Wagner of *Tristan* and the later *Ring* for breaking down the tonal pulls of nineteenth-century music. Modal writing, planing of intervals or chords, and emphasizing tritones helped, but several other devices need to be mentioned.

One is the virtual replacement of the traditional circle of fifths with a circle of thirds, as it were, whether diatonically related and thus close (the flat mediant or submediant in a minor key), chromatically altered but still relatively close by mid-century standards (after Beethoven, the tonal relation of sharped mediant to the tonic, E major to C major, resumed with Liszt), or chromatically altered and jarringly remote, as the sudden juxtaposition of E minor after C♯ major as early as the "Sonnet 104 of Petrarch" in the Italian *Années de pèlerinage*. The use of the sharped major mediant in a minor key (E major after C minor, for instance) is original with Liszt in the "Dante Sonata" (close and opening of the so-called "exposition") or even in such sonata-form expositions as *Tasso* or the outer movements of the *Faust Symphony*. Repetition, not only of themes but of sometimes sizable sections of music, is one of Liszt's ways of providing relative tonal stability, even when the repetitions are sequences or blocks of music repeated a step or half-step higher.

Atonality is a dangerous term to use in describing the music of any nineteenth-century composer. It has been unfortunately employed to describe the opening of the "Vallée d'Obermann" from the Swiss *Années* which is really a "floating tonality" going through a variety of keys in rapid succession; the opening section begins and ends in E minor and the piece's triumphant outcome is E major. The adjective "atonal" has also been applied to the highly chromatic prelude and fugue on B-A-C-H, chiefly because the notes of this motive promote tonal instability and the prevalence of diminished-seventh harmonies destroys any feeling of key. The fugue subject, in retrospect, is in B♭ major despite its chromaticism, and the work ends in B♭ major. The term "atonality" deserves to be used in terms of "diatonic atonality" in the very late works, especially with "Unstern" or the "Bagatelle Without Key."

Tonality and structure with Liszt, as with all other nineteenth-century composers, are inseparable. Liszt's music has often been the object of the reproach of "formlessness"—which his defenders, beginning with Wagner in his essay on Liszt's symphonic poems of 1857, did not really counter, saying merely that Liszt had his "own" form which was taken from the subject of the symphonic poem or program symphony. Liszt's themes are often obliquely defined in key (the first theme of the B minor sonata, for instance). In freer-form works the main subject, after an introduction which starts around a key and gets away from it, is generally stated in a key other than the tonic ("Sposalizio"); the recitative-like transitional passages between sections sometimes imply a key other than the actual outcome (exposition of the first movement of the *Faust Symphony*); and the lack of

tonal closure between sections often makes it difficult to determine where given sections of a sonata form begin or end.

Yet Liszt, more often than not, amazes the listener with firm long-range tonal plans, even though their outcomes are perceivable only after the fact. *Funérailles* is one such piece: the dissonant introduction, with low piano sonorities reproducing the clangor of large bells and planed diminished-seventh chords creating some striking dissonances, contains a D♭ pedal which turns out to be the submediant of the tonic key, F minor. The later *Evocation of the Sistine Chapel* can be misunderstood as the musical equivalent of the picture postcards that had become popular around the 1860's—as maltreatments of Allegri's *Miserere* and Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus*—but the B♭ augmented triad near the opening is also a dominant sonority of G minor in which the *Miserere*, often chromatically reharmonized, is set; and the G major ending is surprising after so much B major for the *Ave Verum Corpus*. Only with some of the piano works of the 1880's, to which I have assigned the term "diatonic atonality," is the expectation of tonality really absent.

