

= Cosima Wagner =

Cosima Wagner ( born Francesca Gaetana Cosima Liszt ; 24 December 1837 ? 1 April 1930 ) was the illegitimate daughter of the Hungarian pianist and composer Franz Liszt and Marie d 'Agoult . She became the second wife of the German composer Richard Wagner , and with him founded the Bayreuth Festival as a showcase for his stage works ; after his death she devoted the rest of her life to the promotion of his music and philosophy . Commentators have recognised Cosima as the principal inspiration for Wagner 's later works , particularly Parsifal .

In 1857 , after a childhood largely spent under the care of her grandmother and with governesses , Cosima married the conductor Hans von Bülow . Although the marriage produced two children , it was largely a loveless union , and in 1863 Cosima began a relationship with Wagner , who was 24 years her senior . She married him in 1870 ; after his death in 1883 she directed the Bayreuth Festival for more than 20 years , increasing its repertoire to form the Bayreuth canon of ten operas and establishing the festival as a major event in the world of musical theatre .

During her directorship , Cosima opposed theatrical innovations and adhered closely to Wagner 's original productions of his works , an approach continued by her successors long after her retirement in 1907 . She shared Wagner 's convictions of German cultural and racial superiority , and under her influence , Bayreuth became increasingly identified with antisemitism . This was a defining feature of Bayreuth for decades , into the Nazi era which closely followed her death in 1930 . Thus , although she is widely perceived as the saviour of the festival , her legacy remains controversial .

= = Family background and early childhood = =

In January 1833 the 21 @-@ year @-@ old Hungarian pianist and composer Franz Liszt met Marie d 'Agoult , a Parisian socialite six years his senior . Marie 's antecedents were mixed ; her German mother , from a prominent Frankfurt banking family , had married a French nobleman , the Comte de Flavigny . Marie had been married since 1827 to Charles , Comte d 'Agoult , and had borne him two daughters , but the union had become sterile . Drawn together by their mutual intellectual interests , Marie and Liszt embarked on a passionate relationship . In March 1835 the couple fled Paris for Switzerland ; ignoring the scandal they left in their wake , they settled in Geneva where , on 18 December , Marie gave birth to a daughter , Blandine @-@ Rachel .

In the following two years Liszt and Marie travelled widely in pursuit of his career as a concert pianist . Late in 1837 , when Marie was heavily pregnant with their second child , the couple were at Como in Italy . Here , on 24 December in a lakeside hotel in Bellagio , a second daughter was born . They named her Francesca Gaetana Cosima , the unusual third name being derived from St Cosmas , a patron saint of physicians and apothecaries ; it was as " Cosima " that the child became known . With her sister she was left in the care of wet nurses ( a common practice at the time ) , while Liszt and Marie continued to travel in Europe . Their third child and only son , Daniel , was born on 9 May 1839 in Venice .

In 1839 , while Liszt continued his travels , Marie took the social risk of returning to Paris with her daughters . Her hopes of recovering her status in the city were dented when her influential mother , Madame de Flavigny , refused to acknowledge the children ; Marie would not be accepted socially while her daughters were clearly in evidence . Liszt 's solution was to remove the girls from Marie and place them with his mother , Anna Liszt , in her Paris home while Daniel remained with nurses in Venice . By this means , both Marie and Liszt could continue their independent lives . Relations between the couple cooled , and by 1841 they were seeing little of each other ; it is likely that both engaged in other affairs . By 1845 the breach between them was such that they were communicating only through third parties . Liszt forbade contact between mother and daughters ; Marie accused him of attempting to steal " the fruits of a mother 's womb " , while Liszt insisted on his sole right to decide the children 's future . Marie threatened to fight him " like a lioness " , but soon gave up the struggle , perhaps valuing the preservation of her social status above her duties as a mother . Though they were living in the same city , she did not see either of her daughters for

five years , until 1850 .

= = Schooling and adolescence = =

Cosima and Blandine remained with Anna Liszt until 1850 , joined eventually by Daniel . Cosima 's biographer George Marek describes Anna as " a simple , uneducated , unworldly but warmhearted woman ... for the first time [ the girls ] experienced what it was to be touched by love " . Of the sisters , Blandine was evidently the prettier ; Cosima , with her long nose and wide mouth was described as an " ugly duckling " . Although Liszt 's relations with his children were formal and distant , he provided for them liberally , and ensured that they were well educated . Both girls were sent to Madame Bernard 's , an exclusive boarding school , while Daniel was prepared for the prestigious Lycée Bonaparte .

