

# LEITMOTIVE

THE JOURNAL OF THE WAGNER SOCIETY OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

## OPERA: T. S. ELIOT and RICHARD WAGNER

The following heretofore unpublished poem appears in the recent superb Harcourt Brace publication, *T.S. Eliot: Inventions of the March Hare. Poems, 1909-1917*. Among the some forty poems previously known only to Eliot scholars is one that should be of particular interest to Wagnerians. Composed by the twenty-year old poet in 1909, the poem is entitled *Opera*; its subject is *Tristan und Isolde*.

Eliot, at the time a master's degree candidate at Harvard, composed *Opera* after attending a performance of *Tristan* in Boston. The particular shape and the ironic distance of *Opera* indicate the powerful influence of the French symbolist poet Jules Laforgue (1860-1887), who pioneered free verse and more importantly projected an anti-romantic image in a romantic age. Laforgue provided a poetic outlook not only for the heretofore unpublished *Opera*, but also for the two great poems that shortly followed, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady*.

Like Laforgue's symbolist poetry, music provided a lifelong influence on T.S. Eliot. It is an influence to which the poet personally attested in a 1942 lecture at Glasgow University, *The Music of Poetry*. Eliot's immersion in music is further confirmed by the titles he gave such poems as *Preludes* and, more importantly, *Four Quartets*, whose interlocking verbal counterpoint, repetition, and varied meter, help to explain that otherwise enigmatic

title (see Jewels Brooke, "From the Waste Land to Four Quartets: Evolution of a Method," in Edward Lobb, ed. *Words in Time: New Essays on Eliot's Four Quartets*, 84-106, especially pp. 97-98).

But Wagner was a particular favorite, appealing to the poet on many levels. A native of St. Louis, Eliot may have been drawn particularly to Wagner because of the Germanic culture that pervaded that particular area. The first verse of *Opera* speaks directly to the overwhelming experience of *Tristan*. There is the sheer "flinging itself at the last limits of self-expression." Igor Stravinsky, of all people, much later testified to Eliot's admiration for this opera. According to the fine Eliot biography of Peter Ackroyd, "When [Eliot] was in his sixties he discussed this opera with Stravinsky, and from that conversation Stravinsky inferred that it must have been 'one of the most passionate experiences of his life'" (p. 38).

Stravinsky's comment is at one with the significant comment of the noted critic Harold Bloom. In his introduction to a collection of essays concerning Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, New York, 1988). Bloom points out that both the critic Francis Fergusson and the poet Stephen Spender compare Eliot's play with Wagner's operatic texts. Bloom goes on to comment that "Eliot, who shared little else with Bernard Shaw, was as Wagnerian as Shaw" (p. 2).

*Opera* is of course not the only poem that takes its cue from Wagner. Of greater significance is Eliot's use of Wagner in *The Waste Land*. According to Robert L. Schwartz, *Broken Images: A Study of the Waste Land* (Lewisburg, 1988), "The recurrence in the poem of [the Wagnerian strains heard intermittently at the beginning of 'The Burial of the Dead'] structurally mimics the Wagnerian use of the leitmotive, a short figure. . . underscoring situations, personages, objects, or ideas as they occur in a music drama" (p. 114). Schwartz further agrees with the scholar Herbert Knust that "Wagner foreshadowed [Eliot's employment] of the mythic method, the paralleling of historic with contemporary events or examples..." Schwartz, furthermore, draws a parallel between Wagner's "aesthetic of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the synthesis of the arts" and "the allusive method of Eliot."

The *Waste Land* contains many more allusions to and influences of the aesthetic ideals of Richard Wagner. Eliot, for example, conflates the River Thames with the Rhine, and as Schwartz points out (p. 183) he expressly refers to *Götterdämmerung* Act 3, Scene 1, for the song of the Rhinemaidens. To quote Schwartz again, Eliot "even turns the Thames-daughter Rhine Maidens into English women, each representing a different social class." There is yet more to Eliot's utilization of *Tristan*, including

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*T.S. Eliot was a Wagnerian from early in his life. Tom Wendel brings us a recently discovered poem by Eliot about Tristan. Verna Parino tells us of recent performances that she attended of Siegfried in both Milan and Buenos Aires. We continue with the rare Heckel letters concerning the creation of the Festspielhaus and the first Ring. We conclude with an amusing tale of a bass player being introduced to the Ring in the Bayreuth-like pit at Flagstaff.*

## —EDITOR'S COMMENT—

## WHAT CAN ART TELL US?

Seattle Opera's Director of Education, Perry Lorenzo, gave a fascinating lecture at a recent meeting of the Wagner Society in San Francisco. Not only does he give an unusually well organized and clear presentation of his ideas, but he also often speaks dramatically, thereby adding still another dimension to his already rich narrative. It is great fun to listen to him.

Lorenzo's topic was nominally *Der fliegende Holländer*, but it was much wider than this single opera, covering a great deal of the cultural history from which Wagner sprang. And Lorenzo also spoke of Wagner's own development and a number of the composer's works that followed *Dutchman*.

Lorenzo is clearly enthusiastic about Wagner, among other things, having given the New York Wagner Society's lectures at Bayreuth the last two summers.

But one element of his discussion, which has extensive implications, caught our attention and raised questions for us. His position seems to be that Wagner, being a product of the literary (and thespian) milieu that had evolved in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, really only carried on his own work in that same cultural and intellectual stew. Although Lorenzo made it abundantly clear that, in his view, most of Wagner's works have to be categorized as being masterpieces, he does not believe Wagner plumbed the depths of life and the world to the extent that the results are truly profound. One senses that while Lorenzo has the greatest admiration for Wagner's works, they remain, for him, basically entertainment, though of an elevated nature.

Lorenzo seems to feel that many commentators find more deeply philosophical material in Wagner than is justified, some, he remarked, even making a religion of Wagner's operas. Early on, Lorenzo made it clear that he was a devout Roman Catholic and had been educated by Jesuits. With that kind of background, one can easily understand any nervousness that might be

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## WIZARD OF AZ TO RETIRE

"Unauthorized and Unacceptable," Say Some

If there is one person who has done more for Richard Wagner in America than any other, it has to be Glynn Ross, General Director of Arizona Opera. Sadly, he has announced his retirement after the presentation of the *Ring* cycles in Flagstaff, next June.

