

Music Appreciation

- Who said “At one time they tried to make music give people pleasure - now they torture and tire them”?
- Tchaikovsky said this after hearing Wagner’s *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1876
 - BBC Music, December, 2002



Wagner and the Romantic Movement

- Romantic movement is expressed best by Wagner's music
- Music Dramas
- Practiced what he preached
- Saw himself as a hero
- Everything he conceived was larger than life
- Lived extravagantly
- Made many enemies
- One of the most innovative artists of the era
- One of the most brilliant and original musicians of the time

Wagner's life and career

- b. 1813 in Leipzig
- Little formal musical training
- Wrote the words and the music for his operas
- First opera, "Die Feen", composed at age 20
- Worked as a conductor with a traveling opera troop
- Married Minna, an actress
- Paris - piano and band arrangements of popular operatic tunes by other composers
- Spent time in debtor's prison
- First masterpiece, "The Flying Dutchman", was produced in 1843
- Moved to Dresden where the "Dutchman" was produced and where he composed "Tannhauser" and "Lohengrin"

Wagner's life and career

- Left Dresden for Switzerland where he lived in exile
- Sketched out a cycle of 4 operas, "The Ring of the Nibelung"
- His wife leaves him
- Falls in love with Mathilde Wesendonck
- 1856-1859 he composes "Tristan"
- Moves to Vienna in 1860
- Flees in 1864 due to debt
- Ludwig II offers him money
- Wagner's spending bankrupt the country; Ludwig forced to exile the composer
- Becomes romantically involved with Cosima von Bulow (Liszt's daughter)
- Begins building a festival theater in Bayreuth - first production in 1882 with the "Ring" cycle
- Composed his final opera, "Parsifal"
- Died in Venice, 1882

Schwanstein

photo courtesy of Ellen Congleton



Neuschwanstein

photo courtesy of Ellen Congleton



The "Complete Work of Art"

- Wagner believed that art and opera must be more than a diversion
- His idea is called Gesamtkunstwerk
- Totally revolutionized Harmony by completely avoiding resolution with known, stable chords
- Orchestra is important now
- Constructed scores with a symphonic sound in mind
- The singing becomes an instrument in the overall effect
- Expanded the size of the orchestra
- Invented new instruments (the Wagner tuba)

The Wagner Tuba

- A relative of the horn, it was invented in the late 1800's to meet the specifications of the composer Richard Wagner
- He wanted an instrument that would add depth to the brass section and provide a tonal color that would bridge the colors of the horn and the trombone
- It is usually played with a French horn mouthpiece by a horn player
- Because of its brash tone quality, it is the perfect sound for depicting the bad guys in Wagner operas

Besides the operas,

- Wagner regarded himself as "the most German of men" and "the German spirit"
- He composed 13 operas and numerous other compositions
- He has been classified as an anarchist, a socialist, a proto-fascist, a nationalist, a vegetarian and an anti-Semite.
- His name appeared in connection with almost all major trends in German history of the 19th and 20th centuries!
- He wrote books and articles and around 10,000 letters

Wagner's Family Tree

- **Parents:**

- Carl Friedrich Wilhelm Wagner (1770-1813), Richard's real father was probably Ludwig Geyer
- Johanne Pätz (1774-1848)

- **First Wife:**

- Minna Planer (1809-1865), no children

- **Second Wife:**

- Cosima von Bülow (1837-1930, the daughter of Franz Liszt), two children with Hans von Bülow and three children with Richard Wagner

- **Children:**

- Isolde (1865-1919), married to Franz Beidler
- Eva (1867-1942), married to Houston Stewart Chamberlain
- Siegfried (1869-1930), married to Winifred Williams Klindworth (1897-1980)

Festspielhaus

photo courtesy of Ellen Congleton





Outside Wagner's Home

photo courtesy of Ellen Congleton

Bayreuth

- Wagner's idea was to create a "mystical abyss" separating the real world (the viewers) from the ideal world (the singers on the stage)
- The inaugural festival in Bayreuth was attended by Kaiser Wilhelm of Prussia, King Ludwig of Bavaria (who insisted on secrecy and did not want to be seen by either his fellow royals or the people), Emperor Dom Pedro II of Brazil, the rulers of various German principalities, nobility from all over Germany and Austria-Hungary, musicians such as Anton Bruckner, Edvard Grieg, Peter Tchaikovsky, Camille Saint-Saëns, Franz Liszt

Tristan Chord



Richard Wagner.

Langsam und schmachtend,
Lento e languido.