In 1847 Liszt met Princess Carolyne zu Sayn @-@ Wittgenstein , the estranged wife of a Russian prince . By the autumn of 1848 she and Liszt had become lovers , and their relationship lasted for the remainder of his life . She quickly assumed responsibility for the management of Liszt 's life , including the upbringing of his daughters . Early in 1850 Liszt had been disturbed to learn that Blandine and Cosima were seeing their mother again ; his response , guided by the princess , was to remove them from their school and place them into the full @-@ time care of Carolyne 's old governess , the 72 @-@ year @-@ old Madame Patersi de Fossombroni . Liszt 's instructions were clear ? Madame Patersi was to control every aspect of the girls ' lives : " She alone is to decide what is to be permitted them and what forbidden " .

Blandine and Cosima were subjected to the Patersi curriculum for four years . Cosima 's biographer Olive Hilmes likens the regime to that used for breaking in horses , though Marek describes it as exacting but ultimately beneficial to Cosima : " Above all , Patersi taught her how a ' noble lady ' must behave , how to alight from a carriage , how to enter a drawing room , how to greet a duchess as against a commoner ... and how not to betray herself when she was hurt " . On 10 October 1853 Liszt arrived at the Patersi apartment , his first visit to his daughters since 1845 . With him were two fellow @-@ composers : Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner . Carolyne 's daughter Marie , who was present , described Cosima 's appearance as " in the worst phase of adolescence , tall and angular , sallow ... the image of her father . Only her long golden hair , of unusual sheen , was beautiful " . After a family meal , Wagner read to the group from his text for the final act of what was to become *Götterdämmerung* . Cosima seems to have made little impression on him ; in his memoirs he merely recorded that both girls were very shy .

= = Marriage to Hans von Bülow = =

As his daughters approached womanhood , Liszt felt that a change in their lives was called for and in 1855 he arranged ( over their mother 's bitter protests ) for them to move to Berlin . Here they were placed in the care of Franziska von Bülow , whose son Hans was Liszt 's most outstanding pupil ; he would take charge of the girls ' musical education while Frau von Bülow supervised their general and moral welfare . Hans von Bülow , born in 1830 , had abandoned his legal education after hearing Liszt conduct the premiere of Wagner 's *Lohengrin* at Weimar in August 1850 , and had decided to dedicate his life to music . After a brief spell conducting in small opera houses , Bülow studied with Liszt , who was convinced that he would become a great concert pianist . Bülow was quickly impressed by Cosima 's own skill as a pianist , in which he saw the stamp of her father , and the pair developed romantic feelings for each other . Liszt approved the match , and the marriage took place at St. Hedwig 's Cathedral , Berlin , on 18 August 1857 . During their honeymoon , along with Liszt they visited Wagner at his home near Zurich . This visit was repeated the following year , when Cosima , on taking her leave , shocked Wagner with an emotional demonstration : " [ S ] he fell at my feet , covered my hands with tears and kisses ... I pondered the mystery , without being able to solve it " .

Cosima , a Parisian by upbringing , found it hard to adjust to life in Berlin , which was then a more provincial city than Paris . Her attempts to mix with local society , according to Marie zu Sayn @-@

Wittgenstein , were handicapped by " [ h ] er exaggerated self @-@ esteem and innate causticity " , which alienated the men and women in her circle . At least initially , Cosima took an interest in her husband 's career , encouraging him to extend his activities into composition . On one occasion she provided him with a scenario she had written for an opera based on the story of Merlin , court magician to King Arthur . However , nothing came of this project . Bülow 's crowded professional schedule left Cosima alone for long periods , during which she worked for the French @-@ language magazine *Revue germanique* as a translator and contributor . In December 1859 she was saddened by the death of her brother Daniel , at the age of twenty , after a long wasting illness . Cosima 's first child , a daughter born on 12 October 1860 , was named Daniela in Daniel 's memory . A further , unexpected blow for Cosima fell in September 1862 , when her sister Blandine , who had shared much of her upbringing , died in childbirth ? she had been married to Émile Ollivier , a Parisian lawyer , since October 1857 . Cosima 's second daughter , born in March 1863 , was named Blandina Elisabeth Veronica .

Bülow was committed to Wagner 's music ; in 1858 he had undertaken the preparation of a vocal score for *Tristan und Isolde* , and by 1862 he was making a fair copy of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* . A social relationship developed , and during the summer of 1862 the Bülows stayed with Wagner at the composer 's home at Biebrich . Wagner records that Cosima became " transfigured " by his rendering of " Wotan 's Farewell " from *Die Walküre* . In October 1862 , just after Blandine 's death , Wagner and Bülow shared conducting duties at a concert in Leipzig ; Wagner records that , during a rehearsal , " I felt utterly transported by the sight of Cosima ... she appeared to me as if stepping from another world " . In these years Wagner 's emotional life was in disarray . He was still married to his first wife , Minna Planer ( she was to die in 1866 ) , and was involved in several extramarital relationships . On 28 November 1863 Wagner visited Berlin ; while Bülow was rehearsing a concert , Wagner and Cosima took a long cab ride through Berlin and declared their feelings for each other : " with tears and sobs " , Wagner later wrote , " we sealed our confession to belong to each other alone " .

