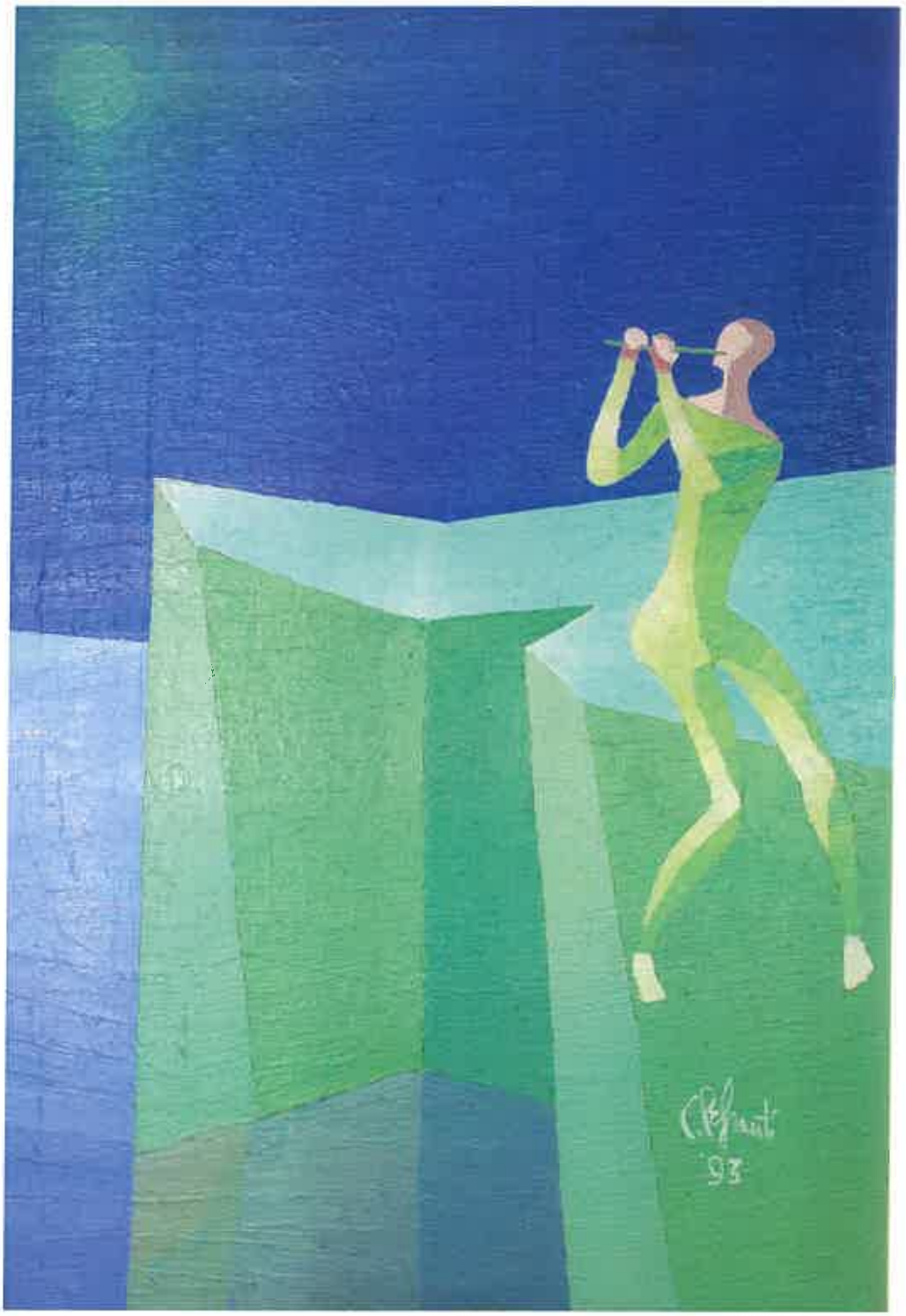
LEITMOTIVE

Journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California | Winter 2017



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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

Welcome to *Leitmotive*'s Winter 2017 issue. The beginning of a new year is a time for both reflection and looking ahead with hope and renewed vigor. In many ways, the past year was pretty ghastly: a bitter, divisive presidential election cycle; abhorrent mass shootings; racial injustice and violence; the rise of an opioid epidemic; and the passing of musical inspirations such as Johan Botha, Pierre Boulez, David Bowie, Leonard Cohen, Phife Dawg, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, George Michael, and Prince. So were the epic ups and downs of 2016 analogous to an entire *Ring* Cycle or were they just one prolonged immolation scene? As we gird ourselves for an uncertain future, we must remember that the New Year also brings the chance for renewal and a fresh start. With a great schedule of upcoming presentations at the Wagner Society of Northern California and new offerings in our rarefied corner of Wagner studies to enjoy, there are indeed reasons to celebrate what is to come. So let's start there!

In fact, the good news starts with the issue of *Leitmotive* you have in your hands right now. At a recent Society meeting, award-winning author David Clay Large gave an illuminating lecture about the connections between Munich and Bayreuth after the death of Richard Wagner. I am delighted to report that Dr. Large also submitted his work to *Leitmotive* and it forms the lead article in this issue. From the heart of post-Wagner Germany, we move to Paris and the career of French dramatic soprano and famed Wagnerian Germaine Lubin. In his probing review essay, the Metropolitan Opera's new Director of Archives Peter Clark provides a detailed analysis of Lubin's art through a close examination of her recordings, recently compiled and released by Marston Records (www.marstonrecords.com). From historic recordings to new ones, the Society's own Lisa Hirsch reviews two high-profile releases of *Das Rheingold*. Finally, in a touching tribute, WSNC President Terri Stuart honors the memory of international *Ring*-goer, Verna Parino.

Also in this issue, we present an interview with San Francisco Opera General Director Matthew Shilvock. Now midway through his first season at the helm, Shilvock is poised to lead the Company into a bold new era. He discusses his transition into his new role and the casting and other preparations for the Company's 2018 revival of the *Ring*. Mark your calendars now: Matthew Shilvock will be the speaker at the WSNC's March 18 meeting.

The reception of the Spring 2016 issue of *Leitmotive* was beyond encouraging! Thank you to all who took the time to provide feedback about the journal's new look

and content. Your praise and criticisms are greatly appreciated as we work to make *Leitmotive* the most stimulating platform possible. If you have an idea for an article, review, or other type of contribution to the journal, please let us know. We are always searching for new voices and viewpoints. Keep those new submissions coming!
—JSM

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

PETER CLARK is Director of Archives at the Metropolitan Opera. He previously worked in the Met's press and marketing departments beginning in 1981.

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*: https://irontongue.blogspot.com.

JEFFERY S. MCMILLAN is the editor of *Leitmotive*. He has written for *Opera News* and *The Record Collector*. His book *Delightfulee: The Life and Music of Lee Morgan* was the winner of the 2008 *Jazz Times* readers' poll. For ten years he was an archivist at the Metropolitan Opera before relocating to the Bay Area where he is now Senior Communications Manager at San Francisco Opera.

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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 Melchoir and was instantly enraptured by the music. This fascination became a life-long passion, and the focus of his work. Educated at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, his paintings have been exhibited since 1961, including at the 1979 Pacific Northwest Wagner Festival in Seattle and at 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.

TERRI STUART has been a member of the Society since 1996 and a Board member since 2002, serving as its Program Director and Treasurer. Since 2011, she has served as Board President and Program Director.

On the cover: *Oed und leer das Meer!—Tristan und Isolde* 1993, oil on canvas by Cal Pedranti

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WAGNER'S BAYREUTH AND HITLER'S MUNICH: A FATEFUL LEGACY

David Clay Large

Germany's tumultuous history between the establishment of the Second Empire in 1871 and the fall of the Third Reich in 1945 can be read as a tale of two cities: Bayreuth and Munich. Much more than Berlin, Germany's capital, these two locales lie at the heart of the German catastrophe in the period between the late nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth century. What links them together, and to the broader German problem, is the heritage of Richard Wagner. By this I do not mean so much Wagner's music as that mixture of stirring theater, sociopolitical ideology, and missionary idealism known as Wagnerism.[1]

Bayreuth, the small Franconian town in which Wagner built his Festspielhaus, and Munich, the Bavarian capital whose court theater premiered some of his most important works, often competed as repositories or showplaces of Wagnerian art. Ultimately, however, they came together in a fateful embrace with ironically strong Wagnerian overtones. The impresario of this embrace was Adolf Hitler, who used critical support from Bayreuth to gain influence in Munich, then employed key ideas derived from Wagnerian theater in his transformation of the Bavarian metropolis into the "Capital of the [Nazi] Movement" and then the "Capital of German Art" during the Third Reich.

Munich, not Bayreuth, was originally meant to be the site of Wagner's festival theater. Bavaria's King Ludwig II, who invited the exiled Wagner to Munich in 1864, and who fully shared the composer's dream of revolutionizing opera, promised to build him a splendid new theater in the Bavarian capital where he could mount his great work in progress, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. On Wagner's recommendation, the king engaged the eminent architect Gottfried Semper to design, in Ludwig's words, "a large theater of stone, since this incomparable work must have a worthy place to be performed."[2] The theater would be located on a hill above the Isar River, where it would stand like a secular shrine. Ludwig even planned to connect the theater to the royal palace with a splendid new avenue that would cut through the center of the city.

But as so often in Ludwig's largely melancholy life, the young king had allowed fantasy to crowd out reality. His ministers balked at committing state funds for the project, while the people of Munich insisted that, contrary to the king's and Wagner's assertions, they *did not* need Wagnerian theater to achieve spiritual and political enlightenment. Moreover, the citizenry was up in arms over Wagner's luxurious lifestyle, which was heavily subsidized by Ludwig. The composer's "insatiable appetite," observed the *Neue Bayerische Courier*, "could be compared only with the

1. For a general history of Wagnerism, see David Clay Large and William Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca, 1984).

2. Quoted in Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 4 vols. (New York, 1933-47), IV, p. 469.

swarms of locusts which block out the sun for months at a time."[3] Münchners were also appalled by the composer's openly conducted love affair with Cosima von Bülow, the wife of the pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow, the latter having been summoned by Wagner from Berlin to help transform the musical culture of Munich. To complete his transgressions, Wagner interfered in royal politics and looked down his Saxon nose at the locals. "The Münchner," huffed an indignant society lady, "is benevolent and respectful toward friendly talents, but will by no means put up with being condescended to by arrogant foreigners."[4] Thus, like that infamous sexpot Lola Montez, erstwhile mistress of Ludwig's grandfather King Ludwig I, Wagner became so hated that his royal benefactor was forced to send him away in 1865. This so broke Ludwig's heart that he turned his back on Munich and began building fairy-like castles in the hinterlands—opulent refuges like Linderhof and Neuschwanstein to which he could retreat and pine in peace for his lost loved one.

