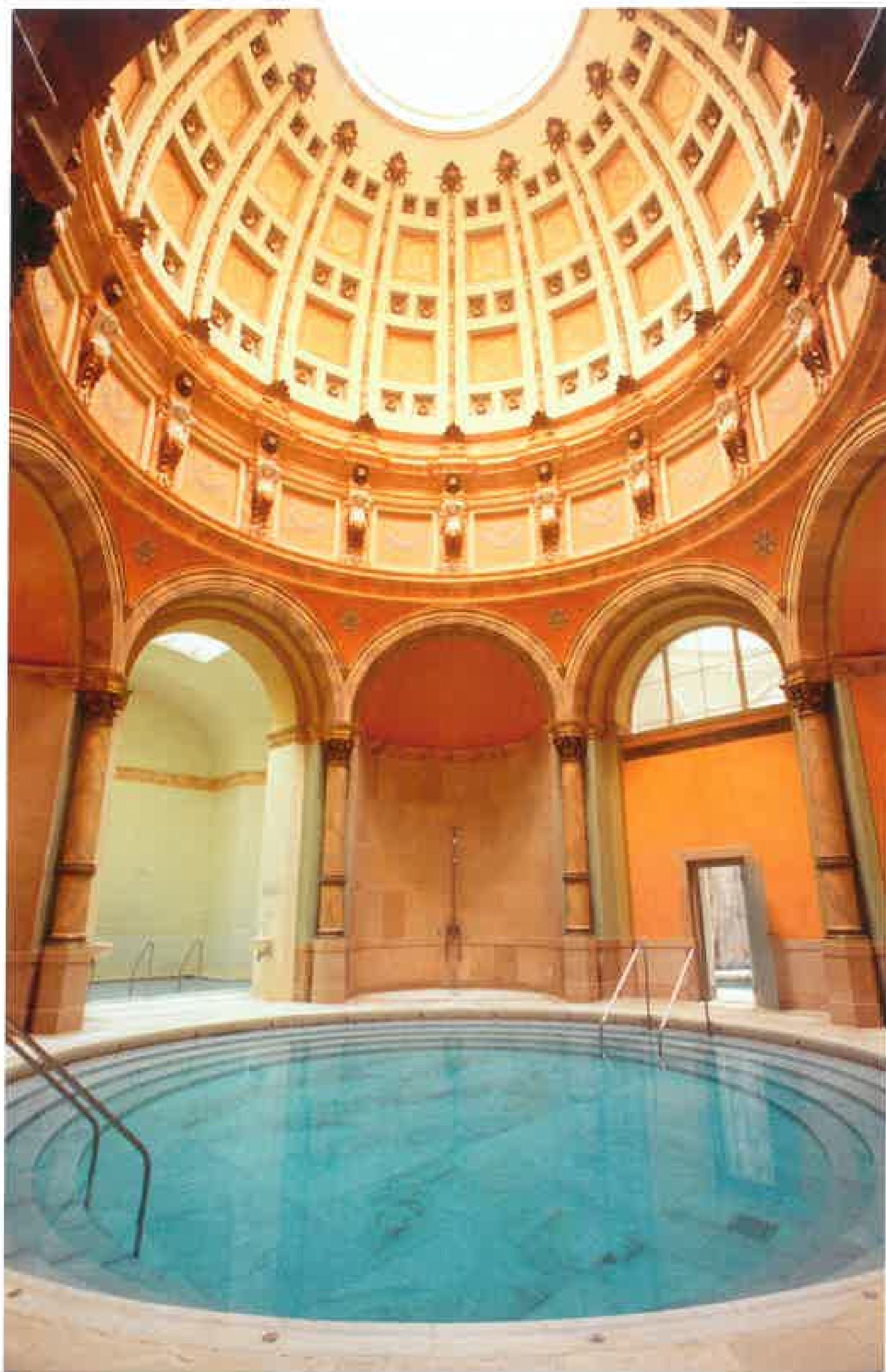
LEITMOTIVE

Journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California | Summer 2020



LEITMOTIVE

Journal of the Wagner Society of Northern California | Summer 2020

CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR . . . 3

OUR CONTRIBUTORS . . . 5

MUSIC IN THE WATERS: COMPOSERS, CONDUCTORS, AND PLAYERS IN THE GRAND SPAS OF CENTRAL EUROPE . . . 7

BY DAVID CLAY LARGE

SIX DAYS IN BAYREUTH: A STIPENDIATEN'S LOG. . . . 21

BY ARIA UMEZAWA

REVIEW . . . 35

Der Freischütz

BY KATE MCKINNEY

FROM THE WSNC ARCHIVES . . . INSIDE BACK

Eugenie Pappenheim (1842–1924)

Jeffery S. McMillan *Editor*
Robert S. Fisher *Editor Emeritus*
Gary Lang *Graphic Designer*
Teresa Concepcion *Copy Editor*

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*
Andrew Rombakis *Vice President*
Daniel Kane *Treasurer*
Gale Lederer *Secretary*
Jeff Bart
Eiko Kikawada
Gary Lang
Rebecca Liao
Kate McKinney
Jeffery S. McMillan
Diane Parker
Emma Popek

*In memorium

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 $70 US for Regular Membership, $55 for Senior Membership, and $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 2020 by the Wagner Society of Northern California

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to *Leitmotive*'s Summer 2020 issue, the pandemic edition. Who would have thought that since the last issue we would be navigating a global pandemic that has taken nearly 700,000 lives and infected millions worldwide. But here we are, living this disheartening news story day-in and day-out while hoping for a medical solution to restore a sense of safety. Meanwhile, the horrific killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers has precipitated global demonstrations for social justice and a reevaluation of what that pre-COVID "normal" really was and whom it served. Fear and destabilization are prevalent in our world right now, but so is the potential for a more equitable and just "normal" on the other side of this crisis.

The effect of COVID-19 on the arts has been predictably dire, bringing opera, theater, symphony, dance, and rock concerts to their collective knees; first to close, last to reopen. Safety guidelines prohibiting gathering have made it difficult for artists to perform alongside one another and for the public to connect with them. But, as we have seen, difficult does not mean impossible. Creative solutions continue to arise for how we might come together, perform, and experience art without fear of exposure.

One obvious shift has been an increased dependence on technology, especially video conferencing platforms like Zoom. The Metropolitan Opera's April 25 *At Home Gala* was among the first bold forays into Zooming opera to the world. The artists sang and played to the tiny aperture on their smartphone cameras rather than audiences they could see and feel. I'm sure many of them wondered if their songs were being received somewhere "out there." They were!

Did you catch San Francisco Opera's *Celebrating the Summer Season* virtual event on the weekend of July 10? Through conversations and performances, the 90-minute program provided a glimpse of the operas and artists who should have been on the War Memorial Opera House stage in June. Though we lost out with the cancellation of early Verdi, a Handelian farce, and a local premiere by the Bay Area's own Mason Bates, it was inspiring to hear tenor Russell Thomas and mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke perform along with artists who were to make their local debuts like Michelle Bradley, Louise Alder, and Jakub Józef Orliński.

And then there is streaming. In lieu of live performances, opera companies and symphony orchestras have been dipping into their recorded performance archives and sharing the treasures therein. I have been consuming quite a lot of streams (usually consulting musicalamerica.com's weekly guide to online offerings) and reliving memories from the recent past or tuning in to performances I never thought I would see. First, there was the incredibly moving 2015 *Il Trovatore* from the Met, capturing one of Dmitri Hvorostovsky's final performances. Tears were streaking down my face

as I watched the Siberian baritone, temporarily free from the brain cancer that would take him two years later, singing with overwhelming passion and relishing every second like he knew it could be his last time on that stage. Then there was a confounding, yet completely engrossing *Khovanshchina* from the Vienna Staatsoper where I feel like I finally *got* Mussorgsky's ambitious and incredibly talky, unfinished masterpiece of Russian art. Since May, our own San Francisco Opera has streamed some great ones, too. Janáček's *The Makropulos Case* with Karita Mattila and the incomparable Czech maestro Jiří Bělohlávek from 2010 was as good as it gets. And, of course, you don't have to look too hard to find some great Wagner streams out there, too. For your humble editor, revisiting Johan Botha's tireless Tannhäuser from the Met was as exciting on the little screen as sitting in the front row five years ago.

Speaking of online Wagner, I hope you have attended the Wagner Society of Northern California's recent webinars. Though we haven't been able to meet in person at the Jewish Community Center in San Francisco, we have had some enlightening get-togethers online with favorite presenters like Scott Fogelsong, Desirée Mays, and William Berger. And there are many more to come! The webinars have been a great success thanks in no small part to the Norns behind the Zooms: WSNC board president Terri Stuart, board members Kate McKinney and Emma Popek, along with former board member Bunny Laden. We are all doing what we can to keep the Society united and feeling connected.

This issue of *Leitmotive* leads off with an article by another WSNC favorite presenter and journal contributor, David Clay Large. In "Music in the Waters: Composers, Conductors, and Players in the Grand Spas of Central Europe," Dr. Large explores how nineteenth-century artists networked and found inspiration while taking the cure in Baden-Baden and other spa towns.

In recent years, the WSNC has been a leader among American Wagner Societies in introducing emerging artists to potentially life-changing encounters with Wagner's art through the Stipendiatenstiftung program. In the Summer 2018 issue, we read about pianist/conductor Samuel Emanuel's sponsored visit to Bayreuth. Now, Aria Umezawa presents her Stipendiaten log detailing six days at the 2019 Bayreuth Festival. Wagner's place in the pre- and post-Festival thinking of this young and innovative opera director may surprise you!

Before the pandemic hit, the biggest story in opera seemed to be the arrival of Norwegian soprano Lise Davidsen. It is hard to imagine any artist living up to the hype (or the comparisons to her countrywoman Kirsten Flagstad), but through recordings and her November 2019 debut in *The Queen of Spades* at the Met a fuller picture has come into focus. And it is pretty exciting! Davidsen's first complete opera recording, von Weber's *Der Freischütz*, is reviewed by Kate McKinney.

And finally, *Leitmotive* has a new regular feature that we are calling "From the WSNC Archives" which will focus on a moment or a personality from the history of Wagner in California. We begin with a short biography of soprano Eugenie Pappenheim, America's first-ever Brünnhilde, whose legacy—both artistically and materially—continues to this day.

So, hold on to your hats and keep your face coverings handy. *Leitmotive* is back!

—JSM

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID CLAY LARGE is a senior fellow at the Institute of European Studies, University of California, Berkeley, and professor of history at the Fromm Institute, University of San Francisco. He has also taught at Smith College, Yale University, and Montana State University. Among his many books are *Berlin*, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936*, *Munich 1972: Tragedy, Terror, and Triumph at the Olympic Games*, and *The Grand Spas of Central Europe: A History of Intrigue, Politics, Art, and Healing*. Large divides his time between San Francisco and Bozeman, Montana.

KATE MCKINNEY is PR & Communications Manager for San Francisco Ballet and a member of the board of directors for the Wagner Society of Northern California. She studied music performance at the University of South Carolina, where she received a grant to research and direct the Southeastern premiere of Aaron Copland's little-known children's opera, *The Second Hurricane*.

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 Manager Communications at San Francisco Opera.

ARIA UMEZAWA is an artist-innovator who is focused on changing the culture of opera and opera creation. She recently completed an Adler Fellowship with San Francisco Opera—the first stage director to be awarded the fellowship in fifteen years. She was the first Canadian stage director to participate in the Merola Opera Program in 2016, where she directed the Grand Finale to critical acclaim. She is the Co-Founder of Amplified Opera, an organization that places equity-seeking artists at the center of public discourse.

