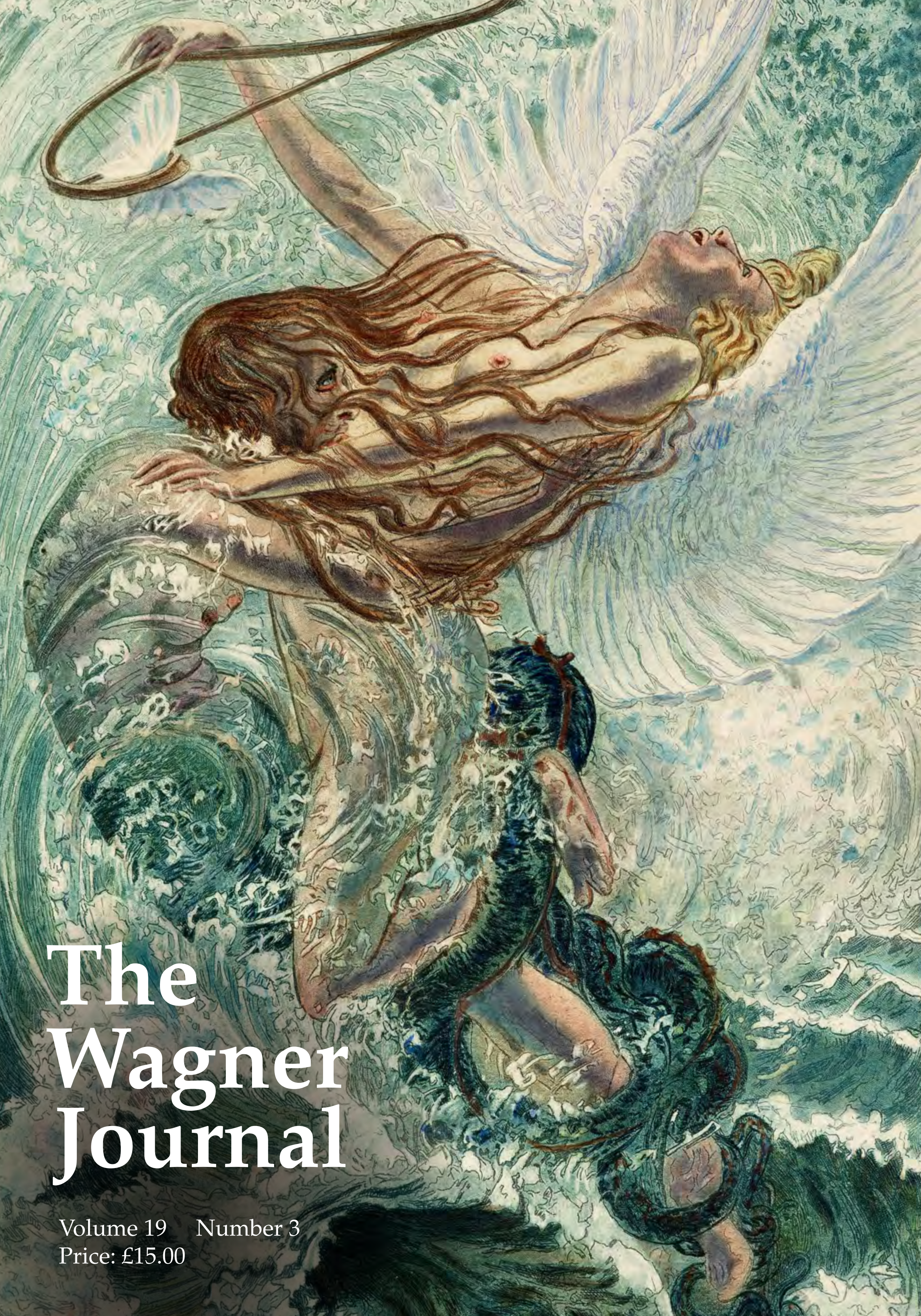

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The Wagner Journal

Volume 19 Number 3

FEATURES

Richard Wagner and the Lied 4
Egon Voss

Wagner and the French Song Cycle 17
Stephen Rumph

Wagner's Early Songs in Orchestrations by Felix Mottl and Hans Werner Henze 32
Malcolm Miller

A Brief Recording History of Wagner's 'Träume' in the Acoustic Era 53
Christoph Moor

REVIEWS

Live Performances 68

Another Sacred Cow Deflated in Bayreuth
Barry Millington joins the party at the new 'Meistersinger'

Cain and Abel with a Happy Ending
Glyndebourne's first 'Parsifal' is musically outstanding but dramatically reduced, finds Tash Siddiqui

Not on the Monet
Hugo Shirley has mixed feelings about demystifying 'Parsifal'

Something New, Something Borrowed
Michael Fuller enjoys a Konwitschny 'Ring' in Dortmund, while not being entirely persuaded

Shipshape in Lübeck
David Ames is impressed by a Hanseatic 'Tristan' despite some unfortunate cuts

An Evening of Shifting Colours
Anja-Rosa Thöming reports on the next instalment of Dresden's historically informed 'Ring'

American Gods
Simon Williams is enthralled by Santa Fe's 'Walküre'

Dancing with Uncle Wolf
Richard Moukarzel is unconvinced by an operatic depiction of Wagner's legacy

Sturm und Drang
Edward Christian-Hare braves the elements for Opera Holland Park's first Wagner production

Books 92

Convention and Invention
Thomas Grey gets to grips with a new collection of analytical essays

Front cover illustration
Carlos Schwabe (1866–1927), *Spleen et l'Idéal*, after Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*.
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Wagner and the Song Cycle

'There are no poems that can be set to music', Wagner told Cosima on 2 August 1881. The topic of this issue, if we are to believe Wagner himself, is an absurdity. He was antipathetic towards both lyric poetry and its manifestation as song, deeming the latter devoid of aesthetic value unless incorporated in music drama. We must naturally distinguish between what Wagner said and what he did – after all, his Wesendonck Lieder of 1857–8 are among the most popular cycles in the history of the genre. And yet, as Egon Voss explains here in his overview of Wagner's songs – the first article that this doyen of German Wagner scholars has penned for this journal – it seems that, even in his youth, Wagner's frame of reference in song was always dramatic, not lyrical (though Voss also includes a tantalising hint that the teenage composer might have been considering a song cycle on poems by Wilhelm Müller of *Winterreise* fame).

The Wesendonck Lieder have long enjoyed scholarly attention, which is why they are not our prime focus here. And as Malcolm Miller explains in his essay, Wagner in fact brought together four of his early songs to create a new 'cycle' in 1868 as a birthday present for Cosima, in a strange echo of his birthday gift for Mathilde Wesendonck a decade earlier (if Cosima had written poetry instead of a diary, perhaps he'd have given her something new instead). Miller traces the odd afterlife of these four songs, which were orchestrated by both Felix Mottl and Hans Werner Henze a century apart – in each case after the same two men had already (re)orchestrated the Wesendonck Lieder. We naturally cannot disregard the latter set altogether here, and so Christoph Moor takes a closer look at 'Träume' from a new perspective, investigating its early recording history to trace interpretive similarities across the acoustic era and beyond (and turning up odd instrumental choices in the studio along the way).

Our investigation of Wagner and the song cycle also takes us beyond the boundaries of the German Lied. As Steven Rumph explains, even after the Franco-Prussian War, when Wagner was largely *non grata* because of his openly anti-French sentiments, his music and ideas still exerted an immense influence on the development of the cycle in the oeuvres of Fauré, Chausson, Debussy and others. Wagner might have claimed to despise the Lied; but it seems that *wagnérisme* in the *mélodie* was ultimately unstoppable.

This issue is a collaboration with a research project on the song cycle at the Basel Academy of Music[1]. I should like to thank my Basel colleagues for their ideas and support, most notably Christoph Moor, but also the baritone Christian Hilz of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and the pianist and conductor Jan Schultsz, each of them an eloquent advocate of the songs of the 19th century.

Chris Walton
Guest Editor

[1] See <https://tinyurl.com/4jvx997p> (accessed 24 Sep. 2025).

The Wagner Journal, **19**, 3, 4–16

Richard Wagner and the Lied

Egon Voss

On 25 November 1935, Thomas Mann noted in his diary: 'Afterwards, music on the radio from Milan and Vienna. Heard Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* once again: beautiful but insatiable, too much too often. Then "Träume", very beautiful, but absolutely not a Lied. It's characteristic that he has no relationship whatsoever to the spirit of the Lied – he's German!'[1]

Thomas Mann naturally understood Lied to mean the German art song accompanied by the piano – a genre in which Wagner's achievements hardly stood out when compared to Schubert, Schumann, Brahms or so many others of the 19th century. If we include his *Sieben Kompositionen zu Goethes 'Faust'* (Seven Compositions for Goethe's *Faust*) WWV 15, which were presumably conceived for performance in the theatre but have come down to us only in a version with piano – then we have just nineteen completed song compositions by Wagner. There is one further song that we know existed, but which is no longer extant (*Glockentöne* WWV 30), plus four attempts that have only survived in sketches (*Einsamkeit* WWV 7, *Extase* WWV 54, *La tombe dit à la rose* WWV 56 and *Es ist bestimmt in Gottes Rat* WWV 92).[2]

It is notable that of the roughly thirty works that Wagner composed during his composition studies from 1828 to 1832, only two were songs. One might reasonably assume that a budding composer in around 1830 would also have practised the art of composing songs with piano, given that this was a popular genre that was relatively undemanding. Can it be that Christian Gottlieb Müller and Theodor Weinlig, Wagner's composition teachers, didn't familiarise their student with the art of song composition? In fact, it seems that Wagner just didn't regard the genre as an inherent aspect of his chosen field of endeavour. It's probably no coincidence that one of those two songs (WWV 7) never got beyond the sketch stage, while the other (WWV 30) hasn't survived at all. We should also bear in mind that neither of these songs is mentioned anywhere in Wagner's autobiographical writings.

1 This article was translated by Chris Walton. The songs discussed here (with the exception of *Soupir* and those that remained unfinished) can be found online at <https://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Wagner,_Richard> (accessed 18 Aug. 2025). Mann cited here as in Hans Rudolf Vaget, ed., *Im Schatten Wagners: Thomas Mann über Richard Wagner. Texte und Zeugnisse 1895–1955* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 145.

2 The completed compositions and the sketches are all given in the Complete Edition. See *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Werke*, i–xxi (series A, Notenteil), xxii–xxxi (series B, Dokumententeil), ed. Carl Dahlhaus, Martin Geck, Egon Voss and others (Mainz 1968–) [SW], xvii, *Klavierlieder* (Mainz, 1976) and xxi, Supplement (Mainz, 2020). A study edition has also been published using the text of the Complete Edition: Edition Schott ED 7078.

***Einsamkeit* WWV 7**

The plural form Lieder was used for WWV 7 in the *Wagner-Werk-Verzeichnis*,[3] though admittedly at a time when the facts about its composition were still uncertain. Since then, Klaus Döge has identified it as a sketch for a single song, a setting of the poem 'Einsamkeit' by Wilhelm Müller.[4] One sketch each for stanzas 3 to 5 of the poem survives, plus a further sketch without any text (in 2/4 metre and in A major), though this last sketch quite possibly belongs in a different context.[5] The sketch is remarkable, both because each strophe is given a different melody, and because their time signatures and keys change (strophe 3 is in 2/4 and E major, shifting to A major; the 4th strophe is in 4/4 and D minor, shifting to E minor; the 5th strophe is in 4/4 and in A major). Just how Wagner envisaged connecting the different stanzas remains unclear, nor do we know why stanzas 1–2 are absent, or whether the song was ever finished at all.

It also remains a mystery how Wagner came to set a poem by Wilhelm Müller to music in the first place. Perhaps the inspiration for the song came from Wagner's sister Rosalie, who seems to have enjoyed singing, despite Wagner claiming that she did not have a particularly striking voice.[6] The songs she sang included Lieder by Franz Schubert, which could well be significant for our purposes here. Wagner later reported that it was from Rosalie that he had first heard the song 'Sei mir gegrüßt' (D 741), which he deemed 'Schubert's loveliest song as far as feeling and artistry are concerned'.[7]

A further stimulus may have been the publication in 1830 of a multi-volume edition of Wilhelm Müller's works by F.A. Brockhaus in Leipzig, the publishing house with which Wagner was connected through the marriage in 1828 of his sister Luise to Friedrich Brockhaus, its joint director. Wagner also occasionally undertook proofreading work for the company.[8] We do not know whether he was engaged to proofread any part of the Müller edition, though nor can we rule it out. The poem 'Einsamkeit' that Wagner selected is number 3 in the poetic cycle *Wanderlieder eines rheinischen Handwerksburschen (Reiselieder I*) and is to be found in volume one of Brockhaus's edition.[9] This cycle appears on pages 82 to 101, thus almost exactly between the cycles *Die schöne Müllerin* (on pp. 3–58) and *Winterreise* (in this edition entitled *Reiselieder II*, pp. 121–57) that provided Schubert with the texts of his two great song cycles. This might be purely coincidental, but we cannot completely dismiss the notion that Wagner might have considered writing a song cycle himself.[10] As for dating this edition of Müller's works,

3 John Deathridge, Martin Geck and Egon Voss, *Wagner Werk-Verzeichnis (WWV): Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke Richard Wagners und ihrer Quellen* (Mainz, 1986) [WWV], 66–7.

4 Klaus Döge, 'Richard Wagner und Wilhelm Müller oder Anfang und Ende des Liedes: Zum Liedentwurf WWV 7', *Intermedialität: Studien zur Wechselwirkung zwischen den Künsten*, ed. Günter Schnitzler and Edelgard Spaude (Freiburg im Breisgau, 2004), 177–92.

5 Reproduced in SW (note 2), xxi, Supplement, ed. Egon Voss (Mainz, 2020), 131.

6 Cosima Wagner: *Die Tagebücher 1869–1883*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, 2 vols. (Munich, 1976–7); tr. and ed. Geoffrey Skelton as *Cosima Wagner's Diaries 1869–1883*, 2 vols. (London, 1978–80) [CT], 27 Mar. 1874 and 29 Jul. 1878.

7 CT, 15 Jan. 1875.

8 Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin (Munich, 1963; 2nd edn, 1976) [ML], 46.

9 Wilhelm Müller, *Vermischte Schriften*, ed. Gustav Schwab, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1830), 86f.

10 Müller's poetry was already popular in the 1820s among composers writing song cycles or song collections, from Schubert to Theodor Fröhlich and Fanny Hensel.

we know that volume 1 must already have been available in August 1830 because a review of it was published at the time.[11]

An important traditional element in the genre of the Lied is strophic form, in which the different verses of a poem are sung to the same melody (though there may also be certain minor variations between individual strophes). Proof that Wagner understood the genre to be inherently strophic can be found in the Lieder that he incorporated in his stage works – such as the Helmsman's song in *Der fliegende Holländer*, Tannhäuser's song to Venus or the Schusterlied in *Die Meistersinger*, to name but three. In his songs with piano, on the other hand, Wagner avoided using the strophe as a formal element, for only five or possibly six of his songs are strictly strophic, namely 'Branders Lied' and the 'Lieder des Mephistopheles' (nos. 3–5 of his *Faust* compositions WWV 15), *Dors mon enfant* WWV 53 and, inasmuch as the sketches allow us to judge, *Extase* WWV 54 too. It is obvious that Wagner preferred a more individual design when setting different strophes to music, and this already applies *in nuce* to his 'Lied der Soldaten' and even more so to 'Bauer unter der Linde', namely nos. 1 and 2 of his *Faust* pieces. This is especially evident in the fourth strophe of no. 2, 'Bauer unter der Linde', where the second and third lines, 'Wie mancher hat nicht seine Braut belogen und betrogen!', are sung to a strictly chromatic scale from *f*″ down to *e*′. This deviates strikingly from the melodic style that Wagner otherwise cultivates in this song, and also presents an element that is generally somewhat alien to the genre of the Lied *per se*. It is notable that such out-of-place chromaticism returns in Mephistopheles's song 'Was machst du mir vor Liebchens Tür' (no. 5), though there it only extends over the interval of a fourth. Here, too, chromaticism provides a musical characterisation of the betrayal that men perpetrate on women when they abandon them.

'Gretchen am Spinnrade' WWV 15

As in his other six *Faust* songs WWV 15, Wagner also remains faithful to traditional metrical patterns in no. 6, 'Gretchen am Spinnrade', by composing a series of two-bar phrases that each corresponds to two lines of text. This ensures the steady, even flow of the piece – a characteristic that Walter Wiora has described as a 'periodic, pulsating rhythm'[12] and that is another traditional feature of the Lied genre. The occasional breaks in this pattern at exceptional moments in the text, such as in the seventh strophe at 'und ach! sein Kuss!' (and oh, his kiss!) are also in line with this tradition. However, traditional strophic form has already ceased to apply here, for the fact that strophes 1, 4 and 8 are all set to the same music is dictated by Goethe's text itself; Schubert did the same in his famous setting of it. Otherwise, Wagner deals differently with the different strophes, only occasionally introducing correspondences between them or between specific lines – such as in strophes 5 (bars 23 and 25) and 6 (bars 28 and 30). Wagner joins several strophes together so as to create three sections to his song: bars 1–15 (= strophes 1–3), bars 16–40 (= strophes 4–7) and bars 41–55 (= strophes 8–10). It is also noteworthy that these three sections are separated from each other by pauses and

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[11] *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, clv (Aug. 1830), col. 599f.

[12] Walter Wiora, *Das deutsche Lied: Zur Geschichte und Ästhetik einer musikalischen Gattung* (Wolfenbüttel/Zurich, 1971), 28ff.

fermatas. The strophic form of the original text is all but annulled, though this is clearly intentional on Wagner's part. Strictly speaking, he is here setting not a poem, but a text.

Schubert's composition employs constant semiquaver motion in the piano to imply that Gretchen is working incessantly at her spinning wheel. The wheel is also audible in Wagner – admittedly in a manner far less original than in Schubert, though still clear enough in his regular alternation between D and E flat in the left hand of the piano. Unlike in Schubert, however, this allusion is not continuous here, but limited to those specific passages in which Gretchen is not singing. It's as if she interrupts her spinning each time in order to sing – or interrupts her singing in order to spin. What we have here depicted is a scenic event, a storyline. Wagner uses short note values to instil a sense of restlessness that is naturally intended to depict Gretchen's plight. In contrast, Schubert's setting seems almost calm.

Der Tannenbaum WWV 50

Wagner composed this song while he was living in Riga (1837–9), though we do not know what prompted him to it. He took the poem from the *Deutscher Musenalmanach für das Jahr 1838*, 'Herausgegeben von v. Chamisso u. G. Schwab', which gives F.A. Brockhaus as the printer (p. 322), the company to whose management Wagner was related, as mentioned above. So it is possible that the book reached him through his familial connections.

It might well have been the dramaturgy of the poem that Wagner found appealing, in which the melancholy Christmas tree reminds a cheerful boy of death. The juxtaposition of the fir tree and the boy is what determines his setting. The boy's shorter note values give him a different diction from the fir tree. This is also reflected in the poetic metre, for the strophes relating to the boy are all composed in three-bar phrases, while those of the fir tree mostly comprise the usual four bars. The differentiation between them is also carried over into the register assigned to each, and the motion of the piano accompaniment. Whenever the fir tree is mentioned, both hands of the piano remain in the bass clef; when the text is about the boy, the right hand moves up an octave into the treble clef; similarly, the passages about the fir tree are accompanied by quaver movement in the right hand and semibreves in the left; in those about the boy, the piano switches to arpeggios and has a dotted rhythm in the left hand and continuous semiquavers in the right. This shift in motion in the piano accompaniment is perhaps reminiscent of Schubert's song 'Der Müller und der Bach' from his cycle *Die schöne Müllerin*; in any case, we cannot rule out the possibility that this song provided Wagner with a model.

The predominantly low register of the piano accompaniment is also paired with the unusual key of E-flat minor – a key that Wagner referred to in a letter ironically as 'Livonian' (liefländisch)[13] – and which is given a special colouring by his regular use of the flattened second (F flat).

It hardly needs to be said that Wagner does not adhere to the strophic form suggested by the poem itself. The shifts in register, metre and motion described above depend solely on the poetic content and ignore the boundaries of the poem's strophic form. It is especially characteristic that the text is rather more declaimed than sung.

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[13] *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Briefe*, i–ix, ed. Gertrud Strobel, Werner Wolf and others (Leipzig, 1967–2000); x–xxv and xxvii, ed. Andreas Mielke, Martin Dürrer and Margret Jestremski (Wiesbaden, 1999–), i.357.

Songs to French texts WWV 53–8, 60–61

These songs were composed between autumn 1839 and late March 1840, in other words right at the beginning of Wagner's first stay in Paris. Wagner was naturally unknown there as a composer, and these songs were intended to help him make a name for himself. According to the account he left us in his autobiography *Mein Leben*, his Parisian friends had advised him to 'write some smaller vocal compositions that I might be able to offer to popular singers for performance in their regular concerts'.[14] The suggestion for the songs thus came from others, and Wagner furthermore states that the texts were sourced for him by his Parisian friends Samuel Lehrs and Gottfried Engelbert Anders.[15] They are poems by Victor Hugo (WWV 54–56), Jean Reboul (WWV 58) and Pierre de Ronsard (WWV 57). The poet of *Dors mon enfant* WWV 53 was previously unknown but has meanwhile also been identified. Martin Dürrer[16] discovered this poem in the *Album du Ménestrel* of 1851. This *Album* presents the texts of songs sung by popular singers in Paris, but does not include the music for them, which in this case was by Georges de Momigny (1812–82). The song was, however, published complete by Challiot of Paris, apparently not long afterwards.[17] The author of the poem is given there as Alexis Bartavelle [*recte* Bartevelle], which was a pseudonym of Edmond-Denis de Manne (1801–77), a librarian at the Bibliothèque Royale in Paris where Wagner's friend Anders also worked. Wagner himself states specifically in *Mein Leben* that Anders had brought him the poem,[18] though his account there errs in that its author was no longer a 'young poet' as Wagner claims, but twelve years older than him. It is unclear whether Bartevelle wrote this text specifically for Wagner to set to music. *Dors mon enfant* is not included in his *Chansons*, the book of his poetry that he published in Paris in 1835. In its setting by Momigny, the poem is entitled *La jeune mère / Berceuse* and comprises four stanzas. We do not know whether Wagner deliberately omitted the fourth strophe of the poem in his song, or whether in fact this fourth strophe had not yet been written when Wagner set it to music. The same doubts apply to certain minor textual variants and alternative arrangements of individual lines in Wagner's setting.

Wagner published *Les deux grenadiers* WWV 60 at his own expense in Paris in summer 1840. He dedicated it to its poet, Heinrich Heine, though his reasons remain nebulous. Perhaps it was intended as a homage to the poet, in return for which Wagner anticipated assistance in making his way in Paris, or perhaps it was a kind of gift in return for financial support. The precise date of composition is also unknown, so perhaps it was in fact a means of thanking Heine for providing him with the topic of *Der fliegende Holländer*, whose libretto Wagner presumably began drafting in April 1840.

It is similarly uncertain who was responsible for translating Heine's poem into French. Ever since the singer Emil Liepe published his edition of Wagner's songs with

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14 ML (note 8), 183.

15 Ibid.

16 I am grateful to Martin Dürrer for kindly sharing this information with me.

17 The title page of the copy published by Challiot lists it as one of several 'new romances' in its overall catalogue; the others include four by the composer Gaston d'Albano (1829–1905), whose date of birth also suggests that Momigny's song was not published before the 1850s, thus long after Wagner wrote his own setting of the same poem's first three strophes.

18 ML (note 8), 183.

From autumn 1839 to spring 1840, Wagner lived in a hotel off the rue Saint-Honoré that claimed to be the house where the playwright Molière was born. It was here that he composed his French songs. Contemporary drawing by François Alexandre Pernot, CC0 Paris Musées / Musée Carnavalet – Histoire de Paris

Breitkopf & Härtel in 1916,[19] Adolphe Loève-Veimars (1799–1854) has been deemed the translator. But this assumption stands in contradiction to the facts at hand,[20] for while Loève-Veimars indeed translated numerous prose texts by Heine into French, we have no proof that he ever translated any of his poems. Wagner himself wrote in *Mein Leben* that the 'Two grenadiers' had been translated 'by a Parisian professor',[21] which would seem to rule out Loève-Veimars.

It is noteworthy that while Wagner's setting failed to achieve any success, it nevertheless influenced the later French edition of Heine's poem (1855) and the printed edition of

[19] In Nov. 1916, according to the *Musikalisch-literarischer Monatsbericht neuer Musikalien, musikalischer Schriften und Abbildungen für das Jahr 1916*, published by Adolph Hofmeister in Leipzig.

[20] See Leslie Brückner, *Adolphe François Loève-Veimars (1799–1854): Der Übersetzer und Diplomat als interkulturelle Mittlerfigur* (Berlin/Boston, 2013).

[21] ML (note 8), 184.

Robert Schumann's famous setting of the German poem, as can be seen most clearly in the latter's title, which was originally *Die Grenadiere*, but which was then altered to *Les deux grenadiers* and *Die beiden Grenadiere* respectively, in line with Wagner's song.[22]

Adieux de Marie Stuart WWV 61 (Pierre-Jean de Béranger) is the only one of Wagner's French songs for which we have an autograph manuscript with an exact date. It is a fair copy bearing the final remark 'Paris 26. Mars 1840'. Wagner is said to have presented a second fair copy to the then famous Parisian singer Julie Dorus-Gras. Either way, we know that such a manuscript was owned by her descendants because it was acquired 'directly' from them by Stanford University in California, where it is still held today.[23] It is possible that Wagner wrote it in the hope that Dorus-Gras might participate in the French-language performances of his opera *La défense de l'amour* (*Das Liebesverbot oder: Die Novize von Palermo*) that were being planned at the time. This production never came about, though we know that Julie Dorus-Gras took part in a so-called 'audition' that took place on 2 May 1840 featuring selected numbers from the opera.[24] She might also have been the reason for Wagner having chosen a valedictory text in *Adieux de Marie Stuart*. On 2 April 1840, the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* remarked that 'Madame Dorus-Gras, whose success last year in London has already made her popular with the English, plans to travel there again this year where she will spend her holidays. She will leave next month, on 25 May.'[25]

Dors mon enfant*, *Attente*, *Mignonne* and *Soupir

These four songs form a group. *Dors mon enfant*, which Wagner claims to have composed first,[26] is the model to which the other three refer by modifying it, each in its own way. It is a purely strophic song that is almost demonstratively strict in its form, while the other three songs clearly depart from the strophic principle of allocating each new strophe to the same melody. It is almost as if Wagner wanted to demonstrate several times over how differently one might organise the formal structure of a song.

Wagner's superficial renunciation of strophic form in *Attente*, *Mignonne* and *Soupir* is undermined by internal correspondences that are indeed reminiscent of it, or that might be understood as relics of it. In *Mignonne*, the third strophe takes up the opening of the first (bars 33–40 = 2–9), thereby giving the impression that we are dealing with an *ABA* form. *Attente* is not dissimilar; here, the beginning of the third strophe (bars 33–4) is a highly modified variant of the beginning of the first (bars 5–6). In *Soupir*, each strophe ends with the same four-bar phrase cadencing in B-flat major, the tonic (bars 13–16, 25–8, 37–40). The third line in each of the three strophes (if one disregards certain minor details) also corresponds melodically to the first line (in other words bars 9–10 = 5–6; 21–2 = 17–18; 33–4 = 29–30). In schematic terms, we may describe *Soupir* as follows:

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[22] See in this regard Egon Voss, '"Das hat etwas zu bedeuten!" Les deux grenadiers und Die beiden Grenadiere', *Getauft auf Musik: Festschrift für Dieter Borchmeyer*, ed. Udo Bermbach and Hans Rudolf Vaget with assistance from Yvonne Nilges (Würzburg, 2006), 315–324, here 317f.

[23] *A Memorial Library of Music at Stanford University*, ed. Nathan van Patten (Stanford, CA, 1950), 273.

[24] See SW (note 2), xxii, documents 70 and 74.

[25] *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, vii/27, 236.

[26] ML (note 8), 183.

	1st strophe	2nd strophe	3rd strophe
The music for each line	a b a c d	e f e g d	h i h j d
Number of bars	2 2 2 2 4	2 2 2 2 4	2 2 2 2 4

Soupir is thus superficially the most conventional of Wagner's French songs. But while Wagner here refers back to strophic form, he at the same time undertakes measures to undermine it, thereby making it unrecognisable or tending towards its dissolution. In *Mignonne*, the opening of the first strophe returns not just at the opening of the third, but also a second time (in bars 45–6) as if a further strophe were about to begin. In *Attente*, the first four bars of the first strophe (bars 5–8) are recapitulated within the second strophe, though only in its second half (at bars 25–8), not at its beginning as the strophic model would normally stipulate. It is almost as if Wagner were determined to make the form of the underlying poem unrecognisable. In *Attente* there are caesuras between the strophes (in bars 18 and 32), but their function is overridden by the fact that other such caesuras also occur within the strophes themselves (in bars 10 and 24). *Dors mon enfant* offers another way of glossing over caesuras. Here, the different strophes follow each other almost without any pause or halt, blurring the boundaries between them. In this way, however, Wagner creates an overarching sense of cohesion, with the different parts merging into the whole. His use of motives also plays an important role. The melisma on the word 'Dors' (sleep) at the beginning of the song is treated like a musical theme. It occurs four times within this initial strophe alone (at bars 1, 3, 7–8, 9–10) and twelve times in total within the entire song. For the listener, this motivic repetition probably assumes greater formal significance than the strophic form of the poem itself.

