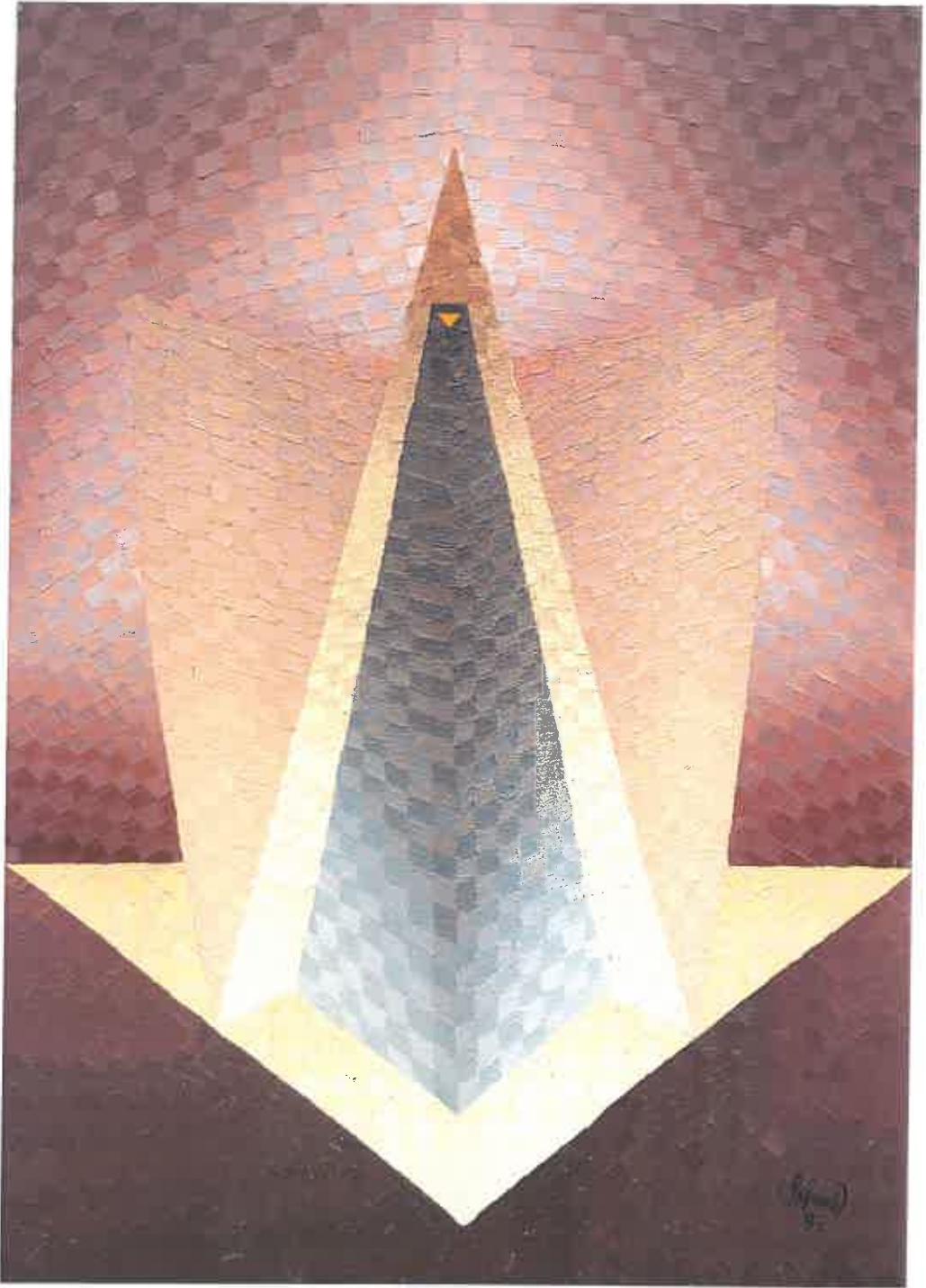


LEITMOTIVE

Journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California | Spring 2016



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Leitmotive is the official journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California and serves as a platform for inquiry and discovery of the works, life, and influence of Richard Wagner (1813-1883). We welcome submissions from scholars affiliated with academic institutions, performing artists, Society members, and anyone with a keen interest in Wagner studies.

All submissions to the journal are subject to review by the Editorial Advisory Board. Reviews are assigned by the editor. The opinions expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Wagner Society of Northern California.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

It's no secret that Bay Area music lovers have a special affinity for the works of Richard Wagner. Rather than fear the complexity of Wagner's vast creations or be intimidated by their epic durations, local audiences relish each new Wagnerian presentation and are impatient for details about future stagings. In the last five years, productions of *The Ring*, *Lohengrin*, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at San Francisco Opera have all been received by open, engaged, and, above all, prepared Wagnerians. There are two very good reasons for this: 1) the San Francisco Opera's long-standing record of staging the music dramas with mostly excellent casts, and 2) the vigorous activities of the Wagner Society of Northern California. Under the leadership of current board president, Terri Stuart, WSNC has presented outstanding monthly programs and events, commissioned new music such as composer Liam Wade's *Tannhäuser Overture*, supported young musicians with scholarships, and paid tribute to the artists who elevated Wagnerian performance standards during our time. For evidence of this synergy between performances and Society activities, look no further than the November run of *Meistersinger* at the War Memorial Opera House and the excellent, day-long *Meistersinger Symposium* presented by WSNC.

Given this exemplary engagement with Wagner right here in Northern California, it is an exciting time for *Leitmotive* and I am absolutely thrilled to join the journal team as editor. From 1991-2015, my predecessor Robert S. Fisher served at the helm of *Leitmotive*; an amazing tenure of 25 years! His long service to the Society's membership is an awesome achievement and a model of devotion for which I have the utmost respect. The values and scholarship he fostered within these pages made the journal an important resource over the years. I am excited to now apply my own sense of inquiry and energy to *Leitmotive* and carry the journal into a new era with a similar devotion. I believe it is crucial for the journal and all of the excellent work of our contributors to be discoverable by the worldwide community, so we are exploring ways of making *Leitmotive* more accessible through indexing in online databases and hosting some content on the WSNC website.

One of my primary goals for *Leitmotive* is to present new, thoughtful voices to the discourse on Wagner; authors who will open up innovative approaches to the composer's life, works, and legacy. Our lead article by Donald Rosenthal examines the impact of Wagnerism through the illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley, a visual artist whose preoccupation with Wagner, and specifically *Tristan und Isolde*, was critical to his creative work. Next, former Metropolitan Opera violinist Erica Miner interviews soprano Christine Goerke, one of the most promising Wagnerian artists to emerge in our time. Their discussion covers the challenges of singing Wagner's

heroines and the difficulty of balancing an international career with motherhood. In *Letter from Bayreuth*, Bay Area music critic and WSNC member Lisa Hirsch reviews the offerings of the 2015 Bayreuth Festival, including a revival of Frank Castorf's controversial *Ring* production, a new production of *Tristan, Der Fliegende Holländer*, and the final revival of Hans Neuenfels' "Rat Production" of *Lohengrin*. Finally, *Leitmotive* returns to covering the newest and most compelling Wagner releases, and Jeff Bart of the WSNC board of directors reviews the new memoir by conductor Christian Thielemann.

I am delighted to unveil the journal's new look and feel. The elegant design and layout are the handiwork of our brilliant designer Gary Lang, who is also a member of the WSNC board of directors.

Thank you for reading *Leitmotive* and supporting the work of the WSNC.

Ho-jo-to-ho!

JSM

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

DONALD ROSENTHAL is a member of the Boston Wagner Society and earned his Ph.D. in the history of modern art from Columbia University. He is the author of several books and catalogues on nineteenth-century art, including *British Watercolors from the West Foundation*, and he has published articles on Wagnerian themes in works by other artists of the period.

ERICA MINER was a violinist with the Metropolitan Opera for 21 years, where she worked closely with James Levine. She is now an award-winning author, screenwriter, journalist and lecturer who has presented multiple times for Wagner Societies on both coasts. Her latest novel, *Murder in the Pit*, takes place at the Met. Details on her published opera-based articles can be found on her website: <http://www.ericaminer.com>.

LISA HIRSCH studied music at Brandeis and Stony Brook. By day, she is a technical writer. She reviews for *San Francisco Classical Voice* and other publications, and blogs about music at *Iron Tongue of Midnight*: <http://rontongue.blogspot.com>.

JEFF BART has been a member of the WSNC for 30 years and a member of the board of directors for over 15 years. Among other duties, he is in charge of the Wagner book sales at the monthly member meetings.

CALVIN "CAL" PEDRANTI (1922-2001) came to Wagner in finest Romantic fashion. Confined to a sanatorium for tuberculosis and recovering from surgery, the sixteen-year-old Pedranti heard a Metropolitan Opera broadcast of *Tannhäuser* featuring Lauritz Melchior and was instantly enraptured by the music. This fascination became a life-long passion, and the focus for his work. Educated at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, his paintings have been exhibited since 1961, including the 1979 Pacific Northwest Wagner Festival in Seattle and a 1980 retrospective at Gallery Become in San Francisco. Pedranti was a longtime member of the WSNC and a donation of his artworks was made to the Society.

