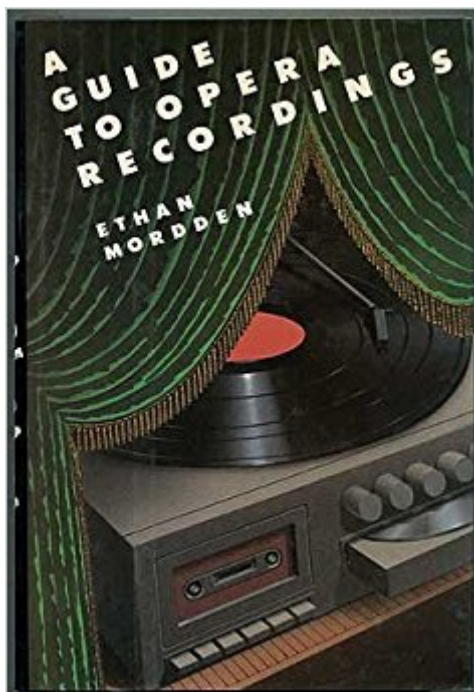


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# A Guide To Opera Recordings



## Synopsis

This book is a consumer guide, an opera appreciation course, and a history of recording techniques and lore, all rolled into one. With the same wit and verve that he brought to *Opera Anecdotes and Demented: The World of the Opera Diva*, Ethan Mordden reviews opera's legacy of recordings, from Monteverdi to Stephen Sondheim, from Nellie Melba to Luciano Pavarotti, from cylinders and 78s to lps and compact discs. There have been guides to opera's discography before, but no single-volume work as wide-ranging and up-to-date as this one: not only the major composers, but also many "minor" ones are represented; and both live performances and studio recordings are featured. Not a mere listing of recordings, but a narrative history of opera since its earliest days, the book provides chapters on the First Operas, Mozart, German Romanticism, Grand Opera, Rossini, Verdi, Russian Opera, Puccini, Stravinsky, Modern French Opera, Strauss, Weill, Britten, Gerswin, American Opera and much more. Even the most recent productions, like *Les Misérables*, and such newly hailed opera stars as Kathleen Battle and Gheena Dimitrova are discussed. Recording information, including cast and label, is contained in the text while a helpful index enables the reader to locate composers, their works, and the recordings of favourite singers quickly and easily. Every opera lover, whether newcomer or veteran buff, will find the answers they have been looking for in this entertaining new handbook. What is the best *Rigoletto*? The most complete *Lohengrin*? The most avoidable *Carmen*? How does Maria Callas sound singing Wagner? What of the great Ring recordings -- how does Georg Solti's measure up against Herbert von Karajan's? Has sonic technology improved Callas' classic, thirty-five- year-old *Tosca*, or has it damaged it? Are "bargain boxes" of records actually a good buy or just shoddy merchandise? Do we really get anything out of ancient recordings that we can't get in digital sound from CDs? Ethan Mordden's latest work is the perfect companion to steer the reader through the marvels of opera.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Mordden's research has been exhaustive...and his sassy style makes for breezy reading."--The Houston Post

About the author: Ethan Mordden was the Assistant Editor of Opera News magazine for two years. His seventeen books include *Broadway Babies*, *Movie Star*, *The Splendid Art of Opera*, *The Hollywood Musical*, and three works of fiction, *I've a Feeling We're Not in Kansas Anymore*, *One Last Waltz*, and *Buddies*.

This is one of my favorite books about opera recordings. Mordden is writing specifically for opera connoisseurs and this book is probably not for the first-comers, but if you are already acquainted with many operas and their recordings, this book is a treat. The book follows the history of opera on recordings with a particular emphasis on several key composers, and Mordden discusses the most important historical live or studio recordings from a very personal perspective. You can clearly see his preferences (e.g. Callas), and dislikes, but as you read his reviews, you can really feel that he has really experienced and thought about the performances he analyses. One may disagree with some reviews, but they all offer a new perspective. I have been rereading this book for the last ten or so years, and particularly like his thoughts on "Norma" and the "Ring" recordings. Once again, if you have had enough of superficial "opera for beginners" books and want something deeper and more rewarding, you should get this book.

This book is a very fun and helpful read. Its breezy style belies its scholarship. As with any record-review tome, no reader will agree with all of Mordden's opinions, but he's easy to "peg," so that when you read his opinions about the various recordings of a certain opera, you can extrapolate whether you would agree with him in that particular case. The world of opera recordings has moved on quite a bit since this book was written, however, so perhaps it's time for a revision and an update. Many operas that had never been recorded when this book was published now have

several competing versions on CD, and many "top choice" recordings of the past have found new and challenging competitors for the consumer's wallet. With that caveat, I recommend this book. I still re-read it, in part and in whole, quite frequently.

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