Partly because of Wagner's frustrating experience in the Bavarian metropolis, the composer, now once again in exile in Switzerland, decided that if he ever *did* manage to build his theater, he would do so in some small town, some unprepossessing burg far away from the diversions and political intrigue of the major cities. Intriguingly, one smallish locale he briefly considered as a site for his projected Festspielhaus was Baden-Baden, which in 1871 offered to build him a theater to his own specifications. Wagner rejected the offer largely because that elegant spa-town was an international watering hole full of foreigners and frothy diversions, not at all a proper place for the highly serious, quasi-religious enterprise he had in mind.[5] Bayreuth, the town Wagner eventually selected, certainly *did* fit his criteria: it was small and relatively isolated, thereby allowing the composer to put it on the map as the capital of his art—or, as he put it, "a sort of *Kunst*-Washington D.C."[6]

Bayreuth's small size and lack of consequence, however, were not its only attractions. It had not only the advantage of being in Bavaria, and thus part of Ludwig's domain, but also a former Prussian seat, having been in the eighteenth century the residence of Margräfin Wilhelmine, Friedrich the Great's favorite sister. It was she, in fact, who had built the local opera house which Wagner initially thought might serve as a suitable stage for his music dramas, but which on closer inspection turned out to be much too small. In selecting Bayreuth, Wagner hoped to continue drawing on the largesse of King Ludwig, but also to tap into the coffers of Prussia and the newly unifying German Reich. In 1866, as Prussia crushed Austria to take the lead in pulling Germany together, Wagner hitched his own star to that of the rising German nation. "My own artistic ideal rises and falls with the fate of Germany," he wrote. "Without Germany's greatness, my art remains but a dream; if this dream is to be realized, Germany must likewise realize its preordained greatness."[7]

3. Quoted in Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner. Sein Leben. Sein Werk. Sein Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1983), p. 555.

4. Rosalie Braun-Artaria, Von berühmten Zeitgenossen (Munich, 1918), pp. 97-98.

5. On the Baden-Baden offer and Wagner's rejection of it, see David Clay Large, *The Grand Spas of Central Europe* (Lanham, MD., 2015), pp. 123-25.

6. Michael Karbaum, *Studien zur Geschichte der Bayre uther Festspiele* (Regensburg, 1976), p. 29.

7. Richard Wagner, *Briefe*, Hanjo Kesting, ed. (Munich, 1983), p. 530. For a study of the political machinations surrounding the creation of Wagner's Festspielhaus, see David Clay Large, "Art, Ideology and Politics at Bayreuth, 1876-1976," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XXXIX, Nr. 1 (January-March 1978), pp.149-56. A more recent treatment of this topic can be found in Sven Oliver Müller, *Richard Wagner und die Deutschen. Eine Geschichte von Hass und Hingabe* (Munich, 2013), pp. 25-100.

At the time of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), Wagner began to project his future theater as the "artistic theater" of German unification. Having earlier denounced Prussia as a barbarous kingdom, a place "as alien to the German spirit as the Jews," he now sang the praises of Prussia's military power and hailed Bismarck as a "great genius."[8] In an effort to win Bismarck's support for his work, Wagner sent him poems and musical compositions. He also offered to compose the music for a "grand solemnity" honoring the troops returning from France. Bismarck hastily declined these generous offers, for he had no desire to rub salt in Gallic wounds by associating himself and the new empire too closely with Wagner, who had become embarrassingly strident in his Francophobia.

This rebuff did not discourage the composer, who decided to press his suit in person by visiting Bismarck in Berlin. An audience was duly arranged, but it was not a success: the Iron Chancellor struck a reticent pose in regard to the theater project, and the chancellor's old dog Sultan actually *bit* Wagner on the hand when he tried to pet him. (Sultan, it seems, had been trained to bite on command.) Wagner was obliged to conclude that he and the chancellor "operated in two different spheres."[9] Yet in the following years, as Wagner's various alternative schemes for raising money for Bayreuth, most notably the Society of Patrons, failed to achieve their goals, the composer continued to bombard Bismarck and Berlin with advertisements for himself. He sent Bismarck his essay *Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Politik*, which pointed up the crying need for a German national art. Bismarck did not even acknowledge receipt of this tract. So Wagner next sent him his promotional brochure on Bayreuth and requested that he read at least the last two pages, which noted the lamentable fact that the new Reich's military and political successes had not managed to turn the German people away from foreign art and toward their own artistic geniuses. Still, however, the chancellor did not respond. Wagner at first could not understand this: *the two greatest Germans of their time were not even communicating!* Only later did he discern the problem: there had been in reality only *one* great German in this confrontation: Bismarck, insisted Wagner, had shown himself to be a coward, shying away from lending support to Bayreuth because he feared the opprobrium of the Berlin Jewish press that this might occasion.[10]

The true reason for Bismarck's reticence regarding Bayreuth, of course, was rather different. Apart from simply not liking Wagner, whom he described as somebody who "always wants to be first,"[11] the chancellor worried that an intervention for Wagner on the part of the Reich would alienate King Ludwig, who continued to regard the composer as *his* property. As Bismarck put the matter, he did not want Ludwig to think that he and Kaiser Wilhelm I were "poaching on his hunting preserve."[12] As it happened, the Bavarian king was indeed deeply wounded by Wagner's pursuit of imperial support, but in the end, when it seemed as if the Master's great project would not come to fruition without another infusion of financial aid from Munich, Ludwig

8. Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind and His Music* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 347.

9. Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*. 2 vols. (Munich, 1976), I, p. 530.

10. Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 16 vols. (Leipzig, 1907), X, p. 6.

11. Curt von Westernhagen, "Wagner und das Reich," Otto Strobel, ed., *Schriften der Richard Wagner Forschungstätte* (Karlsruhe, 1943), p. 61.

12. Ibid.

relented and "loaned" Wagner the one-hundred-thousand thalers he needed to complete the construction of the Festspielhaus.

Because of Ludwig's last-minute intervention, the complete *Ring* cycle could premier in Wagner's new theater in Bayreuth in summer 1876, but this event was emphatically *not* the grand national celebration that the composer had envisaged—certainly not the "artistic sister" of German unification. The Kaiser briefly attended, but Bismarck pointedly stayed away, as did the Reich's chief military heroes, Albrecht von Room and Helmuth von Moltke. Nor was there any imperial sponsorship of the project. Wagner may have become, as Friedrich Nietzsche bitterly complained, "*Reichsdeutsch*," but the Reich had not, in any official way, become Wagnerian.

Wagner remained bitter about this snub by the German national leadership for the rest of his life. In his disillusionment with the Fatherland, and inspired by a tip from his American-born dentist, the composer even contemplated decamping to Minnesota, whose German-American citizens might be persuaded to subsidize a new festival theater and music school. Characteristically, he sought to justify this brief temptation by claiming that the purist Germanic stock was now to be found in the American Middle West. In the end, however, he decided that he was too old to start all over again in America, which is no doubt all to the good: One shudders to think how the profligate composer would have fared among those tight-fisted Scandinavian farmers!

While Wagner's disillusionment with Bismarck's new Reich was genuine enough, it should not obscure the fact that he continued to see himself as the consummate *German* composer and his enterprise in Bayreuth as the noblest expression of the national spirit. Bayreuth may not have enjoyed Reich sponsorship, but by openly identifying his theater with the German nation, Wagner set the stage for Bayreuth's evolution into a nationalist and *völkisch* shrine in the years after his death.

This unfortunate legacy, including Bayreuth, was aided immeasurably by his widow Cosima and the so-called *Bayreuther Kreis* (Bayreuth Circle)—that coterie of self-appointed disciples who took upon themselves the interpretation and propagation not only of the Master's art but also his aesthetic and socio-political ideas. In the hands of acolytes such as Hans von Wollzogen, Heinrich von Stein, Karl Friedrich Glasenapp, Ludwig Schemann, and above all Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Wagner's ad-hoc and contradictory world-view was molded into a systematic compendium of nationalistic and *völkisch* principles.[13] The group disseminated its views primarily through its house-journal, the *Bayreuther Blätter*, which was edited by von Wollzogen. In the *Blätter's* articles, stridently anti-Semitic, xenophobic, and chauvinistic notions were given an idealistic gloss. The Nazis were not off-base when they later claimed that the "Bayreuth Idea," as expressed in the *Blätter* and other works of the Bayreuth Circle, was one of the alloys in the "spiritual sword" wielded by Adolf Hitler.[14]

While Bayreuth busily forged its destructive intellectual weaponry, and in the process became a pilgrimage destination for *völkisch* zealots, Munich experienced a last

13. On Chamberlain's contribution specifically, see David Clay Large, "Ein Spiegelbild des Meisters? Die Rassenlehre von Houston Stewart Chamberlain," Dieter Borchmeyer, Ami Maayani, Susanne Vill, eds., *Richard Wagner und die Juden* (Stuttgart, 2000), pp. 144-159. For the influence of Cosima and the Wagner children, see, inter alia, Oliver Hilmes, *Cosimas Kinder: Triumph und Tragögie der Wagner-Dynastie* (Munich, 2009), pp. 15-40.

14. David Clay Large, "Wagner's Bayreuth Disciples," Large and Weber,, eds. *Wagnerism*, pp. 130-33.

gasp of avant-garde brilliance during the fabled Prince Regency period. The culture that evolved at the turn of the century in Munich's bohemian quarter, Schwabing, was by no means as liberal or tolerant as is often claimed, but the Bavarian capital was certainly a Mecca of progressive thinking compared to Bayreuth. Munich was also a major center for the performance of Wagner's work, and, as such, a dangerous rival to Cosima's Bayreuth, which fought hard to control, limit, or in some cases prevent the mounting of Wagner's music dramas outside of the Festspielhaus. Not only did Munich possess in its Hoftheater (Court Theater) a superb facility and company for the production of Wagnerian opera, but it claimed the rights to the *Ring* and *Parsifal* because the Master had signed them over to King Ludwig in exchange for desperately needed financial support.