In both *Attente* and *Mignonne*, we find melodic and thematic motives treated after the manner of instrumental music. In *Attente*, the melody of the vocal part from bar 5 is heard in varied form in the bass of the piano in bars 10, 18 and 24 (and in fact we have already heard it in a preliminary form in the bass in the very first bar of the piano part). The appearance of this motive serves to articulate the structure of the composition, though it does so – significantly – contrary to the strophic structure of the poem being set. In *Mignonne*, the motive in question consists of a downward leap of a fourth, which is sung at the beginning on the word 'Mignonne' itself and is heard no fewer than eleven times (in bars 1, 2, 6, 15, 18, 33, 37, 45, 50, 52 and 53). It determines the overall character of the composition, while nevertheless undermining the form of the poem's strophes in favour of its own structure.

The time changes in *Dors mon enfant* and *Attente* seem strange and contrary to the Lied tradition. The shift from 9/8 to 6/8 in *Dors mon enfant* (at the end of the strophe) seems formally unnecessary because three 6/8 bars make two 9/8 bars anyway. Wagner might have done this to avoid giving particular emphasis to the word 'Dors' by having it fall on the first beat. In the case of *Attente*, the change of metre from 6/4 to 3/4 (in bars 13–14) interrupts the hitherto metrical scheme (namely a series of two-bar phrases, as is usual in songs). By replacing the dotted minim on the first beat of bar 14 with a crotchet, and by omitting the crotchet rest on the fifth beat, Wagner is superficially engaged in an act of musical compression, though the poetic effect is to combine two lines of the text into an overarching unit.

Les deux grenadiers

It is almost inevitable that we should compare Wagner's *Les deux grenadiers* with the famous setting by Robert Schumann.[27] They were composed at almost the same time, though they are very different, not least because, unlike Schumann – as already mentioned – Wagner set Heine's poem in French translation. Wagner himself described the text as 'a very free arrangement, especially in that its poetic metre is completely different from that of the original'.[28] Wagner's setting is much broader in scope, as is immediately obvious from its sheer dimensions (120 bars compared to Schumann's 82). Schumann's ballad is concise and, in the tradition of the Lied, he follows the structure of the poem. His strophes generally comprise eight bars, divided up into two-bar or four-bar phrases; only the last strophe has been extended by two bars. Wagner does not use such a form (which we might almost term 'classical'). His strophes vary in length, and even when the model of two-bar and four-bar phrases hovers in the background, there are repeated deviations from it. We can perceive Wagner's intentions most clearly in the large-scale piano interlude after the second strophe (bars 21–30), which is foreign to traditional Lied composition, as is the well-nigh orchestral force that he unleashes here. The caesura created by this interlude is further accentuated by the rest with a pause on it in bar 24, while a sense of stretching out time is similarly conveyed by the pause in bar 60. One might even be tempted to speak of this song's 'epic breadth' if this did not seem overly suggestive or banal, given that Wagner's music dramas are generally considered 'epic' in the true sense of the word.

In melodic terms, cantabile sections alternate with others in which the text is more declaimed than sung. In some passages, Wagner's setting has the feel of a recitative (see bars 61ff.). This means that the constant, even flow and the periodic, pulsating rhythm that are all typical of the Lied genre are here either undermined or cancelled out. The whole is held together by musical correspondences such as repeating the beginning of the first strophe (bars 5–10) at the beginning of the seventh (bars 78–83) and by introducing motivic links such as the motive of descending semitones on the word 'empereur' in bars 19, 58f. and 114f. The passage in bars 30–43 also returns (transposed up) in bars 64–75 and is characteristically independent of the strophic structure. It is probably no coincidence that its style is prescient of a passage in Tannhäuser's Rome Narration (*Tannhäuser*, Act III, Scene 3, bars 129ff.).

Adieux de Marie Stuart

This composition completely diverges from what would normally be deemed a Lied. In fact, it is really an aria for a female singer to show off her virtuoso abilities, demanding runs, rapid broken chords, ornaments etc. – in other words, what is generally termed 'coloratura'. It also has a wide vocal range, from *c′* sharp to *c‴*. The middle section (bars 45–70) is notable for a shift of key from E-flat major to G major and features triplet melismas of a kind that were very popular at the time. The conclusion from bar 103 onwards is essentially a stretta. The text by Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780–1857) begins with a verse that returns as a refrain between the other strophes and also

27 See Voss, '"Das hat etwas zu bedeuten!"' (note 22).
28 ML (note 8), 196.

The illustration by Wagner's friend Ernst Benedikt Kietz that was used on the title page of the early editions of Wagner's *Les deux grenadiers*. Creative Commons

appears again at the close. Wagner's setting omits the third strophe and the ensuing refrain, though his reasons for this remain obscure. But in any case, he composed Béranger's refrain exactly as that, albeit with numerous variations in the details and a different ending in each case. One may reasonably speak here of a rondo form (here R = refrain): R (bars 9–19) – A (bars 20–35) – R (bars 36–44) – B (bars 45–70) – R (bars 71–8) – C (bars 79–94) – R (bars 95–102) – stretta (bars 103–13). The middle section of the song ('B') is itself cast in an A-B-A form (bars 45–52 / 53–62 / 63–70) with the first to fourth lines of the second strophe repeated. Wagner might well have conceived this song as an aria with orchestra, given the quasi-orchestral sweep of the ascending chromatic lines in the right hand of the piano in bar 60 and especially in bars 78, 80 and 82.

Wesendonck Lieder WWV 91

Given his lack of success with his songs to French texts, it is hardly surprising that Wagner did not write any more during his time in Paris. But he clearly considered *Dors mon enfant*, *Attente* and *Mignonne* worthy of publication, as they were printed, like *Der Tannenbaum* (1839) before them, as music supplements to the journal *Europa*

(1841–2).[29] More importantly, however, these publications brought in money that Wagner urgently needed. It is thus puzzling why he did not also publish *Soupir* in the same journal.

More than fifteen years passed before Wagner composed his so-called Wesendonck Lieder (1857–8). Wagner must surely have had ample opportunity to compose songs during those one-and-a-half decades, though he wrote none. This abstinence from the genre might conceivably have continued to the end of his life, had it not been for his intense infatuation with Mathilde Wesendonck when he was composing *Tristan und Isolde*. It was this extraordinary, unique situation that led to him setting five of her poems to music, though we should note that the intimate nature of these songs meant they were not originally intended for public consumption. Their publication in 1862 was a matter of sheer necessity, for Wagner had to offer his publisher Schott something to console them for the fact that he was not progressing as swiftly as anticipated with the composition of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.[30] It was a story that repeated itself a decade later when his dire finances compelled him to let Schott publish his *Siegfried Idyll*.

Whether or not, *pace* Thomas Mann, we decide to assign the Wesendonck Lieder to the genre of the Lied is an issue that we shall refrain from debating here. But it is perhaps significant that while Wagner privately referred to them as such, he avoided the word when publishing them, naming them instead *Fünf Gedichte für eine Frauenstimme mit Pianoforte-Begleitung* (Five Poems for Women's Voice with Pianoforte Accompaniment).

Wagner's relationship to poetry and song

In a letter to the song composer Robert Franz of 23 September 1853, Wagner wrote: 'If I harbour any doubt […] it is a doubt about the possibility of respectable lyric poetry existing at all these days. I don't have confidence in these poets.'[31] Given this opinion, it is hardly surprising that Wagner did not devote himself to song composition. How could he have composed songs if he harboured such doubts about poets and poetry? Nor was this expression of mistrust towards poetry merely a fleeting opinion confined to the year 1853. It was in fact a long-standing conviction on Wagner's part, indeed arguably a defining aspect of his overall aesthetic. Similar sentiments resurface over the ensuing years, as is evident from numerous entries in Cosima Wagner's diary:

> 3 September 1875:
> He expresses once again his distaste for lyric poetry.
>
> 22 March 1878:
> A batch of songs sent to him provokes R. into an indictment of lyric poetry; he does not believe the poets.

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[29] See WWV (note 3), 193, 197, 201 and 203 (the publication date of the last of these given there erroneously as 1843).

[30] See WWV, 458.

[31] Zentralbibliothek Zürich (Ms. Briefe).

> 18 October 1878:
> R. does not care for poems.
>
> 27 January 1883:
> To end the evening we read Goethe's 'Dedication', and once again R. remarks how little pleasure lyric poetry gives him.

If Wagner was already mistrustful of poetry as a literary genre, he was even more averse to hearing it set to music by other composers, and utterly opposed to presenting the results to an audience in the concert hall. Cosima noted in 1870 how Alfred Meissner, when visiting them in Tribschen, had remarked to Wagner 'of hearing "Ich grolle nicht" with great delight at a concert in Zurich'. Wagner had responded by saying: 'But just imagine what that means, hearing such bitter inner feelings recited with a bouquet in the hand in front of a concert audience, while people smile at it in enjoyment.'[32] Eight years later, in 1878, Wagner complained about 'these musical love laments, the singers with their lovelorn expressions'.[33] We cannot know whether it was the manner of the performance described above that repelled Wagner, or the public performance itself. But we have reason to suspect that he simply considered poetry, and songs derived from it, to be matters of particular intimacy and thus something private that did not belong in the public domain.

There is one further aspect to Wagner's antipathy towards poetry and song. It seems that he considered the Lied simply as a genre belonging to the past – a representative of an era that had had its day. This, at least, is what is suggested by an entry in Cosima Wagner's diary of 1 March 1879:

> We also go through some songs by R. Franz – 'Du bist elend' and 'Ich grolle nicht', which Franz once asked R. to sing to him. R. enjoys the songs, and some by Schubert which we mention he finds 'unutterably beautiful' ('Sei mir gegrüsst', among others); he says that was Vienna as it used to be, the Vienna in which Beethoven lived, and an ardent, naïve fellow such as Schubert was living under its influence. And then there were Strauss [i.e. Johann Strauss the Elder] and Raimund as well. Now all that is gone.

Thus, in Wagner's eyes, the Lied was no longer contemporary; it was an outdated genre. However, we must bear in mind that he was in any case convinced that the only true, genuine work of art was drama, which accordingly meant that he was – to put it mildly – prejudiced against all other viewpoints. As with the genre of the symphony, it could have been the case that he regarded the Lied as similarly devoid of any validity or justification simply because it did not fit into his own aesthetic concept. The following entries in Cosima Wagner's diaries would seem to support such an assumption:

> 25 October 1871:
> [Richard says] 'All these lyric poets make glosses on things which are not there; the true poet is seen in the characters he creates, a Faust, an Egmont, etc.'

[32] CT (note 6), 18 Nov. 1870.
[33] CT, 22 Mar. 1878.

> 2 August 1881:
> In 'Wer nie sein Brot [mit Tränen aß]' [Richard] points out to us how impossible it is for music to illumine a word like *Brot* [bread], and he declares that the whole of lyric poetry is an absurdity, and there are no poems that can be set to music; it is the task of music to enter at the point where words at their most expansive become action.
>
> 7 March 1882:
> 'Lyric poetry!' he exclaims; 'only drama exists.'

Wagner did not regard the Lied any differently from any other musical genre, for in his eyes they were all imperfect or limited *per se*, and every composer who still desired to cultivate them had failed to recognise the signs of the times. They were artists who had stopped halfway along a necessary journey. For Wagner, the Lied was no more capable of becoming a perfect work of art than a symphony. And, just like the latter, it had to be absorbed into drama – though it naturally had a special role to play there. In Wagner's understanding, the symphony is absorbed into drama both musically and technically, helping to define the treatment of the orchestra in it. Song, on the other hand, is a natural form of human expression and part of the world that is represented on stage in the theatre. Songs accordingly have a dramatic or dramaturgical function there, and we accordingly find Lieder in almost all of Wagner's stage works, most of which are even labelled as such.

As it happens, some of these Lieder are eminently suitable for refuting Thomas Mann's opinion, quoted here at the outset, that Wagner had 'no relationship at all to the spirit of the Lied'. Quite apart from this, Mann also seems to have misjudged Wagner altogether. For Wagner did not see himself as a composer in the traditional sense, if he saw himself as a 'composer' at all. Composing Lieder was not his intention. His metier was the theatre: exclusively so.

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Wagner and the French Song Cycle

Stephen Rumph

The song cycle arrived late in France, long after Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann. Hector Berlioz's *Les Nuits d'étés* (1841) and Félicien David's *Les perles d'Orient* (1846) are loose collections, without obvious narratives, key schemes or thematic recollections, and no further examples appeared for twenty years.[1] Jules Massenet's *Poème d'avril* (1866) is the first French song cycle in the familiar sense, with a coherent narrative and recurring themes. The genre surged to life in around 1890, however, and thereafter Gabriel Fauré, Claude Debussy, Ernest Chausson, Maurice Ravel and Francis Poulenc published almost all their songs in cycles, with varying degrees of poetic and musical cohesion.

This cyclic turn reflects the growing prestige of the *mélodie*, the highbrow genre that emerged in the 1820s, inspired by Schubert's Lieder, and gradually supplanted the simpler *romance*. By the 1890s, the *mélodie* was rapidly surpassing its amateur salon origins and becoming a professional concert genre.[2] Instead of purveying songs singly for the domestic market, as in the heyday of the *romance*, composers increasingly published their work in weightier groupings with texts by a single poet. The preference for collections featuring a celebrated author also mirrors the rising literary aspirations of the *mélodie*, evident in the titles themselves – Debussy's *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire* (1890), Ravel's *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1913), or Camille Saint-Saëns's *Cinq poèmes de Ronsard* (1921).

The ascendance of the song cycle also coincided with the high tide of French Wagnerism. After the disastrous 1861 production of *Tannhäuser*, Parisian opera houses did not mount full Wagnerian operas until the late 1880s, aside from an 1869 production of *Rienzi*. Nevertheless, French composers had ample opportunity to learn Wagner's works by studying his scores, hearing concert excerpts and making pilgrimages to Bayreuth, Munich and elsewhere. Meanwhile, Wagner had captured the imagination of Symbolist poets and authors whose effusions appear most famously in *La revue wagnérienne* (1885–8). During the 1890s, Wagner finally conquered the Opéra, becoming by far the most performed composer at the Palais Garnier.[3]

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[1] Julian Rushton has noted some cyclic connections in Berlioz's cycle in '*Les Nuits d'été*: Cycle or Collection?', *Berlioz Studies*, ed. Peter Bloom (Cambridge, 1992), 112–35. For a comprehensive study of the French song cycle and a list of works, see Ulrich Linke, *Der französische Liederzyklus von 1866 bis 1914* (Stuttgart, 2010).

[2] Emily Kilpatrick traces this evolution in *French Art Song: History of a New Music, 1870–1914* (Rochester, NY, 2022).

[3] For Wagner's French reception during this period, see Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (New York, 1999), 11–21.

This essay will survey the impact of Wagner on song cycles by Fauré, Debussy, Chausson, Lili Boulanger and Olivier Messiaen. His influence appears in specific musical techniques and allusions, but also in the scope and intellectual ambition of these Gallic emulations. As we shall see, Wagner helped shape the French song cycle from its inception, playing a signal role in the history of the *mélodie* during its formative and most fruitful stages.

Baudelaire, Wagner and the new *mélodie*

In 1861, Charles Baudelaire published his famous essay 'Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris', a seminal text in French Wagnerian reception. Amid his passionate advocacy of the German composer, Baudelaire took the opportunity to reflect on poetic theory. He compared Wagner's reunion of the arts to his own notion of *correspondances*, those mysterious synaesthetic relationships that traverse the cosmos; the poet even quoted the octet of his sonnet 'Correspondances' from *Les Fleurs du mal*. Baudelaire thus set the pattern for numerous French poets who would enlist Wagner's music in their own artistic projects, including Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine and other contributors to *La revue wagnérienne*. French composers thus encountered Wagner as mediated through a literary tradition, interwoven with the poetics of the emergent Symbolist movement. Their reception was both Wagnerian and *wagnériste*, a fusion of musical and poetic inspiration.

This mutual influence appears in Fauré's three settings of Baudelaire from around 1870–71. As Roy Howat and Emily Kilpatrick have argued, 'Hymne', 'La rançon' and 'Chant d'automne' form an implicit triptych, even though they were published separately.[4] 'Hymne' shows an unmistakably Wagnerian influence (see Ex. 1a). The voice begins with a rising chromatic line reminiscent of the Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*, and this motive runs throughout the piano part. It also returns in 'Chant d'automne' (see Ex. 1b), anticipating the leitmotivic webs of Fauré's later song cycles. Howat and Kilpatrick find a marked expressive advance in the Baudelaire settings: 'These snaking lines give Fauré's familiar arpeggios and arching lines a fresh intensity, heady and erotically charged, marking a new chromatic and polyphonic language at the heart of an ecstatic enthusiasm almost wholly unheard of in his previous work.'[5] Wagner's influence shows as well in the new gravity, ambition and formal complexity of the three songs, so different from Fauré's lighter strophic settings of the 1860s. Likewise, the cyclic ambitions in the Baudelaire set suggest a broadened vision, stimulated by the stature of both Wagner and his most prestigious French champion.

Fauré was a passionate Wagnerian, like his fellow composers Henri Duparc and Emmanuel Chabrier, and his Baudelaire settings arose at a critical juncture in the history of the *mélodie*. As Kilpatrick has shown, the three composers turned simultaneously to Baudelaire in a spirit of friendly competition during the tumultuous *année terrible* of the Franco-Prussian War and Paris Commune. The most famous result was Duparc's magnificent 'L'invitation au voyage', although Chabrier produced his own quirky

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[4] Roy Howat and Emily Kilpatrick, 'Wagnérisme de Fauré: *Pénélope* et les mélodies', *Le Wagnérisme dans tous ses états, 1913–2013*, ed. Cécile Leblanc and Danièle Pistone (Paris, 2016), 4–11.

[5] Ibid., 6.

The '*Tristan*' line in Gabriel Fauré's Baudelaire settings:
Ex. 1a 'Hymne', bars 3–7

setting of the poem, replete with Wagnerian allusions. 'These five Baudelaire settings', Kilpatrick explains, 'suggest a meaningful, mindful, and probably coordinated effort on the part of their composers, and a conscious shift towards modernity'.[6] The notorious (and glorious) verse of Baudelaire no doubt acted as the primary stimulus, but the shade of Wagner looms large behind these adventurous works. Henceforth, the *mélodie* would begin its steady ascent to a serious concert genre, worthy of professional performance and critical notice.

Debussy, *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire*

Two decades later, Debussy published his own Baudelaire settings, the most Wagnerian of his *mélodies*. The *Cinq poémes de Charles Baudelaire*, composed in 1887–9 and dedicated to Étienne Dupin who had twice accompanied Debussy to Bayreuth, abound in allusions to *Tristan*, *Parsifal*, *Die Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*.[7] The cycle ends with

[6] Kilpatrick, *French Art Song* (note 2), 81.

[7] See François de Médicis, *La maturation artistique de Debussy dans son context historique (1884–1902)* (Turnhout, 2020), 352.

The '*Tristan*' line in Gabriel Fauré's Baudelaire settings:
Ex. 1b 'Chant d'automne', bars 38–42

'La mort des amants' (The Death of Lovers), an idiosyncratic take on the *Liebestod*. In the *Cinq poèmes*, Debussy indulged in a dense chromatic harmony and quasi-operatic vocalism that differ radically from both the lighter manner of his early songs and the concise, understated style of his later cycles. This unabashed Wagnerism, however, did not last. 'After completing this cycle', remarks Denis Herlin, 'Debussy would begin an ardent battle against the sorcery of this "ghost of old Klingsor, otherwise known as Richard Wagner"'.[8]

The confluence of the two titans, Baudelaire and Wagner, again seems to have spurred grand ambitions in the *mélodie* composer. This shows in the complexity of the poetic forms that Debussy chose. The first poem, 'Le balcon', repeats the first line of each stanza at the end (*AbabA*), while the second, 'Harmonie du soir', takes the form

8 Denis Herlin, 'Debussy's Mature Songs', *The Cambridge Companion to French Art Song*, ed. Stephen Rumph (Cambridge, 2025), 224. Quotation from Claude Debussy, *Correspondance (1872–1918)*, ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin (Paris, 2005), 160.

Allegro con moto

Chant

Allegro con moto

Piano

Mè - re des sou-ve- nirs, maîtres - se des maî - tres - ses,

Ex. 2 Claude Debussy, 'Le balcon' (*Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire*), bars 1–6

of a Malaysian *pantoum* with interlocking quatrains (*ABAB*, *BCBC*, …). In both songs, Debussy respected these poetic repetitions by repeating the identical music, creating a complex web of recurring themes. The third song, 'Le jet d'eau', also has a refrain, and the final two poems are in the rigorous sonnet form. The scope of the *Cinq poèmes* is similarly extraordinary: 'Le balcon' is one of the longest of Debussy's *mélodies*, and the entire cycle is two or three times longer than the compact triptychs that dominate his later song oeuvre.

'Le balcon' epitomises the head-on Wagnerism of this uncharacteristic work. The rising chromatic lines in the bass and middle voice immediately awaken memories of *Tristan*, and the song modulates restlessly through four changes of key signature, including a distant move from B to F major. Fluctuating tempo markings also register the changing moods of Baudelaire's six stanzas. The broad vocal lines and testing of the upper tessitura point to the opera house; indeed, David Hertz hears an echo of Brünnhilde's war cry ('Hojotoho!') in the opening phrase, which swoops down and up

from a high *g*″ (see Ex. 2).[9] The repeating phrases that bookend each stanza also create a pattern of cyclical motives across the song reminiscent of Wagner. Moreover, as Katherine Bergeron notes, the different refrains themselves share close affinities with the opening phrase of the song: 'The recurring melodic idea, with its developments and digressions, seems to function in this sense less as a true refrain than as a kind of leitmotif.'[10] These musical recollections, both overt and disguised, embody the central theme of Baudelaire's poem, the power of memory to summon the past.

Wagnerian influence also appears in the phrase construction of 'Le balcon', which departs from the conventional symmetry of Debussy's earlier songs. As Bergeron points out, the composer 'drops the pretense of the four-bar phrase and opts for something different. The result is a curiously fluid and malleable declamation, intermingling phrases of three, four, five, six, or sometimes seven measures.'[11] Bergeron relates this flexible phraseology to the efforts of Baudelaire and the Symbolists to create a more spontaneous lyric flow, unhindered by metrical constraints. Yet we may also detect the influence of Wagner's 'musical prose', the flexible melodic phrasing that matches the irregular lines of *Stabreim*. Here again, we witness the confluence of poetic and musical inspiration, as well as the way that Wagner's techniques could lend themselves to different aesthetic ends.

Chausson, *Poème de l'amour et de la mer* (1893)

While it is tempting to ascribe recurring motives to Wagner's influence, French composers had another important model: César Franck. Franck had refined his technique of 'cyclic form', in which themes return across the sections or movements of a work, in a series of compositions including the *Variations symphoniques* (1886), Violin Sonata (1887) and Symphony in D Minor (1888). During the 1880s, Franck's pupils had taken control of the Société national de musique under the aggressive leadership of Vincent d'Indy, alienating patriotic traditionalists like Saint-Saëns with their embrace of foreign composers. The *bande à Franck* included two leading *mélodie* composers, Henri Duparc and Ernest Chausson, the latter of whom composed one of the great song cycles of the French repertory. *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*, begun in 1882 and first performed in 1893, is the first French cycle composed expressly for orchestra. Based on two recurring motives, Chausson's *Poème* illustrates the problematic attribution of Wagnerian influence.

Chausson belonged to the post-Wagnerian school of French opera composers, which included Saint-Saëns (*Henri VIII*, 1883), Ernest Reyer (*Sigurd*, 1884), Chabrier (*Gwendoline*, 1886) and Massenet (*Esclarmonde*, 1889). His own *Le roi Arthus* (1903), based on Arthurian legend, follows suit with leitmotifs, chromatic harmony and an expansive new role for the orchestra, as well as an adulterous love triangle reminiscent of *Tristan und Isolde*. Chausson's *Poème*, a lush symphonic setting of six poems by Maurice Bouchor, falls into two parts: an ecstatic expression of love reflected in the seascape ('La Fleur des eaux') and a lament over lost love ('La mort de l'amour'). Chausson developed two motives across the cycle: a broad pentatonic melody introduced in the first song repre-

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9 David Hertz, *The Tuning of the Word: The Musico-Literary Poetics of the Symbolist Movement* (Carbondale, IL, 1987), 93.

10 Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Époque* (New York, 2010), 155.

11 Ibid.

sents the sea, while a forlorn descending melody in the minor mode is elaborated in an interlude between the halves of the *Poème* and returns as the beautiful final song, 'Le temps des lilas'. The Sea motive evolves in the introduction to the first song and then breaks forth simultaneously, but out of phase, in both orchestra and voice. It continues to develop in counterpoint with the singer, supporting the soaring operatic lines. The Lilacs motive emerges at the end of the triumphant song, nicely foreshadowing the sad ending of the story, while the most expansive treatment of the Sea motive comes in the long orchestral postlude to the first half of the cycle.

The symphonic texture of Chausson's *Poème*, in which the orchestral lines interweave with the singer's melody, shows the clear inspiration of post-Wagnerian opera. In other respects, however, the theatrical origin is less clear. Chausson's motives do not behave much like Wagnerian leitmotifs. They develop principally in the orchestral interludes, rather than saturating the accompaniment in the vocal sections. Chausson's text-setting also lacks the prosodic fluidity of Debussy's Baudelaire songs. The vocal melody mostly follows the regular flow of the poetic metre, little touched by the asymmetries of Wagnerian 'musical prose'. The motivic design remains chiefly a matter for the autonomous orchestra – a reminder that Franck's cyclic composition took shape within the instrumental genres.

In the case of Guy Ropartz's *Quatre poèmes d'après 'l'Intermezzo' d'Henri Heine* (1899), the inspiration seems even more clearly Franckian than Wagnerian. Ropartz chose translations of four of the darkest poems from Heinrich Heine's *Lyrisches Intermezzo* (1823), the source of Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, and based his cycle on a four-note motto reminiscent of the Dies irae chant (C sharp – B – C sharp – G sharp). This motive permeates the cycle, serving as *basso ostinato*, melody and inner voice, and beginning on different scale degrees. The most telling intertextual moment, however, comes in the piano prelude, which announces the motive in *fortissimo* octaves and then previews its use in the succeeding songs. This prelude strikingly recalls the *Overtura* to Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*, op. 133, a work that Ropartz, a composer of six string quartets, undoubtedly knew. The spirit of Germanic chamber music broods heavily over this cycle, another reminder of the instrumental roots of Franck's cyclic form.

Fauré, *Cinq mélodies 'de Venise'* and *La bonne chanson*

More than any other French composer, Fauré conceived his song cycles as integrated works, with thematic recollections and unified narratives in the manner of Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* (1816) or Schumann's *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe und -leben* (1840).[12] With the exception of the early *Poème d'un jour* (1878), his seven cycles come after 1890. In his first mature cycles, the *Cinq mélodies 'de Venise'*, op. 58 (1891) and *La bonne chanson*, op. 61 (1892–4), both to poetry of Paul Verlaine, he also essayed the most rigorous French application of leitmotifs to the song cycle. While the common motive of the *Cinq mélodies* is an abstract musical idea, at least three of the six recurring motives in *La bonne chanson* convey extramusical meanings (the beloved, the sun, birdsong). This new element transformed Fauré's piano accompaniments, which grow increasingly independent, contrapuntal and symphonic in scope.

[12] For a fuller discussion, see my study *The Fauré Song Cycles: Poetry and Music, 1861–1921* (Oakland, CA, 2021).

Paul Verlaine in a winter landscape, *c.*1890, by Frédéric Auguste Cazals. CC0 Paris Musées / Musée Carnavalet – Histoire de Paris

The new motivic web also transformed Fauré's vocal writing in his Verlaine cycles, leading to a texture comparable to Wagner's 'Orchestermelodie' in which, as Mathieu Schneider puts it, the dichotomy of voice and accompaniment in Fauré 'yields to a symphonic–vocal polyphony that knits voice and orchestra together into one complex tissue'.[13] Schneider was here describing Fauré's later opera *Pénélope* (1913), but the same technique governs the Verlaine cycles, especially *La bonne chanson*. The motivic logic of the piano accompaniment also allowed Fauré to pursue a more flexible, prose-like treatment of the poetic text. While he never abandoned regular, rhyming verse (unlike Debussy, who set numerous prose texts during the 1890s, including his own), Fauré treated Verlaine's verse with a new freedom, stretching out single syllables, rushing through lines, or splintering the text into breathless fragments. The opening of the first song of *La bonne chanson*, 'Une Sainte en son auréole', epitomises this fluid interplay of text and motive; the most extreme example comes at the beginning of the last song, 'L'hiver a cessé', where Verlaine's opening line (but only the first *hemistich*!) arrives on the cadence of a long piano prelude spun out of prior motives. The motives also combine in double and triple counterpoint in which the vocal line becomes an equal polyphonic partner. In the fourth song, 'J'allais par des chemins perfides', for example, the piano states two of the recurring motives, a graceful arabesque from the first song and a rising scale from the second ('La lune blanche'), while the voice enters with a third motive, a rising octave also from the second song (see Ex. 3). This quasi-symphonic texture allows the vocal line to stretch out 'L'amour' for four beats. In the following phrase, the singer lingers on 'joie' for twelve beats, thoroughly deforming Verlaine's octosyllabic metre ('L'amour, délicieux vainqueur, / Nous a réunis dans la joie').

[13] Mathieu Schneider, 'Orchestral Melody in *Pénélope*: Aspects of Wagner's Influence on Fauré', in *Fauré Studies*, ed. Carlo Caballero and Stephen Rumph (Cambridge, 2020), 156.

