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THE RESULTS OF THE WAGNER QUESTIONAIRE

by Steve Sokolow

In the spring of 1990 I sent a questionnaire to the members of the WSNC and other Wagner Societies in order to collect some demographic information on Wagnerians and to survey their opinions on topics Wagnerian and operatic. I was gratified to receive 162 responses to this questionnaire, about 60 from our own members and almost 60 from the Chicago Wagner Society. Many more came from New York, the Southern U.S. and some from Canada. I've seen polls on people's attitudes towards crucially important political issues based on smaller samples than this, so I have no compunction about publishing these results as absolutely definitive information on the demographics and opinions of hard-core Wagnerians. In reality, of course, I recommend that you assign roughly the same validity to the results of this poll as you would to a poll you see in the *Chronicle*. (i.e. none whatsoever).

This was my first attempt at census taking. As a result the questions were not worded as sharply as they might have been. The caustic responses which routinely appeared as answers to some questions proved this. I was probably most severely reprimanded by members of my own family, who sacrificed their anonymity to get in some good licks at some of the sillier questions. Of course I knew that questions like "what is your favorite Wagnerian opera?" or "please assign a number to the following composers, given that Wagner gets 100" probably have no reasonable answers, but I decided that they were worth asking anyway. I'll point out some of the defects of the questions as I discuss them individually below. If we do this again, we'll surely do a better job of framing the questions.

Averages mean absolutely nothing in the case of most of these questions, so rather than giving the mean and standard deviation of each result, I'll try to give an idea of the way Wagnerians spread through each category. Just a few meaningless averages: the average Wagnerian is aged 54, has been a Wagnerian for 25 years and has 1.3 children. (See Figure 1) When asked to rank her/himself politically on a scale of -100 on the far left to +100 on the far right, he/she covers the whole spectrum, and averages out at 24 in the liberal direction. (See Figure 2) (What left and right mean these days is, of course, anyone's guess. Can anyone tell me what the newspapers mean when they refer to someone in Czechoslovakia as left wing or right wing?) He/she reads 30 books a year, watches TV eight

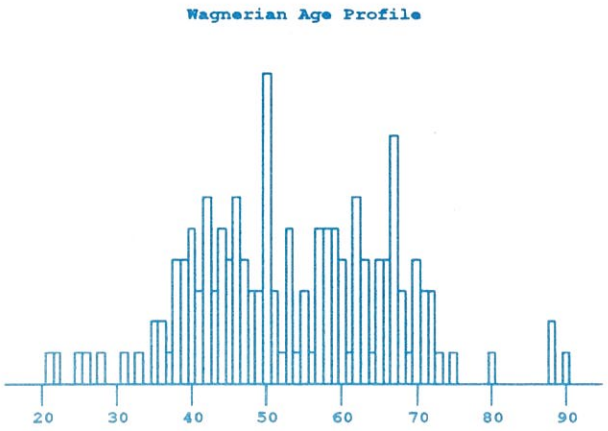


Figure 1

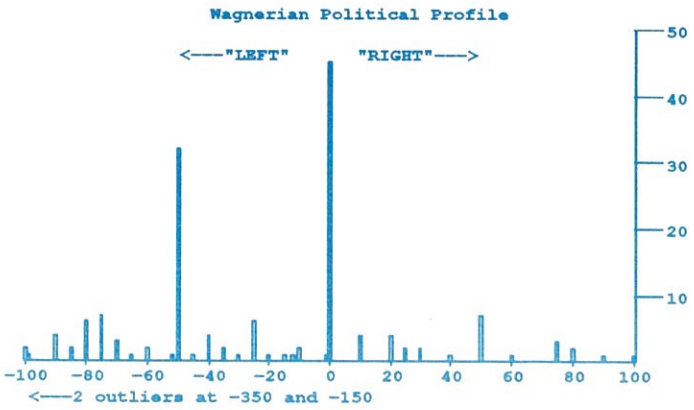


Figure 2

hours a week, listens to the radio 17 hours each week. He/she attends 5 plays, 12 concerts and 14 operas each year, and attends religious services 18 times per year. Breaking down the opera attendance, 43% people attend between 0 and 9 operas per year, 34% between 10 and 19, 13% between 20 and 29, 6% between 30 and 49 performances, 3% between 50 and 80 performances, and one hardy soul attends 85 operas a year!

Our respondents ranged in age from 21 to 90 with only 5 people in their twenties, 20 in their thirties, 45 in their forties, 33 in their fifties, 36 in their sixties, 8 in their seventies, 1 in his/her eighties, and 3 in their nineties. A mature group then. Two-thirds were male, one third female. Of our respondents, 44% are married, 38% are single, 28% divorced, and 4% widowed.

When it comes to religion, a plurality of correspondents (29) gave their religious preference as "None." 26 people declined to state their religion. 23 are Catholics, 19 Protestant, 11 Christians, 10 Episcopalians, 9 Jews (16 if you count those identifying themselves as Jews as a nationality), 6 Lutherans, 3 agnostics, 3 atheists, 2 Anglicans, 2 secular humanists, 1 Unitarian, 1 Christian Scientist, 1 Evangelical Christian, 1 Buddhist, 1 Quaker, 1 Morman, 1 pagan, 1 witch, 1 existentialist, and 1 Wagnerian. Also, one person wrote "Mother Earth" in this category and another wrote "self." The average figure of 18 religious services per year seems larger when you consider the number of non-religious Wagnerians.

Ethnicities were too numerous to mention, as were occupations. 32% of our respondents play the piano, and 26% play other instruments including the Contrabass Tuba, Bass Drum, Bagpipes, Triangle, Harmonica and Accordion . . .