Although Cosima's business manager, Alfred von Gross, managed to retrieve these rights after Ludwig's death in 1886, the powerful director of the Munich Court Theater, Ernst von Possart, regularly began mounting productions of Wagner's music dramas in 1893, which he had the temerity to call "Wagner Festivals." Then, shortly after the turn of the century, von Possart began construction of a state-of-the-art opera house which he proposed to call "The Munich Richard Wagner Festspielhaus." Cosima and von Gross were in a weak position to fight this, since their own theater in Bayreuth was heavily dependent on the Court Theater for singers, musicians, equipment, and production assistants. "Munich," fumed Cosima to Richard Strauss, "sits on everything, from *Der fliegende Holländer* to the swans and dragon."[15] Nonetheless, the keepers of the shrine in Bayreuth sued von Possart in Bavaria's state court, claiming that only Munich's Hoftheater, not the new theater, had a legal right to stage Wagner's works. The court did not accept this argument, but Cosima and von Gross did manage to secure an agreement that Munich would not mount the same works as Bayreuth in any given year, and soloists who sang at the Bayreuth Festival would not sing at Munich in the same season. Von Possart was obliged to change the name of the new Munich entity to Prinzregententheater, and, on the court's order, to turn over to Bayreuth a percentage of the theater's profits. These concessions helped to smooth Cosima's feathers somewhat, for in buttressing the festival's precarious financial position they were almost as useful as (in her words) "the donations of a rich Jew eager to atone for the sins of his race."[16]

Relations between the two Wagnerian centers remained tense, however, especially when Munich saw fit to assist the New York Metropolitan Opera in its production of *Parsifal* in 1903. Wagner had intended this work to be performed only at Bayreuth, and his heirs did everything they could to prevent productions of the opera elsewhere, which they insisted would constitute a "rape of the Grail." Cosima was beside herself over this "treason," and actually banned Felix Mottl from Bayreuth because he had agreed to conduct for a season in New York and to become the principal conductor in Munich.[17] In 1913, when a bust of Wagner was unveiled in front of the Prinzregententheater for the Wagner centennial, the Wahnfried clan pointedly boycotted the event.

15. Cosima Wagner to Richard Strauss, 12 October 1889. Quoted in Franz Trenner, ed., *Cosima Wagner-Richard Strauss: Ein Briefwechsel* (Tutzing, 1978), p. 8.

16. Quoted in Karbaum, *Studien*, p. 45.

17. Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth. A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven, 1994), p. 115.

The First World War, which broke out in the following year, swept both Bayreuth and Munich into a frenzy of patriotic activity. The Bayreuth Festival of 1914 had to be cut short because of the war, and there would be no more festivals until 1924, but during the war years Bayreuth supported the German cause in other ways. The *Bayreuther Blätter* kept publishing, and it outdid itself in chauvinistic venom, turning Wagner, in effect, into a spiritual soldier of the Reich. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who had married Wagner's daughter Eva in 1908 and moved to Bayreuth (taking a house next door to Wahnfried), took advantage of the war to spout vitriol against his native England, which he denounced as the root of all evil in the modern world.

Munich likewise became a hotbed of nationalist agitation, much of it containing strong racist overtones. The city's famous satire magazine, *Simplicissimus*, heretofore renowned for its irreverent attacks on authority, emerged as one of the more strident jingoist voices in the Reich. [18] To show its patriotic spirit, Munich's Court Opera restricted itself largely to works by German artists, particularly those of Wagner and the hypernationalist composer Hans Pfitzner. The Austrian conductor Bruno Walter, who had come to Munich in 1913, participating in that year's Wagner centennial, found himself under attack by local critics as an "alien" (*i.e.*, Jewish) interloper, who had no business tampering with German music, least of all that of the Master. In 1916 Walter complained of a "measureless agitation against me in which the entire Munich press is unanimous."[19] Meanwhile, Bruno Walter's literary friend, Thomas Mann, perhaps Munich's most famous and insightful Wagnerian, did his own part for the war effort by writing a series of essays (published in 1918 as *Die Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*) that justified the conflict as a necessary defense of Germanic *Kultur* against the corrosive contamination of Francophile *Zivilisation* and Slavic barbarism.

Of course, the war that was meant to save Germanic *Kultur* ended up destroying the German empire and imparting a poisonous legacy to the fragile "Weimar Republic" that succeeded it. Bayreuth and Munich, which had suspended their rivalry during the great crusade, emerged from the long conflict as embittered and impoverished as the rest of the Reich. Over the course of the next few years, both would play major roles in parlaying the hatreds and frustrations of the *völkisch* right into a full-scale assault on the shaky foundations of the new republic. Interestingly, it was Bayreuth that actually took the lead here, becoming one of the earliest bastions of National Socialist sentiment and a source of vital support for Hitler as he launched his campaign to win control over the Bavarian capital.

Having already embraced authoritarian nationalism during the war, the Wagner clan was understandably appalled by the collapse of the monarchy and the apparent triumph of parliamentary democracy ushered in by the 1918 revolution. Like many conservative Germans, they were willing to countenance radical measures against the new regime in the name of "order" and national revival. They were looking for a savior, a "redeemer," and it was not long before they believed they had found one in the person of Adolf Hitler.

The Wagner family first became acquainted with National Socialism in 1919, when Michael Georg Conrad, an influential Munich Wagnerian who had helped in

18. David Clay Large, *Where Ghosts Walked: Munich's Road to the Third Reich* (New York, 1997), p. 50.

19. Hans Rudolf Vaget, "Musik in München," *Thomas Mann Jahrbuch 7* (1994), p. 56.

Bayreuth's campaign against New York's "Grail robbery" in 1903, came to Wahnfried with news of a new party and a man called Adolf Hitler. Two years later this fledgling party had a local branch in Bayreuth, and in 1923 Hitler himself visited the town and spoke at the Riding Hall. He took advantage of this opportunity to call on Houston Stewart Chamberlain and his young English-born wife Winifred, whom he had already met in Munich.[20]

The visit with Chamberlain was difficult, for the old man was too ill to say very much. He could, however, listen to Hitler, and he was very impressed with what he heard. After their meeting Chamberlain wrote the future Führer a now-famous letter in which he praised him as a man with "violent tasks to accomplish," though the violence in question would "shape a new cosmos out of the existing chaos rather than simply engendering more chaos."[21] This letter constituted an important service to the Nazi cause. As one of Chamberlain's biographers has rightly noted, "With this letter Chamberlain became the first person of national and even international reputation as a writer to align himself with the Nazi movement."[22]

Hitler and Winifred Wagner

Hitler certainly recognized the value of the Chamberlain alliance. He published the letter of support, thereby staking claim not just to the aging prophet of Teutonism but also to the Wagnerian world with which he was so closely associated. When Chamberlain died in 1927, Hitler attended the funeral in Bayreuth on behalf of the National Socialists. The *Völkische Beobachter* eulogized Chamberlain as "one of the blacksmiths whose weapons have not yet found in our day their fullest use."[23] Once the Nazis came to power, they ritually hailed this renegade Englishman as one of the primary intellectual progenitors of the Third Reich.

Hitler's visit with the Wagners was equally rewarding. He was invited to tour Wahnfried and to stand at the Master's grave out back. For a Wagnerian as devoted as Hitler, this was an epiphany. As he solemnly bowed over the grave, the Nazi leader declared Wagner to be the greatest German of all time, adding: "If I should ever succeed in exerting any influence on Germany's destiny, I will see that *Parsifal* is given back to Bayreuth."[24] Siegfried and Winifred, especially the latter, were mesmerized by the young Austrian demagogue. They promised to help him in any way they could.

20. The best study on the relationship between Winifred Wagner and Hitler is Brigitte Hamann, *Winifred Wagner oder Hitlers Bayreuth* (Munich, 2002).

21. Houston Stewart Chamberlain to Hitler, 7 October 1923, *Deutschlands Erneuering: Monatsschrift für das deutsche Volk* (Munich, 1924), pp. 2-3.

22. Geoffrey G. Field, *Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York, 1981), p. 438.

23. *Der Völkische Beobachter*, 11 January 1927.

24. Erich Ebermayer, *Magisches Bayreuth. Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart, 1952), p. 174.

And help him they did. Through their sponsorship, Hitler gained access to the homes of wealthy Wagnerians in Munich who gave him modest financial assistance and, more importantly, counseling on how to move more gracefully in high society. The Bechstein and Bruckmann families were especially important in this regard. Edwin Bechstein headed the famous piano firm, while his wife Helene presided over fashionable salons in Munich and Berlin. Hugo Bruckmann was an avidly nationalistic publisher whose authors included Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Bruckmann's wife, Elsa, was a Romanian princess who spent much of her time looking down her pedigreed nose at Helene Bechstein. With his intimate knowledge of Wagner, Hitler tremendously impressed his society hosts and hostesses. Frau Bechstein was so taken by the young man that she tried to get him to marry her daughter, Lotte. Hitler politely refused, believing that men with political ambitions like his should remain single. Unable to snare Hitler as a son-in-law, Helene Bechstein treated him like a needy offspring, showering him with affection, food, clothing and advice. She convinced him that an up-and-coming politician could not go around without a dinner jacket, broad-brimmed hat, and patent leather shoes, all of which she procured for him. Hitler was now suitably attired for the Bechsteins' salon, where he could rub shoulders with the "artistic" elements of Munich's reactionary high society. But Hitler was careful also to attend the rival Munich salon of Frau Bruckmann, which had once been graced by the likes of Nietzsche and Rilke, though now attracted *völkisch* zealots such as Rudolf Hess, Alfred Rosenberg, Baldur von Schirach, and Alfred Schuler. Like Helene Bechstein, Elsa Bruckmann took it upon herself to make Hitler *salonfähig* (acceptable in polite society). Noticing, for example, that he had no idea how to eat an artichoke or a lobster, she instructed him in these gastronomical mysteries. She also warned him not to dump sugar in his wine or to use his knife as a spoon. Seeing his awkwardness upon meeting women, she taught him how to kiss a lady's hand.

Perhaps inevitably, Frau Bruckmann and Frau Bechstein fell into bitter dispute in their simultaneous efforts to housebreak Hitler. Each claimed to be the primary influence; each swore that he cared only for her. Thus Frau Bruckmann became livid over reports that Frau Bechstein had given Hitler the leather dog whip he carried on his rounds. *She* had given him the whip, she insisted. In truth, *both* ladies had presented Hitler with whips, and he had cavalierly allowed each patroness to assume that she was his sole benefactress.