On the cover: *Klingsor*, 1983, oil on canvas by Cal Pedranti

AUBREY BEARDSLEY'S DRAWINGS OF *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*¹

DONALD ROSENTHAL

During the 1880s and 1890s, the growing fame of Richard Wagner's music dramas prompted a number of leading visual artists across Europe to interpret these works. These artists varied in their knowledge of Wagner's operas, though some were genuine enthusiasts. In the work of many prominent artists, the tendency to depict realistic, everyday subjects, characteristic of avant-garde art from 1850 to 1880, began to be replaced by a return to imaginary or literary subjects. The remote, legendary, and highly dramatic content of Wagner's operas made them ideal subjects for visual interpretation, though artists realized that the qualities of Wagner's music could not be directly reproduced in other media. This interest in Wagner's operas, at a time when they still were relatively new and controversial, resulted in some outstanding works in visual media until the years after 1900, when a growing trend toward abstraction, as well as new currents in music, began to make "literary" subjects, including Wagner's operas, unfashionable in the avant-garde of the visual arts for many decades to come.²

One of the most exceptional artists working on material of this kind was the English draftsman Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898). Although according to the traditional hierarchies of academic art, accepted throughout Europe, painting and sculpture were considered vastly superior to drawing, Beardsley was quickly recognized as the most original young artist in England. Lacking an academic education in art, Beardsley felt free to ignore many time-honored expectations. He died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-five, and like some other artists with life-threatening illnesses, was extremely prolific until his health gave out. In a career lasting little more than five years, he produced over five hundred finished drawings, not including preliminary sketches.³ Most of these were designed for reproduction in illustrated books or journals. The artist's Wagnerian pictures, though relatively few in number, had an outsize importance within his work. Beardsley also harbored literary ambitions and, as we

1. Originally published by *Wagneriana*, a publication of the Boston Wagner Society. Reprinted by permission.

2. There is still no monographic treatment of Wagner's influence on the visual arts of the late 19TH and early 20TH centuries. Good color reproductions of paintings on Wagnerian subjects are included in *Richard Wagner, visions d'artistes: D'Auguste Renoir à Anselm Kiefer* (exh. cat., Geneva, Musées d'Art et d'Histoire, 2005). See also Emma Sutton, "Wagner in the Visual Arts," in Nicholas Vazsonyi, ed., *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 682–90.

Many general studies deal with the relationship between art and music in the early modern period. A recent book on this subject, with extensive bibliography, is James H. Rubin with Olivia Mattis, eds., *Rival Sisters, Art and Music at the Birth of Modernism, 1815–1915* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014). A major recent addition to the artist's bibliography is Linda Gertner Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2 vols., 2015).

3. A nearly complete, if difficult to use, compendium of illustrations of Beardsley's works is Brian Reade's *Aubrey Beardsley* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, rev. ed., 1987).

shall see, virtually all of his efforts in this area were directed toward works inspired by or reacting against Wagner.

Beardsley belonged to the first generation of artists who were too young to have seen Wagner's own productions of his operas. Some influential older artists working on Wagnerian themes, such as Eugène Delacroix and Henri Fantin-Latour, saw or may have seen one of Wagner's productions (*Tannhäuser*, Paris, 1861, or the *Ring* operas, Bayreuth, 1876). Although Wagner was not completely satisfied with these presentations, they nevertheless gave an idea of his dramatic intentions beyond what could be gleaned from studying the scores of the operas. Beardsley was fortunate, however, to live in London during the early 1890s, when most of Wagner's operas were performed, often with excellent casts and musical direction. With an early background in music and acting in plays before he decided to become an artist, Beardsley retained an interest in all aspects of theatrical opera production, most evident in his pictures relating to *Tristan und Isolde*.

Beardsley made over twenty Wagnerian drawings for books or magazines. Most of these are equally divided among three of his favorite operas: *Tannhäuser*; the *Ring* operas, particularly *Das Rheingold*; and *Tristan und Isolde*. Though he illustrated plays by many authors, Beardsley did not treat subjects from operas by any other composer. Beardsley's work has been analyzed in detail by art historians and, more recently, by literary critics.⁴ Some critics have played a Freudian game of finding sexual symbolism in every straight line or curve of Beardsley's designs; though such observations are sometimes illuminating, they are not subject to proof or disproof. In addition, Beardsley was a celebrity as the most famous, or notorious, young artist of the "decadence" of the 1890s in England, and he has been the subject of a number of full-length biographies. Rather than trying to recapitulate this material, we will concentrate on the Wagnerian subjects and where they fit into Beardsley's life and work.

Most of Beardsley's Wagnerian drawings were published during his brief lifetime, and these works have not escaped the scholarly attention devoted to Beardsley's art. He planned full-scale projects, to be discussed below, for both *Tannhäuser* and *Das Rheingold*, though because of ill health he was unable to complete the first project or to advance very far with the second. The *Tannhäuser* project, involving both text and illustrations, was published and analyzed after Beardsley's death,⁵ while several studies have been devoted to his drawings for *Das Rheingold* and the *Ring*.⁶ A book has even been devoted to Beardsley's Wagnerism, mainly in the context of the "decadence" or neuroticism that some perceived in Wagner's music (a view already expressed in the 1880s by Wagner's former disciple, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche) and in Beardsley's art.⁷ On the other hand, Beardsley's drawings of *Tristan und Isolde* have not been studied as a group. This is not surprising: unlike the drawings for the other two operas, which were completed in relatively short periods and meant to be published together, the *Tristan* drawings were scattered throughout Beardsley's career, and there is no evidence that he intended to present them as a group. All were pub-

4. Ian Fletcher, in *Aubrey Beardsley* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), attempts a picture-by-picture analysis.

5. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser; or, "Under the Hill" ... a Romantic Novel* (London: Academy Editions; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), with an introduction by Robert Oresko.

6. Victor Chan, "Aubrey Beardsley's Frontispiece to *The Comedy of the Rheingold*," *Arts Magazine* 57 (January 1983): 88–96; and Janet Jempson, "Aubrey Beardsley and the Ring," *Wagner* 17 (May 1996): 65–77.

7. Emma Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

lished at different times and in diverse journals and books. Nevertheless, Beardsley was careful to title some drawings as relating to *Tristan und Isolde*, even when initially they seem to have no obvious connection to that opera. Discussing them together may throw some light on Beardsley's attitude toward Wagner's celebrated work and to opera in general. We will focus on the drawings, rather than the printed illustrations, since they are closer to Beardsley's intentions.

We may only speculate about the reasons for Beardsley's devotion to the three Wagner operas. He may have identified with Tannhäuser, an outsider like himself, an artist whose work was rejected by many of his contemporaries as indecent. In *Das Rheingold* Beardsley seems to have been most intrigued by the trickster god, Loge, another outsider: surrounded by flames, he spectacularly upstages Wotan in two of Beardsley's drawings. As for *Tristan und Isolde*, Beardsley, despite a reputation in some quarters for frivolity, was devoted to this most serious of Wagnerian operas. He probably was attracted by the beauty of the music—he owned a vocal score of the opera, for which he drew a title page with two floral decorations (Princeton University Library). Among other items of Wagneriana in Beardsley's library were a French translation of some of the librettos, including *Tristan*, and four volumes of English translations of Wagner's prose works and of the composer's biography by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Wagner's son-in-law.

Gleeson White, former editor of *The Studio*, which had published some of Beardsley's work, reminiscing about the artist's attendance at a London performance of *Tristan*, described Beardsley's "transparent hands clutching the rail in front, and thrilling with the emotion of the music . . . No instrument in the orchestra vibrated more instantly in accord with the changes of the music, from love-passion to despair."⁸ If we speculated again, we might see Beardsley's interest in a story of love that cannot be fully realized in the world, finding consummation only in death, as an analogy to his personal situation as an invalid.

Beardsley entitled his two large Wagnerian projects *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser: A Romantic Novel* and *The Comedy of the Rheingold*. In each case he planned to supply both the illustrations and the text, creating a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* for which he would provide the story and its (visual, rather than musical) accompaniment. Beardsley may also have intended to participate in the design of the books, like Wagner in his theatrical settings, though this is not certain. Projects of this nature by prominent artists were rare, though not unknown: Beardsley was aware of William Blake's books of poetry, illustrated with Blake's hand-colored engravings. Beardsley's texts were to be drastic revisions or interpretations of the librettos of Wagner's two operas.

As an artist, Beardsley had the reputation of favoring sexually charged subjects. While his designs for the partly completed *Venus and Tannhäuser* were relatively demure, this was not the case with the text.

As summarized by Colette Colligan, Beardsley had "published a highly metaphorical work of obscenity, *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser: A Romantic Novel*, which includes stylized descriptions of masturbation, bestiality, coprophilia and pederasty."⁹ Clearly Beardsley envisions activities on the Venusberg that never would

8. Gleeson White, "Aubrey Beardsley: In Memoriam," *The Studio* 13 (May 1898): 260.

9. Colette Colligan, *The Traffic in Obscenity from Byron to Beardsley: Sexuality and Eroticism in Nineteenth-Century Print Culture* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 157.

have occurred to Wagner. Though there are many sources for the Tannhäuser story, Beardsley makes specific references to Wagner and his operas. Colligan's catalogue of sexual practices probably does not represent Beardsley's fantasies, much less the ailing artist's sexual life, if any. The intention of the rather oblique text may be partly satirical, in keeping with Beardsley's dominant mode: his drawings sometimes caricature people he admired, even close friends. Throughout his career Beardsley also showed a desire to *épater le bourgeois*, to shock his Victorian readership. His physical disability left him feeling an outsider, and he did not share the widespread national mood of "imperial triumphalism" and self-satisfaction. The story was published in installments (as *Under the Hill*) in 1896 in *The Savoy* magazine, of which Beardsley was art editor; needless to say, the text was heavily expurgated.

Though Beardsley depicts readily identifiable scenes from Wagner in his drawings of *Tannhäuser* and in particular of the *Rheingold* story, this is much less true of the images he relates to *Tristan und Isolde*. Musicologists generally agree that this is Wagner's most "advanced" opera and has had the greatest influence on music history. Even the opera's most fervent admirers would admit, however, that it does not have the same variety of picturesque settings, characters, and actions as *Das Rheingold*, with the gods, dwarves, Rhinemaidens, and so on, depicted by Beardsley. Much of the action in *Tristan* takes place in the main characters' minds. The only identifiable scene from Wagner's *Tristan* by Beardsley is in an illustration for a book that is not by Wagner.