= = With Wagner = =

= = = Munich and Tribschen = = =

In 1864 Wagner 's financial position was transformed by his new patron , the 18 @-@ year @-@ old King Ludwig II of Bavaria , who paid off the composer 's debts and awarded him a generous annual stipend . Ludwig also provided Wagner with a lakeside retreat at Lake Starnberg , and a grand house in Munich . At Wagner 's instigation , von Bülow accepted a post as Ludwig 's " royal pianist " ; he and Cosima moved to Munich , and took a house conveniently close to Wagner 's , ostensibly so that Cosima could work as the composer 's secretary . From 29 June 1864 Cosima spent more than a week alone with Wagner at Lake Starnberg , before von Bülow joined them on 7 July . According to Wagner 's housekeeper , Anna Mrazek , " it was easy to tell that something was going on between Frau Cosima and Richard Wagner " . Mrazek said that later in the visit von Bülow found his wife in Wagner 's bedroom , but nevertheless made no demands for an explanation , either from Wagner or from his wife . Nine months after this visit , on 10 April 1865 , Cosima gave birth to a daughter , Isolde . Such was von Bülow 's devotion to Wagner that he accepted the child as his own , and registered her as " the legitimate daughter " of Hans and Cosima von Bülow . Wagner attended the Catholic baptism on 24 April . On 10 June 1865 , at the Munich Hofoper , von Bülow conducted the premiere of Wagner 's *Tristan und Isolde* .

Wagner 's role at Ludwig 's court became controversial ; in particular , Ludwig 's habit of referring Wagner 's policy ideas to his ministers alarmed the court . When Wagner demanded the sacking both of Ludwig 's cabinet secretary and of his prime minister , there was a public outcry , and in December 1865 Ludwig reluctantly told Wagner to leave Bavaria . The king did not , however , withdraw his patronage or financial support . After a few months ' wandering , in March 1866 Wagner arrived in Geneva , where Cosima joined him . They travelled together to Lucerne where

they found a large lakeside house , the Villa Tribschen . Wagner made immediate arrangements to rent the house , at the king 's expense , and by 15 April was installed in his new home .

Immediately upon signing the lease , Wagner invited the von Bülow and their children to stay with him . They spent the summer there , returning briefly to Munich before von Bülow left for Basel while Cosima went back to Tribschen . By now von Bülow understood his wife 's relationship with Wagner ; he wrote to a friend that " since February 1865 I was in absolutely no doubt about the extremely peculiar nature of the situation " . Wagner , anxious to avoid associating Cosima in a public scandal , deceived Ludwig into issuing a statement in June 1866 which declared the unbroken sanctity of the von Bülow 's marriage , and promised retribution for those daring to suggest otherwise . By this time Cosima was pregnant with her second child by Wagner ; a daughter , Eva , was born at Tribschen on 17 February 1867 . Through all this , von Bülow retained his devotion to Wagner 's music . He had been appointed music director of the Munich Hofoper , and threw himself into the preparations for the premiere of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* . This took place on 21 June 1868 under his baton , and was a great success . Shortly afterwards , Cosima rejoined Wagner at Tribschen ; Wagner explained to the king that she could not bear the insults to which she was continually subjected in Munich , and wished to escape from the world .

In October 1868 Cosima asked her husband for a divorce , to which he would not initially agree . To sceptical enquirers he explained her absence from the von Bülow family home by a supposed visit to her half @-@ sister in Versailles . In June 1869 , immediately after the birth of her and Wagner 's third and final child , Siegfried , Cosima wrote to von Bülow in what she called a " final attempt at an understanding " . His reply was conciliatory ; he wrote : " You have preferred to consecrate the treasures of your heart and mind to a higher being : far from censuring you for this step , I approve of it " . Legal processes extended the marriage until 18 July 1870 , when the divorce was finally sanctioned by a Berlin court . After the divorce von Bülow distanced himself from both Wagner and Cosima ; he never again spoke to Wagner , and 11 years passed before his next meeting with Cosima .

Wagner and Cosima were married at Lucerne , on 25 August 1870 , in a Protestant church . Cosima 's journal for that day records : " May I be worthy of bearing R 's name ! " Liszt was not informed in advance of the wedding , and learned of it first through the newspapers . The year ended on a high note for the Wagners : on 25 December , the day on which Cosima always celebrated her birthday although she had been born on the 24th , she awoke to the sounds of music . She commemorated the event in her journal : " ... music was sounding , and what music ! After it had died away , R ... put into my hands the score of his " *Symphonic Birthday Greeting* . ... R had set up his orchestra on the stairs , and thus consecrated our Tribschen forever ! " This was the first performance of the music that became known as the *Siegfried Idyll* .

