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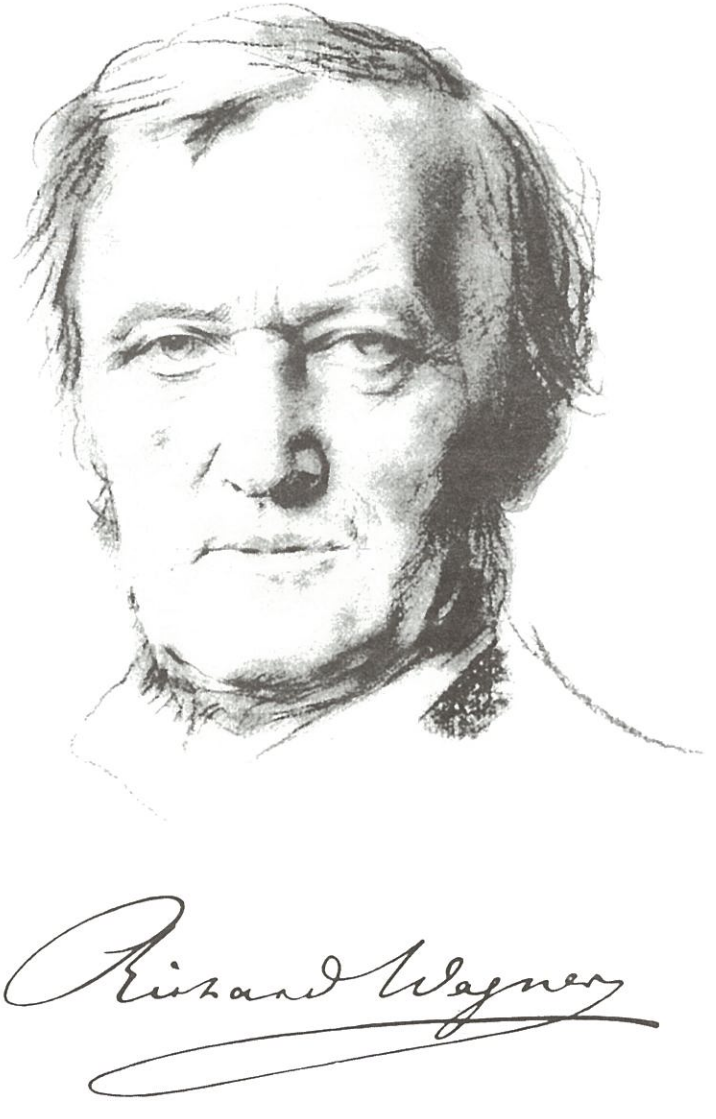

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ISSUE 102

The Editor's Thoughts

Lotfi Mansouri

1929-2013

Lotfi Mansouri was a true friend of those of us who love Wagner. In a recent issue of this journal (#100, Winter 2012-2013) there was a complete list of the many Wagner operas that he produced while General Director of San Francisco Opera. Of course, during his career in Europe and Canada he had also produced many Wagner works. How we hope that circumstances will once again develop to give us such an abundance of Wagner productions.

I have never been an "insider" at San Francisco Opera, but my experience at 301 Van Ness Avenue began 65 years ago with *Die Meistersinger* in 1948, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Walkiire* in 1949 (both with Kirsten Flagstad) Gaetano Merola, General Director. Merola died in 1953 and soon after, Kurt Herbert Adler, who had been Merola's chief assistant, took over: his unique and wonderful record is well known. Many years later, when Adler decided to retire, we all wondered who might be the next General Director. Adler had looked far and wide, but selected his friend, the very bright manager of London Records Terry McEwen, who was the New York-based U.S. executive for the British record giant, Decca (owner of London Records). Even though McEwen had no experience managing an opera company, almost everyone thought that Adler had made an excellent choice (of course, every General Director had to be voted-on by the Board of Directors). But, after only a few years, McEwen's health unexpectedly deteriorated and he had to step down. His choice for the new General Director was Lotfi Mansouri: a known quantity (he had been

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LEITMOTIVE – *THE WAGNER QUARTERLY*

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LEITMOTIVE – *THE WAGNER QUARTERLY* is a journal intended for all persons interested in the works, life, and influence of Richard Wagner (1813–1883). Although many of our authors and readers are scholars affiliated with academic institutions, many are informed lay persons with a keen interest in Wagner studies.

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We invite all interested persons to submit articles for publication: please see the back cover.

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David Dalto, Founding Editor (1985–1989) Paul Schofield, Editor (1990)

About the Authors

Hans Rudolph Vaget (*"My First and Only Love"*) is Professor Emeritus of German Studies and Comparative Literature at Smith College (Northampton, Massachusetts), where he taught from 1967 until 2004. He received his academic training at the universities of Munich and Tübingen, Wales (at Cardiff) and Columbia University, New York. He has published widely in the field of German Studies from the 18th century to the present, focusing primarily on Goethe, Wagner and Thomas Mann. Aside from Smith, he has taught at the University of California, Irvine, at Yale, Columbia, Princeton, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Middlebury College and Hamburg University.

A recipient in 1994 of the Thomas-Mann-Medaille for his edition of the correspondence of Thomas Mann and Agnes E. Meyer (Frankfurt/Main: S. Fischer, 1992, 1170 pages), he is also one of the chief editors of the new edition of the works, letters and diaries of Thomas Mann.

In 2001, he was awarded the *Forschungspreis* (Research Prize) of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Bonn, Germany.

