



Space Opera

Jack Vance

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An opera company composed of aliens from a world no human is familiar with makes a concert hall appearance on Earth. Their music is strange, somewhat disconcerting, but the performance closes to rave reviews. The next day, every one of the aliens has vanished. They didn't leave by spaceship, and it seems impossible to believe they have successfully hidden themselves on a strange planet; so where did they go, and how?

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Roger Wool, a young dilettante who was enthralled by the "space opera," wants desperately to find the unknown world of origin of the musicians and hear more of their music. He persuades his wealthy aunt to sponsor a Terran opera company on a tour of the Galaxy, hoping to encounter the mysterious aliens, or their home world.

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But alien musical systems are NOT always well-received by people unused to hearing them. . .

Space Opera Details

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Author : Jack Vance

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From Reader Review Space Opera for online ebook

Emily says

3 1/2 Stars

Skjam! says

It's not that Roger Wool doesn't want to work, as such. It's that he doesn't want to be tied down to a single job day after day, the same desk in the same office. And he's too well-bred for most work that involves wandering from place to place doing odd jobs as they come. Fortunately, his wealthy aunt Dame Isabel Grayce has been willing to subsidize Roger living in the manner to which he's accustomed, in exchange for being available for her every whim.

And while opera is not Roger's thing, the avant-garde performance put on by the alien Ninth Company of Rlaru has some interesting points. However, later that night the performers vanish into thin air, leaving their human manager struggling for an explanation. Dame Isabel learns that this was supposed to be part of a cultural exchange, and immediately puts her entire fortune behind the project of sending an Earthly opera company to the stars.

This is highly alarming to Roger, who was hoping that his aunt's largess would continue into her will—if she goes broke on this wild adventure, there goes his inheritance! While helping to make the arrangements for the voyage, Roger meets a mysterious beauty named Madoc Roswyn, who is hellbent on coming along. Problem is, she has no musical training or other opera-useful skills, and Dame Isabel quickly sees through the secretary gag.

And so the Phoebus blasts off with a full opera company and orchestra aboard, as well as a crew led by the increasingly nervous Captain Gondar, Dame Isabel and her staff..and Madoc as a stowaway.

Jack Vance (1916-2013) wrote many fine science fiction works. This comedic novel was a stand-alone, written (so he claimed) to fit the title, rather than adding a title to a finished manuscript as was the usual custom. Mr. Vance was known for detailed alien cultures with unusual customs, and that's on full display here.

The plot is episodic, with the Phoebus landing on new planets, meeting new strange customs, and putting on shows. Most of the performances don't go so well for reasons ranging from getting the wrong audience to the planet being actively hostile to life as we know it.

There's a certain amount of classism and cultural snobbery—Dame Isabel and her coterie are aghast to learn the crew has formed a washboard jazz band in their spare time. And the romantic subplot is weak. Madoc is goal-driven, leading her to some femme fatale tactics, and the resolution of that is a letdown.

But top marks for the zany culture clashes and some moments that opera fans will doubtless enjoy even more than the layman.

Recommended for fans of comedic science fiction.

Karl says

This is copy 48 of 200 signed numbered copies.

TJ says

Space Opera was written by Jack Vance in 1964 and first published by Pyramid Books in 1965. Vance had been contracted to write a "space opera." Space opera is a subgenre of science fiction that emphasizes interplanetary adventure, romance, and melodrama. Vance humorously wrote a novel about musical operas in outer space. This is a light hearted, easy to read, 160 page novel that is likely to appeal to most Vance fans. Although the opera troupe featured in this book plays some serious opera, the book itself is definitely "light opera." The old mass market paperbacks of Space Opera are out of print but Spatterlight Press in July 2017 released a high quality trade paperback that I highly recommend.