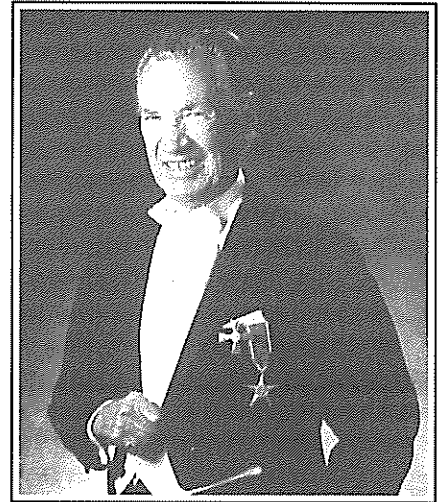
His over-arching accomplishment, as far as Wagnerians are concerned, was his creation of the Pacific Northwest Wagner Festival while General Director of Seattle Opera—which company, just incidentally, he founded. His spectacular *Ring* triumph with a new and small company unquestionably demonstrated to other companies that it could be done, and done well. Today we have many more *Rings* than B.R. (Before Ross).

Those of us who attended many of Ross' *Ring* cycles in Seattle were constantly thrilled. A major reason (among others) for this was his insistence that Wagner knew better than any stage director as to what was going to work on stage. Hence, Ross' productions have always quite closely followed Wagner's stage instructions. Ross never became infected with the European virus that causes so many stage directors to decide that they really know more about Wagner's operas

than Wagner did. Often criticized as "old fashioned", Ross simply stuck to his guns and packed his house at every performance. We were grateful.

After 20 years in Seattle, Ross decided to move to a warmer climate—Arizona. He took over a virtually bankrupt organization and put it on track both financially as well as artistically. And, after many years of carefully nurturing his company, he again brought us a new *Ring*—certainly the most *moving* one anyone can remember, here or abroad! Although he

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Robert S. Fisher, Editor

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## T. S. ELIOT

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some direct quotations from the Wagner text (Schwartz, p. 99). And finally it is most interesting to note that Wagner himself "called London a modern counterpart of the underworld of the Nibelungen myth." Schwartz goes on to remark that Eliot's evocation of "London Bridge is falling down" thus would recall "the fall of Valhalla" (p. 115).

Eliot himself admitted to Wagner's influence on his poetry. As reported by Stephen Spender (Bloom, p. 93), "Once, after having followed a radio performance of *Das Rheingold* with the score," recalled Stephen Spender, "I asked [Eliot] whether, when he wrote *The Waste Land*, he had been studying this libretto. He looked at me slyly and said: 'Not just *Rheingold*—the whole of the *Ring*.'"

Besides the *Ring*, Eliot may have also been contemplating *Parsifal*. So argues Everett Gillis in his provocative essay, "The Waste Land as Grail Romance: Eliot's Use of the Medieval Grail Legends" (Graduate Studies, Texas Tech University No. 6, February, 1974). Though the Grail legends permeate the poem according to Gillis, there is at least one specific allusion to the Wagner version. It is the section of the poem in which Mrs. Porter and her daughter "wash their feet in soda water," a "scurrilous" reference according to Gillis of the washing of the feet of Parsifal by the witch Kundry (p. 23).

The lengthy informative notes provided

by Christopher Ricks, editor of *T.S. Eliot: Inventions of the March Hare*, point out that according to Eric Griffiths "the fatalistic horns" etc. probably allude to Act II

Jewish race." The author of the scurrilous "Judaism in Music" and other like writings was incontestably a leading anti-Semite of his time.

As for Eliot, the case is far less dear. It rests on some three now infamous allusions to Jews within the Eliot corpus. They may be found in "Burbank with a Baedeker; Bleistein with a Cigar," in the poet's essay *After Strange Gods*, in which he criticizes "Tree-thinking Jews;" and in a few private letters in remarks described by his biographer Peter Ackroyd as "fashionably anti-semitic."

Yet unlike Wagner, Eliot would have bridled at the accusation of anti-Semitism. Still, however minor a facet of Eliot's outlook anti-Semitism was, to the extent that the disease was at all present is another indication of a certain sympathy between poet and musician. We may conclude from the above discussion, however, that it was not Wagner's ideology that Eliot admired. Rather it was his aesthetic principles: among them the idea of a synthesis of the

arts, and his use of myth as the foundation of his dramaturgy.

—Professor Thomas Wendel



*Dr. Wendel is retired after a long career teaching history at San Jose State University. He is a graduate of Yale University and is a member of the Wagner Society of Northern California.*

\* From *INVENTIONS OF THE MARCH HARE* by T.S. Eliot, copyright 1996 by Valerie Eliot, reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace & Company.

## O P E R A

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

AND THE FATALISTIC HORNS

THE PASSIONATE VIOLINS

AND OMINOUS CLARINET;

AND LOVE TORTURING ITSELF

TO EMOTION FOR ALL THERE IS IN IT,

WRITHING IN AND OUT

CONTORTED IN PAROXYSMS,

FLINGING ITSELF AT THE LAST

LIMITS OF SELF-EXPRESSION.

WE HAVE THE TRAGIC? OH NO!

LIFE DEPARTS WITH A FEEBLE SMILE

INTO THE INDIFFERENT.

THESE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

DO NOT HOLD GOOD AT ALL,

AND I FEEL LIKE THE GHOST OF YOUTH

AT THE UNDERTAKERS' BALL.

—T.S. ELIOT\*

of *Tristan* wherein the love duet is preceded by sequences for six horns and solo clarinet plus "passionate violins." As for the meaning of the second stanza, Ricks' notes remind us of *The Hollow Men*: "This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper."

One hates to leave the subject of Eliot and Wagner on a negative note, but we cannot deliberate their mutualities without briefly touching on the subject of anti-Semitism. Wagner left absolutely no doubt as to where he stood on the subject of "the

## SIGFRIDO

### *Performances at Teatro Colón and La Scala*

To see each of the new *Ring* productions both at Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and La Scala in Milan necessitates annual trips, and 1997 was the year for *Siegfried* at both houses. Regrettably, a full cycle is not planned for Argentina's beautiful opera house. Renovation or replacement plans for Italy's historic opera building may preclude presentation of a complete cycle there, as well. But the performances of *Siegfried* at both houses were well worth the great effort of getting tickets and traveling alone while trying to use foreign languages.

