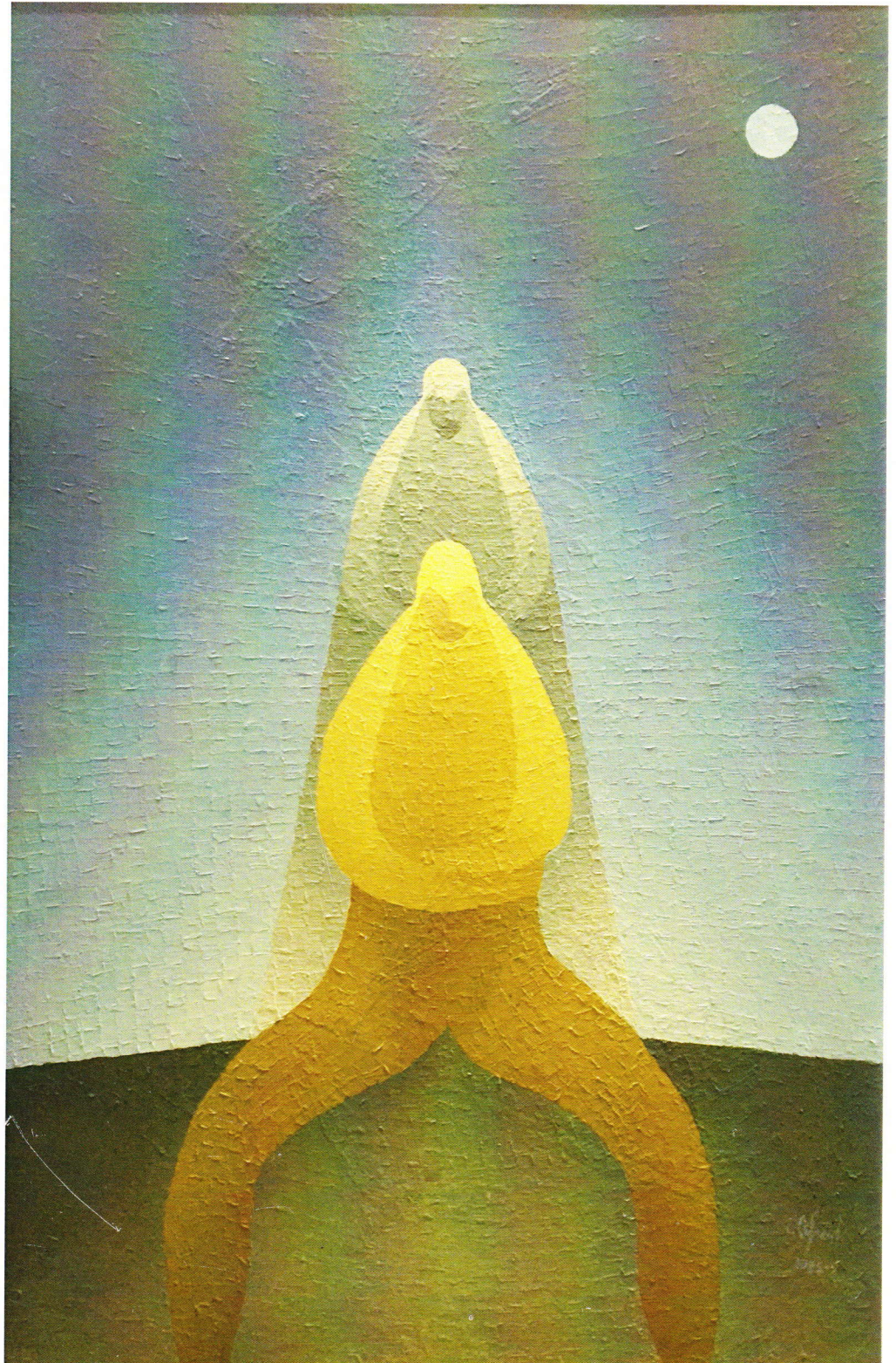


LEITMOTIVE

Journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California | Summer 2018



LEITMOTIVE

Journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California | Summer 2018

CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR 3

OUR CONTRIBUTORS 5

RICHARD WAGNER ON THE PRACTICE AND TEACHING
OF SINGING. 7

BY PETER BASSETT

BRÜNNHILDE SPEAKS: AN INTERVIEW WITH
EVELYN HERLITZIUS 17

BY JEFFERY S. McMILLAN

MY JOURNEY TO BAYREUTH. 25

BY SAMUEL EMANUEL

REVIEW 31

Norse Mythology

BY PATRICK VAZ

REVIEW 33

Die Walküre

BY LISA HIRSCH

TRIBUTE. 35

Carolee Anderson (1940–2017)