Liszt's influence was felt throughout the entire second half of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. One of the greatest altruists in the history of music, Liszt aided nearly every composer who came into his orbit, from Chopin to MacDowell and Debussy, and trained an entire school of pianists. Echoes of Liszt's harmony and musical rhetoric can be found in the work of nearly every composer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; in fact Liszt, more so than Berlioz or Wagner, is the truly seminal figure for most twentieth-century music. The variegated facets of his musical personality were to find many echoes—the heroic in Mahler, the satanic diabolism in late Mahler, Stravinsky, and Prokofiev, the landscape painting (how different from Mendelssohn's) in Debussy and Ravel, the economy of means and use of striking dissonances in Schoenberg's Op. 11 piano pieces and in the works of Bartók, who considered Liszt more important than either Wagner or Richard Strauss in the development of music. Liszt was the dominant figure of the "progressive" trends in music, even to Webern and Messaien, although many today reject his aesthetic, his melodrama, his rhetoric, his optimism—which shows most clearly in the apotheoses of his symphonic poems—as well as his lapses of taste into bombast, roaring chromatic octaves, delicate chromatic filigrees at cadences, or overly rich harmony; those who dislike Liszt's music on these grounds should examine his more astringent late works.

START HERE

RICHARD WAGNER (1813–1883)

Wagner is still the most controversial composer of the nineteenth century. Though his influence on the subsequent history of music was not

as overwhelming as was once believed, no one can deny his important position in the second half of the century, the magnitude of his achievement, or the problems he posed for virtually every operatic composer who came after him. We should therefore look at the musical milieu from which his operatic ideas came (his other works are relatively unimportant in comparison), his chronological development as seen in his operas, and the salient aspects of his musical style.

After Weber's death in 1826 German opera became provincial again, for Germany, still a geographical abstraction, lacked the musical centralization and splendor of Paris or the many urban agglomerations of Italy which supported opera. Musical conditions outside Berlin and Vienna were rather primitive, and German opera had to compete with the French and Italian repertoire, which was better sung and easier to conduct or perform. The "great German opera," for these and other reasons, seemed an unattainable dream, though models existed in Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Weber's *Euryanthe;* Spohr labored in vain, Mendelssohn and Liszt evaded the challenge, and Schumann made the last unsuccessful attempt with *Genoveva* in 1850. Some of the younger German composers saw in *Der Freischütz,* Weber's most popular opera, a model: Albert Lortzing (1801–51) found his inspiration in the folklike *Gemütlichkeit* of Max's aria in Act I and the Huntsmen's chorus in Act III, while the horror story elements like the Act II finale inspired Heinrich Marschner (1795–61) in *Der Vampyr* (1828) and *Hans Heiling* (1833). French and Italian influences dominated the most successful German works like *Martha* (1847) by Friedrich von Flotow (1812–83) and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1849), its third act a minor masterpiece, by Otto Nicolai (1810–49).

Wagner's ideal was a German opera that would occupy an artistic position and status equal to that of the greatest symphonic music, with the theatre a locus for edification and ennoblement rather than mere entertainment (an idea that Schiller had pursued since the mid-1780's) and through his ambition, his will, and his egomania he succeeded, after numerous setbacks that would have broken ordinary spirits. The help he received from Spontini, Liszt, King Ludwig of Bavaria, and the members of the cult that grew up around his music were valuable, but his single-minded and egocentric determination was the principal factor in his eventual triumph; even some of his obstacles were of his own making.

STOP

Wagner's early works extend to 1848; his juvenilia need not detain us here, and we should concentrate on his four major operas of this period: *Rienzi* (1837–40, performed 1842 revised 1843), *The Flying Dutchman* (1841, performed 1843, revised 1846, 1852, and 1860), *Tannhäuser* (1843–45, revised 1860–61, 1867, 1875), and *Lohengrin* (1845–48, performed 1850 though the composer, then in exile, was not to hear it until much later). *Rienzi* is a grand historical opera written, it was thought, to outdo Meyerbeer, but its real parents are the grand operas of Spontini; only its overture is now generally known, but this work established Wagner as an operatic composer and obtained for him a post as conductor in Dresden. *The Flying Dutchman,* a work of greater significance, is the first of the "psychological dramas" in which Wagner was to excel, and the first practical demonstration of his theory of myth as the best source of plot for the music drama. *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* are syntheses of Grand Opera devices, psychological music drama, and the medieval legends that excited many Romantics.

