



Actors and Singers

Richard Wagner

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The essays collected in this volume were written between 1870 and 1873, years that brought a transformation in Germany. After Prussia's spectacular defeat of France, the coalescing of German states into a unified Germany, and Bismarck's declaration of the German Empire, Richard Wagner suddenly felt like a prophet whose predictions had come true before his eyes. At last the German culture he longed to enliven had a German state as grand as his own ambition.

In the same period Wagner was deeply inspired by the works of Shakespeare, an influence that runs throughout this volume. The title essay, "Actors and Singers," is one of Wagner's most deliberate and philosophical writings. He wrote, "Art ceases, strictly speaking, to be Art from the moment it presents itself as Art to our reflecting consciousness." He described how the unconsciousness of art, and thus art's power, connected natural genius to cultivated traditions. German genius, however, still lacked its own traditions. Wagner aimed to provide them.

Also included are Wagner's famous essay, "Beethoven"; his first publications concerning the nascent Bayreuth Festival Playhouse; his visionary "The Destiny of Opera"; and his letter to Friedrich Nietzsche responding to the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*.

This edition includes the full text of volume 5 of the translation of Wagner's works published in 1896 for the London Wagner Society.

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