

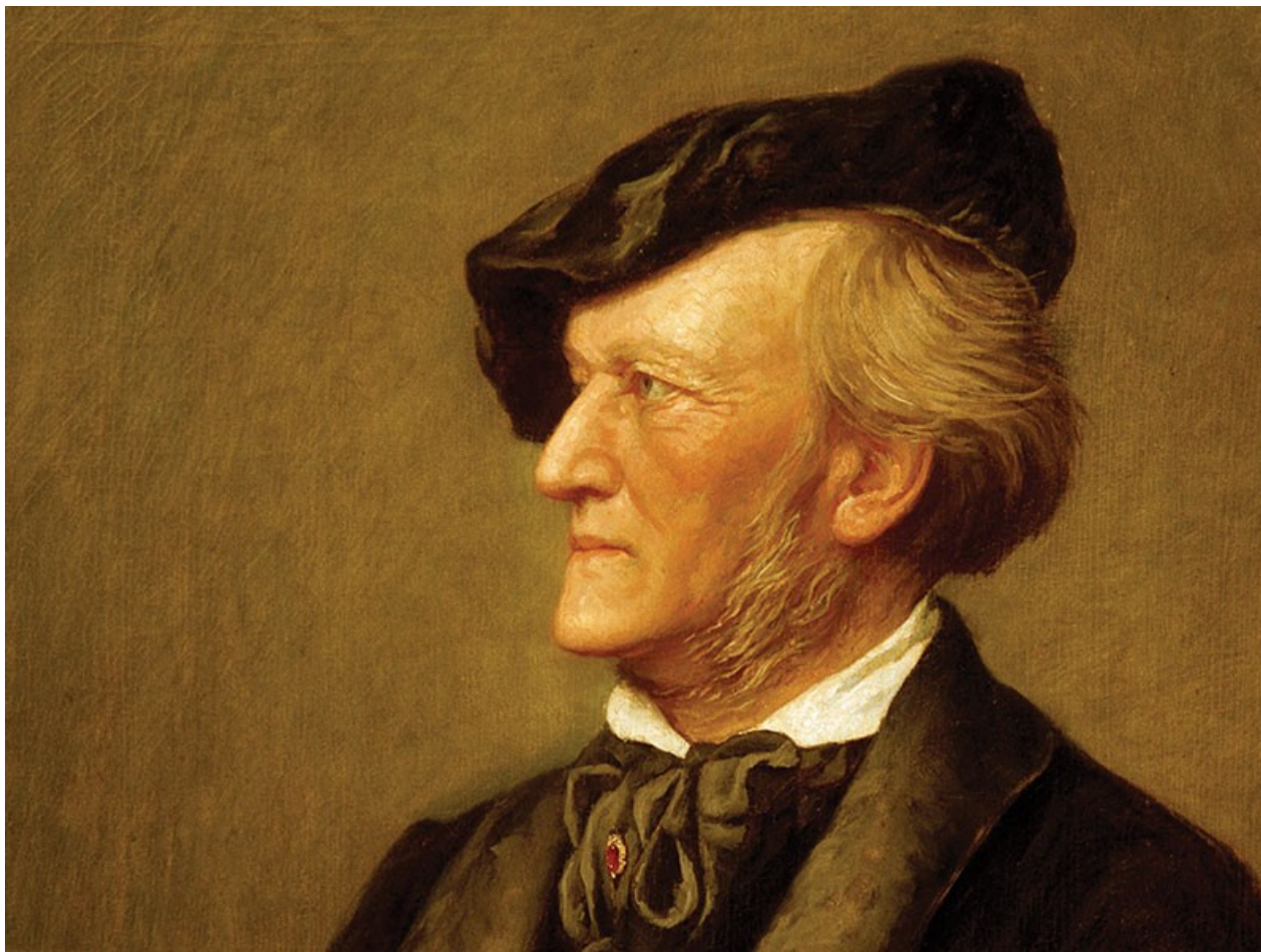
DT501: History of Music

Classical/Romantic

Dr Adrian Smith

Lecture 7: Wagner

Richard Wagner (1813–1883)



Wagner's Early Period

- 1813: Born in Leipzig on May 22
- 1828: Begins studies in music theory and counterpoint
- 1833—1839: String of appointments at provincial opera houses. Chorus master at Würzburg, musical director with a travelling theatre company, conductor at Königsberg followed by a post in Riga (1837 —1839)
- Early operas influenced by the then current repertoire in German opera houses
 - Die Feen*: (1833-4) modelled on German Romantic Opera (Weber and Marschner)
 - Das Liebesverbot*: (1834-36) modelled on Italian and French Opera (Bellini and Auber)
- 1839—42: spends miserable two and a half years in Paris
- 1840: Completes *Rienzi* a work in the French *grand opéra* style. Fails to get it performed at the Opéra in Paris.