On the cover: Bathing Temple, Friedrichsbad, Baden-Baden, Germany. Photo: iStock

MUSIC IN THE WATERS: COMPOSERS, CONDUCTORS, AND PLAYERS IN THE GRAND SPAS OF CENTRAL EUROPE

David Clay Large

"Thank God for the music; without it I would have died of boredom." So said a British patient after undergoing a prolonged cure at Baden-Baden in 1859. Similar sentiments could have been uttered a few decades earlier, or for that matter in the half-century that followed. Indeed, musical entertainment became a veritable staple at the grand Kurorte (spa towns) of Central Europe, from Baden-Baden to Karlsbad, in the years between the post-Napoleonic Restoration in the 1820s and the First World War. Although the major health resorts of France, Italy, and especially England also provided melodious entertainment, it was at the thermal pools and fountains of music-mad Germany and Habsburg Austria that *Euterpe*, the Greek goddess of lyric song, played most passionately and persistently.

Moreover, in these gilded precincts the demand for regular musical entertainment increased dramatically in the nineteenth century due to a new emphasis on *drinking* medicinal waters along with simply bathing in them. Patients making the rounds of the numerous pools and fountains needed to be distracted, and suitably upbeat music provided ideal accompaniment to that ritual.

Another reason for music's greater prominence on the German and Austrian spa scene in this period had to do with the introduction of large-scale casino gambling. Gambling entrepreneurs such as Baden-Baden's Jacques and Edouard Bénazet, much like the impresarios of twentieth-century Las Vegas, understood that high-level entertainment was very useful in terms of attracting customers, particularly when the performers were cultural celebrities of the day. Like Elvis Presleys and Frank Sinatras of an earlier age, the leading artists of the nineteenth century were happy to settle in for extended stays at the spas when compensated handsomely to do so.

It's important to stress, however, that the nineteenth-century Kurorte were venues not only of musical performance but also hothouses of original composition. The sights and sounds of the beautiful natural ambiance surrounding the spas found their way into musical compositions, while the cure process itself cried out for musical interpretation of pain, healing, and wellness.

Inspirational ambiance aside, the musicians who flocked to the Kurorte on a regular basis did so for the same reasons that ordinary folk habitually took the waters: to improve their health, satisfy their libidinal needs, or gain relief from the daily grind at home. Yet when it *did* come time to compose or perform, a major advantage of

the spas was relative freedom from the constraints and pressures prevailing in urban centers. One could work in peace and try out new compositions without fear of instant condemnation by hostile critics and subscription audiences insistent on the old chestnuts. It is thus not surprising that many new musical works owed their origins to the grand spas.

Friedrichsbad, Baden Baden, present day. Photo: iStock

With these general comments in mind, we can get a more precise sense of what the major Kurorte meant to the musicians who made regular use of them by following six major artists on their peregrinations through the variegated water-cure landscape of their day.

If any musician ever needed spa treatments, it was Ludwig van Beethoven. He suffered from a wide variety of nasty ailments, including migraines, colitis, hepatitis, chronic diarrhea, flatulence, stomach pains, piles, and—most horrifying for a musician—encroaching deafness. Typically, he took his cures at small spas close to his home in Vienna, but in 1811 he went to Teplitz, in Bohemia, whose waters he was told might restore his hearing or at least stave off further deterioration. Teplitz was also close to Karlsbad, where art collector and patron Antonie Brentano, his love interest at the time, was taking the cure.

Beethoven found no love in Bohemia, but he *did* find occasion to get a lot of work done. In that summer of 1811, between regular soakings in the thermal springs and trips to the drinking fountains, he managed to compose the incidental music for two plays (August von Kotzebue's *King Stephen* and *The Ruins of Athens*) as well as to start sketching his Seventh and Eighth Symphonies.

Alas, however, Beethoven experienced no improvement in his health problems, including his deafness. Writing off Teplitz as an expensive and wasted effort, the musician quickly returned to his earlier routine of summering in the bucolic wine- and water-cure villages surrounding the Austrian capital. His favorite among these

places was Baden (now called Baden-bei-Wien), which lay just south of Vienna in a lovely river valley flanked by vineyard-covered hills.

Like so many Central European spas, large and small, Austria's Baden had a Roman imperial past, though what gave it cachet in the early nineteenth century was its status as a summer residence for several members of the Habsburg family, most notably Emperor Franz Josef I. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Baden would become a favorite cure resort for wealthy Viennese Jews, some of whom built luxurious villas in the town. Still later, following World War II, Baden would serve as the headquarters of Soviet occupation forces in Austria. From the Romans to the Russians, the lure of Baden lay principally in its thermal *Quellen,* notable for their very high sulfur content.

When Beethoven began summering regularly in Baden in the early 1820s, the town had just undergone extensive reconstruction in the Biedermeier style following a devastating fire. Biedermeier suggests homey comfort, but there was nothing remotely comfortable about the personality of Ludwig van Beethoven, either in Baden or anywhere else. Far from socializing or relaxing during his spa visits, Beethoven used these occasions for serious, sustained work—along with increasingly agonized efforts at healing. Associating the spring and summer months—his spa time—with creative growth, the musician typically sketched out his compositions during this period, allotting the "leafless" fall and winter months back in Vienna to the more mundane task of turning these sketches into finished compositions. Normally, this sketching work involved lots of trial and error passages at the piano, whose keyboard the musician pounded ever more fiercely the deafer he became. Complaints from neighbors about excessive "noise" obliged the composer to shift his quarters constantly—some fifteen times in Baden alone.

One of these stops was the *Kupferschmiedhaus* (Coppersmith House), where Beethoven lodged for two summers in 1822 and 1823. It was in this spartan dwelling that the composer, struck suddenly by a musical inspiration but lacking any paper on which to write it down, resorted to the next best surface to hand: a wooden shutter. A cure-guest quartered across the street witnessed this droll incident and, once Beethoven had moved on, opportunistically purchased the note-covered shutter from the musician's landlord. A year later, when Beethoven returned to Baden in order to complete the sketches for his Ninth Symphony, he was able to regain his quarters at the *Kupferschmiedhaus* only after reimbursing the landlord for "damages" done to the window shade.

Beethoven's repeated stays in bucolic Baden were bedeviled not only by whining neighbors and greedy landlords: The local waters and spa doctors were doing little to alleviate his infirmities, including his hearing loss, which became near total in the last years of his life. Complaining that his increasing deafness was being "made worse by the doctors" and that his personal physician back in Vienna had stupidly advised him to avoid wine but *failed* to warn him off the local asparagus, which aggravated his diarrhea, he seriously contemplated suicide. Unable or unwilling to put a quick end to his misery, he wandered the area's dusty roads alone, disheveled and distraught, and issuing curses and occasional loud screams that he himself could not hear. But alarmed passersby *could* hear these imprecations, and in 1823, during one of his lonely treks from Baden to Wiener Neustadt, the long-suffering musician was denounced to the police as a *Lump* (bum) and incarcerated for vagrancy. This, it should be noted,

was Beethoven's *second* run-in with local authorities. Two years earlier he had been lunching at a local eatery, *Zum Schwarzen Adler*, when he learned that an inexpensive room might be available just across the street in the Rathausgasse; not wanting to miss out on this opportunity, he rushed off without paying his bill, leading to his arrest for what the police called *Zechprellerei* (bilking). He was eventually released after proving his identity and settling the bill.

Beethoven, it seems, could not catch a break in Baden, but he kept coming back year after year almost to his death in 1827. Undoubtedly, he returned not so much for the waters but because he loved to wander through the local hills and valleys. On the eve of one of his sojourns to Baden, he wrote: "How delighted I shall be to ramble for a while through bushes, woods, under trees, through grass and around rocks. No one can love the countryside as much as I do. For surely woods, trees and rocks produce the musical echo which man desires to hear?"

Ludwig van Beethoven, 1823. Engraving by Lazarus Gottlieb Sichling, after the portrait by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller

Beethoven never did find a "cure" for his afflictions (who, in the end, ever does?), but he did find inspiration in that beautiful environment for his musical genius. Although it is difficult to assess with precision the impact of his stays in Baden on his art, musicologists often point to the third movement of his String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, as the strongest evidence of a palpable connection between his curing and his composing. Writes one expert: "This piece portrays the experience of healing and recovery in a way that is not found in any other works by Beethoven or his predecessors, namely through the use of the Lydian mode and the creations of a chorale melody that serves as a basic prayer and is then elaborated in variations." Yet if this work betrays the most obvious connection between place and product, many of his other compositions surely draw as well on his experiences at the spas, especially Baden, where he famously kept notepaper at hand for sudden inspiration during those long walks in the hills.

Let us now jump forward two decades to a musician very different in style and personality from Beethoven, but one for whom spas likewise figured very prominently in his life. Virtuoso pianist and composer Franz Liszt was a hugely successful performer all over Europe—indeed, the most popular performer of his day. Fully aware of his mesmerizing presence, Liszt began each performance in the same way: He would stride forcefully across the stage, his long mane flowing behind him; upon reaching the piano he would pull off his grey kid gloves and drop them dramatically to the floor, then pause for several seconds as if in prayer while gazing raptly at the keyboard. The pianist had learned such arts of extravagant self-representation from none other

than the pioneering violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini, who also performed regularly at the grand spas. Not surprisingly, Liszt's energetic and frenetic concertizing took a toll on his health. Frequently he fell victim to various stomach disorders, constipation, insomnia, and depression. In other words, like Beethoven, this was a man who *needed* spas.

Franz Liszt, 1858. Photo: Franz Hanfstaengl

Fortunately, one soon came to hand. Due to Liszt's great popularity, the French-born gambling impresario Jacques Bénazet, who controlled gaming operations in Baden-Baden, invited the musician to that grand spa town to perform at his magnificent casino. As Bénazet was well aware, his latest acquisition was not only supremely talented but dashingly handsome and charismatic—qualities that made him one of the greatest heartthrobs in the history of music. At the height of "Lisztomania" in the mid-nineteenth century, Franz's female fans wore bracelets made from piano strings he had broken; they carried little vials containing the dregs of his wine; they preserved his cigar butts as sacred relics; and when he left a glove onstage, they tore it to pieces and passed around the fragments.

Like the proto-rock star he was, Liszt took full advantage of his draw with the ladies, becoming a serial philanderer. His more notable paramours included Lola Montez, the self-styled "Spanish dancer" who would go on to conquer the heart of Bavaria's King Ludwig I; French writer George Sand, who loved to sit under his piano as he played; Italian heiress and political activist Cristina Belgioioso, who famously kept a mummified body of one of her lovers in a cupboard; Countess Marie d'Agoult, who bore him three children out of wedlock (one of whom, Cosima, would later become the second wife of Richard Wagner).

When, in 1840, Jacques Bénazet extended his invitation to Liszt to include Baden-Baden in his European tour, the musician was happy to oblige. After all, the worldly grand spa scene was perfect terrain for this "Jupiter of the Keys." Shortly before his arrival the local newspaper, *Das Badeblatt*, could self-satisfyingly crow: "We've learned with great satisfaction that yet another succulent artistic pleasure awaits us, as it so often has in recent years due to an elite European public that rejects mediocrity while offering valuable recognition to true talents." On this occasion, Liszt gave two concerts in Bénazet's opulent casino—performing works by Rossini, Donizetti,

and Schubert as well as some of his own early compositions. These concerts were a huge success, not least with the ladies, whose hearts, rhapsodized the *Badeblatt*, were "coaxed right out of their bodies" by the maestro's playing.