48

Chant

L'a - mour, dé - li - ci - eux vain- queur,

Piano

Ex. 3 Fauré, 'J'allais par des chemins perfides' (*La bonne chanson*), bars 48–52

Fauré's new symphonic conception of text-setting already appears in his Messe de Requiem, whose first version he had completed in January 1888. The Requiem contains its own recurring motive, introduced by the sopranos in the Kyrie et Introït and recalled in the Sanctus and Offertoire. Fauré's mass also includes an unmistakable allusion to the *Ring* cycle, which has implications for *La bonne chanson*. The chromatic Communion of the Agnus Dei (Lux aeterna) is modelled unmistakably on the Slumber motif from the end of *Die Walküre*. Numerous parallels connect the two themes: the common-tone modulation from C to A flat major; the identical chromatic descent in the melody; the initial move to B or C flat major; the rising third sequences in the bass; and the hushed, numinous mood. Moreover, both themes represent the transition between the human and divine, the earthly and heavenly. In *Die Walküre*, the Slumber motif marks Brünnhilde's passage from goddess to mortal woman; in the Requiem, the Lux aeterna marks the moment of transubstantiation, in which the elements of bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.

Fauré also seems to have had Brünnhilde in mind in the opening song of *La bonne chanson*, whose piano motive distinctly recalls the pentatonic Slumber motif from the end of *Die Walküre* (see Ex. 4). The vision of Brünnhilde circled by flames atop her rocky crag fits neatly with Verlaine's opening lines:

> Une Sainte en son auréole,
> Une chatelaine en sa tour …
>
> A Saint in her halo,
> A lady of the castle in her tower …

The poem even includes a reference to a hunting horn resounding in the depths of the woods, which Fauré faithfully imitates in the piano. At a deeper level, the allusion complements the theme of the poem, a Symbolist reflection on the images awakened by Mathilde's 'Carolingian' name. The Slumber motif suggests the associations lying dormant within the beloved's name, waiting to be awakened like Brünnhilde at Siegfried's kiss.

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) by Henry Farré, *c.*1906. CC0 Paris Musées / Musée Carnavalet – Histoire de Paris

Fauré's allusion again underlines the nexus of Wagner and Symbolist poetics within the imagination of French composers (also evident in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, begun in 1893 as Fauré was completing *La bonne chanson*). This poetically filtered (and philtred) Wagnerism appears in a central theme of Fauré's Verlaine cycles: the role of music as a conduit between human and natural realms. His Verlaine settings abound with diegetic music, which the vocal persona both hears and remarks upon – lute dances, barcarolles, mandolin serenades, church bells, bird calls, hunting horns. In the Verlaine cycles, these resonant soundscapes unite humanity and nature in the manner of the Woodbird's song in *Siegfried* or the Rhinemaidens' speech-babble in *Das Rheingold*. The *Cinq mélodies* open with 'Mandoline', in which the ubiquitous music of the singing boughs begins as a vocalise then migrates into the wordless piano, suggesting a music transcending the human voice; the cycle ends with 'C'est l'extase', in which the mention of a naturalistic 'choir of little voices' calls forth a thematic recollection of the third song. *La bonne chanson* begins with a pentatonic *chanson*, matching the chivalric imagery of 'Une Sainte en son auréole', but ends with pentatonic bird calls in 'L'hiver a cessé'. And in 'Avant que tu ne t'en ailles', the cycle's seventh song,

Ex. 4a Wagner, Slumber motif (*Die Walküre*, Act III)

Ex. 4b Fauré, 'Une Sainte en son auréole' (*La bonne chanson*), bars 1–10

the stately chorale of the human poet and the raucous bird calls of the contrasting sections flow together at the end in a single rapturous flow. Not surprisingly, the birdsong motive introduced in this song belongs to the same pentatonic collection as Wagner's Woodbird motif.[14]

[14] See Rumph, *The Fauré Song Cycles* (note 12), 119–31.

We may trace two strands within Fauré's musical cosmology, knotting in the figure of Wagner. On the one hand, the Verlaine cycles draw on Baudelaire's notion of *correspondances*, which had become a central fascination of the Symbolists. In fact, the fourth poem of the *Cinq mélodies*, 'A Clymène', references Baudelaire's famous sonnet, 'Correspondances', quoted in his 1861 *Tannhäuser* essay. As he explained there, things were always expressed 'through a reciprocal analogy, since the day that God set forth the world as a complex and indivisible totality'.[15] On the other hand, Fauré's allusions to the pentatonic Slumber and Woodbird motifs point to the idealised reunion of humanity and nature in the *Ring* cycle. A fusion of Symbolist poetics and Bayreuth techniques, Fauré's Verlaine cycles are wonders of musical and intellectual synthesis.

Boulanger, *Clairières dans le ciel* (1914)

In *La bonne chanson*, leitmotivic experimentation in the French song cycle reached an unsurpassed peak, from which Fauré himself retreated in his last four cycles. Debussy's song cycles make only subtle use of motivic connections and Chausson never replicated the thematic structure of *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*. Nor do the cycles of Augusta Holmès, Ravel or Poulenc show much interest in motivic interconnections, let alone unified narratives or thematic recollections. Lili Boulanger alone followed the example of *La bonne chanson* in *Clairières dans le ciel*, a cycle on poems by Francis Jammes completed in 1914 and first performed after the composer's early death. Bearing a dedication to Fauré on the opening page, *Clairières* contains a web of short motives, reprises the opening song at the end, and follows a unified narrative. Moreover, Boulanger recycled specific motivic material from *La bonne chanson*. These intertextual allusions belong to a network of cryptic structures embedded within the work that include the choice of thirteen songs (the number of letters in the composer's name) and the keys of the outer songs, E major and D minor, derived from the name of her best friend Miki Piré (Mi = E, ré = D).

Significantly, the material that Boulanger borrowed from *La bonne chanson* carries Wagnerian resonances. As Andrew Pau has shown, the appoggiatura motive that pervades *Clairières* from the opening bars is related to both the pentatonic theme from Fauré's first song and the pentatonic birdsong motive introduced in the sixth; indeed, Fauré's three-note birdsong motive emerges midway through Boulanger's cycle and reappears in the final three songs.[16] As suggested above, Fauré's opening melody in *La bonne chanson* alludes to Brünnhilde's Slumber motif, while his birdsong motive recalls the Woodbird's music. Whether or not Boulanger was conscious of these motivic affinities, she included a patently Wagnerian allusion in her sixth song, 'Si tout ceci n'est qu'un pauvre rêve' (see Ex. 5). The chromatic line from the *Tristan und Isolde* Prelude repeats as an ostinato throughout the song, including in transposed and inverted versions. (Boulanger attended Wagner's opera in Nice the night before beginning the

[15] Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris, 1976), 784.

[16] Andrew Pau, 'Fauréan Correspondences: Motivic Practice and Octatonicism in Lili Boulanger's *Clairières dans le ciel*', forthcoming in *Gabriel Fauré: Influences and Influence*, ed. James Sobaskie (Rochester, NY, 2025).

song.[17]) The opening lines of Jammes's poem fit neatly with *Tristan* and its Schopenhauerian emphasis on the world as illusion:

> Si tout ceci n'est qu'un pauvre rêve, et s'il faut
> Que j'ajoute dans ma vie, une fois encore,
> La désillusion aux désillusions …
>
> If all this is but a poor dream, and if I must
> add once more, in my life,
> disillusion to disillusion …

Boulanger even left a punning expression mark, *tristement tendre*, on the final page. (In like manner, Debussy slyly underlined the word 'triste' throughout *Pelléas et Mélisande* with *Tristan* chords.[18])

Ex. 5 Boulanger, 'Si tout ceci n'est qu'un pauvre rêve' (*Clairières dans le ciel*), bars 1–6

Yet the *Tristan* motive sits uncomfortably within Boulanger's song cycle, betraying a gap between the aesthetic climate of the 1890s and that of 1914. The rigid ostinato saps Wagner's leitmotif of its sense of unresolved yearning. Although the motive ends faithfully on a V^7 chord, the numbing repetition neutralises the feeling of unsatisfied longing, reducing the line to an inert object. This tension between form and content belongs to a broader disjuncture in *Clairières* explored by Sabine Giesbrecht-Schutte.[19] Boulanger's vocal line follows the poetic text scrupulously, registering each rhetorical figure and speech inflection with Debussyan sensitivity. Yet the piano maintains a

[17] Annegret Fauser, 'Die Musik hinter der Legende: Lili Boulangers Liederzyklus Clairières dans le ciel', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, cli/11 (1990), 11.

[18] See Carolyn Abbate, '*Tristan* in the Composition of *Pelléas*', *19th-Century Music*, v/2 (1981), 139.

[19] Sabine Giesbrecht-Schutte, 'Lili Boulanger: "Clairières dans le Ciel" – ästhetischer Ausdruck und musikalische Form', *Die Musikforschung*, xlvii/4 (1991), 384–402.

remarkable autonomy, spinning out motives in quasi-motoric ostinato patterns only tangentially related to the text. This is a striking departure from Fauré's 'orchestral melody' in *La bonne chanson* and his egalitarian sharing of motivic material between the voice and piano. Despite its lush ninth chords and passionate vocal writing, Boulanger's cycle thus belongs to its own time. Written on the cusp of the First World War, *Clairières* demonstrates the historical tension between an earlier, rapturous *wagnérisme* and the cooler aesthetic of the new generation, soon to be codified in Jean Cocteau's manifesto *Le coq et l'arlequin* (1918). Wagner has become a fruitful impediment, a source of creative friction between generations of French music.

Messiaen, *Harawi: Chant d'amour et de mort*

Oliver Messiaen makes an arbitrary but appropriate endpoint to this survey. While later French composers continued to produce *mélodies* and song cycles, Messiaen perhaps represents the last paragon of the fusion of poetic and musical art that led Roland Barthes to characterise the *mélodie* as 'a certain culture of the French language'.[20] Messiaen's mother, Cécile Sauvage, was a poet, and his father was an English teacher and translator of Shakespeare. Like that other great Wagnerian Augusta Holmès, Messiaen wrote the texts for all his vocal works (other than two student settings of François Villon and a single setting of his mother's verse). And in his last song cycle, *Harawi: Chant d'amour et de mort* (1945), he left the greatest monument to *Tristan und Isolde* in the *mélodie* repertory.

Harawi, together with the *Turangalîla-symphonie* and *Cinq Rechants* (1948), belongs to what Messiaen dubbed his 'Tristan Trilogy'. These works, as Stephen Broad and David Evans put it, 'consider in very different ways an overwhelming earthly love consummated in death'.[21] *Harawi* is the Quechuan term for a type of Peruvian folksong of doomed love, often dwelling on death. Messiaen's twelve songs trace the mystical *Liebestod* of two Andean lovers, Toungou and Piroutcha, first discovered on a midnight bench like Tristan and Isolde in their bower. After protestations of love, she offers herself as ashes and he asks her to cut off his head ('L'amour de Piroutcha'). The lovers bid each other farewell ('Adieu') and dissolve into an ecstatic flurry of nonsense syllables ('Syllabes'). The lovers reunite in a cosmic dance amid the nebulae before plunging into darkness in the final song, 'Dans le noir'.

As with Fauré and Debussy, Wagner's presence inspired a new grandeur of conception. *Harawi* is an imposing work in every sense. The twelve songs last close to an hour, with extended solo passages for the piano. Messiaen's young student and second wife Yvonne Loriod had just premiered his monumental *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*, and her virtuosic playing inspired the writing in *Harawi*. As in his two previous cycles, *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936) and *Chants de Terre et de Ciel* (1938), Messiaen tailored the songs to the formidable voice of Marcelle Bunlet, a dramatic soprano whom he first heard at the Opéra in the taxing title role of Paul Dukas's *Ariane et*

20 Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, 1977), 186.

21 Stephen Broad and David Evans, 'Olivier Messiaen', in *The Cambridge Companion to French Art Song* (note 8), 284.

Barbe-bleue. The composer also achieved a new complexity in his poetic language, a rich stew of Surrealist imagery, onomatopoetic sounds, nonsense vocables, and both real and fabricated Quechua words.[22]

Messiaen did not use motives, although poetic phrases and onomatopoeia echo across the cycle. Instead, the composer transformed an entire melody in a series of increasingly sombre variations. Introduced as a joyous serenade ('Bonjour toi, colombe verte'), this E flat melody returns in a solemn chorale as the lovers part ('Adieu'). It closes the cycle ('Dans le noir'), sung in an anguished *forte* and accompanied by descending chords in the piano. This theme-and-variations form, which blends leitmotif and strophic song, offers a unique response to Wagner's motivic practice.

Like Fauré, Messiaen responded to the broader philosophical themes in Wagner's work, in this case, the Schopenhauerian desire to escape earthly passion for a purified form of union. This plays out in the linguistic oscillation between sense and sound, articulate speech and the hypnotic incantations of meaningless syllables, like the incessant monotone repetition of 'Doundou tchil' in the fourth song or 'Pia pia pia' in the eighth song. This dissolution of language into sound – that is, music – mirrors the ecstatic release of the lovers into the cosmos. As Broad and Evans explain: 'The interleaving of sections of semantic text in "Doundou tchil" with pure vocables marks a contrast between the worldly realm of the lovers and the mystery of wider creation.'[23] One is reminded of the Woodbird scene in *Siegfried*, as well as of Fauré's blending of human and avian song in *La bonne chanson*. Debussy reached for a similar effect in 'En sourdine', the first song of his cycle *Fêtes galantes I* (1903). In the piano prelude, a twittering birdsong hovers above a literal *Tristan* chord, in Wagner's exact pitch and voicing, anticipating the closing lines of Verlaine's poem: 'Voix de notre désespoir, / Le rossignol chantera' (Voice of our despair, The nightingale will sing).

And here we return to Baudelaire's 1861 essay, with its opportunistic interweaving of poetic theory and Wagner criticism. More than any song repertory, the *mélodie* springs from a fascination with language and its possibilities. French writers and musicians alike found in Wagner's transcendent, intoxicating music a means to revolutionise poetry and its expressive powers. To grasp his extraordinary adoption into the French song cycle, we must immerse ourselves in the distinctively French union of word and tone and appreciate the way he inspired new vistas in this intimate, musopoetic art form.

Music setting by Richard Laing

[22] See Broad and Evans, 'Olivier Messiaen', 301–2; and Robert Sholl, 'Love, Mad Love and the "*point sublime*": the Surrealist Poetics of Messiaen's *Harawi*', in *Messiaen Studies*, ed. Robert Sholl (Cambridge, 2007), 34–62.

[23] Broad and Evans, 'Olivier Messiaen', 302.

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Wagner's Early Songs in Orchestrations by Felix Mottl and Hans Werner Henze

Malcolm Miller

> The first thing that may safely be predicted of Wagner's songs, even before examining them, is that they will be totally unlike any other existing songs; and this prediction will be fully justified by the works themselves. They are in the highest degree original – too original, we fear, to attain anything like a wide popularity. Some of them are in our opinion extremely beautiful, and all are highly interesting; but the beauty and interest are for the most part such as appeal rather to the cultivated musician than to the general public.[1]

This anonymous review of recent editions of Wagner's songs was published in 1873 in the British journal *The Monthly Musical Record*. It is highly prescient of their subsequent reception, for with the obvious exception of the Wesendonck Lieder, it would indeed seem that Wagner's songs have only ever prompted interest from 'the cultivated musician'. Even until recently, his pre-Wesendonck works for voice and piano were subjected to little serious scholarship.[2] Wagner's early Lied oeuvre essentially comprised his seven compositions on texts from Goethe's *Faust* (1832), *Der Tannenbaum*, a setting of a poem by Georg Scheurlin (1838), and a motley group of French songs composed in Paris between late 1839 and spring 1840. At the close of the above review, the author himself contrasted these early songs with the Wesendonck Lieder, of which he was clearly a passionate advocate, and which, he says, are 'so thoroughly characteristic of the composer as to deserve the attention of all who wish to obtain a just idea of Wagner's style'. First published in 1862, this Wesendonck cycle achieved great popularity towards the close

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1 Anon., untitled review of published songs for voice and piano by Wagner (*Trois mélodies*, *Les deux grenadiers*, the Wesendonck Lieder and *Der Tannenbaum*), *The Monthly Musical Record*, iii (1 Jul. 1873), 91. The edition of *Trois mélodies* listed in the review was published by Flaxland in Paris. Flaxland was founded in 1847, obtained the French rights for several Wagner operas, and on 30 Dec. 1869 sold its catalogue to Durand, Schoenewerk et Cie. According to Cosima Wagner's diaries, just three weeks later, on 20 Jan. 1870, her mother had written to Wagner to report that the French publisher had requested purchase of the songs for publication. This implies it was Durand, though perhaps he continued the Flaxland 'imprint', hence the listing in the review. The British Library holds an edition from 1870 under the name Durand, while the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris holds an undated copy (presumably also from 1870) under the name Flaxland. See *Cosima Wagner's Diaries 1869–1883*, tr. and ed. Geoffrey Skelton, 2 vols. (London, 1978–80) [CT], 20 Jan. 1870.

2 See the essay on Wagner's songs by Egon Voss in this issue.

of the 19th century, both in its original version for piano and voice and, later, in its version with orchestra – though only the fifth song, 'Träume', had been orchestrated by Wagner himself, with the remaining four being orchestrated by Felix Mottl in 1893.[3]

Mottl has become best known to the broad public for this orchestration of Wagner's Wesendonck Lieder, though he made a further important contribution to the genre of the orchestral Lied with his arrangements of four early songs by Wagner that were published as *Gesangs-Compositionen* by Adolph Fürstner in 1894. Mottl and his contemporaries frequently programmed these orchestral versions of the early songs, thereby contributing to the growing popularity of Wagner in the 1890s, though they fell into obscurity during the first half of the 20th century, just as the Wesendonck Lieder were becoming a concert staple.

In this article I trace the genesis of these four early songs and their initial publication, then consider the context of Mottl's orchestrations, with a subsequent close investigation of Mottl's arranging style for each song. I follow this with a discussion of their immediate reception in England where Mottl conducted from 1894 onwards. Finally, I discuss the much more recent versions by Hans Werner Henze who, having famously re-orchestrated the Wesendonck Lieder in 1976, turned to Wagner's other songs in his *Richard Wagnersche Klavierlieder* of 1998–9. This later set offers a fascinating insight into Wagner's early style through a postmodern lens whilst also representing a final stage in Henze's own political–aesthetic rapprochement to Wagner and Germany.

The history of the four early songs

This group of songs includes *Der Tannenbaum* and the group of three French songs published as *Trois mélodies* discussed in the review quoted above, namely *Dors mon enfant* to a text by an unnamed poet,[4] *Attente* by Victor Hugo and *Mignonne* by the 16th-century poet Pierre de Ronsard.[5] Since Wagner's time in Paris was fraught with professional and financial difficulties, he modelled his French text settings on contemporaneous salon songs in hopes of enticing leading singers to perform them.[6] Though unsuccessful in that regard, he nevertheless published them in the German-language journal *Europa: Chronik der gebildeten Welt* edited by August Lewald, where he had already published *Der Tannenbaum*.[7]

[3] Wagner orchestrated 'Träume' for solo violin and ensemble for performance in 1857 as a birthday gift to his 'muse', Mathilde, at the Villa Wesendonck in Zurich. See Chris Walton, 'Upstairs, Downstairs: Acoustics and Tempi in Wagner's "Träume" and Siegfried Idyll', *The Musical Times*, cliii (2012), 7–18.

[4] This poet has only recently been identified as Alexis Bartevelle; see the explanation in Egon Voss's essay in this issue.

[5] See my article 'Spinning the Yarn: Intertextuality in Wagner's Use and Reuse of his Songs in his Operas', *The Wagner Journal*, viii/2 (2014), 4–27, <https://tinyurl.com/yc2p3ae3> All websites last accessed on 1 Sep. 2025.

[6] The foreword by Egon Voss and the critical commentary of the Complete Edition shed much light on the provenance of these songs. See *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Werke*, i–xxi (series A, *Notenteil*), xxii–xxxi (series B, *Dokumententeil*), ed. Carl Dahlhaus, Martin Geck, Egon Voss and others (Mainz 1968–) [SW], xvii, *Klavierlieder*, ed. Egon Voss (Mainz, 1976).

[7] *Europa* published *Der Tannenbaum* in 1839, *Dors mon enfant* in 1841 and *Attente* and *Mignonne* in 1842. In 1837, *Europa* had already published the 'Karnevalslied' from Wagner's second opera, *Das Liebesverbot* of 1836. Jeremy Coleman notes that this represented 'the first publication of any of Wagner's operatic music'. See Coleman, *Richard Wagner in Paris* (Woodbridge, 2019), 28.

Although composed separately and unrelated to each other, these four songs were connected through both provenance and, it would turn out, a common destiny. Some thirty years after composing them, Wagner copied them out and bound them together as a birthday gift for Cosima on Christmas Eve 1868 when she was expecting their next child (Siegfried).[8] Perhaps the idea of song as an intimate gift held some echoes for him of his Wesendonck Lieder of the previous decade, and there appears to have been a logic both to their selection (from a potential seven songs that he had completed in 1838–40)[9] and their sequence, which was chronological. *Der Tannenbaum*, a lugubrious ballad in E-flat minor,[10] is followed by the lullaby *Dors mon enfant* in F major, then the fast and ecstatic *Attente* in G major and the lilting, lyrical *Mignonne* in E major.[11]

Wagner retained an interest in his youthful songs, as he confirms in his autobiography *Mein Leben*, where he describes *Der Tannenbaum* as 'a work I am still pleased to call my own'.[12] Cosima's diaries also confirm this. Her entry for 16 June 1869 reads: 'R. went to the piano, a glance at the French songs of his youth (which he had copied out and presented to me at Christmas) filled him with great bitterness: he remembered how he was kept waiting outside the room in Mme Viardot's house and then had begged her to sing his "*Attente*" which "with radiant eyes" she had refused to do. He had had too much to put up with.'[13]

Just as the Wesendonck Lieder were a private communication turned public, published cycle, these four early songs were similarly published in French and German editions within three years of their birthday presentation. The French edition appeared in 1870; the three original French songs were grouped together as *Trois mélodies* while *Der Tannenbaum* appeared separately in a French translation by Paul Lacôme (1838–1920), a writer and operetta composer. The original, birthday sequence for the three French songs was altered, enabling the two lyrical songs to lead into the fast *Attente* that was now transposed from G to F major. This also created a symmetrical F–E–F key pattern for the group.[14]

Soon afterwards, the German publisher Adolph Fürstner bought the rights from Durand and published all four songs (*Der Tannenbaum* separately, the three French songs as *3 Gesänge*; Fürstner later published them together as a set, with *Der Tannenbaum* last,

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[8] The autograph of the 1868 copy is available in the digitised collection of the Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York, <https://tinyurl.com/rfbk5smw>.

[9] The others are *Les deux grenadiers*, *Adieux de Marie Stuart* and *Soupir*. See Voss's discussion of them in his essay in this issue.

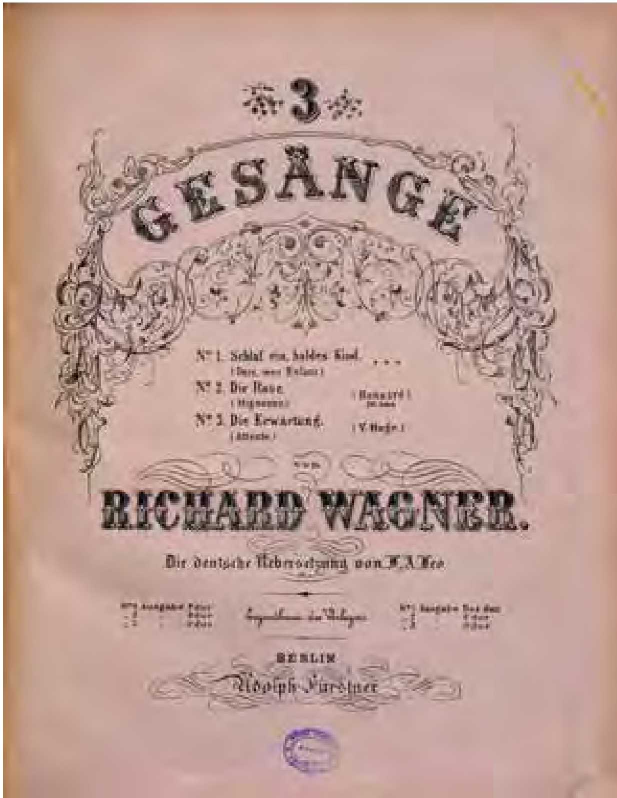
[10] See my article 'Spinning the Yarn' (note 5), 6–13, on the significance of *Der Tannenbaum* for the compositional process of *Götterdämmerung*.

[11] In *The Wagner Journal* xi/3 (2017), 81–5, I reviewed a CD including these songs recorded by the soprano Maria Bulgakova and the pianist Andrej Hoteev. The latter proposes an imaginative narrative behind the order that Wagner chose for them, referring to Christmas (*Der Tannenbaum*) and the imminent birth of Siegfried.

[12] Richard Wagner, *My Life*, tr. Andrew Gray, ed. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1983) [ML], 198.

[13] CT (note 1), 16 Jun. 1869.

[14] I discuss the issue of whether it is a song cycle in my article '"This Round of Songs": Cyclic Coherence in the Wesendonck Lieder', *The Wagner Journal*, ix/3 (2015), 24–41, here 38–9, <https://tinyurl.com/23s89rzp>.



Fürstner's dual-language edition of 1871 of Wagner's three French songs. Creative Commons

in December 1875). The German translations of the three French songs were by Friedrich August Leo (1820–98), a well-known Shakespearean scholar and translator who also wrote poetry.[15] Born in Warsaw of Jewish heritage, Leo had settled in Berlin, where he edited the *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft* to which he also contributed often.[16]

It is remarkable that these song publications appear to have filtered through to the British public very swiftly. The London Wagner Society, founded in 1872 with Edward Dannreuther in a pivotal role,[17] featured the songs in their second-ever concert, given in April 1873 at the St James's Hall. A reviewer noted that 'the vocal music (the least

[15] Cosima Wagner's diaries for Jun. 1871 provide an insight into the French and German publishers' deal, involving fees and reviving Wagner's memories of his Paris years. I discuss this in detail in my article 'Spinning the Yarn' (note 5), 10–12. There is only one reference to F. A. Leo in Cosima's diary (though he actually remains unnamed). On 4 Apr. 1878, she wrote: 'A singer here wants to sing "*L'Attente*," unbelievably bad translations! "Storch, lass im Teich dein Gewürm!" – unsingable.' The line in question departs from the literal meaning in depicting the stork flying high, but follows the remainder of the poem's rhythmic and rhyme scheme.

[16] See the entry on Friedrich August Leo in the online Folger Shakespeare Library, which holds much correspondence about his work: <https://tinyurl.com/ejnrkz85>.

[17] See Massimo Zicari, 'Music Journalism in London: The Late 1870s and 1880s', *Verdi in Victorian London* (Cambridge, 2016), <https://books.openedition.org/obp/3131>.

satisfactory part of the evening's entertainment) was undertaken by Mlle Giradi and Signor Garcia' in a programme of songs from the operas complemented by 'a couple of French songs, "Attente" and "Dors mon enfant", which belong to Wagner's early time in Paris, but which have lately been republished in Germany'.[18] This performance is referred to in the 1873 review of the published songs cited earlier:

> The first and third numbers [of the *Three mélodies*] were produced, as some of our readers may remember, at the second concert of the Wagner Society, and were thoroughly successful. This is by no means surprising, as they are certainly more popular in style than many of Wagner's later works. […] Even in these early songs, however, written, so to speak, before Wagner was Wagner, we meet with points of great originality, and occasionally foreshadowings of some of his subsequent musical innovations.[19]

Mottl's orchestrations of the early songs

Like several other outstanding conductors of his time, Felix Mottl was also an impressive composer and a prolific arranger and editor of music. He was an ideal candidate to orchestrate Wagner's songs. As a student of Anton Bruckner and Joseph Hellmesberger at the Vienna Conservatory, Mottl was a founder member of the Viennese Academic Wagner Society. Invited by Hans Richter to join the famous 'Nibelungen-Kanzlei' in 1876 and to assist at the first Bayreuth Festival, Mottl absorbed Wagner's ideas on performance and production and immersed himself in Wagner's style. Mottl conducted several Bayreuth premieres including *Tristan und Isolde* in 1886. As well as holding major opera directorships at Karlsruhe (1880–1903) and Munich (1903–11), he remained a member of the inner circle around Cosima in the decades following Wagner's death. As early as 1886 he was commissioned to orchestrate Wagner's Symphony No. 2 in E of 1834, about which he wrote in 1886 to Cosima: 'Many thanks, Frau Meisterin, for the commission. […] The orchestration appears to be exactly like that of the Symphony in C (of 1832), and I shall of course bring all my knowledge and efforts to bear on the work.' It was perhaps this project that emboldened him to orchestrate Wagner's Wesendonck Lieder in 1893.

The immediate reason for orchestrating Wagner's songs was to provide repertoire for Mottl's concerts with singers, specifically for his wife, the Viennese soprano Henriette Standhartner (1866–1933). According to Mottl's diaries,[20] the couple married late in 1892 and travelled widely in 1893. Henriette had made her debut at the Vienna Court Opera in 1889, the same year that she appeared as a Flowermaiden in *Parsifal* in Bayreuth. She followed Mottl to the Karlsruhe opera house and in May 1893 sang in the premiere of his opera *Fürst und Sänger* (to a libretto by J.V. Widmann).

Mottl typically spent the summer months in Hietzing on the outskirts of Vienna, away from his busy opera schedule in Karlsruhe, and it was there that he finished his

[18] 'Wagner Society', *The Monthly Musical Record*, iii (Apr. 1873), 52.

[19] Anon., untitled review (note 1), 91.