Now to the more specifically operatic and Wagnerian questions. Our respondents have seen fewer performances of Wagner operas than the above attendance figures might suggest. On average, the least-seen operas are *Parsifal* and *Tannhäuser* (each with 3.6 viewings) followed by *Meistersinger* at 3.9, *Tristan* at 4.1, and *Holländer* at 4.5. At the top come *Lohengrin* at 5.2 and *The Ring* at 5.3. When asked to name their favorite Wagner opera, the results have a much larger variance. Unfortunately I did not tell people whether to consider *The Ring* as one opera, or to consider each *Ring* opera individually. Furthermore, I did not tell people whether or not to consider the three early operas or to start with *Holländer*. I will just report that the results ranked as follows:

Favorite Wagner opera	**Number of people**
Walküre	26
Ring	24
Tristan	23
Parsifal	19
Meistersinger	18
Götterdämerung	14
Lohengrin	11
Siegfried	9
Holländer	2
Rheingold	1
Tannhäuser	1

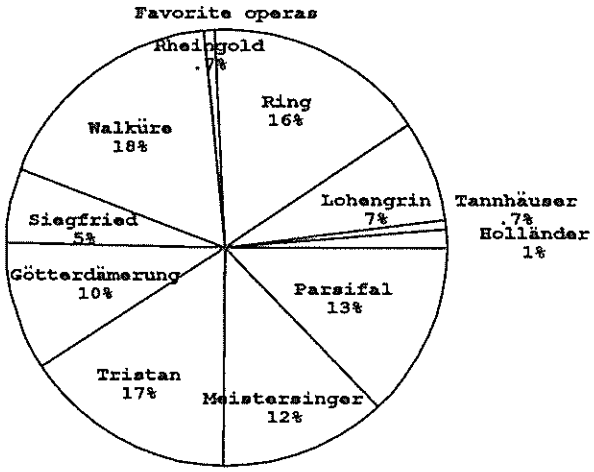


Figure 3

The results for least favorite opera were consistent:

Least Favorite Wagner opera	**Number of people**
Tannhäuser	21
Holländer	17
Feen	13
Parsifal	13
Rienzi	12
Meistersinger	10
Lohengrin	9
Liebesverbot	5
Siegfried	4
Tristan	4 (!)
Rheingold	1

Clearly, *Tannhäuser* is not in favor these days.

I made some attempt to correlate favorite opera with age and gender. Age results were inconclusive, though the people who prefer *Parsifal* tend to be younger than average (median age 45) and those preferring *Tristan* a little older (median age 59). Gender results were more interesting. (See Figures 3, 4 & 5) Figures 4 and 5 show

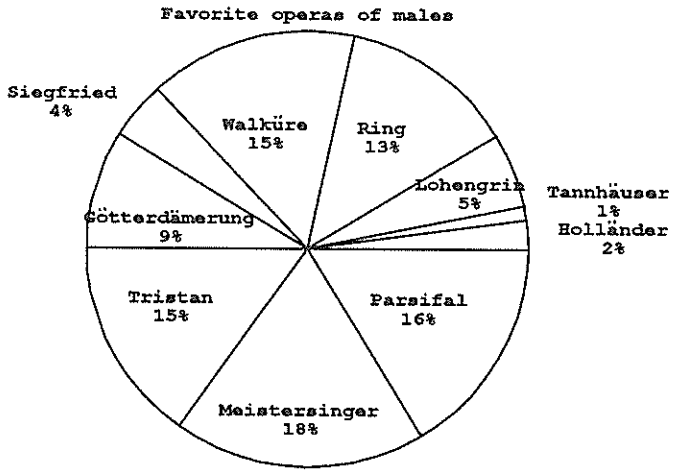


Figure 4

men's favorite operas and women's favorite operas. The big news here is obviously about *Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*. Apparently fewer women than men favor these operas. 62% of women mentioned *Ring* operas as opposed to 41% of men. Explanations of these results are earnestly solicited. Further work on the correlations is in progress and will be reported on later.

When asked to name their favorite opera composer outside of Wagner, 52 people named Verdi, 35 named Mozart, 31 named Richard Strauss, and 26 named Puccini. With some difference in ordering this is pretty much the same as opera audiences everywhere. There are also gender differences here. (See Figures 6, 7 & 8) Apparently women favor Verdi more than men do and favor Mozart less. Is this a real effect? If so, is this true for all opera lovers or only Wagnerians?

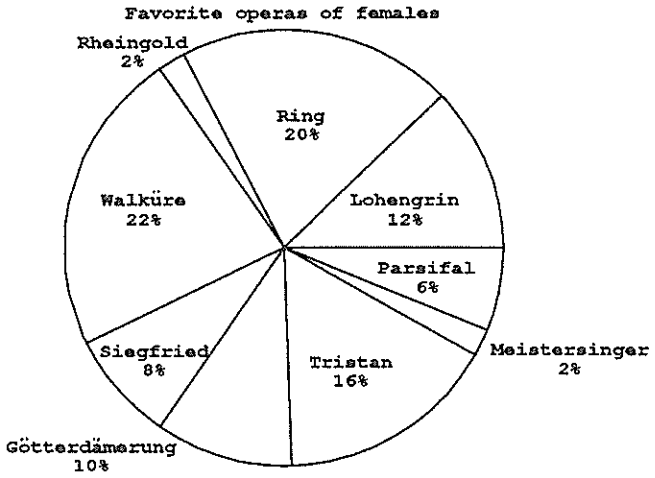


Figure 5

Also mentioned: Beethoven (4), Berlioz and Rossini (2 each), and one mention each for Bizet, Britten, Bartok, Handel, Bach, Bellini, Henze, Debussy, Massenet, Tchaikovsky and Monteverdi. People were also asked to rank these other composers on a scale from 0 to 100, supposing that Wagner would get 100. Some people objected strenuously to the inanity of this question, as well they might. But we pollsters shrink at nothing, so I will report that when their scores are averaged, the results (except for Berg) are amazingly uniform: Mozart and Verdi get a 77, Puccini gets a 75, and R. Strauss a 74. Berg gets a 46. One respondent argued that the only way to make sense of this question was to score each composer by the percentage of his operas which are currently in the repertoire. Since I arbitrarily assigned Wagner 100 when his actual success rate was 10/13, by this method Mozart would get 37, Verdi 72, Berg 135, Puccini 89 and Strauss 61.

Respondents were also asked to name their favorite non-Wagnerian opera. In this case, Verdi operas were cited 36 times, Mozart and Strauss operas 29 times each, Puccini 24 times and Beethoven 6 times. Here, too, people's taste was not terribly different from the general opera audience, except that the top three operas mentioned, while certainly generally popular, are not at the very top of the general opera audience's list. The envelopes, please:

16 Rosenkavelier
13 Otello
11 Don Giovanni
10 Figaro, Boheme
9 Aida
7 Zauberflöte
6 Fidelio
5 Turandot, Salome, Norma
4 Carmen, Tosca, Frau
3 Rigoletto, Traviata, Butterfly, Freischutz, Falstaff
2 Suor Angelica, Ariadne auf Naxos, Elektra, Faust, Contes de Hoffman, Don Carlo, Pelleas and Melisande, Lulu
1 Lakme, Billy Budd, Nabucco, Les Troyens, Cosi, Ballo, Werther, Einstein on the Beach, Peter Grimes, Simon Boccanegra, Dialogues of the Carmelites, Wozzeck, Barbiere, Orfeo