Liszt had become so popular at the spa that he undoubtedly could have returned every season had he so chosen. But the demands of touring had begun to wear on him, and increasingly he preferred to focus on composing rather than performing. His relationship with Baden-Baden reflected this change. Although in subsequent years he occasionally dropped in at the spa to see friends and to get a much-needed physical tune-up, he more typically allowed himself to be represented there through his compositions, which the local orchestra dutifully performed every season.

In May 1880, however, the composer returned to Baden-Baden for an extended stay in connection with an annual musical event sponsored by the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein. Liszt himself was the initiator of this series, and it was he who had selected Baden-Baden as the site for the association's seventeenth annual festival. The high point of the festival's first day was a performance of Liszt's own *Christus* oratorio, which Kaiser Wilhelm's pious wife Augusta had personally requested. On the second day of the festival Liszt stepped aside in favor of works by the late Hector Berlioz, who, as we will see, became even more of a Baden-Baden personality than Liszt himself. According to the *Badeblatt*, demand for tickets to these concerts was so great that hundreds of people had to be turned away. Why all the excitement? No doubt people wanted to pay their respects to the recently departed Berlioz and the aged Liszt, who would appear only one more time at the spa before dying in 1886. But another draw was clearly the festival's final selection: The *Prelude* and *Liebestod* to *Tristan und Isolde* by Richard Wagner.

Richard Wagner's compositions were fast becoming a mainstay at the Central European spas and indeed would end up being performed more often in these locales than those of any other composer in the period between the mid-nineteenth century and World War II. Yet this musician himself was deeply ambivalent when it came to assessing the value of the spa scene as useful quarters for an artist like himself. In 1862, before his prolonged exile from Germany, he considered settling down in Wiesbaden, which he had visited a few times with his first wife, Minna, a passionate gambler. Wagner valued Wiesbaden's local orchestra and theater, where his pioneering music-drama *Tannhäuser* had been performed ten years earlier. Yet "the Master" was absolutely no fan of the elaborate cure rituals that patients at the spas were expected, indeed commanded by their doctors, to endure on a daily basis. He found these rituals boring and tortuous. Nor, unlike his wife, was he attracted to the grand spas' primary diversion: gambling. He had no need of the heady risk of roulette when he was taking plenty of chances as it was with his revolutionary compositions and his bold quest to establish a new theater for the production of his music-dramas. Nonetheless, he ended up spending a goodly amount of time at these places—and even doing some important work while taking, or avoiding, the waters. We can safely say that Central Europe's grand Kurorte figured notably in Wagner's artistic career. Moreover, one of these gilded locales, Baden-Baden, even sought to become the site of the Master's ambitious new theater.

Wagner's very first excursion to a major Kurort took him to Bohemia's premier health resort, Karlsbad, which he visited in 1835 not for its famed waters but to witness

a performance by the local opera company of François-Adrien Boieldieu's *La Dame Blanche*, which he found wretched. Wagner's first actual *cure* visit was to nearby Teplitz, which had been highly recommended by his doctor. Even more than most geniuses, Wagner sacrificed his health for his art, working himself to exhaustion day after day. At Teplitz he hoped to receive treatment for the two ailments that typically afflicted people who spent too much time at their desks and failed to watch their diets: hemorrhoids and malfunctioning bowels. He repaired to Teplitz in 1842 with Minna, who hoped to improve her own health via that Kurort's "fine air and baths." Yet health concerns notwithstanding, Wagner did not do too much curing at Teplitz; he was too busy working on the score of *Tannhäuser*, which at that point he still called *Der Venusberg*. He returned to Teplitz the following summer to seriously take the waters but discovered that he simply did not have the constitution of a successful spa patient; he was just too restless and too bent on working rather than on following the prescribed cure rituals. As he related in his memoir, *Mein Leben*: "I seized the opportunity of drinking the mineral waters, which I hoped might have a beneficial effect on the gastric troubles from which I had suffered ever since my vicissitudes in Paris. Unfortunately, the attempted cure had the opposite effect, and when I complained of the painful irritation produced, I learned that my constitution was not adapted for water cures. In fact, on my morning promenade, and while drinking my water I had been observed to race through the shady alleys of the adjacent Thurn Gardens, and it was pointed out to me that such a cure could only be properly wrought by a leisurely calm and easy sauntering. It was also remarked that I usually carried about a fairly stout volume, and that, armed with this and my bottle of mineral water, I used to take rest in lonely places."

Richard Wagner, 1853. Portrait by Aquarell von Clementine Stockar-Escher

Undaunted by his less-than-satisfactory experience at Teplitz, Wagner (again with Minna) ventured to Marienbad, Bohemia's newest grand spa, in 1845. The "stout volume" he had carried around in Teplitz was the Brother Grimms' *German Mythology*. In Marienbad he was careful to take along books he thought might be compatible with "the easy-going mode of life which is a necessary part of this somewhat trying treatment." Alas, the books in question, Wolfram von Eschenbach's collected poetry and the anonymous epic poem *Lohengrin*, excited him to such a degree that he remarked, "I had the greatest difficulty in overcoming my desire to give up the rest I had been prescribed while partaking of the water of Marienbad." We owe to Wagner's insub-

ordination as a spa patient the first sketches of *Die Meistersinger* and the outline of *Lohengrin*. Again, to quote his memoir: "Suddenly [while sitting in the mineral-bath] the whole of my *Meistersinger* comedy took shape so vividly before me that inasmuch as it was a particularly cheerful subject, and not on the least likely to overexcite my nerves, I felt I must write it out in spite of the doctor's orders. I therefore proceeded to do so this and hoped it might free me from the thrall of the idea of *Lohengrin*, and this longing so overcame me that I could not wait through the prescribed hour of the bath, but when a few minutes elapsed, jumped out and barely giving myself time to dress, ran home to write out what I had in mind. I repeated this for several days until the complete sketch of *Lohengrin* was on paper."

Four years later, Wagner added revolutionary political engagement against the king of Saxony to his portfolio of radical musical adventurism. The revolution failed, and as a consequence of his activism the composer was cast into exile in Switzerland in 1849. Exile proved very painful for Wagner. For one thing, his health, already bad, became even worse. Suffering terribly from an infectious skin disease as well as constipation, he sought a cure for these maladies at Albisbrunn, a small hydropathic establishment near Zurich. The Swiss doctor put him through a brutally severe regimen that Wagner described as "water torture." He soon fled the place, as itchy and stopped-up as when he arrived.

More important, exile was hell for Wagner because he saw himself as a quintessentially *German* artist and desperately wanted to make his mark on his native land. But he could only return to German soil if a residence-ban imposed by King Johann of Saxony and recognized by all the other German rulers were lifted. As fate would have it, Wagner's route back to Germany passed through, of all places, Baden-Baden, a Kurort about which the composer knew next to nothing.

In 1860, Baden-Baden hosted a major conference among European potentates, a service it and other grand spas provided extensively over the course of the nineteenth century. For Wagner, this meeting proved crucial because, through influential female backers he met there, he was able to get his ban from German soil partially lifted. He was still banned from Saxony but could return to any other German state for artistic purposes provided the ruler of that state would allow it. This partial concession from King Johann ultimately paved the way for Wagner's settlement in Bavaria in 1864 at the invitation of King Ludwig II. As we know, it was largely through Ludwig's patronage that Wagner was eventually able to build his long-desired theater in the small Franconian town of Bayreuth. In other words, for Wagner the road to Bayreuth went through Baden-Baden.

Yet Wagner never warmed to what he dismissively called "the much-praised paradise" of Baden-Baden, despite the fact that his works were performed there on a regular basis and he had an influential local supporter in the person of music critic Richard Pohl. Via Pohl and an enthusiastic town council, Baden-Baden offered to build Wagner his dream-theater on the banks of the River Oos. This development would, they were convinced, add immeasurably to the town's luster. Alas, Wagner had already decided on Bayreuth when Baden-Baden's offer came through in 1871. In his letter turning down the Baden offer, Wagner stated that the grand spa town would have been his "first choice" had not the patronage of King Ludwig obliged him to situate his envisaged Festspielhaus within the confines of Bavaria.

Undoubtedly Wagner was just being polite on this occasion. Apart from his own less-than-enthusiastic impressions of Baden-Baden, that town's status as an international watering hole, with all kinds of frivolous diversions, made it distinctly unsuitable for his purposes. Not only did Wagner want a place where he could stand out as the chief attraction; he also wanted a venue compatible with his personal concept of musical drama as a highly serious, quasi-religious enterprise. Moreover, he had always envisaged his theater as a *German* national project, "an artistic sister to German unification" or a "Kunst-Washington, D.C." Bayreuth seemed plausible for these aspirations; Baden-Baden certainly did not.

Given the patronage politics of his day, Wagner's choice of Bayreuth over Baden-Baden is understandable, but he soon came to regret his move to this out-of-the-way little town, which in his lifetime proved a relatively weak magnet for his works. Of course, over the years Bayreuth *did* manage to hang on—but always with the assistance of generous financial backers, including not only the much-abused King Ludwig II but also that zealous Wagner fan Adolf Hitler, during whose rule Bayreuth finally did become a true national project.

German spa life may not have agreed much with Richard Wagner, but for Hector Berlioz, often called the "French Wagner" because of his pioneering work in program music, German Kurorte, especially Baden-Baden, proved to be perfect soil for his artistic flowering. As he himself attested, Germany in general was considerably more receptive to his musical ideas than anywhere else, including the composer's native France. "There are rascals in Germany," he once wrote, "but one must confess that there is in that country much more cordiality and a deeper feeling for art than in the rest of Europe. I have been treated there with understanding, respect, and affection, which touches me to the bottom of my heart. Moreover, it is only owing to this dear country that I keep alive." Thus, it is not surprising that Berlioz felt more at home in Baden-Baden, Wiesbaden, or Weimar than in Paris.

Hector Berlioz became a veritable fixture in the cultural life of Baden-Baden during the decade of 1853 to 1863 due largely to the efforts of young Edouard Bénazet, who had taken over the spa's casino following his father's death in 1848. Edouard's tenure as casino-king was destined to be rockier than his father's, but he was just as determined as his predecessor to merge gambling gold with artistic treasure. Having studied at the Paris Conservatory, he was especially interested in music and thoroughly knew his way around the innovative work of Hector Berlioz, which is more than one could say for most French music critics of the day. Realizing that Berlioz needed a sympathetic audience and a generous benefactor, Bénazet invited the maestro to come to Baden-Baden and to perform a concert of his own choosing in August 1853.

Leaping at the opportunity, Berlioz decided on an ambitious program consisting of the first two parts of his *La Damnation de Faust*, fragments of his dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette* and the *Carnaval Romain* overture. A program like this could not be executed in a small space with a few players. Luckily, Bénazet was not a small-minded impresario: He converted most of his casino into a concert hall and augmented the local orchestra by importing dozens of musicians from Karlsruhe, whom he paid at his own expense.

