with other works, namely "Der Ring des Nibelungen." This guide, which includes a translation of the libretto, will be invaluable to those new to "Parsifal" but will also provide fresh insights for readers who are already familiar with Wagner's final work.

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