Beardsley's first large commission as a professional artist was for illustrations to a new edition of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (c. 1470). This book was a late-medieval English collection of stories about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. There was a revival of interest in the book in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the publisher J. M. Dent planned to issue a new edition, complete with archaic spellings and Gothic type. Between 1892 and 1894 Beardsley produced more than three hundred drawings for this enormous volume, ranging from double-page compositions to small vignettes and decorative elements. There is a substantial overlap between the legends utilized by Malory and Wagner: Malory includes a long, incident-filled account of the story of Tristan and Isolde, as well as the tale of Sir Percival, the only knight pure enough to find the Holy Grail; the analogies to the story of *Parsifal* are evident. These stories were in widespread circulation throughout medieval Europe. While Wagner's main source for *Tristan und Isolde* was Gottfried von Strassburg's epic *Tristan* (c. 1215), Malory (as he freely admits) adapted his tales from French sources.

Of a half-dozen full-page illustrations of the Tristan story by Beardsley for the Malory book, only two relate to Wagner's telling of the story. The first story is described in *Tristan und Isolde* but not enacted on the stage: before the action of the opera begins Isolde had nursed the wounded Tristan in her native Ireland. Malory's version of this incident differs considerably from Wagner's in that Isolde is not aware that Tristan had killed her betrothed, and Beardsley in this case follows Malory. In *How La Beale Isoud Nursed Sir Tristram* (Harvard University Art Museums), a kneeling Isolde is shown looking up anxiously at the bedridden, semiconscious Tristan.¹⁰ The sword mentioned in Wagner is not present, and Isolde shows empathy rather than hostility.

10. Reade, *Aubrey Beardsley*, fig. 100.

intentions toward Tristan. The reverse side of this drawing contains a rare pencil sketch in which Beardsley tentatively blocks out the forms of the composition with near-abstract looseness.

Malory's telling of the story of the love potion also differs considerably from Wagner's. In Malory the scene takes place in a ship's cabin below decks and is a lighthearted affair. Tristan and Isolde find the cup prepared by Brangäne and help themselves to it, thinking it is ordinary wine; Isolde again has no intention of killing Tristan. In *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* (Harvard University Art Museums, figure 1), on the other hand, Beardsley follows the scenario of Wagner's opera, which he had first seen at the Drury Lane Theatre in the summer of 1892. The scene takes place in a curtained-off area on the ship's deck and, as in Wagner, Tristan toasts Isolde with the cup both believe to be poisoned. Such independence in illustrating even well-known texts like Malory's was characteristic of Beardsley throughout his career.

The image is one of the earliest in Beardsley's advanced, "modern" style, and it reveals the many influences he had absorbed. The tall, thin figures recall the enervated personages of English Pre-Raphaelite painting, particularly those of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, who had encouraged Beardsley in entering a career as an artist. The riotous floral and vegetal motifs of the wide border, perhaps symbols of erotic attraction, recall with more energy the designs of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. Isolde's Medusa-like hair is familiar in depictions by Beardsley and others of the *femme fatale*, that ubiquitous figure of the 1890s, an era of a heightened war between the

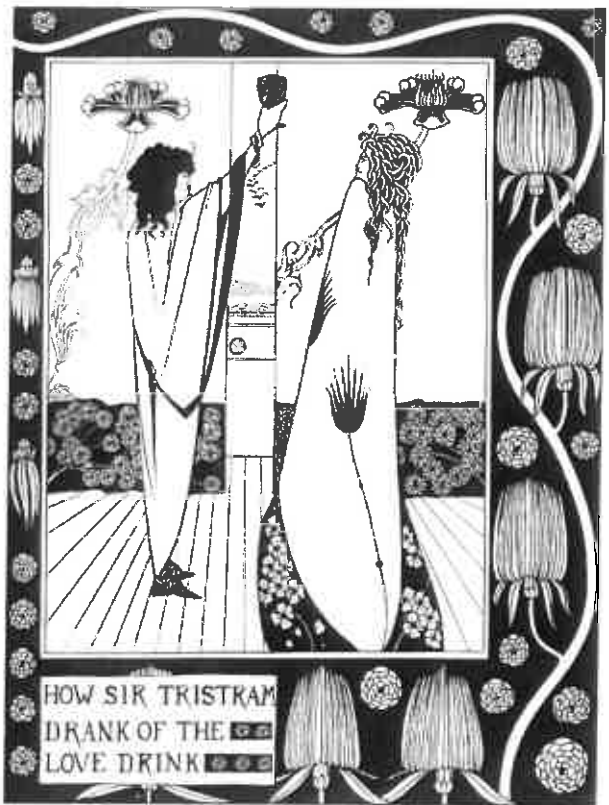


Figure 1. Aubrey Beardsley, *How Tristram Drank of the Love Drink*, ink and graphite, 1893–94, Harvard University Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Bequest of Scofield Thayer, 1986.681.

sexes. But the dominant mode is that of Japanese prints, which Beardsley enthusiastically collected. This is evident in the flattened figures, defined by outlines, Isolde's spectacular mantle, and the tall curtains, resembling Japanese screens, each pane decorated with an enormous clematis flower. The flowers hovering above the figures' heads symbolize romantic passion, though this seems contradicted by the sinister scene enacted below. In the opening between the curtains, separating the figures, we can make out a ship's railing and stylized waves, again in the Japanese manner. On the other hand, the central placement of the figures, and the receding boards of the

ship's deck that still give some sense of depth through traditional perspective, are Western conventions that Beardsley later was often to ignore.

Tristan and Isolde display the androgyny characteristic of many of Beardsley's figures: wrapped in voluminous clothing, they resemble each other at least as much as Siegmund resembles Sieglinde in *Die Walküre*. The only demonstration of emotion is by Isolde: taller than Tristan, with one shoulder raised, her hands hidden, she leans back as if recoiling from him and from the supposedly poisoned cup.¹¹ Beardsley's drawing does not tell us anything about Wagner's intentions when he wrote *Tristan und Isolde* in the 1850s: like all good later interpretations, it embodies attitudes of the artist's own time toward Wagner's work. Beardsley must have been fond of the composition, since he repeated it three years later, this time entitled *Tristan und Isolde*, in a smaller, simplified version published in *The Savoy*.¹²

From a technical viewpoint, *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* is characteristic of Beardsley's best work. His first drawing for the *Morte Darthur* project, *The Achieving of the Sangreal* (by Sir Percival), was done in a traditional technique using pen and watercolor washes to create shading and a greater illusion of depth.¹³ Such drawings had to be reproduced in books by photogravure, and the publisher, Dent, wished to use less expensive line blocks. In this procedure the artist uses only black and white, without shading, relying on line to define figures and objects. The drawing is photographed and transferred to a zinc plate covered with light-sensitive gelatin. The plate is printed after a process resembling that of traditional etching.¹⁴ Beardsley quickly adapted to the new technique, which fitted well with his aesthetic: unlike some other master draftsmen, he was generally satisfied with the quality of the reproductions of his designs, even though they are not always faithful to the originals.

Turning to Beardsley's other drawings relating to *Tristan und Isolde*, it may be beneficial to discuss them not in the usual chronological order of their composition, but in an iconographic or subject-matter order as they relate to the stages of a production of *Tristan*, or indeed of any opera.

Beardsley's background would have predisposed him to an interest in the practicalities of a musical theater production. He and his sister had performed music publicly as children, and Aubrey acted in amateur theatricals both during and after his school days. His sister, with whom he lived for much of his life, became a professional actress; though such a career was not feasible for Beardsley, his involvement with the theater as a spectator continued. The *Tristan* drawings demonstrate that Beardsley was thinking about this opera throughout his career, from some of his earliest works to the latest.

The only work in color among all of Beardsley's Wagnerian pictures is *Isolde*, first completed as a drawing with watercolor (Harvard University Art Museums, figure 2), then published in *The Studio* in 1895 as a color lithograph. Though we think of Beardsley as an artist working only in black and white, he often, working only for himself, added colors to his drawings when they were returned to him after transfer to the

11. These observations have been made by various authors. See Chris Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley, Dandy of the Grotesque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 83.

12. *The Savoy*, no. 7 (November 1896); illustrated in *The Later Work of Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: Dover, 1967), pl. 129.

13. Reade, *Aubrey Beardsley*, fig. 33.

14. *Ibid.*, 16.

line block. He was not averse to issuing works in color when commissions arose: in 1894 he published three posters in color lithography, all considerably larger than his drawings and advertising theatrical productions or new books. *Isolde* is the only one of Beardsley's surviving drawings for lithographs that is not specifically an advertisement. The *Isolde* has similarities to posters: the figure is pushed to the left side, with the right side largely empty except for lettering. In this case it shows only the title, in a green matching parts of Isolde's hat, necklace, and elaborate bracelet. The *Isolde*, then, might be regarded as an advertisement for the opera, though no particular production is specified. Advertising is one of the first steps in an opera production, sometimes preceding rehearsals, in order to generate advance ticket sales. Beardsley had no problem doing work of this kind, since, as he wrote, "advertisement is an absolute necessity of modern life, and if it can be made beautiful as well as obvious, so much the better."¹⁵

Beardsley here depicts Isolde in a hybrid of medieval and "modern dress," a production concept familiar in our own time, though not in the 1890s. (He had already, however, shown biblical-era figures in modern dress in some of his drawings for Oscar Wilde's play *Salome*, Beardsley's most notorious commission.) Isolde's elaborate hat is nearly identical to that worn by one of two women in his *Black Coffee*,

a contemporary café scene not unlike those by Edgar Degas.¹⁶ Isolde leans forward with determination to drink the poisoned cup; Tristan, however, is absent, and the lack of décor in the picture gives it an almost abstract flatness. The curtain behind Isolde is a deep red, indicative of fiery passions. Though the lithograph differs considerably from Beardsley's drawing with its loose brushwork, the artist most likely approved the lithograph before publication. At this period he was living in London and could discuss this face to face with the publisher or the lithographer. Later, living in a coastal resort in hopes of restoring his health, he had to deal with such matters by correspondence. In regard to a small lithograph advertising a set of books, Beardsley asked to see color proofs and set out in detail the colors he wished to be used.¹⁷ The design and brilliant colors of the *Isolde* have analogies to Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's



Figure 2. Aubrey Beardsley, *Isolde*, ink and watercolor, 1895, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop, 1943.656.

15. Cited in David Colvin, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Slave to Beauty* (London: Orion, 1998), 56.