An audience of six hundred thoroughly enjoyed the performance, which was such a success that Bénazet offered Berlioz the opportunity to take over direction of Baden-

Baden's annual music festival starting the following year. Berlioz was only too happy to oblige. As he wrote later in his memoirs: "M. Bénazet, manager of the casino at Baden, has several times invited me to organize the annual music festival there, and has let me have everything I could want for the performance of my own works. His munificence in this respect has far surpassed anything ever done for me by those European sovereigns to whom I have most reason to be grateful. [Bénazet said to me] 'I give you carte blanche; get the artists you need from wherever you please and offer them whatever terms you think will satisfy them. I agree to everything in advance.'"

For Berlioz, then, Edouard Bénazet's Baden-Baden was an artist's dream come true, and he kept coming back for repeat performances every year as long as he could. Crucially, Baden-Baden offered him the chance to expose works that were as yet too daring even for Paris. Such was the case, for example, with the first fragments of his opera *Les Troyens* and his symphony *Harold en Italie.*

Hector Berlioz, date unknown.

In 1862, again at Bénazet's behest, Berlioz was invited to open a grand new theater at Baden-Baden commissioned by the impresario. Erected near the casino, the two-story theater, designed for opera, symphonic music, ballet, and drama, was built in the Florentine Renaissance style, replete with a sculptured pediment featuring the muses of poetry, music, dance, and painting. As was only fitting, Berlioz elected to inaugurate this impressive structure with a new offering of his own: the premiere performance of his third (and last) opera: *Béatrice et Bénédict.*

Berlioz's time in Baden-Baden was certainly one of the happier chapters of his life, and serves as a small corrective to those accounts which accentuate only the despondency of his last decade. But this does not mean that the composer's days at the spa town were filled with nothing but cheer. Dedicated as they were to health and rejuvenation, the spas tended to make people, especially elderly people, hyperconscious of their infirmities, incapacities, and mortality.

Such was the case with Berlioz, who tried during his spa visits to fend off the ugly realities of aging by perusing ever-younger women—which, alas, had the effect of making him feel all the older. At age sixty, during his work on *Béatrice et Bénédict,* Berlioz fell madly in love with a young girl named Amelie. Although Amelie claimed to love him in return, the composer had trouble believing that such a beautiful young thing could fall for a fading old codger like himself. "I am sixty!" he wailed to a friend at the spa. "Look at me. Look at my sunken cheeks and gray hair, look at these wrinkles. I am sixty. She cannot love me!"

Berlioz would have undoubtedly suffered such moments of insecurity anywhere, but arguably they were all the more intense in a place where the reigning ethos was

rejuvenation through restorative waters and healthful living, and the scent of sex combined with that of sulfurous hot springs.

In 1865 Berlioz had to turn down an invitation from Bénazet to direct that year's festival: He was simply too sick to travel. *Béatrice et Bénédict* turned out to be his swan song, at least for Baden-Baden. He died in 1869, never having made it back to the place where he had enjoyed his happiest—and highly productive—days.

Shortly after Hector Berlioz finished his pleasurable and fruitful decade of sojourning in Baden-Baden, Johannes Brahms settled into the spa town for an on-again, off-again, ten-year stay of his own. For Brahms, the chief attraction there was his friend (and old flame) Clara Schumann, for whom he continued to carry a torch. Following her husband Robert's death in 1856, Clara had moved with her seven children into a small cottage in bucolic Lichtental, then a smallish suburb of Baden-Baden. Having a passel of kids underfoot did not prevent Clara from establishing a notable artistic salon that included the likes of opera-singer Pauline Viardot-Garcia, Russian writer Ivan Turgenev, waltz-king Johann Strauss II, pianist-composer Anton Rubinstein, French illustrator Gustave Doré, and German painter Anselm Feuerbach. Clara's salons involved music-making along with the usual elevated talk, and it was not long before newly-arrived Brahms was part of the circle, socializing and performing at the piano.

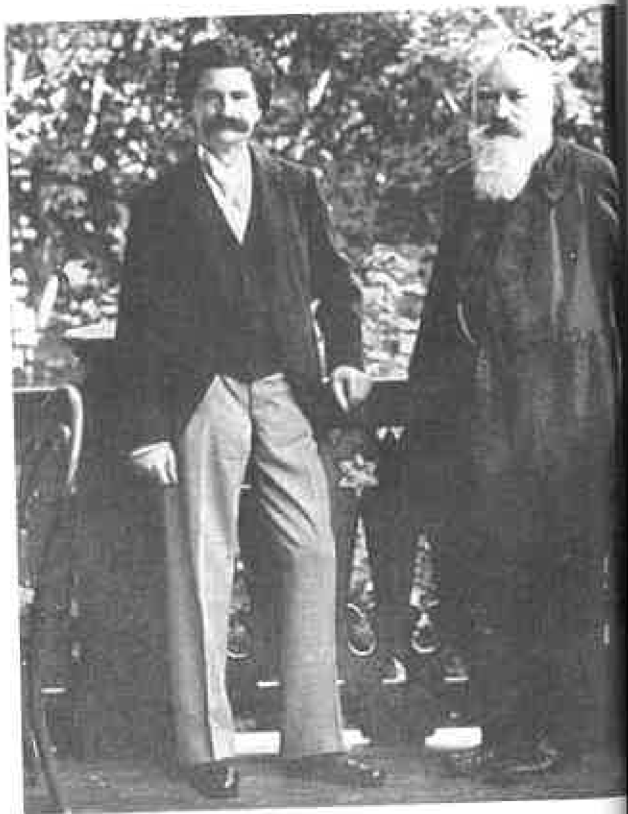
But Brahms did not limit his time in Baden-Baden to socializing and informal sit-ins at the keyboard. Like Beethoven, he preferred to sketch out his compositions during spring and summer months at bucolic locations. Having rented a small cottage near Clara Schumann's residence, Brahms threw himself into serious compositional activity. During the summer of 1869, he worked on preliminary sketches of his String Quartet Op. 52 No. 2, and finished the *Liebeslieder* waltzes for vocal quartet and piano duet. He also plunged into a new amorous passion, this one for Clara's daughter Julie, who, alas, showed no similar interest in him. One of Brahms's biographers hypothesizes that the composer's Baden-bred waltz songs, which represented "a refined apotheosis of domestic music-making," might well have been the "outward expression of his current daydreams for the beautiful Julie, whom he was seeing every day at her mother's house." This critic suggests further that the highly poetic Black Forest landscape around Baden-Baden was instrumental in pushing Brahms in a more "romantic" direction in his work, reflected above all in his Trio in E-flat major for piano, violin, and horn, Op. 40. This argument seems quite plausible inasmuch as Brahms was in the habit of composing musical passages in his head during daily walks from his summer home in Lichtental to Baden-Baden's Old Castle.

If Brahms's regular summer interludes at the Black Forest spa town were highly productive and full of stimulating social contacts, they were unfortunately not as "happy" as those of Hector Berlioz. Throughout his life Brahms was subject to extended bouts of severe melancholy. In part, these dark periods derived from anguish over his art—or rather, the reception of his art, particularly by the modernist musicians and critics of the New German School around Richard Wagner. Undoubtedly though, Brahms's melancholia stemmed also from another factor: his deeply unsatisfactory love life. His serious amorous passions were apparently never requited, and as far as we know he slept only with prostitutes. The most recent target of his needy love, Julie Schumann, showed him plenty of kindness but steadfastly kept him out of her bed. Instead of

Brahms she fell in love with an Italian count, Victor Radicati di Marmorito, whom she proceeded to marry in Baden-Baden. Devastated, Brahms wrote a piece of music for the occasion that he chose to see as his own fantasy-coupling with Julie. As Clara Schumann confided in her diary after the wedding: "Johannes brought me a wonderful piece, the words from Goethe's *Harzreise*, for alto, male chorus, and orchestra. He called it his Bridal Song. The piece to me seems to be neither more nor less than the expression of his own heart's anguish. If only he would once speak so tenderly."

Perhaps Clara was right: if only Brahms could have talked like he composed (he was famously acerbic), he might have had more luck with the ladies. On the other hand, he might not have enriched the world so magnificently with the fruits of his anguish. Indeed, we may be selfishly gratified that Baden-Baden provided no "cure" for Brahms's lonely heart. Like so many lovesick sojourners at the grand spas, Brahms discovered that the romantic ambiance aggravated rather than abated his pain.

Whatever the effect of spa-life on Brahms's emotional state, he did not confine his Kurort experience to bucolic Baden-Baden. In the early 1880s and again in 1896, his spa refuge of choice became Bad Ischl, a lovely Kurort in the Austrian Alps that had become known as "Europe's *musikalischer Umschlagplatz*" (musical hub) due to the presence of numerous musicians such as Johann Strauss II and operetta king Franz Lehár. Ischl was also the summer residence of Austrian Kaiser Franz Josef, who loved the place for its beauty, tranquility, and copious game, which he decimated on frequent hunting expeditions. At Ischl, Brahms did not hunt or fornicate, but he did compose. In fact, it was in this inspirational setting that he composed the last dozen or so of his major works.



Johann Strauss II and Johannes Brahms at Bad Ischl, 1894.

In the summer of 1896, as Brahms was composing his final piece of music, the *11 Choral Preludes* for the organ, he noticed that he was losing weight and feeling distinctly out of sorts. The portly musician, who had been in such good health through most of his life that he rarely consulted spa physicians at his various Kurort residences, agreed to see a physician at Ischl as long as the doctor did not tell him anything "unpleasant." Obligingly, the spa physician diagnosed a mild case of jaundice, although he rightly suspected liver cancer. Because Karlsbad, more than Ischl, was the place to go for jaundice, the Ischl doctor proposed that Brahms repair to Karlsbad for its vaunted water cure. Brahms duly went there in the fall of 1896. Although he enjoyed the Karlsbad scene well enough, he found, not surprisingly,

that the waters there were doing nothing for his supposed "jaundice." He died a few months later, insisting to the end that he was merely going through a bad patch and was rapidly shedding weight in a deliberate attempt to trim down.

While he was still living and composing in Bad Ischl in the early 1890s, Brahms spent considerable time with a young musician who was in many ways his nemesis: Gustav Mahler. Although the Bohemian-born Mahler can be considered in some ways a late Romantic, his work arguably has much more in common with Wagner's "Music of the Future" than with Brahms's more classic romanticism. During his stays at Ischl, Mahler was prepared to tolerate Brahms even though he considered him a musical dinosaur—and a relic so weak in real artistic heft that he would "topple over if hit by one breath from the lungs of mighty Richard Wagner." Regarding his companionship with Brahms at the alpine spa, Mahler wrote that their "friendship" held up only because he, the "young buck," showed Brahms the requisite respect and only that side of his own personality that might please the needy old man. Ultimately, Mahler was convinced that Brahms, his fame and influence notwithstanding, had nothing to say to him artistically.

Gustav Mahler, 1893. Photo: Bieber

What *did* engage Mahler in Ischl was above all the bountiful natural beauty, which often found its way directly into his music. Sounds of nature—bird calls, animal howls, babbling brooks, rushing cataracts, wind whistling through trees—would be woven into his music along with the simple country ballads familiar to the local mountain people. Like Beethoven and Brahms, Mahler came up with ideas for his compositions while communing with nature, but in his case the communing was almost heroically vigorous, involving long hikes and bike rides through the entire Salzkammergut. For him, such serious physical exercise was absolutely essential to his psyche, beset as he was with nervous anxiety and hyperkinetic restlessness. In notes to friends from his alpine retreat, he wrote rhapsodically about multiday treks across mountain passes and alongside rushing streams and mystical lakes.