The story begins with our main character, Roger Wool, sitting behind his aunt's concert box at the Palladian Theater drinking champagne. (Rather than Vance's preferred Scotch.) His aunt, the wealthy Dame Isabel Grayce, Secretary-Treasurer of the Opera League, sits in front of him listening to the Ninth Company of Rlaru, a musical group from another planet who play strange music for Earth residents. Some critics think the group is made up of people from Earth and that it is all a hoax. Others are convinced that the unusual music is authentic and are captivated by its innovation and creativity. Critics find it difficult to believe that an alien species has been able to develop sophisticated music that others find comprehensible and enjoyable. It does not help that nobody has heard of the planet Rlaru and that the space pilot who brought them to Earth and is making much money from their concerts is not very reputable. The musicians look similar to Earth people, although "they were flexible and frail, and somehow one received the impression that their internal organs were different in formation and arrangement from those of Earth-folk.".

Dame Grayce subsequently invites a famous musicologist to one of the Ninth Company concerts to conduct a critical review of their music, but he is never able to hear them because the entire orchestra suddenly disappears over night without trace. No ships left Earth so it is as though they were mysteriously transported off planet.

Dame Grayce learns that the space pilot, Adolph Gondar, who brought the Ninth Company to Earth had promised a cultural exchange program of music so she becomes obsessed with the idea of forming an opera company to travel to other planets to stage famous operas to enrich the lives of intelligent alien beings. Eventually she wants to reach the planet of Rlaru from where the Ninth Company originated so she can return their favor. Gondar is the only pilot who knows how to reach the planet so hiring him is essential to her plans. Bringing along her nephew, Roger, is not part of her plans but she ends up doing so anyhow. And her plans definitely did not include Roger bringing along his new girl friend as a stow away. Unknown to Dame Grayce, her nephew Roger has developed an infatuation with a young woman whom he wants to marry so he smuggles her aboard. This leads to major complications, intrigues, manipulations and mysteries that are eventually sorted out. The famous musicologist also joins them.

Vance provides us with funny, entertaining adventures of an opera company from Earth that travels to other worlds to introduce opera to the intelligent inhabitants various planets. The leaders of the troupe read about

the customs, culture and preferences of the beings on each planet and try to adapt the opera to their tastes. In addition to carefully choosing the right opera, they even modify the libretti and stage settings to make the presentation culturally acceptable. Despite careful planning, the performances are met with odd responses based on local ideas about music, unusual customs and assumptions of why the company is visiting. It is both interesting from an anthropological view and quite humorous.

This is a lighthearted, funny novel with some world building and much satire. Humor is very subjective so readers will respond differently. (Vance's humor sometimes reminds me of Terry Pratchett's.) If you also happen to like opera, which I do, that might provide an extra attraction. Fans of Vance's writing will probably want to read this stand alone novel which I liked even better the second time I read it, now rating it a 4.

Robert Reese says

A comedic novel in which Dame Isabel Grayce takes an Opera across the galaxy. This is a humorous work, but sadly just isn't as funny as vances later work. The plot somewhat mirrors the vastly superior Showboat World which I would recommend anyone read. This work on the other hand is best left to completionists who have finished with Vances better work, but still want a competent story that is faintly humorous.

Derek says

The book is divided among several subplots: the journey to the mysterious planet Rlaru, the mysterious interference and mission of Madoc Roswyn, and the continual conflict between Roger Wool and his wealthy aunt Dame Isabel. All within the comic framework of a space-traveling opera troupe as it encounters unappreciative or incompatible civilizations for performances.

It's about one component too many for the limited space, and as a result each of these things feels slightly short-changed. ((view spoiler))

The highlights are, of course, the characters. Dame Isabel is an obstinate and self-important society lady with certain strong ideas about the height of culture that she represents and what she brings the other worlds. In a strange move for Vance, she is pretty much the protagonist for the piece, taking the role away from her callow nephew Roger Wool, whose main interests are avoiding work and inheriting her wealth. Vance's usual ploy is for the loutish youth to develop unexpected depths and competences under duress.