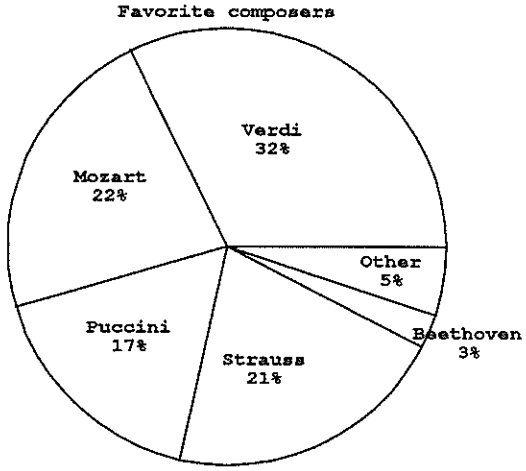


Figure 6

When asked to name their favorite Wagnerian singers, male and female, the results were very interesting. Here, too, I failed to be specific in my questioning, making no distinction between current singers and historical singers. I present the results, not knowing exactly what to make of them:

Females:

29 Kirsten Flagstad, Birgit Nillson — a tie for first place
21 Hildegard Behrens
7 Gwyneth Jones, Eva Marton
5 Waltraud Meier, Jessye Norman, Leonie Rysanek, Helen Traubel
4 Ute Vinzing
2 Helga Dernesch, Nancy Gustafson, Astrid Varnay

1 Eileen Farrell, Wendy Hillhouse, Lotte Lehmann, Frida Leider, Christa Ludwig, Janis Martin, Anna Silja, Cheryl Studer, Tatyana Troyanos, Sandra Walker

Males:

26 James Morris
24 Lauritz Melchior
15 Hans Hotter
10 Jon Vickers
9 René Kollo
8 Wolfgang Windgassen
7 Peter Hoffmann
4 Donald Mcintyre, Kurt Moll
3 Siegfried Jerusalem, Matti Saalminnen
2 Placido Domingo, Thomas Stewart
1 Tenors: Herbert Becker, Ben Heppner, James King, William Lewis, Gerhard Stolze, Set Svanholm, Fritz Wunderlich, Heinz Zednik

Baritones: Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Robert Hale, Gustav Neidlinger, Sigmund Nimsgern, Monte Pedersen, Paul Schoeffler, Friedrich Schorr, Bernd Weikl

Basses: Samuel Ramey, Marti Talvella, Jose Van Dam

Note that this assemblage of male voices includes 5 basses with a total of 10 "votes," 12 baritones with a total of 55, and 15 tenors with a total of 71. Clearly our respondents span a wide range of operatic experience. "What have you done for me lately?" seems to be an operating principle. I find it touching to find Wendy Hillhouse and Eileen Farrell or Monte Pedersen and Paul Schoeffler getting equal billing. I do not find it amusing to see Peter Hoffmann getting seven times as many votes as Friedrich Schorr, or Nancy Gustafson getting as many votes as Astrid Varnay, but that's life.

Gender differences were interesting here too, with women naming current opera singers as their favorites in greater numbers than men.

Probably most interesting were people's suggestions for questions I neglected to ask. Among my favorites:

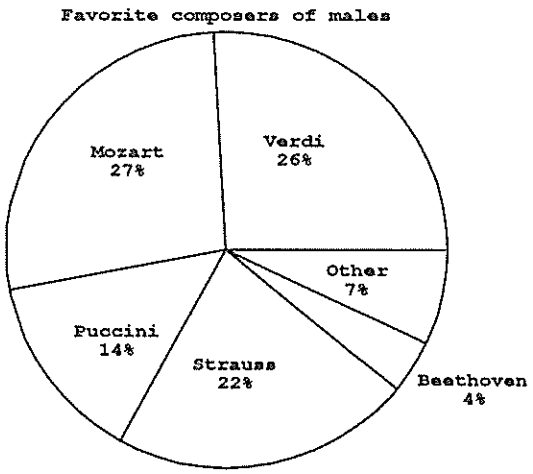


Figure 7

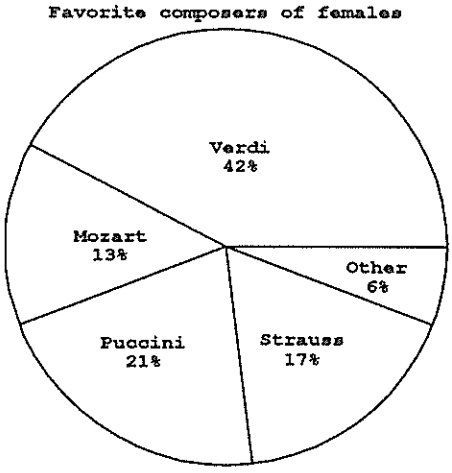


Figure 8

Favorite conductor? (several people pointed out this obvious omission)
Favorite opera composed after 1945?
Favorite Wagner record? Book?
Favorite Wagner producer?
Most exciting scene in a Wagner opera?
Pro- or anti-supertitle?
Hat size?
Age of first sexual experience?
Alcohol consumption?
Been to Bayreuth? How often?
How many books on Wagner do you own? Recordings?
Years spent in psychotherapy?
Does your spouse love Wagner?
What's a nice Jewish boy like me doing in a Wagner society?
Where can I get one of those helmets with the wings on it?

Obviously, there's plenty of material for a second survey.

WAGNERIANA

"...the minutest details..."

by William O. Cord

The following essay is William O. Cord's adaptation of material included in his work *The Teutonic Mythology of Richard Wagner's* THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG, *Volume III - "The Natural and the Supernatural Worlds,"* published by The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, and published with the permission of the publisher.

The Spring, 1989, edition of the journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California, *Leitmotive*, contained an excerpt from an article that was written by Artur Bodanzky, a former Senior Conductor at the Metropolitan Opera and published in *Etude*, April, 1938. Bodanzky wrote:

> "To my mind, Wagner stands beside Sophocles and Shakespeare as the third great foundation pillar of drama. His music represents but a part of his gigantic achievement. He conceived his own opera plots from sagas and legends; *acquainted himself with the minutest details of research* in order to work them out in accurate fashion; wove his own dramatic libretti, with their plots and characters and dialogue; and bound the whole structure around with stage directions of such richness of content and *such precision of detail* that to deviate from even the slightest of Wagner's own indications is enough to ruin a performance. I know from experience." [1]

Bodanzky's paragraph contains several matters that are readily suggestive for serious yet interesting discussions of Richard Wagner and his mythico-legendary art. However, for purposes of this essay, the conductor's remarks about *the minutest details of research* and *such precision of detail* seem most appropriate for a relative discussion because they can act as a demonstrative guide in presentation of the topic at hand. In turn, the mythical theme that is developed here is subject matter that will then serve as an exemplary as well as a representative illustration of Wagner's careful research and meticulous attention to detail.