Yet, his arduous exercising notwithstanding, Mahler did not have a strong physical constitution, and thus he frequently partook of the region's healing waters and spa treatments, including those of a Viennese masseur, who administered rubdowns for his aching muscles as well as dubious unnamed treatments for early symptoms of the heart disease that would cause his untimely death in 1911.

Like so many artists who visited the grand spas, Mahler also found release through hobnobbing with the many aristocratic grandees who summered in Ischl. For Mahler this socializing was especially important, for as a Jew brought up in Bohemia,

rubbing shoulders with the crème de la crème of Austrian Christian society suggested that he might be "making it" after all.

Or perhaps not. Although, after converting to Catholicism for career reasons in 1897 and becoming director of the Vienna court opera in that same year, Mahler certainly attained the summit of Austrian musical life, he never felt in the least secure. In her memoirs, his widow, Alma, recalled him lamenting: "I am thrice homeless: as a native of Bohemia in Austria; as an Austrian among Germans; and as a Jew throughout the whole world. Everywhere an intruder, never welcomed."

Yet such laments, if indeed Mahler actually made them (one never knows with the spiteful and undependable Alma), would undoubtedly have come in his last years. His letters from Ischl gave no evidence of such angst. At that point, he was still consulting spa doctors for his *physical* maladies rather than—as he would famously do in 1910—seeing fellow spa-aficionado Sigmund Freud for his psychic suffering. Freud helpfully suggested that Mahler was as chronically infirm as his long-suffering mother, who had died when he was a youngster.

Alma Mahler entered Gustav's life too late to be part of his Bad Ischl scene in the 1890s. But had she accompanied him to his summer refuge she would undoubtedly have found cause for complaint, because, like so many grand Central European Kurorte, Bad Ischl was increasingly attracting wealthy urban Jews as *Stammkunde*, or regular patrons. Alma, her later marriage to yet another Jewish artist (Franz Werfel) notwithstanding, was deeply anti-Semitic.

Alma Mahler's anti-Semitism bears mention in connection with the story of the grand spas and their musical heritage because militant anti-Jewish prejudice ended up playing its ugly part in the decline and near-extinction of the magnificent Central European water-cure culture in the twentieth century. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the grandest of the grand spas managed to keep their doors fully open to a multinational, multiethnic clientele, but that would change during the First World War, when xenophobic nativism swamped the Kurorte along with the rest of European society. That war also brought the collapse of the European socio-political order that had fed the grand spas' growth. A brief socio-economic recovery in the mid-1920s was followed by renewed economic distress in the 1930s and the triumph of Nazism in Germany and Austria, developments that swept over the spas like a perfect storm. In 1945, at the end of five years of destructive carnage, it seemed as if the grand spa scene might have been extinguished for good.

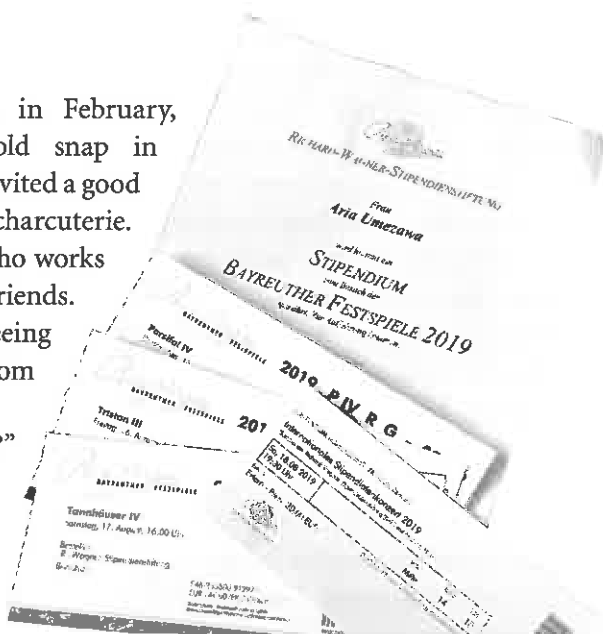
Of course, that proved not to be the case. Over the course of the post-WWII era, the major Kurorte of Central Europe all returned to service and that service included musical offerings of various kinds. One thinks, for example, of the annual Beethoven festivals in Baden-bei-Wien; the huge and very active Festspielhaus in Baden-Baden; the "Music and Mountains" festival in Bad Gastein; and the lively Offenbach Theater in Bad Ems. But what is missing from this contemporary scene is that vital component of the nineteenth-century spa ambiance: namely, musicians actively *producing* original art and fruitfully networking with their peers.

One can only wish that the spa-entrepreneurs of today might one day attempt to remedy this deficiency by adopting an insightful practice of their forebears: sponsoring musicians and other artists for extended stays at the Kurorte, allowing them to throw themselves fully into their work—and even, perhaps, to get a physical tune-up in the bargain.

SIX DAYS IN BAYREUTH: A STIPENDIATEN'S LOG

Aria Umezawa

On a frigid afternoon in February, during the worst cold snap in decades in Toronto, I invited a good friend of mine over for tea and charcuterie. She is an actress and producer who works in theatre and one of my closest friends. This is the first time we're seeing each other since I moved back from San Francisco.



"So what's new with you?" she asks.

"Well… The Wagner Society of Northern California is sending me to the Bayreuth Festival." I reply. She looks confused. I assume this is another instance of something being unique to opera and not translating over to the world of theatre. "You see… the Bayreuth Festival is this…"

"Oh no. I know what the Bayreuth Festival is." She says cutting me off. Her eyes widen in disbelief, and she leans back in her chair. "Everyone knows what the Bayreuth Festival is. That's not why I'm shocked. I mean… You? Why?"

These are good questions. The truth is, I was quite shocked when the Society approached me about going. I would not qualify myself as a Wagner fan. His reputation as a genius and the whole philosophy behind *Gesamtkunstwerk* clashes with my own values of collaboration and decentralized leadership in the rehearsal room, not to mention my work trying to unravel the cult of genius in opera. Yet I have to acknowledge his influence not only on the art form I love, but culture in general.

"I'm not sure why." I say to her, refilling our mugs with steaming tea. "But I think I have to go, keep an open mind, and embrace the opportunity to experience something extraordinary. I want to get a better understanding of what Wagner's legacy is and why he continues to be valued in modern society."

"Well cheers to that!" We clink our mugs together.

Day One

Months later, in August, I'm stepping off the train in Bayreuth. I've just spent a couple of days in Berlin visiting with some friends from my university days and acclimating to Germany. I feel a bit anxious now that I'm on my own. I am both intro-

verted and shy, and now that I've left my friends, I wonder who I'm going to talk to for the next five days.

When I roll my luggage out of the station, I'm surprised by how modern the town I'm looking at is. I was imagining something like the Old Port in Montreal. The grey stone buildings before me certainly look old and share some of the historical qualities of the Old Port, but they've been well maintained and everything is clean.

I check my phone for directions to the hostel I'm staying at and begin walking in that direction. My phone leads me away from downtown and towards what looks to be a campus of some sort. Once I make it through a small, narrow park, I find myself facing a couple of well-manicured fields and some tennis courts. On my left, I can see a residential neighborhood, and I wonder briefly what it would be like to grow up in a town like this.

Aria Umezawa in Bayreuth.

Dragging my luggage behind me, I circle one of the large fields towards a series of identical, grey buildings. A sign reads *Internat Handswerkammer*, and a banner outside of one of the buildings advertising the Festival signals to me that I'm in the right place.

Inside the building, I give my name to a young gentleman standing behind an information table. He crosses my name off a list and hands me an envelope and an updated schedule. Then he tells me to go to a small office at the front of the building to get my room keys.

The room I'm assigned is a private dorm room containing a bed, a desk, a cupboard, and a private washroom. When I signed up for the hostel, I had assumed that I was going to be sharing space with other people, so this is another pleasant surprise. I quickly unpack my things and sit on the bed to open the envelope.

Inside are four wide tickets. One for each of the shows we will be viewing over the next few days. I hold them in my hand and marvel at my good fortune. Surely there's a catch, a test, or some studying we need to do. I glance over the revised schedule, and while there are events scheduled every day, it's fairly relaxed. It looks like all I need to do is show up. This is almost too good to be true!

The first thing on the schedule is a barbeque in the courtyard of the hostel. When dinnertime rolls around, I leave my room and make my way over to the event. I stop

and take in the scene. People are squished into the small outdoor courtyard, talking in tight-knit circles while eating sausages in crusty buns. As I grab my food, I examine the clusters to see if one looks penetrable. Wisps of Italian, Spanish, and German float by, and I feel myself begin to panic. First of all, everyone seems to know each other. Second, I'm not strong enough in any of the languages I'm hearing to elegantly butt into a conversation.

I try to remember the advice Eiko Kikawada gave me when we corresponded via email, and I confessed to her that I was feeling anxious about making friends. "Just reflect on when you arrived in SF for Merola." It's good advice. I was nervous about making friends back then, as well. The key difference is that I attended Merola with someone I already knew, Jennifer Szeto, so I had at least one person I knew would speak to me. This feels completely different.

My anxiety continues to mount, as I psych myself up to introduce myself to someone. Anyone. But I can't seem to catch an eye and am now standing by myself lamely holding a sausage. I turn to my right and offer a lame "hello" to someone's back, and when they don't turn around to acknowledge me, I rush away in embarrassment. In the end, my shyness prevails and I find myself back in my dorm room, eating alone.

Day one might have been a strike-out friend-wise, but as I tuck into the delicious food and look out my window, I resolve to do better tomorrow.

Day Two

I wake up the next morning determined to make a friend. After my failure to make a meaningful connection the night before, I tell myself that I need to be bolder.

Our first event of the day is a welcome reception at the Festspielhaus. A shuttle has been organized to transport us to the gathering. Outside the hostel, I watch as Stipendiaten board a cramped bus. It becomes clear that they're going to have to make more than one trip, and, even then, it looks like it will be a tight fit. The thought of getting into a hot, compact space seems unappealing as I note the beautiful morning, so I decide to walk instead. Making friends can wait for another half-hour.

I stroll through a park with a river running through it, then under a bridge that takes me to the center of town. I pass the train station and make my way towards the theater. The charm of Bayreuth is unavoidable. I pause to appreciate the beautiful green spaces, giggle as I note the restaurants and shops with Wagner-themed names, and delight when I stumble across my first statue of the Maestro himself. For the first time, I allow myself to be immersed in the environment, and I feel a flutter of excitement.

This is really happening!

A break in the trees reveals the Festspielhaus. It's a beautiful building sitting atop a lush hill, overlooking manicured gardens. I smile as I take in the famous balcony where the banda signals the end of intermissions. It looks just like I imagined. As I start up the path, I'm passed by one of the shuttle buses. "Perfect timing." I think to myself.

When I get to the reception it's already packed. Members of Wagner Societies from around the world, local politicians, administrators of the festival, and Stipendiaten

are standing around cruiser tables. Many people already seem to know each other. And as I once again find myself observing the small, closed groups of four or five dotted around the event space, I feel my shyness creeping.

Just as I'm picturing a nightmare scenario where I make a complete fool of myself and spend the rest of the weekend as "That weird Canadian," I see a young woman standing by herself.

I stride over to her before I can change my mind. She sees me approaching her, and in a panic I blurt out the first thing that comes to mind, "Hi! I'm so sorry, I don't speak German very well. My name is Aria. I love your dress."

Aria and Igor

A friend once told me when I was feeling nervous about introducing myself to people, I should find something about their outfit to compliment as an icebreaker. I stand there smiling in a way I hope is warm and inviting, and I'm relieved when she smiles back. "Thank you!" she replies.