BY TERRI STUART

Jeffery S. McMillan *Editor*

Robert S. Fisher *Editor Emeritus*

Gary Lang *Graphic Designer*

Editorial Advisory Board

Liese Bauer *Mill Valley, CA*

Mary Cicora *Mountain View, CA*

Thomas Grey *Stanford University*

Herbert Lindenberger *Stanford University*

Thomas May *Seattle, WA*

Dunbar Ogden *University of California Berkeley*

Pamela Potter *University of Wisconsin*

Duane W. Roller *Ohio State University*

Nicholas Vazsonyi *University of South Carolina*

Simon Williams *University of California Santa Barbara*

Wagner Society of Northern California

Board of Directors

Terri Stuart *President*

Robert "Ski" Grabowski *Vice President*

Daniel Kane *Treasurer*

Gale Lederer *Secretary*

Jeff Bart

Valerie Hamamoto

Eiko Kikawada

Gary Lang

Rebecca Liao

Jeffery S. McMillan

Diane Parker

Andrew Rombakis

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.

Leitmotive is published three times per year by the Wagner Society of Northern California, PO Box 590990, San Francisco, CA 94159. All contents are copyrighted by The Wagner Society of Northern California and may not be reproduced in any form without prior written permission of the Society.

Leitmotive is available as a benefit of membership to the Wagner Society of Northern California. Annual dues are \$55 US for Regular Membership, \$40 for Senior Membership, \$25 for Youth Membership. Library subscriptions are \$40. To join WSNC, visit the Society's website at wagnersf.org or email wagnersocnc@gmail.com.

Copyright 2018 by the Wagner Society of Northern California

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings Wagner Society friends and welcome to the Spring 2018 issue of *Leitmotive*. It's *Ring* time again! Richard Wagner's four-part, 17-hour mega-opera returns this June to the War Memorial Opera House. The Bay Area has long been fertile ground for this massive work, beginning with San Francisco's first exposure to the cycle in 1900 when the touring Metropolitan Opera swung through town and presented the four operas in five days. A German company led by veteran soprano Johanna Gadski staged the cycle in 1930 and 1931 (the latter minus *Das Rheingold*) before Gaetano Merola's San Francisco Opera joined the fray with its own production in 1935. San Francisco Opera set a lofty vocal standard in its first outing as a *Ring* presenter by featuring several of the world's greatest Wagnerian artists, including Kirsten Flagstad, Lauritz Melchior, Elisabeth Rethberg, and Friderich Schorr. Presentations in 1972, 1985, 1990, 1999, and 2011 further established the Company as a great home for Wagner's *Ring* cycle and its constituent parts. As we all look forward to the June 2018 *Ring*, I hope the contents of this volume will nourish your curiosity and stimulate your appetite for the performances. Indeed, there is plenty of food for thought contained herein.

We begin with Peter Bassett's in-depth look at Wagner the education reformer whose artistic vision called for the formalized training of his performers. For those attending *Ring* cycle 1 at the War Memorial Opera House this summer, don't miss the chance to hear Bassett, a distinguished Australian Wagner scholar and dramaturg, on Saturday, June 16, at the all-day *Ring* Forum. The line-up of presenters for the three Forums (June 16, 23, and 30), all jointly presented by the Wagner Society of Northern California and San Francisco Opera, is decidedly top shelf: Peter Bassett, Desiree Mays, Simon Williams, David Clay Large, William Berger, Jonathan Khuner, Speight Jenkins and John Mastrogiovanni. For a full listing of the Forum programs and other *Ring* Festival events between now and July 1, visit sfopera.com/ringfestival.

The hero of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is, of course, the goddess-turned-mortal, Brünnhilde. Until May 8, Evelyn Herlitzius was scheduled to be San Francisco Opera's Brünnhilde this summer, but she unfortunately had to withdraw for health reasons (Irène Theorin will sing Brünnhilde). I had the pleasure of meeting Herlitzius back in February during her triumphant run as Kundry at the Metropolitan Opera. She is a striking person: vivid and intense on stage, warm and thoughtful in conversation. Though we will have to wait a little longer for Herlitzius' local debut, I hope readers will appreciate my interview with this thrilling German artist.

In our next feature, talented young conductor and pianist Samuel Emanuel reports on attending the Bayreuth Festival as a sponsored student observer or Stipendiat. Emanuel, you may remember, was a participant in the 2015 Merola Opera Program and attended the 2016 Bayreuth Festival with the support of WSNC. At one point in his account, Emanuel mentions meeting up with a violist friend from Braunschweig at the Festival. We have an update: Since filing his report for *Leitmotive*, Emanuel informed us that he and that friend, Sara Kim, got married! Congratulations to the happy, musical couple.