Those several words regarding Wagner's compositional care with his dramas that Bodanzky wrote bespeak at once the metaphoric nature of the composer as well as the literary hallmark of his work. Those followers of the Wagnerian art who have delved into the composer's studies and their relationships with his artwork soon become aware that no thematic or dramatic detail, no element, no ingredient, no particular, no aspect of any kind, regardless of its relationship, direct or tangential, was too minimal for Wagner's theatrical attention, and likewise, no consideration of a cultural, a mythical, or a legendary substance was ever rejected out of hand. The composer's remarkable mind constantly and consistently absorbed and meditated the extensive and varied matters that came under his studious eye, and then, later, that same mind generously but appropriately regenerated the pertinent data and information as he went about the business of the composition of his dramatic works. At times, the details that Wagner included in a specific drama were data that seemed quite removed from the thematic specifics of the argument that he was weaving, yet in one way or another he would envision the need of such data and include those matters simply because his astute and perceptive mind told him that the ideas were related to or were associated with the drama in one form or another, if not necessarily to his story. Of course, in such cases he was also bolstered by his own keen and well-honed inner perception that the matters offered added mythical ambience for his "national work of art."

The monumental landmark *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is indeed a composition that is a literary emissary of this manifest characteristic of the Wagnerian format. A side-by-side view of *The Ring* and the early Germanic stories, poems, songs, legends, and religious concepts will quickly reflect that Wagner's poem is a resplendent mirror of that earlier time. The follower of Wagner's *Ring* who digs beneath the surface of that work and who then familiarizes himself with the early Germanic history, culture, civilization, and also its religiosity, will come to know early on that the *detail* of that ancient past is indeed the very *detail* of *The Ring*, and the minutest detail of that past often becomes the cause or the justification of some matter that Wagner has included in his poem.

A minor, indeed insignificant, but nevertheless still a detail associated with *The Ring* can serve most adequately to illustrate the Bodanzky thesis of Wagner and the *minutest details of research*. There can be no doubt that there are those who will think that the matter to be depicted is inconsequential, probably even bland and unexciting. The subject is of course minuscule, veiled as it were. Yet, when such matters as this are pertinent to *The Ring*, and their great number becomes known, and when each is found receiving the appropriate development as Wagner determined that development to be, one will find himself face to face with the fundamental core and the essential substance of the work.

[1] pp. 219, 266. (Italics added.) Bodanzky's operatic disaster was a performance of *Tannhäuser* which he mounted "in a freer, more modern style" during his tenure as Chief Musical Director of the Royal Theater of Baden in Mannheim.

Such is the stuff that becomes the solid foundation on which Wagner constructed his mammoth work and, at the same time, the dramatic magnet that so silently yet so irrefutably draws each and every one of us into the world that we call Wagner, staring as we are at that *absolute* truth, that ultimate experience that myth allows, that dramatic quality that makes Wagner *Wagner* and his *Ring* so *Wagnerian*, and without which, or even if present in an adulterated state, *The Ring* becomes just another hackneyed production by yet another uninformed producer!

An appropriate opening to such a discussion can be the following question: "Who is the least known, the most indefinite, the most indistinct and unheralded character that Wagner placed in *The Ring*?" The response to that question can only bring to mind one or both of the two mortals who, at one and the same time, appear in the poem of *The Ring*, but who are characters whose names, like that of Grimhild, are not to be found in the *dramatis personae*. Each of these warrior-figures appears but briefly, indeed if at all, or at least each name is mentioned, and each is in a role that has no dialogue, each in a role whose purpose is only that of being a kind of visual property that assists the depiction of the mythical function of those more principal characters, the Valkyries, with whom the pair is associated. This duo of mortals is, in fact, so relatively subordinate within the argument of *The Ring* that it is very possible that even the most seasoned followers of Wagner's drama will have difficulty in recalling their names.

The two individuals to whom reference has been made are Sintolt, the Hegeling, and Wittig, the Irming. These are two warriors who have been slain on the field of battle and who have been selected to be 'raised' in order to serve in Wotan's celestial army that will fight the enemies of the gods at *ragnarök* (the destruction of the universe). The dialogue in the first scene of Act III of *Die Walküre* is such that we are informed that the Valkyrie Helmwige is carrying Sintolt on her saddle and that her sister Ortlinde brings Wittig on her saddle as the Valkyries gather at Valkyrie Rock before they continue the journey on to Valhalla.

Wagner could easily have chosen, even created, names for these individuals. There was no dramatic or thematic, or indeed a mythical need for such names to be impressed on the minds of an audience, and there was no need for either of these names to be of any significance. They were names that would make no impression whatsoever on an audience, names that would fade from the mind of an audience immediately after the Valkyries pronounce them. Wagner was, however, the man of detail, authentic detail, and in the matter of his warriors he would not be at all indifferent to these champions, these *einjerar*, and he would not even look askance at their truly unheralded roles. Rather, he would exercise his usual dramatic concern, and he would identify them with proper names. Such names, however, would not be just any names! He would reach into his vast store of cultural information and give each of the pair a name that had figured in some way in Germanic history, a name that he had encountered somewhere in his studies of his culture's ancient era, a name that had been associated with a respected warrior of the mythical and/or legendary Germanic past.

Each of the names that Wagner gave to the two slain warriors that he introduces into his *Ring* drama has an interesting morphological as well as semantic history. It would seem, however, that the name of Wittig, the Irming, is the more fascinating, and therefore some dedication to this Wagnerian character will reveal how detailed, how minute, how rich in mythico-legendary characterization Wagner can be as he develops even the minutiae of his Siegfried tale.

The original word of the modern name *Wittig* was *Witege*, the name of a respected warrior who is a prominent figure in the numerous tales and sagas that circulated during the early centuries of Germany's history. In the *Nibelungenlied*, the national epic of Germany, he is identified as the warrior who killed Nodung, a kinsman of Gotelind. However, in *The Wilkina Saga (Thidrekssaga)*, a work that focuses on Dietrich von Bern (Theodoric the Great) and which was a source-work for Wagner and his *Ring*, Wittig is one of two sons of Wieland (Wielant, Veland, Weland) and the daughter of King Hertwich. (Wieland is the famed smith around whose legendary life Wagner once planned to write an opera, and even began a libretto.)