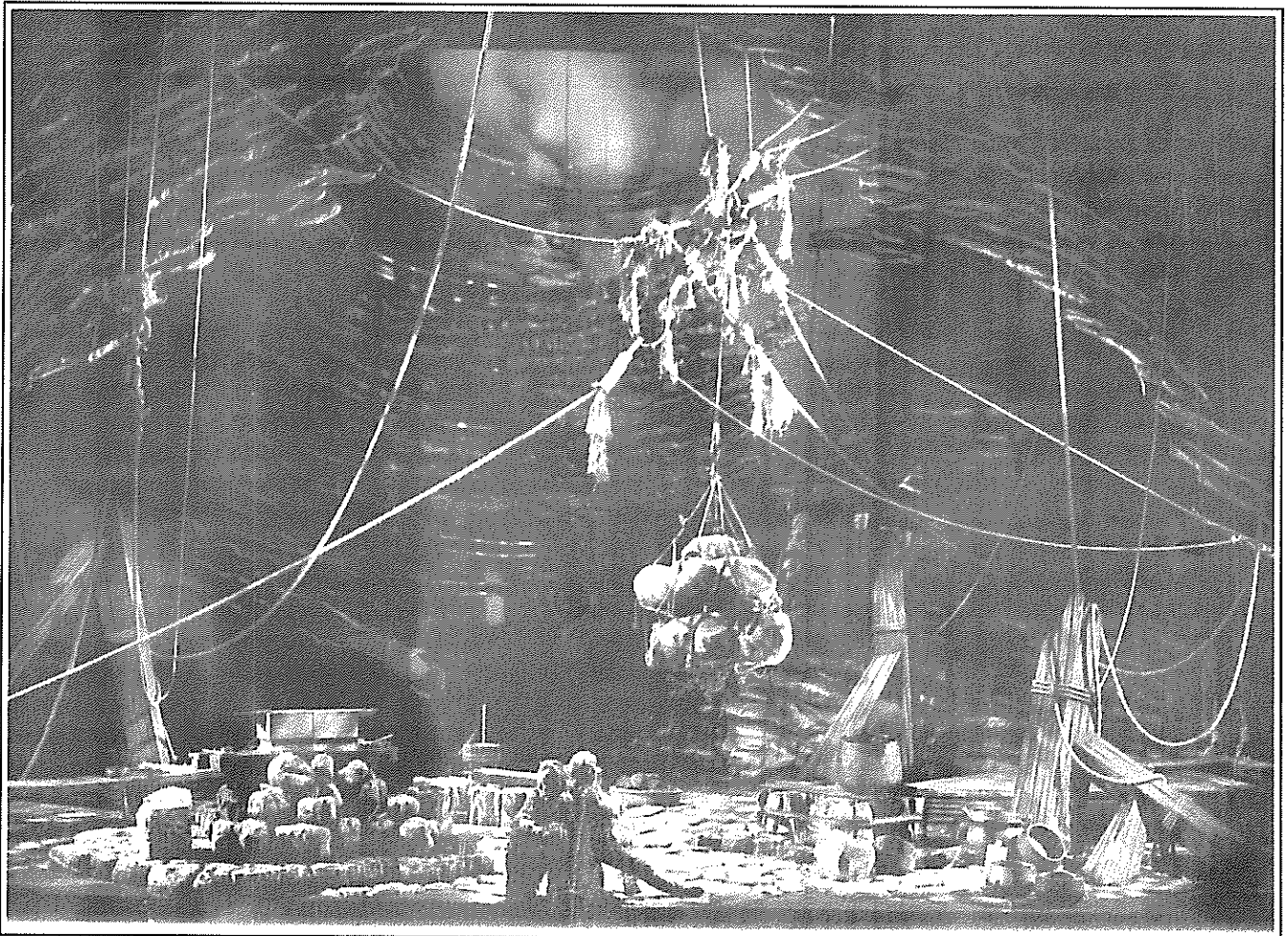
Most memorable from the Teatro Colón stage in Argentina (June 11) was their dragon—a long “Wurm” with slathering mouth (John Tranter) who re-

ally fought with Siegfried, (Stig Andersen, who had portrayed the role so well in the Aarhus, Denmark *Ring* last year). Throughout the opera, however, from the depths and the darkness and the dialogues, one could feel the development of Wagner's “new man”, free from convention, finally meeting with the predestined woman in Act 3, their love expressed in the height of glorious music.

The Argentine sets and costumes by Roberto Oswald and Anibal Lápiz were neither historic nor futuristic, but imaginative and thought-provoking. Our friends Helmut Pampuch, Ekkehard Wlaschiha, Tom Fox and Anne Evans were excellent as Mime, Alberico, El Caminante (Wotan) and Brunilda respectively. Greeting them

the next day on the plane to the Iguazu Falls was a joy. It was interesting how Wlaschiha, who is a large man, was made to look almost as small as Pampuch, who is short, by placing him below high rocks and by his costume and stance. The evening that I attended was a subscription, black-tie night, and the very formally dressed, sophisticated, knowledgeable audience seemed delighted to hear Wagner again in Buenos Aires.

Last April in Milan two casts were used for their *Sigfrido* with Wolfgang Schmidt and Falk Struckmann singing Siegfried and Der Wanderer in the first two performances, and Siegfried Jerusalem and Monte Pederson in the third. I saw all three.



*Act 1 of Siegfried in Mime's hut at the Teatro Colón production in Buenos Aires. Photo by Miguel Micciche courtesy Teatro Colón.*



*Act II of Siegfried fighting the Dragon. Stig Andersen sang Siegfried and John Tranter sang Fafner. Photo Teatro Colón.*



*Act II of Siegfried in Milan: The Wanderer (Monte Pederson) and Alberich (Wolfgang Schmidt) arguing. La Scala photo.*

Jane Eaglen sang Brünnhilde, Heinz Zednik (with glasses) was Mime, Hartmut Welker (walking with crutches from an injury) was Alberich, Julian Rodescu did Fafner, and Mette Ejsing Erda. All were excellent, although hidden bottles of water helped on occasion. Riccardo Muti's conducting was sensational. The poppy field, that had been used in *Die Walküre*, was still there in Act III. Costumes were