She tells me her name is Jade. She is from Singapore and is studying voice in Germany. Similar to how I had found my way to Bayreuth, she was contacted by the Wagner Society of Singapore, who offered to send her to the Festival.

We fall into an easy conversation. Jade is impressively intelligent and articulate. She is fluent in German, but expresses that she welcomes the opportunity to speak English with me. She asks me why I wasn't on the bus, and I tell her about my walk. Her eyes light up. She loves being outside and found the bus too cramped. "Can we agree that we're going to walk together to all the events this weekend?" she asks. I joyfully agree as the image of me friendless and ostracized fades from my mind.

Our conversation is interrupted by an announcement over a microphone. The speeches are beginning, and we are officially welcomed to the program by a man in a suit. Everything is delivered in German, and although I struggle to understand, I am able to follow the arc of the speeches. We are given the history of the award and the number of countries that participate. My presence seems significant enough to note, because the man remarks, "This year, we even have a participant from the United States!" This elicits a murmur from the crowd.

"Is that you?" Jade whispers to me.

"I think so!" I reply, "But I'm actually Canadian. I was sent here by the Wagner Society of Northern California."

"So you're living in California?"

"No, I live in Toronto." I answer. She looks a bit confused. "I'll explain later!"

After the speeches, we are directed to the Festspielhaus, where we are given a tour. Luckily they offer an English guide, so I'm able to fully understand what's going on. Jade decides to stick with me, and we make our way over to the group.

Our tour is led by an enthusiastic woman who gives us a great deal of insight into Wagner's character. She tells us about some of Wagner's less savory attributes: how he borrowed money from many people to try and get the Festspielhaus built, and how he skipped town when he couldn't repay his debts. How when King Leopold paid Wagner's debts off himself, he had difficulty informing the composer, because Wagner thought the envoys were collectors. These stories do very little to rehabilitate the image of Wagner I have in my mind. It sounds like he was comfortable taking advantage of people's generosity. Still, as we move around the house, I can't help but be impressed with the innovation and vision that Wagner had for his art, in particular, the dome over the orchestra pit and the hollow ceiling. It seems like every part of the room was designed for sound.

Innovation seems to be a keyword for Wagner. We are told that Wagner wanted his name to always be synonymous with innovation and creativity. The Festival was created to be a space where Wagner's operas could continue to evolve long after his death. That is a value I understand. My own view of operatic scores is that they are living documents that endure because their contents are able to grow and adapt with the times. This commitment to opera as an evolving form is admirable, and I find myself looking around with new eyes. "Innovation is the word to keep in mind," I tell myself.

We descend into the orchestra pit. It's smaller than I expect. The tour guide points out where all the sections sit. She points out the dome overhead and notes that because the orchestra is not seen by the audience, the dress code in the pit is casual. I imagine trombone players in jeans and t-shirts, unseen by their glamorous audience, and smile. Then I feel a hand touch my shoulder.

I turn around and instantly recognize a student I met in 2014 at McGill University. I light up. "Igor, oh my goodness! How are you?"

Before me is a young, tall baritone. We don't know each other well, but I recognize him from the last time I directed at Opera McGill. Igor explains to me that he won a vocal competition that got him to the Festival. We snap a selfie of ourselves in the pit and send it to the head of the program in Montreal.

After our tour, Jade and I decide to forego the free lunch offered at the hostel and instead make our way into town. The food they served at breakfast was pretty standard cafeteria food, and it seems like a wasted opportunity not to take in some of the local cuisines. Over the course of the tour, Jade has made friends with an English Stipendiat, a conductor named John, so the three of us wander into town to find a place to eat. We end up at a place called Oskar—Das Wirsthaus am Markt.

Over lunch, I get to know my two new friends. John is a wealth of knowledge. He went to school at Oxford and works at Glyndebourne. It's a joy listening to his insights on the shows we're seeing over the weekend and the broader world of European opera. Jade enthusiastically shares her own ambitions about the classical music industry. She is a singer by training, but aspires to move into artistic administration. They are both interested to hear about my experience in North America. The conversation flows from topic to topic, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have wound up with these two as lunch buddies.

Time flies, and, before I know it, we're settling our tab. Jade expresses that she wants to rest a bit before the evening's performance, so we walk back to the hostel and arrange to meet later so we can walk to the Festspielhaus together.

That evening, we attend our first production, *Parsifal.* I am seated at the very top of the theatre and have an excellent view of the stage. I love sitting up high where I can take everything in at once. The further back, the better!

The lights dim, and the ushers shut the doors. I sit in anticipation, and when the orchestra sounds the first notes, I am transported. The acoustics are everything people say they are.

The show was directed by Uwe Eric Laufenberg. This particular production, which premiered in 2016 shortly after 15 people were killed in a suicide bombing in Ansbach, poses some interesting questions about the role of religion in contemporary society. It draws a distinction between spirituality and religion, which seems to suggest that through the rejection of religious fundamentalism and iconography, humanity might be able to save itself.

There are some incredibly impactful scenes to support this thesis—the Act I ritual is slow, deliberate, grotesque, and breathtaking. In another, naked supernumeraries bathe in a waterfall that feels very human and separate from religion. There is a well-thought-out visual through line of a bombed-out Christian monastery in Kurdistan that is slowly overtaken by nature, and, in the end, it opens up to reveal an abyss. Overall, I enjoy the whole thing and am shocked at how time has flown when I realize the show is over.

There are a few sticking points with this production. When I consider the underlying politics, the show becomes problematic. Specifically, the mechanism through which it depicts the rejection of religion leaves a bad taste in my mouth. This sentiment is explored almost exclusively through the Muslim characters and more specifically through the Muslim women. In Act II, during the Flowermaiden scene, women in *abaya* remove their coverings to reveal belly dance costumes, which suggests that if one were to strip away their oppressive outer garb, Muslim women would be exotic sex-symbols. There is a scene in Act III where Parsifal pontificates to women in *hijabs* and removes their headscarves as if liberating them. It would be one thing if we saw this targeting people from all religions, but aside from one dramatic moment right at the end (which feels like it was shoehorned in), that criticism is not obvious.

This othering of Muslim women and their objectification in Act II undermines the overall message of the production. Especially as I reflect on the great care that was taken to show people of many backgrounds existing together and ultimately transcending their differences. I am disappointed that the bulk of the critical commentary came at the expense of depicting Muslim women as oppressed, wild, hypersexualized beings. The director's point, which is compelling and worthy of discussion, could have been made in other ways.

I share these thoughts with the other Stipendiaten during the intermissions.

Discussion is one of the unexpected delights of the festival. Most of the Stipendiaten have a dedicated chaperone who is meant to check in with them and guide the overall Bayreuth experience. During the first intermission, I cross paths with John and the English participants, whose chaperone enthusiastically offers inciting questions to the group. During the second break, I bump into Igor who is conversing with a group of Ukrainian Stipendiaten. They graciously switch to English so I can be

included in their thoughts. No matter who I interact with, people not only want to discuss what we're seeing, they want to analyze it and debate its merits. I'm in heaven.

When I finally get back to my room at the hostel at the end of the evening, my head is swirling with music, conversation, and excitement for tomorrow's events.

Day Three

The next morning, Jade and I meet in front of the hostel to walk to our first event at City Hall. It's a networking event. After brief remarks, we're encouraged to mingle with each other. Jade and I take advantage of the free coffee and pastries and float from conversation to conversation. Jade seems to be shy in the same way I am, but as a pair we have better luck breaking into conversations. I tell her the advice I was given about complimenting a person's outfit.

We leave early to walk around Bayreuth before our next event, and Jade tells me that she read about a microbrewery online that supposedly serves a delicious brunch buffet. "Do you want to check it out with me tomorrow?" she asks.

"You had me at brunch," I reply.

Eventually, we make our way to our next event: the pre-opera lecture for *Tristan und Isolde* at the Festspielhaus. John is already there when we arrive, so we grab seats next to him.

Right on schedule, a man strides towards the podium and introduces himself as Dr. Sven Friedrich. He launches into what sounds like a matter-of-fact lecture about the show we're going to see this evening. I say "sounds like" because unfortunately, what's being discussed is well-outside of my abilities as a German speaker. Jade periodically leans in to tell me what Dr. Friedrich is saying, but we're shushed by someone behind us so she falls silent. I do my best to glean what's going on based on the slide presentation that's being projected onto the curtain of the stage. Every so often I catch a snippet of something I think I understand, but generally, I'm only left with a vague sense of what to expect and the desire to acquire a knit turtleneck sweater like the one in Katharina Wagner's headshot.

Aria and Eiko

When it's finally over, Jade and I part ways so I can meet Eiko for lunch. Eiko and I have arranged to meet at a Vietnamese restaurant. It's a welcome change from the heavy Bavarian meals I've been indulging in over the past few days.

It's wonderful to see Eiko. I'm so glad that our trips were planned for the same time. She fills me in on all the gossip about the Festival. The reception of Valery Gergiev at the opening of *Tannhäuser* is a particularly huge deal. I proudly tell her that I've made friends, and she nods knowingly. She mercifully doesn't say, "I told you so!"

After lunch, Eiko and I take a stroll. She shows me where the Wagner Museum is and tells me about the multimedia center in the basement where you can listen to almost any archival recording of a Wagner performance from around the world. She takes me to the old opera house and snaps a picture of me in front of a fountain. She shows me a hotel where she tells me she's made friends and bumped into cast members from shows. It's so wonderful to see her, but soon it's time for me to get ready for that evening's performance.

It's difficult to comment on this production of *Tristan und Isolde* from a dramatic standpoint.

Something I wasn't able to appreciate the previous night when I was up high and could see everything is that there are some very pronounced sightline issues in the theatre. Now I'm sitting five seats in on the left side of the orchestra section, and much of the staging takes place on the extreme ends of the stage. This means for large portions of the performance I can't see what's going on.

For most of Act II, I am staring at an empty scene while Tristan and Isolde sing just out of view. It's maddening. Every so often I see a hand or the back of Isolde's head, but these moments are brief. At one point, I hear what sounds like a bag of beads dropping on the floor, and a beautiful glowing star appears just in view before a hand picks it up and takes it away. I wonder how the star plays into the drama.

I look around the hall and estimate that the first ten to twelve seats on either side of the hall are likely experiencing the same thing I am (depending on what extreme the singers are playing to). That would be a couple of hundred people. I wonder why these sightline issues weren't addressed.

When the singers are in view, they are stiff and static. The blocking feels dated, as if we've gone back in time a couple of decades to when we believed singers had to stand perfectly straight in order to be heard over the orchestra. If I hadn't seen the show the previous night, and if I hadn't learned about Wagner's commitment to innovation on the tour, I would be inclined to think that all the worst stereotypes of opera were part of the Wagner aesthetic: not connecting with scene partners, awkward physical contact, a general sense of tension in the movement.

Since my view of the blocking is limited, I am able to take some time to appreciate the design elements. It's certainly clear that Katharina Wagner drew inspiration from M.C. Escher's labyrinth and Plato's allegory of the cave. Knowing what I do of the piece, the latter seems to be used to underscore the lovers' naiveté and discovery of themselves, although that is admittedly an assumption on my part. I have to leave space in my interpretation for the fact that I couldn't see a lot of what was going on.