Dame Gwyneth Jones (*"Quartet*: The Joy of Music, Friendship and Fun Together"), born in Wales, initially studied at the Royal College of Music in London, later studying in both Siena and Zurich where she made her debut as a mezzo soprano. She has sung starring roles in virtually every major opera house in Europe and America. Her Wagner roles were always outstanding, but of special note in San Francisco was an Elektra: every member of the audience was exhausted when the final curtain came down. The other unusually memorable performance was at the Met as Brünnhilde, replacing Hildegard Behrens who had been struck by falling scenery: Dame Gwyneth caught the next plane from London and rescued the Met. She received a full 30 minutes of cheering from that New York audience. Literally hundreds of her performances were the best.

The Wesendonck house in Zürich, built of stone and on several acres. The interior walls are marble. A much smaller, wooden cottage, built for Richard and Minna, was located behind the trees on the far left: imagine the servants carrying the written notes that Wagner and Mathilde exchanged. This photograph was taken in 1984.

"My First and Only Love": Wagner, Mathilde, and the *Wesendonck Lieder*

I take the title of my talk from one of Wagner's letters to Eliza Wille, his confidante, in which he says this about Mathilde Wesendonck: "I love the woman too much, my heart is so overly tender and full [...] At least one human being has to know what is going on in me. That's why I'm telling you: she is and remains my first and only love! This I feel with ever greater certainty."[1]

This letter is dated, June 5, 1863, that is to say, five full years after the heyday of their famous affair. It must therefore be seen as part of Wagner's lifelong effort to shape his biography for posterity and to fashion a grand monument of himself. Wagner was a superb creator of myths not only in the narratives that sustain his works for the stage, but also in the narratives that he composed to sustain his biography. This particular narrative is anchored in the prototypical romantic belief that a great work of art, such as *Tristan und Isolde*, could only have been generated by a great, passionate love. A work conceived as a "monument to love," as he described his plan for *Tristan* to Franz Liszt, simply had to have as its biographical basis a monumental love story. In that letter to Liszt of December 16, 1854, three years before he actually began work on *Tristan*, Wagner explains that he wished to erect a monument to "the most beautiful dream of all," the dream of love—not, as one might think, because he was overflowing with the bliss of love and sexual fulfillment, but rather because he himself had never really tasted such bliss.[2] But now, in 1863—with *Tristan* completed, though still unperformed—Wagner saw fit to amend his earlier assertion. According to what he wrote in *My Life*, it was during the composition of Act III of the opera, while at the same time proofreading the score of

1. *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, tr. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1988), 559. Cf. Eliza Wille, *Erinnerungen an Richard Wagner* (Zürich: Atlantis, 1982).—This paper was presented at the 2013 Festival of the American Liszt Society, held at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, May 30–June 1, 2013. Some of the ideas grew out of conversations with my colleague and friend, Peter Bloom, who is the author of a thematically related paper, "Tracking *Träume*: The Sources and Sounds of Wagner's Wesendonck *Lied*," forthcoming in *The Wagner Journal*.

2. *Selected Letters* (n. 1), 323.

Act II, that he "realized with complete clarity that in this very opera [he] had written the most audacious and original work of [his] life."[3] This realization required a significant upgrading of the biographical spark of the work. Hence the elevation of Mathilde, I submit, to the status of "first and only love."

It is precisely as editor of the story of his affair with Mathilde that he invested it with a silken and sexual lining, and furthermore ensured that the amended version would be the "official" one, for he knew that the "one human being" to whom he communicated it would preserve it for posterity. This would have the not unwelcome effect of erasing all claims to his heart by all his earlier loves. The letter to Eliza Wille continues: "It was the climax of my life: those anxious, delightfully anguished years when I lived in the growing magic of her nearness and her affection, they contain all the sweetness of my life [...] She remains ever beautiful to me, and my love for her will never grow cold." Thus does Wagner align the climax of his emotional life to the climax of his creative life. So firmly linked is Mathilde now to *Tristan und Isolde* that, Chris Walton, author of a recent monograph on the composer's Zürich years, is led to observe that "Mathilde Wesendonck may be one of the most famous women in the history of Western music [...]," even though her fame rests "not on any concrete achievements of her own but on her role as 'muse' of Richard Wagner."[4]

In what follows I want to interrogate and problematize this much discussed and crucial chapter in the career of the composer, and make essentially two points about the subject of Wagner and Mathilde, a subject that has been and remains one of inexhaustible fascination. First, I want to clarify the meaning of "muse" in this particularly consequential case by asking: What did the role actually entail? What did it not entail? How did Mathilde actually fit herself into the role? And how did it come to an end?

Second, I want to argue that Mathilde's exceptional position in the biography of Richard Wagner is best defined not in sexual but rather, broadly speaking, in aesthetic terms. She is the only person who became part of the most forward looking chapter of Wagner's larger esthetic project through a creative give-and-take that is unique in the orbit of this radically independent and self-sufficient artist. This means examining the so-called "Wesendonck Lieder"—a group of five poems by Mathilde that were set to music by Wagner in preparation, as it were, for composing *Tristan und Isolde.* Aside from the purely sensual pleasure they give, these gems vividly remind us that there is a Wagner beyond the "Ride of the Valkyries"—a composer, that is, who was

3. *My Life*, tr. Andrew Gray, ed. Mary Whittal (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 588. Translation adjusted.
4. Chris Walton, *Richard Wagner's Zürich. The Muse of Place* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), 201.

also a master of the intimate and sophisticated genre of the Lied. They remind us that Wagner was, after all, the contemporary of Robert Schumann, and the forerunner of Hugo Wolf and Richard Strauss.

It is essential that we have a realistic picture of the biographical and physical setting of this famous romance. At the end of April 1857, Wagner and his wife, Minna, accepted the offer from Otto Wesendonck to live in the comfortable cottage next to the Wesendoncks' own newly built villa on their spacious property in Zürich. The Wagners dubbed the cottage their "Asyl," meaning "asylum," in the sense of refuge. Ironically, Otto had bought the house out of fear that its owner, a noted Swiss neurologist, might convert it to an insane asylum.[5] Little did he know that the "Asyl" would soon be visited, after just one year of an emotionally trying neighborliness, by a madness of a quite different order.