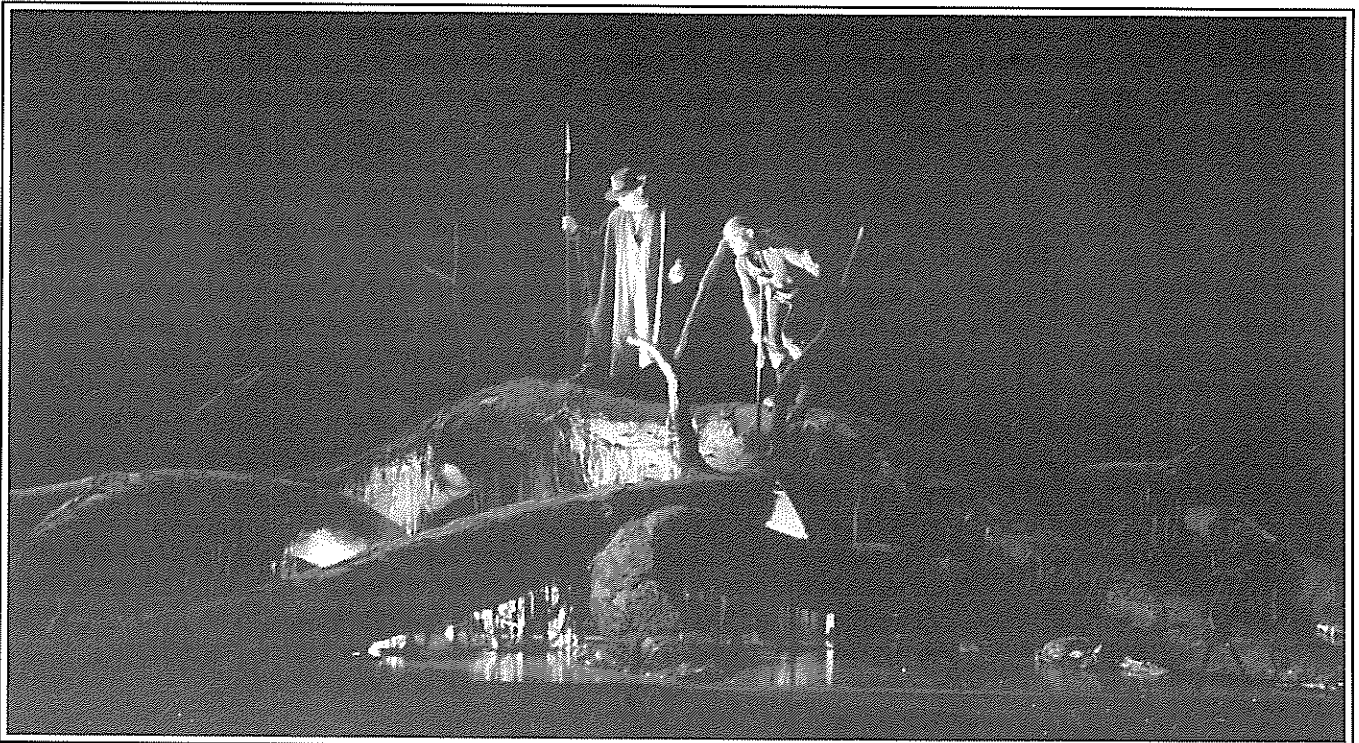
working-men's clothes except for Eaglen whose beautiful gown had a nice waistline.

Director Franco Malgrande added many pertinent touches in his characters' movements which enhanced their portrayal of fear, power, sympathy or humanity. The personality of the characters seemed more individualized. The argument between the Wanderer and Siegfried

was very physical. Lighting effects were especially interesting, particularly for Fafner's cave as the Wanderer and Alberich called down to warn the dragon. One wonders what comes next at La Scala.

—Verna Parino

Note: See LEITMOTIVE, Volume 9, Number 4, Winter 1995, for a description of our author's peregrinations to attend *Ring* performances.



*The Wanderer and Alberich in Act II calling to Fafner. Both La Scala photos by Silvia Lelli, courtesy Teatro alla Scala, Milan.*

# LETTERS OF RICHARD WAGNER TO EMIL HECKEL

## *A First-hand Account of the Creation of the Bayreuth Festival*

*Emil Heckel founded the first Wagner Society. It was the beginning of his support and assistance to Richard Wagner in his ambitious quest to produce the Ring for the first time and in a theater designed and built for that specific purpose.*

*Heckel lived in Mannheim and corresponded with Wagner often. The following letters and commentary were put together in book form by Heckel's son, Karl. In 1899 it was translated by William Ashton Ellis and it is from that rare volume that we here reproduce part of the text. It is our plan to present more of Heckel's commentary with his letters from Wagner in future issues.<sup>1</sup>*

In the year 1853, at the age of two-and-twenty, I heard the *Tannhäuser*-overture for the first time, conducted by Liszt at Carlsruhe. I was filled with rage at this "horrible" music, which flatly contradicted all my previous notions of the "beautiful." I gave my wrath as free a rein, as my companion H. M. Schletterer—thereafter a well-known opponent of Wagner's—gave his immoderate enthusiasm. Not for some time was I afforded occasion to change my mind; for the new art was not then practiced in my native city, Mannheim. Our Court-conductor, Vincenz Lachner, was its determined and powerful adversary. To be sure, he was compelled to put on *Tannhäuser*, and later *Lohengrin*; but the solecisms of the production were little calculated to recruit for Wagner.

Ten years after that concert, and again at Carlsruhe, I heard the "Walküren-Ritt" conducted by Wagner himself. This time I underwent a strong impression, and was convinced that similar concerts, personally conducted by Wagner, would break the ice at Mannheim too. I had some desire to bring this about, but my zeal was not yet warm enough to urge me to active measures. However, the longing remained, to make the acquaintance of a Wagnerian stage-work in model rendering.

At Venice, on my way home from

Italy with my wife in the summer of 1868, I read the announcement of the first performance of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at Munich. My decision was swiftly taken: off to Munich.

This perfect and complete production under Wagner's personal superintendence, with Hans von Bülow as conductor and Hans Richter as leader on the stage, had the effect upon me of a revelation—and shewed me the task of my life.

Arrived home at Mannheim, I induced my father as President of the Committee of Management of the Court-theatre, to have the *Meistersinger* mounted. A battle royal ensued with Lachner, who, unable to prevent the performance itself, made cuts in the score amounting to 171 lines of verse in the first act, 137 in the second, and 345 in the third; among them all but the opening words of Sachs' monologue, and the chorus "Wach' auf!" Nevertheless the thing was a success.

Next year I got a "Concert-union" founded for the financial support of things musical. Though there could be no question of informing it with a definite tendency, I hoped to have won at least a basis for the reform of musical matters; and I drafted a letter to Wagner, inviting him to conduct a concert in person. My enthusiasm, however, was in advance of the times. There was no chance of my plan being adopted, and the letter had to stay unsent.

At that time, even among the friends of the new art, in most respectable circles there reigned a secret dread of confessing oneself a Wagnerian. The calumniations of his person and distortions of his object, that crowded to the light on every hand, cast their reflection on his adherents also, to the detriment of their position in civic life. Only slowly did there form a small community of unscared advocates. On the 30th April 1871 these made their first public appearance in the music-room of my pianoforte-warehouse, where they rendered Wagner's *Kaisermarsch* on two concert-grands a few weeks after its com-

position. The performance was undertaken by Herr A. Hänlein, Dr. Zeroni, Herr Ernst Bassermann and Herr Rud. Artaria, conducted by Herr Ferd. Langer. Members of the Court-theatre and two or three vocal unions sang the closing chorus. For a repetition the doors and windows were thrown open; our enthusiasm spread to those outside, and, at a time so strung to patriotism, the whole street took up the final chant.

The first performance of the *Kaisermarsch* had taken place on April 14, 1871, in Berlin, under Bilse, followed by Gungl on April 23 at Leipzig. On May the fifth it was played in Berlin under Wagner himself, for the benefit of the "Kaiser-Wilhelm-Stiftung."