The upside to the sightline issues is that there is nothing to focus on but the music, and the music is glorious. At one point I notice the floor is vibrating. Down on the orchestra level, I can feel the music through my feet! I'm also struck by how balanced the sound is. When one thinks of Wagnerians, one thinks of huge voices with tons of volume. But between the dome over the orchestra pit and the general acoustic design of the house, everything feels well calibrated. As I think about the considerations of producing Wagner outside of the Festspielhaus, it dawns on me that he was always composing for this space. The orchestra playing forte here means something completely different in a different hall with no cover over the pit. This realization feels like a pretty obvious one, but it's wonderful to see it demonstrated so concretely.

The general sentiments at intermission seem to echo my own. John and Jade are in similar seats to mine and also did not see much of what was going on. As the director in the group, I am at a loss to explain why I think some of the choices were made. Frankly, the whole thing could have been resolved by moving the action four feet towards the center on either side.

The prices for food and beverages at the Festspielhaus are quite expensive—they seem to be charging a hefty convenience fee. We're all feeling peckish, so Jade, John, and I decide to take advantage of the hour-long intermissions to walk to a nearby grocery store and cafe. We grab some cakes and coffee to go, then head back to wander through the beautiful gardens. We bump into one of the Stipendiaten from Belgium, and while I can't speak German, my French is quite strong, so the two of us enter into a lively discussion about what we've just seen.

Understanding the legacy that Katharina Wagner has inherited, I truly wish I could say I enjoyed this production. But as the minutes creep by, and I continue to struggle to see what's happening, my interest begins to wane. I am somewhat relieved by the time the final curtain falls.

I meet Jade and John outside after the show, and we decided to grab a bite at a nearby pizzeria with some of the other English Stipendiaten. One of them, a young woman named Isabella excitedly tells us that she has heard that tomorrow's production is really interesting. We all express our hope that it will have fewer sightline issues.

The evening ends with our group leisurely strolling back to the hostel. It's a gorgeous moonlit night, and as we make our way through the park with the river flowing through it, I can't help but think back to San Francisco Opera's production of *The Ring* and wonder if we might bump into some Rhinemaidens.

Day Four

Our first event of the day is the *Tannhäuser* lecture. Jade and I meet outside the hostel and make our way over to the Festspielhaus. Unlike yesterday's talk, there is no accompanying slideshow presentation, and, while I have been able to upgrade my German to the point of ordering my own food, complex explorations of art history and theatre are still beyond my grasp.

My confusion must be obvious because a conductor from Scotland leans over to me and offers me the program book he purchased the day before. "I don't know what they're saying either, so when I saw this yesterday, I thought it might be helpful." he says with a smile.

While the lecture continues, I flip through the pages of the program. It's a gorgeous book, something that would look wonderful on a coffee table, but is admittedly sparse on information. I hand the book back to the conductor and thank him for helping me.

When the talk is over, Jade reminds me about the microbrewery with the brunch buffet. I am ravenously hungry, and it's the perfect time for brunch, so we start to walk in the direction of the restaurant. I continue to be surprised by Bayreuth. It seems like it would be a small town, but it's actually quite large. We pass a bus depot and what looks to be a mall, then we take a turn down a residential road. As the houses begin to thin, we come upon a stream with a bridge over it. On the other side is a modern brewery, Maisel's Bier-Erlebnis-Welt.

Much to our dismay we have missed the buffet, but I'm too hungry to go looking for another restaurant, so we decided to stay for lunch. The brewery feels like something I might find back home in Canada. The patio is large with a mix of tables and seating areas under tents. The building itself looks new, and the interior has minimalist decor with exposed brick. The menu fits the gastro-pub vibe of the place.

Over lunch, Jade and I talk about the current state of the opera industry, and I get to know a bit more about her experience as an opera artist in Singapore. Inspired by what we've learned about Wagner, we talk a lot about art and innovation. What does it mean to be innovative in art today?

In Singapore, there is a real focus on technology. Jade tells me about the Changi airport and an art exhibit they've installed called The Jewel. It's a large indoor waterfall and lighting installation. She shows me a video, and I watch in fascination as perfectly mapped beams of light seem to float within the moving water. This is something that is incredibly difficult to achieve, and I'm absolutely captivated by trying to figure out how they did it. The images feel familiar, and I tell Jade that the work reminds me of a Japanese design firm called teamLab that does really cool work in light and projection mapping. She looks them up on her phone, and it turns out they were the ones that worked on the waterfall. Small world.

We finish up our meal and decide to take a walk through the pedestrian area downtown. As we catch sight of the statues of Wagner tucked away in various corners around the city, Jade and I wonder what it might be like to live in a town that is so closely associated with one man.

One thing we both notice is how lush and verdant Bayreuth is. Between the manicured gardens at the Festspielhaus, the parks we stumble upon, and the trees and flowers everywhere, we are never far from nature. We walk through the town without any sort of plan. Before long, though, it's time to head back to the hostel and get ready for this evening's performance.

Up to this point, I would say I have only seen one operatic performance that came close to perfection. By this, I mean a show where I felt the music and the drama were completely in harmony and where there was a compelling thesis that was fully explored. As I sit in the theater during Act 1 of *Tannhäuser*, I get the distinct feeling I'm watching a second near-perfect production.

Director Tobias Kratzer updated the show to modern times. Venus is presented as an anarchist, with a band of artists who exist outside of society. In this telling, the tension of Tannhäuser's choice is clear: he is wrestling with his role within the establishment. Venus represents a rejection of the expectations placed upon him, Elisabeth represents maintaining the status quo. The premise is elegantly explored as the drama unfolds, and the way Kratzer turns the lens on the audience is masterful. The establishment turns out to be the Bayreuth Festival itself, and Act II, which is a tricky scene for most directors, becomes a commentary on traditional, expected, and problematic stagings of operas. I am deeply impressed by how nuanced and detailed the production is.

For example, during the Act I intermission, a member of Venus' band of anarchists, a drag queen named Le Gateau Chocolat, performs on the pond at the foot of the Festspielhaus grounds. Among the numbers she sings is a hilarious version of "Part of Your World" from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. What appears to be a silly throwaway performance during the intermission actually plays out later in the show, when

a billboard is revealed in Act III bearing Le Gateau Chocolat's face on an advertisement. Evidently, in the end, she has succeeded in becoming a part of our world. I find this level of attention to detail breathtaking, and I am completely immersed in what's happening on stage.

This show makes me feel like the future for the canon of opera is bright. That a place like Bayreuth is willing to completely reframe a beloved work so expertly and engage in public discourse is inspiring. I am reminded of why I love opera in the first place. This is what great art is all about.

My critical thoughts on this production are incredibly small to the point of being nit-picky:

Casting Elena Zhidkova as Venus is an interesting choice. If the point is that Venus and her group of Anarchists are outside of conventional society, portraying Venus as a cis-gendered, heterosexual, white, able-bodied, absolutely gorgeous, blonde woman doesn't completely make sense. Aside from possessing personal politics which may be considered counterculture, how is she marginalized by society? That the goddess of love needs to embody conventional standards of beauty and love, and that Tannhäuser could only love a woman who is all these things seems to be at odds with the overall message of the show. It's ultimately a small critique, but I do think it's worth considering how a slight re-frame in either casting or costuming might help enhance the production.

The second very small thought is that Elisabeth's suicide didn't feel fully earned. As a dramatic beat, it makes sense with what the director was going for—death is the only way for her to escape the strict role that she has been cast in as a woman in society. But, as an audience member, if I wasn't a stage director and completely rapt with attention, I might have missed the foreshadowing that this was going to happen. I don't know that every audience member would equate the visual metaphor of taking off her costume and hanging it on a tree as symbolizing how she was rejecting her societal role.

Ultimately, both my thoughts seem somewhat unnecessary for what I find to be an expertly produced, sung, and conceived production.

The reaction from the rest of the Stipendiaten is equally enthusiastic. This is a show that really seems to resonate. Everything from the singing to the direction is discussed during the intermissions. It is exciting to feel that you have been genuinely invited to discuss and question a performance. Often it feels like there is a pressure to not be overly critical of what you're seeing on stage. Here in the gardens, during the intermission, the lack of fear when bringing up challenging ideas is refreshing.

When the show is over, Jade needs to spend some time with her chaperone, so I walk back to the hostel on my own, reliving the performance in my mind and feeling excited that the type of opera I've always wanted to see is already happening on one of the world's most prestigious stages.

Day Five

We are determined to experience Maisel's breakfast buffet.

Jade and I wake up early and make our way back to the brewery. We planned things so that we would arrive shortly after the restaurant opened, but when we get there it seems that we are not the only ones who were in search of brunch. While the brewery was busy yesterday, today it is packed. Families and large groups feast on breakfast

items, and waitstaff walk with determination from table to table carrying trays of coffee and orange juice.

Upon first glance, it looks like we might be turned away, but when it's our turn to speak to the hostess, we learn there is one table for two left inside. Once seated, Jade and I devise a plan to share plates so that we can taste a little bit of everything. I am delighted that the person I have spent the most time with this weekend seems to share my affinity for walking and eating. Under normal circumstances I probably wouldn't have proposed a buffet tactic like this to someone I've just met, but I have found a co-conspirator in Jade.

As we sit and snack on various styles of bread, fruit, cured meats, and cheeses, we review the schedule for the day. There is a walking tour of Bayreuth, and then a significant amount of free time before our evening performance. It is an extremely hot and sunny day. Even sitting inside, and with my SPF 50 sunscreen, the light streaming through the window has caused me to develop a mild sunburn on my shoulder. The thought of trekking through Bayreuth as part of a tour seems like a recipe for sunstroke, especially as neither of us thought to bring water bottles.

I tell Jade about the multimedia suite that Eiko told me about and her eyes light up. She doesn't mind the heat or the sun, but the idea of an air-conditioned building is none-the-less appealing. We decide that we'll go visit the Wagner Museum to learn at our own pace, explore the city using a combination of Google Maps and Wikipedia when the sun is lower in the sky, and then end our self-guided tour at the Margravial Opera House.

When we arrive at the Wagner Museum, Jade and I head straight for the multimedia suite. We find it tucked behind a corner in the basement. It is four lounge chairs, each with their own touchscreen, facing a window looking out at a live wall. It reminds me a bit of the one at the MoMA in San Francisco.

We each take a seat and put our headphones on. I scroll through the options, feeling momentarily paralyzed by the sheer volume of content to choose from. I think back to Merola. Specifically I think about Kyle van Schoonhoven singing Rienzi at the Grand Finale and decide to start there.

Soon, I'm flying virtually around the world listening to excerpts of operas and watching video clips of performances, all while staring at some beautiful greenery. It is a very peaceful experience, and I lose track of time. After what seems like forever, Jade catches my attention and signals that we should move on.

We stroll through the rest of the museum, taking our time to take in the displays of costumes and relics from previous productions. Then we make our way back out onto the street. As per our plan, we take out our phones and identify the points of interest on the map. It is the early afternoon and still incredibly hot out, so we duck into a cafe to pick up water bottles. Once we are armed with hydration, we take turns suggesting locations to visit on the map.

Eventually we find our way to the Old Opera House, also known as the Margravial Opera House.

Once inside, Jade speaks to the woman at the counter, who explains to us that because we are Stipendiaten the admission fee is waived. We wait with a small crowd gathered in the lobby, then the doors open and we enter the hall.

My jaw drops. The first thought that springs to mind is "decadently Baroque." Ornate carvings and paintings adorn the walls. The private boxes circle the room

and reach up to the ceiling. It's a smaller theatre than I imagined, but the stage itself is quite deep. We mill about for a bit taking pictures, then the light dims, and we are treated to a video about the history of the house.