Otto Wesendonck, who hailed from Wuppertal, an industrial town near Düsseldorf, had been a partner in a New York silk trading company and, at thirty-six, had made enough money to be able to retire and to devote himself to the pleasant and rewarding task of supporting the arts. Together with Mathilde, his attractive and talented German wife, Otto's junior by thirteen years, Wesendonck decided to settle in Zürich, where he and Mathilde soon made the acquaintance of Wagner. Mathilde first met the composer at a reception following a concert at which he conducted Beethoven, in February of 1852, when she was twenty-four, and he thirty-nine.[6] She was married to a widower, and was the mother of a little girl, born the previous year. Three sons followed, in 1855, in 1857, and 1862, only two of whom lived into adulthood. Mathilde's motherly traits must have been pronounced, as was evidently the accommodating character of her personality. Consider the curious business of her name. Her real given name was Agnes, but she agreed to accept the name Mathilde to comply with a curious desire on the part of her husband. Otto's first wife, Mathilde, née Eckhardt, had died in Florence during their honeymoon, and apparently he wanted another one by that name.[7] What are the odds that a woman of today, and of the same qualities and accomplishments, would accept the imposition upon her person of the name of her predecessor! Wagner's "Mathilde" was in fact Otto Wesendonck's creation—although it would seem that the creator of Tristan was unaware of this.

5. Cf. Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner. His Life, His Work, His Century*, tr. by J. Maxwell Brownjohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 268f; Eva Rieger, *Minna und Richard Wagner: Stationen einer Liebe* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 2003), 166. The noted neurologist was Ludwig Binswanger, grandfather of the psychiatrist and pioneer of existential psychology, also named Ludwig Binswanger.

6. That reception was hosted by Hermann Marshall von Bieberstein, a fellow refugee from Dresden. See Eva Martina Hanke, *Wagner in Zürich—Individuum und Lebenswelt* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2007), 167.

7. Walton (n. 4), 187.

When Wagner finally turned to the subject of Tristan, in the summer of 1857, Mathilde had been on his mind for some time. After their initial encounter in 1852, she began to become a factor in the volatile economy of Wagner's creativity. In June of 1853 he wrote a little piano "Sonata for Mathilde Wesendonck," and chose as an epigraph a rather suggestive, one might say ominous line from the libretto of *Götterdämmerung*: "Wißt Ihr wie das wird?" —Do you know what will become of this? A year later, in the compositional sketch for Act I of *Die Walküre*, he wrote various confidential messages including the three letters "G. S. M.," meaning "Gott segne Mathilde" —Blessed be Mathilde. Whatever was brewing here, it came into sharp focus only after Wagner's dramatic discovery of the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer—in which the composer found clarification and confirmation of much of what he had been thinking about life and the world except for one crucial question—that of sexual love.[8] To Schopenhauer, sex was the ultimate cause for the ceaseless perpetuation of life's suffering. To Wagner, sex was and remained a "Heilsweg"—a road to salvation. This became an issue of great urgency for the conception of *Tristan und Isolde*. However, from this it does not follow that sex was the all-important factor in the relationship of Richard and Mathilde. Apparently the answer to the question of whether they should progress from the drawing room to the bedroom was not a deal breaker. The only detail we know concerning the matter of their sexual relationship—and it is a highly revealing detail—is their vow to abstain from relations with their married partners once Mathilde had made it clear to Wagner that she would not grant him the "union" that he desired.[9] The only one who seems to have abided by this vow was Wagner, as Mathilde soon became pregnant for the third time. As for Otto, the King Marke figure in this triangle, his wife's intimacy with the needy artist next door caused him enormous strain. Let the record show, nonetheless, that Otto Wesendonck showed great composure and class. Despite everything he became one of Wagner's staunchest benefactors, one whose generosity was topped only by that of King Ludwig II of Bavaria.[10]

John Deathridge is undoubtedly right to say that "The supposed sexual shenanigans between Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck have been so grossly exaggerated that it has become all the harder to trace the underly-

8. Cf. Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 70-71.

9. See Wagner's revealing letter to his sister, Clara, 20 August 1858, *Selected Letters* (n. 1), 399–403; cf. Walton (n. 4), 216.

10. Cf. See Egon Voss, "Die Wesendoncks und Richard Wagner," *Minne, Muse und Mäzen: Otto und Mathilde Wesendonck und ihr Zürcher Künstlerzirkel*, ed. Axel Langer und Chris Walton (Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 2002), 117–129, and the chapter "Otto's Family Ways," in Walton (n. 4), 185–199.

ing seriousness of their relationship."[11] Both seem to have sensed that, if not for Otto's sake, then for the sake of the new work struggling to be born, they ought not to go that far. Once the decision to write an opera on the subject of Tristan and Isolde was taken, Wagner needed a muse—and only a muse—to get his creative juices flowing. And in the event those juices gushed—thanks to Mathilde, who seems clearly to have understood that her role would best be fulfilled if she remained an unattainable object of intense desire. As Chris Walton more graphically put it: "Her power over him resided precisely in her never letting him (as it were) grasp the carrot that she dangled."[12] Contrary to what is often assumed or insinuated, then, all indications are that Wagner, when pressed, could truthfully have uttered a now celebrated sentence: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." Wagner's reputation as a sexual predator and a kind of Don Juan is quite misleading and undeserved.[13] That unsavory reputation probably owes its existence, at least to some extent, to the consistently unflattering portrayal of the institution of marriage in his operas.[14]

We get a good sense of what went on between Wagner and Mathilde and of the seriousness of their intellectual and soon-to-be creative partnership when we consider the events leading up to the catastrophe that brought their almost daily meetings to an abrupt end. This was brought about by Wagner's wife, Minna, when she intercepted one of the countless messages that went back and forth between the "Asyl" and the Wesendonck mansion. The message in question was a lengthy and weighty epistle, which Wagner described as a "Morgenbeichte"—an early morning confession. But what exactly was he confessing?