Middle Period: Kapellmeister at Dresden

- 1841: Completes *The Flying Dutchman* while in Paris.
- 1842: *Rienzi* premiered to acclaim in Dresden
- 1842: Leaves Paris for Dresden.
- 1843: *The Flying Dutchman* premiered. Wagner appointed Kapellmeister at the King of Saxony's Court in Dresden.
- 1842-45: composes *Tannhäuser*
- 1846: conducts a performance of Beethoven's Ninth
- 1845-48: composes *Lohengrin*
- 1848: year of uprisings around Europe. Wagner joins the insurrection in Dresden in June
- 1849: by May Prussian troops have gained control. Wagner forced to flee Dresden. Seeks refuge with Liszt at Weimer, then escapes to Switzerland via Paris with a false passport. Settles in Zurich

The Zürich essays: Art and Revolution (1849)

There are even many of our most popular artists who do not in the least conceal the fact, that they have no other ambition than to satisfy this shallow audience. They are wise in their generation; for when the prince leaves a heavy dinner, the banker a fatiguing financial operation, the working man a weary day of toil, and go to the theatre: they ask for rest, distraction, and amusement, and are in no mood for renewed effort and fresh expenditure of force.

It is for Art therefore, and Art above all else, to teach this social impulse its noblest meaning, and guide it toward its true direction. Only on the shoulders of this great social movement can true art lift itself from its present state of civilised barbarianism, and take its post of honour. Each has a common goal, and the twain can only reach it when they recognise it jointly. This goal is the strong fair man, to whom Revolution shall give his strength, and Art his Beauty!

The Zürich essays: The Artwork of the Future (1850)

Man as artist can only be fully satisfied in the union of all the art forms in the collective artwork [*Gasamkunstwerk*]; in every individualisation of his artistic capacities he is unfree, not wholly that which he can be; in the collective artwork he is free, wholly that which he can be.

The highest artwork is the drama; it is present in its ultimate completeness only when each art form, in its ultimate completeness, is present in it. True drama can be conceived only as resulting from the collective impulse of all the arts to communicate in the most immediate way with a collective public; each individual art form can reveal itself as fully understandable to this collective public only through collective communication, together with the older art varieties, in the drama, for the aim of each individual art form is fully attained only in the mutually understanding and understandable cooperation of all the art forms.

Judaism in Music (1850)

The Jews could never take possession of this art [...] So long as the separate art of Music had a real organic life-need in it, down to the epochs of Mozart and Beethoven, there was nowhere to be found a Jew composer: it was impossible for an element entirely foreign to that living organism to take part in the formative stages of that life. Only when a body's inner death is manifest, do outside elements win the power of lodgment in it—yet merely to destroy it. Then indeed that body's flesh dissolves into a swarming colony of insect-life: but who, in looking on that body's self would hold it still for living?

The Zürich essays: Opera and Drama (1850)

- Begins with further critiques of French opera and the general cultural climate
- Elaborates on the idea of *Gesamkunstwerk*
 - everything must be related to the idea of music drama
 - no superfluous ornamentation
 - a new type of melody is needed, musical prose rather than verse
 - drama bound together with leitmotifs, musical ideas associated with a particular character, emotion, thing, event, etc.
- Contains the following explanation of the leitmotif technique:

The melodic moments, in themselves adapted to maintain our feeling at an even height, will be made by the orchestra into a kind of guides-to-feeling throughout the whole labyrinthine...building of the drama. At their hand we become the constant fellow-knowers of the profoundest secret of the poet's aim, the immediate partners in its realisation.