WSNC members Lisa Hirsch and Patrick Vaz contribute reviews of recent Wagner-related products. Hirsch continues her review of conductor Jaap van Zweden's *Ring* cycle recordings with the Hong Kong Philharmonic. Vaz gives us a careful reading of Neil Gaiman's recent bestseller, *Norse Mythology*, a retelling of the stories that long ago fueled Wagner's creation of the *Ring*.

We conclude with WSNC President Terri Stuart's tribute to former board member Carolee Anderson. Carolee was a dear friend of the Society and will be missed.

See you at the *Ring* celebrations in June!

—JSM

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

PETER BASSETT is an author, speaker, and broadcaster on opera, particularly the works of Richard Wagner. Since the 1990s he has been closely associated with Wagnerian productions in Australia, notably as dramaturg and artistic administrator for the Adelaide *Ring* of 2004, and his doctoral thesis was on the production and staging of the South Australian *Rings* of 1998 and 2004 and *Parsifal* of 2001. In an earlier life he served for two decades in the Australian diplomatic service and subsequently as chief of staff to two Governors of South Australia.

SAMUEL EMANUEL is a New York-born conductor and pianist. He grew up in a musical household and earned degrees from Syracuse and Indiana Universities in music. A 2015 participant in the Merola Opera Program, Emanuel has served as a conductor and pianist at the Staatstheater Braunschweig in Germany since 2014, leading performances including *Tosca*, *Rigoletto*, *Werther*, and *La Clemenza di Tito*.

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*: 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.

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

PATRICK J. VAZ studied English Literature at University of California, Berkeley. He spends all the time he can reading and listening to music. He blogs at *The Reverberate Hills*: reverberatehills.blogspot.com.

On the cover: *Schläfst du Hagen Mein Sohn—Götterdämmerung*, oil on canvas by Cal Pedranti

RICHARD WAGNER ON THE PRACTICE AND TEACHING OF SINGING

PETER BASSETT

W eber and Beethoven were still alive when Wagner was a teenager, and their long shadows, together with those of Mozart and Marschner, fell on all of his early projects. His first completed opera *Die Feen*, composed in 1833 when he was just twenty years old, was never performed in his lifetime but, even if it had been, it would not have sounded as good as it does in the best recorded versions we know today. The type of singing familiar to Wagner was far from ideal, and many German singers of his era were poorly trained and had unsophisticated techniques. His sternest critic, Eduard Hanslick had something to say on the difference between German and Italian singers at that time: 'With the Italians' he said, 'great certainty and evenness throughout the role; with the Germans an unequal alternation of brilliant and mediocre moments, which seems partly accidental.' Wagner had to entrust his major roles to inadequately trained singers in many cases, which must have been challenging to say the least. He worked hard to improve matters, pouring much time and energy into the preparation of performances. 'I do not care in the slightest' he once said, 'whether my works are performed. What I do care about is that they are performed as I intended them to be. Anyone who cannot, or will not, do so, had better leave them alone.'

David Breckbill has written that "The differences between the singing which Wagner knew and that which we hear today are considerable. In his day, the best singing was far from straight-toned ... but the continuous vibrato which has long been an element in present-day operatic singing [designed to project and colour the voice] was entirely foreign to him."¹ Wagner died in 1883, long before the invention of sound recording, but three of his chosen singers made recordings when the technology was in its infancy. One was Hermann Winkelmann who created the role of Parsifal in 1882. His voice was recorded in 1905, as was the voice of Marianne Brandt who was Waltraute in the 1876 *Götterdämmerung* and Kundry in the 1882 *Parsifal*. The third, and vocally most assured, even in later life, was Lilli Lehmann who also became a famous teacher. Her book of 1902, published in English as *How to Sing*, is still available in print and online, and her account elsewhere of the 1876 *Ring* rehearsals gives us a glimpse of Wagner's skill and energy as one of the first true stage directors. He selected her for the roles of the Rhinedaughter Woglinde, the Valkyrie Helmwig and the Woodbird in the first complete *Ring*. During her long career she sang 170 roles including Isolde and Brünnhilde, and was equally at home with Mozart and Bellini.

1. David Breckbill, "Wagner in performance—Singing," in *The Wagner Compendium*, ed. Barry Millington (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

One of her surviving recordings was made in 1907 when she was fifty-nine. Obviously her voice is more mature than it had been in Wagner's time, but her performance of "Du bist der Lenz" from Act I of *Die Walküre* is a fascinating record, especially since it is more than a century old.