The previous evening had not gone well for Wagner. He was having dinner with Mathilde while Otto was away on business – an absence of operatic opportuneness, as George Bernard Shaw would have quipped. However, Mathilde and the composer were not alone; present at the dinner was another guest, Francesco De Sanctis, a professor of Aesthetics and Italian literature at the Technical University of Zürich. De Sanctis was a brilliant and good-looking man whom Mathilde had hired as her private tutor in Italian. Like Wagner, he was a political radical; years later he served as the Italian Minister of Education and became an eminent literary historian. Wagner did not like what he

11. John Deathridge, *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 128.

12. Walton (n. 4), 215.

13. Cf. Barry Millington, *The Sourcerer of Bayreuth: Richard Wagner. His Work and His World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 133–134.

14. Cf. the chapter "Das Verbrechen der Ehe," in Dieter Schickling: *Abschied von Walhall. Richard Wagners erotische Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), 29–33.

witnessed at that dinner. The Italian academic, his junior by four years, was acting openly like a serious contender for Mathilde's affections. What made things even more uncomfortable was the fact that De Sanctis was holding forth on Schopenhauer and on Goethe's *Faust*—two subjects in which Wagner, too, could claim some expertise. The discussion must have been lively, but apparently Wagner felt that he had not gotten his points across with his customary forcefulness. Hence his urge to write a long letter first thing next morning—"just out of bed." It is worth noting that this is the only letter to have survived from the "hot" phase of their relationship: all others were destroyed—in all likelihood by Cosima.[15] The "Morgenbeichte" was preserved because Minna, having intercepted the incriminating document, refused to part with it. After Minna's death, the letter, along with other memorabilia, passed into the possession of Nathalie, Minna's daughter from a liaison prior to her marriage to Wagner, and from Nathalie it was acquired, along with many other items, by Mary Burrell, for her famous collection of Wagneriana.[16]

What can we say of the content of Wagner's "confession?" In large part, it is an incisive critique of Goethe's figure of Faust, who, in Wagner's eyes, does not deserve redemption because his love of Gretchen lacks compassion. But the letter also contains, perhaps to fend off his Italian competition, an unambiguous confession of love for Mathilde, who is referred to as "the well-spring of my redemption."[17] The missive concludes with an urgent request for an assignation later that day.

Wagner's first wife is not known to have had an interest in *Faust*, but nor was she any man's fool. Minna had concluded that her husband and his lady friend were having an adulterous affair and that she could no longer ignore what was going on under her very nose. Even though her marriage to Richard had for all intents and purposes been dead for some time, Minna decided that she had to break up the idyll. The storm that resulted meant that just one year after it began, the near-cohabitation of the Wesendoncks and the Wagners became impossible to prolong. Wagner thus took off for Venice, where he completed the score of Act II of *Tristan und Isolde*—a score in which messy personal relationships are transformed into exquisite musical symbolism.

It is here, then, that we discover the true significance of Mathilde for the genesis of *Tristan und Isolde*. As Wagner worked on the score, she played the

15. Walton (n. 4), 201.

16. See *Letters of Richard Wagner. The Burrell Collection, ed. with notes by John N. Burk* (New York: Macmillan, 1950). For an appreciative review of this important publication, see Thomas Mann, "Richard Wagner's Letters," first published in the *Saturday Review of Literature* (January 1951), now in Thomas Mann, *Pro an Contra Wagner*, tr. by Allan Blunden, with an Introduction by Erich Heller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 211–221.

17. *Selected Letters* (n. 1), 381.

role of his partner, at once using her powers to awaken his sexual desire and, by withholding gratification, to lead him to transform that desire into music—music that revels in the excess of pain. Unique among the women in his life, Mathilde thus became part of a larger aesthetic project; she was instrumental in his achieving the quantum leap in the development of his style from the largely diatonic loveliness of the "Forest Murmurs" in *Siegfried* to the chromatic hell of desire and suffering in the Prelude to *Tristan*. Considering the grand arc of his development as a composer, it seems clear that a strong inner compulsion of an artistic nature was the chief reason why Wagner interrupted the composition of the *Ring of the Nibelung* after Act II of *Siegfried* and turned to the musically more enticing possibilities of *Tristan*. He was driven by the forceful dynamic and musical logic of his development as an artist. After *Tristan*, while he was at it, and continuing to follow that inner artistic compulsion, Wagner decided to add *Die Meistersinger* to the mix. He would thus return to *The Ring* after a creative hiatus of some ten years. In the history of music, there is no more mind-boggling demonstration of musical prowess and artistic self-assurance than this series of towering masterpieces.

As we have seen, Wagner began drawing Mathilde into his orbit, and into the still shadowy world of *Tristan*, by dedicating the piano sonata to her. He made a more explicit move when, on 18 September 1857, he went over to the Wesendonck house to present her with the autograph manuscript of the libretto of Act III of *Tristan und Isolde*. Mathilde led him to a chair in front of the sofa, embraced him, and said: "Now I can wish for nothing more."[18] For me, this remark remains enigmatic. For Wagner, however, there was no mistaking Mathilde's words: he took them as a confession of her love, telling her that in that hour he felt re-born. A few days later he began the compositional sketch for Act I, and when that sketch was completed, he presented it, too, to Mathilde, complete with an ecstatic dedicatory poem.

