

## HANS VON BULOW

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Hans von Bulow was born in Dresden on 8 January 1830 and became a virtuosic pianist, conductor and composer.

He also became a champion of the music of Wagner and Brahms and admired Liszt who was the most gifted pianist of his time and, in fact, Bulow eventually married Liszt's daughter Cosima (1837-1930). This wedding took place in 1857 but Cosima eventually left her husband for Wagner.

Bulow was an excellent conductor particularly of Beethoven and he was one of the earliest European musicians to tour the USA.

But to backtrack. From 1839, Bulow was a student of Friedrich Wieck (1785-1873) whose daughter, Clara, (1819-1873) married Robert Schumann. But Hans's parents thought that there was future or financial security in law and pushed him to study law and so he went to Leipzig for this purpose. Here he met Liszt and heard Wagner including the premiere of Lohengrin in 1850 and thereafter devoted himself to music. His piano tutor was Louis Plaidy (1810-1874) who had many notable students such as Cowen, Draeseke, Grieg, Rontgen and Sullivan. Plaidy wrote two books on piano technique.

At Wagner's recommendation, Bulow made his debut as a conductor in Zurich in 1850.

But he was difficult and tactless and upset many people and this is why he was sacked from Zurich. However, he was admired for his conducting particularly of complex modern scores and he conducted the standard repertoire from memory.

His studies with Liszt began in earnest in 1851 and his marriage to Cosima, some six years later, produced two daughters, Daniela, born 1860, and Blandine, born 1863.

The 1850s was the time when he blossomed as a pianist and he was outstanding. He premiered the magnificent Liszt Sonata in Berlin in 1857.

He became the Hofkapellmeister in Munich in 1864 and conducted the premieres of two Wagner operas, Tristan and Isolde in 1865 and The Mastersingers in 1868 both with great success. At this time, however, his wife, Cosima was having a lurid affair with Wagner and together they had daughters which they named Isolde and Eva. To



Bulow's credit he remained a champion of Wagner's music and genuinely mourned his death in 1883.

It was in 1867 that Bulow became director of the new Koingliche Musikschule in Munich

Cosima left Bulow in 1868 with Isolde and Eva and the divorce was completed in 1870.

He was a phenomenal intellect. He played all 32 of Beethoven's piano sonatas from memory and premiered the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto no 1 in Boston in 1875. It was not well-received and subjected to jeers. Although Bulow played Chopin, he had nicknames for all of the preludes of Opus 28.

In 1880, Bulow left his second Kapellmeister post after a fight with a tenor singing the Knight of the Swan from Lohengrin so badly. This was in Hanover.

He moved to Meiningen and while living there he met Richard Strauss, although this was in Berlin and did not like him at first. He gave Strauss the first opportunity to conduct. Strauss became a pupil of Bulow.

Bulow was influenced by the divisive teachings of the philosopher Max Steiner (1806-1856) whose teachings approached nihilism, existentialism, postmodernism and anarchism with an emphasis on ego.

In the late 1880s, Bulow settled in Hamburg.

For most of his adult life he suffered from chronic neuralgiforme headaches caused by a tumour of the cervical radicular nerves which may explain his notorious behaviour. He sought a warmer climate for his health and died in a Cairo hotel on 12 February 1894.

Two scores follow to give some indication of his piano and orchestral music.

[\*Score of Ballad Op 11\*](#)

[\*Score of Nirwana\*](#)

(616)