The story of Wittig, which varies somewhat in the several poetic and epic works in which he is featured, can readily be summarized. First and foremost, Wittig is a celebrated warrior, one who confronted and slew a giant, a warrior who is celebrated for his bravery and courage in battle. Wittig joins the court of the German hero Dietrich and brings added glory to his name as a trusted warrior and confidant to Dietrich. One version of Wittig's story tells of his battle, along with others of Dietrich's court, with the Burgundians Gunther and Hagen at their capital at Worms. In time, Wittig became so renowned and famed for his skill and valor in battle that Dietrich named him a commander of the German's armies in Italy.

Wittig's demise is as romantic in nature as is his heroic life. Wittig kills Dietrich's brother, Diether, and then flees the Court. Wittig's act infuriates the German hero who sets out after the killer. Dietrich is unable to overtake Wittig because of the latter's swift stallion. Ultimately, Wittig comes to the sea into which he rides his horse. In the waters of that sea, Wittig succumbed to the charms of the mermaid Wachilt, whom he joined forever in the depths of her watery world. Such was the tale of the Wittig whose name Wagner was to bring over into his drama as a given name for one of his slain heroes.

The second part of Wittig's name, *Irming*, which serves in *The Ring* as the family or clan name, can be looked upon as one of the most interesting, indeed the most fascinating of all the names that Wagner brought to his dramas, edging out the intriguing *Schwertleite*. Wagner created this specific word *Irming*, which means literally "Son of Irm," which he then made a part of his poem. There can be no doubt, however, that when Wagner fabricated this clan name, and attached it to one of his *Ring* characters, he was walking not only on solid Teutonic mythological ground in the fabrication of the

name, but also on that of the history of his native soil in its dramatic use.

In the first century after Christ, before the time that Wotan and his pantheon of Aesir deities had come into their full divine glory throughout the Germanic lands, the most powerful of the Teutonic gods was *Tyr*, the great God of War, the god who decided which of opposing armies would be granted victory and which would suffer humiliating defeat, which warriors would live and which would die in battle. The widespread, often extravagant, worship of this god caused the original Old Norse name to undergo linguistic changes that were natural to languages as the word was spread about in a vast geographic region and handed down from generation to generation by means of the oral tradition. Thus it was that the battle god Tyr was worshipped throughout the heathen Teutonic world, although his name was taking on several distinct pronunciations in separate regions of that world. The Anglo-Saxons called him *Tiw* as well as *Tiu* and *Tir*. In Denmark the god was known as *Tir*, while in Switzerland he was called *Tis*. In northern Germany he was called *Tiu* and *Tiuz*, as well as *Tiwaz*. In south Germany he was called *Ziu*, which later became *Zio*, and later *Zien*, and then *Dien*. So famed and celebrated was this god that his name served as the basis for a rune, one of those special bits of mythical magic that was so much a part of the heathen religious beliefs of the Teutonic peoples, and so extensively and so profoundly was he worshipped in all of Teutondom that in time his name was used to denote the second day of the week, that is *Tuesday (Tiw's Dag)* in English and *Dienstag (Dien's Dag)* in German (Dutch — *Dinsdag;* Swedish — *Tisdag;* Danish — *Tirsdag;* Norwegian — *Tirsdag;* Yiddish — *Diensttog*).

The early continental Saxons also worshipped this god. (Wagner was himself a Saxon by occasion of his birth in Leipzig.) These clans called him *Tiw* (as well as *Tiu* and *Tiuz*), and the day that these peoples had set aside in his honor was known as *Tiwesdag* (*Tyrsdag, Tiwzdag*). This deity ultimately became so much a part of the life of these Saxons, so inextricably embedded in the religious culture, and so much a favorite deity in the intimacy of their lives, that they gave him a *byname*. In their comfortable familiarity with the god, these Teutonic peoples called him *Irm(in)*, a byname that was derived from the name of the first national German hero, the chieftain *Arminus* (*Arminius*), who lived at the time of Christ and who is considered to be the leader who liberated the Germans from the yoke of the Romans. (This celebrated warrior's name quickly evolved into several oral variations: *Irmen, Irman, Ermen, Ermin*, and *Erman*, all of which eventually developed into the modern German *Hermann* [English — *Herman*].) This popular byname soon became so fixed in the early Saxon society that the Old Saxon *Tiwesdag* (Tuesday) became *Irminstag*, or *Irmin's Day*. It was that original byname, *Irmin*, or at least its root word, *Irm*, that gave Wagner the basis for the name of his warrior, a name that depicts his Wittig as a descendant of Germany's first soldier-hero, and a name that, in its own way, associates Wagner's warrior with the early Teutonic God of War.

The Saxon belief in Tiuz (Tyr), in the God of War that they also called *Irm(in)*, was so intense and so extensive that there remain yet today, in modern German culture, remnants of that early veneration. A brief history of the worship of this deity will demonstrate how elevated was his religious status in the early society, and, at the same time, that historical information will reveal additional evidence of Wagner's concern for detailed data, a process that literally totally governed his manner and method of dramatic composition. Such a chronicle will also reveal the minuscule attention that the composer extended, even to the surname of a slain warrior who has no serious function of any kind within the argument of his *Ring*.

The early Saxon people, those worshippers of Tyr whom they also addressed as 'Irmin', had their center of worship at Eresburg, now Marburg, some eighty kilometers north of present-day Frankfurt am Main. The people constructed a temple in that city, a temple that honored Tiuz. Within the confines of that shrine, which was considered to be the holiest of temples, the worshippers erected a large marble pillar on top of which they placed a statue of a warrior equipped with helmet, breastplate, and shield. In the minds of the people, the statue projected a twofold image, the first being that of the war god Tiuz, and the second being that of the famed hero-warrior Arminus.

Religious worship as well as ritual developed around that pillar and that statue. It became custom for the Saxon men, when dressed in full armor and about to go into battle, to circle the pillar several times, at first in a slow walk which gradually increased into a full run. As they walked and then ran, they brandished their spears and shouted prayers to the god, always requesting that he grant them victory in the coming conflict.

The warriors addressed this idol of the war god by his byname, *Irminsul*, *sul* meaning 'pillar' or 'column'. These same soldiers also carried smaller images of the Irminsul with them into battle, as a religious means both to assure victory as well as to assure personal protection from harm and even death. Later, after the fighting of battle had ceased, the captives that the Saxon soldiers had taken, as well as the Saxons who had fought cowardly, were slain as offerings to the Irminsul.