As I sit and watch the highly produced video, I can't help but admire that everything at the Bayreuth Festival is an experience. As the video progresses, lights illuminate around the hall to highlight various points of interest.

When the presentation is over, I ask Jade what we should do next. She looks at me very seriously, and says, "I think we should go get ice cream."

The ice cream shop Jade has identified is close by. We walk to the hilariously named Eis Opera and bump into John and the rest of the English Stipendiaten on the way. We invite them to join us, and a few minutes later we're all sitting by the fountain outside of the Margravial Opera House eating generous scoops of gelato. We ask the English Stipendiaten how their tour of Bayreuth went, and we compare notes about the various sites we visited. We all agree the opera house was a highlight.

With our snacks finished, we walk as a group back to the hostel so we can rest our feet before the Stipendiaten concert planned for this evening.

That night, we're treated to a program of opera's greatest hits and a percussion solo, a great way to shake things up even though it's a bit out of place.

I generally don't find it a particularly helpful exercise to be overly critical of young artists who are still in the process of forming their own identities and developing their craft. These are the types of concerts that are meant to be taken at face value, and are more about building collegiality among artists and patrons than anything else. Many of the performers look to be in their early to mid-twenties and some seem fresh out of Master's programs. Still, as we progress through the evening, I can't help but feel I've been spoiled by the participants of Merola and my experience working with the Adler Fellows. Every one of the young singers we listen to is a perfectly talented, capable musician. Some, like Igor who sings "Kogda bi zhizh domashnim krugom..." from *Eugene Onegin*, are very impressive. But I can't help but think about my colleagues from the Adler Fellowship: Sarah Cambidge, Kyle van Schoonhoven, and Andrew Manea in particular. I smile as I imagine how they would blow the roof off this program.

After the concert, we are treated to another reception. Wagner Society members from around the world, Festival staff, and Stipendiaten gather around tables of food to celebrate the end of a successful weekend. To my surprise, in spite of my initial shyness, I have met a lot of people that I feel the need to say goodbye to: Igor and the rest of the Ukranian Stipendiaten, the woman from Belgium, the group from England, the Scottish conductor. I make my way around the reception and say goodbye to as many people I can find.

After about an hour, I meet up with Jade and John. It's been a long and stimulating weekend, and we're all feeling exhausted. Despite the fact that we want to spend as much of the time we have left together, we decide to head back to the hostel for our last sleep in Bayreuth.

Day Six

It's our final day. Jade, John, and I leave the hostel together. Even though we have only known each other for five days, it feels like the end of something significant is approaching. None of us seems ready to say goodbye. In keeping with our tradition,

we forego the shuttle bus and elect to walk to the train station, dragging our luggage behind us.

It's an overcast day, which is both a relief after yesterday's heat and feels appropriately gloomy for the prospect of leaving new friends. We walk through the park with the river running through it, under a bridge, and onto the main road. Only this time instead of continuing on to the Festspielhaus, we stop at the train station. We are back at the place where this whole adventure began.

We part ways in Nuremberg. I'm in a rush to catch my connecting train, and there is just enough time for us to blurt out a hurried goodbye and a commitment to keep in touch, before I'm racing through the station to get to my next platform. I catch one last glimpse of John and Jade waving before I board.

On the train to Munich, I stare out the window at the passing rural landscape and reflect on the questions I had at the start of this experience. What is Wagner's legacy, and what value does it have for contemporary society? I can't say that the image of Wagner, the man, was rehabilitated much in my mind. Our politics are too at odds, and our creative processes are polar opposites. However, I feel like I've found somewhat of a kindred spirit in Wagner, the artist. His desire to always be innovating, his emphasis on art as a catalyst for conversation, his willingness to see his art fail, his fearless approach to creation.

So what is Wagner's legacy? In my opinion, Wagner has created a unique space where tradition and innovation intersect. Where the audience expects old stories to be told in new ways. The Festival is a place where rigorous debate is encouraged, and ideas are allowed to be challenging and imperfect. Through the Stipendiatumstiftung that he founded, he has inspired the generosity of people around the world and has encouraged other artists to model his fearless approach to creation. Those are values that are truly worthy of admiration.

When I step off the train in Munich, it feels as if I'm stepping out of a dream and back into reality. I extend the handle on my suitcase and stride down the platform shaking my head in disbelief as I relive the weekend in my mind. Is it possible to feel nostalgic for a place you've just left?

My thoughts are interrupted by a rumble in my stomach. I'm hungry. I'll have to ponder the answer after I find some currywurst.

Months after my trip to Bayreuth, I am still thinking about the experience. I don't often find myself at a loss for words, but I truly cannot adequately express the depth of gratitude I feel towards the Wagner Society of Northern California for providing me with this opportunity. I was humbled by the generosity of this gift and the enthusiasm and support of everyone I interacted with. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. I will never forget my trip and know that it has already shaped how I move forward as an artist in my career. *Vielen Dank!*

REVIEW

From the Wolf's Glen

Von Weber: *Der Freischütz*. Andreas Schager (Max), Lise Davidsen (Agathe), Alan Held (Kaspar), Sofia Fomina (Ännchen), Markus Eiche (Ottokar), Franz-Josef Selig (Eremit), Corina Kirchhoff (Samiel), Peter Simonischek (Kilian), Andreas Bauer (Cuno), Frankfurt Radio Symphony, MDR Rundfunkchor Leipzig, conducted by Marek Janowski. Pentatone (2 CDs)

Der Freischütz celebrates its bicentennial anniversary in 2021, making the recent release of the opera under the direction of Marek Janowski a welcome reminder of Carl Maria von Weber's musical storytelling and the richness it holds. Released in October 2019, the album features Andreas Schager as Max and Lise Davidsen as Agathe, topping a well-rounded cast that provides a musically deft and dramatically satisfying adaptation of Weber's work. Janowski and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony deliver a sharp and spirited performance from start to finish, showcasing the cleverness of Weber's orchestration throughout. Katharina Wagner and Daniel Weber offer efficient direction of the album, replacing original dialogues by Johann Friedrich Kind with their own narration. The result is a finely balanced album presented with clear, present audio by Pentatone—a welcome addition to one's collection.

Schager's Max is peppy and youthful, a hopeful marksman who finds himself down on his luck. Throughout the opera, Schager offers dramatic urgency to the text whenever it's demanded ("Verfiel ich in des Zufalls Hand?" / "Have I fallen into the hands of chance?"), yet never falters in his lyricism. His bright-toned and impassioned delivery occasionally results in unfocused vibrato, though he always recovers quickly. There is a simplicity to his interpretation that is sustained throughout the album; his Max is a wonder boy, heroic and bold in both voice and character, doggedly pursuing his goal even when the pursuit appears most futile. It is no wonder that Schager is now sought-after for Heldentenor roles, both abroad and now here; he made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Siegfried in *Götterdämmerung* in April 2019.

Der Freischütz also introduces Norwegian soprano Lise Davidsen in her first recording of a complete opera. Davidsen handles Agathe's Act II scena adeptly, particularly in the coda, where her voice assumes *bel canto* tone and pliancy in one moment ("O süsse Hoffnung!" / "O sweet hope!") and full, Wagnerian lyricism the next. The Act III

cavatina divulges Davidsen's rich middle range, surely amplified by her early training as a mezzo-soprano, and the celestial qualities of her voice vis-à-vis sustained pianissimos above the staff. Throughout, the recording captures the shocking resonance of Davidsen's instrument and the control which the 33-year-old singer asserts, and her potential for dramatic conviction. Davidsen, who made her role debut as Agathe in Zürich in 2016, erupted in popularity in the United States last year after her Metropolitan Opera debut in *The Queen of Spades*—"A 'One-in-a-Million Voice' Arrives at the Metropolitan Opera," *The New York Times* preview headline read—before which she had already been contracted to appear in prominent roles in the Met's future seasons. *Der Freischütz* is Davidsen's second complete recording. Her first, a collection of Strauss lieder and select Wagner arias, is led by Esa-Pekka Salonen, perhaps a portent for those in the Bay Area who wish to hear her perform soon.

Sofia Fomina gives a laudable performance as Ännchen, one marked by clarity and fluidity of voice; I was especially charmed by her Act II opening duet with Davidsen. Bass-baritone Alan Held sings a husky Kaspar who is at his most demonic in the exclamatory phrases ("Triumph!") that fall in his middle range; his diabolic maneuvers are complemented by Samiel, a she-devil portrayed exquisitely by theater and screen actor Corinna Kirchhoff. With the tight direction of Janowski, Held and Kirchhoff offer a gripping and well-paced *agitato* in the Wolf's Glen scene, their tête-à-tête matched in intensity moments later as the horns herald Max's arrival. The MDR Leipzig Radio Choir adds significant dramatic appeal to the recording, too, and tackles Weber's demanding choral writing with aplomb.

Der Freischütz is available on all major streaming sites and a two-SACD set, including a booklet with program notes in both German and English by Kaspar van Kooten and a side-by-side translation of the libretto. The new narrations for Samiel and the Hermit, spoken by Peter Simonischek, add an easy shape to the opera, though they do give away some major plot points, like Agathe's fate. The typesetting of the booklet does little to differentiate between stage directions, narrations, and the sung lines, making it difficult to follow along, and an errant typo here or there may catch your eye.

In the hands of Janowski and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, and with some of the finest singers of our time, Weber and Friedrich Kind's crepuscular world comes to life, settles into the witching hour, and reemerges in triumph. Two centuries after its creation, *Der Freischütz* remains a source of magic, mystery, and musical abundance.

Kate McKinney

FROM THE WSNC ARCHIVES

Making an Impact: Eugenie Pappenheim (1842–1924)

Long before Wagner's works were embraced as "the music of the future" in America, Austrian soprano Eugenie Pappenheim was a Wagnerian trailblazer on this side of the Atlantic. On April 2, 1877, she was America's first Brünnhilde in *Die Walküre* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. She was also the nation's first Senta in *Der Fliegende Holländer* (performed in Italian as *Il Vascello Fantasma*) and the first Irene in *Rienzi*. Already a standout in the crowded Italian and French repertories, Pappenheim's Wagnerian triumphs were won without competition from other stage divinities of the age like Pauline Lucca, Christine Nilsson, and Adelina Patti.

Eugenie Pappenheim as Brünnhilde

Pappenheim traveled the United States during the 1880s with her own opera company. In September 1883, the troupe stopped at San Francisco's Grand Opera House for two weeks of performances in which Pappenheim appeared in almost every performance as Elsa in *Lohengrin*, Agathe in *Der Freischütz*, Rachel in *La Juive*, or Valentine in *Les Huguenots*. The company enjoyed successful years and financially disastrous ones, prompting the soprano to say, "The life on the stage is a hard one, and not everyone is suited to such a thorny path."

After retiring from singing, she became one of the nation's leading voice teachers. She and her husband, Hamburg businessman Rudolf Ballin, split their time between New York and Los Angeles where young singers sought out the diva. Upon her death in 1924, Pappenheim's will stipulated that $10,000 be given to the city of Hamburg (where she made her operatic debut) for the care of impoverished children. The gift effectively established the Rudolf Ballin Stiftung, which more than 90 years later continues to support multiple childcare facilities and education programs in the city.

Wagner Society of Northern California
P.O. Box 590990, San Francisco, CA 94159