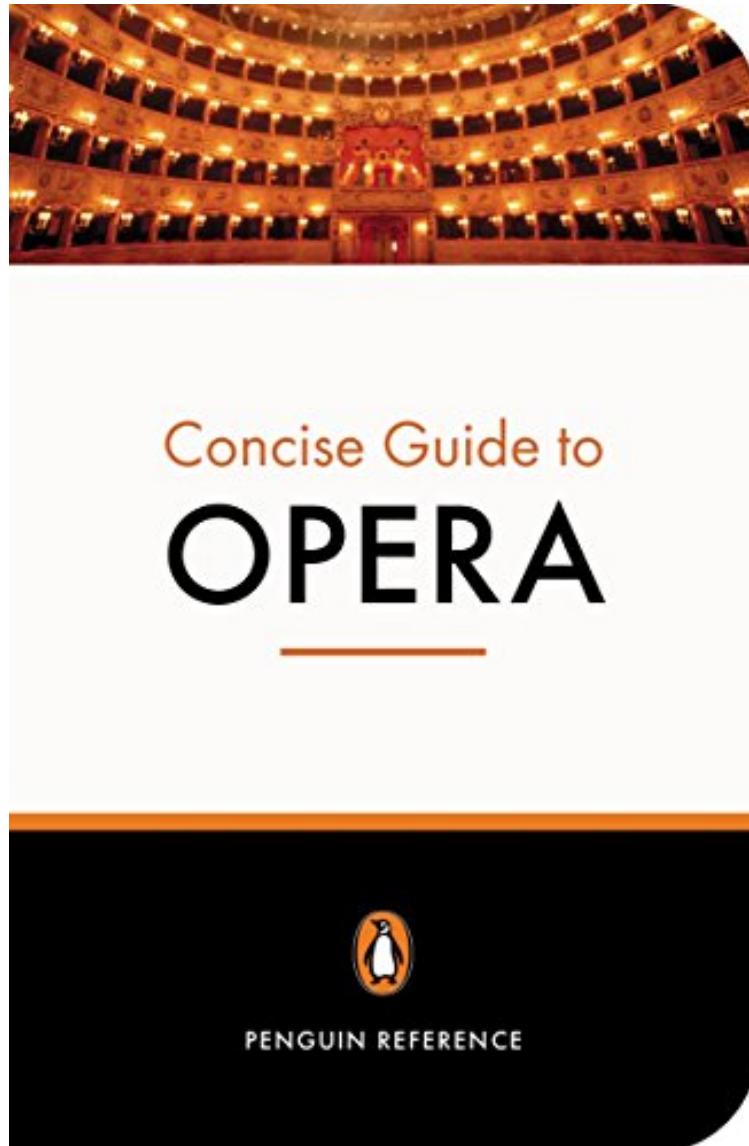


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The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera

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From Alfred Music : The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera:

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people found the following review helpful. Think twice. By Henry Thoreau This "concise" edition of the significantly bulkier and heavier "New Penguin Opera Guide" (2001) includes no illustrations and covers "only" 250 operas (instead of the the other edition's roughly 2000 operas, not to mention 750 additional composers). Of course, the 250 works that ARE covered here include virtually all of the operas commonly performed. (But this edition does omit perhaps a handful of "borderline-popular" titles such as Belioz' "La damnation de Faust.") Considering that this "concise" edition can be bought from 's third-party sellers at a dirt-cheap price, it's a pretty good deal. But, whatever you do, don't pay the full retail price (of roughly \$16). Heck, you could find a nice-condition copy of the unabridged "New Penguin Opera Guide" costing no more than that if you do some searching. Of course, if neither "price" nor "compactness" is any concern to you, why even consider this edition? (Spend more and GET more!) Finally, also be aware that perhaps the best (most comprehensive) single-volume "opera and composer encyclopedia" of them all is the original, 1993 version of "The New Penguin Opera Guide," which was titled "The Viking Opera Guide." That "Viking" edition (typically rather pricey in the used-book market!) has darker (easier-to-read) text and many more illustrations than its circa-2001 successor. Moreover, it covers somewhat more of the older composers and operas. [For more details, see my review (06-15-2007) of "The New Penguin Opera Guide."]

This concise edition of the critically-acclaimed New Penguin Opera Guide focusses on the composers and works most frequently performed today - ranging from Britten to Massenet, and from Mozart to Wagner. Composer biographies are accompanied by informed articles on individual operas, offering plot synopses, musical analysis and general commentary.

Praise for The New Penguin Opera Guide: 'For range, breadth, enthusiasm and common sense, Amanda Holden's labour of love is already irreplaceable' Dennis Marks, Observer
About the Author
Amanda Holden has written some 50 translations and texts for the opera stage, theatre, and concert hall, including the libretto for Mark Anthony Turnage's opera 'The Silver Tassie', for which she received an Olivier Award. For The New Penguin Opera Guide she assembled a team of 100 experts. She lives in London.
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Glossary of Terms
Aria - Italian for "air", and the standard term for a distinct solo song in an opera.
Entr'acte - a musical interlude between acts of a play or opera; a distinct musical work intended for performance in this way.
Falsetto - A method of singing which enables a male singer to reach notes above his usual range.
Grand Opera - the large-scale operatic genre of the early 19th century particularly in France, in which epic historical subjects were staged with enormous forces and great spectacle.
Intermezzo - A musical (usually orchestral) interlude between operatic scenes.
Libretto - the printed or manuscript literary text of an operatic work.
Prima Donna - the principal female singer in an operatic cast.
Vibrato - the rapid fluctuation of pitch (and sometimes loudness) that gives the voice and certain instruments their main expressive quality.
Opera's Bigwigs
Mozart
Mozart is the most famous of all infant prodigies, the little boy who charmed kings and princes as his music continues to charm us today. After three operas composed by the time he was 12, Mozart had the extraordinary honour of being commissioned to compose the opera seria *Mitridate* for the royal ducal theatre of Milan in 1770 when he was 14, with two more operas for 1771 and 1772. His own personality gradually gained the upper hand over the Italian models he has assimilated.
Puccini
Puccini is generally regarded as the greatest Italian composer of the post-Verdi generation. All but the first two of his operas remain a firm part of the operatic repertoire, and several (*La bohème*, *Madam Butterfly*) are among the most popular ever written. During a period in which the Italian operatic tradition was finally coming to an end, he alone among his contemporaries managed to renew himself creatively, to fashion a convincing series of works, repeatedly forging a successful compromise between his native inheritance and the French and German influences that increasingly gained sway in his country.
Verdi
Giuseppe Verdi is one of a tiny group of composers who set the supreme standards by which the art of opera is judged; of his 28 operas several of which exist in more than one version about a dozen from the backbone of the standard operatic repertoire. He was the dominant figure in Italian opera for 50 years, and was largely responsible for a radical transformation of its character.
Wagner
Wagner is a major figure in the history of opera and one of the most controversial (and written about) figures of the 19th century. No detail of Wagner's life was too sordid to be aired in public in the 19th century (his liking for silk underwear and supposedly homosexual relations with his patron Ludwig II of Bavaria were two favorites). Yet this lurid fascination would have been unthinkable without the two things that will always be most important about him: the power of his music and the ambitious artistic claim he made for opera.