Comical as these situations could be, they were part of a social makeover whose importance should not be underestimated. Through the solicitous instruction of his society backers, Hitler learned to move more comfortably in fashionable circles. This skill proved invaluable to him as he began to expand his influence beyond his original coterie of lowbrow Bavarian beer-bellies. One might therefore say that Hitler's path to power was paved not only with broken heads and fiery speeches, but also with properly eaten artichokes.[25]

This road was additionally paved with calculated references to Wagner's art. On May 6, 1923, at a rally in Munich's cavernous Zirkus Krone, Hitler intoned, "Our task is to present the dictator, when he comes, with a people that is ready for him! *Deutsches Volk, wach auf! Es nahet gen' den Tag!* (German people, wake up! The day

25. On this see Large, *Where Ghosts Walked*, pp. 149-56.

is approaching!)[26] As most folks in that Munich audience surely knew, this was a reference to the scene in *Die Meistersinger* when the people of Nuremberg welcome Hans Sachs as their hero, their deliverer. Hans Sachs was but one of many Wagner figures with whom Hitler personally identified; he also projected on to himself bits of Rienzi, Wotan (hence his self-reference to "Wolf"), Lohengrin, Siegfried, and Parsifal (a famous poster from the 1933 Bayreuth Festival celebrates Hitler as Parsifal).[27]

Back in Bayreuth, in the fall of 1923, Siegfried Wagner described Hitler as a "magnificent man" with a "genuine folk soul." Hitler would "make something happen," he proclaimed.[28] This was on the eve of the so-called "Beer Hall Putsch," Hitler's abortive effort to take over Munich as a first step in a Mussolini-style "March on Berlin." Siegfried and Winifred happened to be in Munich during the putsch, and they were devastated by its failure. Siegfried wrote that the post-putsch prosecution of Hitler and his cohorts was akin to the Spanish Inquisition. "The breaking of oaths and treason are proclaimed as holy acts, and Jews and Jesuits go arm in arm to destroy Germany," he lamented. Wagner's son was not sure if the Nazi cause was now dead, but he did know one thing: "My wife is fighting like a lioness for Hitler!" [29] Indeed she was. Winifred gave a report on the putsch to the Nazi Party group in Bayreuth. She also wrote an open letter to the press in which she declared her "deepest personal sympathy and approval for the constructive work of Adolf Hitler, this German man who, filled with the most ardent love for his Fatherland, sacrifices his life for his ideal of a purified, united Greater Germany...We stood with him in time of good fortune, now we maintain our loyalty to him in time of need."[30] While Siegfried visited an ailing Hermann Göring in Innsbruck, Austria, whence he had fled to nurse a serious groin injury incurred during the putsch—Göring now matched his *Führer* in having "only one ball," as the British WWII song had it—Winifred collected food and clothing for the families of Nazis who had been incarcerated after the failed uprising. She also sent food and writing paper to Hitler in Landsberg Prison, though this was probably not the paper that he used to write *Mein Kampf*, as is sometimes alleged. She definitely *did* provide quarters in Bayreuth for an illegal meeting of the now-banned Nazi Party during the 1924 Wagner Festival.

Hitler was deeply grateful for this support in a time of crisis for his movement. He wrote Siegfried from Landsberg expressing his sorrow that he had not been able to visit Wahnfried again in November 1923, since Bayreuth "lay on the march route to Berlin." He could also report that the Nazis had done very well in the April elections in Bayreuth, for which he knew he had the Wagners to thank. And he added: "Great pride filled me when I saw the *völkisch* victory in precisely that city wherein first the Master and then Chamberlain forged the spiritual sword we now wield."[31]

26. Quoted in the unpublished forthcoming study by Hans Rudolf Vaget, *"Wehvolles Erbe." Richard Wagner in Deutschland: Hitler, Knappertsbusch, Thomas Mann.*

27. On this, see Vaget, *"Wehvolles Erbe."*

28. Alexander Spring, "Siegfried Wagner: Zur 70. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages," *Bayreuther Festspielführer* 1939, p. 22.

29. Siegfried Wagner to Rosa Eidam, Christmas 1923, Karbaum, *Studien*, Document 2, p. 65.

30. Quoted in Hartmut Zelinsky, *Richard Wagner: Ein deutsches Thema, 1876-1976* (Berlin and Vienna, 1983), p. 169.

31. Hitler to Siegfried Wagner, 5 May 1924, Karbaum, *Studien*, Document 3, pp. 65-66.

As it turned out, both Bayreuth and Munich proved to be prominent way stations on Hitler's road to Berlin. When the Bayreuth Festival reopened in 1924, the Festival Guide described Wagner as the "Führer of German Art." The Festspielhaus flew the imperial flag rather than the republican colors, and Siegfried welcomed as an honored guest General Erich Ludendorff, who had been acquitted of the charges brought against him for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch. Munich, to which Hitler gratefully returned in December 1924 following his early release ("for good behavior") from Landsberg, remained the headquarters of the Nazi Party despite concerted efforts by an anti-Bavarian faction to move the head office to central or northern Germany. As Hitler himself stated in rejecting calls for a headquarters transfer: "Our movement is inseparably tied to Munich because it was born there and lost its first martyrs there. The city is...holy ground."[32]

Once ensconced in Berlin as Reich Chancellor, Hitler continued to think of Bayreuth and Munich as focal points in the evolution of National Socialism. In fact, there were no other locations in Germany—not even Nuremberg—that he considered more central to his mission.

Festspielhaus during the Third Reich

In the case of Bayreuth, Hitler's reverence was not shared by most of the other top Nazi leaders, who typically had no interest in Wagner's art and regarded the annual festivals as elitist and degenerate—not to mention excruciatingly boring. Bayreuth's centrality in the Third Reich was the personal contribution of Hitler, who attended the festival each summer from 1933 to 1939, sitting in King Ludwig's royal box. Out of respect for Wagner's work, devotion to Winifred, and pragmatic interest in keeping the enterprise financially viable, Hitler allowed the festival some unusual freedoms. Winifred could, on occasion, hire Jewish performers, and she was able to retain the valuable services of her artistic director, Heinz Tietjen, and the stage designer Emil Preetorious, both of whom were seen by Nazi Party zealots as politically unreliable. Even more importantly, the Bayreuth Festival remained virtually the only major cultural enterprise in the Third Reich that did not fall under the control of the *Reichskulturkammer*, the regime's oppressive overseer of the arts.[33]

Yet such freedoms did not spell genuine independence from the state, nor was this even desired by the Bayreuth administration. With the number of foreign visitors and contributors falling off precipitously post-1933—Winifred's continued employ-

32. Quoted in Large, *Where Ghosts Walked*, p. 204. On Hitler's early release from Landsberg Prison, see Peter Ross Range, *1924. The Year That Made Hitler* (New York, 2016), pp. 248-50.

33. On this see Spotts, *Bayreuth*, pp. 185-92.

ment of Jewish artists and technicians notwithstanding—the Festival faced another financial crisis. Like Richard Wagner before her, Winifred Wagner scurried to Berlin for help. But unlike Bismarck in 1871, Winifred's good friend Hitler immediately sprang to the rescue by arranging annual state subsidies and government purchases of unsold tickets, thereby guaranteeing the Festival's survival. "I considered it to be a particular joy," Hitler later said, "to keep Bayreuth going at a time when it faced economic collapse."[34] Thus the Nazi chief did for Bayreuth what the Master himself had not been able to do—ensure that the Wagner Festival would be recognized as a national enterprise.

Hitler, again out of reverence for Wagner, made some effort to prevent the Nazi-era Bayreuth Festivals from becoming overwhelmed by political frenzy, but in fact they turned into bombastic advertisements for the Third Reich.[35] Swastika flags hung from every flagpole and Stormtroopers marched through town singing the *Horst Wessel Lied*. Hitler upstaged Wagner as the central attraction. There were more copies of *Mein Kampf* than of *Mein Leben* in the shop windows, more busts of the *Führer* than of the Master in souvenir stores, and the street leading from downtown to the "Green Hill" now bore the name Adolf-Hitler-Strasse. The *Festival Handbook* celebrated Wagner less as a great composer than as a harbinger of Hitler. (For example, Hans Sachs in Bayreuth's 1933 production of *Die Meistersinger* came across heavy-handedly as a Hitler-Waiting-to-Happen.) The oft-repeated contention that Adolf Hitler was Richard Wagner's direct heir is of course simplistic, but Bayreuth itself did much to further this highly useful myth.

While Bayreuth basked in its newfound status as "Hitler's Court Theater," Munich, the birthplace of Nazism, assumed the honorific titles of "Capital of the Movement" and "Capital of German Art." In part this was compensation for the fact that the Bavarian city had little real political clout in the National Socialist system. Nonetheless, the distinction of being a major stage for Nazi ritual (a lead-role it shared with Nuremberg) as well as the primary showplace for state-approved art meant a great deal in the Third Reich. Hitler, after all, continued to see himself essentially as an "artist," and for him art and politics were inseparably intertwined; by "rejuvenating" German art, the *Führer* believed he was simultaneously rejuvenating German politics.[36]

Munich took its role as "Capital of German Art" *very* seriously. The town's intellectual and artistic establishment did their best to prove worthy of this distinction. As part of its campaign to demonstrate true German credentials, the city staked a major claim to the heritage of Wagner, going so far as to call itself the "Richard-Wagner-Stadt-München." (This despite having run the composer out of town on a rail in 1865!) The Wagner that Munich claimed to have inherited mirrored the Wagner celebrated by the Bayreuth Circle. This became abundantly clear in an infamous attack in 1933 by the city's cultural and political leadership against that most discriminating

34. *Adolf Hitler: Monologe im Führerhauptquartier, 1941-1944. Die Aufzeichnungen Heinrich Heims*, Werner Jochmann, ed. (Hamburg, 1980), p. 225.

35. For a penetrating analysis of Nazi instrumentalization of Bayreuth, see Holgar R. Stunz, "Hitler und die 'Gleichschaltung' der Bayreuther Festspiele," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Jg. 55, Heft 2 (April, 2007), pp. 237-68.

36. This is a principal theme of Wolfgang Pyta's recent study, *Hitler: Der Künstler as Politiker und Feldherr. Eine Herrschaftsanalyse* (Munich, 2015). On this subject see also Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (New York, 2003), passim.

of Wagnerians, Thomas Mann. In the 1920s Mann had turned away from his earlier nationalist conservatism to an uneasy embrace of democratic humanism, becoming in the process a bitter critic of the Nazis. In February 1933 the writer delivered a speech at Munich University that set forth a penetrating appraisal of Wagner's work as well as an appreciation of the Master's persistent appeal. To the Nazis and their intellectual backers, Mann's speech was an unforgivable affront. The *Völkische Beobachter* found it "disgraceful" that the "half-Bolshevist" Mann had been allowed to sully the sacred name of Wagner. Shortly after the *Beobachter* article appeared, the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* (which, like the rest of the German press, now operated under state control) published an open letter entitled "Protest der Richard-Wagner-Stadt-München." The letter attacked Mann for, among other offenses, seeing Wagner's work as "a fertile field for Freudian psychoanalysis." It accused him of denigrating Wagner as a modernist dilettante and of failing to recognize the composer as "the embodiment of the deepest German sensibilities."[37] Among the signatories of this obtuse polemic were not only Nazi bosses such as Adolf Wagner (Gauleiter of Bavaria), Max Amann (publisher of the *Völkische Beobachter*), and Karl Fiehler (mayor of Munich), but leading artists and cultural luminaries, some of whom Mann had considered his friends. These included musicians such as Hans Knappertsbusch, Richard Strauss, Hans Pfitzner, and Siegfried von Hausegger; the painter Olaf Gulbranssohn; and the theater director Clemens von Frankenstein. For Mann, this attack came as a terrible shock, and was instrumental in his decision to flee into exile—to turn his back forever on his once-beloved Munich.