The restoration of the German Reich strengthened Wagner's belief in the development of a truly German Art and Culture. Inspired by this confidence, he issued a public appeal, under the title "Ueber die Aufführung des Bühnenfestspieles: Der Ring des Nibelungen," in which he begged the friends of his art simply to make themselves known to him by name. In answer to this appeal I (alas! alone) wrote the master as a personal stranger on May 15, 1871, that he might count myself with the friends of his art, asking him to tell me what they first could do to contribute to the success of his great national enterprise.

After a day or two, Wagner's answer arrived:—

Dear Sir,

Heartily thanking you for your proofs of friendship, I have above all to acknowledge the value of your announcement that you wish to share in the facilitation of my great undertaking. For further particulars I beg you kindly to address yourself to Herr K. Tausig, 35 Dessauer Strasse, Berlin. Until a Patronat-Committee shall have been constituted, he has provisionally taken over the business side of the matter, and will give you precise infor-

mation as to the mode in which your sympathy may be made effectual.

With every compliment,  
Yours faithfully

RICHARD WAGNER.

LUCERNE 19th May, 1871.

Instead of writing, I made a personal journey to Tausig, and learnt from him the plan for raising the requisite funds through the issue of a thousand *Patronat-vouchers* at three-hundred thalers [about £45] apiece. My proposal to found "Wagner-Vereins," to enable the less affluent to share in taking up these vouchers, met his approval.

Returned to Mannheim, I at once began to found the Verein. Its origin and evolution are described at length in a book of my son's.<sup>2</sup>

Despatching the statutes to Tausig, I asked him if it would be at all possible to induce Wagner to conduct a concert at Mannheim himself. At like time I informed Tausig of my intention to urge the foundation of Wagner-societies in other towns. He answered me:—

Dear Sir,

Your "Wagner-Verein" is an excellent idea, and, with such earnest and persistent advocacy, the result cannot but be gratifying. I will write Wagner about the conducting of a concert at Mannheim, but scarcely think he will decide on such another trip. The inner circle of the Patronat consists, as I told you before, of Fr. Liszt, Madame von Muchanoff, Baroness von Schleinitz, and myself; the full Committee list cannot be issued for a few months to come.

So soon as I receive a favourable answer from Wagner, I will drop you a line. The signed applications for Patronat-vouchers please send to me at Berlin.

Yours very truly

CARL TAUSIG.

WEIMER 7th June, 1871.

Dear Sir,

I can see no objection to your plans for a "Wagner-Verein" excepting that we shall encounter difficulties and delays in cashing the Patronat subscriptions. As the theatre, i.e. the building and other preliminaries, will be taken in hand by the end of this autumn, we shall soon require to have the disposal of substantial means.—At any other time Herr Wagner would have accepted your invitation to conduct a concert at Mannheim; but the composition of the Nibelungen forbids him to split up his energy in any way that parts him from his work.

With best compliments,

Yours faithfully,

CARL TAUSIG.

BERLIN, 17th June, 1871.

Regarding the concert, a more favourable prospect was opened up by a letter of Wagner's, after I had acquainted him with the satisfactory progress of the Verein:—

Dear Sir,

Delighted by your acceptable news, I confine myself at present to answering the wish you have expressed to me. I am quite certain that it would offer a most agreeable diversion to my very secluded life, to take a few days' outing to conduct such a species of concert among friends. Only, for the moment I should not care to pledge myself to any given date, as—after many outward exertions—I have only just arrived at settling down to my work. Rely on it, however, that I will let you know in good time—probably in the autumn; and I shall rely on you for its being something proper.

With sincerest compliments,

RICHARD WAGNER.

LUCERNE 21st June, 1871.

By Tausig's sudden death on July 17, 1871, Wagner lost one of the ablest and most provident of his adherents. Tausig

had intended to form an orchestra in Berlin expressly to perform appropriate portions of the Ring des Nibelungen in the concert-room. This project had a twofold aim: to introduce the public to the work, and so to familiarise the executants with its style that they might form the nucleus of the future Bayreuth orchestra.

A few questions which I had addressed to Wagner, touching preparations for the Mannheim concert, were kindly answered by Frau Wagner. She had already apprised me by letter that Wagner, of course, declined any honorarium for the concert.

Honoured Sir,

My husband again requests me to thank you most sincerely in his name; your organisation of the Verein to him seems admirable, and he begs you will have the kindness to send him two more prospectuses, since he has already despatched the former two as models.

As regards the concert, he assumes that its interest will consist in his conducting it; consequently he deems vocal numbers superfluous. The orchestra which you have specified is what he needs, and the programme will therefore be composed of a Beethoven symphony, the two marches (King and Kaiser), the Lohengrin or Tristan prelude and the Tannhäuser-overture. A fortnight before the concert my husband will send you more exact particulars. Should not the Patronat-vouchers, to be acquired with the proceeds of the concert, be raffled for the benefit of the orchestra?<sup>3</sup>

How would it be, honoured Sir, if you placed yourself in communication with other cities, so that the Wagner-Verein might spread from Mannheim over Germany? I think it would be well if this business had its centre with you. If this is your view also, I only beg you to confirm it, and I would give you the addresses of persons in various towns to whom an appeal might be sent with certainty of good results.

To the most friendly greetings of my husband I add, most honoured

## HECKEL LETTERS

(Continued from page 7)

Sir, the assurance of my own esteem.

COSIMA WAGNER  
née Liszt

TRIBSCHEN, NEAR LUCERNE, 16th July, 1871.

This letter was forwarded to me at Partenkirchen whence I set out for Vienna, to co-operate with Dr. Kafka in founding a Verein on the spot.

In my answer to Frau Wagner I declared my readiness to undertake the central management of the Vereins. At like time I asked whether the visit of Herr Hänlein, committee-man of the Mannheim Verein, would be welcome at Tribschen for discussion of the concert preliminaries. This question was answered in a letter written by Frau Wagner at the master's dictation:—

TRIBSCHEN, NEAR LUCERNE, 12th August 1871.

My dear Sir,

I shall be pleased to receive the pianist Herr Hänlein and to give him the desired details of the concert.

I have written to Court-piano-forte-purveyor Karl Bechstein in Berlin praying him to take Karl Tausig's place;<sup>4</sup> until I receive his answer, communications may be sent to her Excellency Freifrau von Schleinitz, Ministry of the Royal and Imperial Household, Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin.—

No public appeal can be entertained by the Berlin committee, as its first principle has been to keep to personal and private paths. With best thanks and friendliest greeting,

RICHARD WAGNER.

Herr Hänlein was quite enthusiastic in the report of his interview with Wagner, who had often spoken "like a Seer"; he told me that Wagner meant to apply to the Grand Duke of Baden for the participation of the Karlsruhe orchestra in our concert.