16. Reade, *Aubrey Beardsley*, fig. 393.

17. *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. Henry Maas et al. (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970), 194 (letter of 1 November 1896 to Leonard Smithers). The lithograph is reproduced in color in Colvin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 82.

famous lithographic advertising posters of the 1890s, which Beardsley easily could have seen on his regular trips to Paris. In Beardsley's work, Wagner's tragic heroine curiously shares the visual world of Jane Avril, La Goulue, and the other denizens of Lautrec's Montmartre. Characteristically, Beardsley did not explain why he chose to depict Isolde in this way.

Beardsley depicts another aspect of opera production, the rehearsal, in *A Répétition of "Tristan und Isolde"* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, figure 3). This was published in December 1896, in the final issue of *The Savoy*. Though dealing with



Figure 3. Aubrey Beardsley, *A Répétition of "Tristan und Isolde,"* Indian ink, 1896, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

one of the earliest stages of an opera production, it is actually the last published image of Beardsley's *Tristan*. It is in his late style, first seen in some of the illustrations for *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, published in the same journal earlier that year. Instead of the open spaces and spare, sweeping lines of *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink*, the entire surface here is covered with a dense web of lines, with white appearing only in the reserved open spaces of the upper bodies, hands, and feet of the figures. The background is filled with a mass of black dots, making it difficult to identify the location of the scene, which might be outdoors at night.

Mixing several languages in the title, Beardsley uses the French word for “rehearsal.” The longhaired figure with a raised hand is the rehearsal coach, though he wears the formal tails usually associated with an orchestra conductor. Given the work being rehearsed, the two young women might be the singers playing the roles of Isolde (on the left) and Brangäne. Leaning close together, they wear elaborate modern dresses, possibly opera costumes, showing considerable décolletage. Like many compositions by Beardsley, this one relates to one of his other works, in this case a wash drawing of 1895 entitled *Frontispiece to Chopin's “Nocturnes,”* referencing another group of musical works that he admired. That scene, like some of Beardsley's other depictions of music making, unaccountably takes place outdoors in an open field. The conductor or coach in that work leans sharply toward the two women, who are dressed more demurely and maintain a greater distance from each other.

The rehearsal scene from *The Savoy* has some of the strangeness of Beardsley's other *Tristan* illustrations. Suggestions about the identity of the male figure (Tristan?) or the relationship between the two women remain in the realm of speculation. The standing figure leans against an ornate pillar entwined with flowers; this might be the column of a harp,¹⁸ an instrument Wagner used to great effect in works such as *Die Meistersinger*, though a piano would be a more usual rehearsal instrument. Although the women watch him closely, he looks away, as if conducting unseen musicians. A rehearsal is a fairly mundane event, often taking place in nondescript surroundings, yet Beardsley again gives the scene a mysterious, unexplained quality. This brings to mind Kenneth Clark's view of Beardsley: “He was essentially a visionary and an ideal artist.”¹⁹ Beardsley was not given to realistic reportage of everyday scenes, and the indeterminate, dreamlike quality of much of *Tristan's* plot and music would have been exceptionally appealing to him.

In regard to the action of the opera itself, we have seen that Beardsley inserted the love potion scene from *Tristan und Isolde* into his early illustrations for Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. Another important type of depiction of an opera production, in Beardsley's time and today, is in publicity portraits of the “stars” or lead players. Beardsley essays this genre in his image of the Hungarian soprano Katharina Klavsky, an early work of 1892 (Princeton University Library, figure 4). Beardsley sought a portrait-like depiction of Klavsky, judging from contemporary photographs of the singer in newspapers and magazines, though modified to his own svelte beauty ideals (figure 5). He depicts her in the role of Isolde, which he had seen her portray at the Drury Lane Theatre in the summer opera season of 1892. Her Tristan was the German tenor Max Alvary; Gustav Mahler conducted. All of these artists had reached adulthood during Wagner's lifetime and presumably had some idea of the Master's musical and dramatic intentions; Mahler had heard Wagner conduct *Tannhäuser*. Though Beardsley was more enthusiastic about Klavsky, he also drew a profile portrait of Alvary in vaguely medieval costume.²⁰ The tenor had performed both *Tristan* and *Tannhäuser* in London that year, however, and a role is not specified.

The image is tall and narrow in format, suggesting the influence on Beardsley at this stage of his career of Japanese prints, especially the category of *kakemono*, or

18. Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 172.

19. Kenneth Clark, *The Best of Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 31.

20. Reade, *Aubrey Beardsley*, fig. 29.

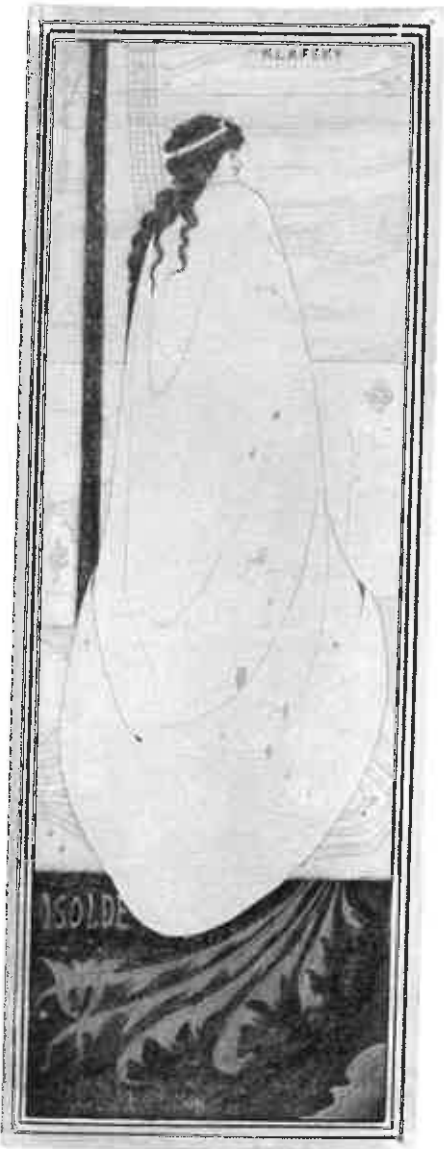


Figure 4. Aubrey Beardsley, *Katharina Klavsky as Isolde*, ink and watercolor, c. 1892, Aubrey Beardsley Collection, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

pillar prints, which had been known in France and England for some time.²¹ Isolde's long strands of hair and sweeping cloak anticipate her appearance in the slightly later *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink*. Her back to us, with one shoulder raised, she leans on a ship's railing and looks ahead toward a mountainous shoreline. This is probably the Isolde of Act 1, looking toward the approaching Cornwall of King Marke as she broods about Tristan's supposed indifference. Alternatively, it could represent her sea voyage from Cornwall to Brittany and the dying Tristan, though this action is not depicted in the opera. Klavsky's name (perhaps in its Germanic pronunciation) appears above, while the title of her role is written below amid stylized Japanese waves and weeds.

Modern criticism in the arts pays considerable attention to the reception of an artwork: that is, how it is perceived by critics and its audience at the time of its introduction and later. This perception may or may not correspond to the artist's own view of his work. The remaining two *Tristan* subjects by Beardsley may both be described as "reception pictures." The most famous of all Beardsley's Wagnerian images, a drawing largely in black and white ink entitled *The Wagnerites* (Victoria and Albert Museum, figure 6), published in *The Yellow Book* in 1894, does not show any dramatic action at all; instead it focuses only on the audience. As such, it is highly unusual among nineteenth-century depictions of theatrical performances. Though small (about eight by six inches), *The Wagnerites* has been

the subject of a surprising number of different interpretations.

In an ornate, darkened theater an audience in the orchestra stalls faces the stage. Whatever may be happening there is not visible to us; however, a theatrical program discarded on the floor at the lower right informs us that the evening's program is *Tristan und Isolde*. There has been much speculation about the attitude of the audience toward the performance. With one exception, the orchestra stalls, the most expensive seats in the theater, are filled entirely with women. Most have elaborate coiffures and wear off-the-shoulder dresses, their upper bodies highlighted by the reserved areas of white paper in a largely black ink drawing. Their faces, seen mostly in profile, are

21. Linda Gertner Zatlin, *Beardsley, Japonisme, and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 81f.

particularly difficult to read. The standard interpretation of the picture, proposed by Kenneth Clark, Brian Reade, and others, is that Beardsley's intention, as so often, is satirical.²² The women's expressions may be seen as hard and oversophisticated, even decadent; as such, they make an ironic contrast with Wagner's idealistic tale of romantic love that is being presented on the stage.

This is not the only possible interpretation, however. The literary critic Emma Sutton discusses the widespread conservative opinion in England and elsewhere that Wagner's music was "decadent."²³ If so, then having a sensual, decadent audience would be entirely appropriate. Beardsley's view of the scene therefore could be considered objective, or at least nonjudgmental, rather than satirical. Beardsley himself, it will be recalled, was regarded by many, perhaps unfairly, as a prominent Decadent, largely due to the notoriety of his illustrations for Wilde's *Salome* and to his emaciated yet fastidious appearance. More recently, the French critic Xavier Lacavalerie, in an extended discussion of this image, finds in it no evidence of decadence.²⁴ Instead he sees the audience members as concentrating intensely on Wagner's music drama; the principal effect of *Tristan und Isolde* takes place within their minds, as Wagner intended. In this interpretation, Beardsley's attitude toward the audience in *The Wagnerites* is sympathetic and approving.

The lone male figure in the orchestra stalls, balding and timid-looking, probably would have been understood at the time as a caricature of a Jew. Again Beardsley's attitude is by no means clear. He is known to have been friendly with a number of Jews from London's artistic community, such as the young satirist and caricaturist Max Beerbohm. During the last two years of his life, Beardsley was heavily under the



Figure 5. Katharina Klavsky as Isolde. Photo: Emil Bieber, Berlin. Collection of the Metropolitan Opera Archives.

22. Clark, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 122, cat. 39, and Reade, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 347, cat. 364.

23. Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 100.

