

RICHARD WAGNER

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Wagner is the first composer to have inspired me, and he still does. At the age of thirteen I declared that he was my favourite composer. I conducted *The Mastersingers Overture* in my front room many times! I had Furtwangler's magnificent recording of *Tristan and Isolde* and played and played it with a large vocal score on which I wrote many comments some of which are awful juvenilia.

I said it was the greatest of all operas and, today, I still believe that passionately although I may not be quite as emphatic so that people are not offended, as they so easily are. I loved the second act and could sing most of it without the music although my German was dubious. The *Liebtestod* is the most sublime music I know. And what a way to end an opera. The only comparison is the end of Verdi's *Aida* with the contralto chanting out those glorious D flats.

I was censured for my admiration of Wagner and taunted with comments such as, "Are you anti-Semitic too?". I do not think that he was a rabidly anti-Semitic person. It was just that he hated the composer Meyerbeer who was a Jew. As Wagner was himself painfully sensitive his remarks may have been insensitive. The composer who was vehemently anti-Semitic was Chopin

I do not trust anyone who says that they love all the works of a composer. I remember how disappointed I was at the *Siegfried Idyll* and I still do not like it much. The *Bridal March* from *Lohengrin* is maligned and badly played by many an organist at Saturday afternoon weddings, but listen to it in the opera as it is sung and marvel also at the orchestration. To me, Wagner is the greatest orchestrator of them all.

The most frequent comment about Wagner's music is, "There are some great moments but long half hours." I can see that point but the expectation of the next tremendous moment is worth the wait and can be edge of the seat excitement.

Wilhelm Richard Wagner was born on 22 May, 1813 the ninth child of Carl Friedrich Wilhelm Wagner and Johanna Rosine, nee Patz. The birth took place at a house called *The Red and White Lion* in the *Bruhl* district of Leipzig. Carl was a police official and thought by some to be a friend to the occupying French and, therefore, something of a traitor. He died of typhus on 23rd November 1813, his early death caused by insanitary conditions following the *Battle of Leipzig* and before Richard's first birthday. He was 33.

Richard's mother remarried the following year on 28 August to Ludwig Geyer and they had a daughter six months later. Geyer was an actor, painter, costume designer and thought himself to be a playwright. In September they set up home in Dresden.

At the age of four Richard deputised for a girl in a performance of Schiller's *William Tell*. The resultant consequences are well known but reveal how the boy was ultra sensitive.

In 1820 he went to the village school in Possendorf.

By now his stepfather was very ill with tuberculosis and spent some time with Richard's uncle Adolf. Hitler relished in the Adolf connection. Geyer was very depressed and his asthma became worse. Young Richard played the piano to Geyer who saw the boy's potential talent but this realisation was too late. Geyer died the next day, 30 September.

The older children now had to work to provide income for the large family and Johanna took in lodgers. At one time it was the composer, Spohr.

Richard had the nickname of the *Cossack* and when he was sent for a year to Eisleben to stay with Karl

Geyer he was taken with a local tightrope walker and tried to copy his feats. But he was a very sensitive and emotional child subject to shocking nightmares. Loneliness was a great fear for him and he was regularly ill. He had a fascination for Greek mythology and drama. The Greek appealed to him because it was not real and, therefore, not a threat; it was fantasy and fiction and these concepts were later to infuse his great operatic masterpieces.

When Weber came to Dresden for performances of his opera *Der Freischütz* young Wagner would watch him walking to the theatre. It deeply impressed Richard who now decided to emulate Weber and be a great composer. He was going to copy him. Although Weber is best known for his operas he also wrote two symphonies. So did Wagner. Weber wrote a few piano pieces including sonatas. So did Wagner. The similarity cannot be overlooked. Richard tried to play Weber's music and went to Herr Humann for piano lessons.

Weber died in 1826. Richard moved into lodgings with a family called Bohme and he developed an interest in girls. He was now a teenager but he still behaved as a child in many ways. He was smitten with a girl called Amalie Hoffman who was a stunning beauty. He would often pretend to be asleep so that she and the girls in the house would carry him off to bed. He loved the closeness of girls.

His mother took him to Prague in 1826 and in the summer of 1827 his mother and his two youngest sisters moved to Leipzig but, although he visited, he was still at school in Dresden. His passion for literature increased but within two years this was superseded by music and the memory of Weber. The other great motivation was seeing Beethoven's *Fidelio* and, I suspect, being overwhelmed by the soprano Wilhelmine Schroder-Devrient. He actually wrote to her.

In 1830 he wrote two overtures in C and B flat respectively. The second survives. He enrolled as a music student at the University of Leipzig in 1831. Drinking, gambling and the resultant debts plagued him. He even staked his mother's pension and lost it. It was also the age of revolution. There was the Warsaw uprising which meant Polish refugees were present in Leipzig. He wrote a Political Overture which is lost.

There are a few piano works of this time. A *Fantasia* in F sharp minor owes something to Bach but his first published compositions were the *Piano Sonata* in B flat and a *Polonaise* and *Trio* in D for piano duet. His indebtedness to Beethoven was revealed in his *Concert Overture* in D minor which was well received on Christmas Day 1831; there was a *Concert Overture* in C, which ends fugally, and also an overture, *König Enzo* premiered in March 1832. Then there was second piano sonata, the *Grosse Sonata* in A major, and a *Scene* and *Aria* for the soprano Henriette Wust.

That year saw a local cholera epidemic and Wagner removed to Vienna and then to Bohemia where his interest in girls took a different turn. Here they aspired to social climbing, emulated the Italians and read trashy novels! But Richard's *Symphony* in C was now complete and there was a private performance in November. He had also made sketches for his first opera, *Die Hochzeit*.

The next move was to Wurtzberg and to the opera house to learn about the theatre. He had written the libretto to his next opera *Die Feen*. The work was completed in January 1834. Later, he was offered the post of conductor of the Magdeburg theatre in Leipzig. On finding lodgings he met the most beautiful woman of the company, Minna Planer, and his life changed. He conducted Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and was working on his *Symphony* in E.

Minna was four years older than Wagner. When she was fifteen she had been raped by a captain of the Royal Guards and in February 1826 gave birth to a daughter whom she pretended was her younger sister. Wagner hated the attention Minna received from all the men and her constant flirting. At a New Years Eve party he became very drunk and was taken home in a wheelbarrow. Minna took to him as a lad that needed looking after and it is assumed that they soon became lovers.

Wagner had written a cantata *Beim Antritt des neunten Jahres* and another overture, *Columbus* and he was working on his third opera *Das Liebesverbot* which music is heavily influenced by other composers.

In 1833 Wagner had become notorious for exploring the Bavarian countryside and the girls! He was always in the local taverns 'chatting up' the girls! One tried to become engaged to him but he became serious with Frederike Galvani. When he met up with her after a while in 1835 he found that she had had a child by some country bumpkin whom he dismissed as an unworthy rival. That year his Uncle Adolf died and Minna's mother arrived and told Minna that she must not get involved with Wagner. When Minna left for Berlin it broke Wagner's heart. He cried like a child and wrote several love letters to her.

Das Liebesverbot was performed on 26 March, 1836 but it was something of a disaster. Worse was to come. He went to prison for debt. He moved to Berlin later and met up with Minna where their attraction to each other was obvious and on 24 November they married at Tragheim church. It was to prove a mistake. Marrying a flirt is always unwise.

In 1837 he wrote the Overture Rule Britannia for George Smart of the Philharmonic Society in London. It is a work best forgotten. At this time Wagner was reading Lytton's Rienzi which he began to set as an opera. It was premiered in Dresden in 1842 and with great success.

After six months of marriage the Wagners separated. Richard could not stand her flirting and almost certain infidelity. She hated his criticisms and objections. On her side she did not like the problem of his debts and his temper. He missed her dreadfully and 'wrote an apology to her', although she was the main wrongdoer, and he begged her to come back. There was a reconciliation and she remained in an uneasy marriage. They split over Wagner's affair with Mathilde Wesendonck in 1858 but Minna returned to Wagner in 1859.

Karl von Holtei was a theatre manager and appointed Wagner as conductor in Riga in 1837. They soon became enemies. Holtei was a lewd man, a homosexual but to make himself acceptable he chased women of the theatre. He apparently had designs on Minna as well and introduced her to a rich and handsome merchant. Wagner was furious and he had every right to be.

Holtei left because of the troubles which he had caused and his replacement, Joseph Hoffmann, wanted Wagner replaced. There were threats that Wagner could be imprisoned for debt and so Wagner had no choice but to flee Russia. He wanted to go to Paris where it was alleged the music scene was second to none.

Wagner's passport had been impounded, so how could they afford to travel to Paris? They sold what they could. Friends accompanied the Wagners to meet a friend on the Prussian side of the border. This friend drove them through the quiet roads and to the Russian frontier where there were sentries at short distances who had instructions to shoot all fugitives on sight. During one stage of the journey the carriage crashed and the Wagners were injured. It is said that the injuries Minna suffered prevented her having children. They arrived at Pillau, Wagner having decided to sail to London thinking it would be cheaper option and safer. They were at sea for what was an interminable time including sailing past Copenhagen. There was a terrific storm and, no doubt, Wagner had this sea voyage in mind when he composed The Flying Dutchman.

The Wagners and their dog Robber arrived in Gravesend and went by steamer to London bridge. They found lodgings. Later they did some sightseeing but they did not like London. They sailed to Boulogne in August and on the ship met two Jewish ladies who were friends of the composer Meyerbeer who was also a Jew. On reaching terra firma a meeting was arranged between Wagner and Meyerbeer who welcomed him and was very kind to him. Why Meyerbeer should be thus hated by Wagner might be a mystery but the timing was so soon after many trials including the deception of Holtei, a dangerous escape, an uncertain future and nowhere to go and no prospects. Meyerbeer was comparatively secure.

They arrived in Paris and made friends quickly among other poor and struggling artistes. But he was in deep despair. Although much is made of Wagner's anti-Semitism he had many friends who were Jews. He shared a house with one in Paris. That Wagner was judgmental about any race or condition of man does not carry weight; he was friends with Ernst Kietz, an objectionable man because he was involved in pederasty. Some of Wagner's friends advised him to write some songs that would be acceptable at social functions and in 1840 Trois Melodies were published. Still impoverished, Wagner was constantly asking friends for money.

In April he had a brief meeting with the great Franz Liszt who later invited him to one of his recitals. Liszt was a marvellous pianist, perhaps the greatest the world has ever known, but Wagner was cross because young women, and other women who had lost their youth and beauty, were fawning over him. Clearly his financial problems were causing him endless stress and sleepless nights and making him dislike everybody, whether it was Meyerbeer or Liszt. Extreme worry can have extreme consequences. His enemies ridiculed him about his debts.

He composed his Faust Overture and took up journalism thus emulating Meyerbeer. He wrote three short stories. He also began sketches for The Flying Dutchman. Meyerbeer encouraged him and even when Wagner returned to Germany Meyerbeer still helped Wagner in many ways. I have the opinion that Wagner hated his dependence on Meyerbeer and, in a strange way, therefore hated Meyerbeer.

Wagner went to prison again for debt. On his release he sent the completed score of Rienzi to the director of the Dresden Court Theatre with a complimentary letter from Meyerbeer. Fearing imprisonment again Wagner did a lot of hack work and with Minna and her daughter, Natalie, they huddled together in one room. In July 1841 the new director of the Paris opera expressed interest in The Flying Dutchman and there were the murmurs of an interest in his work back in Germany. Thirty months in Paris were too much for the Wagners and in April 1842 they left for Dresden. The next few months were spent trying to mount performances of Rienzi and The Flying Dutchman. He went to Berlin and encountered Mendelssohn whom he did not like. He visited one of his brothers, Albert, in Halle and was taken with his fifteen year old daughter, Johanna, who was a good singer. She was later to sing the role of Elisabeth in Tannhauser. In the late summer rehearsals for Rienzi began and it opened on 20 October. Despite its great length the audience were delighted. Wagner conducted a performance of Weber's Euryanthe and this was also a great success and Caroline, Weber's widow, pressed Wagner to accept the post of second Kappelmeister in the theatre.

On 2 January 1843 Wagner conducted the premiere of The Flying Dutchman with Schroder-Devrient as Senta. The audience did not take to the subject matter and considered it a flop compared with Rienzi. But The Dutchman is a vastly better piece. On 2 February Wagner was appointed Kappelmeister of the Royal Court of Saxony. As a conductor and musician he was astounding but in relationships with others. It was another story.

The Vienna Court Opera wanted a new work from Wagner and Tannhauser was in progress and earmarked for Dresden but he explained that Lohengrin might be ready for 1845. He suggested that Vienna mount Rienzi. Wagner wrote a Festgesang for male chorus to accompany the unveiling of a statue of Friedrich August I. He also wrote The Love Feast of the Apostles rather hurriedly.

Thanks to the good offices of Meyerbeer, Berlin staged The Flying Dutchman in January 1844 with the composer conducting. Mendelssohn congratulated and embraced Wagner at the end of the performance.

The following year, in October, saw the premiere of Tannhauser which had its problems with performance and audience response. It was claimed to be too epic. Wagner turned to work on Lohengrin.

Wagner wanted improvements in the Dresden orchestra, the players' conditions and generally a reassessment of all things. He wrote to the director in March 1846 with these sound and sensible suggestions but his proposals were eventually rejected. On Palm Sunday 1846 he conducted Beethoven's Choral Symphony and it was said to be a sensational account. In the audience were two aspiring musicians von Carolsfeld and Hans von Bulow. Young Bulow went to meet Wagner and inspired him by his keenness. In turn, Wagner went to meet Spohr.

But he was still in debt. He appealed to the director, Luttichau, for a loan which was given in consideration of the collateral of a life policy, one third of his salary and the publication rights of three operas. But this loan only paid existing debts. It had no effect for the future.

Wagner was now disillusioned with the theatre and its management. Tannhauser was produced with the

alternative ending and in January 1848 Wagner's mother died. He threw himself into completing Lohengrin and this was to coincide with political upheaval.

The Paris revolt of 1848 ousted the Orleans monarchy. This triggered new laws in Hungary and an upheaval in Vienna. The world wanted change. There were uprisings in Vienna, Venice and Berlin. The Prussians put down an uprising in Warsaw, Austria had to tackle a revolt in Prague and the main agitator, Bakunin, fled to Dresden.

Wagner saw change as the only way to improve Germany and address the issues that meant so much to him. But still his debts troubled him. He wrote to Liszt for a loan at one time. He submitted plans to reorganise the National Theatre of the Kingdom of Saxony and he took great interest in the plans for the unification of Germany. He made more enemies by his political views.

He began to prepare an essay *The Nibelung Myth* with a view to transforming it into a musical drama. In the following year Liszt planned a production of *Tannhauser* in Weimar. This encouraged Wagner whose first impression of Liszt was wrong. Wagner became involved in the *Orchestral Players Union* to improve the conditions for the orchestra at Dresden which widened the gap further between him and management.

And then came the political explosion, the Dresden revolt. Wagner was friends with the leaders of the revolt and attended their meetings. He helped arm the people for the coming conflict, he ordered the manufacture of weapons including hand grenades. He ran a revolutionary newspaper. He tried to gain support from Prague. He tried to persuade Saxon troops to defect and therefore was guilty of treason. The King of Saxony rejected all the demands of the Liberals and the revolt began. Eventually it was suppressed and the leaders condemned to death although the sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Wagner had to be smuggled out of Dresden or he could have been given the same sentence. He went to Switzerland and in a shop he discovered Meyerbeer who was unwilling to talk to Wagner who was now a notorious fugitive. Minna was in Paris.

In August 1850 Liszt staged Lohengrin at Weimar. Wagner continued to be bellicose and wrote an article *Opera and Drama* which was an attack of the excesses in opera as shown in the works of Meyerbeer. It was a vicious reaction to Meyerbeer snubbing him in Zurich. Wagner now wrote about how the theatre in Zurich could be improved which was also unwise since Switzerland had proved to be his welcome refuge. He was working on *Siegfried's Tod* and then considered the young *Siegfried*. He took up a mild form of mountaineering and endangered the life of a friend. He persevered with the concept of *The Ring* saga and wrote sketches for *Rhinegold* and *Walkure*. *Gotterdamerung* was still in the distance.

There was a great amount of work involved in *The Ring* and to add to Wagner's workload he had been inspired by the *Tristan and Isolde* story but could not undertake to work on that as well. So it was shelved but in 1852 Karl Ritter reminded him of this subject. It is clear that Wagner dug into all the characters of his dramas even to the point of having special motifs for them. The *Tristan* story really impressed him and there was nervous excitement which he experienced about this future project.

On Christmas Eve 1854 the London Philharmonic Society met in urgent session. They had no famous name as their guest conductor and after eliminating some who were occupied elsewhere Wagner's name came up. His music was not well known in London but he did have a name.

After spending a few days in Paris, Wagner came to London arriving on 4 May 1857. He had rooms at 22 Portland Terrace, Regents Park. The cost of everything made his salary seem meagre. Whether he was a success is debateable. He took music slightly on the slow side although not as slowly as Klemperer did a hundred years later and London audiences preferred more ebullient tempi. Wagner was concerned with clarity not cheap thrills. He met the Scots composer Macfarren and conducted a symphony by Ciprani Potter and a George Onslow overture along with regular repertoire from Mendelssohn to Chopin. But he was not happy in London. He was also working hard on scoring *Die Walkure*.

I want to go back a few years to the time of the beginning of Wagner's refuge in Switzerland.

Beethoven, whose life was very much like Wagner's, had his immortal beloved. Wagner had Mathilde Wesendonck whose importance in his life may not yet be fully realised.

In October 1850 Otto Wesendonck, who was a rich partner in a silk company in New York, arrived in Zurich and settled there the following year with his young wife Mathilde who was in her early twenties.

It was the time that Wagner was undergoing change and becoming hostile to many ideas and people, his *sturm und drang* period. He wrote his notorious essay, *Judaism in Music*, which is regarded as anti-Semitic and he also wrote *Art and Revolution* which was an attack on Christianity which he considered to be against art, free expression and which dictated to man and therefore debased him. This brooding melancholy led him to write *On Musical Criticism*.

The gloom was lifted on 16 March 1852 when Mathilde attended a concert including the mighty *Tannhauser Overture* and *The Flying Dutchman* was given four performances in Zurich during April and May. Otto supported Wagner financially and in many other ways but it was Mathilde that Wagner was fascinated by. Between *Lohengrin* and *Rhinegold* he wrote an *Album Sonata* in A flat and dedicated it to her. Why not Otto, his benefactor? He also wrote a *Polka in G* for her. In 1854 Mathilde gave Wagner a gift of a golden pen and she was always in his mind as he completed *Rhinegold*. He was clearly in love with her and her relationship with Minna was very strained. It also seems possible that his relationships are revealed in the Ring saga, the most obvious being Wotan and Fricka symbolising Richard and Minna.

While in London he wrote to Mathilde of his new fascination, that of Buddhism and, how he read regularly from Dante's *Inferno*. He went to pantomimes and saw *Mother Goose* and *Cinderella*. But he was missing Mathilde.

Liszt was proving to be a consistent champion of Wagner's music. Liszt dedicated his *Dante Symphony* to him. Liszt was now romantically involved with Princess Caroline and they arrived in Zurich in 1856 and stayed for six weeks.

The following year the Wesendoncks began building a large villa overlooking the lake. This meant that Wagner's house would be much closer. He worked feverishly on *Siegfried* but it was abandoned as was the whole of the Ring project because Wagner's publishers showed no interest in it.

He turned to *Tristan*

Also in 1857 Bulow visited Wagner with his new wife, Cosima, the daughter of Liszt. Bulow had abandoned studies with the law after hearing the Weimar production of *Lohengrin*. He studied with Liszt and had taken up conducting.

Cosima was to become the third major female influence in Wagner's life. Cosima did not like Wagner at first, believing him to be vulgar and a self-centred man. In the winter of 1857/8 Wagner was setting some poems of Mathilde's which have become known as the *Wesendonck Songs*. Only *Traume* was orchestrated by Wagner; the others were later orchestrated by Felix Mottl.

By the new year both Minna and Otto were unhappy about the relationship between their respective spouses. It exploded and Wagner went to Paris for a while to let the matter cool down. It did and the friendships were revived but not without another drama.

The full score of *Tristan* was completed in April 1858 while Minna was trying to prove that Mathilde was nothing but a common seductress. Mathilde would flaunt herself at Wagner and she had a husband and two children. A letter was intercepted and Minna took it as an admission of a sordid affair and threatened Mathilde by suggesting she show it to her husband, Otto.

Cosima was not happy in her marriage and apparently began to show some interest in Wagner. He quarrelled with Liszt and as the older man was coming to the end of his career he would not be of more benefit to Wagner. He began work on Parisfal, a curious subject for a man who had attacked both Catholicism and Christianity.

In the Spring of 1861 Wagner set out for Vienna, his efforts to stage Tristan in Paris having failed, where he encountered Eduard Hanslick, a music critic, who had raved about Tannhauser but now had become an enemy. Here Wagner was receiving a taste of his own medicine. Hanslick hated Wagner. Wagner hated Meyerbeer and without reason. Wagner now began to contemplate again The Mastersingers as his next project. He was having real problems with Minna and the staging of Tristan. And he was privately seeing Cosima often while her husband was rehearsing.

Wagner's life was full of intrigue. Ludwig II became king of Bavaria in March 1864. He was 18. He had been interested in Wagner's music for many years although still a boy and he summoned Wagner to Court in Munich. The King learned that Wagner was living in exile in Switzerland but demanded Wagner be brought to Germany urgently.

Wagner was in two minds. On the one hand his return to his native country would be a blessing and an expression of forgiveness.

The king was homosexual and probably into other sexual perversions. Some homosexuals are. The poet W. H. Auden was a homosexual and his interest went further, to include what has conveniently called a study of mans relationship with animals. There is no suggestion that Wagner's friendship with the king was homosexual. Rather, Wagner hated homosexuality, pederasty and bestiality as any decent person would. In fact Wagner wrote, "There is one thing about the Greeks we will never be able to understand - a thing that separates them utterly from us: their love and pederasty."

Gossip prevailed about Wagner and the king. The king did have passionate affairs with members of his all-male retinue.

Wagner worked on The Mastersingers and wrote another pamphlet On State and Religion. He kept on about certain subjects wanting to put the world right by getting them to agree with him. His dominant, powerful personality was his downfall. He composed the Huldigungsmarsch for Ludwig. He wanted to start a music school in Munich concentrating on singing and with a deliberate view to training singers to learn his work. There were rumours of a new theatre to be built which would cost a fortune and there was the scandal about a portrait of the king by Pecht and its cost which Wagner was a party to and the alleged comment that Wagner had referred to the king as a mere boy. People always kick a man when he is down and Wagner's creditors began to pursue him.

After a short time the king pleaded with Wagner to stay in Munich, graphically referring to their friendship as glorious and until death.

Hans von Bulow was now a very sick man and Cosima could not cope with an invalid or potential invalid. Her thoughts were always centred on Wagner. But the friendship that was a problem was that of the King and Wagner. Politicians told the king that this friendship could cause a constitutional crisis and the newspapers were enjoying a potential scandal with wild cartoons. Reluctantly Ludwig said that Wagner had to leave Bavaria. There had been talk of a possible assassination attempt on the king.

Wagner was a fugitive again and went to Switzerland.

On 26 December 1865 Minna died in Dresden. Wagner did not seem that concerned and worked on Die Meistersinger. In March 1867 Cosima and her daughter, Daniela, joined Wagner. Cosima fell pregnant with Wagner's child and Liszt was furious. In May of that year the King said he wished to abdicate in order to be with Wagner who advised him not to be rash. Bavaria was about to be drawn into a war between Austria and

Prussia.

Cosima was back and forth between Bulow and Wagner but she left her husband for ever in November 1868. On the 6 May 1869 she gave birth to Helferich Siegfried Richard. Cosima begged Bulow for a divorce. Hans Richter now became Wagner's ambassador.

Nietzsche was a professor of philology in Basel and took an interest in Wagner. Nietzsche was a man who had thoughts similar to those of Wagner although they were more extreme. Nietzsche promulgated the idea that God was dead, that religion was holding man back and that Darwin's theories, because they were atheistic, must be embraced. In social and business life everyone had to fight for survival and advancement and to achieve goals it did not matter who was hurt in the process. As with the Beatles today the idea was, "No God and so no morality. We can all do what we like. No law, therefore the freedom to do what we like. We are answerable to no one."

Wagner was now completing the final opera in the Ring cycle. Nietzsche was sending Wagner his essays. Wagner was also reading about Bayreuth and its famous connections of the 18th century. In September 1870 his son Siegfried, who was now legitimised, was christened. Wagner had married Cosima on the king's birthday, 25 August.

For her birthday on Christmas Day 1871 Cosima received the gift of the Siegfried Idyll played by a group of musicians under Richter. It is not a work that I am particularly drawn to but Richter liked it. But it has to be said that Richter's value judgements were often faulty. He claimed to be ultra professional and fastidious about all aspects of music and yet later he was to acclaim a British composer as great whereas this British composer's work contains all the flaws that Richter condemned.

The final years of Wagner's life was taken up with the Bayreuth project and the completion of Parisfal. It is curious that Parisfal reveals Wagner's character. It seems to be his attempt to convert Catholicism to Wagnerism.

A theatre at Bayreuth would involve a massive financial outlay. King Ludwig was in favour of Wagner's plans. He was still besotted with Wagner and had broken off his engagement to Sophie largely because of his homosexuality and love for Wagner. The king would not comply with his advisers telling him to marry to prove that he was not homosexual. Ludwig was also distressed because he knew that Wagner would not return to Munich.

The cost of building the theatre was estimated at 300,000 thalers. There would have to be sponsors and fund raising events and share certificates at 300 thalers each.

Wagner did not let up on his literary work. The death of Auber in 1871 prompted *Recollections of Auber*; he also published an open letter to Nietzsche who first book compared the Greeks to modern Germany and urged that Greek ideas that should be adopted into Germany society which, he said, had to revive the Hellenic world. From this came the naturist movement when Germans went off into the woods for 'hikes' and in some secluded spot, camped and went around naked. They claimed to be advocating health and beauty and the need for the sun to shine on all parts of the body. Of course, it was really voyeurism and lead to sexual licence of all sorts, a mere extension of Darwin's theories that human beings are only animals and animals have no sexual inhibitions and so neither should the human animal. Morality did not count for anything. It is true that these activities were furtive and secret and what is furtive and secret is almost always wrong. The Greeks loved nudity, including its publication in the arts, and they advocated homosexuality and pederasty. To the Greeks such things were not wrong. The eleven years silence between Liszt and Wagner came to an end with a sort of reconciliation. Partly it was that Cosima wanted to discuss with her father becoming a Protestant.

The foundations of the Bayreuth theatre were laid in 1872 but the numbers of sponsors were not enough. By the new year of 1874 the project seemed doomed. In April of that year Wagner moved into Wahnfried, his

Bayreuth home. By November the Ring was finished and the theatre was being built. The first festival was in 1876. One of the main problems were the swimming machines for the Rhinemaidens. The second and last festival of his lifetime was in 1882. He had planned another for the summer of 1883 but Wagner died on 13 February that year from a heart attack.

Since his death he has been maligned. The fact that Hitler loved Wagner's music has caused some people to regard Wagner as they do Hitler. The unreasonable hatred that Hitler had for the Jews has be transmitted as Wagner having the same feelings. This concept of guilt by association is unjust.

I am thinking of a living composer whose lifestyle is immoral but that does not mean that those who like his music are immoral as well. Schubert's music is widely popular but, as a man, he was quite despicable. It never ceases to amaze me that people who condemn immorality in some and yet excuse it in their own heroes. I do not regard Wagner as a hero and I have to say that, as a person, I would not have liked him. We cannot shrug off moral problems. The current pop music scene is advocating promiscuity and immoral lifestyles and it is aimed at the young and vulnerable.

It has been said that had Wagner not been a socialist and corrupted by the theories of Darwin and Nietzsche and had been a decent, nice man he would never have written this unsurpassed music.

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