The transition to a warmer, more emotive sound since Lilli Lehmann's time may have been influenced by Italian operatic practice, especially after radio and phonographic recordings brought the ringing tones of Italian singers into homes throughout the world. Sir Roger Norrington, champion of the so-called historically informed approach to performance, asserts that the fashion for vibrato arrived with Hollywood, aerodynamic car design, radio, ocean liners and the early days of flight.² One should not dismiss though, the continuing allure of all things Italian in opera, exemplified by the preference for Italian libretti and even Italian stage names. Ludwig Leichner for instance, who sang the role of Hans Sachs to Wagner's satisfaction, was better known to his audiences as Raphael Carlo. Opera companies from London to Rio de Janeiro, including the court opera in Dresden where Wagner spent part of his youth, were designated Italian opera companies and, in the second half of the 19th century, Wagner's works were customarily sung in Italian in



Lilli Lehmann as Woglinde in *Das Rheingold*, Bayreuth 1876.

non-German speaking countries. In *Mein Leben*, Wagner records a discussion on the subject that he had with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert during his visit to London in 1855. When *Lohengrin* was first performed in Australia in 1877 it was sung in Italian, prompting Wagner to urge the singing of his works in English in English-speaking countries. Would he have approved of a continuous vibrato in the modern style? Adherents of the historically informed approach say no, because the written

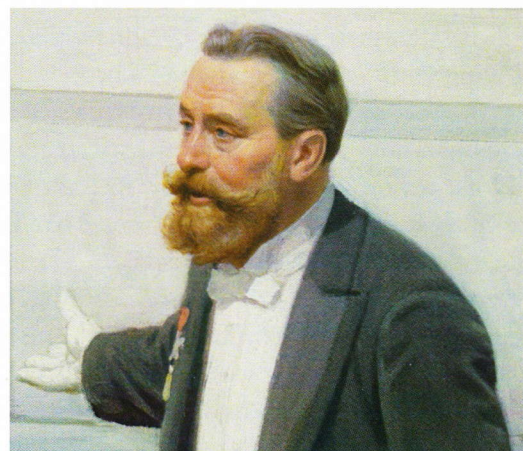
2. Roger Norrington, "Time to Rid Orchestras of the Shakes," *New York Times*. February 16, 2003.

evidence is that he treated vibrato as a special effect, restricting its use to particular functions. They also insist that continuous vibrato constrains dramatic flexibility and impedes a vivacious delivery of the text – both issues of considerable importance to Wagner. It would have been unfamiliar to him but, as with everything else to do with performance, he would probably have said that dramatic need—not inflexible rules—should dictate musical expression.

“Dramatic need”—now there is something that Wagner came to appreciate in one particular woman whom he first saw in his youth. In *Mein Leben* he recounts the story of the formative theatrical impression made by the dramatic soprano Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient. His recollection was that she had been performing the role of Leonora in *Fidelio* in 1829, and a few years later he saw her again in Bellini’s *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. It was not her voice as such that impressed the young Wagner but her ability to take on the whole dramatic persona of her character through a combination of music, clear delivery of text, and acting. His ecstatic reaction has no parallel in his writings: “When I look back across my entire life,” he said, “I find no event to place beside this in the impression it produced upon me.” Later he was to have some misgivings about the actual lyrical capacity of her voice, but he dismissed these in favour of the larger significance of her theatrical personality. In his 1872 essay *On Actors and Singers* he admitted: “No! She had no ‘voice’ at all; and yet she knew how to work her breath so beautifully and to project with such a truly feminine soul that one ceased to think any more about singing or voices at all! ... My entire understanding of the actor’s mimetic art I owe to this great woman, a lesson that allows me to view truthfulness as the essential foundation of that art.”

He noted the extraordinary effect created by her innovation of speaking rather than singing the final word in her threat to Pizarro: “Just one sound and you are *dead!*” The terrific effect of that gesture, said Wagner, was the sudden and shocking return from the ideal world of music to “the naked surface of dreadful reality.”

Clearly, the encounter with Schröder-Devrient set the benchmark for his ideal singing actor—or is that acting singer? She had performed Leonora in front of Beethoven himself in 1822 when she was just 18. It is reported that Beethoven was not at all happy about his exalted heroine being entrusted to “such a child.” But her father Friedrich Schröder was an accomplished operatic baritone, and her mother Sophie was one of the most celebrated German actresses of her day, famous especially for her depiction of Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth. She coached her daughter and so the young Wilhelmine was trained in that combination of singing and acting that appealed so much to Wagner and, as it turned out, to Beethoven. The latter had attempted to conduct the dress rehearsal but since he was almost completely deaf at that time, it descended into chaos. Persuaded to watch the performance from the front row of the audience,



Ludwig Leichner, who sang Hans Sachs, was best known to audiences under the Italian stage name Raphael Carlo.

dwelling on them, and when *Tannhäuser* was first staged in Dresden, he actually had the words of the text copied into the parts of all the orchestral players, so that they could follow the phrasing of the singer. It would be a mistake to assume that Wagner cared more for the orchestra than he did for the voice, which is one accusation often levelled at him. On the contrary, he once remarked that “the human voice is the oldest, the most genuine, and the most beautiful organ of music—the organ to which alone our music owes its existence.” In describing the relationship between singer and orchestra in *Tristan*, he begged the reader to observe how, in the third act, the gigantic orchestra seems to disappear, or, more correctly, becomes a constituent part of what Tristan is singing.