Now it was Mathilde's turn. Having read the libretto she responded by writing a number of poems in reaction to *Tristan*. Wagner set five of them to music as soon as they came off Mathilde's desk. Later, the composer would designate two of the compositions as "studies for *Tristan und Isolde*." By doing so he certified, as it were, Mathilde's indirect but momentous contribution to the creation of what he increasingly felt was his "most audacious and original work."

Mathilde's role in the lead-up to *Tristan und Isolde*, specifically the unique give-and-take that led to the creation of the five Wesendonck Lieder, under-

18. See *Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonck. Tagebuchblätter und Briefe, 1853–1871*, ed. Wolfgang Golther (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 11th ed. 1904), 44–45.

scores, I believe, the passionate but non-sexual nature of their relationship. Theirs was an erotically charged intellectual and aesthetic partnership, as Wagner's "Morgenbeichte," the only document from the crucial phase of their romance, so clearly shows. Wagner's communications to Mathilde after the break-up of the idyll in the Asyl reinforce this impression: they largely concern esthetic matters relating to his work, including, famously, in a letter from Paris, his description of his chief accomplishment as a composer as "the art of transition."[19] To a much greater extent than is usually recognized, Mathilde Wesendonck was an intellectual and a writer in her own right, as witnessed in her correspondence with the likes of Francesco De Sanctis, Gottfried Kinkel (the art historian and 1848er revolutionary), Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (the Swiss poet), Otto Benndorf (the archeologist), William Ashton Ellis (the English Wagner scholar), and others. And as witnessed also in her own literary production, encouraged by Wagner, of poetry, children stories, and mythological dramas in the Wagnerian vein.[20] It seems like an ironic footnote to music history that Mathilde captivated not only Wagner but also charmed his later rival and opponent, Johannes Brahms.[21]

What we today call the "Wesendonck Lieder" were published in 1862 under the title "Five Poems for a Female Voice, accompanied by pianoforte, set to music by Richard Wagner." Originally Wagner had proposed to Schott, his publisher, a different title: "Fünf Dilettanten Gedichte"—a title that would have made it clear that the five poems were penned by someone other than the composer. It is quite possible that the designation "dilettante" was also meant to suggest some doubts about their poetic excellence.

Without examining their literary merit, I here offer a brief summary of Mathilde's poems. The first, "Der Engel" (The Angel), recalls stories heard in childhood about angels who come down from heaven to console the suffering and bleeding of hearts and to take them back to heaven. Like those hearts, the poet, too, has experienced the coming of an angel who on shining wings has lifted her spirits heavenwards. The second poem's title: "Stehe still!" (Stand still!), refers to the roaring wheel of time. The poet wishes to arrest time in order fully to savor her joy and bliss but also, in the presence of God, to solve the sacred riddle of Nature. In the third poem, "Im Treibhaus" (In the Greenhouse), the poet finds herself in a greenhouse where she addresses the exotic plants from distant lands. These seem to stretch their arms longingly into the void. The poet identifies with their woeful existence because they share

19. Letter to Mathilde, 29 October 1859; *Selected Letters* (n. 1), 475.

20. On Mathilde Wesendonck, the writer, see Walton (n. 4), 234–238.

21. Ibid., 219–220.

the same fate: they are from a different world; their "Heimat" is not here on earth. This is one of the songs that Wagner identified as a "study for *Tristan*": the music we hear at the beginning of Act III of *Tristan* harks back to the opening bars of this song. "Schmerzen" (Pain), the fourth poem, is the most overtly operatic of the songs. Here, the poet contemplates the dual nature of pain, which can at the same time be the source of bliss—like the sun, which dies every evening only to rise to new glory the next morning: So, thank you Nature, for giving me this kind of pain. "Träume" (Dreams), the concluding composition, is the second song that Wagner later designated as a study for *Tristan*. It anticipates the music that marks the transition to the great love duet in Act II. Here, the poet marvels at the power of dreams. Far from bursting like bubbles, they keep her captive to their intimations of heaven; they cause her to remember only one thing, and to forget everything else: "Allvergessen, Eingedenken." Dreams have the power of the sun in spring time: from the snow-covered earth, they awaken with a kiss the flowers that will grow and blossom and, before they die, will spread their scent on "your" breast.

When Wagner prepared the publication of the set in 1862 he deviated from the chronological order in which they were written. Apparently he wanted to suggest that they form a cycle, loosely connected through some inner thematic and tonal logic. As he looked at them again he felt greatly pleased with their artistic strength. About "Träume," the magical anticipation of the nocturnal love scene in Act II, he wrote to Mathilde: "Heaven knows this song pleased me more than the proud scene itself. Heavens, it is more beautiful than everything else that I have done." [22] Earlier, as he contemplated the music for Act II, he had written to her: "I have never composed anything finer than these songs, and there is very little in my work that is worthy of comparison with them." [23] He also confided to her: "With these songs I have tried my wings"—his artistic wings, that is, on which he would fly, in Act II, into the dark realm of the "Night." These communications to Mathilde resonate with palpable pride in the chapter of their biographies that they were destined to share, and document the satisfaction in what they had accomplished together. Aside from the two compositions specifically linked by Wagner himself to *Tristan*, the Wesendonck Lieder had, as John Deathridge has rightly observed, "a wider creative connection with *Tristan* [...] In abstract terms the link is about style, expressive manner, and gesture. But it is also about exploring an *idea* of the lied [...] that was just as central to the conception of *Tristan* as its

22. *Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonck* (n. 18), 287. Cf. Egon Voss, " 'Besseres, als diese Lieder, hab ich nie gemacht...' Zu den Wesendonck-Liedern," E. Voss, *"Wagner und kein Ende." Betrachtungen und Studien* (Zürich: Atlantis, 1996), 105–109.

23. *Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonck* (n. 18), 62.

larger symphonic ambition."[24]

The song of the set that is most often performed is "Träume." This is the second poem that Wagner set to music, early in December of 1857. He took it up again almost immediately in order to pay extravagant musical homage to his adorata. He orchestrated it for a small ensemble of 13 instruments (2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 4 violins, 2 violas, 1 cello), transferring the voice part to a solo violin. What the violin plays is what the singer sings, except for a number of very small adjustments that essentially take advantage of the fact that the violin does not have to breathe. Wagner had this orchestrated version performed at the Wesendonck villa on December 23, Mathilde's 29th birthday.

Ten years after the death of the composer, in 1893, his publisher, Schott, commissioned an orchestrated version of the songs from Felix Mottl, a distinguished Wagner conductor and one of his assistants at the first Bayreuth Festival. Mottl took some leads from Wagner's orchestration of "Träume" but otherwise employed the big Wagnerian orchestra that people had come to expect, thereby sacrificing some of the intimacy and magic of Wagner's own conception. However, if Mottl went full throttle, a contemporary German composer, the late Hans Werner Henze, understanding the desirability of a more restrained and subtle orchestral version re-orchestrated the entire set in a style that has the chamber-music atmosphere which we know of Wagner's version of "Träume."

Wagner very much liked the impression his serenade to Mathilde had made. Thirteen years later in Tribschen, and under similar circumstances, he composed a symphonic summary of the love-music in *Siegfried* and surprised Cosima, the mother of their son, Siegfried, with a performance of the so-called *Siegfried-Idyll* on the morning of her birthday, December 25, 1870. Aside from the striking closeness of their birthdays, Mathilde and Cosima, although rivals in real life, are forever connected, in the sphere of art, as the addressees of what we may regard as Wagner's two grandest and most admirable gestures as a lover and composer. But whereas Cosima's partnership with Wagner remained essentially receptive, Mathilde's partnership was, to a limited but significant extent, productive, as the Wesendonck Lieder demonstrate. And therein lies the glory and uniqueness of Mathilde Wesendonck's role in the life of the creator of *Tristan und Isolde*.

—Hans Rudolf Vaget

24. Deathridge (n. 11), 123.

Quartet: The Joy Of Music, Friendship And Fun Together[1]

One morning my husband Adrian woke me with a kiss and the words "Good morning, my film star!" I thought he was playing one of his usual jokes and laughed, but he said "No, I am serious! You have just received an email with an invitation to make a film with Dustin Hoffman!" This was the beginning of a totally new experience for me in the world of the film industry, which is so very different from the world of opera.

I felt very honoured to have been chosen by Dustin Hoffman to play the role of Anne Langley in *Quartet;* but also quite nervous because this was a character who was a rather bitchy prima donna. Adrian (who was playing the piano for me and others in the film) and I were staying in the famous and very beautiful Hotel Cliveden. Close by was Hedsor House, which was renamed Beecham House for the film. The days were very long as we had to be in make-up by 7am and there again at 7 or 8 in the evening to take the make-up and wig off. This meant a very early rise, no breakfast at the hotel, and a quick meal at the local pub before going early to bed.

On the first morning I had a very strange feeling entering the breakfast room on the set. I felt as if I was truly in a home for old people and I had hardly sat down when the lady behind me tapped me on the shoulder and said "Who are you?" I returned the question and she said "I'm Catherine Wilson". "Catherine! I didn't recognise you! I'm Gwyneth Jones". "What! Why did you die your hair?" I explained to her that I was wearing a wig, as I didn't want to be myself in the film. Catherine and I had not seen each other since the days when we studied with Ruth Packer and Maria Carpi in Geneva, so this was a

1. This article previously appeared in the British Wagner Society publication, *Wagner News,* April 2013. It is republished here with the kind permission of the British Wagner Society as well as that of the author.

lovely surprise to meet again.

Dustin wanted to have real singers and musicians in his film and this is what makes it so very special. Old friends were reunited and there was always a wonderful atmosphere on the set. It is such a privilege to be able to do what you enjoy and love most. Music unites, inspires and uplifts you. It is nourishment for the Soul. It also seems to help keep you young, because although many taking part in the film were advanced in age, their energy and enthusiasm were boundless. Dustin knew exactly how to keep people in a good mood. One day he even entertained us by playing the piano whilst we were waiting for the set to be prepared. He is a fantastic actor with enormous experience and this, together with his kindness, understanding, patience and endless energy, was a constant inspiration.

An opera singer must come to rehearsal with the role prepared and memorised, often in a foreign language, and because there is usually an orchestra, or piano accompaniment, one has to be absolutely correct musically. In film one receives a script; but this can be subject to change at the last minute and instead of doing whole scenes or acts, as in opera, one has very short scenes which are then repeated from many different angles for the camera. Every tiniest detail on the set has to be exactly as it was before. I was fascinated to learn that there actually exists a large number of people who try to spot mistakes in films, like for instance whether objects have been slightly moved. This is why our lovely Welsh trumpet player, Ronnie Hughes, who had a tooth missing, was not allowed to have a new one put in until the film was completed.

The Gala Concert in the film was in many ways just like doing a real concert. The room was actually very small and because it was packed with a real audience, plus cameras, lights, smoke effects etc., it very quickly became extremely hot. The audience was squeezed in very tightly and were really enjoying themselves. The atmosphere was unbelievable. It was a great success! It's such a pity that so much of the programme, including "Run Rabbit, Run", "Underneath the Arches" by Trevor Peacock and David Ryall, "Tit Willow" by John Rawnsley, a large amount of "Three Little Maids from School" by Nuala Herbert, Melodie Waddingham and Cynthia Morey and the climax of my aria, had to be cut; otherwise the film would have been much too long. The scene where we were all having a fabulous time dancing (I with Michael Gambon) also landed on the cutter's floor; but Dustin promised that lots would be put back into the Director's Cut.

My work didn't stop with the end of the filming, because I decided to do the dubbing.

I did it in German in Berlin, in Italian in Rome and in French in Paris. I

am the only one of the cast who has done this and it has been a very interesting experience. You have to speak very fast, in order to synchronise the lips, which is not so easy, but I thought that it would be nice for my Public in these countries to hear my voice when they see the film.

When the film was finally finished came the excitement of the famous red carpet film premieres, so very different from opera premieres. I found the masses of screaming reporters and flashing cameras quite amazing. I attended the premieres in London, Torino and Berlin. The latter was held at the Deutsche Oper, where I have sung regularly since 1966 and was quite incredible, because although London and Torino were enormous successes, both with long standing ovations, the opera public in Berlin went totally crazy. There were endless standing ovations and the public's reactions made one realise just how special the film is. Dustin flew over from Los Angeles and was very moved.

Today old people are often put into homes that are not as beautiful as Beecham House, sometimes far away from their families, lonely and forgotten. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they were able to spend their last days, sharing the joy of music and friendship in such beautiful surroundings, and having fun together like they do in *Quartet*?

—Dame Gwyneth Jones

(Continued from page 4)

directing a number of operas in San Francisco since 1963). And that decision could hardly have been better.

Outsiders (like me), cannot possibly know all of the circumstances and problems in the management of *any* organization, least of all the extraordinary complexities of an opera company. But it is difficult not to think that had Lotfi Mansouri been involved in selecting the next General Director, it would have been beneficial, especially for the Company as well as the audience. Alas, it did not work out that way.

No general director of any opera company always does everything to the satisfaction of everyone. But in looking back at the three who preceded him, I find that Lotfi always seemed to me to be outstanding: not necessarily the same or better than his predecessors, but, in his own way, equally great.

Thus, it was a major loss when he left in 2000 and an even greater loss today now that he is no longer around as a repository of a history that would be of much interest and value to all of us.

Once, not so long ago, over lunch, Lotfi and I discussed Mr. Adler. We both had great respect for him. But, I said I was happy that I never had to work for him. Lotfi laughed (which he did more often than most people), but agreed that Adler's reputation for being a severe task-master was accurate (although the words he used were somewhat different from mine here). "But," he said "what about his ability to talk the world's greatest singers into coming to San Francisco at the unusually low fees that he could afford? He was a genius!"

However, Lotfi was much more than a little successful in that department, too. Thinking back about the many new singers of note that we heard during the Mansouri era makes a most impressive list. And the many young singers developed by the Merola and Adler programs further demonstrated his devotion to the Company and, especially, to its future. And add the imposing list of operas new to San Francisco, plus the many newly composed operas that Lotfi gave us. His recording program included CDs, DVDs as well as many TV broadcasts. A personal favorite of mine is the rarely performed *Capriccio* by Richard Strauss with the incomparable Kiri Te Kanawa.

The remarkably close relationship he had with the St. Petersburg Kirov Opera yielded new and wonderful results, including a number of never-seen-before (in San Francisco) operas as well as Russian stars Valery Gergiev, Anna Netrebko and Sergei Leiferkus, among many others. It truly reflected Lotfi's complete sense of San Francisco Opera striving to be "America's Number One company" (as noted author and critic Andrew Porter had earlier written).

And who other than Lotfi would have managed (1) the re-building of the Opera House (resulting from damage during the Loma Prieta earthquake) simultaneously with (2) his magnificent productions in the Civic Auditorium? San Francisco Opera didn't miss a beat! Many General Directors would have turned off opera while they supervised the re-construction. Lotfi did both. For me, the Civic Auditorium *Lohengrin* was one of the two most moving productions of that work I have ever seen.

Perhaps his greatest influence on opera as a whole was his invention of super-titles after his wife, Midge, remarked about the titles accompanying a TV opera broadcast. Virtually no North American opera company (and a majority of foreign companies), does not use them, even if James Levine did put it off for a long time. Again, this invention was a reflection of Lotfi's intense focus on the audience: surely it has been one of the major innovations

that has positively affected opera in the past 50 years: it greatly increases the audience engagement with the production.

And during all those many years he was always "Mr. Nice-Guy." He always was up-beat and his enthusiasm was infectious. He was always smiling, helping, directing, encouraging, coaching how could everyone not love him? (He also happened to be an incredibly hard worker).

He was 84 this year (just five months older than I) and, last August, just before I left for Seattle and their *Ring*, we spoke on the telephone and agreed that as soon as I returned we would again have lunch. "I look forward to that," he said; and I replied that I certainly felt the same. Talking with Lotfi on such occasions was so stimulating: he knew so much, he had so many unique experiences, and always was so upbeat.

When I returned and was about to call him, a good friend, Lisa Burkett, told me of his passing. A unique, important and wonderful person was gone. How very sad it was.

It is impossible not to have the greatest respect for him, his so many accomplishments and his complete dedication to San Francisco Opera: he was always focused on what counted.

At the grand celebration of the reopening of the War Memorial Opera House in 1998 (it also was his 10th year as General Director), he briefly spoke, telling how his primary focus was always on the audience. It would be easy for any general director to give first consideration to the many other groups that constantly require attention: the singers, the orchestra, the composers of new works, the critics, the staff, the set designers, and, of course, the Board. Managing an opera company is clearly not easy; making mistakes obviously is *quite* easy! From my perspective, Lotfi always had his 'eye on the ball.'

At the 10th Anniversary (of Lotfi becoming General Director) gala, some of the many stars attending included (among many others) Leonie Rysanek, Marilyn Horne, Joan Sutherland, Placido Domingo, Samuel Ramey, Beverly Sills, Deborah Voigt, Janet Williams, Carol Vaness, Patricia Racette (the latter four were graduates of San Francisco Opera training programs that had meant so much to Lotfi). A marvelous sixty page, full color book was published honoring Lotfi[1] with an introduction by Placido Domingo praising Lotfi and pointing out what an unusual and wonderful General Director he was.

And in the program for this season's San Francisco Opera's *Falstaff*, there is an article about Bryn Terfel in which he tells us, "I would look forward to going to San Francisco because I would always meet Lotfi there. I'm incredibly sad not to be seeing him there this autumn. Lotfi gave me wonderful opportunities to sing *Figaro* [1997] and *The Rake's Progress* [2000]. He was always very supportive not only of young singers cutting their teeth, but also of the stalwarts of our operatic profession—he liked to invite them back—and that's a great combination. Every good young golfer likes to play with an older golfer and watch and learn. It's the same in every profession, isn't it?"[2]

Like all of us, Bryn Terfel had great admiration for Lotfi and his many accomplishments.

Perhaps we should concentrate on all of the wonderful work he did while he was the General Director: that is his true legacy. His tenure as our General Director was a marvelous time for ev-

1. *An Operatic Odyssey: Lotfi Mansouri and San Francisco Opera*. San Francisco: Joan Chatfield-Taylor, 1998.

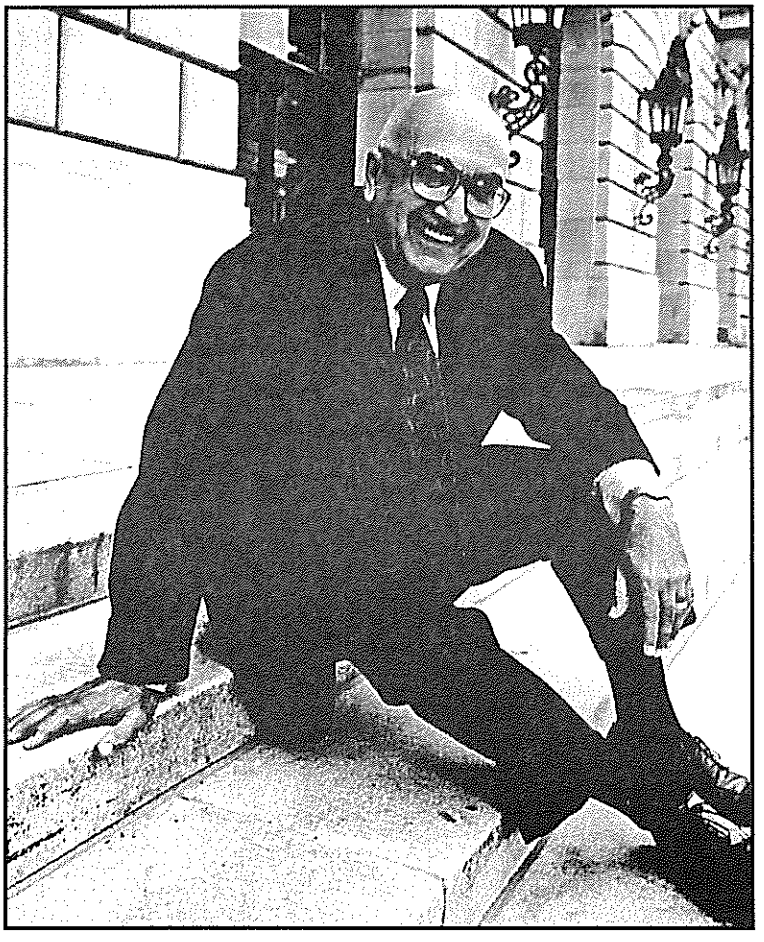
2.. San Francisco Opera Magazine, Volume 91, Number 2. Page 33. Reprinted with permission of San Francisco Opera.

eryone in the San Francisco Opera's audience. Thank you, Lotfi!

While interviewing Lotfi in his office, writer Sue Stephenson noticed that on the wall behind his desk was hung an unusually large, very intricate and beautiful quilt. Being a quilter herself, she asked him about it. He told her that it was a gift to him from the Opera's Costume Department: they had spent a great many of their own hours making it for him.

One wonders just how many other general directors who accomplished so very much also have received the love, admiration and respect that was showered on Lotfi Mansouri?

A shining star of the opera world has gone out.



Lotfi Mansouri
1929-2013

Wagner Wrote...

In January of 1833 my Symphony was performed at a Gewandhaus [Leipzig] concert, and met with highly inspiriting applause [Wagner was only 19]. At about this time I came to know Heinrich Laube.

To visit one of my brothers, I travelled to Würzburg in the spring of the same year, and remained there until its close; my brother's intimacy was of great importance to me, for he was an accomplished singer. During my stay in Würzburg I composed a romantic opera in three acts: *"Die Feen,"* for which I wrote my own text, after Gozzi's: *"Die Frau als Schlange."* Beethoven and Weber were my models; in the *ensembles* of this opera there was much that fell out very well, and the Finale of the Second Act, especially, promised good effect. The 'numbers' from this work which I brought to a hearing at concerts in Würzburg, were favorably received. Full of hopes for my now finished opera, I returned to Leipzig at the beginning of 1834, and offered it for performance to the Director of that theater. However, in spite of his at first declared readiness to comply with my wish, I was soon forced to the same experience that every German opera-composer has nowadays to win: we are discredited upon our own native stage by the success of Frenchmen and Italians, and the production of our operas is a favour to be cringed for. The performance of my *Feen* was set upon the shelf. [One wonders to what extent Wagner's experiences of this sort influenced his life-long attitudes about French and Italian music].

From the Autobiographic Sketch *(included in the volume titled "The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works," (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) pp8,9. Translated about 1895 by William Ashton Ellis.*

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