One who studies these works is struck by the various points at which Wagner either adheres to or departs from the operatic conventions established by Weber or Meyerbeer. Despite the continuous texture, arias and "set-numbers" are evident but are connected into scene-complexes; with Wagner the "scene-complex opera" replaces the "number opera" comprised of discrete set-numbers like arias, ensembles, or choruses with full cadences and pauses for applause between them. *The Flying Dutchman's* arias seem overwritten, especially Senta's ballad in Act II; it was the number of the opera written earliest and has the burden of explaining many of the incidents of the drama that went before or are to come. However, Elisabeth's "Dich, teure Halle" in *Tannhäuser* is a magnificent specimen of the traditional grand aria, and Wolfram's song to the evening star in this opera shows that Wagner could write a "hit tune" as well as any composer. Not until *Lohengrin* did Wagner display a thorough mastery of the duet. Wagner's large-scale ensembles are the most spectacular parts of these early operas and are most successful when they follow traditional conventions, like the march in Act II or the pilgrims' choruses in Acts I and III of *Tannhäuser.* The finales tend to follow the Spontini-Meyerbeer tradition, with the whole company on the stage; the longest finale is that of Act II of *Tannhäuser* with its prolix tournament of song and its hero's praising the charms of Venus in the chivalric accents of Weber's knightly heroes like Adolar or Hüon. *Lohengrin* contains the most interesting departure from the conventional spectacles, for they become muted, restrained, and subdued, and what seems to be a massive buildup to a climax in Elsa's procession in Act II is thwarted by Ortrud's denunciation. In all these operas Wagner shows a great love of contrast: Act III of *The Flying Dutchman,* in which Wagner effectively contrasts the merrymaking of the Norwegian sailors with the spectral atmosphere of the Dutchman's ship, is an excellent illustration.

In retrospect, Wagner did not make as much of a break with traditional operatic and musical conventions as either his enemies or his admirers claimed. Wagner's treatment of the voice in his early operas is quite noteworthy: though the voice dominates the orchestral accompaniment, much of what is to be sung is in a measured, quasi-melodious recitative akin to arioso (Wagner insisted that his singers perform from the standpoint

of dramatic realism rather than for vocal effect), with the orchestra establishing an introductory atmosphere, interjecting comments, playing reminiscence motives, linking sections together, and even serving as a giant continuo. At its worst the effect is dull, compounded by a square-cut phrase syntax in the vocal parts with an overuse of a $\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ ♩. ♪ | ♩ rhythm, but it can also rise to the heights of dramatic declamation, as in the hero's narrative in Act III of *Tannhäuser*, in which he describes his pilgrimage to Rome and its unsuccessful outcome.

Wagner's orchestra in these operas is not unusually large, and the additional resources he demands are chiefly for on-stage fanfares, but in *Lohengrin* he discovered the expressive effects of the English horn and bass clarinet. Wagner's use of the brass ranges from the "heavy artillery" noise of *Rienzi* to the great restraint of *Lohengrin*. Harmonically, Wagner was no more adventurous than Spohr, Liszt, or Chopin at this time; it is Spohr's chromaticism that pervades the Pilgrims' chorus and Elisabeth's prayer in *Tannhäuser*. Beginning with *Lohengrin*, Wagner associated keys with certain characters or incidents: A major (also the key of the prelude) for Lohengrin, F♯ minor for the conspiracy of Telramund and Ortrud, E♭ major and its related keys for Elsa, A♭ minor for accusations. In his recitatives Wagner is most tonally adventurous: in "Die Frist ist um" of Act I in *The Flying Dutchman* he uses one of his finest recitatives to get from B minor to C minor by way of floating diminished-seventh chords, although the ensuing aria has a conventional tonal scheme. The third act of *Tannhäuser* shows how Wagner was groping to achieve the dramatically and tonally unified structures characteristic of his later operas: the heightened declamation, accompanied by reminiscence motives, of the hero's pilgrimage (in A minor) is a harbinger of his later style, but set-pieces like the Pilgrims' chorus and Elizabeth's prayer are reminiscent of the Grand Opera tradition, and the tonality of E♭ major begins and closes the act.