The orchestra as “a constituent part of the song” sums up Wagner’s intentions very well. Consider an especially beautiful example of how this merging of orchestra and voice works to create the impression of a single sensory experience. The second act of *Tristan* is an apostrophe to the night and to that “unity of being” which lies beyond the world of illusion, yearning and suffering—the harsh world of day. Almost everything in the work is viewed from the perspective of the two lovers, including the warning call of Isolde’s maid Brangäne—more lullaby than alarm as it floats through the night. We hear it, so to speak, through the ears of a man and a woman

for whom no world exists beyond themselves. The total effect is ravishing.

There were at least five occasions on which Wagner set out to improve standards of performance through formal education and training. The first occurred when he was a young man in Dresden in the 1840s, occupying the position of second Kapellmeister at the Saxon court. He proposed some entirely reasonable reforms to the conditions and payment of the Royal orchestra but ran up against the insecurities of his superiors and



Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient as Leonora in *Fidelio*.

the resentment of others. He then submitted a *Plan for a National German Theatre for the Kingdom of Saxony* in which he advocated the removal of the theatre from the control of the court, the creation of a democratic association of dramatists and composers which should elect the director and determine artistic policy, and the foundation of a theatre workshop to train young artists, producers, and technicians. Again, nothing was done and this report was left to gather dust. The whole experience was an early and depressing brush with bureaucracy and it fed the fires of his revolutionary inclinations.

His next attempt at major reform came in Zürich where he had fled after the failure of the 1849 Dresden uprisings. He wrote a paper entitled *A Theatre in Zürich*, calling on the town fathers to reshape their theatre from top to bottom. He insisted they should hire singers who were also trained actors, train them on a year-round basis, actively recruit German poets and composers to develop works, limit performances to no more than three per week (so that singers would not be burned out by exploitation), and found a Commission of Theatrical Affairs to govern the institution. As always he conceived his plans in the context of a reformed world of opera. In Zürich, he drew parallels between what he wanted the theatre to become and folk-like activities such as village festivals and the singing societies in German towns. This was too novel for the staid burghers and, again, nothing came of it, but the seeds of *Die Meistersinger* were being sown in his mind even at that early date.

He wasn't discouraged, and the next opportunity to do something came in March 1865, when he was living in Munich under the patronage of Ludwig II. The young king commissioned him to prepare a report *On the Foundation of a German Conservatoire in Munich*. Once again Wagner called for a school in which singers would be better trained in the theory and practice of music than was usual at the time. He urged the development of performance and production practices for a distinctly German art. But exclusivity was never part of his plan. After all, he had had considerable experience of conducting the operatic and symphonic works of other composers. Between the ages of 20 and 23 he had conducted or prepared no fewer than seventy-seven operas by most of the major operatic composers of the 18TH and early 19TH centuries—German, French, and Italian. Like Hans Sachs, he was aware that tradition and inspiration are not mutually exclusive but mutually enriching.

Incidentally, the term that has come to be applied to Wagner's mature operatic style—"Musikdrama"—was not coined by him, or even officially sanctioned by him. He used a variety of descriptions: "drama," "stage festival play," and so on, but deliberately avoided a single generic classification. In his essay of 1872 entitled *On the Designation Musikdrama* he acknowledged that others were using this term but he was unwilling to adopt it. He did though distinguish his works from debased, traditional forms of "opera" as practiced in the late 18TH and early 19TH centuries. The "stars" in the whole system were the singers and they could make or break a production. It was the heyday of the volatile *prima donna*, and none was more volatile or more *prima donna* than Caterina Gabrielli. One contemporary writer described her as "the greatest singer in the world... certainly the most dangerous siren of modern times, having made more conquests than any woman breathing." She had a power of which modern leading ladies can only dream. If she were in a bad temper, which was often, she'd only hum her arias. It was commonplace for singers at that time to bribe the press and pay for claquees, and by 1830 in Paris an agency had been established to provide any number of *claqueurs* ordered by theatre managements or individual singers. Wagner fell foul of them in 1861.