== = Bayreuth == =

== = = Building the Festspielhaus == = =

Wagner 's deception over his relationship with Cosima had seriously damaged his standing with Ludwig . Matters were worsened by Ludwig 's insistence , over Wagner 's objections , that the premieres of the two completed Ring operas , *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* , be given at once , in Munich , rather than as part of a complete Ring cycle on some future date at a venue of Wagner 's choosing . To Wagner 's mortification these premieres took place , under Franz Wüllner , on 22 September 1869 and 26 June 1870 respectively . The need for a theatre of his own , and full artistic control , was now clear to Wagner . On 5 March 1870 Cosima , according to her journal , advised him to " look up the article on Baireuth [ sic ] in the encyclopaedia " . Wagner knew the town from a short visit he had made there in 1835 ; he was attracted to it by its central location and by its quiet non @-@ fashionability . When he and Cosima visited in April 1871 they decided immediately that they would build their theatre there , and that the town would be their future home .

Wagner announced the first Bayreuth Festival for 1873 , at which his full Ring cycle would be

performed . Aware of the honour that such an event would bring to the town , the local council donated a large plot of land ? the " Green Hill " ? overlooking the town , as a site for the theatre . Since Ludwig had declined to finance the project , the start of building was delayed and the proposed date for the initial festival was deferred . By the spring of 1873 only a third of the required funds had been raised ; further pleas to Ludwig were initially ignored , but early in 1874 , with the entire project on the verge of collapse , the king relented and provided a loan . The full building programme included a handsome villa , " Wahnfried " , into which Wagner , with Cosima and the children , moved from their temporary accommodation on 18 April 1874 . The theatre was completed in 1875 , and the festival scheduled for the following year . Commenting on the struggle to finish the building Wagner remarked to Cosima : " Each stone is red with my blood and yours " .

During this period Cosima admitted to Liszt , who had taken minor orders in the Catholic Church , that she intended converting to Protestantism . Her motive may have been more the desire to maintain solidarity with Wagner than from religious conviction ; Hilmes maintains that at heart , " Cosima remained a pietistic Catholic until her dying day " . On 31 October 1872 Cosima received her first Protestant sacrament alongside Wagner : " a deeply moving occasion ... what a lovely thing religion is ! What other power could produce such feelings ! " .

= = = = First festival = = = =

In March 1876 , Cosima and Wagner were in Berlin when they learned that Marie d 'Agoult had died in Paris . Unable to attend the funeral , Cosima expressed her feelings in a letter to her daughter Daniela : " There is nothing left for me to do , except to grieve for the woman that brought me into the world " .

From June onwards , Cosima 's journal entries consist almost entirely of comments on the forthcoming festival 's rehearsals , sometimes warmly approving , often critical and anxious ; for example , she found the costumes " reminiscent throughout of Red Indian chiefs ... all the marks of provincial tastelessness " . From the beginning of August 1876 distinguished guests began to converge on the town ; Ludwig , incognito , attended the final dress rehearsals between 6 and 9 August , but then left the town , reappearing in time to attend the final performances of the festival . Among other royal visitors were the German emperor Wilhelm I , Dom Pedro II of Brazil and an assortment of princes and grand dukes from the European royal families . Many of Europe 's leading composers came : Bruckner , Tchaikovsky , Saint @-@ Saëns , and Cosima 's father , Liszt , who held court at Wahnfried among the notables who gathered there . Also in Bayreuth was Wagner 's current mistress , Judith Gautier . It is unlikely that Cosima knew of the affair at this time , though she may have harboured a degree of suspicion . Cosima 's demeanour as the festival 's hostess was described by a young American visitor in fulsome terms : " Mme Wagner is exceedingly gracious and affable ... a magnificent @-@ looking woman , a perfect queen ... " .

The festival began on 13 August and lasted until 30th . It consisted of three full Ring cycles , all under the baton of Hans Richter . At the end , critical reactions ranged between that of the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg , who thought the entire work " divinely composed " , and that of the French newspaper Le Figaro who called the music " the dream of a lunatic " . Wagner himself was far from satisfied ; in a letter to Ludwig he denounced the singers Albert Niemann and Franz Betz as " theatrical parasites " and complained that Richter had not got a single tempo correct . Months later , Cosima records , his attitude towards the productions was " Never again , never again ! " .

= = = = Parsifal = = = =

After the conclusion of the festival and the departure of the guests , Wagner and Cosima left with the children for Venice , where they remained until December . The festival had accumulated a large financial deficit ; this , and Wagner 's deep artistic dissatisfaction , precluded the possibility of any repeat in the near future . Wagner 's mood was such that he seriously contemplated giving up the entire Bayreuth project ; he was distracted from such thoughts by an invitation to conduct a series of

concerts in London . Leaving the children behind , he and Cosima enjoyed a two @-@ month break in England where , among others , Cosima met the novelist George Eliot , the poet Robert Browning , and the painter Edward Burne @-@ Jones ( who made a number of sketches of Cosima from which no finished painting emerged ) . On 17 May both Wagners were received by Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle .

The English tour raised little money but restored Wagner 's spirits . On his return he began work on what would prove to be his final stage work , Parsifal , a project that would occupy him for most of the next five years . Cosima 's influence was such that Wagner asserted that he would not have written another note , had she not been there . On a practical level , when the festival 's creditors began to press for payment , Cosima 's personal plea to Ludwig in 1878 persuaded the king to provide a loan to pay off the outstanding debt and open the door to the prospect of a second Bayreuth Festival . For Cosima 's birthday on 25 December 1878 , Wagner hired an orchestra to play the newly composed prelude to Parsifal . The concert also included the Siegfried Idyll ; Cosima wrote afterwards : " There stands he who has called forth these wonders , and he loves me . He loves me ! " .

Progress on Parsifal was hampered by Wagner 's recurrent ill @-@ health , but by late 1880 he announced the next festival for 1882 , to be devoted entirely to the new work . Wagner secured Ludwig 's agreement that Parsifal should be staged exclusively at Bayreuth , but in return , Ludwig required that his current Munich Kapellmeister , Hermann Levi , should conduct the festival . Wagner objected on the grounds of Levi 's Jewish faith ; Parsifal , he maintained , was a " Christian " opera . Both he and Cosima were vehement anti @-@ Semites ; Hilmes conjectures that Cosima inherited this in her youth , from her father , from Carolyne zu Sayn @-@ Wittgenstein , probably from Madame Patersi and , a little later , from Bülow , " an anti @-@ Semite of the first order " . Thus Cosima 's anti @-@ Semitism predates her association with Wagner , although Marek observes that he nurtured it in her , to the extent that derogatory references to Jews occur , on average , on every fourth page of her 5 @,@ 000 @-@ page journal . The musicologist Eric Werner argues that Wagner 's anti @-@ Semitism derived in part from his initial revolutionary philosophy ; as a disciple of Proudhon he saw Jewry as " the embodiment of possession , of monopoly capitalism " . Cosima 's had no such basis , and whereas Wagner retained an ability to revise his views on the basis of his experiences , Cosima 's anti @-@ Semitism was visceral and remained unchanged . Cosima records Levi 's astonishment on being informed of his appointment . Ludwig was insistent that , despite Wagner 's objections , the appointment would stand . Levi would subsequently establish himself as the supreme conductor of the work , held by critical opinion to be " beyond praise " .

At the second Bayreuth Festival Parsifal was performed 16 times ; at the last performance on 29 August , Wagner himself conducted the final scene . Cosima wrote afterwards of how different the orchestra and singers sounded under Wagner . Overall , she and Wagner were entirely satisfied with the outcome of the festival which , unlike its predecessor , had made a handsome profit . : " [ N ] ot once did the spirit of toil and dedication on the part of the artists abate ... I believe one may be satisfied " . One dissident voice was that of Friedrich Nietzsche , once a devoted friend of Wagner 's but latterly a harsh critic . Nietzsche considered Parsifal an abomination for which Cosima was responsible ; she had corrupted Wagner , and as a non @-@ German she had no business meddling in matters of German culture .

= = = Venice and widowhood = = =

At the conclusion of the festival the Wagner family departed for an extended stay in Venice . To accommodate the large party of children , servants and expected guests they took a spacious apartment in the Palazzo Vendramin Calergi , overlooking the Grand Canal . The principal concern during the autumn and winter months was Wagner 's declining health ; his heart spasms had become so frequent that on 16 November 1882 Cosima recorded : " Today he did not have a spasm ! " . Cosima 's journal entry for 12 February 1883 ? the last she was to make ? records Wagner reading Fouqué 's novel Undine , and playing the Rhinemaidens ' lament from Das Rheingold on the piano . However , an underlying cause of domestic friction may have surfaced concerning Carrie

Pringle , an English soprano from the Parsifal cast who was rumoured to be having an affair with Wagner . According to Isolde , recalling the occasion much later , the Pringle suspicions led to a furious row between Cosima and Wagner on the morning of 13 February . There is no solid evidence of an affair between Wagner and Pringle , nor is Isolde 's story of a row supported by any other testimony . At around noon on that day , Wagner suffered a fatal heart attack , and died in the middle of the afternoon .