The city from which Mann fled in 1933 became center-stage for the elaborate political rituals and street theater so beloved by the Nazis, especially by Hitler. In his Spandau prison diaries, Albert Speer spoke of Hitler's "mania for the theater."[38] He should have said *Wagnerian* theater, for ever since Hitler's adolescent obsession with Alfred Roller's productions of Wagner's work in Vienna, this was the kind of theater that impressed him most. Thus the *Führer* borrowed heavily from Wagner in the choreography of the Third Reich's most hallowed ritual—its yearly reenactment of the march from Munich's Bürgerbräukeller to the Feldherrnhalle, which ended in the "martyrdom" of sixteen Nazis on November 10, 1923. (In 1935 the bodies of the Nazi martyrs were reinterred in two Grecian-style "Honor Temples" on the Königsplatz; the Feldherrnhalle itself became a sacred site, replete with a memorial plaque and permanent SS honor guard.) The primary inspiration for this bizarre reenactment pageantry was Siegfried's Funeral March from *Götterdämmerung*, which was played over and over during the ritual. This was understood to be both a lament for the sacrificed "heroes" and a signal that an "*Erlösung*" (solution)—or better, *Endlösung* (final solution)—was in the offing.

Hitler also had Wagner on his mind when he contemplated the reconstruction of Munich as one big shrine to the Nazi movement and the glory of German art. Among the projects he envisaged was the world's largest opera house, five times the size of the

37. On this episode see Large, *Where Ghosts Walked*, p. 241. For broader examinations of the context and atmosphere surrounding the attack, see Hans Rudolf Vaget, *Seelenzauber. Thomas Mann und die Musik* (Frankfurt, 2006), pp. 323-57; and Jürgen Kolbe, *Helle Zauber: Thomas Mann in München* (Berlin, 1987), pp. 402-05.

38. Albert Speer, *Spandau: The Secret Diaries* (New York, 1976), p. 104.

Staatsoper in Vienna. Although this theater would not produce exclusively Wagnerian works, the Master's music-dramas would be featured there, and in front of the building would stand the world's largest statue of Wagner, a monstrosity some forty meters high. In the end, all that came of this project was an enormous architectural model, which was put on display in 1939 during the Nazis' annual summer cultural extravaganza in Munich, "2000 Years of German Culture." (This bombastic parade, by the way, broke new ground in the domain of Nazi kitsch, no small feat. It featured, among other delights, floats depicting the Nuremberg Cathedral, Goethe's head, and the Cosmic Oak Tree wrapped in green foil.)[39]

In that fateful year 1939 Hitler plunged Europe into a new world war, one that would ultimately bring devastation to Munich and Bayreuth along with much of the rest of Europe. Although Bayreuth, unlike Munich, escaped Allied bombing until near the end of the conflict (thus allowing some Bayreuthers to fanaticize that American Wagnerians were exerting behind-the-scenes influence to spare their town), United States Air Force bombers arrived with a vengeance in April 1945, pulverizing over two-thirds of the city and leaving it proportionally even worse off than Munich.[40]

In the years since 1945 both Munich and Bayreuth have had considerable difficulty coming to terms with their leading roles in the German catastrophe. At the same time, both cities have managed to reassert themselves as major centers for the interpretation and production of Wagner's art. In their laudable efforts to reconnect with the universal and humane meanings in the Master's work, they have had to salvage Wagner not only from Hitler, but also from their own fateful exploitation of this complex legacy.

39. See Large, *Where Ghosts Walked*, p. 261

40. On this, see Spotts, *Bayreuth*, 199.

SAN FRANCISCO OPERA'S NEW RINGMASTER

An Interview with Matthew Shilvock

JEFFERY S. MCMILLAN

Photo: Simon Pauly / San Francisco Opera

San Francisco Opera General Director Matthew Shilvock is a true Wagnerian. Having joined the Company in 2005 and served as the right-hand man of former General Director David Gockley, he has been with the Company through many outstanding Wagner productions including *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in 2015, *Lohengrin* in 2012, and the *Ring* in 2011. On August 1, 2016, Shilvock became the Company's seventh General Director, the youngest to hold the office in San Francisco Opera's ninety-four year history. Now in the midst of his first season as the Company's top executive, Shilvock took some time to meet with me for a discussion about his first year in the new office and the revival of Francesca Zambello's production of Wagner's *Ring* in June 2018.

Jeffery McMillan: So, how is season one as general director going?

Matthew Shilvock: The pace of this company, even after eleven years, is simply staggering. What we can accomplish with a relatively small staff and limited time in the theater is really incredible. That is the thing that impresses me most: the ability of the company to move so quickly through so many things. This is interesting because when we get to the *Ring* it makes the undertaking a little less daunting because we are

used to turning from show to show to show. With the *Ring*, at least with this staging, there is a common deck and common set pieces so it is, in some ways, a little bit easier.

I am excited to be figuring out the differences in this role as general director from what I was doing before. In some ways, it has been a very smooth move down the corridor. I'm still working with many of the same people, working on the same projects, same issues, the same facts and figures we have dealt with for many years. What is different is the shift to a more strategic focus. One has to think more about the future direction; what is to come as opposed to where we are right now. That shift will, I think, become even more acute in the spring when there is more time. We are moving so quickly now that the chances to sit back and reflect are almost non-existent. One week into the job and we were already deep into stage rehearsals!

For me that's been the biggest change; finding the right rhythm and figuring out when to get deep into the details. I have always been a details guy, so I have had to pull myself out a little bit and trust in the great team we have. You can't get involved in everything because that would kill anyone.

JM: Have there been any surprises since you took over this role?

MS: I am excited by the way the planning is going. We have a team of four who concentrate on planning. We bounce ideas off one another, come up with new ideas, test out productions against each other, talk about the order of things, and try to troubleshoot the seasons before we get too deeply into them. That's working well. Operas are such multi-faceted beasts that you want multiple pairs of eyes on the seasons, because everyone comes with a different perspective. Someone might point out that two particular operas will be difficult for chorus rehearsal or that another two operas will be an impossible pairing on stage, or that there will be no way to get the right cast for that piece at that time of the year. Trying to examine those facets before you start signing contacts is part of the challenge of planning an opera season.

The other surprise is the amount of public speaking. You are pretty much expected, on a daily basis, to opine on something in public or give a speech. It's not daunting, but it's just a recognition that you are now the spokesperson for what goes on with the company.

Just being in this office is a little isolating. We have an ante-office that you have to pass through to get into this one, so people don't stop in like they used to. You have to make sure that you get out and about in the company and aren't stuck in an almost ivory tower kind of environment.

JM: The San Francisco *Ring* production was mounted at Washington National Opera last year. There were changes in the staging and director Francesca Zambello revisited elements of the production. Just how fresh and new will the *Ring* be when it returns to San Francisco Opera in June 2018?

MS: The staging has tightened and Francesca has found even more ways to develop the powerful storytelling within the *Ring*. The projections, to some degree, are improved due to some redesigns and improvements in technology. The use of hi-def content, and the resolution of that content, has shifted over the last six years. The projections

will be sharper and they have some new imagery, but it's still that same honest, very human telling of the *Ring* story that was so powerful in 2011 because it in no way denigrated, tried to overlay, or ignore Wagner's storytelling. There is so much storytelling built into the music itself which can make it tricky if you try to walk away from that; it's baked into the piece. I have been very impressed with what Francesca has done because she has found a way to tell the story in a new, fresh way that resonates with us as twenty-first century audiences, but in no way do I believe she has ignored the intent of the composer. Interestingly, I think the same is true of our new *Aida* which she directed this fall. It had the same integration of a new perspective with a great respect for the inherent value and authenticity of the score.

You have to be a great storyteller to direct the *Ring*. Over the span of sixteen hours and four days, you must uncover stories that are all interrelated and connected to something bigger than the operas themselves. It was interesting to see that scope, the arc of the piece, come together in 2011. It was an organic process for this team as they uncovered the flow of the *Ring* as we rolled out the operas in Washington and San Francisco one by one. They certainly had a great sense of the whole, but with a flexibility to modify as we went.

Die Walküre. Photo: Cory Weaver

The big difference this time around is the cast. We have Donald Runnicles back on the podium, which was a hugely important thing for all of us. He owns those scores in this house so wonderfully and breathes such nobility into them. He knows how to get this orchestra to play them in a deeply moving way. He maximizes the rehearsal time and gets the players to participate in the storytelling from a musical perspective.

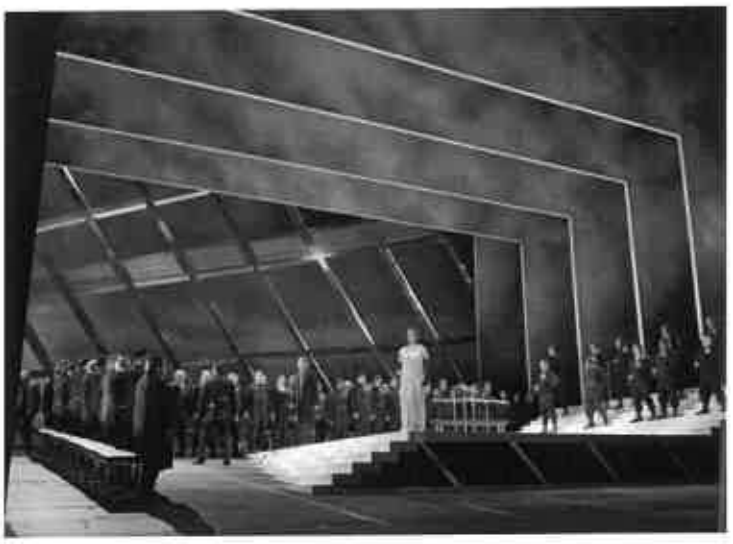
But beyond that, I think it will be a different *Ring*, and have a wildness and passion to it because of the personnel involved. Particularly with Evelyn Herlitzius and Karita Mattila: they are both raw, visceral singers who are forces of nature. Nina Stemme [Brünnhilde in 2011] has an incredible poise and Herlitzius is a little more edgy and living at that edge. It is hard to imagine a more powerful interpretation than Nina's, but I am excited that with Evelyn we will have an equally impactful but very different kind of interpretation.