By the time of *Lohengrin* in 1850 and, certainly, by *Tristan* in 1865, the center of gravity had begun to shift. Gone were the days when even composers were at the mercy of headstrong singers who would count the bars of music allocated to various roles and either demand extra ones to outdo their rivals or just insert additional music themselves. Rossini once complained that while he didn't mind some changes, "to leave not a note of what I composed—even in the recitatives—well, that's unendurable."

In proposing a school in Munich, Wagner argued for a new type of poetic text that took account of the particular attributes and constraints of the German language—so different from the Italian. From such a text, he said, would emerge a dramatic, declamatory vocal line, often un-lyrical and un-vocal to the point where the human voice was treated almost as an instrument of the orchestra. The committee charged with giving effect to Wagner's report met once or twice, scratched its collective head and decided that his proposals were too expensive. So, that was that. They might also have had trouble dealing with his daunting prose style and one wonders whether the lengthy report was actually read to its conclusion.

Tristan und Isolde was performed in Munich in June of 1865, having been completed six years earlier and already declared un-performable in Vienna after seventy-seven rehearsals. Wagner came to regard his first exponent of the role of Tristan, Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld as a model interpreter of his works, and was hugely impressed by his intelligence, artistry and musicianship—notwithstanding his corpulence, which had initially been off-putting. Schnorr, who was just 29, had been borrowed from the Dresden Court Theatre. His wife Malvina (who was eleven years his senior and from a Brazilian family) was to perform the role of Isolde. Towards the end of the first series of performances Schnorr felt unwell. There was a fourth performance of *Tristan* on July 1st and then he participated in a staging of *Der Fliegende Holländer* and in a royal concert at which he sang excerpts from *Siegfried*, *Die Walküre*, *Das Rheingold*, and *Die Meistersinger*, none of which had been staged at that point. He and Malvina returned to Dresden where he attended a rehearsal of *Don Giovanni*. The next day he fell seriously ill, and on July 21st he died. Rumours spread that he had died from the exertions of the role of Tristan. Talk of a "*Tristan* curse" resonated with the gullible because of the length and strangeness of the work and Tristan's harrowing delirium and death on stage. It seems most likely that the overweight tenor had died from rheumatic complications that caused a stroke. Schnorr's death was a calamity that Wagner lamented for the rest of his life. He was, in the composer's view *the* singer, and we can add his name to that of Schröder-Devrient as having had a profound effect on Wagner's concept of how his roles should be performed. In this case it was the tenor's musicianship and intelligence rather than his physical gestures that delivered a convincing portrayal of the role. Clearly there was more than one way to give a totally convincing performance. It is fair to say that Wagner learned as much from his singers as they learned from him.

When in 1872 Wagner laid the foundation stone of his festival theatre—not in Munich as the king had wished, but in the provincial town of Bayreuth—he also began work on a long essay entitled *On Actors and Singers*. In this he elaborated his ideas on the fundamental importance of gesture, mime, and improvisation, and lamented the disappearance from the modern theatre of a true improvisatory art, which, in his view, only survived in elements of popular culture. The salvation of dramatic art, he concluded, lay in the selfless collaboration of the dramatist and the singer or actor.

The improvisatory quality of Wagner's staging comes out very clearly in the detailed accounts of rehearsals for the first *Ring* in 1876. It was noted that all the things Wagner did at the rehearsals created the impression of having been improvised. He kept changing his mind from day to day, altering not only blocking, stage movement, and gestures, but also the musical tempi. Needless to say, this drove the singers mad but

be studied under the guidance of a special singing-master. Given the pre-determined level of vocal expertise, the focus of the course would be on interpretative and performing skills. Piano studies would also be undertaken by experienced pianists, which would lead to the conducting of orchestral performances. It was hoped that sufficient instrumental musicians would be available during the final three months to form an orchestra or, failing this, that musicians on holidays from the court orchestra would be able to fill any gaps. During the second quarter, attention would be paid to string-quartet playing. How interesting that Wagner felt that the four “voices” of a string quartet had something to teach human singers about expressive relationships! Throughout the year there would be lectures focusing on cultural, historical, and aesthetic matters towards an appreciation of German performing styles.

In the second year, 1879, a similar course would be followed, but now the focus in the last term would be on Wagner’s own dramatic works, particularly his earlier operas. The third year, 1880, would culminate in complete stage performances of the earlier works—if possible *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*. *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger* would follow in the fifth year, 1881; *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in 1882, and the first performance of *Parsifal* in 1883. He recognized that not all those who enrolled for the first year would still be involved in the sixth, but he hoped that a sufficient number would continue from year to year to form a nucleus of experienced students who might be able to assist with teaching and serve as models for later intakes.