24. Xavier Lacavalerie, "Beardsley, Aubrey Vincent (1872–1898)," in Timothée Picard, ed., *Dictionnaire encyclopédique Wagner* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010), 217.

influence of Marc-André Raffalovich, a Jewish emigré poet and Roman Catholic convert who helped steer Beardsley's conversion to Catholicism. Is the male figure a reference, satirical or not, to Wagner's well-known anti-Semitism? The subject is never mentioned in Beardsley's extensive correspondence. In his notorious essay *Judaism in Music* (1850), Wagner had written that Jews were not a suitable subject for representation in the visual arts. Perhaps here, as in *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*, Beardsley is showing signs of rebelliousness against Wagner, a revered authority figure. He does not hesitate to depict a Jewish subject, who moreover has a central place at a performance of Wagner's opera.²⁵

Beardsley again deals with audience response to *Tristan und Isolde* in a little-known



Figure 6. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Wagnerites*, pen and white ink, 1894. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

drawing of circa 1892, now in a private collection (figure 7). The work is entitled *Les revenants de musique* (*The Ghosts of Music*); it is one of a number of works to which Beardsley gave French titles, perhaps influenced by his simultaneous involvement with Malory's *Morte Darthur*. The drawing is tall and narrow and surrounded by a triple-lined border, as in his nearly contemporaneous portrait of Katharina Klavsky. As in that picture, the bottom of the composition is filled with motifs from nature, in this case sketchy tree limbs. It was one of Beardsley's group of four drawings reproduced as line-block illustrations in *The Studio* in April 1893.

At the left a thin young man with long hair is seated in profile on a chair, evidently before a curtain and on an empty stage. He is slumped as if exhausted, looking downward, his right hand open and limply supported by the chair. His costume is unusual: a jacket buttoned up to the neck, baggy trousers, and pointed shoes. The costume resembles that traditionally worn by Pierrot, the French version of a hapless character of the *commedia dell'arte*. Beardsley used the Pierrot figure elsewhere and seems to have identified with it; thus the subject shown here takes on the aspect of a self-portrait.²⁶

Facing the young man are three somewhat smaller figures, the ghosts of the title. A standing young man and woman look at him, though he does not seem to notice them. Sutton plausibly suggests that these are Tristan and Isolde, recognizable by their unruly hair, also seen in *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* and in *Klavsky*. A robed female figure seen from the back below them may represent Brangäne.²⁷ The

25. Milly Heyd, *Aubrey Beardsley: Symbol, Mask and Self-Irony* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 175 and 188n13.

26. Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 62.

27. *Ibid.*, 63.

young man, then, has just seen and heard *Tristan und Isolde*, the work that, according to the account of his friend Gleeson White, had such an intense effect on Beardsley in the theater. Beardsley also would have known Burne-Jones's large painting *Le chant d'amour* (*The Song of Love*; 1868–1877; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), based in part on a French folk song, in which a young knight in armor sits at the left, spellbound and drained of energy, as he listens to a musician.²⁸ In Beardsley's image the young man's musical experience is based not on listening but on recollection. In an age before recordings and videotapes, when one could experience works fully only through infrequent live performances, a devoted Wagnerian might well replay an opera in his imagination. The drawing may suggest the enervating, "decadent" effect some critics of the time thought Wagner's music had on its audience.

Beardsley did not attempt to imitate the effects of music or a leitmotif in any of the *Tristan und Isolde* images: the visual arts and music were not directly comparable, at least before the advent of abstract art in the twentieth century. Nor, for the most part, did he seek to emulate the intense emotions of the opera, except perhaps in the strange watercolor *Isolde*. His other groups of Wagnerian drawings had consistent styles: decorous for *Tannhäuser*, lively and picturesque for *Das Rheingold*. On the other hand, the *Tristan* drawings, made throughout his career, show the rapid evolution of his technique: from the linearism of *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* to the *horror vacui* of the late *A Répétition of "Tristan und Isolde."* Beginning



Figure 7. Aubrey Beardsley, *Les revenants de musique*, Indian ink and wash, c. 1892, private collection/Bridgeman Art Library.

28. On the Burne-Jones painting, see Tim Barringer, "Burne-Jones's *Le Chant d'amour* and the Condition of Music," in Rubin with Mattis, *Rival Sisters*, 249–271.

in Beardsley's lifetime, a few critics have suggested the possible stylistic influence on the British artist of the French painter and lithographer Odilon Redon,²⁹ though the effect could have been mutual. The extent of Beardsley's knowledge of Redon's work is uncertain, though members of his immediate circle certainly were familiar with it: Arthur Symons, later Beardsley's editor at *The Savoy* and his biographer, had published an article on Redon as early as 1890.³⁰ Recently Rachel Sloan has proposed that Redon's influence was specifically on Beardsley's Wagnerian works;³¹ if so, then in the *Tristan* drawings this might be evident in the quality of arrested motion in some of the compositions, notably *How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink* and *Isolde*.

Although Beardsley drew caricatures of such composers as Carl Maria von Weber and Felix Mendelssohn, and a portrait of the still-active Giuseppe Verdi, he never depicted Wagner. Without work and short of money, Beardsley contemplated selling his extensive library, but he excluded a few books: religious texts and the volumes of Wagner's prose works. A photograph taken late in Beardsley's life shows the artist in the hotel room in Menton, France, where he died.³² Wearing a suit, he is seated facing a wall of photographs of Italian Renaissance figural compositions, including many religious and mythological subjects by Andrea Mantegna. Arranged on the top of a bookcase, in the manner of an altar, are photographs of Beardsley's sister—and Richard Wagner. Aubrey Beardsley remained faithful to the Master of Bayreuth to the end.

29. M. H. Spielmann, "Original Lithography: The Revival on the Continent," *Magazine of Art* 20 (January 1897): 150.

30. Arthur Symons, "A French Blake: Odilon Redon," *Art Review* (July 1890): 207.

31. Rachel Sloan, "The Condition of Music: Wagnerism and Printmaking in France and Britain," *Art History* 32, no. 3 (June 2009): 545–77.

32. Illustrated in Colvin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, 106.

SOPRANO ASCENDING

An Interview with Christine Goerke¹

ERICA MINER



Soprano Christine Goerke has rocked the opera world of late. A 2001 recipient of the Richard Tucker Award, she caused a sensation at the Metropolitan Opera with her portrayal of the Dyer's Wife in Richard Strauss's *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* in 2013 and elicited critical raves for her Brünnhilde in Canadian Opera Company's *Die Walküre* in 2015.

Certainly Goerke is one of the most important singers of our time. A veteran of some of the world's top opera houses and named the 2015 Vocalist of the Year by *Musical America*, she has worked with some of the most prominent directors on the planet, including film director Atom Egoyan. Here she chats about opera, directors, being a working mom, and finding your way.

Erica Miner: Christine, you are a shining light in the opera world. I totally know what it's like to raise kids and work in opera simultaneously—except I was never a stage star.

Christine Goerke: I think being a working mommy makes us all stars.

EM: Beautifully put. I read that your mentor Diana Soviero, one of my favorite sopranos of all time, helped you in your journey from singing Handel, Gluck and Mozart to working through your *crise-de foi* a few years ago. How did you transition to your present status as an operatic icon of Strauss and Wagner?

CG: She's one of my favorite sopranos of all time too! Not just because she is a remarkable musician and an insanely fabulous technician—but because she's my biggest cheerleader and manages to kick my butt if I'm not taking care of myself at the same

1. Original published by www.broadwayworld.com on March 12, 2015. Reprinted by permission. <http://www.broadwayworld.com/bwwopera/article/BWW-Interviews-Christine-Goerke-Ascending-20150312>

time. I remember a master class I had done with Diana when I was in the Lindemann program at the Met when I was starting to look for a new teacher. People were wildly confused about my choice at the time. "... But Diana didn't sing *any* of the rep you are going into!" I stand by the fact that teachers are there to give you a technique. Once you have a solid technique that works with your instrument (because it is very individualized), then you can worry about your "rep", whatever that may be. Diana insists on a firmly supported *bel canto* technique. As far as I'm concerned, that is the key to longevity in my current repertoire...in any repertoire, really!

EM: Your triumph as the Dyer's Wife in the Met's production of *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* rocked the opera world. What was that like for you?

CG: I will tell you that when I came out for my curtain call on opening night...nothing could have prepared me for the response. Truly. I still have friends giving me a hard time. "...You cried. YOU CRIED." Are you kidding me?!?!...I totally cried. I came off stage, stunned, and went right into the arms of a long time friend and staff member at the Met and said to her, "No one will ask me if I'm broken anymore." It was an epic moment for me. I had worked *so* hard to convince people that this was the right repertoire for me after I made the change. Even though I'd had great success in other big roles already, this apparently was the thing that solidified my place in this repertoire. Phew.

EM: What would you say is the key to singing Strauss and Wagner?

CG: Now bear with me here...this is going to sound odd. Singing Strauss and Wagner doesn't feel any more difficult to me than any other repertoire. Knowing your instrument is the most important thing that you will ever do for your career. The whole *fach* thing. I think it works for some, and doesn't work for others. Finding the roles and repertoire that works for your instrument, your technique, your body...this is what every singer needs to do. My voice was always headed in this direction. I just didn't quite catch the transition in time, so it was a bit more of a bump in the road than perhaps it could have been. Diana was lightning quick to catch that I had just disconnected from my support because I was trying to sing with a light enough touch for Handel and Mozart—and that wasn't how my voice needed to function at the time. Within three months of lessons and exercises, I had completely reconnected to my support, and spent the next year realizing just how much more sound was in there. From there, it just became a decision of which roles to begin with. Also...“icon.” What?!?!?!? LOL!

EM: Did you enjoy singing the role?

CG: I will be perfectly honest with you. I *loved* singing the Dyer's Wife. I actually really love the character, and I know that might be difficult to understand. I love playing the bitches and baddies. When we get a role like that, we have an opportunity to show the audience just *why* they are the way that they are. My goal is always to have the audience seeing things from their side, if not being *on* their side, when they leave. The Dyer's Wife is certainly not the most warm and fuzzy of ladies (#understate-

ment)...but if you look at her life, the disappointment, the fear of failure—both as a wife and a mother, the feeling of being trapped. If someone showed up and offered you a way out of everything that frightened or disappointed you, and you saw no other way out...wouldn't you take it?