It was in the eighth century that Charlemagne sought to Christianize the Saxons. As part of his action he destroyed the temple at Eresburg in 772, and then proceeded to bury the Irminsul. The Abbey of Corbye was then erected on the spot where the idol had been buried. Later, when the French dug up the idol and carried it about as a trophy, the Saxon people became so enraged that they rose against the French as they sought to rescue their most precious and prized idol. An intense battle followed, a military engagement that took the name *Armansula*. The Saxons regained their Irminsul and then determined that it would be safe only if they sank it in the river Innen, now the Leine. In time, the idol was fished from the river, purified by Christian priests, and made to serve as a candelabrum in a church in nearby Hillesheim, now Hildesheim.

Such is the history to support the name Wittig, the Irming. Wittig, the celebrated legendary warrior, one who was known for his courage and his bravery, and Irming, meaning *Son of Irm*, who was part God of War and part first German hero of war. What more perfect warrior to inhabit Valhalla, and what more perfect way to illustrate the work-method of Richard Wagner, the method that produced a drama that essentially exudes a mythico-legendary ambience from every thematic pore! Given the lengths to which Wagner went to name and to dramatize an obscure figure of his drama, one can only assume, in astonishment and marvel, as to what must have been Wagner's research into the depths of the Teutonic past on those matters of *The Ring* that are primary in dramatic and thematic importance!

THE RING AND *PARSIFAL*:

Wagner's Embracing and Rejection of Schopenhauer

by Paul Schofield

This article is a follow-up to my article two issues ago titled "Tragedy As Mysticism: The Influence of Greek Tragedy on *The Ring* and *Parsifal*."

Well-known songwriter and folk singer Pete Seeger once said, "There's always more in a good song than the songwriter originally intended."

This is true for every good work of art, not just folk songs. And the larger and more expansive the work of art in question, the greater the extent to which this idea will be true.

I cannot think of any artist for whom this would be more true than Wagner. Because Wagner used myth to such a deep and profound extent, his artworks contain levels of meaning and symbolism that he would never have been completely consciously aware of. His very well-directed intuition would have told him that he was on the right track, but the very nature of myth itself is limitless, far outdistancing the conscious mind alone.

The Ring is an excellent example of this idea. It is well-known that Wagner changed the text of the ending several times, finally settling on the version that would allow the *most* interpretations, not the fewest. He scrapped the various endings that were didactic expositions of philosophical thought, and retained the ending that allows the listener to enter into many views and meanings, even to the extent that many people cannot agree on what *The Ring* is about! Here Wagner the dramatist emerged above Wagner the philosopher. *The Ring* is endless in its levels of meaning and its possibilities of interpretation. Witness the number of different interpretations on our contemporary stages around the world. One does not have to like or agree with every individual production to appreciate the incredible wealth of ideas *The Ring* contains, a wealth that modern directors continue to mine.

To illustrate this point, I will refer to Judy Bogart's article in Volume 4, Number 1 of *Leitmotive*, "The Spear, the Ring, & the Sword: A Feminist Approach." To my knowledge, at least, Wagner never asserted such an interpretation of his *Ring*. And yet such an interpretation is there, with as much validity as any other. To quote from Judy's article:

> "This transfer of power from Goddess to God is a basic mythic expression of a real sociological process, where warlike god-worshipping cultures overwhelmed peaceful goddess-worshipping peoples. This is a historical process, now being uncovered and studied by archaeologists such as Marija Gimbutas, and described at length by Riane Eisler. Certainly it could not have been known to be historical by Wagner, but the ancient trauma echoes through the mythic literature which he used as source and inspiration, and through earlier oral tradition on which that literature is based."

While Wagner knew nothing of our modern archaeology, the "echoing" of the ancient trauma was at work on the intuitive and subliminal levels, both in Wagner's sources and in his own mind. To quote again from Judy's article:

> "I believe that the making of Nothung, like the making of Siegmund and Sieglinde, represents an attempt to reunite the sundered male and female principles. Not that this is what Wotan consciously had in mind — nor, as Fricka points out, is it something he would want if he got it. It is rather an attempt on the part of nature, working through the unconscious, to heal itself. Erda, the goddess, sleeps and dreams the world. Wotan, with unconscious motivation hidden even from himself, expresses her will."

Here is Wotan intending one thing while actually accomplishing another. I believe that the same was true

for Wagner. Let me quote from a letter Wagner wrote to Röckel in 1856:

> "I was scarcely aware that in the working out, nay, in the first elaboration of my scheme, I was being unconsciously guided by a wholly different, infinitely more profound intuition . . . the consequence of which was, that as I was true to my living intuitions and not to my abstract ideas in my completed work, something quite different saw the light from what I had originally intended."

In this letter Wagner was talking about *The Ring*, and how reading Schopenhauer led him to a much higher understanding of his conception than he had had at the first writing of the poem. Wagner, consciously and intellectually, came to see his music dramas as articulations of Schopenhauer's philosophy, even though he wrote several of them (*Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and the poem of *The Ring*) before he had ever read Schopenhauer. He claimed that reading *The World As Will and Representation* defined ideas that he had previously grasped intuitively, but I believe that Wagner's intuitive level went farther than even he himself realized. I think that we can use the above quote to show not only that Wagner came to see how an artist could intend one thing while actually accomplishing another, but also that in fact this was true with Wagner in a way that he himself was not aware of. In the remainder of this article I will try to show that Wagner not only went beyond an articulation of Schopenhauer's ideas, but actually rejected them.

To understand how Wagner went beyond, and finally rejected, Schopenhauer's ideas, we must first see what those ideas were, and how Wagner initially embraced them. Needless to say, a complete analysis of these ideas would take a book, and I strongly urge any of you who haven't already done so to read *The World As Will and Representaion*, rather than taking my word for it here. But I will attempt to condense Schopenhauer's ideas as much as possible, particularly those that relate specifically to *The Ring* and *Parsifal*.

Departing from Kant, Schopenhauer believed that the essential nature of man was not reason, but will. The parallel that Kant had found between the outside world of man and man's reason was found by Schopenhauer to be the outside world and will. Thus, instead of comprehending the world through reason, Schopenhauer found comprehension, at least as far as it could go, through an understanding of will.

Schopenhauer believed, as Kant had believed, that a separate reality existed beyond man's own perception of his environment. Some philosophers, such as Feuerbach, believed that divinity was a projection of the human mind, that man created God. But Schopenhauer believed that there was a reality completely beyond the projection of man's own mind, a reality that man could not completely know because he was trapped within the confines of his mind's own perception. As long as man looked on reality, or attempted to look on reality, from the point of view of this limited and egocentric perception, he could never truly know it. Schopenhauer did believe, however, that man could sometimes break through the veil separating his own limited perceptions from the true reality by three means: erotic love, art, and mystical empathy.