[20] Mottl's diaries are in the Mottl archives at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, shelfmark BSB-Hss Ana 452.B (available online at <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00002179>).

orchestrations of the first four Wesendonck Lieder in August 1893.[21] Significantly, on 30 July 1893 Mottl had recorded in his diary that he had dined with the publisher Adolph Fürstner,[22] who that year also published his *Fürst und Sänger*. Mottl is likely to have told him of his intention to orchestrate the Wesendonck Lieder, which were published by Schott the following year. This may have played a role in Fürstner's decision to commission Mottl to orchestrate the four songs that he owned and had published in their original form back in 1871. Fürstner was already a champion of Mottl's own music, for in 1892 he had published his nineteen *Gedichte deutscher Dichter* in three volumes, with another three Lieder following in 1894. A set of Wagner song orchestrations would have made commercial and artistic sense.

Mottl's diary entry for 30 June 1894 states 'Lieder von Wagner instr.' and on 1 July, 'Zu Hause. Instrumentiert.'[23] Since he had completed the Wesendonck Lieder the previous year, this could only refer to the four earlier Wagner songs. Fürstner published its edition of them shortly afterwards in that same year, under the title *Gesangs-Compositionen von Richard Wagner. Instrumentirt von Felix Mottl*, numbered one to four, all with German titles, the French titles and poets being given in smaller print (though the poet of *Dors mon enfant* remains anonymous here, as explained above). Each of the songs is accompanied by different orchestral forces:[24]

1. *Schlaf ein, holdes Kind – Dors mon enfant*
   vn 1, vn 2, va, vc, db (intended for string orchestra, not soloists)
2. *Die Rose – Mignonne* – Ronsard (1524–84)
   fl, ob, cl, hn, str
3. *Die Erwartung – Attente* – V. Hugo
   fl, 2 ob, 2 cl, 2 bn, 2 hn, 2 tpt, str
4. *Der Tannenbaum – Le vieux chêne – Ballade* – Scheurlin
   2 cl, 3 bn, 2 hn, 3 trbn, str

For Mottl, these were prolific years for song orchestrations. Following Wagner's four early songs, he orchestrated six Mozart arias in the week of 21–9 August 1894, and the following year saw him orchestrate *Ständchen* by Richard Strauss in May, seven Lieder by Weber on 23–4 July and six Schubert Lieder from 25 to 29 July. Mottl might already have had specific performances in mind, since the name 'Hanserl', his pet name for his wife Henriette, appears several times in these song arrangements, and it is clear that some of them were made for her.

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[21] The date on Mottl's autograph is 3 Aug. 1893, with 'Hietzing bei See' added to the score; according to Frithjof Haas, Mottl received the commission from Schott-Verlag in 1893 thanks to Cosima Wagner's recommendation. There is no mention of the four early song orchestrations in the biography of Mottl by Frithjof Haas, *Der Magier am Dirigentenpult* (Karlsruhe, 2006).

[22] Fürstner was founded by Adolph Fürstner in 1868 and acquired several existing publishers in 1872. 1893 would appear to have been a period of growth for the company.

[23] Mottl, diary (note 20).

[24] This also applies – almost – to Mottl's orchestrations of the Wesendonck Lieder. Only 'Stehe still!' and 'Schmerzen' use the same ensemble; the other three (including Wagner's own orchestral version of 'Träume') are scored differently.

The title-page of Mottl's orchestral arrangement of Wagner's four early songs. Creative Commons

Mottl's orchestrating strategies

In orchestrating Wagner's four early songs, Mottl responded closely to the mood and character of each, as already suggested by the different orchestral forces employed. Subtle contrasts and variations of timbre serve both to mark structural features and to heighten the expression, adding variety where the piano accompaniments are homogenous, though remaining true throughout to Wagnerian sonorities and style.

1. 'Schlaf ein, holdes Kind – Dors mon enfant' (WWV 53)

Each of the three stanzas of this lullaby comprises eight lines with the last line – 'Dors mon enfant' – repeated as a refrain. The musical setting of each stanza is similar and follows the rhyme scheme ab–ab–cdd–cc in grouping the lines into four lyrical musical phrases, A–A'–B–C, the final phrase corresponding to the refrain.[25] The melody of phrase A features a distinctive grace-note gesture, whilst the accompaniment throughout is a semiquaver broken-chord pattern. Phrase B, setting three lines, is contrastingly lyrical, whilst C, the final refrain, retrieves the grace note motive, and reaches a registral peak (*g″*) before descending for the cadence.

Mottl's version is for strings only, offering a homogeneity that sustains the gentle lullaby mood. Mottl's string textures fairly faithfully reproduce the original piano lines, yet with subtle variations marking the verse structure. As shown in Exx. 1a and b, the rocking right-hand broken-chord pattern is assigned to the first and second violins; the inner voice that outlines the melodic shape is given to the viola; and the cellos naturally assume the bass line.

The middle lines of the first and third stanzas depart from this pattern, with the second violins temporarily separating from the first violins to take over the viola's inner voice. The double bass emphasises the cadence of each stanza by rising from the dominant to the tonic (C to F) and marks the conclusion by moving down to the lower tonic, reinforcing closure through the use of a low register. The subtle changes of

[25] These elements link the song to the Spinning Chorus of *Der fliegende Holländer*. See my article 'Spinning the Yarn' (note 5), 13–15.

Voice
Schlaf, hol - des Kind, ich wieg' dich in
Dors, en - tre mes bras, en - fant plein de
Piano
pp
Schlum - mer, fern dir noch sind die Thrä - nen, der Kum - mer,
char - mes! tu ne con - nais pas le sou - ci, les lar - mes;
etc.

Ex. 1a *Dors mon enfant*, Wagner's original for voice and piano, bars 1–4

sonority within the string texture underline the overall form by differentiating the stanzas whilst maintaining the rhythmic and melodic regularity of the original.

2. 'Die Rose – Mignonne' (WWV 57)

The character of *Mignonne* is similarly lyrical, with calm, regular rhythms flowing in a triple compound 9/8, a waltz-like accompaniment of bass note plus two chords varied only once by a thinning out at the start of the second stanza. The ternary form *ABA'* is used for the three stanzas of this poem by Pierre de Ronsard (1524–85)[26] about youth and age, beauty and love. The first stanza compares the beauty of a rose with that of a young girl, while the second reflects on old age and introduces inflections from the minor mode as it observes how nature only allows the rose to flower from dawn until dusk. After a poignant climax rising to a vocal peak, the third stanza returns to the theme of enjoyment of youth while comparing the fading rose to ageing.

A distinctive falling fourth motive on the word 'Mignonne' introduces the vocal melody and reappears as an introductory, linking and concluding gesture in the piano. Mottl varies its timbral character. In the introduction he assigns it to the oboe (see

[26] De Ronsard was a diplomat and poet at the court of Francis I of France. He dedicated this Ode to the 13-year-old Cassandre Salviati, daughter of an Italian banker, whom he encountered in 1545 but who left the next day.

Andantino

Voice

Schlaf, hol - des Kind, ich wieg' dich in
Dors, en - tre mes bras, en - fant plein de

Violin 1 *con sordini* **pp**

Violin 2 *con sordini* **pp**

Viola *con sordini* **pp**

Violoncello *con sordini* **pp**

Double bass pizz. **pp**

Schlum - mer, fern dir noch sind die Thrä - nen, der Kum - mer,
char - mes! tu ne con - nais pas le sou - ci, les lar - mes;

etc. **pp**

Ex. 1b *Dors mon enfant*, Wagner–Mottl for voice and orchestra, bars 1–5
All orchestral instruments in the following examples are notated in C.

Allegretto

Flute
Oboe
Clarinet
Horn
Voice
Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Violoncello
Double bass

p *dim.* *p* etc.

Heut', Lieb - chen, er-blüht' früh die Ro - se,
Mig - non - ne, al-lons voir si la ro - se,

p *sempre* etc.

Ex. 2a *Mignonne*, Wagner–Mottl, bars 1–4

Ex. 2a), in the link to the second stanza to the clarinet, while in the postlude it is given to the oboe, then the horn, then the clarinet. Wagner's continuous piano doubling of the voice is also segmented by Mottl. In the first stanza, the clarinet dovetails the melody with the oboe, then with the flute. In the second stanza, off-beat chords in flute, oboe and clarinet trace the vocal line. The horn enters as the music moves into the minor mode, then the clarinet and flute an octave apart double the vocal line together, reinforcing the vocal peaks (bars 23/25/29) and dovetailing again with the oboe (see Ex. 2b).

3. 'Die Erwartung – Attente' (WWV 55)

The vivid character of this song derives from its compelling momentum and rhythmic intensification towards the conclusion, evoking the poetic imagery of an impassioned lover who calls on a variety of animals – a squirrel, a stork, an eagle and a lark – to climb skywards to see if their beloved is returning. The main vocal melody has a rising, thrusting character, with a wide-ranging contour. It is pre-echoed in the rising bass line of the piano in the introduction that also features in one-bar links within and between stanzas (except for the climax between stanzas 2 and 3).[27]

[27] The internal links connect the stanza sections divided according to the 7-line rhyme scheme, aab–cccb.

Flute
Oboe
Clarinet
Horn
Voice
Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Violoncello
Double bass

Pracht! O wie schwach, Na-tur, ist dein Wal - ten, kannst mir doch
cheoir! O vrai - ment ma-rast-re na - tu - re, puis-qu'u-ne

nicht die Ros' er - hal - ten, ent - blät - tert schon
tel - le fleur ne du - re que du ma - tin

Ex. 2b *Mignonne*, Wagner–Mottl, bars 22–7; climax in stanza 2

The song's sense of excitement and anticipation is created by Wagner's choice of a rapid repeating chordal texture in both hands for most of the song. There are two main moments of contrast: a switch to a more fluid, thinner melodic doubling with a broken-chord bass at the first stanza's mid-point (bars 13–15) depicting the stork in flight, and a lighter texture in which the bass note alternates with off-beat chords at the start of the final stanza.

Mottl's strategy is to vary the scoring of the distinctive bass motive on each appearance, gradually intensifying its sonorous richness, leading to the full ensemble playing in the postlude. He also varies the sonority of the repeated chords, providing a contrast with the prevailing timbral colouring. In both the introduction and the one-bar link in the first stanza (bar 10), the melody is given in cellos and bassoons with the repeated chords in upper wind, horns, trumpets and strings. For the link to the second stanza (bar 18), the double bass joins the cellos and bassoons to play the rising motive, with a thinner chordal strand for clarinets, horns and strings. The violas, double bass, cello and bassoon play the rising motive in the one-bar link within the second stanza (bar 24), with the repeated chords assigned to oboes, clarinets, horns and trumpets. The final appearance of the motive is as a four-bar melody, symmetrically matching the introduction, but scored here for the full string section in octaves, with the repeated chords played by the full woodwind and brass to provide a splendid peroration. Mottl's strategy of reinforcing the sonority of the bass melody helps to highlight the song's large-scale narrative design.

In addition to these orchestration strategies, Mottl utilises his orchestral palette to highlight important changes of texture and to add a visceral layer of poetic interpretation through imaginative effects. In the first part of the first stanza, the accompaniment of repeated chords is assigned to the woodwind; the change to a more fluid melodic texture, suggesting the stork's flight, is highlighted by a switch to strings for the remainder of the stanza (bars 13–17). Here, Mottl also responds to the imagery of flying ever higher by doubling the vocal line with the first violin, clarinet and flute. The flute plays one octave above Wagner's original line, reaching *f''* at the cadence (the highest note of the entire song). In this way, Mottl responds orchestrally to the imagery of the final line of Victor Hugo's poem 'du haut clocher au grand donjon', intensified in Leo's translation as 'zum höchsten Kreuz des Dom's empor' (from the high bell tower to the great keep / up to the highest cross of the cathedral). In the second stanza, Mottl offers an even more vivid poetic interpretation through his orchestration by assigning the repeated chords to the woodwind as in the opening of the first stanza, but then switches to the strings in bar 25 to allow the flute and clarinet to emphasise the vocal line with off-beat trills, taking his cue from the German translation of the poem ('Du, deren Triller erklingen' – You whose trills resound; the original French makes no mention of trills). Once their trills are done, the oboe, clarinet and violins support the vocal line, leading into a tutti for the climactic cadence at the end of the stanza. This motivic strategy also intensifies the feeling of speed as we embark on the third stanza with its excited mood. It begins with strings alone, the cellos and double basses playing the bass on the beat while the upper strings play syncopated chords with sporadic woodwind. When the repeated chords return, Mottl assigns them to the full woodwind and horns, leading to the climactic tutti postlude mentioned above, shown in Ex. 3 (the last five bars of the song, bars 43–7).

Ex. 3 *Attente*, Wagner–Mottl, bars 43–7 (conclusion)

4. 'Der Tannenbaum – Le vieux chêne' (WWV 50)
This was the earliest of these four songs to be composed, but was placed at the end of the Fürstner set; it is also the most dramatic and the darkest of them. Its depiction of a lake and forest is rendered ominous through a dialogue between a fir tree and a youth out boating. The boy asks the tree why it is sad, to which the tree replies – in the last of its five stanzas – that it realises that it will be cut down to make the boy's coffin. The dialogue is dramatised musically through contrasting the tree's minor mode, low chords and slow quaver arpeggios (evoking the slow swaying of the branches) with the youth's major mode, his faster, higher arpeggios (suggesting the water) and his higher-lying bass line.

Mottl's evocative orchestration features a full string section that is complemented by a wind section focused on low registers comprising two clarinets exclusively in their low range for sustained harmonies, plus three bassoons and two horns. He also employs three trombones, though reserves them solely for the final stanza.

The minor-mode phrase for the introduction and the depiction of the tree in the first couplet of the first stanza assigns the quaver arpeggios to muted cellos, harmonised by sustained chords in three bassoons and the double bass. By contrast, the second couplet is in the major mode and assigns its higher semiquaver arpeggios to alternating first and second violins over a sustained chordal layer of clarinets and horns, punctuated by pizzicato chords in divided violas.

The first couplet of the second stanza, describing the fir tree, assigns the low sustained chords to violas, divided cellos and double bass. The second couplet describes the youth and is similar in scoring, though adds violas and violins to the arpeggios and pizzicato chords. The clarinets are now joined by the bassoons instead of the horns as in the first stanza. The horns join the other wind in the third stanza, when the youth poses his question to the tree. The fourth stanza describes the tree's response and repeats the scoring of the opening stanza, but the denouement in the fifth stanza, in which the fir tree 'speaks', transforms the sonority. As shown in Ex. 4, double basses are added to the cellos' undulating quaver arpeggios whilst the chords are re-assigned from bassoons and double bass to a hauntingly expressive trombone choir that is joined at their final note by all three bassoons in unison.

The stirring symbolism of trombones also has specific Wagnerian undertones – notably in the brass in the Norns' scene of the Prologue to *Götterdämmerung*, whose music was in part inspired by this song.

The reception of Mottl's orchestrations in England
It seems clear from reviews and other documents that Mottl conducted his orchestrations of Wagner's youthful songs already during his initial conducting visits to London, which began in 1894 when he was invited to direct several of the Queen's Hall Schulz-Curtius Wagner concerts. He thereafter made regular visits, culminating in his conducting the *Ring* cycle at Covent Garden in 1898–90. It remains unclear whether it was Mottl's wife Henriette Standhartner who sang his Wagner arrangements in England, though it seems likely because she sang other songs orchestrated by her husband. At his fourth concert, Mottl's programme featured the Sachs–Eva duet from *Die Meistersinger* plus several orchestral songs. The critic wrote: 'Frau Mottl ([…] previously known as

Ex. 4 *Der Tannenbaum*, Wagner–Mottl, bars 31–40, showing the shift from bassoons to trombones

Fr. Standhartner of the Vienna opera) sang the part of Eva with charming *naiveté* and dramatic expression and made a signal success with two pretty songs: Mozart's "Wiegenlied" and "Ständchen," by Richard Strauss, both daintily scored by Herr Mottl.'[28]

Other London reviews of the mid-1890s confirm that Mottl's orchestrations of early Wagner received performances there soon after their publication. In 1895, in the third 'Schulz-Curtius Grand Wagner Concert' at the Queen's Hall (Hermann Levi having conducted the first, Mottl the second), Siegfried Wagner conducted a mixed programme in which 'Miss Esther Palliser was especially successful in Wagner's dainty song "Dors

[28] J.B.K., 'Concerts of the Month', *Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review*, xviii/215 (Aug. 1895), 695.

mon Enfant"', which can only have been in Mottl's orchestration.[29] We might speculate as to whether anyone apart from the conductor would have been aware of the significance of the song, a lullaby that had been intended for Siegfried when Wagner gifted a fresh copy of it to Cosima during her pregnancy in 1868. Nevertheless, that performance of *Dors mon enfant* might have been the one to which a critic referred – using its German title – in a review of a performance of the piano version of all four songs at one of Miss Dora Bright's 'National Pianoforte Recitals' at the 'small Queen's Hall' in November 1895:

> Mr. Bispham was the vocalist, and sang, among other things, four early songs by Wagner. 'Schlaf ein, holdes kind' was lately heard, *with Mottl's orchestral accompaniment*, at the 'Grand Wagner Concerts.' It is a very pretty melody no doubt, and the form of the song has much completeness. 'Der Tannenbaum' (not sung in the programme order) was new to most people. It is not very impressive; but it has a colour in the accompaniment (and vocal part) that is rather striking. The other two were 'Die Rose' and 'Die Erwartung'— all written before Wagner had felt his ground. But they are one and all interesting. The theme of the song 'Der Tannenbaum' seems to have been much used by Wagner later on.[30]

It is interesting that the tone of this review suggests that the songs were little known, though as shown at the outset here, they had already been reviewed in Britain in the early 1870s in their original versions for voice and piano. Critical responses to Mottl's orchestrations of the Wesendonck Lieder and the four songs were mixed. More explicit praise emerges in a review of the first concert of the seventh series of Schulz-Curtius Wagner concerts on 9 November 1897. The main fare was Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, criticised by some for sounding overly 'Germanic', whilst the Wagner items on the programme included the closing scene from *Die Walküre* with Anton van Rooy as Wotan joined by Marie Brema as Brünnhilde. The anonymous critic wrote: 'Madame Brema took part in the finale to *Die Walk*üre and also sang an air of Grieg and two of Wagner's songs, "Schmerzen" and "Attente," the accompaniments being scored for the orchestra by Herr Mottl. But although the vocal pieces were in high favour, the orchestra was equally appreciated.'[31]

These early Wagner songs orchestrated by Mottl were regularly performed as a four-song 'cycle', as is evident from the above-quoted review of 1895 and from a somewhat mixed review of 1910 penned by the *Musical Times*'s 'special correspondent' of 'Music at the Bournemouth Centenary Fetes'. The latter reviewer notes that seventy-six large-scale pieces were performed at the festival concerts, the most important of which were 'the Wagner concert of July 15 and the all-British concert of July 8. At the former were sung Wagner's four seldom-heard early songs (1838–1840), beautiful in themselves but quite ineffectively scored, except the last one, "Attente", by Felix Mottl'.[32] This review

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29 J.B.K., 'Concerts of the Month', *Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review*, xviii/214 (July 1895), 628.

30 Anon., 'Other Concerts', *Musical Standard*, iv/98 (16 Nov. 1895), 323. My italics.

31 Anon., 'Mottl Concerts', *The Monthly Musical Record*, xxvii/324 (1 Dec. 1897), 277.

32 Anon., 'Music at the Bournemouth Centenary Fetes', *The Musical Times*, li (Aug. 1910), 526–8. No singer is named, but the review continues with praise for the finale of *Walküre* sung by Susan Strong and Robert Maitland, who may have performed the songs too.

significantly highlights the final song of the set, which Mottl orchestrated for large orchestra and is the most brilliant of the four. However, it is also possible that the Winter Garden Pavilion did not do justice to the nuanced chamber orchestra scoring of the other songs.[33]

Hans Werner Henze's orchestrations in *Richard Wagnersche Klavierlieder*

A century after Mottl's orchestrations, the four early songs were again revisited, this time by the prolific and politically involved German composer Hans Werner Henze (1926–2012). In Henze's 1998–9 set entitled *Richard Wagnersche Klavierlieder*, a song cycle for two vocalists (mezzo-soprano and baritone), mixed chorus and orchestra, Wagner's four songs are restored to a larger, implicitly cyclic context. The set opens with a brief, two-song introductory section. The celebratory pomp of Wagner's *Gruss seiner Treuen an Friedrich August dem Geliebten* (1844, originally for male chorus and wind band) is followed by *Der Tannenbaum*. There then follows the cycle of *Sieben Kompositionen zu Goethes 'Faust'* (1832) and then a second 'cycle', namely Wagner's eight French songs composed in Paris, including two that have only survived in sketches, *Extase* WWV 54 and *La tombe dit à la rose* WWV 56. Henze presents these songs in chronological sequence, concluding with the bravura coloratura 'scena' *Adieux de Marie Stuart*, in which, as in several other of these songs, Henze appears to enjoy sending up the (French) grand operatic style that the youthful Wagner was attempting to emulate.

Hans Werner Henze in Bochum, 2008, EytanPessen, CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://tinyurl.com/5n6vdh89>, via Wikimedia Commons

1. 'Berceuse (Dors mon enfant)'

Mottl's homogeneity and striving for continuity are turned upside down in Henze's version, where a characteristically subtle mixing of timbres produces blurred outlines and a more fragmentary shifting of colours. Henze's palette combines an evocative selection of woodwind – flute and alto flute, clarinet and bass clarinet – with a rich blend of muted strings including divided violins and double bass, plus a solo string quartet. The musical contrasts that Henze employs serve to shift the listener's aural focus constantly between the different instrumental groups.

[33] The songs were performed by the (presumably *ad hoc*) Winter Gardens Orchestra conducted by Dan Godfrey – a prolific conductor who, the reviewer calculates, must have conducted some 90,000 works [*sic*] over a fifteen-year period, astonishing as this seems.

Each verse starts differently. The introductory bars highlight the woodwind, which continue as the voice enters. Here the rocking, broken-chord pattern is assigned to the alto flute, the slower outline of the melody to the flute and clarinets, and a delicate harmonic layer to the muted lower strings with a deep double bass. Yet the colours change: in the third couplet, the rocking patterns shift to the violins, then return to the flute and alto flute (bars 6–7) and switch markedly to the (unmuted) solo string quartet for the repeated refrain 'Dors mon enfant'.

In the second verse, there is a more fluid interchange of wind and strings in the rocking pattern, while the solo quartet is deployed just before the refrain and in the final repeat of 'Dors mon enfant'. In the third stanza, the rocking accompaniment alternates between wind and strings, also in the refrain; here the solo quartet joins only in the epilogue in a kaleidoscopic succession of timbral groups: strings and wind, strings, solo quartet, wind and – for the final chord – the combined tutti and solo string sections. Within this final F major triad, the second violins sustain the dissonant supertonic, injecting disquiet into the surface calm. Together with the addition of several new melodic lines in quavers within the variegated texture, providing new harmonic inflections, and the recasting of broken chords as syncopated inner pedals, these creative alterations add a sense of restlessness to the gentle lullaby in a paradoxical gesture characteristic of Henze, creating an ironic stylistic distance between the arranger and the composer.

2. 'Mignonne'

Where Mottl had used a string orchestra for *Dors mon enfant*, Henze chooses strings alone for his orchestration of *Mignonne*; he also transposes the song down a semitone to E flat major, the overall result being a darker, uniform sonority that stands in contrast to his orchestrations for the remainder of the French songs. Instead of following the piano version in its right-hand doubling of the voice, Henze invents new counterpoints to the vocal melody for the first violin that acts as a duet partner to the singer. In the first stanza, the violin doubles the voice but then stops short of the final cadence to give greater prominence to the voice. Henze employs the double bass at moments of structural tension: just before the climactic intensification (bars 22–4), immediately after the climax at the return to the cadence, and again at the very end.

In the second stanza, Henze alters the textures by twice introducing violin semiquavers to intensify the narrative. The first alteration occurs in the lead-up to the final cadence (bars 25–30), especially where the vocal melodic peak *g″* (bar 29) is matched by first violins surging – in semiquaver arpeggios – to *f″* in a heartfelt cry of despair that the young flower's beauty will only last from the morning until evening. Since the string sections are no longer divisi as earlier but 'uniti', the sonorous effect is powerful, and heightens the contrast with the final stanza, a varied reprise, which returns to the textures of the opening stanza. A second rhythmic intensification with violin semiquavers occurs in the final vocal phrase (bars 46–9), where the comparison between flower and girl is made explicit.

3. 'Attente'

At the beginning, Henze effectively reverses Mottl's scoring, assigning the introductory chords to the horns and woodwind – the latter placed in a brighter, higher octave – with the bass theme given to the cellos and violas. The chords accompanying the

stanzas themselves are assigned to strings in the original register. Rather than changing their instrumentation at each appearance, Henze keeps the linking bars (mentioned above) as a constant, referential sonority, adding powerful accents and with the cello melody overlaid by chords in the woodwind and strings. In the second stanza, Henze uses strings for the repeated chords throughout and builds up the strands in the wind towards the climactic cadence at 'au ciel' (bars 31–2). Henze follows Mottl in scoring the syncopated texture of the third stanza for strings, though he also uses the clarinet to double the voice. Also as in Mottl, the repeated chords are allocated to the woodwind on their return, though Henze switches back to strings for the final cadence ('mon bien-aimé'), thereby using the scoring to underline structural moments.

4. 'Der Tannenbaum'

As mentioned above, this song is here placed second out of the full seventeen. The textures of the passages in the major mode vary, with the semiquavers given to clarinet and bass clarinets enhanced by flutes and jaunty high strings with sprinkles of celesta. In the second phrase in the major (bars 17–26), the semiquavers are assigned to strings, changing to flutes and clarinets, and the texture enriched with bright harp chords, bassoons, horns and trombones. The minor-mode phrases depicting the tree provide varied colours for the quaver arpeggios. First they are shared between the bass clarinet and the cello, then the later sustained chords (bars 13–17) are given to bassoon, horn, harp and divided double basses. The final stanza has sparse textures, with the quavers played as a kind of *Klangfarbenmelodie* involving cor anglais, piano in octaves, bass clarinet and strings, while the final chord is given a Hitchcockian dissonance in the high strings that adds to the eerie atmosphere. This is a transformative arrangement, adding subtlety and intensifying the ambience with a highly creative use of the large orchestra.

Henze's aesthetic motivation

With this remarkable large-scale work Henze aimed to revive and revitalise songs that had fallen into neglect during the course of the 20th century (despite some of them having been relatively well known just a few decades earlier, in Mottl's day). But at the same time, Henze's act of reinterpretation was far-reaching in its significance, both aesthetically and politically. His early antipathy to German fascism and the German culture that it espoused (which his father's wartime support of Nazism only heightened) led to a similar antipathy to Wagner on Henze's part. His move to Italy in the 1950s was accompanied by a shift to the left as revealed in his subsequent works such as *The Raft of Medusa* (1967) and *Voices* (1973). But Henze also underwent a change of heart while working with his librettists Chester Kallman and Wystan Auden on the operas *Elegy for Young Lovers* and *The Bassarids* when, as he recalled, 'I yielded to him [Wagner] and sat through *Götterdämmerung*', adding that '*Tristan* […] has become a kind of bible for me'.[34] This turning point was confirmed in Henze's electro-acoustic piano concerto *Tristan* (1972), which quotes both from the music drama and from 'Im Treibhaus' from the Wesendonck Lieder. The latter song symbolised for Henze

[34] Hans Werner Henze, *Music and Politics: Collected Writings 1953–81*, tr. Peter Labanyi (London, 1982), 228.

'weeping and silence [… for] the dead whose passing has impoverished mankind, while the fascists' goose-step resounds through buildings deserted by the people'.[35] Henze made his arrangement of the Wesendonck Lieder for mezzo-soprano and chamber orchestra soon after, in 1976. They are both a homage and a reinterpretation. The *Richard Wagnersche Klavierlieder* represents the final stage of Henze's confrontation with his German past. Here his approach to Wagner is more relaxed, combining homage with witty irony, poking fun at Wagner's youthful flamboyance whilst weaving disparate songs into a unified, hour-long work. By adding colour, drama and humour to Wagner's songs, Henze's orchestrations imbue them with an almost operatic ambiance, arguably bringing them closer to the atmosphere of his own operas such as *The Bassarids* in which he similarly reinterprets earlier musical languages.

Henze's own explanation of his approach in these songs focuses on their aesthetic, technical elements:

> After having orchestrated the Wesendonck-Lieder, I was also encouraged to tackle the remainder of Wagner's song settings. I soon, however, established that I found it impossible to hold myself back and to proceed no further than an effortless recreation of these works in an orchestral texture with Classical Romantic instrumentation. As a result, numerous alterations can be detected which were not undertaken arbitrarily, but prompted by artistic curiosity: for example changes of metre, tonal and tessitura transformation […]. I have also occasionally added new, supplementary musical lines. All these features sprang from my desire to focus a spotlight on the allusive beauty of this music which is frequently concealed in the piano accompaniment. During this process, my thoughts often wandered to the great composer himself, wondering what he would perhaps have thought and said if he had been looking over my shoulder to pass judgement on my interventions and alterations.[36]

In a review of a performance of these songs on the occasion of Henze's 75th birthday in 2001, Guy Rickards noted hints of 'an early vein of Gilbert and Sullivan burlesque' in some of the early pieces, stressing that 'what is remarkable about Henze's larger treatment of these songs is that there is no loss of intimacy with the originals; hearing them, one still felt in the recital room rather than a large concert hall'.[37] Indeed such 'intimacy' arises from Henze's postmodern re-instrumentation that reinterprets the Wagnerian aura with unusual sonorities, sensitive responses to the poetry and, in certain songs, a bold and witty musico-theatrical style.