EM: How about its difficulty?

CG: Musically, the role is a beast in places, but it's still always Strauss. The same man wrote "*Allerseelen*". No matter how bombastic the orchestral writing, or how disjunctive the vocal writing seems, it must still have legato and line.

EM: Opera aficionados waited with baited breath for your stunning debut as Brünnhilde last month at Canadian Opera Company in Toronto². The *New York Times* raved about your command of the role, saying that your voice penetrated the huge Wagner orchestra without a problem, that your high notes were astonishing, and that your approach to the role was meticulously thought out. What was it like to play this iconic role in the most iconic *Ring* opera, directed by Atom Egoyan, no less?

CG: Oh...it was fine. LOL! It was incredible. I have waited to sing this role...prayed that I would sing it...since I was a baby singer. I remember singing the Third Norn, busting the rope, and scooting off into the wings. The other two were in the dressing rooms, collecting their checks. I was in the wings thinking, "Please God...someday..." I have been thinking about Brünnhilde's character since then. She's so much like me. She's fiercely loyal, she has so much love, she's so brave, and at the same time so frightened. She is a leader, she is a fierce protector. She knows what is right, even at the risk of the severe punishment she received. All of this as a teen! Bringing all of these ideas to Atom Egoyan—especially since they've been formulated in my head for so long—was a bit scary as you never know what a director will ask of you. Especially when it's one that you've not worked with before. He heard everything I had to say and worked with me to find every aspect of the characterization. Penetrating the orchestra...The thing is? This is the music that now fits my voice. I am constantly laughed at when I ask, "How is the balance? Can you hear me?" People think I'm joking. But in my head? Things don't sound the same way as they do to the folks in front of me. I just sing. Finding the pacing. That's tricky. There were two performances of the seven that I found I didn't have quite the amount of "oomph" I wanted by the end. The first time you do any role, it's about finding your way with pacing, breathing, how much to give and in which places. I feel as though I have a real road map at this point, and can't wait to get back to rehearsals with her next week in Houston.

EM: Tell me about Atom Egoyan. What is he like to work with?

CG: He's amazing. He's actually very quiet, very intense, and very sweet. It was hard for me, because he was very big on stillness, and taking the physical emotion out. He insisted on letting the music do the work. I am really frenetic, so that was work for me, but I am really amazed at what he's gotten out of me. He looks at things through

2. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/03/arts/music/christine-goerke-as-brunnhilde-in-wagners-die-walkure.html?_r=3

very different eyes for the stage, he notices every angle, everything that is happening. I suppose that is the filmmaker watching. I will also say that Atom truly listened to and *saw* the people in front of him. He saw their personalities and their takes on things, and watched the interactions between all of us in rehearsals. It helped the character development immensely. It's been an absolute joy and I can't wait for the next opportunity to work with him.

EM: Very astute observation! Yes, a filmmaker does see everything with different eyes. How lucky are you to get this view from both film- and non-filmmaker directors. What are your future plans, both immediate and long term?

CG: Immediate plans include another run of *Die Walküre* at Houston Grand Opera, and some concerts with Simon O'Neill in New Zealand with the NZO and Pietari Inkinen. Long term? Trying to balance career and Motherhood, like all the other working Moms out there!

EM: What is your wish list of roles you haven't yet done that you would like to sing?

CG: Isolde has been sitting on my piano for three years. It's definitely my next learn. I want to sing Santuzza. I want to do Minnie at some point! I would like to sing Marie in *Wozzeck*. Possibly Senta. I know that at some point I will likely head south into some of the high mezzo roles, and before this is all done I am *definitely* singing Klytemnestra!

EM: I would kill to hear you in any of those. Is there anything you'd like to add?

CG: Just that I am often asked by young women who are studying to perform, "When is a good time to have children in this business? Can it really be done?" Yes. It can. You will need a support system, but yes absolutely. And there is no good time. So, if it's something that you want, something that calls to you, something that you can't be without? Just do it. I wouldn't trade the insanity in my life for anything. My girls...I feel like a failure every day in some way, but I love them fiercely and they're the things I am the most proud of in my life. Just like there is no such thing as a "storybook love," there is no such thing as "Storybook Motherhood." Find your way, and love your children...oh also, sing.

LETTER FROM BAYREUTH¹

LISA HIRSCH

Every Wagner fan dreams of a trip to the Bayreuth Festival, a pilgrimage to hear Richard Wagner's operas in his very own opera house, the Festspielhaus, complete with its famously beautiful acoustics, notoriously uncomfortable seats, and lack of air-conditioning. Thanks to the Wagner Society of Northern California, I was lucky enough to obtain tickets this year to all of the productions, seeing seven operas in eight days.

Yes, this was an *intense* opera-going experience. Because of the one-hour intermissions and early curtain times—4:00 P.M. for the three-act operas and 6:00 P.M. for the long one-act operas you spend a high proportion of any given day getting ready for the opera, getting to and from the Festspielhaus, and seeing the opera. That doesn't leave a lot of time for other activities.

This year's operas were Frank Castorf's production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, conducted by Kirill Petrenko, the incoming chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic; a new *Tristan und Isolde*, directed by the composer's great-granddaughter Katharina Wagner and conducted by Christian Thielemann; Jan Philipp Gloger's *Der Fliegende Holländer*, conducted by Axel Kober; and the very last performance of the famous "rat" *Lohengrin* production, directed by Hans Neuenfels and conducted by Alain Altinoglu.

The productions are all set in some more or less current time period, with cars, rolling luggage, subways, hypodermic needles, electric fans, above-ground swimming pools, and oil wells on stage, and the performers in modern dress. After seeing them, it's clear to me that what counts in such productions is not the scenery, costumes, and props, but how close the director is able to come to the emotional heart of the operas, as expressed in the *Personenregie* (direction of the individual performers). As in any opera production, the purely musical success depends largely on the conductor and the singers.

Of the seven operas, surely the most unified and dramatically effective was Neuenfels' *Lohengrin*, which during its several reiterations has become something of a Bayreuth classic. I had seen some photos from the production since its debut in 2010, showing the principal singers in modern dress and the chorus in rat costumes, but none of that prepared me for the mysterious beauty of the whole.

The production plays on a white unit set, with a series of slots on the left and right for chorus entries and exits. Large scenic elements, including Elsa and Lohengrin's Act III bedroom, slide forward from the rear of the stage. Sometimes the back of the stage is black, sometimes white. It's as though you're looking at a completely closed world. There's no river for Lohengrin's swan boat—though there is a swan at the knight's entrance—and no sense that the natural world even exists.

1. Originally published by San Francisco Classical Voice (sfcv.org) on September 9, 2015. The review has been revised and updated by the author for *Leitmotive*.

The presence and behavior of the rat-costumed chorus reinforces this sense. Sometimes they're in black rat costumes, sometimes white; a group of rat-children wears pink. The chorus members wear rat-paw prostheses and constantly rub their paws together or groom their rat-heads. At one dramatic juncture, the men step out of their rat costumes and underneath they're wearing safety-yellow formal dress. Later in the opera, the female choristers appear in pastel dresses and hats—trailing rat-tails behind them.

The effect is strangely charming despite the sinister implications of the rest of the staging. Are the characters trapped in a lab? Or are they in an insane asylum? At one point, supernumeraries dressed in blue lab outfits appear and inject a couple of unruly rats with—what?

The behavior of two of the principal characters reinforces the sense that the opera takes place in an asylum. King Henry is strangely craven, cringing and sometimes afflicted with tremors. He also needs to be managed by his Herald.

Elsa also appears to be truly disturbed and physically afflicted as well. She staggers around as if she has incomplete control of her feet and legs. She enters dressed in white and punctured by numerous arrows, St. Sebastian-like, perhaps suggesting the torture inflicted on her by the suspicions that she has killed her brother. When she challenges Lohengrin after their wedding, she fears him, and her fear seems to go beyond her legitimate concerns about who he is and into a more existential fear of emotional and physical intimacy with another human.

Lohengrin first appears during the prelude, pushing a wall from the front to the back of the stage. The characters are all blatantly color coded, with the King and Herald initially in black, Telramund and Ortrud in gray, and Elsa and Lohengrin in white. By the end of the performance, we've seen the latter in pure white, for their wedding, and the bad guys in pure black. At one striking moment, Elsa and Ortrud confront each other in feathered gowns that are



Bayreuther Festspiele 2015, *Lohengrin*, Annette Dasch as Elsa
Photo: Bayreuther Festspiele / Enrico Nawrath

identical but for their colors. And at the very end of the opera, both Elsa and Lohengrin, their marriage destroyed, are in black.

Neuenfels' brilliance goes well beyond the physical production and its various symbols, for it includes the beautifully detailed direction of each singer. Their movements were always economical, yet the emotional intention was powerfully projected. And Neuenfels had singers fully able to execute his vision, many having appeared in the production before.

What does it all mean? Well, I don't really know. It could be about the mindlessness of rodents in a lab, or of average people in a political machine. (Between the Third Reich and Soviet control of East Germany, Germany certainly has had plenty of experience of this nature during the twentieth century.) It could be some kind of fantasy in the hearts of madmen in an asylum. Regardless of your interpretation—and you can see this production on video with almost the same cast—it's a great theatrical experience.

I've long been aware of and curious about Klaus Florian Vogt, who sang Lohengrin. He has a voice of unearthly beauty, with a sweet timbre and grace that bring to mind that of John McCormack more than any other tenor. And yet, in the grateful acoustic of the Festspielhaus, this Mozartean voice has all the power and projection needed for the swan knight. Add to this his physical beauty and superb acting—you could hardly take your eyes off him—and you have a dream Lohengrin.