Particularly interesting was Wagner’s intention to train students in the performance of his works and employ them in the festival theatre, including for a second performance of the *Ring* in 1882 (six years after the first) and for the premiere of *Parsifal* planned for 1883. He was determined, it seems, to prepare up-and-coming singers, répétiteurs, and conductors in a music school environment rather than rely on the ad hoc engagement of outsiders in the traditional way. It was an audacious plan that crystallised once it was clear to him that another festival could not be mounted in 1877. Now he would create a cadre of especially prepared singers and instrumental musicians. After all, his motivation for the Bayreuth experiment from the outset had been to present ideal performances in ideal surroundings, using singers who truly understood his intentions. This was what would distinguish Bayreuth from other opera houses. While many of his singers for the first festival had been the best available, the reality was that they had come from busy careers in the wider world of opera, and were wedded to old habits which were not easily cast off. He was particularly annoyed by the attention-seeking Franz Betz, his Wotan, who had been peeved that he could not take curtain calls whenever he wished and had, as Wagner noted, hammed up his part in some places, especially at the beginning of *Die Walküre*. Wagner was inclined not to invite him back and, for his part, Betz declared that he would not come anyway.

To his great regret, Wagner was unable to proceed with his school and create the model productions he desired. The first Bayreuth Festival had left an enormous deficit, which was hardly surprising given that the composer had not only staged the huge four-part *Ring* for the first time but had also built an entire theatre in which to perform it. There was no way he could mount a new festival in 1877, so he set about giving concerts in the hope of raising funds. When these concerts generated only modest returns, other ideas were floated, including the sale of the entire enterprise to either the Imperial or Bavarian governments, or relocating the Festival to Munich. These

ideas came to nothing and he eventually released the *Ring* for general performances throughout Europe. This would at least generate royalties, but any hope of creating ideal performances seemed gone forever. The financial crisis was finally settled in 1878 with the intervention of the King who arranged for the Munich Court Theatre to pay royalties until the debt was wiped out.

It was during those testing times after the first Festival that Wagner contemplated one of his more extraordinary solutions. He would sell his house and the theatre in Bayreuth and move to America. At various points during his life America loomed as an attractive prospect or was suggested to him by admirers in the United States. He wrote to a supporter in July 1877 that if nothing came of his plans for a financial solution then he would wash his hands of his Festival and go to America and would never return to Germany. A financial solution was found and Wagner was soon fully absorbed in his composition of *Parsifal* which, in July 1882, received its premiere in Bayreuth with great success. His health deteriorated and in February 1883 he died in Venice without having set foot on the North American continent or having brought to fruition his plans for a music school.

In Act III of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, which is itself a giant demonstration of the art of singing, Hans Sachs gives Walther von Stolzing a lesson in how to construct an ideal song and, in the process, Wagner gives *us* a lesson in how songs should be written and sung. The text is perfectly clear, the musical expression mirrors the spirit of the words, the orchestra is part of the song and, as Wagner put it, his declamation is at the same time song and his song declamation. There is also a masterly lesson in how to set conversations to music.

Wagner's efforts were titanic and his achievements remarkable, and hand in hand with those achievements went a passion for educating singers and everyone else concerned with the production of opera. Clearly, for him, one crowded lifetime was far too short.

be studied under the guidance of a special singing-master. Given the pre-determined level of vocal expertise, the focus of the course would be on interpretative and performing skills. Piano studies would also be undertaken by experienced pianists, which would lead to the conducting of orchestral performances. It was hoped that sufficient instrumental musicians would be available during the final three months to form an orchestra or, failing this, that musicians on holidays from the court orchestra would be able to fill any gaps. During the second quarter, attention would be paid to string-quartet playing. How interesting that Wagner felt that the four “voices” of a string quartet had something to teach human singers about expressive relationships! Throughout the year there would be lectures focusing on cultural, historical, and aesthetic matters towards an appreciation of German performing styles.

In the second year, 1879, a similar course would be followed, but now the focus in the last term would be on Wagner’s own dramatic works, particularly his earlier operas. The third year, 1880, would culminate in complete stage performances of the earlier works—if possible *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*. *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger* would follow in the fifth year, 1881; *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in 1882, and the first performance of *Parsifal* in 1883. He recognized that not all those who enrolled for the first year would still be involved in the sixth, but he hoped that a sufficient number would continue from year to year to form a nucleus of experienced students who might be able to assist with teaching and serve as models for later intakes.