Postlude

Mottl's version of these four early songs reflects a post-Wagnerian aesthetic in a late 19th-century context of orchestral song. Henze's 20th-century re-instrumentation in-

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[35] Ibid., 228–9. For more information on Henze's attitude to Wagner, see my 'Essence, Context and Meaning in Versions of Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder* by Wagner, Mottl and Henze', in *Of Essence and Context: Between Music and Philosophy*, ed. Rūta Stanevičiūtė, Nick Zangwill and Rima Povilionienė (Cham, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14471-5_26>.

[36] See Henze's 'Description' on the Schott website, <https://tinyurl.com/4kwvb8kh>.

[37] Guy Rickards, 'South Bank: "Voices: Henze at 75"', *Tempo*, no. 217 (2001), 48–52.

tensifies their poetic aura by employing more subtle sonorities such as the use of harp, low strings and unusual blends of woodwind especially involving alto flute, bass clarinet and contrabassoon. He also embarks on an intensified process of 'motivicisation' and layering of textures, treating Wagner's early style with an intriguing blend of homage and amiable irony. The art of orchestration for both Mottl and Henze becomes a medium for shaping the individual songs into a more coherent and ordered cycle, rather than a random selection, with each arranger making a case for their preferred performance as a group. For Mottl, the gradual expansion of forces, from strings through chamber to full orchestra, suggests a deliberate process of intensification. The symmetrical tonal scheme of the three French songs, followed by the German song in the minor mode, suggests various possible narratives both personal and universal, addressing nature, love and the life-cycle. Henze's large-scale grouping of the early Goethe set and the French songs recalls his own major song cycles such as *Voices* (1973), where strategies of orchestration similarly provide a framework in which to combine contrasting individual songs within a single, richly variegated palette. For Henze, the narrative quality of his Wagner 'cycle' would appear to lie in the proto-theatrical character of the young composer, hence his use of the adjective 'Wagnersche' in the title of his set.

Whilst there are innumerable recordings of Mottl's orchestrations of the Wesendonck Lieder and several other of Mottl's song orchestrations, there are none of his arrangements of these four early songs.[38] Nor is a commercial recording of Henze's collection available. Both sets – or 'cycles' – succeed in affirming Wagner's early strength of inspiration in a field that he later disregarded (the Wesendonck Lieder notwithstanding) while adapting them to the respective aesthetic requirements of later generations. In an era when there seem to be few discographical lacunae left, it can surely only be a matter of time before a recording company rectifies this situation and makes these two sets available to listeners today.

[38] There may be one exception: a 1938 recording in German of *Berceuse* by the soprano Elisabeth Schumann with an 'unnamed orchestra' conducted by Walter Goehr that appears to use the Mottl arrangement, albeit with the addition of a harp and a few adjustments that extend the values of the double-bass notes. The song has also been extended by adding several bars of orchestral introduction. This recording was released on the 6th CD of the 6-CD set *Elisabeth Schumann – Silver Thread of Song*, EMI Classics ICON 9184802 and is available today on YouTube at <https://tinyurl.com/3v3e6pwf>, though it there sounds in F-sharp major, not F major as in the original (whether because the instruments had been tuned higher to accommodate the singer or because of a glitch in the recording process remains unclear).

The Wagner Journal, **19**, 3, 53–67

A Brief Recording History of Wagner's 'Träume' in the Acoustic Era

Christoph Moor

The history of the composition and reception of Richard Wagner's Wesendonck Lieder has long been a subject of scholarly investigation.[1] However, until now their early recording history – up to the end of the acoustic era in *circa* 1924 – has not been properly addressed. Nor have these recordings been investigated to determine the possible emergence of a specific performance tradition after the songs became a standard feature on concert programmes in the late 19th century. I shall here consider the extant recordings of the fifth song, 'Träume', both in its original version with piano accompaniment and in Wagner's own orchestration, to examine whether such a performance tradition might have existed, and also whether these early recordings might have been influenced by the technological circumstances of the medium at the time.

The first recording of 'Träume' was made by one Théophile-Michel Hirlemann (1854–1927) in 1900 – forty-three years after its composition – though it was of an unspecified arrangement for piano solo. In total, I have identified no fewer than thirty-six recordings of the song before the invention of electric microphones in 1924, though only fourteen of those recordings seem to be extant today.

The sources for my research included record label recording lists, museums, collections and online literature.[2] But the source situation is not unproblematic. Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877, the first commercial recordings date only from the 1890s, and technical variables make it difficult to evaluate and compare early acoustic recordings. Much contextual knowledge is needed for this. While space prevents me from discussing these issues in detail here, I refer the reader to the large body of literature that exists about interpreting early recordings,[3] such as the book by Daniel Leech-Wilkinson on the topic,[4] or the brief study on early recordings with voice by Malte Kob and Tobias Weege.[5]

[1] This article was translated by Chris Walton. See Malcolm Miller, '"This Round of Songs": Cyclic Coherence in the Wesendonck Lieder', *The Wagner Journal*, ix/3 (2015), 24–41.

[2] I am especially grateful to the Gesellschaft für Historische Tonträger (GHT) and its deputy chairman Claus Peter Gallenmiller for their assistance. See <https://www.phonomuseum.at>. All websites last accessed on 1 Sep. 2025.

[3] See <https://charm.rhul.ac.uk/index.html>.

[4] Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance* (London, 2009), <https://charm.rhul.ac.uk/studies/chapters/intro.html>.

[5] Malte Kob and Tobias Weege: 'Wie sind frühe Aufnahmen zu interpretieren? Artefakte und Resonanzen bei der Aufnahme und Wiedergabe von Gesangsstimmen',

The popularity of Wagner's music in the acoustic era is proven not merely by the fact that his works were recorded from an early date and in large numbers,[6] but also – albeit in a more banal example – by the fact that Wagner enthusiasts were even able to acquire a sound box for their Edison phonograph featuring the Master himself.

A sound box with an image of Richard Wagner[7]

The recordings

All the recordings that I have managed to identify – both with piano accompaniment and with orchestra – are listed in the table at the end of this article, together with the relevant discographic information. Recordings without voice are designated as such. Partly for reasons of space, but primarily in order to be able to compare like with like, I shall here discuss only recordings with voice. In order to compare the tempi of individual recordings more accurately, I have divided the song up into seven sections.[8]

Computergestützte Archivierung von Tonträgern, ed. Rolf Bader (Cham, 2024), 363–79, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-49640-0_16>.

6 See, for example, the 12-CD collection by Pan Classics, *The Cosima Era: The Early Bayreuth Festival Singers 1876–1906*, PC 10288, 2004.

7 From the private collection of Áurea Domínguez of the research project 'Voices in Wax' at the Basel Music Academy, whom I should like to thank for her kind assistance. See <https://tinyurl.com/mrr9vbd7>.

8 Readers wishing to consult the score can find one here, with bar numbers added: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16925424>.

The first recording of 'Träume' with voice that I have been able to locate was made by **Laura Hilgermann** (1869–1945) in *circa* 1905. She was born in Budapest and was brought to the Vienna Court Opera by Gustav Mahler, where she sang in numerous Wagner operas. After retiring from the stage, she worked as a singing teacher. She died in the cellar of her house during the siege of Budapest by the Red Army in 1945.

Hilgermann recorded Wagner's 'Träume' three times altogether, each time in Vienna, each time with piano. One record dates from around 1905 (Odeon 38115),[9] another was made in November 1905 (Favorite Record 592-0)[10] and her third in June 1908 (Gramophone 13221 u). Only the first two recordings are extant; the identity of her accompanist remains unknown.

These two recordings differ little from each other in their vocal aspects. The piano introduction and postlude are abridged in both cases. The first recording starts at a tempo of around quaver = 160, whereas the second begins much slower (quaver = 130). But tempo-wise, the two recordings already converge in bar 21, and both establish a tempo of *circa* quaver = 145 over the rest of the piece. There are clear *rubati* in the accompaniment and in the voice. The quaver accompaniment is played staccato, and there is a considerable *ritardando* before the singer enters.

Hilgermann's voice is clear, her diction clean, and she has a regular vibrato whose purpose is more to add colour than to serve as a means of expression. Her phrasing, with its deliberate ebb and flow to and from the intermediate climaxes, corresponds to what we might expect to hear today – though singers in the 21st century would probably avoid her practice of taking a breath between 'lee-re' and 'Schäu-me' in bars 26–7 (she only does this on her first recording). Hilgermann's efforts to achieve comprehensibility of the text are also evident at the end of her phrase in bars 29–30 ('ver-gan-gen'), where she clearly articulates the 'r'. We hear a portamento between the last two syllables of the word in both recordings.

'Träu-me' in bars 31 and 32 is sung appropriately as a *sospirando* and is slowed down slightly, though Hilgermann picks up the tempo again in the ensuing bars, which are more dynamic in nature. The words 'und mit ihr-er' (bar 35) are sung hesitantly in order to lead all the more confidently to a climax on 'Him-mels-kun-de' (bar 36). 'Durchs Ge-mü-the' (bars 37–8) is slowed down considerably in both recordings. On the first, this clearly causes Hilgermann to take a breath before 'ziehn', thus interrupting the line once again. Bars 46 and 47 ('All-ver-ges-sen, Ein-ge-den-ken!') are sung with a great deal of agogic freedom, reminiscent of an operatic recitative, as Hilgermann builds up to a climax on 'Träu-me' in bars 48–9. In bars 52–4, her top note 'nie' and the words 'sie der neu-e Tag' are drawn out, and from bar 61 onwards she is keen to keep everything quiet and calm. In both recordings, she interrupts the vocal line after 'Brust' in bar 63 to take a breath; a slight portamento connects the syllables 'sin-ken' in bar 66. The piano accompaniment returns to the opening tempo after the vocal part ends. But in the first recording, the piano jumps from bar 67 straight to bar 74 (in other words, the singer's last bar is already accompanied by bar 74 in the piano) and also omits bars 82 and 83. The second recording omits bars 76 to 79 and increases the tempo considerably.

9 <https://archive.org/details/78_traume_249_07>.
10 <https://mediathek.slub-dresden.de/ton80000362.html>.

Even though Hilgermann's interpretation of the song remains very similar in both recordings, the length of the different sections varies by up to four seconds each time. The second recording also sounds more mature and secure.

The next recordings to survive are by **Katharina Fleischer-Edel** (1873–1928) – both of them with orchestra. She worked primarily at the Hamburg City Theatre, where she was highly regarded in the Wagner repertoire. She sang Sieglinde, Eva and Elisabeth at Covent Garden in London, and was a regular at the Bayreuth Festival from 1904 to 1908. She also sang in the world premieres of three operas by Siegfried Wagner. Later, she moved to Dresden, where she taught singing for the rest of her career.

The Odeon discography lists two recordings of 'Träume' by Fleischer-Edel, one from 1907 and one from 1910, the latter made in Berlin.[11] The first recording (Odeon xB 3072) has proven unobtainable and we know nothing about it except that it was conducted by Friedrich Kark. The second recording (Odeon xB 3072-2) was conducted by Eduard Künneke and is abridged at the beginning and at the end – or, to be more precise, it simply halts before the finish, which suggests that the technical transfer onto disc was incomplete (though it is at present impossible to determine when this happened). It is this latter recording that is the subject of our deliberations here.[12]

The orchestral introduction begins with bar 13. The tempo is quaver = 120. Fleischer-Edel sings very legato, even in bars 33 to 36, 42 to 44 and 50 to 54, whose smaller note values might perhaps otherwise have lent themselves to a more rhythmic, declamatory interpretation. She applies vibrato mostly to the last syllable of words, and while she generally avoids rhetorical emphasis, her performance is flexible and expressive. 'Träu-me' in bars 40–41 is considerably elongated. She generally sings dotted notes as triplets, though the last beat in bars 56 and 59 is sung each time as two quavers, not as a dotted quaver and a semiquaver ('dass sie'/'ihr-en'). She uses portamento twice: in bar 66 ('sin-ken') and in bars 67–8 ('die Gruft'). Her recording ends with a *ritardando* in bar 75 that is followed directly by what seems to be bar 83, with all the instruments holding the A flat major chord for two beats; after a beat's rest, we hear a brief chord of F minor in its first inversion that breaks off immediately. It is obviously a recording glitch; it is indistinct, but it might even be the chord of A flat major from bar 80 with the added major sixth barely audible – perhaps this bar had been recorded in a different take and somehow sneaked onto the end of the final recording through a technical error.

Ottilie Metzger-Lattermann (1878–1943) enjoyed great success as the first contralto at the Hamburg City Theatre from 1903 to 1915. She was particularly known for her Wagner roles and also sang from 1901 to 1912 at Bayreuth, playing Erda and Waltraute. In 1910, she sang in the world premiere of Mahler's 8th Symphony under the baton of the conductor. She retired from the stage in 1925, but remained active as a recital singer and as a teacher; she was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943.[13]

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[11] See Christian Zwarg, 'ODEON Matrix Numbers – B/xB/xxB/xxxB (Berlin)', <http://discography.phonomuseum.at/odeon/odmxB.pdf>, 172.

[12] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVnWHRPOhzM>.

[13] In a review of Gottfried Wagner's autobiography, Frederic Spotts tells the story of Peer Baedeker, an antiquarian bookseller in Bayreuth who, when the centenary festival opened

Ottilie Metzger-Lattermann in c.1925.
Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ggbain-35632

Metzger-Lattermann made numerous recordings. We know that her first of 'Träume' dates from November 1911 and was produced in Berlin (Pathé (V) 54902), but it has thus far proved impossible to locate. Her second recording, made in May 1913 under the baton of Friedrich Kark in Berlin, is the only one currently available to us (Lindström 2-1660).[14] It sounds as if the bass part here might have been reinforced with a wind instrument such as a bassoon, though the recording quality makes it impossible to determine this unequivocally. The postlude here, as in other early recordings, has been abridged. The tempo is also unusually fast, especially in the introduction (quaver = 171), though the orchestra plays its quavers *portato*, giving them a certain lightness, and the tempo slows down before the entrance of the voice. Metzger-Lattermann uses vibrato throughout, though as with Hilgermann, it is primarily for colouristic purposes. From bar 19 onwards, the tempo becomes consistent. In the three four-bar phrases that open the vocal part (bars 17–28), she holds back each time before singing the dotted minim (bars 19, 23 and 27). The syllables of 'ver-gan-gen' (bars 29–30) are broadened and given dramatic emphasis. In bars 33 and 34, she accentuates the individual syllables ('*je*-der', '*je*-dem' and '*schö*-ner') and audibly takes a breath after 'blühn' (35) and 'Him-mels-kun-de' (36). We also hear stresses on individual syllables in bars 42–4, and this is even more pronounced in the parallel passage beginning with the upbeat to bar 50. There are subsequent tempo fluctuations in the voice, though everything becomes very slow from bar 56 onwards, giving Metzger-Lattermann time for a broad portamento on 'blü-hen' in bar 57. She also follows Wagner's instruction at bars 58–9 'immer mehr nachlassend' (easing back more and more) by reducing the tempo, though in bar 60 she breaks off the final note of the phrase ('Duft') earlier than is the case on other recordings of the time. She takes a very slow tempo from bar 61 onwards, using much legato and well-nigh celebrating every note. As in other recordings discussed here (see Hilgermann

in 1976 with a wreath-laying ceremony at Wagner's grave, placed his own wreath with the words: 'In memory of / Richard Breitenfeld / Henriette Gottlieb / Ottilie Metzger-Lattermann / Honoured as festival singers / Murdered in Nazi concentration camps.' Subsequently, Winifred Wagner wrote to Baedeker: 'I myself never heard Frau Metzger-Lattermann in Bayreuth, but I know that my husband had a very high impression of her. […] But were all three really killed at Auschwitz? I would doubt that in the case of Frau Lattermann, since she must have been terribly old.' *Opera*, xlviii (Aug. 1997), 915.

[14] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=KDK13b2eQbA>.

Ernestine Schumann-Heink in 1917. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ggbain-23798

and Iracema-Brügelmann), Metzger-Lattermann interrupts the line to breathe after 'Brust' in bar 63. The tempo now slows down further, and she employs an even broader portamento at 'sin-ken' than Hilgermann does. The orchestral postlude increases the tempo (though it is not as fast as in the opening bars), bars 76–9 are omitted, and there is a *ritardando* towards the final cadence. In 1919, Metzger-Lattermann made her third recording of 'Träume', this time on the Pathé label (A1019), though this recording was not available to me.

The contralto **Ernestine Schumann-Heink** (1861–1936) sang in Dresden and Berlin before being engaged by the Hamburg City Theatre in 1883, where she later worked closely with Gustav Mahler. Schumann-Heink enjoyed a major international career, was a frequent guest at the Bayreuth Festival between 1896 and 1914, and sang the role of Klytämnestra in the world premiere of Strauss's *Elektra* in Dresden in 1909. She was by this time already an American citizen.

Schumann-Heink began her recording career in 1900. She first recorded 'Träume' on 7 December 1911 with the Victor Symphony Orchestra for the US label Victor Records (Victor 88343 C 11337-1).[15] She recorded a second version (Victor C 11337-2) the following day. The conductor remains unknown. I have only been able to locate the second of these two recordings. It is notable for revealing contemporary solutions to the technical limitations of the time. We can clearly hear a tuba in the orchestra, its task being to make the bass line audible. However, it does not play the bass line one-to-one, instead often strengthening the harmony at the beginning of a bar by playing a full crotchet instead of joining in the repeated quavers. When the bass line is given longer note values later on, however, the tuba plays these as notated. The introduction is kept at a steady tempo of quaver = 152, though the orchestra slows down considerably before the soloist enters, thereafter keeping to quaver = 120. Schumann-Heink's diction is clear, and it is presumably her desire for clarity that makes her draw out the tempo slightly in her dotted-note passages in bars 22, 26 and 29. She uses vibrato sparingly, though when she does, it tends to be fast and regular. As in other recordings discussed here, she sings the *sospirando* 'Träu-me' in bars 31–2 slowly and then pushes the tempo forwards. The upbeat quavers at 'und mit ih-rer' in bar 35 leading to 36 are stretched out (as in Hilgermann's recording) as a means of emphasising the climax in the next bar. She interrupts her line with an explicit breath before the word 'se-lig' in bar

[15] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=N-LeZqUZ0dQ>.

37. Bars 42–4 are more urgent, but the tempo is reduced again in bar 45 on 'ma-len'. She inserts a breath after 'Won-ne' in bar 53, though this does not impede the flow of the line. The tempo slows down from bar 54 onwards, and the legato on 'blü-hen' in bar 57 is almost a portamento. There is another slight portamento at the word 'sin-ken' in bar 66. The orchestral postlude is again stable in tempo (quaver = 144), only slowing down in the last two bars. This last section is one of the slowest on the recordings I have found from this era.

Hedy Iracema-Brügelmann (1879–1941) was born in Brazil to a German immigrant family. She studied in Cologne and over the years sang variously in Stuttgart, at the Vienna State Opera (where she sang major Wagner roles including Kundry) and in Karlsruhe. She retired from the stage in 1927 due to illness, but continued to teach for several years.

Iracema-Brügelmann recorded 'Träume' in Berlin in 1913 (xxB 5869/Odeon 76350). As in the recording by Schumann-Heink, a tuba is clearly audible, doubling the bass line, though here it plays the quavers as originally notated. The opening (quaver = 135) seems static, the repeated quavers rather short. The characteristic sound of the clarinets and horns is very clear here in comparison to other recordings of this era. The tempo barely changes when the voice enters, though it feels as if the singer would prefer to take her time a little more. There are generally few agogic nuances. After a slight *ritardando* in bars 37–9, the song continues in tempo. The tempo slows down from bar 54 onwards. The following section (bars 61–8) is the fastest of the recordings I have compared here. The vocal line is interrupted by a breath just before 'Duft' in bar 60, and (like Hilgermann and Metzger-Lattermann) Iracema-Brügelmann also breathes after 'Brust' in bar 63. We can hear a slight portamento on the word 'sin-ken' (66). At the close of the postlude, the chords in bars 81 and 83 end together, omitting the longer, sustained note otherwise notated for the horn.

Ellen Gulbranson (1863–1947) was born in Sweden. She studied with Mathilde Marchesi in Paris and developed in the years thereafter into a dramatic soprano. She sang regularly at the Bayreuth Festival from 1896 to 1914, enjoying particular success in the roles of Brünnhilde and Kundry. As of 1915, she devoted her energies mostly to teaching.

Gulbranson recorded 'Träume' with orchestra for Pathé in Christiania (today Oslo) in June 1914 ((V) 90289/S 3233).[16] As with Hilgermann and Fleischer, both the introduction and the postlude are

Ellen Gulbranson by Michael Peter Ancher (1849–1927). Wikimedia Commons

[16] Included in the 12-CD set *The Cosima Era* (note 6). See also <https://tinyurl.com/y4u7b7ha>.

abridged. The former in fact comprises just bar 17, which is played twice: once without the voice, then as given in the score with the voice entering on the third beat. We can rule out the possibility that this introduction was a glitch that occurred at some point during either production or the later digitisation process. What is striking here, however, is that the voice is doubled by an instrument. It is clearly audible throughout, with the sole exception of a few brief passages. The timbre is more difficult to identify, though the instrument in question seems to be a flute, playing the vocal line an octave higher. In bar 29, the flute stops for a bar and lets the voice sing alone. The tempo is circa quaver = 130.

Gulbranson uses little vibrato, though when she does, it is very regular. She emphasises the declamation in bars 33 and 34, singing '*je*-der *Stun*-de, *je*-dem *Ta*-ge *schö*-ner'. She breathes after the word 'se-lig' in bar 37 and makes a slight portamento on 'Träu-me' in bars 48–9. She relaxes the tempo audibly from bar 54 onwards (the passage marked 'nachlassend' by Wagner), with a further *ritardando* heard in bar 57, allowing her phrase to die away more slowly. At the close, the orchestra jumps from bar 69 to bar 80, with some of the woodwind playing the upper octave.

Johanna Gadski (1870–1932)[17] sang variously in Stettin, Mainz and Berlin and then embarked on an international career as a dramatic soprano. She sang Eva in Bayreuth in 1899 and moved to the Met in New York in 1900 where she enjoyed success in the main Wagner and Verdi roles. Her legacy includes almost a hundred recordings for the Victor Company, including the first complete recording of Wagner's Wesendonck Lieder.

Gadski's recording of 'Träume' for Victor in 1917 (Victor 88591),[18] conducted by the Polish-American Josef Pasternack (1881–1940), is another on which we can hear alterations to the orchestration, for once again a tuba is clearly used to double the quaver bass line. The tempo of the introduction is quaver = 130, increasing to quaver = 139 when the voice enters. In bars 27–8, the vocal line is accompanied only by an oboe on 'Schäu-me'. The tempo drops just before the climax in bar 36 on 'Him-mels-kun-de' and is held back even more in bars 37 and 38 before the original tempo returns in bar 39. The dissonant clash heard in bar 46 on 'All-ver-ges-sen' (where the voice drops from A flat to G while the orchestra still holds onto the former note) is emphasised here for colouristic purposes. Gadski employs a pronounced, fast vibrato throughout. She follows the *diminuendo* notated through bar 48 after the climactic word 'Träu-me'. Later, like Hilgermann, Metzger-Lattermann, Gulbranson and Schumann-Heink, Gadski sings a clearly audible portamento on 'sin-ken'. In the final section, the orchestra jumps from bar 75 to 80, thus omitting bars 76–9.

The recording of 'Träume' that the renowned tenor **Richard Tauber** (1891–1948) made in 1919 is probably the first ever with a male voice. He is perhaps best known today for his Mozart roles and for the many operettas in which he sang, though he also played the lighter Wagner roles on stage, such as Erik in *Der fliegende Holländer* and the Young Sailor in *Tristan und Isolde*. He also appeared in several films and recorded some 730 discs that cemented his worldwide popularity. Tauber fled Austria after the *Anschluss* in 1938 and settled in England.

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17 Some sources give 1872 as her year of birth, but 1870 seems more reliable.
18 See <https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/700004769/C-19686-Trume>.

Richard Tauber. Wikimedia Commons

Tauber recorded 'Träume' in June 1919 for Odeon (JXX 81025),[19] accompanied on the piano by Carl Beines, his sometime singing teacher.[20] The introduction omits bars 11–14. The song opens at quaver = 158, though the tempo increases up to bar 3 before being held back in bar 4 to emphasise the climax in bar 5. The piano accompaniment is notable for arpeggiating the opening chords of bars 5, 7 and 9. When the vocal part enters, the tempo is reduced (quaver = 125) but it increases again when the voice reaches the long 'Träu-me' in bars 19–20. In bar 30, the tempo is held back once more in order to lead up to the long 'Träu-me', and the same pattern is repeated in bar 35 towards the word 'Him-mels-kun-de', after which Tauber takes a breath. The upbeat to bar 42 ('die wie') is slowed down; this phrase climaxes on 'ver-sen-ken' in bar 43, after which Tauber audibly takes a breath before proceeding more calmly. Bars 46 and 47 are sung in recitative fashion, though in tempo, while Tauber's powerful 'Träume' in bars 48–9 features a *glissando* on the consonant 'm'. Like Schumann-Heink, Tauber interrupts his line to breathe after 'Won-ne' in bar 53. The tempo comes to a near standstill in bar 57 ('blü-hen') and Tauber sings a long *diminuendo* towards 'Duft' in bar 60 – more explicitly, in fact, than on any other recording considered here (the word itself is also accompanied by an arpeggiated chord in the piano). The tempo in these final pages is notably slow, but even despite another pronounced *ritardando*, Tauber still sings his four-bar phrase 'sanft an dei-ner Brust ver-glü-hen' (bars 61–4) in a single phrase (in contrast to Hilgermann, Metzger-Lattermann and Iracema-Brügelmann, who all breathe after 'Brust'). Like his female contemporaries discussed here, Tauber does a slight portamento on the word 'sin-ken'. The postlude is played similarly to the prelude, with the pianist arpeggiating his chords in bars 70 and 72; he omits bars 76–9. Tauber sings with a pronounced vibrato throughout.

Frida Leider (1888–1975) made her operatic debut as Venus in Wagner's *Tannhäuser* at the Stadttheater in Halle in 1915. She enjoyed an international career as one of the most highly regarded Wagner sopranos of her time, particularly as Isolde, Brünnhilde and Kundry, and was a regular guest at Bayreuth until 1938.[21] She ended her stage career in 1942, thereafter devoting herself to teaching. Leider's first

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[19] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zR7_2g_s8tI>.

[20] Daniel O'Hara, *Richard Tauber: A Revised Chronology* (Saltburn-by-the-Sea, 2019), 14.

[21] For the full story of Leider, her Jewish husband Rudolf Deman and their problems under the Nazis, see Eva Rieger, *Frida Leider: Sängerin im Zwiespalt ihrer Zeit* (Hildesheim, 2016).

recording of 'Träume' dates from 1921; she is accompanied by the orchestra of the Hamburg City Theatre (conductor unknown).[22] She made another recording in 1928, this time with John Barbirolli and the London Symphony Orchestra.[23] Since we are limiting ourselves to the acoustic era, we shall consider only her first recording here.

The orchestra increases slightly in tempo and volume towards the fifth bar; slight *ritardandi* can then be heard in bars 8, 12 and 16 of the introduction. The voice enters calmly and in tempo, though with a pronounced vibrato. The tempo is reduced towards bar 31, 'Träu-me', which is held for a long time so that the transition to the upbeat in bar 32 occurs almost seamlessly. Leider takes a brief breath after 'Himmels-kun-de' (bar 36), though this does not disturb the line. After the calm, *sospirando* 'Träu-me' in bars 40–41, the tempo increases noticeably, though the next 'Träu-me' (bars 48–9) is drawn out until the upbeat to bar 50 brings us back into the main tempo. The next section ('wie wenn Früh-lings-son-ne') is the fastest of the recordings surveyed here, and the dotted quaver and semiquaver on the third beat of bar 56 sound almost like two semiquavers. The tempo remains stable from bar 61 onwards, though there is a *ritardando* on the word 'sin-ken', which is given a portamento as in most other recordings here. The orchestral conclusion is slightly slower than the introduction, and slows down more in bars 72 and 75.

Lauritz Melchior. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-B2- 6511-2

The Danish Heldentenor **Lauritz Melchior** (1890–1973) recorded 'Träume' with orchestra (conductor unknown) for Polydor (1503) in Berlin in 1923.[24] One of the most celebrated Wagner interpreters of the era, he sang at the Bayreuth Festival from 1924 to 1931 and in 1926 made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York as Tannhäuser. Over the next twenty-four years he sang in over five hundred Wagner performances there and subsequently assumed American citizenship.[25]

The orchestral introduction in Melchior's recording is the slowest of all those discussed here (quaver = 115). The quavers are played expansively and there is a striking portamento in the melody line to the long E flat in bar 5. Melchior's diction is clear, though he maintains a de-

[22] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTbJEHHRY-0>.
[23] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCdHNcCv9wE>.
[24] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMlYx3USykk>.
[25] See his repertoire list at <https://archives.metopera.org/>, and the discography on the website of the University of Warwick: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/cas/staff/lockley/melchior/>.

gree of ardour that can at times seem laboured. The *sospirando* 'Träu-me' in bars 31–2 is sung with a slight portamento; the following bars are kept in tempo, but the intensity is heightened through more precise enunciation and a *crescendo*, the latter beginning on the second syllable of 'Träu-me' in bar 41. Not until the next 'Träu-me', in bars 48–9, does the tension decrease. There is a portamento on 'träu-mend' in bar 58, and the section from bar 61 onwards is sung noticeably slower, with the tempo being held back more and more towards the end of the phrase. As was the case with the introduction, the orchestral postlude is the slowest of all the recordings we have discussed. Melchior sings with a pronounced vibrato throughout.