Annette Dasch, singing Elsa, doesn't have nearly as distinctive a voice as Vogt, but she gives a performance of great dramatic depth and conviction, ranging from Elsa's initial hopes and fears to the collapse of her dream. Petra Lang's Ortrud is rather terrifying, but in a good way: intense, creepy, full of hate. Vocally, she sounded better than in the same role in San Francisco in 2012, but she also seemed under some stress by the end of the performance. It remains to be seen how she will handle the much longer role of Isolde in next year's Festival.

Jukka Rasilainen made an unusually strong Telramund. He made the character less abject than usual, and he sang with great tonal beauty. Wilhelm Schwinghammer was a memorably neurotic Heinrich, and Samuel Youn an excellent King's Herald. The Bayreuth chorus, a mighty group, sang superbly, with near-perfect unison and beautiful tone. Alain Altinoglu's conducting had poise, balance, and a direct and natural feel for the music in both its grandest and most intimate aspects.

At the close of the performance, the audience went more or less crazy, giving the cast and crew, and Neuenfels himself, the greatest ovation I have ever heard. It must have gone on for close to twenty minutes. The ovation turned into a standing ovation sometime around Vogt's fourth or fifth curtain call, and within a few minutes the audience was clapping rhythmically in unison. After such a great performance, the cast and conductor deserved every last minute of that ovation.

The greatest part of my time in the Festspielhaus was of course taken up with Castorf's *Ring* production, which was performed for the third time since 2013 and will be revived in 2016. This production has been variously characterized as anarchic, anti-directorial, and as an overall mess. I can certainly understand why, but I am going to call it "complicated" instead. So much is going on in the production that I don't believe anyone can take it all in with just one viewing. Since a great deal of the production is rather far from our usual conception of the libretto and the music, I

didn't exactly *like* the whole, but Castorf certainly gives his audience plenty to think about. I hope that the Festival is filming this production, because I'd like to wrestle with it further.

Born and raised in East Germany, Castorf originally trained as a railway worker, and in his *Ring* he has created a production that is deeply connected with political history and his own origins. A gigantic frieze clearly modeled on Mount Rushmore looms over much of *Siegfried*, but instead of presidents of the United States, the sculpted heads are Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. Castorf incorporates a subway



Bayreuther Festspiele 2015, *Das Rheingold*, Scene 2, Wolfgang Koch (Wotan), Johan Daszak (Loge), Alison Oakes (Freia), Daniel Schmutzhard (Donner), Lothar Odinius (Froh), Andreas Hörl (Fafner), Wilhelm Schwinghammer (Fasolt), Claudia Mahnke (Fricka) | Photo: Bayreuther Festspiele / Enrico Nawrath

entrance and a clock from Berlin's Alexanderplatz into the same opera.

In *Die Walküre*, an Azerbaijani oil well forms the set for both Hunding's house and the Valkyries' rock. A sign marking an industrial city famous in East Germany dominates one *Götterdämmerung* set, and in the same opera, a baby carriage bumps down a staircase and spills a load of potatoes—a scene straight out of Sergei Eisenstein's film *The Battleship Potemkin*.

Castorf's approach is to focus tightly on just one or two aspects of the operas and their characters. You won't find much in this production of the natural world, or of the magic and majesty portrayed in most *Ring* productions. The director largely omits dragons, frogs, craggy mountaintops, rainbow bridges, and the like. Almost the only typical effect is the thunder and lightning in Donner's call to the mists.

In *Das Rheingold*, set primarily in and around the "Golden Motel," the Rhine-maidens are vicious floozies who torture, rather than tease, Alberich. The gods are vicious gangsters, with little of the noble stature implied by Wagner's music. However, this isn't a completely unreasonable proposition, given Wotan's trickery and desire

for power. Castorf's staging of the opera is exceptionally complex, with the action unfolding on the motel's three separate levels, and with each character assigned an immense amount to do.

For example, before the gold is measured against Freia, one of the giants nearly tears apart an upstairs bedroom in the motel, breaking a window and tossing bedding, pillows, and the mattress out the window frame. Next, Freia is dragged upstairs, nearly raped, thrown on the bed while several other gods crowd into the room, and then covered with the gold. Meanwhile, as is the case throughout the cycle, live cameras capture what's going on in the motel room as well as some of the action elsewhere in the motel, and the video streams are projected onto screens set on the roof of the motel. Especially in *Das Rheingold*, this is rather exhausting for the audience. Both the live action and the video streams demand your attention, with the video and the other stage action sometimes commenting on and sometimes adding to what's prescribed by the libretto.

Castorf adds another layer of complexity by including a silent actor who has his own script to follow. This character appears in all four operas; he manages the store in the gas station next to the Golden Motel and takes various other parts later in the *Ring*. He represents *Everyman*, and as such, he is regularly abused by Wagner's characters, who represent *The Powers That Be*. He stands in for the bear in *Siegfried*. He's beaten, chased around, and finally murdered and stuffed in the trunk of a car in *Götterdämmerung*.

The director places *Die Walküre* in the Azerbaijani oil fields, upon which the Soviet Union was significantly economically dependent before its dissolution. Hunding's "hut" is a huge structure surrounding an oil well. The tender scenes between Sieglinde and Siegmund take place outside the structure, while the dinner confrontation among the three characters is on a deck high above the stage. The video feed is used to show Sieglinde making nice to Hunding in a room not visible to the audience, then drugging him.

Valhalla is an oil-processing facility, with various machines and samples of oil visible behind the action, as well as the supernumeraries working in the facility. Castorf stages the long dialogs and monologues of Acts II and III fairly conventionally. His interpretation of the relationship between Wotan and Brünnhilde, however, is unique in my experience. You might think that Wotan hates his daughter, because there is no tenderness anywhere in their interactions. When he attempts to kiss her, well before the *Leb' wohl*, she pushes him away because he has just attempted an incestuous *romantic* kiss.

Castorf conceives of Siegfried as a complete lout, living with Mime in an Airstream trailer. He has none of the innocence and curiosity implied by the score, and he doesn't even seem to be a youth. While he does reforge Siegmund's sword, when he finally kills Fafner, it's with a machine gun, and Fafner isn't a dragon, either—he's the same giant from *Das Rheingold*. Siegfried's interactions with the Forest Bird, who is on stage and quite beautifully costumed, do have some charm—until he has sex with her right before your eyes.

Götterdämmerung continues the violence of this *Ring*'s intrapersonal relationships. Hagen tries to force himself on Guttrune, echoing Wotan's behavior toward Brünnhilde. The Rhinemaidens try to beat up Siegfried to get the ring back from

him; he has sex with one of them, and so do Hagen and Gunther. Siegfried is seriously drunk in his last scene, and Hagen beats him to death with a baseball bat.

However, for all of the peculiarities in Castorf's staging, the production also benefits from his attention to each individual's acting, and his decisions here are mostly brilliant and deeply detailed. One need only consider how he handles some key scenes in *Götterdämmerung*. When Waltraute visits Brünnhilde and tries to persuade her to surrender the ring, Castorf has Waltraute try to forcibly take the ring away. Later in the act, when the kidnapped Brünnhilde comes to Gibichung Hall in shock and looking half dead, she nevertheless makes a regal descent down a staircase, terrifying Guttrune and perhaps planting some doubts in Guttrune's mind about marrying Siegfried. She then rounds on Guttrune and Siegfried before being pulled away from them. And Guttrune's short scene after the Funeral March, when she hears Siegfried's horse neighing, is wonderfully spooky, and we watch Guttrune's fears grow.

If some of these details sound vaguely familiar to you, such as the Airstream and the emphasis on the horrors of capitalism, it might be because they also appeared in Francesca Zambello's *Ring*, which was performed in San Francisco in 2011, with the individual operas appearing previously at Washington National Opera. I don't know, whether Castorf had any knowledge of Zambello's production, but his conception of the *Ring* and its characters seem like what you might get if you took the comparatively timid politics of Zambello's production to their natural extreme.

The singing in this production was quite strong, although I don't know whether all of the singers would fare as well in a more difficult acoustic. Wolfgang Koch was an outstandingly expressive and intelligent Wotan. Albert Dohmen, a late addition to the cast after the tragic death of Oleg Bryjak in the Germanwings plane crash, sang well and made a brutal Alberich. Catherine Foster seemed lightweight for Brünnhilde. Her cool, clear soprano is best in the upper register rather than in the middle where most of the role lies; she's more a Chrysothemis in *Elektra* or Kaiserin in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* than a Brünnhilde. She had surprising pitch problems off and on, and the end of *Siegfried* marked the first time I've heard the tenor sounding better than the soprano!

Stefan Vinke was utterly tireless as Siegfried, despite a good deal of unnecessary oversinging. He could sound sweet when he backed off, which he should have done more often. Johan Botha isn't much of an actor, but his Siegmund was a wonder, with beautiful tone and a crisp sense of rhythm. Anja Kampe made a touching Sieglinde, again with exceptionally beautiful tone. Claudia Mahnke's high mezzo made her a near-perfect Fricka, Waltraute, and Second Norn. Nadine Weissman's sassy Erda looked and sounded great. Stephen Milling's vocally and physically towering Hagen nearly stole the show in *Götterdämmerung*, as did John Dazak's scheming Loge in *Das Rheingold*. The production also boasted exceptional Rhinemaidens, Norns, and Valkyries, with one or two of the latter sounding about ready to sing Brünnhilde.

Conductor Kirill Petrenko has led this production since the beginning, and I understand that he has received mostly excellent reviews. However, I was unimpressed and thought his Wagner simply not very good. *Das Rheingold* was oddly boneless, conducted very fast and with little attention to the structure of the piece

and how the internal climaxes move it forward. Any given moment it sounded good, with the orchestra beautifully balanced, but from a structural standpoint, the whole never coalesced.

Petrenko's work was similar in the first two acts of *Die Walküre*, with little musical drama or tension. Something must have happened at the second intermission, because Act III was thrilling in every way. It didn't hurt that the act opens with the Ride of the Valkyries and continues in a rousing fashion almost to the end. Maybe

a little elemental excitement was just what Petrenko needed.

