



A History of Opera

Carolyn Abbate, Roger Parker

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A bold, engaging exploration of opera's fundamental nature and enduring appeal, from the sixteenth century to the present.

A History of Opera, the first new, full-length, single-volume history of opera for more than a generation, provokes in-depth discussions of many works by the greatest opera composers, from Monteverdi, Handel, and Mozart to Verdi and Wagner, to Strauss, Puccini, Berg, and Britten. There are lively discussions of opera's social, political, and literary backgrounds, its economic circumstances, and the almost continual polemics that have accompanied its development through the centuries. Central to the book is an exploration of the tensions between words and music, character and singer that have always sustained and enlivened opera. In a polemical final chapter, Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker examine the problems that opera has faced in the last half century, when new works once opera's lifeblood have shrunk to a tiny minority and have largely failed to find a permanent place in the repertoire.

Yet the book's message is one of celebration. Even if the majority of opera's most popular and enduring works were written in what is now a remote European past and in circumstances very different from our own, and even if the viability of contemporary opera is ever more in question, opera as an art form remains extraordinarily buoyant and challenging. It continues to transform people physically, emotionally, and intellectually, and to articulate human experience in ways no other art form can match.

24 pages of illustrations, including four-color

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