Cosima sat with Wagner 's body for more than 24 hours , refusing all refreshment or respite . During the embalming process , which occupied the next two days , Cosima sat with the body as often as possible , to the dismay of her children . She also asked her daughters to cut her hair , which was then sewn into a cushion and placed on Wagner 's breast . On 16 February the journey back to Bayreuth began , and on Sunday 18 February the cortège processed to Wahnfried , where , following a brief service , Wagner was buried in the garden . Cosima remained in the house until the ceremonies were over ; according to her daughter Daniela she then went to the grave " and for a long time lay down on the coffin until Fidi ( Siegfried ) went to fetch her " . Afterwards she went into seclusion for many months , barely even seeing her children , with whom she communicated mainly through written notes . Among many messages , she received a telegram from Bülow : " Soeur il faut vivre " ( " Sister , it is necessary to live " ) .

= = Mistress of Bayreuth = =

= = = Interregnum = = =

Wagner had left neither a will , nor instruction on the management of the Bayreuth Festival after his death . He had written of the future : " I ... cannot think of a single person who could say what I believe needs to be said ... there is practically no one on whose judgement I could rely " . The festival 's uncertain outlook was aggravated by Cosima 's total withdrawal from all contact except that of her daughters and her friend and adviser Adolf von Groß . Without Cosima 's participation the 1883 festival , as planned by Wagner ? 12 performances of Parsifal ? went ahead , with Emil Scaria ( who sang the role of Gurnemanz in the opera ) doubling as artistic director . The cast was largely that of 1882 , and Levi remained as conductor .

At the conclusion of the festival Cosima received a long , critical memorandum from an unknown observer , which highlighted numerous divergences from Wagner 's directions . This , says Marek , proved to be a critical factor in determining her future life 's mission : the maintenance of Wagner 's heritage creations through the preservation of his interpretations . In her seclusion , Cosima learned of an abortive plan masterminded by Julius Kniese , the festival 's chorus @-@ master , by which Liszt was to assume the role of music director and Bülow would be chief conductor . Neither Liszt nor Bülow was interested in this arrangement , and the plan died . With Groß 's assistance , Cosima pre @-@ emptied any further attempts by outsiders to assume control of the Wagner legacy , by obtaining legal recognition of herself and Siegfried as sole heirs to all Wagner 's property , physical and intellectual . By this means she secured an unassailable advantage over any other claim on direction of the festival 's future .

= = = In control = = =

In 1885 Cosima announced that she would direct the 1886 festival . Her tenure as Bayreuth 's director lasted for 22 years , until 1907 . During that time she oversaw 13 festivals , and by gradually increasing the repertory established the " Bayreuth canon " of ten mature Wagner works . Her triumvirate of conductors ? Levi , Richter and Felix Mottl ? shared the musical direction until 1894 , when Levi left . Richter and Mottl served throughout Cosima 's years , joined by several of the leading conductors of the day , although Bülow resisted all offers to participate . In the course of her long stewardship Cosima overcame the misgivings of the hardline Wagnerites patrons who believed , like Nietzsche , that Wagner 's works should not be entrusted to a non @-@ German . Under her

watch the festival moved from an uncertain financial basis into a prosperous business undertaking that brought great riches to the Wagner family .

Although the festival 's historian , Frederic Spotts , suggests that Cosima was more creative than she affected to be , the primary purpose of all her productions was to follow the instructions and reflect the wishes of the Master : " There is nothing left for us here to create , but only to perfect in detail " . This policy incurred criticism , among others from Bernard Shaw , who in 1889 mocked Cosima as the " chief remembrancer " . Shaw scorned the idea that Wagner 's wishes were best represented by the slavish copying in perpetuity of the performances he had witnessed . Ten years later Shaw highlighted as a feature of the " Bayreuth style " the " intolerably old @-@ fashioned tradition of half rhetorical , half historical @-@ pictorial attitudes and gestures " , and the characteristic singing , " sometime tolerable , sometimes abominable " . The subordination of the music to text , diction and character portrayal was a specific feature of the Bayreuth style ; Cosima , according to Spotts , turned the principle of clear enunciation into " a fetish ... The resulting harsh declamatory style came to be derided as ... the infamous Bayreuth bark " .

Parsifal was shown alongside other works at each of Cosima 's festivals except for 1896 , which was devoted to a revival of the Ring cycle . In 1886 , her first year in charge , she added Tristan und Isolde to the canon . Amid the bustle of the festival Cosima refused to be distracted by the illness of her father , Liszt , who collapsed after attending a performance of Tristan and died several days later . Cosima supervised her father 's funeral service and burial arrangements , but refused a memorial concert or any overt display of remembrance . According to Liszt 's pupil Felix Weingartner , " Liszt 's passing was not of sufficient importance to dim the glory of the Festival , even for a moment " .