To establish a common base of operations between the Vereins and the Patronat-committee, I addressed myself

to Freifrau von Schleinitz, who was, at all times most successfully at work in private for the undertaking.

SALZBURG, 17th August 1871.

Dear Sir,

Your lines of the 14th inst. have this moment reached me here at Salzburg.—I hasten to inform you that to-day we travel via Munich to Lucerne, from which place I will write you in full after I have had a talk with Wagner.—I have already written to Dr. Kafka in Vienna, telling him how glad I should be if you would submit to the labour of taking over the whole business department of the great undertaking, making the Verein founded by yourself at Mannheim its centre.—

With fervent wishes for the success of your efforts, I remain with high esteem

Yours faithfully,

FREIFRAU VON SCHLEINITZ.

At the beginning of September Baron von Loen, General Intendant of the Weimar Court-theatre, informed me that he had been entrusted with supreme control of the Patronat," and that he thought it necessary to form a "General Council" consisting of himself and the heads of the various local Wagner-Vereins, in order to issue a public appeal to found additional unions.

I expressed my entire concurrence with this plan, and begged Baron von Loen to carry out his intention as soon as possible, since several unions had already been formed on the Mannheim model. In spite of further negotiations by letter and word of mouth with Baron von Loen, who seemed to regard his task too strictly in the light of a representative, this "General Council" never came into existence.

As it had been made known in the papers that Wagner would conduct two concerts in Vienna, I asked the master whether the Mannheim concert might not also be announced. Without his express consent I would make nothing public, but attached great weight to whatever seemed adapted to shew the world that the enterprise was no longer in the clouds. From

the following two letters of the master's I first learnt how onerous the preparations were to Wagner, and for awhile avoided all importuning about the concert.

My dear Sir,

Forgive this delay with my answer. Precisely in the last few weeks I have been engaged in active correspondence about the steps immediately necessary for my undertaking, which needs must suffer a considerable postponement if the first building-operations for the theatre cannot be begun this autumn. It is essential for me to know the present amount of subscriptions, to be able to judge whether I can give the needful orders to the architect and machinist; for, if the date announced by me is to be observed, the preliminary work must commence at once. I therefore beg you in particular to acquaint Herr von Loen as soon as possible with the results of your labours in Mannheim to date, so that he may be in the position to inform me of the grand total in good time.

In a favourable event I then propose to meet the architect and machinist at Bayreuth toward the end of this month, to settle all the requisites for the laying of the foundation-stone—to which, my dear Sir, I propose to invite yourself and the principal officers of the other Vereins. In every respect such a meeting, from which I should have to address a word to the public too, would help the progress of our enterprise; so that, even should delays arise thereafter, I eagerly desire the execution of my plan.—

I am sorry that a very premature announcement, that I intend giving concerts in Vienna, has somewhat upset you. Certainly, the rumour of my acceptance for Mannheim awoke in my Viennese friends a like wish for my personal intervention, and I could do no else than declare the same good-will to Vienna as to Mannheim. Now it is to be feared that every union in the

various towns on whose co-operation I must count will advance a similar claim upon me, and the strength which I have promised to sacrifice in full to the execution of my work itself will be frittered away beforehand on amassing, the material means, with incalculable consequences to myself. I undisguisedly acquaint you with this fear, without, however, withdrawing the promise I gave you: merely it would reassure me, if I could move you to a little patience, and if you would not be too pressing about the date of my concert-visit to Mannheim. To Vienna, also, I have only been able to give an indefinite consent as yet: I should much prefer our all assembling soon at Bayreuth, when this concert business also could be definitely arranged.

With the warmest acknowledgment of your most amiable services, and the request that you will present my best compliments to our valued friends in Mannheim,

I remain with all esteem

Yours faithfully

RICHARD WAGNER.

LUCERNE, 1st October, 1871.

Dear Herr Heckel,

Allow me, in the thick of business, to report you just one thing: namely, that according to the architect's latest statement the building of the theatre cannot be begun, and consequently the foundation-stone cannot be laid, before March. At the end of this month I shall go to Bayreuth, to clear up all anxieties about the plot of land etc. I believe, however, that a meeting of delegates from the Vereins would have no particular object before that desired occasion in March. Until then we shall probably have to see what each Verein is able to accomplish by itself. I still remain disposed to come to you and conduct a concert in the interim: further particulars I must reserve for a somewhat freer time than the present.

Heartiest greeting from

Yours faithfully

RICHARD WAGNER

LUCERNE 3rd November 1871.

A little earlier I had written Wagner: "I think the collecting of funds by the Vereins makes your brilliant undertaking a truly *national* one. How fine it would be, if the Vereins could be connected up—for which I strive with all my heart—so that, even after the first performances of your Bühnenfestspiel at Bayreuth, they might continue to aid your further labours at every season." Now that the meeting of delegates from the Vereins had been postponed, I myself sent Wagner a plan of organisation for a "German Wagner-Verein." Upon receipt of his answer I likewise sent the sketch of a "Call."

Dear Herr Heckel,

Your proposal is first-rate: if such a unification comes to vigorous life, it will be the very thing I want. Meanwhile the strength of the situation still resides in its single robust parts. It is *units* that offer the most solid support at present. The society "Wagneriana" in Berlin lately voted the purchase of sixty (60) Patronat-vouchers, and the engagement of the whole orchestra. Vienna promises that it will shew itself equally generous in course of this winter. At Leipzig, on the other hand,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a voucher has been signed till now: in Munich—per Vereins—absolutely nothing, so far as I know. You in Mannheim alone have proved yourselves alive. Nevertheless, I comprehend that only by means of a large and general association, can the enterprise be lastingly and resultfully insured: therefore I think your proposals much more than simply worth consideration.

As to the date of my journey, at present I can say no more than that it will occur at latest in the first part of December, when I think of spending at least two days in Munich. At Bayreuth everything is already stirring in the most auspicious fashion; my wishes are met with the most

earnest attention. There I shall arrange whatever is needful, especially as concerns the site (which the town will probably present to me), so that the building may begin in March. But where are the heads of Vereins, to be called thither (or to Leipzig—according to Herr von Loen)? Beyond your Mannheim Verein I know none that has done anything hitherto, or even made itself worth noticing, as a Verein. Herr Dr. Kafka *will* shew us in time, with his Viennese, how things are going there. So I think that a convocation would have no meaning before next March at Bayreuth. For the moment the really important thing appears to me that you should issue a strongly-worded appeal in the sense you have conveyed to me by your draft. By next March we should know the full extent of the response, and *then* a calling of the clans at Bayreuth (for the foundation-laying) would have some meaning.

I hope you are of my opinion; and perhaps you will have the kindness to communicate your views to Herr van Loen, at like time giving him my best compliments.