It doesn't take the Wagnerite long to see the influence of Schopenhauer here. Wagner, who had earlier in his life agreed with Feuerbach, came to embrace Schopenhauer on three main points. The first was that this veil could be pierced in the three ways just mentioned: erotic love, art, and empathy. And of course we immediately see *Tristan*, *Meistersinger*, and *Parsifal*. The libretto of *The Ring* had of course been completed prior to Wagner's reading Schopenhauer, so *Tristan* was really the first opera he wrote from scratch after that reading.

The second way that Wagner embraced Schopenhauer was in finding music the dominant art form. Prior to reading Schopenhauer, Wagner had attempted to espouse and practice a theory where music drama was created by a union of all the arts, each art given an equal place in that union. But of course his operas, with the possible exception of *Rheingold*, never do this. Music *is* predominant, and Schopenhauer had much to do with this.

Schopenhauer held that will was at the foundation of the universe itself. We can speak here of the "Universal Will," which is the impulse to Creation itself. Here again is the parallel between man and the universe around him. Schopenhauer believed that the source of all existence was this universal will.

Schopenhauer believed music to be the greatest of all arts because all other arts are what he termed "representations of objects of the will," whereas music was a representation of the will itself. For example, a painting or sculpture is a representation of a specific thing, or object. A dance or play tells a specific story, or a poem is written about a specific event, emotion, etc. But music, at least what we call "absolute music," which Schopenhauer had in mind here, does not depict any specific object or story or emotion. It does not depict any specific thought or philosophy. It is not *about* anything. Therefore, freed from representing specific objects of the will, it becomes a representation of the will itself.

Wagner embraced this idea, and we see that in the work he created after reading Schopenhauer, music becomes more and more the dominating art form. Thus, *Gesamtkunstwerk* did not mean a combination of all the arts, each given equal importance, but rather a combining of various arts, each having its own place in the drama as needed for the overall effect. Wagner knew when to let the music take over when it could do what none of the others could do as well.

The third way in which Wagner embraced Schopenhauer is the most complex way, and the way in which he also went beyond Schopenhauer, so far that, in my mind, he actually rejected Schopenhauer's thought.

Schopenhauer believed, correctly, that the will to existence led to the arising of desire, and that the frustration that man experienced in his life was the frustration of unsatisfied desire. In Schopenhauer's mind, this desire could never be satisfied. Desire led to more desire, and behind the arising of this desire was

will. Therefore, the way to end desire was to abnegate the will. This is a drastic oversimplification, and I again direct all of you to the original work, but I can at least make my point here concerning Wagner.

Schopenhauer believed redemption to lie in this denial of the will. Through mysticism, at least as he understood it, and empathy, the will could be 'put to sleep', if I may, and thereby both desire and the impulse to life itself would be extinguished. We seem to have *Parsifal* here, but there is much more to it than even Wagner was aware of.

As I have mentioned earlier, Wagner fully embraced Schopenhauer's ideas, and considered himself to be Schopenhauer's artistic missionary. But this is where Wagner's intuitive mind took over from his intellectual, philosophical mind.

At the core of Schopenhauer's idea of renouncing the will is the idea of *cessation*. This is very important. In my earlier article on tragedy I had talked about *converting* those aspects of ourselves that cause suffering into aspects that alleviate suffering. This is very different from simply ceasing to exist. Schopenhauer did *not* believe that suicide was the way to cessation, for, in his idea, the individual will would in this case simply return to the universal will, and the impulse to life and desire would remain. By putting the will "to sleep," there would be nothing left to return.

Schopenhauer was extraordinarily close to the mysticism I talked about in the previous article, but just as he got right up to the gate, so to speak, he turned around and went the wrong way. He correctly perceived that our suffering comes from desire, and that renunciation of attachment to the objects of that desire is absolutely necessary, but he failed when he thought that the way to that renunciation was by denying the will itself. This is where Wagner intuitively, not consciously, went beyond Schopenhauer. For Wagner understood that true redemption does not come from *cessation*, but from *regeneration*.

Witness all of the religions that we speak of as the "great religions." Whether it is Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, or others, all speak of "rebirth." "Unless ye be born again, ye cannot enter the kindom of heaven." Buddhism speaks specifically of rebirth, and the title of a well-known book by a modern Zen roshi is *Zen is Eternal Life* (Roshi Jiyu Kennett from the Zen abbey at Mt. Shasta). Nowhere is there mention of denial, abnegation, or extinction. The renunciation that one does hear of in Buddhism is not a renunciation of will or life, but rather renunciation of the attachment to the world of illusion. This renunciation, in Buddhist terms, leads to entrance into Nirvana, but this entrance is a step forward, if you will, not a step back.

This is where Wagner's rejection of Schopenhauer can be seen in its clearest light. I will repeat what I believe to be the key: The essence of redemption is not *cessation*, but *regeneration*. Philosophically, *The Ring* might seem to be the perfect embodiment of Schopenhauer. By returning the ring to the Rhinemaidens, Brünnhilde renounces the Will to Power, and by her own immolation, she renounces the Will to Life. All is consumed, both the phenomenal and the noumenal. Through her renunciation Brünnhilde has attained oblivion, the Schopenhauerian redemption.

But this is not what the music leaves us with, and it is certainly not what we leave the theatre with. The last theme we hear is the "redemption through love" motif. This is a misnomer, but the label is not important here. What is important is the motif itself. It is the theme to which Sieglinde sings "Oh radiant wonder" when she finds out that she is pregnant with a child. A few moments earlier she has been pleading for death to end her suffering, but when she finds out about her child, she longs desperately for life. She cries out to the Valkyries, "Save a mother." This motif is a theme of life, of birth, of hope, of courage, and of the will to live in the face of indescribable odds and sufferings Sieglinde knows are ahead. And we leave the theatre inevitably (assuming the performance hasn't been *too* terrible) with a feeling of hope and renewal. Nothing in *The Ring* itself guarantees that a new, better order will spring from the ashes of the old. But we instinctively feel that that is what will happen, or at least *can* happen. The point is that *emotionally*, if not philosophically, we feel uplifted. Wagner tried his hardest to be Schopenhauerian, but he failed. We leave the theatre not with thoughts of oblivion and extinction, but with feelings of hope and renewal.

What about *Parsifal*?