Die Meistersinger was added in 1888 , Tannhäuser in 1891 , Lohengrin in 1894 and Der fliegende Holländer in 1901 . After the 1894 festival Levi resigned , the years of working in an anti @-@ Semitic ambience having finally had their effect . At the 1896 festival Siegfried made his Bayreuth conducting debut in one of the five Ring cycles ; he remained one of Bayreuth 's regular conductors for the remainder of Cosima 's tenure .

In common with Wagner , Cosima was willing to shelve her anti @-@ Semitic prejudices in the interests of Bayreuth , to the extent of continuing to employ Levi for whom she developed considerable artistic respect . However , she frequently undermined him behind his back in private letters , and allowed her children to mimic and mock him . Cosima expressed to Weingartner the view that " between Aryan and Semite blood there could exist no bond whatever " . In accordance with this doctrine , she would not invite Gustav Mahler ( born Jewish though a convert to Catholicism ) to conduct at Bayreuth , although she frequently took his advice over artistic matters .

Cosima was determined to preserve Bayreuth 's exclusive right , acknowledged by Ludwig , to perform Parsifal . After Ludwig 's death in 1886 this right was briefly challenged by his successor , an attempt swiftly defeated by Cosima with the help of Groß . A more serious threat arose from the German copyright laws , which only protected works for 30 years following the creator 's death ; thus Parsifal would lose its protection in 1913 regardless of any agreement with the Bavarian court . In anticipation , in 1901 Cosima sought to have the period of copyright protection extended by law to 50 years . She lobbied members of the Reichstag tirelessly , and was assured by Kaiser Wilhelm II of his support . These efforts failed to bring about any change in the law . In 1903 , taking advantage of the lack of a copyright agreement between the United States and Germany , Heinrich Conried of the New York Metropolitan Opera announced that he would stage Parsifal later that year . Cosima was enraged , but her efforts to prevent him were to no avail ; the first of 11 performances took place on 24 December 1903 . The enterprise was a popular and critical success , though in Cosima 's view it was a " rape " ; her hostility towards the Metropolitan lasted for the remainder of her life .

By the beginning of the new century three of Cosima 's daughters had married : Blandina to Count Biagio Gravina in the closing days of the 1882 festival , Daniela to Henry Thode , an art historian , on 3 July 1886 , and Isolde , Cosima 's first child by Wagner , who married a young conductor , Franz Beidler , on 20 December 1900 The youngest daughter , Eva , rejected numerous suitors to remain her mother 's secretary and companion for the rest of Cosima 's tenure .



= = = Transfer of power = = =

On 8 December 1906 , having directed that year 's festival , Cosima suffered an Adams @-@ Stokes seizure ( a form of heart attack ) while visiting her friend Prince Hohenlohe at Langenburg . By May 1907 it was clear that her health was such that she could no longer remain in charge at Bayreuth ; this responsibility now passed to Siegfried , her long @-@ designated heir . The succession was accomplished against a background of family disagreement ; Beidler thought that he had rights , based partly on his greater conducting experience and also because he and Isolde had produced Wagner 's only grandchild , a son born in October 1901 , who could establish a dynastic succession . Beidler 's claims were dismissed by Cosima and by Siegfried ; he never conducted at Bayreuth again , and the rift between the Beidlers and Cosima developed in due course into a major family feud .

= = Retirement , decline and death = =

Cosima moved into rooms to the rear of Wahnfried , away from the house 's daily bustle , where she passed her days surrounded by Wagner 's possessions and numerous family portraits . Although at first Siegfried discussed his festival plans with her , she avoided the Festspielhaus , content to read reports of the productions . Siegfried made few changes to the production traditions set by Wagner and Cosima ; Spotts records that " whatever had been laid down by his parents was preserved unchanged out of a sense of strict filial duty " . Only in matters on which they had not spoken was he prepared to exercise his own judgement . As a result , the original Parsifal sets remained in use even when they were visibly crumbling ; the view of Cosima and her daughters was that no changes should ever be made to stage sets " on which the eye of the Master had rested " .

In December 1908 Eva , then 41 , married Houston Stewart Chamberlain , a British @-@ born historian who had adopted as his personal creed a fanatical form of German nationalism based on principles of extreme racial and cultural purity . He had known Cosima since 1888 , though his affinity with Wagner extended back to 1882 , when he had attended the premiere of Parsifal . He had successively courted Blandina and then Isolde , before settling on Eva . Cosima had considerable empathy with his theories ; according to Carr " she came to love him as her son ? perhaps even more " . Chamberlain became the dominant figure within the Wagner circle , and was largely responsible for the increasing alienation of the Beidlers . Cosima may have been unaware of Isolde 's attempts at rapprochement , because Eva and Chamberlain withheld Isolde 's letters . In 1913 Isolde was effectively disinherited when she sought to confirm her rights as a co @-@ heir to the considerable Wagner fortunes in a court case , which she lost . After this she withdrew , and to the time of her death in 1919 never again saw or communicated directly with Cosima .