With *Lohengrin* Wagner stopped composing, not only because his time was occupied with disputes with his superiors in Dresden, participation in the abortive revolution of 1849, proscription and exile to Switzerland, but because he felt that this opera marked a terminal point in his musical style. He had found it necessary not only to write the words as well as the music to his operas but also to train his performers and educate his audience; now he would have to begin all over again by developing a new kind of opera and explaining, in a series of essays (especially *The Art-Work of the Future* and *Opera and Drama*), his theories of what musical drama should be. After intensive study of both Nordic mythology and ancient Greek tragedy, in 1848 he made the first draft of a libretto, starting with what eventually became the last opera in the cycle, and in 1850 the first musical sketches for his cycle of music dramas *Der Ring des Nibelungen (The Ring of the Nibelung)*, which he was not to complete until 1874.

The prologue, *Das Rheingold*, was finished in 1854 and *Die Walküre (The Valkyrie)* in 1856 (the works not performed, though, until 1869 and 1870 respectively), but he abandoned *Siegfried* at the end of the second act in 1857. Though in 1864 and 1865 he resumed work on what he had already done, he did not begin composing the third act until 1869, after his musical style had undergone substantial changes, and finished it two years later. The hiatus beween the second and third acts was filled by *Tristan und Isolde* (1857–59, first performed 1865), originally intended as a "practical" opera which would not require elaborate staging or scenery, and *Die Meistersinger* (1861–67, first performed 1868), Wagner's most beloved opera, praised even by those who dislike his other works. *Die Götterdämmerung (The Twilight of the Gods)*, the last and greatest of the *Ring* cycle, was finished in 1874, and the entire cycle was given in Bayreuth in 1876 in a theater designed to Wagner's specifications. *Parsifal*, his final opera, which he called a "festival drama for consecration of a theater" *(Bühnenweihfestspiel)*, was composed between 1877 and 1882.

CONTINUE HERE

Although Wagner often went counter to his theories in the actual composing of his operas, we should nevertheless examine the basic philosophy of his operatic ideals as stated in his essays.

Wagner first of all sought to restore the idea of drama as a thoroughly integrated art, in which plot, poetry, music, scenery, costume, and action would be combined (the *Gesamtkunstwerk*); in Wagner's own words, "The highest collective art work is the drama; it is present in its ultimate completeness only when each kind of art, in its own ultimate completeness, is present in it." Hence Wagner wrote not only the music but also the words and the stage directions for his music dramas.

From his survey of the history of dramatic music, Wagner felt that this art had grown corrupt and separated from its original purpose. The drama was no longer the ultimate object but merely a vehicle for music; music, which should be the means for the fullest realization of the drama, had become in itself the ultimate goal. In addition, music had become separated from poetry and dance and had developed its own autonomous laws, thereby becoming artificial. Song had degenerated into the operatic aria; the sacred dance had declined into the French ballet with its quadrille tunes; and music itself had become a concern not of the heart but of the mind through the use of musical artifices, particularly counterpoint. The orchestra, which Beethoven had raised to a peak as an expressive medium, was relegated by the Italians to service as a mere accompaniment for the singers or was utilized by the French (especially by Meyerbeer) as a means for producing stunning but superficial effects.

Wagner's two basic problems in creating music dramas were the unification of speech and song and the reconciliation of drama and music. In unifying speech with song, Wagner sought a middle ground between

bald prose on one hand and rhymed poetry on the other. His solution, seen most clearly in *The Ring of the Nibelung* (its poetry composed before its music), was a reversion to the technique of ancient north European poetry in which common consonants in alliteration (the *Stabreim)* would not only provide coherence but would also permit contrast and antithesis which could be underlined by the music, especially through harmonic modulation. The *Stabreim* also eliminated the constraints on musical phrase-structure imposed by the rhymed verse and regular metric accents of traditional opera poetry (even that of Wagner's earlier operas), thus demanding more rhythmically flexible settings than the square-cut four-measure phrase so often used in the operatic set number. Speech, therefore, was intensified into tone language, with equal parity given to words and music. This tone language would be the principal vehicle for dramatic action, for soliloquy, and for dialogue.