With all respect, Yours faithfully

RICHARD WAGNER.

LUCERNE 9th November, 1871.

Dear Sir,

Herewith I return you your draft, which has my entire approval. May the thing take its course, and the German shew that he understands at last to pay the needful tribute to such earnest and persistent efforts on behalf of so shamefully neglected, and withal so boundlessly influential a branch of public art, as that on which I have staked my life. It is splendidly encouraging, my dear Herr Heckel, to light on people of your stamp.

Of the "green pamphlet"<sup>55</sup> on the Production of the Nibelungen-ring there still stand at your disposal, here as well, a good number of copies for distribution. If you wish it, I

will send you some.—

As regards all money matters, and so on, I beg you to treat with Herr v. Loen alone. The banker Cohn, however, has also undertaken to provide for interest on the incoming funds until they are required.

With all respect,  
Yours faithfully

RICHARD WAGNER.

LUCERNE 13th November 1871.

A report in a Darmstadt newspaper, that it was contemplated to hold the Bühnenfestspiele [Stage-festivals] in the Court-theatre there, made me telegraph to Wagner at Tribschen before issuing the said public Call. He answered by the same route:—

*Darmstadt unknown. Town-councillor Bodmer's offer. All a misunderstanding. Bayreuth decision unalterable. Call can go out unhindered.*

Wagner.

The "Call" signed by the Mannheim Wagner-Verein was issued forthwith. Circulated far and wide, partly through direct despatch, partly through reprint in German and foreign journals, it led to the formation of fresh Vereins.

In a letter to Wagner I enclosed my photograph, and touched once more on the concert business. I was highly delighted by his kind assent. The question, whether he proposed to obtain the cooperation of the Carlsruhe orchestra himself, he answered per telegram:—

*Esteemed! Have to do with you at Mannheim, with nobody at Carlsruhe. Provision of means left entirely to you; answer only for my person.*

Wagner.

The preparations for the concert necessitated venous queries, answered in three more letters to myself.

Honoured Sir,

To come at once to the point on which you probably are most intent, I take leave to inform you that

from the evening of December 16 I stand at your disposal for a Mannheim concert, if so it must be (to gain a few extra 5 fl. <sup>6</sup> contributors !)

The rehearsals could take place on the 17th and 18th the performance on the 19th or 20th As your room is small, I am afraid to introduce a chorus. If a large hall (and consequently a *strong* chorus) were possible, I should propose to end the concert with "Wacht auf!" and the close from the Meistersinger: "Ehrt eure deutschen Meister"—with barytone solo (Hans Sachs).

Further 1. Overture to the Magic Flute (Mozart).  
2. Symphony in A-major (Beethoven).  
3. Prelude to Lohengrin.  
4. (Subject to that condition) the above-named fragments from the Meistersinger. Preceding them: the Prelude to the Meistersinger.

The whole might begin with the Kaisermarsch. I think that would be about enough music ?—

Frau v. Muchanoff resides: Warsaw, Palais Potocki.—

Everything else is good and in order. I stay here till December 7.— Best thanks for your photograph: at Mannheim they shall take my physiognomy too, to enable me to return the compliment.

With the most respectful greetings, Yours sincerely

RICHARD WAGNER.

25th November 1871.

My dear Sir,

There's to be a concert—consequently an end to tranquillity ! I knew it !—

Well, well !—

Your arrangements as regards the time and the rehearsals are excellent. The smallness of the place is bad: what do you mean by the "Theatersaal" ? then ?

If there is really to be no chorus, I beg there may be no singing at all. We will wind up with the prelude

and closing scene from Tristan und Isolde—instead of the closing scene from the Meistersinger. The parts for this please ask—in my name—from Kapellmeister C. Eckert in Berlin. They belong to *me*, and were merely lent to him.—

Accordingly the following programme: no division, but *As introduction*: Prelude to Lohengrin.

1. Overture to the Magic Flute.
2. A-major Symphony.
3. Prelude to the Meistersinger.
4. Prelude and Close from Tristan und Isolde.
5. Kaisermarsch.

It doesn't look very grand, but will sound all right.—

In any case I should like you to reserve me six good seats.—

Could you also kindly take the trouble to find me good quarters? As my wife is going to meet me at Mannheim, accompanied by her eldest little daughter, I shall want besides a sittingroom, two bedrooms with 3 beds.—

I congratulate you on the good reception of your Call by the newspapers. The [Augsburg] "Allgemeine," it is true, has uttered not a word as yet—presumably for cogent reasons.—

Greet our friends, and accept the very best thanks of

Yours sincerely

RICHARD WAGNER.

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## NOTES

1. *Letters of Richard Wagner To Emil Heckel: With A Brief History Of The Bayreuth Festivals*, edited by Karl Heckel, translated by William Ashton Ellis, London (Grant Richards) 1899. As is our normal practice, we have not changed the original with respect to spellings, punctuations, emphasis or otherwise.
2. Karl Heckel, "Die Bühnenfestspiele in Bayreuth" *Authentischer Beitrag zur Geschichte ihrer Entstehung und Entwicklung*.

(Continued on page 12)

## AT THE BOTTOM OF THE *RING*

### *A Professional Musician Meets the Ring and the Grand Canyon*

I'm sitting with my bass in the bowels of the orchestra pit. The house lights dim to total blackness. The only thing I can see is the penlight the conductor starts waving. I play a low E flat and count 136 bars as the orchestra gradually builds. I turn the page. The world of Richard Wagner's immense *Ring of the Nibelung* has begun. How did I get here?

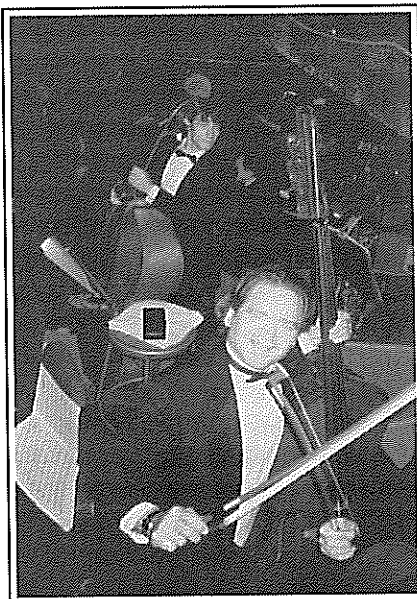
West Palm Beach Florida - Spring 1996. I'm driving on I-95 to a performance of *The Merry Widow* by Franz Lehár with the Palm Beach Opera where I work as principle bass. I really loath this opera which represents to me the decline of Western musical taste. On my car radio I hear an ad for Arizona Opera's production of the *Ring*. "God" I think, "I could do that!" Something with real artistic depth and meaning. Maybe I'll call them and ask if they need a bass player. If I tell them I auditioned for Maestro Guidanio (did I spell this correctly) for my job here, they might hire me. You don't get hired by Maestro Guidanio unless you're really good—they just might go for it. So I call Arizona Opera and talk to one of the top guys, Dean Ryan. "So Guidanio hired you as principle bass huh? You must be really good. So do you want the job?"