The last recording we shall discuss here was made in Berlin in December 1924 by the mezzo-soprano **Sabine Kalter** (1890–1957), a native of Austrian Galicia. She began her career at the Volksoper in Vienna and in the 1920s set off on an international career, singing both the major mezzo roles in the Romantic repertoire and works by contemporary composers from Korngold to Hindemith. She emigrated to England before the Second World War.

Kalter's discography includes numerous acoustic recordings for Odeon in Berlin including 'Träume', accompanied by the orchestra of the Berlin State Opera under Hermann Weigert in 1924.[26] A tuba can be heard in places, though instead of doubling the repeated quavers it has its own bass part with longer notes. The tempo of the introduction (quaver = 144) makes it one of the faster recordings considered here, though as with most of the others it slows down slightly when the voice enters. 'Träu-me' in bars 31–2 is slightly expanded, though the tempo thereafter urges forward, slowing down again on 'se-lig' in bar 37. Like several other singers here, Kalter explicitly sings two quavers on 'dass sie' in bar 56 instead of a dotted quaver with semiquaver. Kalter phrases the passage from bars 61 to 64 to climax dynamically on the words 'Brust' and 'glü(-hen)'. The ending is one of the slowest here. In bar 80, the violins add the upper octave; the final chord is played very short and is not together in the orchestra.

Sabine Kalter as Aida in 1914.
Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

26 <https://archive.org/details/sabine-kalter-preiser-lv-231-side-b>.

Conclusion

In these acoustic recordings from the first quarter of the 20th century, the tempo and the use of vibrato differ from one to the next, but the singers generally reveal only subtle differences in their approach to the vocal line. The treatment of the instrumental introduction and postlude varies far more widely, regardless of whether the accompaniment is played by an orchestra or a piano. In five of the recordings we have been able to hear, the introduction was shortened, while six shortened the postlude (albeit in different ways). In the complete recordings, the total duration varies from 3:41 (Johanna Gadski) to 4:20 (Lauritz Melchior), which at first glance seems remarkable. However, when we break down the song into smaller sections (see the table), we find that Melchior's recording is so much longer primarily because of the tempo of the orchestral introduction and postlude. If we compare the individual vocal sections, we find that the differences between recordings is never more than nine seconds. The tempo variations in the vocal line are thus similar across all our recordings.

Of the recordings with orchestra to which we have been able to listen, five have undergone at least minor re-orchestration. In most cases, this involves adding a low wind instrument, generally the tuba (Gadski, Schumann-Heink, Iracema-Brügelmann, Metzger-Lattermann 1913, Kalter), which plays either the double-bass part as written to support the harmony, or a new part featuring longer note values instead of repeated quavers. On one recording, a flute is also used to underline the melody (Gulbranson). It therefore seems to have been common practice to adapt the orchestration in whatever manner seemed necessary in order for the recording process to achieve the best possible results.

With the exception of Richard Tauber, whose more lyric tenor restricted him to minor Wagner parts, all the singers we have considered here were known for their interpretations of Wagner's major operatic roles. Seven of the eleven singers were engaged at the Bayreuth Festival (Fleischer-Edel 1904–8, Metzger-Lattermann 1901–12, Schumann-Heink 1896–1914, Gulbranson 1896–1914, Gadski 1899, Leider 1928–38 and Melchior 1924–31). The others sang the Wagner repertoire at leading houses in Europe and elsewhere.

Most of these singers are highly expressive in performance, their phrasing follows the meaning of the text, and they construct dramatic arcs and use rhetorical emphases and careful enunciation for purposes of comprehensibility. Their accompaniments, however, differ considerably. Some of the orchestral versions were made with a 'house ensemble' put together by the label, and the conductors – often anonymous – were similarly attached first and foremost to the label, not to the *ad hoc* ensemble they were directing. The German conductor, pianist and composer Friedrich Kark (1869–1939), who conducted 'Träume' for two of the singers listed above (Fleischer-Edel and Metzger-Lattermann), was a prototype of this kind of studio conductor. He was a pianist and violinist and became a central figure in the early recording industry through his work for Odeon in the first decade of the 20th century – though in today's terms, his work would probably best be described as that of a recording manager, not a music director. His recordings also covered a broad spectrum, from opera to ragtime. The early biography of the conductor Eduard Künneke (1885–1953), who conducted 'Träume' for Fleischer-Edel, is not dissimilar to that of Kark. Before he became well known as a

composer of operettas, Künneke also conducted for Odeon Records and had to cope with a very broad repertoire at relatively short notice (incidentally, it was either Kark or Künneke – scholars continue to disagree – who conducted the first-ever recording of Ludwig van Beethoven's 5th Symphony for Odeon in 1911).[27] We have no information on recording schedules, but it is likely that little time was spent on rehearsing 'Träume', and that the interpretations extant on record were created more or less spontaneously. This can also explain why the tempo generally slows down when the voice enters – quite apart from time pressures that were acute in the acoustic era, the conductor and singer had perhaps done little to discuss and coordinate their preferred tempi.

It thus seems likely that the broad similarities across the recordings we have heard are a result of an existing performance tradition. This would also explain why the interpretations of 'Träume' that were recorded in the electric era from around 1925 onwards do not differ greatly from those of the acoustic era – for proof, I suggest listening to the electric recordings of Maria Jeritza (1926),[28] Karin Branzell (1927),[29] Frida Leider (1928),[30] Elisabeth Ohms (1929),[31] Julia Culp (1930),[32] Margarete Teschemacher (1934)[33] or Ernestine Schumann-Heink (1934).[34] The two singers considered above who made both acoustic and electric recordings (Leider in 1921 and 1928 respectively; Schumann-Heink in 1911 and 1934) also deliver strikingly similar interpretations each time. The recording technology available, plus the improvements that were made in recording conditions, seem to have had little effect on the aesthetics of performance. And since a performing tradition by definition does not appear overnight, this suggests in turn that the earliest singers to record 'Träume' in 1905 were themselves perpetuating traditions that were already established and that continued until well into the 20th century.

[27] See <https://tinyurl.com/3kf3f8j6>. Kark is listed there as the conductor; but for arguments in favour of Künneke, see James Hepokoski, '"Listen and Be Amazed!": Odeon, Künneke, and the First Recordings of Complete Symphonies', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, lxxvi/1 (2023) 113–67.

[28] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRlSkg0x_eM>.

[29] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izKHVAMo4ik>.

[30] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCdHNcCv9wE>.

[31] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MNV7lvZMuU>.

[32] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7f-fM9Fcq8>.

[33] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uirDuF1cZ4E>.

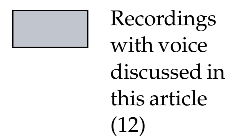
[34] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2nDboPIPL0>.

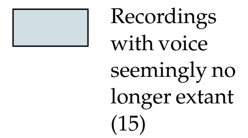
Acoustic recordings of 'Träume' until 1924

Year	Performer(s)	Bars 1–16	17–39	40–47	48–55	56–60	61–73
1900	Théophile Hirlemann						
1900	Théophile Hirlemann						
1904	Marcel Houdret						
1905	Laura Hilgermann	00:00:14*	00:01:02	00:00:25	00:00:26	00:00:19	00:00:27
1905	Berta Kiurina						
1905	Laura Hilgermann	00:00:05*	00:01:02	00:00:30	00:00:23	00:00:18	00:00:26
1906	Amalie Carneri						
1907	Cäcilie Rüsche-Endorf						
1907	Aleksandr V. Smirnov						
1907	Katharina Fleischer-Edel						
1908	Laura Hilgermann						
1910	Katharina Fleischer-Edel	00:00:13*	00:01:00	00:00:27	00:00:27	00:00:19	00:00:25
1911	Ottilie Metzger-Lattermann						
1911	Ernestine Schumann-Heink	00:00:39	00:01:02	00:00:30	00:00:25	00:00:23	00:00:30
1912	Russian Symphony Orchestra						
1913	Rudolph Ganz	00:00:43	00:01:05	00:00:21	00:00:21	00:00:18	00:00:23
1913	Elisabeth van Endert						
1913	Ottilie Metzger-Lattermann	00:00:36	00:01:00	00:00:28	00:00:25	00:00:23	00:00:31
1913	Hedy Iracema-Brügelmann	00:00:44	00:01:00	00:00:25	00:00:22	00:00:20	00:00:24
1914	Julia Culp						
1914	Amelia Pinto						
1914	Ellen Maria Gulbranson	00:00:05*	00:00:59	00:00:23	00:00:23	00:00:17	00:00:24
1914	Victor Herbert and his Orchestra						
1915	New Queen's Hall Orchestra						
1916	Margarete Matzenauer						
1917	Johanna Gadski	00:00:42	00:01:00	00:00:21	00:00:22	00:00:15	00:00:27
1919	Ottilie Metzger-Lattermann						
1919	Richard Tauber	00:00:28*	00:01:00	00:00:27	00:00:25	00:00:22	00:00:28
1921	Gustav Riemann	00:00:50	00:01:02	00:00:23	00:00:24	00:00:19	00:00:26
1921	Emmy Bettendorf						
1921	Franz Egénieff						
1921	Frida Leider	00:00:44	00:01:00	00:00:26	00:00:22	00:00:18	00:00:27
1922	Maria Olszewska						
1923	Lauritz Melchior	00:00:53	00:01:00	00:00:27	00:00:25	00:00:19	00:00:26
1924	Josef Burgwinkel						
1924	Sabine Kalter	00:00:42	00:01:00	00:00:21	00:00:22	00:00:19	00:00:27

74–84	Total duration	Scoring	Label
		pf solo	Pathé (I) 1204
		pf solo	Pathé (I) 1204S
		pf/vn	Columbia F34519
00:00:23*	00:03:16	pf/voice	Odeon 38115
		?	Pathé (lll) 38032
00:00:23*	00:03:07	pf/voice	Favorite Record 592-0
		?	Pathé (lll) 38285
		?	?
		pf solo	Pathé 27334
		orch/voice	Odeon xB 3072
		orch/voice	Gramophone 13221 u
fade out*	00:02:51	orch/voice	Odeon xB 3072-2
		orch/voice	Pathé (V) 54902
00:00:46	00:04:15	orch/voice	Victor 88343 (C 11337-1 and C 11337-2)
		orch	Columbia 36484-1
00:00:42	00:03:53	pf roll	Welte-Mignon Nr. 3064
		orch/voice	Gramophone 695 m
00:00:27*	00:03:50	orch/voice	Lindström 2-1660/Parlophon-Records P 1660
00:00:46	00:04:01	orch/voice	Lindström xxB 5869/Odeon 76350
		orch/voice	Victor C 14371-1
		orch/voice	Lindström xxPh 5065
00:00:16*	00:02:47	orch/voice	(V) 90289 and (V) 90289 N.1/Pathé S 3233 (MC 90289)
		orch	Victor 55041 (C-13340)
		orch	Columbia 6588-1
		orch/voice	Columbia 48842
00:00:34	00:03:41	orch/voice	C 19686-3/Victor 88591
		orch/voice	Pathé A1019
00:00:32*	00:03:42	pf/voice	Lindström xxB 6440/Odeon – JXX 81025
00:01:08	00:04:32	pf roll	Hupfeld Animatic 58333/Hupfeld Phonola 17968
		orch/voice	Lindström 2-5557 and 2-5557-2
		orch/voice	Polydor 655
00:00:49	00:04:06	orch/voice	Polydor 631 as Grammophon 65746
		orch/voice	Polydor 753
00:00:50	00:04:20	orch/voice	Polydor 1503 as Grammophon 72884
		orch/voice	Polydor 1780
00:00:49	00:04:00	orch/voice	Lindström xxB 7106 and xxB 7106-2/Odeon xxB 7106

Key


Recordings with voice discussed in this article (12)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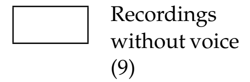
Recordings without voice (9)

* Section abridged in the recording

The Wagner Journal, **19**, 3, 68–91

Live Performances

Another Sacred Cow Deflated in Bayreuth

Barry Millington joins the party at the new 'Meistersinger'

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Georg Zeppenfeld (Hans Sachs), Michael Spyres (Walther von Stolzing), Christina Nilsson (Eva), Jongmin Park (Veit Pogner), Ya-Chung Huang (David), Christa Mayer (Magdalene), Michael Nagy (Sixtus Beckmesser), Martin Koch (Kunz Vogelgesang), Werner Van Mechelen (Konrad Nachtigal), Jordan Shanahan (Fritz Kothner), Daniel Jenz (Balthasar Zorn), Matthew Newlin (Ulrich Eisslinger), Gideon Poppe (Augustin Moser), Alexander Grassauer (Hermann Ortel), Tijl Faveyts (Hans Schwarz), Patrick Zielke (Hans Foltz), Tobias Kehrer (Nightwatchman); Bayreuth Festival Chorus and Orchestra/ Daniele Gatti, Matthias Davids (director), Andrew D. Edwards (designer), Susanne Hubrich (costumes), Fabrice Kebour (lighting). Bayreuth Festspielhaus, 22 August 2025

Tristan und Isolde. Andreas Schager (Tristan), Camilla Nylund (Isolde), Jordan Shanahan (Kurwenal), Ekaterina Gubanova (Brangäne), Günther Groissböck (King Mark), Alexander Grassauer (Melot), Matthew Newlin (Young Sailor), Daniel Jenz (Shepherd), Lawson Anderson (Steersman); Bayreuth Festival Chorus and Orchestra/Semyon Bychkov, Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson (director), Vytautas Narbutas (designer), Sibylle Wallum (costumes), Sascha Zauner (lighting). Bayreuth Festspielhaus, 23 August 2025

Regular readers of this journal will be well aware that *Die Meistersinger*, for all its surface jollity and psychological probing into the mysteries of love and art, has a dark underside of nationalistic sentiment that extends, in the view of many, to a representation of anti-Semitism in the characterisation of Beckmesser. You wouldn't know that from Matthias Davids's new production, which studiously avoids any such murkiness in favour of spectacle, colour and fun.

On this level it's broadly successful. The action opens, in Andrew D. Edwards's design, with a vertiginous staircase leading up to a tiny model church, followed by the gathering of the Masters in a triangular-shaped interior flanked by the staircase. They sport motifs associated with the historical Schlaraffia gentlemen's club, whose members get their kicks dressing up in knights' cloaks, with pointed hoods and helmets, wielding daggers and swords, and celebrating absurdity and earthly delights. The seriousness with which the Masters might have hoped to be depicted is here undermined not only by their silly attire but by their antics – one is a chain-smoker who takes the opportunity of Kothner's reading of the *Tabulatur* to pop out for a quick fag.

Act II opens with a gaudy postmodernist take on a gabled Nuremberg street scene. Later Fabrice Kebour achieves a more evocative effect with his subtle blue/green/ orange lighting. A yellow German-style telephone box has been converted into what

Scene and herd: the Festival Meadow. Photo: Bayreuther Festspiele/Enrico Nawrath

Sunday supplement interior designers now optimistically call a 'bibliothèque' (usually a few Scandi-style shelves bearing a handful of arty books). This one contains an illustrated volume, selected first by Eva and Walther, later by Sachs, which I assume to be Wagenseil's *Nuremberg Chronicle*.

Act III opens in an oval-shaped workshop, on one wall of which hangs a photograph of Sachs's deceased wife and one of their children, on which the cobbler movingly meditates at moments of heightened emotion. The Festival Meadow Scene is a riot of tawdry commercialism: a high-octane, TV-celebrity-cum-Miss-World show against a neon sunburst backdrop; a huge bouncy bovine inflatable, legs and udder in the air, presiding over the proceedings; the partying populace dressed in everything from faux lederhosen and dirndls, through daft pointy hats to jeans and trainers.

It remains unclear whether Davids is making a point about the degradation of true culture in a commercially driven society. Or about the values of 'traditional', folkish Germany versus those of the modern world. Or about the skills of a reactionary elite in relation to popular taste. Or is his intention merely to satirise everyone and everything: a send-up to mock those who take these issues seriously? His interview in the programme book offers few clues. In the final scene, the defeated Beckmesser tries to deflate the cow as Sachs warns of the threat to holy German art, but the latter reconnects the air supply as the chorus exhorts us to honour the German masters. Again if any significance is intended, the point is too obscurely made. When Walther rejects the crown, Pogner takes back Eva, who responds by returning the Masters' chain to him and steering Walther away to freedom. Sachs and Beckmesser are left arguing over possible interpretations of Walther's song.

The two previous productions of *Meistersinger* at Bayreuth – by Katharina Wagner (2007) and Barrie Kosky (2017) – both confronted the baleful Nazi legacy of the work in different ways. Katharina has since 2008, of course, been director of the festival, and there's some irony in her commissioning a production that avoids the issue altogether. If that's the trend of the day, so be it. What's less easy to forgive, in a staging devoted to fun, is the

inability to raise a smile in the scene of Sachs's hammerblow 'marking' of Beckmesser's Serenade (beyond his use of pots and pans to vary the pitch). Played as written it rarely seems amusing, but there are ways to bring it alive. Davids seems to be unaware of them.

And talking of lost opportunities, the notoriously tedious scene of the elucidation of the tones by Sachs's apprentice David hardly fares any better. Here, each tone is represented by a placard referencing an arcane scientific pursuit – phrenology, Goethe's colour theory, and so forth. You could say that such an exhibition of abstruseness rivals the Masters' rule-book of the tones, but it doesn't exactly help the scene to skip along.

The hope was doubtless that Davids would draw on his experience in the world of musicals – this was his first Wagner – to deliver a lively show for the new, younger demographic the festival needs to pull in. There are indeed some good sight gags and the general mood of hilarity may please those who have found the previous productions too hard going. Most of the *Personenregie*, however, is generic rather than text-based and it's not until the third act that original ideas start to come thick and fast.

Georg Zeppenfeld has turned in dependable King Marks, Gurnemanzes, Dalands and King Henrys over the last fifteen years, but he rarely managed to project the rounded humanity or wisdom of Sachs. Jongmin Park was a more solid Pogner, his gravity matched by a statuesque stage presence. Michael Spyres sang Walther with a full-throated but wonderfully mellifluous tone; his hesitant stage movements were presumably intended to suggest a lover unsure of himself – an interesting insight. This Eva, sung by Christina Nilsson, whose confident tone blossomed as the evening wore on, was certainly the driving force in their relationship. The forthright David of Ya-Chung Huang suggested a character tenor of considerable promise. Michael Nagy's Beckmesser, unafraid to assume the persona of a rock star to win over his audience, had the charisma and vocal quality to make such an assumption plausible. Christa Mayer was the admirable Magdalena. The lean new festival chorus, trained by Thomas Eitler-de Lint, acquitted itself with aplomb. Daniele Gatti achieved only an occluded sound in the more declamatory music – admittedly the Festspielhaus acoustic is not exactly empathetic to the verticality of much of the Masters' music – though things improved where the music is more linear and/or lyrical.

By contrast, in conjunction with Semyon Bychkov's supremely sentient conducting, Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson's *Tristan*, on which I reported in detail last year, (*TWJ*, xviii/3, 63–5) ends as movingly as anything seen in Bayreuth for many a long year. Act I, sadly, is no more engaging than before, and indeed virtually the entire production is bereft of imaginative *Personenregie*. The use of totemic icons (many nautical) in Act II, however, to capture the post-traumatic state of Isolde's mind (following the appalling behaviour to which she has been subjected before the curtain rises) and the transformation of these images to probe the unconscious mind of the wounded Tristan in Act III are as potent as ever. New to the cast are Ekaterina Gubanova as Brangäne and Jordan Shanahan as Kurwenal, both excellent in those roles. Andreas Schager's line and intonation are as fragile as last year, especially where he tries to match Bychkov's sensitive *piani* and *pianissimi*, though his depiction of Tristan's breakdown is suitably harrowing. It is, however, the glorious Liebestod of Camilla Nylund, accompanied by Bychkov's ravishing orchestral sonorities, against the burnished golds and russets of Vytautas Narbutas's sets (lit by Sascha Zauner), that lingers in the memory.

Cain and Abel with a Happy Ending

Glyndebourne's first 'Parsifal' is musically outstanding but dramatically reduced, finds Tash Siddiqui

Parsifal. Daniel Johansson (Parsifal), Kristina Stanek (Kundry), Audun Iversen (Amfortas), Ryan Speedo Green (Klingsor), John Relyea (Gurnemanz), John Tomlinson (Titurel), Liam Bonthrone (First Grail Knight), Dingle Yandell (Second Grail Knight), Hannah Crocker (First Squire), Rachel Roper (Second Squire), Matthew McKinney (Third Squire), George Curnow (Fourth Squire), Anna Denisova, Camilla Harris, Jade Moffat, Serafina Starke, Shannon Keegan, Ekaterina Chayka-Rubinstein (Flowermaidens), Ekaterina Chayka-Rubinstein (A Voice from Above); Glyndebourne Chorus, London Philharmonic Orchestra/Robin Ticciati; Jetske Mijnssen (director), Ben Baur (designer), Gideon Davey (costumes), Fabrice Kebour (lighting), Dustin Klein (choreography). Glyndebourne Festival Opera, 17 May 2025

'Sieh', es lacht die Aue!' – look, the meadow is smiling! – says Parsifal to Kundry at the end of the Good Friday Scene, but it could just as well be said of Glyndebourne's splendid pastures in the Sussex Downs on the occasion of the festival's first ever staging of *Parsifal*. 'What took you so long?' mutters this critic under her breath, no doubt become *blasée* by the improbable flourishing of country-house opera and especially country-house Wagner. Bayreuth-on-the-Wold, a.k.a. the Longborough Festival, has staged two full *Ring* cycles in the Cotswolds amidst its many Wagner projects. And Grange Park Opera at West Horsley in Surrey is launching its own *Ring* cycle next year after dipping its toe into the Wagner fount. But the granddaddy of these and similarly bucolic ventures is of course Glyndebourne, founded by John Christie and Audrey Mildmay in 1934. Christie was a passionate Wagnerian and always dreamt of staging *Parsifal* at Glyndebourne as an Easter offering, only to be dissuaded by Mildmay, according to their son, George Christie, who ran the festival after his father's death.

That this *Parsifal* was musically worth the wait became clear immediately, as the conductor Robin Ticciati, Glyndebourne's music director, coaxed the first sonorous leitmotifs of the Prelude from the London Philharmonic Orchestra. The audience behaved impeccably too, maintaining a hushed silence in the pregnant pauses between the initial phrases. Glyndebourne's pit is able to accommodate the full *Parsifal* orchestra, yet the intimacy of the 1200-seat house and Ticciati's careful attention to Wagner's dynamic markings gave the actor–singers time and space to articulate their characters' guilt and innocence, suffering and peace, complicity and compassion.

But who are these characters? During the Prelude the curtain rises to reveal a late 19th-century bedroom. An invalid lies in bed, attended by an auburn-haired woman sitting at the bedside, dressed as a Victorian maid; upstage there hovers a third, indistinct figure. We only have a moment to absorb this tableau before the curtain falls again, but anyone not a *Parsifal* virgin will have perceived the invalid as the wounded Amfortas and his attendant as Kundry. But then the plot thickens – as if the plot of *Parsifal* wasn't already thick enough – as words from Genesis 4:9 are projected onto the closed curtain: 'And the Lord said unto Cain, where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?'

Eh? It took quite a while for this baffled reviewer to find enlightenment. The setting, by Ben Baur, remains the same throughout: a late 19th-century bourgeois interior, with

a door stage right and a window stage left. Two sets of horizontal curtains are used to partition the space, which serves as the forest clearing, the temple of the Grail, Klingsor's realm, and so on. Fabrice Kebour's lighting subtly animates the settings: sunlight streaming through the open window in Act I represents Amfortas's 'woodland splendour of the morning', for example. Costumes, by Gideon Davey, are of the same period, with Kundry's elegant red bun and full dress giving her a Pre-Raphaelite look, despite her prim entries carrying a tea-tray in Acts I and II. This could be a Chekhov play, or Ibsen's *Ghosts* – first staged in 1882, the same year as *Parsifal* – with Amfortas suffering from the unmentionable disease of the 19th century.

In fact Chekhov's depictions of claustrophobic family life provide the key to this production. The director Jetske Mijnssen domesticates Wagner's Grail legend into a bourgeois family saga set around the time of the opera's premiere. Klingsor and Amfortas are brothers, vying for the approval of the dying patriarch, Titurel – who favours Amfortas – as well as for Kundry's affections. Instead of the ceremonial or mystical aspects, Mijnssen puts the spotlight on dysfunctional family relationships. As Gurnemanz narrates Amfortas's seduction and Klingsor's theft of the holy Spear, the upstage curtain opens to show these events acted out by the characters' younger selves. Or rather, what we see, on an idyllic carpet of green grass and purple delphiniums, is a fight between the teenage Amfortas and Klingsor. Klingsor lashes out with a small knife, while two Kundrys – the adult with red bun and the schoolgirl with red pigtails – look on. So, ominously, does the aged Titurel. The presence of outsiders in the troubled family milieu acts as catalyst for the action: first the guilt-ridden Kundry, and then the young innocent, Parsifal, the harbinger of redemption, or perhaps mere reconciliation. Gurnemanz, in a long black cassock, seems to be some kind of house priest, half-insider, half-outsider.

The Communion Scene is an intimate domestic affair; the Grail Knights are not present for the uncovering of the Grail, which has been downsized into an ordinary metal chalice. The ceremony is conducted at a table, with Titurel, Amfortas and Gurnemanz all donning surplices. Parsifal is amongst them, but refuses the proffered bread and wine. The knights are a thuggish gang of family serfs, also in surplices to take communion, but then, shockingly – on 'zu kämpfen mit seligem Mute!' (let us fight with holy courage!) – savagely assaulting Parsifal, the outsider.

In Act II, the Flowermaidens are a whole chorus of identikit Kundrys with auburn hair buns and full-skirted dresses. Dustin Klein's choreography and Kebour's lighting combine to form an arresting picture as the women threaten Klingsor, their putative master, while he cowers in the corner of the stage. However, the most disconcerting aspect of Mijnssen's production concept comes at the end of the act. There's no miraculous suspension of the holy Spear, since there's no Spear, only the small knife again wielded by Klingsor. As the synopsis in the programme has it: 'Klingsor attacks Parsifal, but Parsifal remains unscathed and breaks the pattern of violence.' Indeed, Parsifal gives Klingsor a big hug instead of crushing him and his kingdom, and – as becomes clear in Act III – takes the wrongdoer with him on his wanderings before bringing him home to the domain of the Grail. The theme of compassion and reciprocity continues in the final act: the penitent Klingsor participates in the reunion of Gurnemanz, Kundry and Parsifal; Kundry washes Parsifal's feet, but, rather sweetly, he washes hers too. Mysteriously but

'It's only wafer thin' but Parsifal (Daniel Johansson) refuses communion. Photo: Glyndebourne Festival/Richard Hubert Smith

beautifully, Titurel's funeral procession takes place in a winter wonderland with snow falling and top-hatted undertakers circling the stage. The final tableau is the reconciliation of Klingsor and Amfortas, with only Parsifal and Kundry in attendance.

Maybe the snow refers to the target audience of this modern, inclusive *Parsifal*, the snowflakes of Gen Z. While Wagner's theme of enlightenment through compassion shines through, the numinous, hieratic element of Wagner's last essay in redemption is abandoned in favour of homely reconciliation – exemplified by Mijnssen's words in the programme on 'the rituals that families undertake at home', including 'social mores as common as the weekly Sunday roast'. There's surely more to the brotherhood of the Grail than overgrown choirboys in surplices tucking into their dinner.

Having said that, the staging is redeemed by Mijnssen's outstanding *Personenregie* and the whole-hearted commitment to her scenario by all concerned. Ticciati drew a well-paced, transparent and gleaming account of Wagner's miraculous fusion of music and drama from his orchestra and chorus, and the cast really had no weak link. The stand-out performance was John Relyea's magnificent and untiring Gurnemanz, a traumatised but tender priestlike figure. John Tomlinson as Titurel managed to upstage everyone else with his looming presence, despite not singing a word for the first eighty minutes. Kristina Stanek, with her lustrous, rich mezzo tone, was a deeply affecting and vulnerable Kundry, yet properly spine-chilling at the drop on 'lachte' as she described how she laughed at Jesus. Daniel Johansson, helped by his flowing Christlike locks, had all the charm, gravitas and heft to depict Parsifal's journey from innocent bystander to enlightened saviour. Amfortas's anguish was depicted by Audun Iverson with a Lied-like beauty of tone, and Ryan Speedo Green's portrayal of Klingsor was unusually nuanced, projecting pain as well as menace. Let's hope that John Christie was looking down from the Elysian Fields.

Not on the Monet

Hugo Shirley has mixed feelings about demystifying 'Parsifal'

Parsifal. Ian Koziara (Parsifal), Jennifer Holloway (Kundry), Nicholas Brownlee (Amfortas), Iain MacNeil (Klingsor), Andreas Bauer Kanabas (Gurnemanz), Alfred Reiter (Titurel), Kudaibergen Abildin (First Grail Knight), Sakhiwe Mkosana (Second Grail Knight), Idil Kutay (First Squire), Nina Tarandek (Second Squire), Andrew Bidlack (Third Squire), Andrew Kim (Fourth Squire), Clara Kim, Idil Kutay, Nina Tarandek, Nombulelo Yende, Julia Stuart, Judita Nagyová (Flowermaidens), Katharina Magiera (A Voice from Above); Chorus and Orchestra of Oper Frankfurt/Thomas Guggeis; Brigitte Fassbaender (director), Johannes Leiacker (designer and costumes), Jan Hartmann (lighting), Katherina Wiedenhofer (choreography). Oper Frankfurt, 18 May 2025

In a video interview published on Oper Frankfurt's YouTube channel, Brigitte Fassbaender and Thomas Guggeis mention their joint aim of presenting *Parsifal* without the baggage, with the distinguished mezzo-turned-director expressing her desire to normalise and to bring order to a work around which there is so much accumulated mystery and mythology. These are in many ways admirable aims, but, as was made clear at the first night of this new production, they can mean different things for the musical performance and for the staging.