Here again Wagner went completely beyond Schopenhauer in a way that I am positive Wagner himself did not intend. At least I have never come across a reference in his letters to support the idea I will present here. For it is in the following analysis that I see Wagner's overt rejection of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

Remember that Schopenhauer believed that the world is a manifestation of will, the impulse to life that is inherent in both the physical universe and in man. To abnegate this will is therefore to extinguish the desire for life, thereby attaining oblivion, free from the universal will and from rebirth.

Symbolically speaking, sex represents this impulse to life, an impulse that must be negated and nullified. Klingsor is denied membership in the Grail brotherhood because he has not conquered sexual desire, and so he castrates himself and reapplies for admission. All of this is narrated by Gurnemanz. Amfortas is horrified by Klingsor's act, and banishes him forever from the Grail. At this point Klingsor declares himself an enemy of the Grail Brotherhood and plots to steal the Spear and Grail through deception. His tools are Kundry and sexual seduction.

Of course there are many levels of meaning to this, and I am concentrating on only one, but let's examine it.

Klingsor, on this level, represents Schopenhauer. The self-castration is Schopenhauer's denial of the will. Remember that I mentioned before that the key to Wagner's rejection of Schopenhauer was understanding that redemption is regeneration, not cessation. The sexual organs are regenerative, and the loss of them represents the loss of the ability to regenerate. Amfortas rejects Klingsor because sexual desire must be overcome through spiritual training and devotion to the

Grail, not through mutilation. At this point we have arrived exactly at my conclusion in the previous article on tragedy, that redemption is attained by transforming the *arete*, or will to greatness, away from individual glorification and toward spiritual union with the divine. *This transforming is an act of will.* Rather than a *denial* of our will, it is a *harnessing* of our will. And we use the energy from this harnessing to attain enlightenment, in which we find not oblivion, but eternal life. This is redemption, and this is what Amfortas knows and why he rejects Klingsor. It remains for Parsifal, not Amfortas, to accomplish this redemption, but the rejection of Klingsor by Amfortas is Wagner's rejection of Schopenhauer. Again, I cannot prove that Wagner consciously intended this symbolism, but it is there in living color, another example of how there is always much more in a good work of art than the artist could ever consciously intend.

Amfortas' rejection of Klingsor is not the only way in which *Parsifal* rejects Schopenhauer. At the end of the opera, Parsifal is alive, not dead, and the order of the Grail is redeemed. The Grail ceremony, symbolic of both spiritual and physical nourishment, is again performed, and we are left with a world reborn and revitalized. The music too represents this. After Parsifal has healed Amfortas' wound and uncovered the shrine, the gathering sings "Miracle of supreme salvation!/ Our redeemer redeemed!" to a succession of ascending motifs. As each enunciation of the motif ends, another comes up behind it, over and over. In Buddhism, the lotus blossom is used as the symbol of enlightenment. Seeding in the mud at the bottom of a pond, the lotus grows up through the water to bloom on the surface, open to the sun. The mud is symbolic of the darkness of ignorance. The stem, growing out of the mud up through the water, is symbolic of spiritual training. The blossom open on the water's surface, receiving the sunlight, is symbolic of the awakening to Nirvana. Eternity is a limitless lake where new blossoms are forever coming up through the water and opening on the surface. When I listen to those final words of *Parsifal*, I cannot help picturing in my mind these lotus blossoms continually ascending and opening, just like the musical themes. There is no sense, for me, of extinction or oblivion, but rather continual and endless rebirth into sunlight. Wagner may have intended this music to represent renunciation and oblivion, but I feel something entirely different. I believe that here, again, the intuitive genius of Wagner, attuned as it was to the universal, took over from Wagner the conscious intellectual and created a musical representation of enlightenment itself. Again Schopenhauer has been surpassed, for with *Parsifal* music is no longer a representation of the will itself, but rather a representation of that which the will aspires and leads to: not oblivion, but everlasting life.

I will close with a passage I believe sums up everything I have discussed concerning Schopenhauer and Wagner's rejection of him. The passage is Nietzsche's Song of the Midnight Bell from Part III of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The translation here is by Morse Peckham.

O man! Listen!
What does the deep Midnight urge?
"I slept, I slept —,
from deep dreaming I am awakened —,
the world is deep,
and deeper than the day has thought.
Deep is the world's woe —,
joy — deeper still than agony;
woe urges: Perish!
Yet all of joy wants eternal being —,
— wants deep, deep eternal being!"

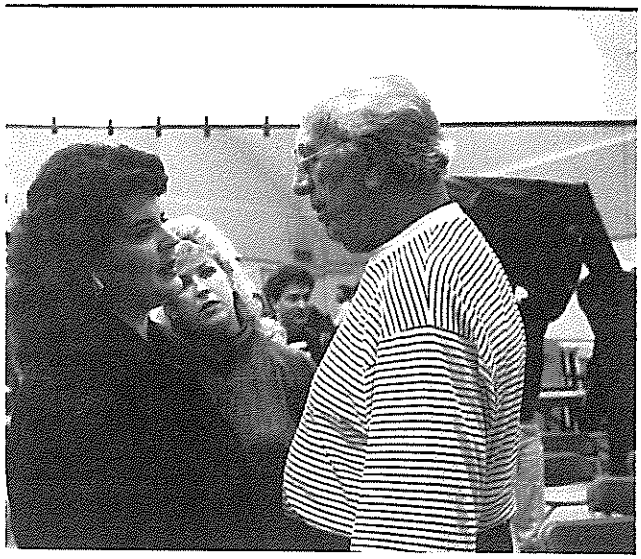
NEW GRANT RECIPIENTS

The Wagner Society of Northern California is pleased to announce that it has awarded grants this year to Catherine Keen and Dora Koutelas, two young singers with Wagnerian experience and aspirations.

$1,500 was awarded to Miss Keen, which she will use to study in Europe with Hans Hotter and Regine Crespine. Miss Keen sang the role of Schwertleite in this summer's San Francisco Opera *Ring* production, and was the cover for Fricka. She covered the role of Marfa here in SFO's recent *Khovanshchina*, and has numerous other roles to her credit. She will appear next season as Sonya in SFO's *War and Peace*.

Miss Koutelas received $1,000, which she will use for study of the Wagnerian repertoire in New York with Herr Walter Tausig at the Met. Miss Koutelas covered the roles of Helmwige and Gerhilde this past summer in SF, and is embarking on the study of the role of Sieglinde.

We wish both recipients the best of luck in their careers!



KOHLER

Dora Koutelas and Catherine Keen talk to Hans Hotter during a San Francisco master class.

LEITMOTIVE

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Paul Schofield, Editor

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