I start to panic because I'll have to turn down work at the Burt Reynold's Dinner Theater and a really good gig on a luxury cruise ship. Both these jobs pay more than the *Ring*. I ask my wife, Nancy, what I should do. "Well Mik, what do you want to do?" "Uh, I want to play the *Ring*." "So, go play the *Ring*, I wouldn't want to live with you always regretting that you never played it." So I get ready to drive to Arizona. The opera sends me the four operas that comprise the 16 hour cycle (no cuts!). I buy a 1953 recording and start to work. The bass is the power behind the great and terrible engine that drives the *Ring*, and it takes a lot of preparation. Lots of heavy plucks and technical difficulties. It takes a lot of time.

I drive from West Palm Beach to Phoe-

nix where we have a week of orchestra rehearsals. The conductor is Stephen Minde, a German guy who knows the *Ring* inside and out and speaks with a funny German accent. The orchestra is not as good as any of the recordings I've heard, but they have some very strong players. The first time the horn player plays Siegfried's horn call, the orchestra cheers! There is a full complement of Wagner tubas and six harps, all out of tune. But they get better.

On my time off I train for my assault on the Grand Canyon doing baby hikes around Phoenix. The *Ring* and the Grand



*Mik Groninger in the bottom with his bass at Arizona Opera's Ring.*

Canyon have a lot in common. They are both immense and deep and to fully experience them, preparation is required. Lots of people hear the *Ring* without studying it, just like those people who go to the Grand Canyon and just walk around the rim. I was determined to plumb the depths of both the *Ring* and the Canyon. I read Owen Lee's great introduction to the *Ring* a dozen times trying to get a grip on it. I looked for what Thomas Mann calls "A presentient complex of mother-fixation, sexual desire and anger" in the bass part. I drink German beer to further my under-

standing of German culture. Anything for art! A friend gives me a comic book on the *Ring* that follows the libretto almost literally. After work I go to a club called "The Jungle." The stage that the dancers use has a waterfall and the girls cavort under it while I drink my German beer and watch the "Rhinemaidens" at play. A deep understanding of the *Ring* begins to glow within me as I watch and drink.

Finally we move the orchestra to Flagstaff where we will perform. I get up at 4:30 to tackle the Canyon. I carry 5 liters of water and high-energy food as I start down the South Kaibab (did I spell this correctly?) Trail. There are warning signs not to attempt a trip to the bottom and back in one day, which is what I'm planning. I see "Wotan's Throne," a huge formation that is surreal in its majesty and grandeur. In a few hours I'm looking up at it instead of down. I have descended a vertical mile into the depths of the gorge. "Wow, this is just like the *Ring*, really deep and really awesome and *really* tough!" I have my lunch at Phantom Ranch and start my trip out on the Bright Angel Trail. As I plod my way out, I'm surrounded by primordial formations from the beginning of the world. It is truly an environment worthy of the Gods that Wagner has brought to life. I'm inspired by the power of the *Ring* and I huff and puff my way out of the great and terrible canyon. I made it!

I attend every technical rehearsal of the *Ring* so I can see what is happening on stage. A huge screen has hundreds of different slides projected on it to set mood. Hi-tech "cyber lights" add to the effect. The Rhinemaidens aren't as cute as the ones at the club in Phoenix, but they sing very well indeed. The dragon is scary, and I learn that there is a crew of people inside making him move and breath fire. The singers, mostly American, make me proud of them. I'm the only orchestra member at these rehearsals and I feel blessed to be there.

During the day I go to the library and

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

(Continued from page 2)

generated when Wagner adherents start talking about the *Meister's* works being the basis for a religion.

We would not suggest that Wagner's art (nor any art, for that matter), is the basis for a religion. However, we often do wonder if great art does not transcend the immediate cultural environment in which its creator is immersed. When Wagner (and others) deal with the fundamental constituents of human nature and the world, it seems to us that there are profound lessons displayed for us all to ponder.



## WIZARD OF AZ

(Continued from page 2)

continued to closely follow Wagner's instructions, the Arizona *Ring* is entirely different from the Seattle productions—proving again the richness and versatility of Wagner's genius, as well as Ross'.

The Flagstaff *Ring* represents the culmination of this man's life work and for many at the June, 1996 performances it was the most impressive *Ring* they had ever seen. It truly is Ross' masterpiece.

His accomplishments are legion, and we hope to have a more definitive article about him in a future issue. Ross will continue with Arizona Opera as General Director Emeritus after June, 1998.

## HECKEL:NOTES

(Continued from page 10)

(E. W. Frikzsch, Leipzig.)

3. The members of the orchestra claimed no pay. On the other hand they had entered into full rights of membership of the union.

4. He declined.

5. "Ueber die Aufführung des Bühnenfestspieles: der Ring des Nibelungen." Eine Mittheilung und Aufforderung an die Freunde seiner Kunst von Richard Wagner, Leipzig, Verlag von E. W. Fritzsche, 1871 [See *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. v., "Final Report, etc."—Tr.]

6. The subscription to the Mannheim Wagner-Verein was five guldens a member.

7. In my letter I had used this abbreviation for the concert-hall in the theatre-building.



## AT THE BOTTOM

(Continued from page 11)

try to read some of the arcane books about the *Ring*. I don't understand most of it, but I'm sure none of these authors has ever played the bass part to the *Ring*, so how much can they *really* know?

Finally the performances begin. These are the longest shows I've ever played. *Götterdämmerung* is five and one-half hours! I concentrate heavily and when I have a few bars out I get to look at the supertitles to see what the singers are singing about. Lots of passionate love stuff

that makes me crazy. Most of the time I'm too busy playing my monster plucks to think about the psychological aspect of the myth being played out onstage, but I'm definitely not just playing notes, something of the meaning of life and love and true power is coming out in my little bass part. I'm happy that I never hack at it and actually I am proud of my meager contribution to the project.

I've been touched by the power of the *Ring* and the Canyon and my soul has been seared by both. I'll carry the psychic energy of hundreds of musical motives along with powerful images of the glorious Grand Canyon within me forever.

I'm glad I took this job!

—Mik Groninger

*Mik Groninger performed in both cycles of the Arizona Opera production of the Ring in Flagstaff during June, 1996. He lives in West Palm Beach, Florida, where he performs with opera, ballet and symphony companies. Barbara B. Friede kindly assisted in the preparation of this article.*

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