Guggeis, following on from his acclaimed *Tannhäuser* at this house last season, conducted a performance that certainly presented Wagner's final score afresh (not for nothing was Pierre Boulez's 'Wege zu *Parsifal*' reprinted in the programme). His reading was swift – especially in Act I – with textures clean and lucid. But such was his command of the score and internal tempo relations that one rarely felt short-changed. And while the clean textures occasionally precluded a true blending of colours (at least from my stalls seat), the flip side was a sharply defined sense of musical drama, underlined by impeccable orchestral balance. The conductor, coming to the end of his second season as Generalmusikdirektor at Oper Frankfurt, elicited superb playing from his orchestra.

In Fassbaender's production, however, the desire to free *Parsifal* from its accumulated baggage proves more problematic. Right from the start, the choice to accompany preludes and transitions with projections of Claude Monet's paintings of Rouen Cathedral immediately sends mixed messages: a clichéd gesture apparently setting out to underline precisely the hazy, impressionist elements of the music that Guggeis's reading underplays. After Act I's Prelude, these projections subside to reveal a set mixing abstraction (black side panels adorned with parallel white lines) with stylised realism (a back wall featuring a craggy opening into a cave, a panel showing one of Monet's river scenes). Later, side walls are revealed with grand doorways, while the grotto entrance opens to accommodate an oversized golden Grail.

In Act II, the grotto entrance serves as a craggy proscenium arch for Klingsor's carefully directed theatre of seduction, inhabited at first by Flowermaidens dressed as brides, and then, against a background of purply kitsch, Kundry alone – also in a wedding dress. In Act III, nature is represented by a small patch of green grass, while the rocks seem to have grown back to reclaim their realm: this society's attempts to

Theatre of seduction: Klingsor (Iain MacNeil) and Kundry (Jennifer Holloway) in Act II. Photo: Frankfurt Opera/Monika Rittershaus

impose order having apparently lost their power. Even the Grail Knights – dressed in Act I to resemble the members of some distinguished 19th-century institution – are turning to stone, in a literal manifestation of the ossifying effects of their beliefs. The three acts are suggestively elided as characters appear prematurely or unexpectedly: Kundry, already in her wedding dress, is there for the Act I Grail ceremony, at the end of which Klingsor – with spear and magician's top hat – also appears, as if checking the scene for his big entrance in Act II.

Fassbaender is true to her aim to demystify, even gently to mock. Amfortas checks the small print on the medicine Kundry produces from her rucksack; in Act III Titurel's coffin contains an urn of ashes rather than a corpse, and the unveiling happens without Wagner's prescribed 'Wehruf'; the Grail ceremony in Act I concludes with distribution of pretzels. Parsifal's big scene with Kundry, meanwhile, plays out as a series of seduction attempts, Kundry growing petulant as her flirty approaches are rebuffed. At the close, Kundry and Amfortas make up, kiss, and leave the stage together as celebratory champagne is brought out. We have a happy ending, then, but little sense of what it means, little sense of redemption or what has been at stake.

There are nevertheless plenty of isolated moments of dramatic intensity, which is a tribute to Fassbaender's skilled *Personenregie*, as well as to a fine cast, with a superb Gurnemanz from Andreas Bauer Kanabas at its foundation. The German bass sang with easy volume, pleasingly gravelly timbre and a patient sense of stoicism. Nicholas Brownlee's Amfortas was outstanding too, his visceral dramatic intensity allied to a rich, rounded voice in its prime. Neither Ian Koziara's Parsifal nor Jennifer Holloway's Kundry represented conventional heroic casting – his voice a little diffuse in focus, hers short on dramatic edge – but Koziara charted his character's trajectory well and Holloway brought impressive dramatic instinct and fearless commitment to her performance. Iain MacNeil's Klingsor was suitably insidious, Alfred Reiter's Titurel movingly frail.

But these fine performances, and the superb work from Guggeis, his orchestra and the excellent Frankfurt chorus, exist within a framework that undermines their overall effect. Ultimately, one is left wondering if it's not precisely the baggage, the mystery and the quasi-religious aura that, for better or worse, lend *Parsifal* its unique dramatic power.

Something New, Something Borrowed

Michael Fuller enjoys a Konwitschny 'Ring' in Dortmund, while not being entirely persuaded

Die Walküre. Tomasz Konieczny (Wotan), Stéphanie Müther (Brünnhilde), Viktor Antipenko (Siegmund), Barbara Senator (Sieglinde), Kai Rüütel-Pajula (Fricka/Grimgerde), Denis Velev (Hunding), Tanja Christine Kuhn (Gerhilde), Vera Fischer (Ortlinde), Natascha Valentin (Waltraute), Maria Hiefinger (Schwertleite), Sooyeon Lee (Helmwige), Ruth Katharina Peeck (Siegrune), Edvina Ustaoglu (Roßweiße);

Siegfried. Daniel Frank (Siegfried), Stéphanie Müther (Brünnhilde), Thomas Johannes Mayer (The Wanderer), Morgan Moody (Alberich), Matthias Wohlbrecht (Mime), Melissa Zgouridi (Erda), Denis Velev (Fafner), Rinnat Moriah (Woodbird);

Das Rheingold. Michael Kupfer-Radecky (Wotan), Joachim Golz (Alberich), Matthias Wohlbrecht (Loge), Fritz Steinbacher (Mime), Ruth Katharina Peeck (Fricka), Denis Velev (Fasolt), Artyom Wasnetsov (Fafner), Irina Simmes (Freia), Melissa Zgouridi (Erda), Morgan Moody (Donner), Sungho Kim (Froh), Sooyeon Lee (Woglinde), Tanja Christine Kuhn (Wellgunde), Marlene Gassner (Floßhilde);

Götterdämmerung. Daniel Frank (Siegfried), Stéphanie Müther (Brünnhilde), Joachim Golz (Gunther), Barbara Senator (Gutrune), Samuel Youn (Hagen), Anna Lapovskaja (Waltraute/Second Norn), Morgan Moody (Alberich), Rita Kapfhammer (First Norn), Tanja Christine Kuhn (Third Norn/Wellgunde), Sooyeon Lee (Woglinde), Ruth Katharina Peeck (Floßhilde);

Opernchor Theater Dortmund and Dortmunder Philharmoniker/Gabriel Feltz; Peter Konwitschny (director), Jens Kilian (designer and costumes, *Das Rheingold*), Frank Philipp Schlößmann (designer and costumes, *Die Walküre*), Johannes Leiacker (designer and costumes, *Siegfried*), Bert Neumann (designer and costumes, *Götterdämmerung*), Florian Franzen (lighting). Theater Dortmund, 22–25 May 2025

In an innovative experiment around the turn of the century, Oper Stuttgart staged the *Ring* cycle with a different production team and cast assigned to each part of Wagner's tetralogy, to enable audiences to experience the *Ring* in a fresh way through the disassociation of its component parts – for reviews of the subsequent DVD releases, see *TWJ* ii/1 (2008) and iii/2 (2009). On that occasion *Götterdämmerung* was entrusted to Peter Konwitschny. Two decades later, this experiment has been re-visited in Dortmund: Konwitschny now directs the entire cycle, but with different collaborators for the staging of each work, and with the order of the works changed in order to underline the deconstructionist approach being taken (in a programme note Konwitschny refers to this as 'alienation', reflecting his Brechtian influences). The Dortmund production of *Die Walküre* was premiered in 2022, *Siegfried* the following year, and *Das Rheingold* in 2024: the addition of Konwitschny's original Stuttgart staging of *Götterdämmerung* led to two full cycles this year.

The four stagings certainly look very different. The sets for *Die Walküre* consist of three kitchen-living rooms: a humble sink and hob to one side of a scuffed sofa and chairs for Hunding's hut, a bright modern fitted kitchen with a retro-style fridge and an angular grey sofa for Wotan's confrontations and their aftermath in Act II, and a

'Zu neuen Taten!' Grane (right) leads the way in the Prologue of *Götterdämmerung.*
Photo: Theater Dortmund/Thomas M. Jauk

blingy island and fittings, with a gold-covered sofa, for Act III. Chunks of tree-trunk for occasional tables are common to all these sets, reminding us of the felled World Ash Tree. *Siegfried*'s sets are transport containers: that for the first act contains Mime's hovel (Siegfried opening a trapdoor in the floor and tossing the furniture into it in order to fire up his forge), that for the second presents us with Fafner's lair, with gold-plated walls and ingots scattered around, and that for the third contains a large chest freezer, from which the Wanderer arouses Erda from her sleep. In *Das Rheingold* the Rhinemaidens taunt Alberich, who appears as a primitive figure dressed in skins, on an empty stage; Scenes 2 and 4 are set in a stone-age settlement, with a tepee, two hide-covered huts and a large smoking campfire (Wotan blowing on the embers of this in an attempt to summon Loge), whilst Scene 3 presents us with a modern cityscape, seen from Alberich's office on the upper floor of a skyscraper (the dwarf-turned-plutocrat's Nibelung minions presenting him with the components of a nuclear warhead rather than golden treasures). In *Götterdämmerung* the set for all three acts consists of a large half-timbered

structure, its sides covered by black plastic sheeting which can be raised to reveal all or part of its interior as it revolves on the stage. This ingeniously creates separate scenic spaces for the various locations: the domestic idyll of Brünnhilde and Siegfried is represented by a table and chairs against a backdrop depicting a Rackhamesque landscape of a mountain lake; the projection of a flowing, sunny brook forms the background for the opening scene of Act III, and so on. Brünnhilde's concluding peroration takes place on an empty stage and at its conclusion a screen descends on which Wagner's stage directions for the final conflagration scroll as the music unfolds.

Konwitschny's detailed *Personenregie* is sometimes playful (the joshing of Wotan and Brünnhilde with cardboard cut-out sword and spear at the beginning of Act II of *Walküre*), sometimes deeply moving – Brünnhilde's confusion and anger in *Götterdämmerung* Act II, with her scornful dismissal of Hagen ('An Siegfried? … du?'), and her reluctant admission of the vulnerability of Siegfried's back – but constantly fresh and revealing. A notable feature of this staging is the frequent underlining of the role of the orchestra as a protagonist in the drama. At the conclusion of *Walküre* the sleeping Brünnhilde is pushed out over the orchestra pit, so that the six harpists sitting above and either side literally surround her with the Magic Fire Music. During the Forest Murmurs in *Siegfried* the hero is joined onstage by a horn player from the orchestra, with much comic interplay between the two. As the lights rise during the Prelude to *Das Rheingold* Alberich is revealed sitting fishing on the edge of the stage, his rod dangling into the orchestra pit as the Rhine motif swells within it.

What of the singers? Tomasz Konieczny's intensely characterised and powerfully sung *Walküre* Wotan effectively communicated the emotional roller-coaster travelled by the god; Thomas J. Mayer was a more lyrical Wanderer and Michael Kupfer-Radecky's *Rheingold* Wotan something of a cipher. Daniel Frank was a likeable Siegfried, frequently sitting cross-legged as he learned, wide-eyed, from the events unfolding around him. Vocally he had the range and the stamina required, but not quite the heft. That quality was provided in abundance by Stéphanie Müther: a serendipitous consequence of the sequence in which the cycle was performed meant that she was able to sing all three Brünnhildes, and (some squally top passages in *Siegfried* notwithstanding) she did so magnificently. Her vocal and physical acting were thoughtful and moving throughout. Joachim Golz was rather too likeable as the *Rheingold* Alberich, his mild-mannered presence more suited to Gunther, but he sang strongly and beautifully in both roles. On his other appearances Alberich was sung by Morgan Moody, who put his words across well. Viktor Antipenko sang clearly and powerfully as Siegmund, producing long-sustained cries of 'Wälse!'; as both Sieglinde and Gutrune Barbara Senator displayed a bright top, but was sometimes submerged by the orchestra in lower passages. Samuel Youn was a loud and unsubtle Hagen. Matthias Wohlbrecht sang strongly as both the *Siegfried* Mime and Loge, his rather uningratiating tone being more suited to the former than the latter. Denis Velev was a personable Hunding (playing cards over drinks with his unexpected guest) and Fasolt; as the *Siegfried* Fafner his amplified voice sounded disconnected from the utterances of those on stage with him. One would not wish to get on the wrong side of Kai Rüütel-Pajula's icily implacable, pill-popping, contract-waving *Walküre* Fricka: small wonder that Wotan is no match for her. Melissa Zgouridi was a powerfully impressive Erda on both her appearances, and

Anna Lapovskaja a moving *Götterdämmerung* Waltraute. Singers in the smaller roles generally acquitted themselves well. The orchestral strings sounded a little attenuated, and the lower brass were occasionally over-dominant: conductor Gabriel Feltz produced some marked changes of tempo on occasion, but in general the dramatic intensity was kept high, and sympathetic support was offered to his singers.

What are we to make of the experiment that this Dortmund *Ring* continues? To be sure, there is much to be gained from viewing each of these works through a separate lens. Any unitary vision of what the *Ring* might 'mean' must inevitably involve the emphasis of some aspects of it and the playing down of others. So, on the one hand, taking each work separately and in isolation from the others may well elicit insights that would be submerged in any attempt to homogenise the work (as well as perhaps facilitating the revivals of individual operas without the necessity of staging the complete cycle). On the other hand, a focus on the parts inevitably means that it is impossible for the whole to be more than the sum of them – and that is surely what encounters with the *Ring* consistently demonstrate it to be. Not only that: it is impossible to isolate each evening of the *Ring* completely from the others. Obviously, the musical motifs employed in the works unite them, even if the significance of those motifs may be mutable, even fluid. A single conductor is likely to underscore these musical links: even in Stuttgart the same conductor was employed throughout, whilst in Dortmund not only were conductor and director shared, so also were many singers. Moreover, the first three works presented all begin with the same image (the hewing of a leafy branch protruding through the stage curtain), and the audience is thereby encouraged to look for recurrent visual and dramatic motifs through the four evenings – and they are not hard to find. All these factors contribute to a centripetal force, encouraging the audience to appreciate links and continuities across the four evenings despite the stated aim to fragment the work.

The 80-year-old director was roundly booed by some in the audience as he took a bow at the conclusion of each evening's performance. But for all its inconsistencies and occasional frustrations, I found this to be a consistently enjoyable dramatic presentation of the *Ring* cycle – and the contributions of singers like Müther raised it to a very high musical level indeed.

Shipshape in Lübeck

David Ames is impressed by a Hanseatic 'Tristan' despite some unfortunate cuts

Tristan und Isolde. Ric Furman (Tristan), Lena Kutzner (Isolde), Steffen Kubach (Kurwenal), Marlene Lichtenberg (Brangäne), Shavleg Armasi (King Mark), Noah Schaul (Melot/Young Sailor/Shepherd), Viktor Aksentijević (Steersman); Choir of Theatre Lübeck, Philharmonic Orchestra of Hansestadt Lübeck/Stefan Vladar; Stephen Lawless (director), Frank Philipp Schlößmann (designer and costumes), Falk Hampel (lighting), Andreas Beer (video designer). Theater Lübeck, 29 June 2025

It was in Lübeck that the adolescent Thomas Mann first became acquainted with the music dramas of Wagner, a composer about whom he would have a lot to say in his maturity. However, by 1908, when opera performances moved from an older venue to the newly-built Theater Lübeck, Mann had long since cleared off to Munich. Fortunately the conflagration of 28–9 March 1942 (the first of a series of firestorms in medieval city centres initiated by RAF Bomber Command), which cut a 300-metre-wide and 900-metre-long swathe through the ancient town, stopped a couple of blocks short of this stolid building, so one can still get some sense of what opera attendance might have been like for the immediate post-*Buddenbrooks* generation.

While many members of a 1908 audience would have been well acquainted with the soundscape conjured up by Stefan Vladar and his collaborators, they would have been shocked by almost any 21st-century opera staging, including this fascinating (if occasionally irritating) Stephen Lawless production, first given in February of this year.

It was disappointing that in addition to the standard excision of twelve minutes of music from the *Liebesnacht*, large tracts of Tristan's Act III delirium also got the blue

Sea of Dreams: The fevered brain of Tristan (Ric Furman) conjures up the image of Isolde (Lena Kutzner) in Act III. Photo: Theater Lübeck/Jochen Quast

pencil treatment, so that the last act played for barely sixty-four minutes. Nevertheless, there was a lot to like about Vladar's fluid conducting of a reduced (three double basses, six cellos – I could not count the violins from my seat), but very competent orchestra. Often, the musical tension was intense; the woodwind playing was outstanding and some of the singing was superb.

The young Hanover-born Lena Kutzner deserves to have a huge career. She produced a steady, full, warm tone all night, handled both *fortissimo* and *pianissimo* passages equally well, had accurate intonation and acted with conviction. I have not been more impressed by any Isolde since Nina Stemme's role debut in 2003. Would somebody please get Gus Christie to sign her at once to sing Rezia in the overdue *Oberon* production that Glyndebourne owes the world?

Because of the cuts, Ric Furman did not have to sing large tracts of Tristan's music, but he was a worthy partner to Kutzner, singing with an incisive style, clear tone and dramatic conviction. The high points of any Brangäne's evening are the two warning solos in Act II, and Marlene Lichtenberg sang these beautifully, also providing a convincing foil to Kutzner in their numerous exchanges. Steffen Kubach's robust vocalism conveyed Kurwenal's straightforward nature in a strong account of his largely diatonic music. Shavleg Armasi was a late replacement as King Mark. On a thirty-degree day he was togged up in overcoat and fur hat, which made him look as if he'd wandered in from the movie *Doctor Zhivago*, and under the circumstances he did a creditable job of the Act II monologue and Mark's much shorter Act III utterances. The smallest parts were competently taken, most of them (sometimes in rapid succession) by Noah Schaul, while Viktor Aksentijević was a plangent Young Sailor. All the principals acted with admirable commitment.

British opera-goers may have encountered Stephen Lawless's work for Glyndebourne three decades or so ago. He and his designers set all three acts in the hold of a ship, with a staircase and portholes in its upper level, through which the Young Sailor and later Melot observe the action below. Sometimes a roiling seascape is projected onto the walls. The chief design feature is a jagged gash through the whole set, which slides together after the love potion is consumed and at the opera's end, and moves apart when the lovers are discovered. Although there is much reference to the intensity of the sun in Act III, a series of ice floes appear at the rear of the fissure in that act. Sadly, although there is substantial clichéd use of dinner jackets in Act II (it is hard to hunt in evening dress), the budget does not run to the addition of a few stuffed penguins.

As well as taking the love potion in Act I, the lovers top up with an extra hit in Act II, while Isolde takes the death potion at the end. Her manifestation in bridal attire in Act III appears to be a hallucination of the dying Tristan. At other times she wears tasteful, flowing gowns. Other costumes range from business attire for Brangäne to nautical jumper and woolly hat for Kurwenal.

Although the loss of so much psychologically vital material from Tristan's monologue is deeply unfortunate, and despite a few *Regietheater* excesses (Tristan dies later than indicated in the score and the iceflows are very strange), the opera's story is clearly presented, and the chance to hear Kutzner early in what I predict will be an enormous career was the highlight of a very enjoyable Sunday evening in historic Hanseatic Lübeck. At just €75 for a top-price seat, the experience was great value for money.

An Evening of Shifting Colours

Anja-Rosa Thöming reports on the next instalment of Dresden's historically informed 'Ring'

Siegfried (concert performance). Thomas Blondelle (Siegfried), Åsa Jäger (Brünnhilde), Simon Bailey (The Wanderer), Daniel Schmutzhardt (Alberich), Thomas Ebenstein (Mime), Gerhild Romberger (Erda), Hanno Müller-Brachmann (Fafner); Concerto Köln and musicians from Dresden Festival Orchestra/Kent Nagano. Dresden Philharmonic Hall, 14 June 2025

'Intensely musical and emotionally compelling': Brünnhilde (Åsa Jäger) with Siegfried (Thomas Blondelle) at the climax of *Siegfried* Act III, with Kent Nagano and Concerto Köln. Photo: Oliver Killig

Much like *Die Walküre* last year, this concert performance of *Siegfried*, given in historically informed style, left a captivating impression. The 14 June performance at the Dresden Philharmonic Hall in the Kulturpalast marked a highlight of this year's Dresden Music Festival, held under the guiding theme of 'Love', and followed previous performances of the opera in Prague, Cologne and Paris.

Once again, Kent Nagano conducted the ensemble Concerto Köln, augmented by musicians from the Dresden Festival Orchestra. A team of scholars had researched the historical context, with their findings flowing directly into the current production.[1]

In a pre-concert talk, assistant conductor Volker Krafft offered insights into the rehearsal process. Krafft referenced detailed rehearsal notes kept by Heinrich Porges,

[1] 'Wagner-Lesarten', <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:14-qucosa2-343518> (accessed 15 Aug. 2025)

Wagner's assistant during the 1876 preparation of *Siegfried*.[2] These documents reveal a considerable degree of tempo flexibility, dependent on the dramatic demands of the stage. This interpretation is supported by Felix Mottl's 1896 conducting score, where annotations such as 'wait here' or 'Fermate here' appear. For example, in the Woodbird scene of Act II, the fluttering string accompaniment was intended to be played in strict tempo, while the birdcalls in the winds floated above it in a rhythmically independent, free-flowing line.

Additional notes survive from rehearsals involving Wagner himself, Julius Hey and Georg Unger – the original Siegfried. Though Unger was vocally ill-suited to the role, Wagner insisted he sing it for the premiere. An analysis of these rehearsal documents highlights Wagner's core belief: that singing should be grounded in speech. 'Singing', Krafft explained, 'was for Wagner a heightened form of speaking' – an idea that was the central focus during this production's rehearsals.

The evening's master of vocal rhetoric was Thomas Ebenstein as Mime. Everything Wagner sought to convey about this character – envy, cowardice, self-pity, deceit, cunning and delusions of triumph – is embedded in the text and score. Ebenstein brought each of these nuances vividly to life, though always with taste and restraint. He proved a worthy adversary both for the heroic Siegfried and for the world-weary Wanderer (portrayed with dignified resignation by Simon Bailey). Mime's bitterly resented brother, Alberich, was just as strikingly characterised by Daniel Schmutzhardt, with impressive vocal colour and clarity.

As Siegfried, tenor Thomas Blondelle bore the evening's most demanding role with considerable aplomb, anchored in his remarkably articulate diction. Portraying a naive child of nature with intelligence is no small task, but Blondelle impressed with his youthful ease and playful energy, while also offering the necessary nuance in more introspective moments. Slender and photogenic, he delivered an admirable musical performance, though a touch more 'steel' in his voice would not have gone amiss. Fortunately, the orchestra, placed onstage directly behind the singers, showed great sensitivity and rarely overpowered the voices, only unleashing its full force when it could do so without overshadowing them.

As Fafner, Hanno Müller-Brachmann gave the monstrous dragon an air of eerie refinement, his lean bass both agile and commanding. His first entrance from the rear with a large speaking horn – as prescribed in the score – was especially memorable. The first high voice of the evening came from an attentive boy of the Tölzer Knabenchor as the Woodbird ('Hei! Siegfried gehört nun der Niblungen Hort!'), who engaged in lively and expressive interaction with the hero. The natural soundscapes evoked by the orchestra in the second act offered some of the most beautiful musical impressions of the evening.

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[2] Christa Jost also referred to these valuable notes in her article on the rehearsal of the *Rheingold*, which is well worth reading: Christa Jost, '"Wie aus dem Traume kommend": Zeitgenössische Probenbeobachtungen zu Wagners Bayreuther *Ring* von 1876', *Veröffentlichungen der Richard-Wagner-Akademie der Dresdner Musikfestspiele*, ii/1 (2024), <https://tinyurl.com/5xnpmezn> (accessed 15 Aug. 2025). See also *Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Werke,* i–xxi (series A, *Notenteil*), xxii–xxxi (series B, *Dokumententeil*), ed. Carl Dahlhaus, Martin Geck, Egon Voss and others (Mainz 1968–) [SW], xxix/III, *Dokumente zur Aufführung des Bühnenfestspiels 'Der Ring des Nibelungen' 1876*, ed. Christa Jost (Mainz, in press).

As is well known, Wagner only resumed composition of Act III after a twelve-year hiatus – following *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. And the opening of this final act – under Kent Nagano's meticulous direction – emerged with overwhelming sonic richness, its orchestration more opulent than in the earlier acts. When Siegfried awakens the slumbering Brünnhilde with a kiss, the music echoes the sensuality of *Tristan*. As Brünnhilde, young soprano Åsa Jäger gave ample emotional depth to the Valkyrie's doubts and fears. In her cry, 'Sonnenhell leuchtet der Tag meiner Schmach' she became a twin to Isolde in her rage. Though her final high C came across slightly frayed and unfocused, Jäger's performance was nonetheless a triumph – intensely musical and emotionally compelling.

In a podcast accompanying the Cologne performance in April, a participating first violinist offers revealing insights from within the orchestra.[3] Andreas Preuß speaks of the unusual *rubati* Nagano introduced every four bars or so, and of the constant attention paid to textual clarity. This, he explains, allows for a broader dynamic range as the orchestra engages in active dialogue with the libretto. Playing on gut strings, he notes, yields a warmer sound but also creates more resistance. He identifies the violas as the orchestral 'core' of the *Ring* cycle – they play almost constantly, while the violins are silent for more than a hundred bars at the beginning of Acts I and II. His conclusion was striking: audiences can sometimes gain more from such a concentrated concert version than from a staged one. The lush, romantic effects of the music remind him of Hollywood film scores: 'The score is full of colour changes and shifting light moods.' A full recording of the project, along with accompanying musicological publications, is currently in preparation.

3 <https://klassikfavori.de/andreas-preuss-ueber-den-siegfried-im-the-wagner-cycles/> (accessed 15 Aug. 2025).

American Gods

Simon Williams is enthralled by Santa Fe's 'Walküre'

Die Walküre. Ryan Speedo Green (Wotan), Tamara Wilson (Brünnhilde), Jamez McCorkle (Siegmund), Vida Miknevičiūtė (Sieglinde), Sarah Saturnino (Fricka), Soloman Howard (Hunding), Jasmin Ward (Gerhilde), Wendy Bryn Harmer (Ortlinde), Gretchen Krupp (Waltraute), Jennifer Johnson Cano (Schwertleite), Jessica Faselt (Helmwige), Aubrey Odle (Siegrune), Lauren Randolph (Grimgerde), Deanna Ray Eberhart (Roßweiße); Orchestra of the Santa Fe Opera/James Gaffigan; Melly Still (director), Leslie Travers (designer and costumes), Malcolm Rippeth (lighting), Tinovimbanashe Sibanda (choreography). Santa Fe Opera, 10 July 2025

The Santa Fe Opera's long-delayed inclusion of Wagner into its repertoire continued this season with its first-ever production of a *Ring* music drama. Given Santa Fe's earlier success, especially with *Tristan und Isolde* (2022), the production of *Die Walküre* was awaited with excitement, but at first sight, the permanent setting, designed by Leslie Travers, seems disappointing and prosaic. The entire stage is backed by a high wall with all the allure of monotonous façades common in 1960s public buildings, topped by a platform marked by red posts and festooned in a mishmash of red yarn, representing Valhalla; the stage below is littered with stained and rusty kitchen appliances. This *Walküre*, it might be feared, could turn out to be a dreary tale of grinding poverty and mean-spirited government, far from the exhilarating but anguished spirit of Wagner's drama. Such fears, however, are unfounded. By the end of a thrillingly staged and sung first act, the set throbs with life.

Welfare, it turns out, has nothing to do with the show. Melly Still, the British director making her debut at Santa Fe and her first foray into Wagner, is much more interested in transformation. The institutional façade is composed of wires through which the enaction of dark, eerie forces emanating from past events or from characters' unconscious can be seen, sometimes clearly, sometimes in shade. The yarn-bedecked upper platform is the realm of the gods and their spies; the filthy kitchen appliances are removed by darkly-clad 'shape shifters', whose constant manipulation of scenic props, mundane and fantastic, gives a dynamic quality to the space and establishes an atmosphere of playfulness, infusing the tragedy with a distinct air of carnival, not generally the norm for *Walküre.*

Still displays little concern for stylistic consistency. The melodramatic passions of Siegmund and Sieglinde unfold with a heart-stopping immediacy, often magnified by the broadest of gestures that work well in this theatricalised world. Wotan and his cohort recall modern concepts of *noir,* exuding a disturbing nastiness that undercuts any trust one might have in them, while a statuesquely posed Fricka, a classical figure, dwells in realms of steely indifference. Brünnhilde is a brawler, who would, one suspects, miss marauding on the battlefield more than the affections of her father. This mixture of carnival, war and devastating passions morphs into circus with the Ride of the Valkyries, during which the shape shifters, as resuscitated corpses, swing through the air on ropes, imitating horses, while the Valkyries bellow with glee from Valhalla above. And Wotan's daughters are not your usual sleek armour-clad warriors, but

characters drawn from different periods and styles of European folk drama – a pudgy policeman, a blood-stained Wife of Bath, a begoggled aviator, a Dutch doll, a nun, a medieval knight, a guerilla, a haunted woman. The mayhem delighted some in the audience – including your critic – but horrified others; the vast majority, however, stayed happily until the end.

The danger of such a mixed and rumbustious approach is that it might belittle the action and violate the story that it represents. Generally that is not the case. A coherent narrative runs through the production, so while the vigorous physical activity opens unusual perspectives into many passages in the opera, it does so with the effect of clarifying rather than obscuring the action. And, as one has learnt to expect from Wagner at Santa Fe, musically this *Walküre* was an indisputable success.