Particularly interesting was Wagner’s intention to train students in the performance of his works and employ them in the festival theatre, including for a second performance of the *Ring* in 1882 (six years after the first) and for the premiere of *Parsifal* planned for 1883. He was determined, it seems, to prepare up-and-coming singers, répétiteurs, and conductors in a music school environment rather than rely on the ad hoc engagement of outsiders in the traditional way. It was an audacious plan that crystallised once it was clear to him that another festival could not be mounted in 1877. Now he would create a cadre of especially prepared singers and instrumental musicians. After all, his motivation for the Bayreuth experiment from the outset had been to present ideal performances in ideal surroundings, using singers who truly understood his intentions. This was what would distinguish Bayreuth from other opera houses. While many of his singers for the first festival had been the best available, the reality was that they had come from busy careers in the wider world of opera, and were wedded to old habits which were not easily cast off. He was particularly annoyed by the attention-seeking Franz Betz, his Wotan, who had been peeved that he could not take curtain calls whenever he wished and had, as Wagner noted, hammed up his part in some places, especially at the beginning of *Die Walküre*. Wagner was inclined not to invite him back and, for his part, Betz declared that he would not come anyway.

To his great regret, Wagner was unable to proceed with his school and create the model productions he desired. The first Bayreuth Festival had left an enormous deficit, which was hardly surprising given that the composer had not only staged the huge four-part *Ring* for the first time but had also built an entire theatre in which to perform it. There was no way he could mount a new festival in 1877, so he set about giving concerts in the hope of raising funds. When these concerts generated only modest returns, other ideas were floated, including the sale of the entire enterprise to either the Imperial or Bavarian governments, or relocating the Festival to Munich. These

BRÜNNHILDE SPEAKS: AN INTERVIEW WITH EVELYN HERLITZIUS

JEFFERY S. McMILLAN



Evelyn Herlitzius as Brünnhilde in *Götterdämmerung*.
Photo: Michael Poehn/Wiener Staatsoper.

Anyone who has witnessed a live performance by soprano Evelyn Herlitzius or seen her on DVD [Richard Strauss' *Elektra* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Wagner's *Lohengrin* and Verdi's *Oberto* are all available] is likely to come away with at least one common impression of her: intensity! A fierce and committed stage presence, Herlitzius also wields her agile voice and silvery tone with apparent abandon.

For more than two decades Herlitzius has earned acclaim in many of opera's most demanding roles—*Elektra*, the Dyer's Wife, Brünnhilde, Kundry, Isolde, Katerina Ismailova, Turandot—on Europe's leading stages. Her portrayal of Brünnhilde, the heroine at the heart of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, has thrilled opera lovers at a long list of theaters that includes the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, Dresden's Semperoper, Deutsche Oper Berlin, and the Vienna State Opera. But until recently, a trip abroad was the only way to catch Herlitzius in person. Fortunately for American audiences this is beginning to change. Since 2009, Herlitzius has appeared twice in concert at New York's Carnegie Hall and in February she made her long-awaited American staged opera debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Kundry in Wagner's *Parsifal*.

I met with Herlitzius in New York on the day after one of her performances as Kundry. We began our conversation deep below the Metropolitan Opera House in the Company's Archives amid evocative *Ring*-related artifacts, including a statue of tenor Jean de Reszke as Siegfried, the Brünnhilde costume worn by Kirsten Flagstad in both New York and San Francisco during the 1930s, and, at Herlitzius' request, a stack of photos of her favorite, German soprano Frida Leider. Buoyant and quick to laugh, even after performing in the marathon-like *Parsifal* the night before, Evelyn Herlitzius brought thoughtful introspection and her accustomed intensity to our conversation.

Last night's *Parsifal* performance was sensational. After giving so much emotion and energy on stage, how are you doing today?

I'm tired, of course. I couldn't sleep until five in the morning last night because of the adrenaline flowing in my body. Right now I am a little beneath myself, but it comes back by 5 P.M. I usually need lots of coffee.

You have performed both *Erwartung* and *Wozzeck* at Carnegie Hall, but this is your first time performing in United States for a much longer period.

Yes, it's my first time being here for more than three days.

So what do you think of New York? Have you gotten the hang of the city?

It took me some time to become accustomed to its velocity and the noise. During the first two weeks I was here, I just went straight to the rehearsal at the opera house and back. It was just too much. But then I started to explore a little bit.

Where do you go when you explore?

First of all to Central Park just to get some rest. Also the museums. Just walking around the avenues and getting all of these impressions, watching the people, the windows, the restaurants, the way of behavior. It's all totally different from Europe.

How did you begin this career path to becoming an artist, a singing actress?

Originally I intended to become a dancer. From the age of 5 I was interested in dance and theater and began studying. At around 16 years old, I began singing lessons, but not to become a singer at all. I wasn't fond of opera, I must confess, but I thought it would be an advantage to be able to sing and to dance.

My singing lessons were two times per week and half an hour long. My teacher said half an hour was enough and to not practice at home, but to just come to the lesson and sing, then go home and do something else. After I quit dancing, my teacher said you've got the voice and the musicality, why don't you give this a try. I did and that's why I'm here.