

An Introduction to the Dramatic Works of Giacomo Meyerbeer: Operas, Ballets, Cantatas, Plays

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864) was a great musical dramatist in his own right. The fame of his operas rests on his radical treatment of form, his development of scenic complexes and greater plasticity of structure and melody, his dynamic use of the orchestra, and close attention to all aspects of presentation and production, all of which set new standards in Romantic opera and dramaturgy. This book carries forward the process of rediscovery and reassessment of Meyerbeer's art "including not just his famous French operas, but also his German and Italian ones" placing them in the context of his entire dramatic oeuvre, including his ballets, oratorios, cantatas and incidental music. From Meyerbeer's first stage presentation in 1810 to his great posthumous accolade in 1865, some 24 works mark the unfolding of this life lived for dramatic music. The reputation of the famous four grand operas may well live on in the public consciousness, but the other works remain largely unknown. This book provides an approachable introduction to them. The works have been divided into their generic types for quick reference and helpful association, and placed within the context of the composer's life and artistic development. Each section unfolds a brief history of the work's origins, an account of the plot, a critical survey of some of its musical characteristics, and a record of its performance history. Robert Letellier examines each work from a dramaturgical view point, including the essential"often challenging"philosophical and historical elements in the scenarios, and how these concepts were translated musically onto the stage. A series of portraits and stage iconography assist in bringing the works to life.

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