

**THE PERTINENT
WAGNERITE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649511617

The Pertinent Wagnerite by B. M. Steigman

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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NEW YORK
THOMAS SELTZER
1921

ML410
W12581

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO OTTO H. KAHN, ESQ.:

An address to you here may seem a reversion to the prefatory type of two hundred years ago, that prudently made obeisance to its noble lord with full many a scraping superlative. Your benefactions in behalf of American art, in truth, have been such as to make the courtly tribute seem hardly an anachronism. It is the more gladly rendered since there is no real occasion at the same time for preclusive protest against an eighteenth century interpretation of the motive. For one thing, even those who do not know the extent of your patronage of artistic enterprise, are aware of your insistence upon anonymity. And those who by chance have had a glimpse of the range of this patronage, realize how slight must be the possible tribute to it — were such attempted — of an occasional dedication like mine. This every one knows: that the democratic principles you have expressed are certainly two hundred years beyond the age of Halifax and Chesterfield; and that any attempted restoration, be it merely literary, of the encumbrance of ruffle and silken stocking, would meet with a doubtful reception.

The more cause have I to hope that the impersonal protest of these essays will be given such consideration by you as the theme merits. For the in-

debtedness of music and drama in America to you — here, properly, might be doffed the plumed hat and bent the silver-buckled leg — is not only for the extension of their scope, but, even more, for their elevation to sometimes proud æsthetic levels. It seems unlikely that an appeal against the recent degradation of these two arts, united in the music drama, will be disregarded by you.

It is possible to attribute to our singleness of purpose during the war our unreasonable aversion for German opera. The result was a great artistic wrong committed by way of retaliation against no matter how infinitely greater an international wrong. The attack upon Wagner was certainly an unevenhanded attempt at justice for the attack upon Belgium. It seemed more an unflattering revelation of our real regard for the master. The post-war acceptance of the music dramas *in English* is a corroboration: for the banishment of Wagner's original text can hardly be considered a Versailles visitation; and must be wholly attributed to our blurred understanding.

Surely there is nothing really extenuating in our patriotic protestations that it was not that we loved Wagner less, but that we loved America more. The inevitable conclusion must then be that our love blinded us to the beauty of one and to the ideals of the other.

The sedative years are happily restoring our vision. The concession made is now general that the best music drama ever written belongs not to the Germans alone, but is the heritage of all man-

kind. It is by no means the least of the distinctions of the Metropolitan Opera House under your guidance that it was the first to recognize this.

In addressing this little book, therefore, to the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the world's greatest opera house (who by virtue of this office is the chief administrator of Wagner's bequest to humanity) I am confident that its plea for a complete restoration of our heritage — the original poetry of it no less than the music — will be heard. And in addressing you personally, Mr. Kahn, I venture to secure as advocate for this plea one of the foremost of America's connoisseurs.

Yours truly,

B. M. STEIGMAN.