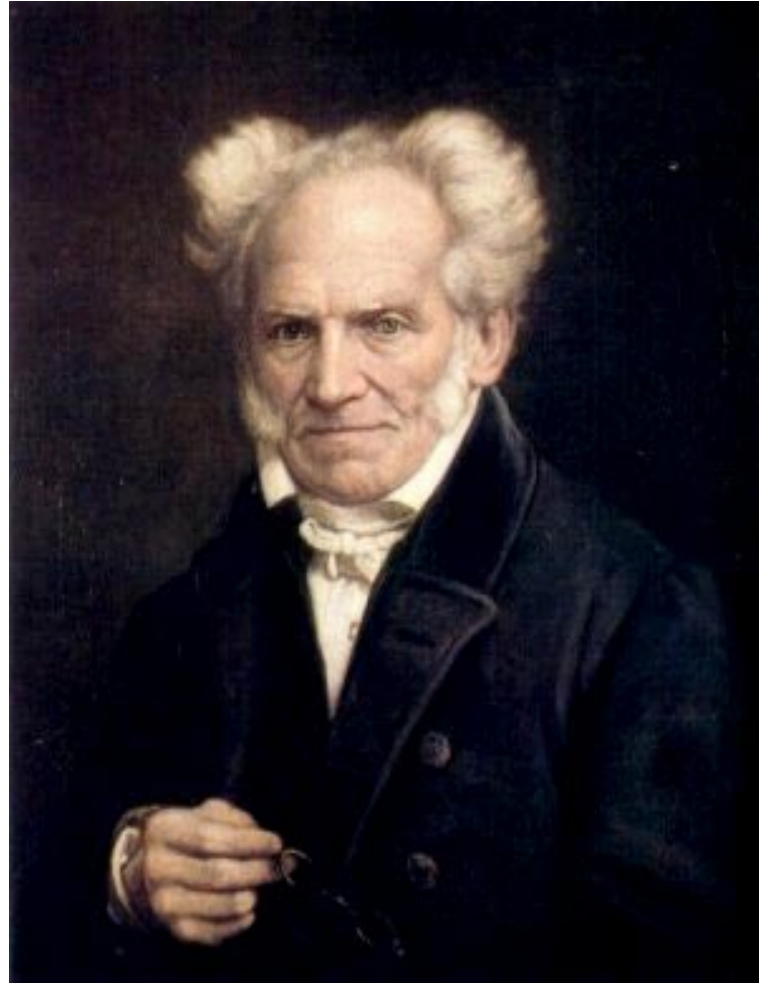
Der Ring des Nibelungen

- A colossal cycle of four music dramas composed between 1848 and 1874
 - Das Rheingold* (The Rhinegold) (1853—4)
 - Die Walküre* (The Valkyrie) (1854—6)
 - Siegfried* (1856—71)
 - Götterdämmerung* (The Twilight of the Gods) (1869—74)
- The libretti written by Wagner himself are based on stories from German medieval epic poems and Nordic legends.
- The first complete performance took place at the Bayreuth *Festspielhaus* — a state-of-the-art theatre built to Wagner's specifications — in August 1876.
- The cycle makes extensive use of leitmotives: musical ideas associated with a particular character, emotion, thing, event, etc.

Bayreath *Festspielhaus*



Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860)



Tristan und Isolde

- Inspired by his love affair with Mathilde Weisendonck and his reading of the philosophy of Schopenhauer.
- Composed between 1856-9 on a break from work on Siegfried
- After its publication in 1860 the work was considered unplayable, first performance planned for the Vienna Court Opera in 1861 was abandoned after 77 rehearsals.
- Eventually premiered in Munich in 1865 conducted by Hans von Bülow.
- Examples played in class
 - Prelude
 - Act 2: Love Duet
 - Act 3: Liebestod (Love-death)

Tristan und Isolde: Prelude

Langsam und schmachtend.

5.

First system of the musical score. The top staff is for Violoncello (Vcello.) and the bottom staff is for Bass (Fag.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo/mood is 'Langsam und schmachtend.' The first measure of the Vcello. part is marked *pp*. The second measure of the Vcello. part is marked *p*. The Fag. part has a *p* dynamic in the second measure. The system ends with a double bar line.

Second system of the musical score. The top staff is for Violoncello (Vcello.) and the bottom staff is for Bass (Fag.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo/mood is 'Langsam und schmachtend.' The first measure of the Vcello. part is marked *cresc.*. The second measure of the Vcello. part is marked *dim.*. The third measure of the Vcello. part is marked *p*. The Fag. part has a *p* dynamic in the third measure. The system ends with a double bar line.

Prescribed Listening

Das Rheingold: Excerpt from Scene 1 (specified in email)

Tristan und Isolde: Act III, 'Liebestod'

Prescribed Reading

Chapter 28 in the *Norton History of Western Music*, pp. 678—695.

Taruskin: *Music in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 539—562.

The various chapters in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* have more detailed information on various aspects of Wagner's music.

The following is a link to Wagner's essays in translation:

[http://imslp.org/wiki/
Richard_Wagner's_Prose_Works_\(Wagner,_Richard\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Richard_Wagner's_Prose_Works_(Wagner,_Richard))