In the last two operas, the order of the day was decent, but in no way outstanding, conducting. Besides lacking a sense of the large-scale shape of the operas, Petrenko's command of local rhythm and phrasing was lax. The beautiful chords that precede Brünnhilde's awakening at the end of *Siegfried* exemplify his problems. They lacked majesty and failed to bloom, largely because of Petrenko's poor handling of their timing and dynamics. The chords sounded *perfunctory*, and, in fact, Petrenko's inability to make the music sound important marred the entire *Ring*.

On the other hand, sufficient superlatives do not exist to describe Christian Thielemann's incandescent con-



Bayreuther Festspiele 2015, *Tristan und Isolde*, Evelyn Herlitzius (Isolde), Stephen Gould (Tristan), Christina Mayer (Brangäne)
Photo: Bayreuther Festspiele / Enrico Nawrath

ducting in the new *Tristan* production. Act II was the greatest ninety minutes of Wagner conducting that I have ever experienced live, both because of the conductor's extraordinary sense of the shape of the act and the astonishing beauty of the orchestral sound. The outer acts, inherently less beautiful than Act II, made equal musical and dramatic impact.

Thielemann's Wagner is in no way mannered or extreme; it is simply *right* in every way. He balanced each phrase perfectly, so that you could hear every voice in the orchestra, and yet at the same time, the instruments blended into a magnificently unified sound. He paced the work ideally, the many and complex tempo changes

presenting no challenges, with each act reaching its multiple climaxes with complete inevitability, as though it could not be done any other way.

Katharina Wagner's production of *Tristan* is extraordinarily dark, both emotionally and physically, and it is sometimes at odds with Wagner's libretto and music. Act I takes place in an Escher-like maze of stairs and platforms, with characters scurrying up and down the stairs or changing levels on moving platforms. Tristan and Isolde are at odds to the point that she physically attacks him and they wrestle a bit. When they are ready to drink the potion, they instead join hands and pour it out, an acknowledgment of the emotional truth that they have already fallen in love and that they are doomed whether it's a love potion or a poison that they drink.

Act III is beautifully bleak, with Tristan, Kurwenal, the shepherd, and two attendants set in an isolated pool of light. During Tristan's long delirium, he repeatedly hallucinates Isolde's presence. She appears at several points standing or seated in a triangle on or above the stage as Tristan sings to her.

The staging of the outer acts is largely appropriate, though Act II, despite its long musical stretches of joy and contentment, is set in a torture chamber that is under observation from above by spotlight-wielding outsiders. During the duet, Tristan and Isolde hide from the spotlights; Tristan is more or less hurled into the torture chamber through a door, and Kurwenal, on stage long before the libretto has him enter, is beaten at least once.

Most strangely, the director portrays King Marke, the most benevolent of betrayed husbands, as an abusive torturer rather than a man deeply hurt by the betrayal of his beloved wife and nephew. He is clearly responsible for the Act II surveillance of the lovers, and he has Tristan tied up during the sorrowful monologue at the end of



Bayreuther Festspiele 2015, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, Tomislav Muzek (Erik), Ricarda Merbeth (Senta)
Photo: Bayreuther Festspiele / Enrico Nawrath

the act. And it is beyond shocking that after Isolde sings “*Mild und leise*,” he drags her bodily offstage, after having already stated that he is there to free her from their marriage vows and reunite the lovers. Evidently, Katharina Wagner took her inspiration for this aspect of the production from some of the medieval versions of the story rather than from the libretto.

The singing in *Tristan* was mostly quite good. I do not entirely understand the general enthusiasm for Evelyn Herlitzius (Isolde). She sang with inconsistent tone and frequently started phrases a third or fourth down before hooking up to the correct pitch. She did not seem unusually vivid on stage. Stephen Gould (Tristan) has a fine tenor voice; he punched at notes occasionally in Act I but otherwise sang tirelessly, with a good legato and intelligent phrasing. The greatest pure vocalism came from the Marke of Georg Zeppenfeld, who has a gorgeous basso *cantate* and sang very beautifully. Christa Mayer made a lovely Brangäne, especially in the long lines of offstage solo in Act II. Iain Paterson was a sympathetic Kurwenal.

Then there was Jan Philipp Gloger’s *Der Fliegende Holländer*. The director is young—thirty-four in 2015—and this production, seen last in the string of performances, seemed to collect every last cliché of *Regietheatre*. Instead of taking place in a village port, it takes place inside a printed circuit board that doubles as an airport and at a factory. Everyone wears twentieth century business suits or dresses, and the male choristers behave like Japanese salarymen. The Dutchman arrives pulling a wheeled suitcase. Instead of spinning wheels, the spinning chorus refers to a new design for a small electric fan, and Senta and the female choristers work in the factory where the fan is being produced. Senta drags around a hideous statue representing the Dutchman, making her obsession with him seem more deranged than usual. Erik is a mechanic in the factory. The Dutchman’s ghostly ship is never seen.

Unlike the other productions, this updating appeared arbitrary; it never meshed emotionally with the story or provided any special illumination of the characters and their behavior. It received a decent performance, led by Samuel Youn’s resonant and strongly sung Dutchman and Kwangchul Youn’s vivid Daland. Ricarda Merbeth took Senta’s entire ballad (“*Traft ihr das Schiff*”) to warm up, and none of her singing could really be termed beautiful. Her performance was extroverted and unsubtle. Christa Mayr was fine as Mary, exercising supervisory powers over the factory girls. Tomislav Mužek, singing Erik, looked and sounded rather like the young Ben Hepner, only better—he showed absolutely no risk of cracking. Benjamin Bruns was amusing as the Steersman (or perhaps the lead salaryman), singing well and nudging the male chorus together for a group portrait taken with a cell phone. Axel Kober conducted compulsively.

What conclusions can one draw from this year’s Bayreuth productions? First, that the musical standards at the Festival remain astonishing. The orchestral playing was magnificent throughout, with the orchestra, composed of players from all over Germany, making an especially dark and beautiful sound. Similarly, the chorus was as great as any I’ve heard, singing with an immense sound, perfect tuning, and astonishing unanimity of phrasing.

Second, regardless of how you might feel about the specific productions, the standard of direction is extremely high, with the directors taking great care with their

productions both at the high level and in their work with the singers. I was truly amazed at the singers' detailed and exceptional acting in all roles.

Third, there are significant tradeoffs whenever a Wagner production is put into modern dress. Insight into specific aspects of these psychologically and theatrically complex works is a potential gain. One noticeable loss, at least in most of these productions, is a loss of theatrical majesty, with the characters somehow shrunken by being placed in the modern world. The gods lose a great deal of their godliness when they are portrayed so directly as criminals. Much of the tension and complexity of Wotan's character comes from how his better instincts contend with his greed for power. With modern dress productions, there is also a great loss of mystery and of certain elemental theatrical delights. Who doesn't like a good Rainbow Bridge, for example? Only the Neuenfels *Lohengrin* succeeded fully in retaining the ambiguous mystery present in the score.

REVIEW

My Life With Wagner: Fairies, Rings, and Redemption: Exploring Opera's Most Enigmatic Composer,
BY CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN WITH ANTHEA BELL. NEW YORK: PEGASUS BOOKS, 2015.
320 PP. \$26.95.

Christian Thielemann is the celebrated German conductor who was recently named Music Director of the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth, having made his successful debut there in 2000. He has led a remarkable career, being appointed Principal Conductor and Music Director of the Munich Philharmonic in September 2004 and chief conductor at Dresden in 2009. At 56, he is considered young for a conductor with such a list of accomplishments. His new book attempts to cover the major topics of the work and background of Richard Wagner, the dramas and the music, the politics, and the family as Thielemann perceives them.

This book should engender strong interest among seasoned Wagnerians as well as music lovers to whom this seductive aesthetic is unfamiliar. It is an edited version of discussions Thielemann had in Bayreuth, Berlin, and Salzburg between August 2010 and July 2011. The book is structured in well-organized sections and is, in general, a smooth and engaging read. Thielemann is reported to speak excellent English, and there are only a few spots in the book that read as if they were translated from the German. The book was originally published in a German edition in 2012 and the translator for here is Anthea Bell.

Thielemann starts off with his family background, music training, and early exposure to Wagner. Along the way, he relates a number of amusing anecdotes and entertains as well as enlightens. As his career proceeds, he describes his successful apprenticeships, serving with ever-increasing responsibility under renowned conductors. He made his own star debut leading *Rienzi* in concert form in Hannover at 25, and four years later during the 1988–89 season he was appointed General Music Director at Nuremberg and led *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* for the first time.

In the midst of relating these personal achievements, Thielemann sketches an introduction to the personality of Richard Wagner and the composer's ethically debatable excesses. The artistic goals and characteristics of Wagner as composer and dramatist are examined and clarified at length.

There is an intriguing historical overview of the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, including a detail of which Festival regulars may be unaware: the so-called "Rogues' Gallery," a private corridor leading from the orchestra pit featuring chronological portraits of every conductor who ever graced the podium at Bayreuth. Thielemann gives us biographical background on each of his predecessors and his opinion of their relative importance to the history of Bayreuth.

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the Festspielhaus and other halls and how he has learned to address their acoustical challenges.

As to relatively recent Wagnerian personalities, Thielemann describes meeting Wolfgang Wagner for the first time and working with him over a period of years on dramatic and musical issues in many successful productions.

The notorious Wagnerian ideological sore points are brought to the fore, examined, and put into a context that does not dismiss or minimize them. Thielemann himself is sensitive to this because he has been accused of making reactionary slights regarding his Berlin rival Daniel Barenboim, a charge he strongly denies.

The three early works not considered part of the Wagnerian canon—*Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot*, and *Rienzi*—are discussed with the same attention to development, plot, and music as the canonical great works beginning with *Der Fliegende Holländer* and culminating with *Parsifal*. For the seasoned Wagnerian, character description and plot points are probably unnecessary, but Thielemann's musical analysis is of great interest and value.

There are some minor errors in the text but, all in all, this is a stimulating, enjoyable overview, and an opportunity to share in the thoughts and feelings of one of the most respected Wagner conductors performing today.

—JEFF BART





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