A happier family event from Cosima 's standpoint was Siegfried 's marriage in 1915 , at the age of 46 , to Winifred Williams , the 18 @-@ year @-@ old foster @-@ daughter of Karl Klindworth who had been friends with both Wagner and Liszt . When the couple 's first son , Wieland , was born on 5 January 1917 , Cosima celebrated by playing excerpts from the Siegfried Idyll on Wagner 's piano .

The outbreak of the First World War curtailed the 1914 festival ; the conflict and the political and economic upheavals that followed the war closed the Festspielhaus until 1924 . Plans for the festival 's resumption coincided with an upsurge in Germany of extreme nationalist politics . Adolf Hitler , a fervent Wagner admirer , first visited Wahnfried in 1923 , and although he was not received by Cosima he befriended the family and was thereafter a regular visitor . The Chamberlains , together with Winifred , became enthusiastic members of the Nazi Party , and the 1924 festival became an overt rally for the party and its leading supporters . That year Cosima , then 86 , ended her long absence from the theatre by attending the dress rehearsals for Parsifal , and watching the first act at the opening performance on 23 July . The tenor Lauritz Melchior remembered Siegfried returning from frequent visits to a small gallery above the stage and saying " Mama wants ... " .

By 1927 , the year of her 90th birthday , Cosima 's health was failing . The birthday was marked in Bayreuth by the naming of a street in her honour , although she was unaware ; the family thought

that knowledge of the celebrations would overexcite her . In her last years she was virtually bedridden , became blind , and was only lucid at intervals . She died , aged 92 , on 1 April 1930 ; after a funeral service at Wahnfried her body was taken to Coburg and cremated .

= = Legacy = =

Cosima 's life mission was total service to Wagner and his works ; in the words of the music critic Eric Salzman she " submitted herself body and soul to the Master " . In Wagner 's lifetime she fulfilled this purpose primarily by recording in her journal every facet of his life and ideas . After his death the journal was abandoned ; she would henceforth serve the master by perpetuating his artistic heritage through the Bayreuth Festival . Guided by Groß , but also using her own acumen ? Werner calls her a " superb business woman " ? she succeeded in making the festival first solvent , then profitable .

While acknowledging that Cosima was an effective " keeper of the flame " , commentators have criticised the nature of her legacy . The Ring historian J.K. Holman describes it as one of " stifling conservatism " . Her policy of sticking to Wagner 's original stage conceptions was not fully abandoned until after the Second World War , when a new generation took charge of the festival . Hilmes likens Cosima 's role to that of the abbess of a religious community : " a cohesive , quasi @-@ religious congregation of Bayreuthians sharing a common philosophical outlook " . Anti @-@ Semitism was integral to this philosophy ; although in 1869 Cosima had opposed the re @-@ publication of Wagner 's anti @-@ Jewish treatise *Jewishness in Music* , this was on grounds of commercial prudence rather than sensitivity . In 1881 she encouraged Wagner to write his essay " Know Thyself " , and to include in it a tirade against Jewish assimilation .

The critic and one @-@ time librettist Philip Hensher writes that " under the guidance of her repulsive racial @-@ theorist son @-@ in @-@ law [ Chamberlain ] ... Cosima tried to turn Bayreuth into a centre for the cult of German purity . " Thus , he continues , " By the time she died , Wagner 's reputation was ... at the forefront of a terrible political dynamism : antique stagings of his works were presented to audiences of Brownshirts " . The close association of the festival with Hitler and the Nazis during the 1930s was much more the work of Winifred ? an overt Hitler supporter ? than of Cosima , though Hensher asserts that " Cosima was as much to blame as anyone " .

In the immediate aftermath of Cosima 's death , some writers heaped copious praise on her . Ernest Newman , Wagner 's biographer , called her " the greatest figure that ever came within [ Wagner 's ] circle " ; Richard du Moulin Eckart , Cosima 's first biographer , introduced her as " the greatest woman of the century " . In time judgements became more measured , and divided . Marek closes his account by emphasising her role not only as Wagner 's protector but as his muse : " Without her there would have been no *Siegfried Idyll* , no Bayreuth , and no *Parsifal* " . In Hensher 's judgement , " Wagner was a genius , but also a fairly appalling human being . Cosima was just an appalling human being . " In 1977 , 47 years after her death , Cosima 's urn was recovered from Coburg and buried alongside Wagner in the Wahnfried garden .

= = Bayreuth Festival performances under Cosima Wagner = =

The symbol indicates work 's Bayreuth premiere . Under Cosima Wagner *Parsifal* was performed 97 times , *Tristan und Isolde* 24 , *Die Meistersinger* 22 , *Tannhäuser* 21 , *Lohengrin* 6 , the Ring cycle 18 and *Der fliegende Holländer* 10 .