I am going to go to *Elektra* in Barcelona in December and talk with Evelyn about how we can introduce her to San Francisco audiences. She is one of those totally immersive artists (like Nadja Michael) who throws herself into every note with wild abandon. When she and Karita [as Sieglinde] are onstage together in *Walküre*, it is going to be pure raw power going. Greer [Grimsley] will be a very different Wotan

than Mark [Delavan]. *Ring* audiences know Greer well from Seattle. He has that stentorian elegance to him. Daniel Brenna [Siegfried] has a lot of charismatic vigor. There are some singers who end up finding their way in Europe and rarely come back, and this is a great opportunity for him to do that. It's always great to see those homecomings. And then there's Jamie Barton as Fricka and Brandon Jovanovich as Siegmund. It's going to be a great *Ring* cast and they all will bring different things to it. It isn't a question of whether this cast is better than that the 2011 one; it's rather just a different set of incredible performers. That will lead to differences in the storytelling. Working with Francesca is always a dialogue, so it isn't just a matter of "Stand here because that is where Nina stood as Brünnhilde in 2011". It is more about Francesca and Donald exploring these characters afresh with a new cast.

JM: Is that dialogue the biggest challenge between now and when the *Ring* is on stage again—rather than the building of new sets and fitting them on the stage?

MS: It's definitely different now with it coming back as a known entity. Last time around we were for the first time unveiling *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* at the same time as the cycles. So on top of the very busy rehearsal schedule of putting the whole *Ring* on, we were also creating two new productions. There will be a predictability, in the best sense, to the process in 2018. We have figured out the rehearsal schedule in terms of when to start and how to work on these pieces simultaneously. We have only one director and one conductor, so what support staff (associate directors and associate conductors) are needed to do this? How many rooms do we need? (The Wilsey Center will be a godsend!) What is the best use of the Rheinmaidens' time? How do we best rehearse the Valkyries? We don't have to work on all of that from scratch, which brings some predictability that is good.



Götterdämmerung. Photo: Cory Weaver

For me the goal is making sure the audience knows the cast and that we find ways to introduce the audience to the cast well ahead of time. The audience had the benefit of having seen Nina once or twice before seeing her in the *Ring*, so there was an excitement about her because you knew how her sound could fill the hall and how she could ride this incredible wave of sound over the orchestras. With Herlitzius, this will be, for many in our audience, their first time hearing her.

JM: What was your first experience with Wagner's *Ring*?

MS: My first was a concert *Ring* in Birmingham, England. I had got to know it on recordings and from the Met DVDs of the old Otto Schenk *Ring*. But the first time I saw it live, the Royal Opera House was in their renovation period so they were out of the opera house. They did a concert *Ring* cycle in a few venues, one of which was the Symphony Hall in Birmingham. Bernard Haitink conducted and Siegfried Jerusalem, Hildegard Behrens, Ekkehard Wlaschiha, and John Tomlinson sang. I lived twenty miles from there and I got tickets for the first two operas and as it went on I got tickets for the last two. As I was going through the week, I was gradually getting more and more tired. I was sitting in the choir seats behind the orchestra for the *Siegfried* and I just couldn't stay awake. I was thinking, "This isn't good." As it turned out, I was coming down with mono so I had an excuse! I never made it to the *Götterdämmerung* because by the time it came around I was really sick and could barely move. So that was my first *Ring*, three-quarters of it anyway, thwarted by illness.

I got to see, in reverse order, the *Götterdämmerung* and *Rheingold* at Bayreuth in 2007, which was an amazing experience. I saw that Lisa [Hirsch] recently wrote about the Bayreuth experience for *Leitmotive* [Spring 2016]. It was tremendous to hear the differences in the tonal palette that results from that pit and that house. I was surprised by how small the theater was—very intimate and still with a court theater feel. The width of it, the intimacy, the sanctity of the experience, but most of all the different tonal palette in that room. I also attended the Seattle *Ring* in 2005, including the big, three-hour lectures before each opera. I began to get a feel for how deep and passionate Wagner people were. You rather have to be if you're going to see a three-hour lecture before a five or six-hour opera. There have been a number of points where I have intersected with the *Ring*, but it's interesting that my first live experience with it was in a concert hall.

JM: As an opera-goer, which highlight from the *Ring* do you find most thrilling? As an opera-producer, which moments do you find most satisfying?

MS: As an audience member, the most satisfying points for me are often the points of dramatic transition. My number one moment would be the awakening of Brünnhilde in *Siegfried*. Just the way that Wagner builds and builds and builds: you really get the sense of someone awakening from a very deep sleep, but also of their awakening as a person. A counter to that would be the annunciation of death scene in Act II of *Walküre*. Death and life are so intertwined in the *Ring*—they are mirrors of each other. The transitions in *Rheingold* are also so magical and theatrical.

As a producer, I think the opening of *Rheingold* is critical. You are announcing what is going to happen and the way you deal with that is really important. How you bring the crowd scenes into the story is also important. The scope of the *Ring* makes you think you are dealing with the totality of humanity and yet there are so few moments when you see that writ large on stage. It's a very small cast for the story we are telling. But then, when you have the Nibelungs or the Gibichungs, you are suddenly seeing the world outside of these characters. These points of mass population on stage are few and far between in the *Ring*, but they are so arresting. This is not an intimate love drama. It's much more than that.

JM: How can Wagner Society members contribute to this upcoming revival of the *Ring* at San Francisco Opera?

MS: By doing what Wagnerites do best—which is being evangelists! I encourage people to focus on their own personal history with the *Ring* and share the belief that immersing yourself in this project for a week is like no other artistic experience you can have. This is an opportunity to participate in something really glorious and transformative, something that a company like San Francisco Opera can do at an absolutely transporting level. The members of the Wagner Society are such wonderful ambassadors. Their ability to encourage others to partake in this experience is absolutely critical. I'm incredibly excited for what lies ahead!

REVIEWS

Germaine Lubin: The Complete Recordings. MARSTON RECORDS 52070-2 (2 CDs).

Given the dearth of Wagnerian dramatic sopranos in our own time, it is difficult for us to imagine a time like the 1930s when three of the finest voices of this type ever heard were active at once: the German Frida Leider, the Norwegian Kirsten Flagstad, and the French Germaine Lubin. Though probably less known in the U.S. than her contemporaries, Lubin nevertheless possessed the outstanding vocal qualities that make her one of the legendary sopranos of the twentieth century. These included a warm, feminine timbre that remained full and steady from one end of her vocal range to the other, and an ability to control dynamics so that she could both soar and float according to the demands of the music. She possessed radiant top notes, a velvety middle register, and a warm lower extension. In addition, she sang with rigorous musicality, unfailingly accurate intonation, and a broad, uncompromising legato even in Wagner's most declamatory sections that is a rarity. A tall, striking blond, Lubin also attracted attention for her imposing stage presence and dramatic instincts. Following a performance in the title role of Strauss's *Elektra*, one critic wrote: "I heard several people say after the dress rehearsal that they hadn't seen anything like her since Sarah Bernhardt. Such high praise seems to me amply merited by Germaine Lubin."

Thanks to Ward Marston, we now have Lubin's complete recorded legacy in a two-CD set that includes everything she is known to have recorded, including a few unreleased takes and a handful of songs from the French Radio. Tragically for us, Lubin did not like her voice on recordings—a judgment that is difficult to believe when listening to her brilliant, sumptuous sound on these discs—and consequently made few visits to the studio. Curiously, there do not seem to be any live radio broadcasts of her from her prime years between the two World Wars, though I live in hope that something might turn up in some archive.

As the reigning prima donna in the Wagnerian repertory at the Paris Opéra during the interwar period, Lubin naturally made the majority of her recordings in works by the Bayreuth master. Almost all are sung in French, as was the custom of the time,

and it is fascinating to hear how the soft fluidity of the that vowel-rich language alters the musical effects from the more angular, consonant-studded original. "*Dich, teure Halle*" ("*Salut à toi, noble demeure*") is dispatched with authority in recordings made a year apart. Sieglinde's "*Ein Greis in grauen Gewand*" ("*Drapé dans une cape noire*") also given in two versions (one unpublished) builds in excitement with no sense of vocal strain whatsoever. Among Lubin's vocal virtues is an astounding ability to float a sustained tone such as can be heard in the final measures of Elsa's Dream and again in the perilous ending of the "*Liebestod*" where her glowing, translucent final note is perfection. There is a rounded sweetness to her timbre throughout that is completely unlike the blanched-out, often acid quality typical of so many French sopranos of her time (such as Fanny Heldy or Germaine Féraldy). In fact, it is not an overstatement to say that Lubin and her occasional pupil Régine Crespin are the two indisputably great French operatic sopranos of the twentieth century.

Though Lubin's use of *portamento* is out of fashion today and may not be to everyone's taste, it was a standard practice coming from the Romantic era and can be heard in the singing of pretty much every singer from the time. In any case, it is completely in tune with the style of most of the music she performs. As is the case with other great singers, she uses *portamento* judiciously rather than excessively and as an extension of the legato line she so carefully cultivates.

While Wagner was a major part of Lubin's career, she frequently sang the standard French repertory as well as Italian repertory in translation and works by contemporary composers, mostly notably those of Richard Strauss. Though she was France's first Elektra, Octavian, and Ariadne, and was a famous Marschallin, she never recorded anything by Strauss. Among the recordings she *did* make, we have arias from *Der Freischütz*, *Faust*, *Tosca*, Reyer's *Sigurd*, and songs by Chopin, Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, Fauré, and Debussy. She is particularly impressive in the *Tosca* aria, where she easily produces the grand sweeping lines that climax and then pull back into the softly prayerful "*perchè me ne rimuneri così*," an ending that terrorizes most sopranos. Hers is not the most touching or unrestrainedly emotional interpretation, but it has nobility and musical integrity to burn. Her performance of the aria from Reyer's *Sigurd* is equally magnificent and makes one eager to hear more of this opera by a composer who was clearly heavily influenced by Wagner. Some enterprising festival would do well to consider an exploration of works by some of the numerous talented composers who were Wagner's acolytes, Reyer prime among them.

The second disc begins with two selections recorded in Lubin's prime that represent the sort of thing you would have heard at a recital in her day, but which are totally out of fashion today. The first is the aria "*Mein gläubiges Herze*" from Bach Cantata No. 68, sung in French in the high Romantic style complete with *portamenti* at every opportunity. The prevailing musical taste demanded line and full, beautiful tone, and Lubin delivers, though it will make today's early music crowd either cringe or crack up. Still she retains a sort of sincerity and classical restraint as opposed to overt emotionalism that make the music live in a rather affecting way. The second excerpt goes even farther out on the Romantic limb with a sung version of Chopin's Etude No. 10 to a text called "*Tristesse*" apparently arranged for Lubin's teacher, the great Franco-Russian soprano Félia Litvinne. Again, if you can accept the musical tastes of the time, you can enjoy some lovely vocalism here, notably the seamless line, crystal clear diction and emotional sincerity as when she inflects the final line "*Tout est*

fini" in a somber mezzo-like timbre with no hint of a sob or any verismo-like effects. The fifth selection is a strongly dramatized rendering of Schubert's "*Der Erlkönig*," in which she ably alternates between a sinister full sound that displays her rich lower register (as the father), and a light, clear, soft sound (as the child). Lubin was particularly proud of this rendition and once wrote a note to the Metropolitan Opera's longtime archivist Robert Tuggle declaring that it was, in her opinion, the recording most representative of what she sounded like in live performance.

Two versions of Isolde's "*Liebestod*" recorded in 1938 are included, one in French and one in German, the only Wagner Lubin ever recorded in the original language. She was still at the height of her powers at this time, and both versions show her ability to arch the long swelling musical phrases, riding the climaxes, adjusting the dynamics as required by the text, and remaining ever secure in timbre and intonation. It's no wonder she was invited to Bayreuth where she sang Isolde in 1939 (she had debuted there the previous year as Kundry). Her ease in singing German is further in evidence with the lieder presented on the second disc, but the real charmer is a little Italian duet she sings with the very young baritone Gérard Souzay. Blangini's "*Per valli, per boschi*" with its alternating lines for soprano and baritone is simple and playful, and you can almost see the "grande dame" of the Opéra casting flirtatious glances at the handsome young baritone. It is unlike anything else she ever recorded.

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera Archives

Unfortunately, it was her association with German music and particularly with Wagner, that led to the tragic denouement of her career. Accused of collaboration with the Nazis after the Liberation in 1944, Lubin was acquitted by the courts. But she was later convicted of a retroactively created law following the Liberation called "*Indignité nationale*" that not only ended her career, but also temporarily confiscated her property and restricted her movements. The law, created to punish active members of collaborationist parties and officials of the Vichy government, was in fact used as a means to avenge petty jealousies and accusations. Lubin, who had continued to sing at the Opéra during the war, though she turned down invitations to sing in Germany, had been much too high profile under the Occupation to escape the wrath of the French people who were eager to avenge their ignominious defeat of 1940. It is true that the singer had probably maintained too much cordiality towards the music-loving occupying German officers who admired and flattered her. And there was an accusation that she had denounced the gardener at her country chateau to the Gestapo, though I've never seen any proof of this, and one suspects it was more village gossip than truth. It seems all the more unlikely in view of the fact that there were numerous confirmed instances of her intervening on the behalf of friends and

colleagues. But the sad spectacle of France condemning its artists for no identifiable crime (while often missing the real culprits, like Maurice Papon), was one of the great tragedies of the post-war period. Hitler's love of Wagner's music made many performers easy targets of those who cared more about revenge than truth. In 1945, the *American Weekly* quoted a Paris columnist who had written, "I am not surprised at Mme. Lubin's feelings in regards to the Germans, for she has sung Wagner's music for so many years that she has fabricated for herself a German soul." A ludicrous claim of course, but this kind of attitude sullied more than one artist. Flagstad was also a victim by association, and although she suffered a less catastrophic fate than Lubin, she faced similar sentiments when she returned to the U.S. to sing after the war (though she had no problems in France or Britain).

In 1954 after her proscription, Germaine Lubin returned to the French Radio to sing five songs—an old Italian song by Durante, two songs by Debussy, and two by Wolf. By then she was 64 years old and had not sung on the opera stage for ten years. Her voice is still clearly a heroic instrument and retains both its fullness and steadiness, but we hear moments of strain, particularly at the extremes of her range, and a general lack of ease. All the same, it's a valuable reminder of a great voice even if it is past its prime.

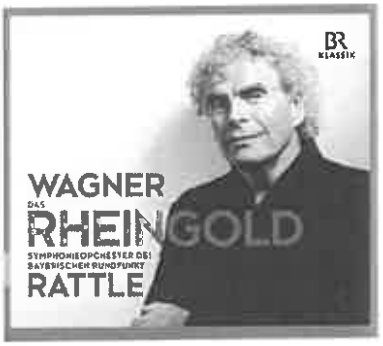
Lubin never sang at the Metropolitan Opera, and in a 1965 French television interview, she stated that it did not matter since she had made it to Bayreuth, which was the summit for her. She may have temporarily forgotten by then that she had, in fact, been engaged by the Met and had signed a contract, still in the Company's archives, to perform during a ten-week period during the 1940-41 season. Her debut role was to have been Alceste, but the contract also lists the major Wagnerian parts as other roles she might be assigned while at the Met. However, the January 4, 1941 *New York Times* carried a notice that Lubin was caught in occupied France and unable to obtain a passport. The Met's general manager had only recently received her handwritten letter, sent 81 days earlier. Hers was to have been the most important debut of the season. Met management had been trying desperately to find out if she would be able to come to New York since August 1940, Paris having been occupied in June. Lubin wrote a second letter to the Met in January 1941, declaring herself heartbroken at not being able to go to New York, but that the fact she had sung often in Germany before the war made her *less free* now (her emphasis). Presumably she meant that the German commanding officers who frequented the Opéra wanted her there as its star soprano. In her biography, she states that it was Otto Abetz, the German ambassador himself, who denied her a passport. Though this excuse has been doubted by some, it seems more than plausible, precisely because she was *the* great Wagnerian star the Germans wanted to hear. She would have also had the problem of leaving behind a son and daughter to whom she may or may not have been able to return.

Had she made it to the Met, we would almost certainly have a broadcast recording of her Alceste—the premiere was sung instead by Marjorie Lawrence and the broadcast by the young American, Rose Bampton. Lubin herself later expressed her regret at not coming to America, because she would have been able to record "everything." This is one of the many unfortunate circumstances that so embittered Lubin's later years and deprived us of an even greater legacy by which to remember her extraordinary art. Nevertheless Ward Marston has done an admirable job of presenting what we have of Lubin's singing in this two-CD set. The accompanying booklet gives two

excellent appreciations of the soprano's work: a lengthy note on her vocalism and life by Vincent Giroud, and a personal remembrance of the singer by the dean of French authorities on singing, André Tubeuf.

The second disc is filled out with three selections sung by the much less famous French soprano, Lucienne de Méo. Based on these recordings, de Méo was in her own right a gifted singer with a large, metallic sound and solid lower register. In Alceste's *"Divinités du Styx"* she sings with strong, classical line, though *"Der Männer Sippe"* from *Die Walküre*, sung in French, seems to tax her beyond her capacities. Juxtaposed as filler to the complete Lubin discography, de Méo's recordings present an interesting portrait of a little known singer, though she is in no way comparable to the great French Wagnerian.

—PETER CLARK



WAGNER: *Das Rheingold*. MICHAEL VOLLE (WOTAN), ELISABETH KULMAN (FRICKA), TOMASZ KONIECZNY (ALBERICH), BURKHARD ULRICH (LOGE), JANINA BAECHLE (ERDA), PETER ROSE (FASOLT), ERIC HALFVARSON (FAFNER), ANNETTE DASCH (FREIA), BENJAMIN BRUNS (FROH), CHRISTIAN VAN HORN (DONNER), HERWIG PECORARO (MIME), MIRELLA HAGEN (WOGLINDE), STEFANIE IRÁNYI (WELLGUNDE), EVA VOGEL (FLOSSHILDE). BAVARIAN RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CONDUCTED BY SIR SIMON RATTLE. BR KLASSIK 900133 (2 CDs).

WAGNER: *Das Rheingold*. MATTHIAS GOERNE (WOTAN), MICHELLE DEYOUNG (FRICKA), PETER SIDHOM (ALBERICH), KIM BEGLEY (LOGE), DEBORAH HUMBLE (ERDA), KWANGCHUL YOUN (FASOLT), STEPHEN MILLING (FAFNER), ANNA SAMUIL (FREIA), CHARLES REID (FROH), OLEKSANDR PUSHNIAK (DONNER), DAVID CANGELOSI (MIME), ERI NAKAMURA (WOGLINDE), AURHELIA VARAK (WELLGUNDE), HERMINE HASELBÖCK (FLOSSHILDE). HONG KONG PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA CONDUCTED BY JAAP VAN ZWEDEN. NAXOS (2 CDs).

Efforts to record Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* go all the back to the 78 era, when HMV recorded extended excerpts from the cycle between 1927 and 1932. Since then, at least thirty complete audio sets have appeared, studio and live, conducted by legends such as Wilhelm Furtwängler, Clemens Krauss, Hans Knappertsbusch, Georg Solti, Herbert von Karajan, James Levine, Pierre Boulez, Reginald Goodall, and Wolfgang Sawallisch. In other words, there's a lot of competition in *Ring* recordings, and vast riches for any Wagner lover to dip into.

The last year has brought a pair of intriguing new recordings of *Das Rheingold*, both made in concert. In the case of Jaap van Zweden's set, with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, we know that a full cycle is planned. *Die Walküre* has already

been recorded, and *Siegfried* is scheduled for January, 2017. Whether Sir Simon Rattle's *Rheingold*, with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, portends a full set is unknown as of July, 2016.

Van Zweden's set is of special interest for two reasons: the conductor will be the next music director of the New York Philharmonic, and the great recitalist Matthias Goerne sings Wotan. Goerne doesn't spend much time in opera houses, typically appearing in one to three operas annually. Van Zweden has led only concert performances of Wagner to date, all in Amsterdam with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and Radio Choir. His *Meistersinger*, *Lohengrin*, and *Parsifal* from those performances are available on record.

Unfortunately, this *Rheingold* is largely a disappointment. Wagner's operas demand great conducting even more than great singing, and van Zweden is, at best, erratic. He does not seem to have a conception of the shape of *Das Rheingold* as a whole. There's no sense of gathering momentum or direction over the course of the opera. The biggest and most exciting moments mostly have the impact you would expect, but the subtler and quieter moments are strangely inert.

You can hear the problems right from the beginning. The prelude, taken a bit on the slow side, sounds dull and barely inflected. It's not the tempo that's at fault so much as the lack of an underlying sense of pulse and flow. Much later in the opera, Erda's warning to Wotan (*"Weiche, Wotan!"*) lacks mystery and both musical and emotional weight. There's no suspense or thrill in Donner's call to the mists and the orchestral passage that follows.

A great cast might rescue a recording from a conductor who doesn't seem entirely present, but this cast is far from the ideal. The singing ranges from good to execrable, with too many of the singers in or near the execrable end of the spectrum. They are rife with issues such as wear, loosened vibrato, pitch problems, and poor legato.

The set gets off to a truly terrible start: Eri Nakamura (Woglinde), Aurhelia Varak (Wellgunde), and Hermine Haselböck (Flosshilde) are an embarrassingly weak trio of Rheinmaidens. As a group, they blend poorly, they're matronly in tone, and they sing without finesse or delicacy.

There's no improvement with the entrance of baritone Peter Sidhom, as the dwarf Alberich. He hammers the notes and words, hectoring the other characters ceaselessly. Sarcasm abounds, and little else.

Goerne, alas, simply hasn't got the right kind of voice for Wotan. This recording exposes all the flaws you never hear when he sings a recital. His usually handsome baritone sounds grainy and without sufficient core or color, and the lower range of the role audibly stresses him. He sings with the intelligence you would expect from a famously eloquent Lieder singer, but without the power and variety that Wotan requires.

There are many valid ways to portray each of the characters in the *Ring*. Mezzo-soprano Michelle DeYoung opts for the mature Fricka route, rather than the youthful, covetous goddess. Sung with a dark and weighty tone, this Fricka takes her tone from the righteous and long-suffering goddess of *Die Walküre*, already deeply concerned with Wotan's hubris and the dangers he has put the gods in through his deal with the giants.

The marvelous Danish bass Stephen Milling gives a splendid vocal and dramatic performance as Fafner, putting the worn-sounding Kwangchul Youn's Fasolt in the

shade. The veteran tenors Kim Begley and David Cangelosi are suitably lively and dramatic as Loge and Mime, respectively, though both are audibly past their best.

Oleksandr Pushniak wobbles his way through Donner, his call to the mists painfully out of tune and without presence or nobility. Anna Samuil and Charles Reid fare better as Freia and her brother Froh, singing with competence, if not distinction. Deborah Humble's strongly-sung, commanding Erda would be welcome in many *Ring* casts.

Lastly, to my ear the very sound of the recording is dull, with the orchestra strangely recessed compared to the singers. This obscures a great deal of the beautiful orchestral detail, much to the detriment of the whole. Unless you are a *Ring* completist, or a fan of one of the singers, there's no compelling reason to buy van Zweden's recording.

Sir Simon Rattle's *Rheingold* is another story entirely. Spaciously recorded, beautifully sung, and vividly conducted, it's a superb addition to the vast *Ring* discography, a snapshot of just how good Wagner performances can be today. And while van Zweden's Hong Kong Philharmonic is a good professional orchestra, it's not in the class of the magnificent Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Above all, it is Rattle's command of the pacing and balance of the music, of the details as well as his overarching sense of the whole, that make this recording so satisfying. He never loses the underlying pulse of the work, even with a great deal of tempo flexibility within each section and from phrase to phrase.

Again, Erda's *"Weiche, Wotan!"* is instructive. The layered entries of brass, winds, and strings register on the ear vertically as well as horizontally, each sonority leading inevitably to the next. The phrase *"Alles was ist, endet"* (All that is, shall come to an end) is beautifully poised and balanced, both a midpoint and a climax, and it leads inexorably to *"...dir rat' ich, meide den Ring!"* (I charge you, shun the Ring). The conductor caps this with a magnificently timed pause before Wotan's response. The mezzo Janina Baechle sings with an ideal balance of mystery and command, creating an overwhelming sense that Erda has stepped in from another time and place.

Baechle is just one example of how strongly Rattle's performances were cast. Soprano Annette Dasch, who typically appears in leading roles such as Eva and Elsa, sings Freia with a wonderfully youthful sound. Mirella Hagen (Woglinde), Stefanie Irányi (Wellgunde), and Eva Vogel (Flosshilde) make superb Rheinmaidens, singing joyfully and with beautiful tone. Their timbres are sufficiently varied that you can tell them apart easily and yet they blend and phrase together seamlessly.

Bass-baritone Christian Van Horn, who has made a number of memorable appearances at San Francisco Opera in recent years, is a firm-toned, noble, and incisive Donner, godly indeed as he calls to the mists. Benjamin Bruns is a fine, lyrical Froh.

Fafner and Fasolt are in the excellent hands of Peter Rose and the veteran Eric Halfvarson. Halfvarson is paradoxically a bit wobbly, yet his core tone is so solid and beautiful, his command of the role so complete that it hardly matters. Rose's basso cantante makes a good sonic contrast with Halfvarson's darker sound. They make a great pair of giants.

Tomasz Konieczny's Alberich is subtly sung, with a fine legato, making the dwarf a tortured and complex character rather than a one-dimensional bad guy. The tenors Burkhard Ulrich (Loge) and Herwig Pecoraro (Mime) sing intelligently. Alone among the singers, they are too light for their respective roles, with Pecoraro vocally shallow and pressed.

Elisabeth Kulman makes Fricka a vividly youthful goddess, projecting the text with a Lieder singer's sense and an exceptionally beautiful tone. And Michael Volle is an excellent Wotan, perhaps lacking the last bit of power, but nonetheless solidly in command of the role's requirements.

Overall, then, this is a recording well worth having, whether it's your first or fifteenth *Rheingold*. It's easy enough to discern why it's so much better than van Zweden's effort: better singers, a conductor with far more opera house and Wagner experience, better engineering, and a better orchestra.

–Lisa Hirsch

TRIBUTE

Verna Parino (1916–2015)

It is hard to think about the Wagner Society without many wonderful memories of Verna, who became a member of the Wagner Society of Northern California soon after it was founded in the 1980s and who served as its President for many years. Verna had also been a member of the local branch of the predecessor organization, the Wagner International Institute, which was based in New York. In the early 1980's the San Francisco members broke away from the Wagner International Institute and formed what is now known as The Wagner Society of Northern California.

Verna's interest in opera had beginnings similar to that of many people who were first exposed to opera with Met Opera radio broadcasts. For Verna that happened in Minneapolis where she grew up and went to college. Interestingly enough, in 2013 Verna went to Minneapolis to see two Minnesota Concert Opera productions of "Legend of the Ring" a revised four-hour version of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Verna sat in the front of the orchestra and when the artists bowed at the end of the performance, her dear friend tenor Jay Hunter Morris blew her a kiss. While there, she attended church services at her parish church so she could hear the choir, the very same choir in which she sang as a young girl.

Nothing invigorated Verna more than sharing her love of music, opera, and Wagner with others. Verna was especially fond of the late Monte Pederson, a terrific bass-baritone, and the winner of the very first Wagner Society Grant. Verna saw Pederson give many Wagner performances, including especially his riveting Wotan at La Scala and Seattle and other opera houses.

In her lifetime Verna had seen seventy-six *Ring* performances, the last of which was in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 2015. Verna witnessed *Rings* on four continents. Perhaps the most unusual was a *Ring* in Shanghai, the first performed in that city. The Chinese people, who venerate the elderly, heard about Verna and soon she was hounded by the press and her photo appeared in one of the many newspapers. She wound up "holed up" in her room to avoid paparazzi. I know many members have wonderful *Ring* stories about Verna.

I had the joy of sharing a San Francisco Opera subscription with Verna. I had to "audition" for the position! Winning this coveted position meant that I got to spend

some of my happiest times sitting next to Verna and discussing all things operatic eight to nine times a year. The most memorable of these occurred in 2011 when we sat through three complete *Rings* together! Sitting in Dress Circle Row A, I could watch as Verna held court as the hundreds of people she knew would pass by.

For me, Verna's most striking characteristic was that she always had interesting and positive comments about productions, conducting, singing, and Wagner scholarship. No matter how unusual a particular *regie* theater production may have been, Verna could always manage to find something positive to say.

Verna was a force of nature in the musical life of the Bay Area. She managed the opera preview lectures for the San Francisco Opera for thirty years. These lectures began in 1970 and Verna took charge during the 1978 opera season. She was not the first lecture coordinator for the San Francisco Opera Guild and chapters, but she was clearly the one with the longest history and she had a profound impact. Verna came to Opera Guild meetings with a couple of armfuls of books and articles with which she had researched not just the speakers she was considering for each opera, but the operas themselves. If she was going to seek out a new speaker, she came prepared! She loved experimenting with new speakers and was willing to risk an unpopular choice in pursuit of the right expert for the opera. And when she really liked a speaker, she worked hard to bring him or her back to further educate audiences.

Verna's invitational letters are a delight to read. She comments on productions she had seen, articles in San Francisco Opera programs, newspapers, and magazines. In a 2008 letter to Richard Taruskin, she reminisced about his very first appearance for the Guild thirty years earlier, when he lectured on *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk.*

Under Verna, the lecture landscape shifted from local professors and newspaper critics who had already presented to inviting top scholars, composers and other opera professionals. She invited internationally renowned scholars such as Julian Budden and Philip Gossett and also included librettists such as Michael Korie and the composers Conrad Susa and John Adams to speak to the chapters. She researched everything extensively and raised ideas in her correspondence with each of her speakers, all of whom clearly both respected and loved her.

The operas previewed in 1988 were: *L'Africaine* (with Michael Mitchell, UC Santa Barbara and Seattle Opera), *La Gioconda* (with William Huck), *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (with Richard Taruskin, UC Berkeley), *Maometto II* (with Philip Gossett, University of Chicago), and *Parsifal* (with James Keolker, Fromm Institute)—all arranged by Verna. At that time a letter from the SFOG indicated that "previews are presented by three Bay Area Chapters, the Junior League of San Francisco and the San Jose Opera Guild" at five locations including Sonoma. The East Bay Chapter had not yet formed. Verna worked tremendously hard to organize the previews so the speakers could move conveniently from venue to venue.

Verna's impact on the San Francisco Opera Guild Chapters was honored with the prestigious 2002 San Francisco Opera Volunteer of the Year Award.

When Verna retired from her many duties as San Francisco Opera Guild Preview Coordinator, Treasurer, and Preview Chair of the Marin Chapter, it took three people to replace her. Fortunately, being Verna, she was up to the task of not only finding, but also training all three!

—Terri Stuart

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