Bertrand says

Roman de SF léger et accessible, Space Opéra a les défauts de ses qualités. En effet, les personnages prêtent à sourire et sont sympathiquement risibles avec leur vision anthropocentrique de la "grande musique" et le caractère messianique de leur épopee. Toutefois, ils peuvent justement apparaître rapidement comme un peu plat et sans saveur particulière face à l'enjeu de leur dessein (ou alors c'est clairement souhaité et je suis passé à côté). De même que le périple est mené à un rythme frénétique et on saute bien trop vite d'une planète à une autre. Alors certes, c'est du space opéra et là dessus, Jack Vance s'amuse sur son postulat de départ mais quitte à multiplier les escales autant leur donner plus de profondeur plutôt qu'un recensement à la limite du

superflu des planètes "colonisées".

Il en reste toutefois, une lecture agréable et dépayisante qui, sans révolutionner le genre, devrait parvenir à plaire au plus grand nombre.

Matt says

An interesting light read, kind of high-society space adventure.

TJ says

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Ji?í Pavlovský says

Jack Vance napsal román jménem Space Opera - a je to, p?ekvapiv?, space opera. Ne, vážn?. Je to opravdu vesmírná opera. Do vesmíru vyráží operní soubor, aby p?inesl mimozemským bytostem trochu kultury. Pod dohledem kulturn? angažované šlechti?ny a jejího otráveného synovce, kterého víc než kulturní povznesení zajímá teti??ino d?dictví a jedna pasažérka. Jejich cílem je tajemná planeta, ovšem p?i cest? jsou odhodlání ud?lat n?kolik zastávek a p?edvést mimozemských rasám pár úžasných koncert?.

?ili je to klasický Jack Vance. Román složený z epizodek, kdy se hrdinové st?etávají s podivnými zvyklostmi a dostávají se díky svému nepochopení do problém?. Jelikož je tohle psané tak trochu jako pocta P. G. Wodehousovi, drží se ty problémy vyložen? v úsm?vně rovin?. Žádné masakry.

Space Opera je krátká a pohodová knížka. Jasn?, pokud to budete srovnávat p?ímo s P. G. W., tak si uv?domíte, že on by m?l ty problémy mnohem vygradovan?jší a zamotan?jší, tady je to spíš jen tak na?uknuté, takže je kniha jen jako takový sled lehkých nápad?. Nic objevného, ale p?íjemné ?tení, které ukazuje, že hudba možná uklidní rozlícenou šelmu, ale proti odhodlaným teti?kám nic nezm?že.

Jim Jones says

If PG Wodehouse wrote a SF novel, this would probably be it. There's a certain fussiness in the writing that seems more Edwardian than futuristic. Vance's witty dialog and fast-paced plot, which involves a rich, overbearing aunt who brings Earth operas to the universe via a touring company, make this a fun, fast read. But the book also actually has something to say too about assumptions of cultural superiority. The satire is Swiftian at times.

Gerard says

Een verhaal uit de jaren zestig van de 20e eeuw, maar zeker niet gedateerd. Naar mijn idee is het achterliggende idee nog steeds geldig. Idealisme kan leiden tot vele problemen, maar ook hele mooie dingen

opleveren. Zonder idealisme zou het allemaal een stuk saaier zijn. Aan de andere kant kan idealisme ook kortzichtigheid tot gevolg hebben.

Het verhaal is, zoals we dat gewend zijn van Jack Vance, vlot geschreven en het leest dan ook als een trein.

Metaphorosis says

Vance plays on the phrase 'Space Opera' by offering ... space opera. The result is the very definition of farce, as a well-meaning philanthropist and her opera troupe wander the stars offering a taste of Earth's culture.

The setup is decent, and the fulfillment is okay, but for me this lacked Vance's usual sparkle and color. It's funny, but not as funny as Vance often is. The characters are drawn too clearly; there's not much in the way of subtlety. It's an episodic story, and the episodes are fun, but it doesn't really add up to much.

Certainly worth reading for Vance fans, and somewhat for those looking for a light read, or one with operatic references. Otherwise, I recommend looking for some of Vance's other, and much stronger work.

CVIE V

Federico Kereki says

At some places, it looks like what P G Wodehouse would have written, if he had been into Sci Fi !

Gene says

Perhaps the strangest book I've ever read, but wonderful writing.