James Gaffigan, who had made such a profound impact with his sonorous reading of the 2022 *Tristan und Isolde,* delivered a lucid interpretation of the score in which a multiplicity of leitmotifs synchronised seamlessly with the broader, sweeping melodies that impart such an unusual degree of pathos to *Walküre*. The inner life of the characters, which springs more readily and freshly from the orchestra than in other *Ring* dramas, was powerfully enhanced by the singers who could consistently be heard, even among the most eruptive climaxes. There was a pleasing sense of competition between orchestra and voices, while Gaffigan always ensured that the voices could be heard and the story was clear.

The cast ranged from seasoned Wagnerians to newcomers. Perhaps the most striking was the Lithuanian soprano Vida Miknevičiūtė, already a star in Europe, but making her American debut. She was a sensation. A slight woman with a delicate prettiness, she seemed the embodiment of physical frailty, but her voice was colossal, flawless and uncommonly pure. Her bestowal of the name of Siegmund on her brother at the end of Act I was an awe-inspiring paean, a moment compellingly recalled as she reacted to the news of Siegfried's coming birth and Brünnhilde's courageous sacrifice to protect mother and future son in Act III. Miknevičiūtė was also a subtle actor, who made of Sieglinde an enigmatic but fascinating blend of defiance, fear and devil-may-care malice. Her Siegmund, Jamez McCorkle, is also the possessor of a remarkable voice, with the heft of a Heldentenor but with a surprisingly sharp edge. As a result, he can be heard with ease, suggesting both inner grace and hidden reserves of strength, which makes the waste of the Volsung's death that much more tragic. His rough exterior gave credibility to Siegmund's existential anguish. Solomon Howard's Hunding embodied the man's vicious jealousy to perfection, and although the role is small, it actively stuck in one's memory.

The upper realm of the gods was partly cast with familiar voices. Tamara Wilson sang Brünnhilde; apart from a seeming hiccup in her earliest 'Hojotoho's, she sang smoothly and with conviction. Interestingly, among the motley of costumes (also designed by Leslie Travers), she was the only performer to wear what was unmistakably a traditionally designed Wagnerian costume. This had the intriguing effect of drawing our eyes to her as the central figure of the drama. Ryan Speedo Green is fast advancing to eminence as Wotan. In *Rheingold* last year in Los Angeles he was a ruthless man of power, but in *Die Walküre* Wotan is a more complex figure. This was in part signified by a crown of thorns, making him look not so much like Jesus Christ as Prospero from

Letter of the law: Wotan (Ryan Speedo Green) displays his runes. Photo: Santa Fe Opera/Curtis Brown

The Tempest, a figure who lives between the extremes of venerable wisdom and brutal vengeance. This unexpected touch gave Green an inscrutable stage presence, allowing him to explore Wotan as a figure of contradiction. While he sometimes lacked warmth in the tender parts of the role, the contradictions that compose Wotan's character began to emerge clearly. Unexpectedly, Green's Wotan surrendered easily to Fricka's rigorous demands. Sarah Saturnino, a newcomer to the Wagnerian repertoire, was an impressive, even intimidating presence as Wotan's wife. Her substantial and evenly toned voice was more than sufficient to establish the full authority of the goddess and to articulate clearly the tragic bonds of time and consequence that bind the god. Her stiff, white costume, encircled by tangled red yarn, indicated that she was the dominant power in Valhalla, but a touch of warmth in her voice suggested regret at the destruction that following her divine duty had wrought on her own marriage.

The varied dramatic landscape of this production does not plumb the deepest emotional levels of the drama. Wotan and Brünnhilde's farewell, especially, draws few tears as it is skimpily characterised, and the lighting, by Malcolm Rippeth, so evocative in earlier scenes, is unremarkable, so that father and daughter part against the dull institutional wall that had first faced us when we entered the auditorium. It is a disappointing ending; one wonders whether there had been time for sufficient rehearsal. But for most of its length this *Walküre* enthralled its audience. As one left, it was clear from the audience's energy that Santa Fe Opera had filled Wagner's most pathos-laden work with a life-enhancing power. We can only hope that the company revisits the *Ring* in future years.

Dancing with Uncle Wolf

Richard Moukarzel is unconvinced by an operatic depiction of Wagner's legacy

Wahnfried: The Birth of the Wagner Cult (music by Avner Dorman, libretto by Lutz Hübner and Sarah Nemitz). Mark Le Brocq (Houston Stewart Chamberlain), Susan Bullock (Cosima Wagner), Meeta Raval (Anna Chamberlain/Eva Wagner), Edmund Danon (Hermann Levi), Andrew Watts (Siegfried Wagner), Alexandra Lowe (Winifred/Isolde Wagner), Oskar McCarthy (Wagner-Daemon), Adrian Dwyer (The Master's Disciple, a.k.a. Hitler), Antoin Herrera-López Kessel (Kaiser Wilhelm II/Bakunin); Longborough Festival Orchestra/Justin Brown. Polly Graham (director), Max Johns (designer), Anisha Fields (costumes), Peter Small (lighting), Adi Gortler (movement). 27 May 2025

The seasoned *Wagner Journal* reader may be familiar with the rustic charms of Longborough – I was not. Brainchild of the late Martin Graham, Cotswold-lad-turned-opera-visionnaire, the festival takes place every year within the walls of a former barn – in which, I am told, chickens were sometimes kept. This delightful venue is one of the many bucolic getaways that sprout all across England at the opening of the summer season, with long breaks during which one may enjoy the outdoor gardens – weather allowing.

Alas, no chickens were seen on this opening night, although many a strange bird graced the stage. Avner Dorman's *Wahnfried: The Birth of the Wagner Cult* (2016), on a libretto by Lutz Hübner and Sarah Nemitz, explores the problematic afterlife of Wagner's legacy and ideas in the decades following the composer's death. Centring on the figure of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the opera is intended as a sort of satirical review of Wagnerism, but mostly succeeds in airing Wahnfried's dirty laundry. From the severity of Cosima up until the irruption of Adolf Hitler upon the Bayreuth stage, one contemplates Wagner's troubled posterity, personified by a misbehaving 'Wagner-Daemon'. Clad in a parakeet-green frock and jockstrap, the composer's ghost can be seen wreaking havoc throughout the opera and getting his descendants in a muddle – which, to be fair, does justice to the embarrassing mess that is the Wagnerian legacy.

The librettists and composer apparently sought to defuse the sinister politics of Wahnfried by opting for a crudely comical setting. The opera unfolds as a succession of short-ish, purposefully anti-Wagnerian sung numbers, reminiscent of Weill's and Brecht's operas. This caricatural intent is evident in Dorman's score, which, if not groundbreaking, calls for a whole panoply of percussion and wind (most of the latter doubling on slide whistles) that evokes Prokofiev's or Shostakovich's grittiest moments. And indeed, there was much whistling, buzzing and plucking to be heard from the orchestra pit under the direction of Justin Brown. The music is particularly eclectic and frisky as one watches the Wagner-Daemon dancing suggestively with Bakunin to an orgy of anarchic glee, aptly putting the 'twerk' in *Gesamtkunstwerk*. At other moments, the orchestra indulges in mock-Wagnerian gloom, with mini brass choruses solemnly supporting Cosima's grief and indignation. This highly derivative patchwork soon lapses into a tedium of cartoonish wit, which hardly does justice to the seriousness of the racism and petty feuding that so plagued Bayreuth society. It is unclear whether the opera truly proposes a critique of the 'Wagner cult' in this humorous vein, or if it simply glosses over it.

The plot of *Wahnfried* puts forth an awkward carousel of historical figures. From Kaiser Wilhelm II and Siegfried Wagner to Hitler himself, the opera unfolds as a parade of despots and mediocrities where each character is given a moment to soliloquise before rejoining the sorry-go-round of Wagnerian posterity. Rather than 'humanising' those fraught historical personalities in all their fallibility (as its creators claim), the work ends by whipping up a series of rather one-dimensional figures, further exacerbated by the staging choices of director Polly Graham. For example, Chamberlain is hopping around catching butterflies in Germany, but feels alienated as a foreigner. The main role was held by Mark Le Brocq: a clear and eloquent *Nerventenor*, as it were, whose brisk delivery was quite compelling given the bilingual nature of the scene (Chamberlain sings in English at first, but then insists on becoming *echt Deutsch*). The scene features a great deal of pantomimic acting by the chorus, which is quite intriguing until it becomes redundant. Cosima, in a solemn Wilhelmine interior draped with red curtains and lined with a dozen Wagner busts (the team's approximation of Haus Wahnfried), agonises over the late Meister's legacy. The illustrious Susan Bullock was authoritative in the role of the grieving matriarch, with a full-bodied, quintessentially Wagnerian timbre. Enter Chamberlain, who promises to safeguard the Master's work and ideas, supported by a chorus of Bayreuth groupies all garbed in Wagnerian merch – bestrewn with 'W' badges, patterns and other accessories, just in case we haven't got the point. Later, Chamberlain and his supporters enthusiastically proclaim their racial-cultural creed. When the poor Hermann Levi tries to protest, they all gang up on him to the sounds of a burlesque march while chanting 'Die arische Rasse'. So much for artistic subtlety. Siegfried Wagner returns from one of his illicit nocturnal trysts; his is a dainty countertenor role (sung by the excellent Andrew Watts) apparently intended to connote the character's sexuality. This stereotyping of Wahnfried's 'token gay' as a sort of effete Pierrot Lunaire, vocalising open syllables into the night, is probably one of the opera's most degrading ideas. Surely, there must be fairer ways to portray 'queer' historical figures than reducing them to walking clichés.

Need I say more? The nonchalant manner of *Wahnfried* is sadly unconvincing. If amusing at first, its attempts at satire end up falling short of any real criticism, lapsing into a tediousness that not even a great cast can redeem. One may have to wait for an opera that will truly make the Wagner-Daemon roll in his grave – this one will merely make him groove.

Go to the devil! The Wagner-Daemon (Oskar McCarthy) wreaking havoc. Photo: Longborough Festival Opera/ Matthew Williams-Ellis

Sturm und Drang

Edward Christian-Hare braves the elements for Opera Holland Park's first Wagner production

Der fliegende Holländer. Paul Carey Jones (The Dutchman), Eleanor Dennis (Senta), Robert Winslade Anderson (Daland), Neal Cooper (Erik), Angharad Lyddon (Mary), Colin Judson (Steersman); Opera Holland Park Chorus and City of London Sinfonia/Peter Selwyn; Julia Burbach (director), Naomi Dawson (designer), Sussie Juhlin-Wallén (costumes), Robert Price (lighting), Cameron McMillan (choreography). Holland Park, London, 7 June 2025

Sometimes the weather forecast is wrong and sometimes it is right. In this case, it was right. Almost as soon as the first act began, the heavens opened onto the canopy at Opera Holland Park (OHP). Then the surtitles flashed inconsistently on their screens.

Yet the audience's spirits were not dampened (even if their coats were) in the delightfully intimate auditorium. The spray of the rain during Act I was a welcome addition that, combined with those famous chromatic string runs and an overpowered wind machine, added a rare degree of verisimilitude to Wagner's oceanic drama.

Julia Burbach directs this *Holländer*, following her previous productions of Mascagni's *L'amico Fritz* and Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* at OHP. What was clear early on in this performance was the strength of her relationship with conductor Peter Selwyn, with whom she had collaborated on the Hackney *Ring* in 2022. The OHP Chorus were well choreographed and performed generally in sync with Selwyn's baton and the resident City of London Sinfonia. Suitable use is made of all parts of the stage, which includes ships' ladders ascending from floor to ceiling. The Norwegian sailors and village maids frequently enter the stage from the seating area – a lovely touch, enabled by the intimacy of OHP. The orchestra – albeit a small one – is sunk in the centre of the stage. All these factors complement one another wonderfully, creating a feeling of involvement for the audience well-nigh impossible at other venues.

Selwyn ensured the dynamics of the orchestra contrasted well during the Overture, demonstrating attention to detail in rehearsal. The cadences were punchy though the staccato at the end of phrases could have been sharper. The brass were occasionally out of sync, perhaps because they were situated at opposite ends of the pit, but this was probably necessary for sonic balance given the small space.

Holländer is notorious for its many versions; Wagner revised it even more often than *Tannhäuser*. There were the original 1840 sketches for *Le Hollandais volant* which evolved into *Der fliegende Holländer*, composed in poverty in Paris in 1841. The premiere finally came in Dresden in 1843 but Wagner revised the score in 1844, 1846 and 1852, toning down the brass and the tremolando criticised by Berlioz. In 1860 he replaced the *forte* endings of both the Overture and Act III with a quotation from Senta's Ballad and a motif from *Tristan*, including harps. In 1864 he made minor adjustments to stage directions, libretto and score. And after attending a performance of the work at Munich in 1880, Wagner removed a C minor chord originally scored for trombones towards the end of Act II.

For this production, Selwyn conducted Tony Burke's orchestral reduction – for thirty-eight players – of the Dresden version. This means there are sadly no harps during the

Overture, but attention is diverted by Burbach's decision to introduce first Eleanor Dennis (Senta) and then the village maids to the stage. By the end of the Overture they are all staring at the audience, eerily demanding its attention.

The experienced Wagnerian, tenor Colin Judson, was in fine fettle as the Steersman, eliciting some laughter during his interaction with Robert Winslade Anderson (Daland). Anderson projected his bass over the orchestra admirably at first, but struggled to do so in Scene 3 alongside Paul Carey Jones's Dutchman. Again, Selwyn had excellent control of dynamics, ensuring precise crescendos from his musicians, especially during the Dutchman's narration. Jones was a powerful Dutchman with a commanding presence.

But more could be made of the psychological narrative of *Holländer* during Act I. Senta lies motionless in her bed elevated above the stage, next to an empty frame which the Dutchman later gazes through, the implication being that she is dreaming of him as the action plays out elsewhere. This is a relatively unimaginative method of portraying Senta's obsession which somewhat limits Dennis's dramatic potential. Instead, Burbach might have opted for something akin to Harry Kupfer's 1978 Bayreuth production in which Senta is apparently awake but actually unconscious, the perceived action consequently taking place in her mind.

The Spinning Chorus that opens Act II whizzed along at a lively tempo which has become the norm in recent interpretations in concert and on record. Selwyn's tempo certainly exceeded the *Allegretto moderato* noted in the score, but this was the right decision and surely tallies more closely with the action of spinning threads even if Felix Weingartner – editor of the 1896 edition of the score – disagreed. The village maids, led by the dynamic mezzo Angharad Lyddon (Mary), were brilliantly portrayed by the OHP Chorus. But Eleanor Dennis rightly dominated the stage as Senta during Act II, captivating with action and voice. She conveyed her broken relationship with Erik (Neal Cooper) persuasively, but – whether through her fault or Burbach's – fell victim to a dramatic inconsistency in Scene 6 when she is supposed to be 'rooted to the spot' in the words of Daland but was moving towards the Dutchman. This is forgivable, though, in her otherwise strong performance. Neal Cooper interacted with Dennis convincingly, demonstrating his mature Wagnerian style and firm grasp of Erik's character.

As the light outside faded during Act III, the auditorium of Opera Holland Park became even more atmospheric. The Dutchman's crew came into its own, threateningly clad in burqa-like costumes. Selwyn took the players and cast to a cathartic close at a terrific pace.

A different matter: before the performance began, Opera Holland Park CEO James Clutton gave a short speech thanking everyone for supporting the organisation in troubling times for UK opera. It's worth bearing in mind that OHP receives no public funding yet consistently produces high-quality and ambitious opera every summer. Your correspondent was generously granted access to the private members' area, where Clutton was helping out behind the bar. In any other sector, a company director marking twenty-five years of service would most likely celebrate by entertaining donors rather than serving drinks. Whilst there is some crossover, it signals a warm and supportive company culture that Clutton was doing the latter. All power to them.

Books

Convention and Invention

Thomas Grey gets to grips with a new collection of analytical essays

Steven Vande Moortele, ed., *Wagner Studies* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2025). xiv + 246 pp. £90.00. ISBN: 978-1-108-83706-4

In the wider universe of 'Wagner studies', as noted in the introduction to this new *Wagner Studies* collection, close analytical engagement with the musical scores occupies a relatively small space. This has to do both with the seemingly infinite range of Wagner as cultural phenomenon, on the one hand, and with the often recondite discourses of academic music theory, on the other. The origin of this collection in a pandemic-era online symposium of (mostly) music theory-identified scholars is evident in what can feel at times like a conversation among initiates; but the conversational aspect, evident in much mutual citation within the footnotes, also creates a satisfying sense of coherence. And while exegesis of Wagnerian harmony, in particular, has often necessarily tended toward the abstruse in explicating the novel challenges of his mature practice, a leitmotif throughout these essays is Wagner's abiding debt to musical tradition, operatic and otherwise.

Thus the heading of William Marvin's chapter, 'Wagner and the Uses of Convention?', could apply to the book as a whole, or at least the central sections grouped under the rubrics 'Form, Drama and Convention' and 'Time, Texture and Tonality'. Both Marvin and Steven Vande Moortele ('*Scena*, Form and Drama in Act 1 of *Die Walküre*') address the background presence in Wagner's oeuvre of the 'double aria' format common to most early to mid-19th-century Italian and French opera, dubbed by early Verdi scholar Abramo Basevi as *la solita forma* (the usual form), and revived by Italian opera scholars Philip Gossett and Harold Powers as a critical tool for appreciating 'the uses of convention' in *primo ottocento* opera. In this model, a lyrical cantabile for one, two or more voices is followed by a more dynamic cabaletta or, in finale-ensemble scenes, a concluding stretta, both of those regular, closed lyric forms being introduced by looser, dramatically 'kinetic' (Harold Powers's term) concatenations of recitative, arioso, or other more declamatory material. In *Beyond Reason: Wagner contra Nietzsche* (University of California Press, 2017) Karol Berger proposed that the double-aria lyric prototype actually informs nearly all of Wagner's music dramas, at least in some crucial passages of (relatively) 'closed' musical structure. Marvin's chapter provides a useful complement to Berger's study by surveying the presence of the prototype throughout all the pre-*Ring* operas (none of them discussed by Berger). As could be expected, this presence is most overt in the first three operas, but also in the 'transitional' case of *Der fliegende*

Holländer and the first two act finales of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. More speculatively, Marvin suggests that the entire Tannhäuser–Venus scene of Act I, normally heard to be structured around the hero's strophic song to Venus ('Dir töne Lob!') is actually embedded within a 'scene and aria' structure defined by the goddess's contributions, culminating in the angry cabaletta-style rebuke, 'Hin zu den kalten Menschen flieh'. (Such a reading would reinforce Venus's role as a controlling force from which Tannhäuser seeks to free himself.) Vande Moortele's chapter directly addresses Berger's claim that the entire first act of *Die Walküre* is a kind of 'operatic *scena*' (or rather, scene and duet) 'writ large'.[1] In broader terms of musical dramaturgy, Berger is surely correct. As Vande Moortele argues, however, the operatic formal model can be more plausibly applied to the bulk of Scene 3, from where Sieglinde re-enters following Siegmund's monologue, with Siegmund's famous 'Spring Song' ('Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond') as its central cantabile axis. It is worth noting, too, that Wagner's adaptation of the *solita forma* model – whether in the Tannhäuser–Venus scene, the first act of *Die Walküre*, or the Act II 'love duet' of *Tristan und Isolde* – vividly points up a semantic misnomer of sorts in Harold Powers's designation of both lyric–melodic phases as 'static' (albeit from a dramatic point of view). Wagner's characters may be momentarily stuck in place, true to operatic form, but their musical–expressive strivings in the final stage of these (quasi-) numbers could scarcely be more kinetic, dynamically propulsive – a point that extends to their more conventional operatic kin in many a cabaletta or stretta in Donizetti and earlier Verdi.

An important background to this volume is the editor's status as a leading exponent of the so-called 'new *Formenlehre*' as extended from Classical to Romantic or later forms and genres. Vande Moortele's earlier work clarified issues in the formal structure and thematic syntax of 'cyclically' conceived tone-poems of the Liszt–Strauss tradition, and a more recent study extends William Caplin's form–functional theories of Classical thematic procedure and James Hepokoski's systematic parsing of formal procedures in the Classical sonata to a wide corpus of Romantic overtures.[2] Graham Hunt illustrates the extent to which the most important leitmotivic formulas in *Lohengrin* – Elsa's first instrumental and vocal appearances, Lohengrin's *Frageverbot* ('forbidden question'), the Grail theme of the Prelude, and Ortrud's sinister, brooding instrumental signature – can all be read as variants or extensions of Caplin's form–functional period or sentence designs. He further applies the concept of 'rotational form' (a way of reading the thematic components of sonata form or looser derivations thereof as a repeating, evolving series) to the Act I Prelude and the last 150 bars of the Ortrud–Friedrich scene beginning Act II. 'Classical' thematic functions (e.g. 'basic idea, contrasting idea, continuation, cadence') and harmonically

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1 Karol Berger, *Beyond Reason: Wagner contra Nietzsche* (Oakland CA, 2017), 78. Reviewed by Arnold Whittall in *TWJ*, xi/2 (2017), 83–90, <https://tinyurl.com/3bettvrw> (all links here accessed 1 Sep. 2025).

2 William Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* (New York, 1998); James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory* (New York, 2006); Steven Vande Moortele, *Two-Dimensional Sonata Form: Form and Cycle in Single-Movement Instrumental Works by Liszt, Strauss, Schoenberg and Zemlinsky* (Leeuven, 2009) and *The Romantic Overture and Musical Form from Rossini to Wagner* (Cambridge, 2017).

The 'central axis': Sieglinde (Lee Bisset) and Siegmund (Bryan Register) in Act I of *Die Walküre*, Singapore 2020. Photo: Brandon Koh

articulated phrase structures are demonstrated, but are also – as one might imagine – subject to elements of expansion, 'detour' and formal–expressive climax (*telos*) serving Wagner's decidedly Romantic and dramatic purposes.

Three chapters towards the end of the volume share an interest in balancing the more radical implications of Wagner's mature harmonic practice with the norms of functional tonality, in keeping with the theme of 'tradition and the individual talent' (to invoke the title of T. S. Eliot's apposite essay) underlying much of the contents. I include here Ariane Jeßulat's chapter on 'Wagner's Late Counterpoint' because it mainly concerns the role of chromatic voice-leading in some of Wagner's most characteristic, hypnotic or trance-like leitmotivic progressions (Kundry's awakening by Klingsor or Brünnhilde's and Erda's 'magic sleep' formulas, anticipated in Ortrud's conjuring of pagan magic in defiance of her Christian enemies), rather than imitative counterpoint or the superimposition of independent melodic or motivic lines, as at the conclusion of the *Meistersinger* Prelude. Jeßulat postulates the role of 'cumulated and layered conventions, re-worked and re-formulated by memory' in the contrapuntal–harmonic convolutions of Wagnerian 'late style' (p. 179). Archaic formulas such as the 'Dresden Amen' in *Parsifal* or refracted memories of Bach, Kirnberger, or simple part-writing pedagogy 'provided a diatonic matrix for chromatic reformulations' (p. 165). An analogous layering of innovation over conventional models is the starting point for Alexander Rehding's expert survey of early Wagnerian musical analysts, almost exclusively concerned with interpretation of the harmonic practice in and around *Tristan*. Key among those figures is Hugo Riemann, whose system of harmonic analysis – still standard

in the German-speaking world – accommodated late-Romantic chromaticism of the Wagnerian style to a sort of centrifugal theory of basic tonal functions (tonic, dominant, subdominant), indicating various stages of departure from those bases with what can look to the uninitiated like a rather complex system of hieroglyphics. It is that same set of signs and a related 'transformational' capital-letter shorthand, along with such additional esoterica as Richard Cohn's 'hexatonic cycles', that will keep J.P.E. Harper-Scott and Oliver Chandler's essay ('Waltraute's Plaint: Riemannian Tonal Function and Dramatic Narrative') off-limits to non-initiates. Yet here too, the underlying message has to do with the continued importance of functional tonality for the semantics of harmonic alteration techniques in Wagner's most 'advanced' language. Specifically, Harper-Scott and Chandler argue that traditional Riemannian theory, rather than its more liberal and relativist 'Neo-Riemannian' offspring, is the more pertinent lens for analysing the repeated, portentous distortions of the Wotan/Valhalla motif at the start of Waltraute's report to Brünnhilde on the sad state of things back home. 'Neo-Riemannian' theory developed an explanatory system for what Schoenberg dubbed the 'wandering tonality' of Wagner and other late Romantics, in which smooth chromatic voice-leading came to supplant the role of a single controlling tonic. Harper-Scott and Chandler, by contrast, argue that, however chromatic alterations or distortions may serve to darken the import of the Valhalla motif and to suggest the inexorable weakening of Wotan's will, Wotan's authority still continues to exert itself in the role of a controlling tonic (here F sharp/G flat). The attenuated harmonic functions in this passage, they suggest, 'protest against the right of a social authority to make the rules' (quoting Adorno) 'while continuing, ultimately, to obey them' (p. 159).

The contributions by Tobias Janz ('Time, Sound and Regression in *Tristan und Isolde*') and Anna Stoll Knecht ('Silence and Gesture in Mahler's Ninth Symphony and Wagner's *Parsifal*') are less strictly music theory-based, though still grounded in details of the musical score. Janz is concerned with broadly phenomenological categories of temporal perception, sound and listening, within the opera and from an audience perspective. Such themes are clearly germane to *Tristan* at various levels, but a certain conceptual obscurity tends to supplant the understandable tendency toward technical obscurity elsewhere in this volume, such as in repeated but diffuse invocations of 'dramaturgy' or 'musical dramaturgy' (some of these apparently rooted in the author's 2006 dissertation on the 'dramaturgy of sound' or *Klangdramaturgie* in the *Ring* cycle). Knecht's essay on the reverberation of a specific, pervasive Wagnerian melodic gesture from *Parsifal* in Mahler's Ninth Symphony is part of an ongoing study of Wagner's impact on Mahler.[3] This gesture, a simple ornamental 'turn' figure, can be traced back to numerous earlier Wagnerian models (notably Rienzi's 'Prayer'). Mainly it tends to operate as a melodic intensifier, whether expressing blissful diatonic innocence or anguished chromatic suffering. The few but pointed 'citations' of the figure in the Ninth remind us that such intensifications were a Mahlerian specialty.

The first two contributions (by fully theory-certified authors) are rather more in the nature of personal impressions, or Wagnerian 'confessions', we might say. In his somewhat salaciously, if intriguingly, titled chapter 'Bottoming for Wagner: Listening,

3 A related instalment appeared in *TWJ*, xi/3 (2017), 4–26, <https://tinyurl.com/yp2sdfv3>.

Analysis and (Gay-Male) Subjectivity', Matthew Bribitzer-Stull proposes that identifying, and identifying with, the subject-position of the passive member in a gay male sexual encounter can capture an aspect of the Wagnerian listening experience – of feeling overwhelmed, or indeed penetrated, by the force of the music at a key climactic moment – that has been variously remarked on throughout the reception history of the composer. A dutifully detailed Schenkerian graph of the *Lohengrin* Prelude and a metrical–harmonic chart of the Act II Prelude from *Die Walküre* have something of the effect of penitential offerings at the end of the essay, but they do lend technical support to the verbally articulated impressions they accompany. The *Walküre* Act II Prelude example illustrates Bribitzer-Stull's thesis more viscerally. The D major climax of the *Lohengrin* Prelude is well described, but the observation that 'its functional transformation into an activated ii^6 pre-dominant' has an overwhelming, attention-demanding effect begs a larger question of how or why the (more passive?) subdominant area has been allotted this climactic function here in the first place. The volume as a whole is introduced, fittingly, by veteran Wagnerian Arnold Whittall reflecting broadly on the 'disorienting' effects of *Tristan und Isolde* (as perhaps Wagner's signature creative achievement) on listeners, writers and other composers over the years. Curiously, in pondering various loosely 'modernist' responses to the end of *Tristan* (by theorist David Lewin, opera scholar Sandra Corse, composers Luciano Berio and Luigi Nono), Whittall conveys a general unease with the consolation of Isolde's Liebestod/Transfiguration, as a potential betrayal of the unremitting 'disorientations' characteristic of everything that has gone before. By contrast, he quotes post-modernist Louis Andriessen claiming, rather breezily, that 'the nice thing about tonality is that the key is only established at the end', and hence: '*Tristan* ends simply in B major.' Whatever disorientating effects the phenomenon of Wagner may continue to produce, the collective wisdom of *Wagner Studies* reassures us (I think) that, as a composer, he never lost touch with the basics of operatic form and functional tonality that had nurtured him from the start.

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Paul Dawson-Bowling studied classics and philosophy at school and Oxford, and joined the Civil Service before beginning, at 29, to train as a Doctor of Medicine. For thirty years he was a family doctor in Kent. In retirement, he long remained a trustee of the Sick Doctors Trust.

In 1958, when still a schoolboy, he bicycled across Europe for the Bayreuth Festival. For twenty-five years he was principal reviewer for ***Wagner News***, the Journal of the London Wagner Society. He has published articles in the UK and America; and is well known as a lecturer. For twelve years his annual Paul Dawson-Bowling Presentations and his study days were highlights of the Wagner Society (London) calendar. He was married to the late harpsichordist Elizabeth de la Porte, whose great love of Bach and Couperin he shared.

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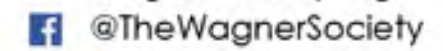
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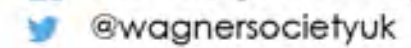
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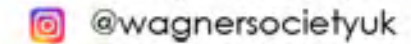
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