The reconciliation between music and drama was to be provided by the orchestra, which would serve, in Wagner's words, as "the soil of infinite universal feeling . . . the perfect complement of scenic environment . . . [to dissolve] the solid motionless floor of the actual scene into a fluid, pliant, yielding, impressionable, ethereal surface whose unfathomed bottom is the sea of feeling itself." Instrumental music, as Beethoven had shown, could express everything that speech could not; it could arouse indeterminate emotions, comment on the action taking place on the stage, and, through the power of association, could recall past incidents, ideas, and feelings, and could actually produce more precise impressions than words alone could do. The orchestra would thereby complement the voice, bearing it along on the surface of harmony as a boat is borne on the surface of the ocean.

The form of the opera was to be a continuous unfolding of musical ideas as dictated by the plot. This was in contrast with the "number opera," in which self-contained arias, ensembles, and choruses were linked together by spoken dialogue, recitatives, or transitions. The plots were to be based on myth or legend; although Wagner wanted a "human" drama, the personages of myth or legend were larger than life and thus better able to serve as the incarnations of the basic questions of life itself: love, goodness and evil, heroism, faith, renunciation. In *The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser,* and *Lohengrin,* Wagner had already made use of medieval legend, which he was to continue in *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal; The Ring of the Nibelung,* on the other hand, was based on pagan Nordic mythology.

Wagner did not consistently apply his theories of opera to his music dramas. To begin with, he was too good a musician and too experienced a man of the theatre to be completely fettered by theories, even his own. In a way, *Die Meistersinger* is a repudiation of his operatic theories, for it is written in rhymed verse, the characters are drawn from sixteenth-century

Nuremberg and seem like real persons rather than mythological beings or legendary personages, and there are numerous set-numbers of the kind encountered in traditional opera—choruses, arias (especially Walther's "Prize Song"), a ballet, even a quintet—embedded in the musical fabric. On the other hand, Wagner showed that his essential ideas of continuous musical flow, supported and reinforced by the orchestra, could be effectively applied to the "comic opera."

Revolutionary as Wagner's theories may have seemed at the middle of the nineteenth century, his music dramas nevertheless had many antecedents: the "symphonic style" of the operas by Mozart, Cherubini, and Beethoven; the continuous texture of Weber's *Euryanthe* and Meyerbeer's mature operas, in which the boundaries between the set-numbers were blurred; and the cyclic instrumental forms, with thematic linking, from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony onward. Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* where all operatic devices are united in a whole, stemmed not only from Gluck's operas but also from the dramas of Goethe, Schiller (whose *Die Braut von Messina* of 1803 would have been the first *Gesamtkunstwerk* had there been adequate musical and theatrical resources in Weimar), and Schubert's friend Franz Grillparzer (1791–1872). Even at his most innovative, Wagner preserved links with the musical past.

Only in *Das Rheingold* (effective because of its stage effects and fast action) and *Siegfried,* the least popular of Wagner's mature operas, did the composer's theories interfere with his instinctive musical and theatrical sense. Wagner's vocal melody, often just another strand in the orchestral texture and chiefly devoted to expressing the text, is sometimes perfunctory or is doubled by the orchestra, yet one sometimes finds full-fledged arias or dry but measured recitative, with the string section serving as the continuo. Wide leaps, generally fifths or minor sevenths, are one of Wagner's favorite expressive devices; the most extreme example may be found in Kundry's part in *Parsifal,* which established a precedent for the even wider leaps in the operas of Richard Strauss, Schoenberg, and Berg. Wagner's vocal melody is seldom "tuneful," for it is designed to carry the short textual lines and quick exchange of dialogue in the dramatic poem. Wagner's declamation demanded a new type of singer,[2] but there were several precedents for those roles which demanded endurance: Meyerbeer's heroic tenors or the heroines of Cherubini's *Medea,* Beethoven's *Fidelio,* and Weber's *Euryanthe* and *Oberon.*

Except for the on-stage brass instruments, Wagner used in his early operas a more conventional and less adventurous orchestration than Berlioz. The orchestra in the *Ring* is the largest because Wagner was creating

[2]It is interesting to note that throughout the history of his operas their heroines have been better cast than their heroes (Heldentenors), most of whom were originally baritones.