RICHARD WAGNER

(1813 - 1883)

The Ring

der Ring des Nibelungen

- *Nibelungenlied* is a Medieval German legend
- *The Ring of the Nibelung*
 - *Das Rheingold* (The Rhine Gold)
 - *Die Walkure* (The Valkyrie)
 - *Siegfried* (Siegfried)
 - *Gotterdammerung* (The Twilight of the Gods)

der Ring des Nibelungen

- **3 Norns**
- **Erda**
- **Rhinemaidens (guarding the gold in the Rhine)**
- **Walkures (Brunhilde et al)**
- **Giants (Fasolt & Fafner)**
- **Wotan (ruler of the gods who lives in Walhalla)**
- **Fricka & Freia**
- **Loge**
- **Walsungs (Siegmond and Sieglinde = Siegfried)**
- **Hunding**
- **Nibelungs (Alberich & Mime)**
- **Gibichungs (Gunther, Getrune & Hagen)**

Richard Wagner

- **Gesamtkunstwerk**
- **Bayreuth**
- **Endless melody**
- **Leitmotifs**
- **Chromatic harmony**

Star Wars and The Ring

• Star Wars

- Conceived as a series of nine films it was soon realized as a trilogy, and is in the process of becoming a hexalogy (six films).
- The film trilogy was initiated with *Episodes IV*, *V* and *VI*.
- Lucas then worked backwards with *Episode I*, more than two decades later, and is now working forwards with *Episodes II* and *III*
- A gallery of aliens
- Cult Following

• The Ring

- Four great (and long) operas, thematically connected and conceived as a single work - encompassing 15 to 16 hours of music and action. This huge project was realised after years of planning and work.
- The opera tetralogy began with the text for *Götterdämmerung*. Then Wagner worked himself backwards with the texts, and then forwards with the music until it was completed more than two decades later.
- A gallery of gods, dwarves
- Cult Following

Star Wars v/s The Ring

- Lucas creates his own film studio, his own company for creation of new and revolutionary visual effects (Industrial Light & Magic, founded in 1975) and his own standards for sound and image (THX).
- In *Star Wars* Lucas uses newly developed computer techniques to create special visual and audio effects. *Star Wars* was the first film with a world-wide distribution to use the new Dolby stereo-optical sound system, a system which later has made possible the many surround systems.

Wagner creates his own theater (the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth) in order to realize his ideals concerning the visual and audio effects.

The *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth is built to present the *Ring* in the best possible way. Wagner hides the orchestra to create a new "sound" and a better balance between singers and orchestra. By hiding the orchestra and by turning out the lights in the theater, Wagner also ensured a much better visual illusion than what was previously possible. He also introduced a whole range of new sound effects, from hidden bells to the construction of new horns (the Wagner tuba), from the balancing of voice and orchestra to the special architecture of the hall. The hidden orchestra and the wooden construction turned the hall into a huge musical instrument with the audience inside. Bayreuth was the first, and is still the only place to do this.

Star Wars v/s The Ring

- The Star Wars is a simple tale of good and evil, of love and power. It makes you want to be a better person.
- Light sabre = Sword
- Luke Skywalker = Siegfried
- Luke & Leia = Siegmund & Sieglinde
- The Death Star = The Ring
- *Star Wars* = symphonic film
- The Ring is a complex tale of good and evil, of love and power. It also makes you want to be a better person.
- Sword = Light sabre
- Siegfried = Luke Skywalker
- Siegmund & Sieglinde = Luke & Leia
- The Ring = The Death Star
- *Der Ring des Nibelungen* = symphonic opera

Wagner Quiz

- **1. Which composer has been considered to be the single most important phenomenon in the artistic life of the latter half of the nineteenth century?**
 - A - Berlioz
 - B - Schubert
 - C - Wagner
 - D - Schumann

Wagner Quiz

- **2. Wagner's cycle of four music dramas is called:**
 - **A - *Lohengrin***
 - **B - *Tristan and Isolde***
 - **C - *The Ring of the Nibelung***
 - **D - *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg***

Wagner Quiz

- **3. Wagner called his operas:**
 - A - tone poems
 - B - music dramas
 - C - oratorios
 - D - operettas

Wagner Quiz

- **4. The principal themes in Wagner's operas, which recur throughout a work and carry specific meanings, are called:**
 - **A - libretti**
 - **B - leitmotifs**
 - **C - motives**
 - **D - fixed ideas**

Wagner Quiz

• 5.



A - Lohengrin

– B - Tristan and Isolde

– C - The Ring of the Nibelung

– D - Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg