



## OTHALIE GRAHAM soprano

Soprano Othalie Graham has made her mark on the opera world, receiving critical acclaim internationally. Of her *Turandot*, *EDGE Boston* lauded: “Her voice is sumptuous, with firmly-focused, penetrating highs. Possessing beauty, temperament and superb acting skills, Graham is destined for stardom in the world of opera.” Recent engagements include productions of *Turandot* with Knoxville Opera, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and Teatro Cervantes de Málaga, and a Martin Luther King Jr. Tribute Concert with Bach Festival Society of Winter Park. In the 2019-2020 season Ms. Graham sings the role of Lady Macbeth with Opera Carolina and Toledo Opera.

She has portrayed *Turandot* around the world including with the Detroit Symphony, Arizona Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, Opera Columbus, Opera Delaware, Utah Festival Opera, Connecticut Grand Opera, Pensacola Opera, Sacramento Opera, and Nashville Opera, as well as Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM, Edmonton Opera, Grand National Theater of Peru, and Ópera de Nuevo León. She has also performed the role in concert the Westfield Symphony Orchestra, the Harrisburg Symphony, and Boston’s Chorus pro Musica.

Recent seasons’ roles include *Aïda* with Festival Euro Mediterraneo, Istanbul International Opera Festival, Opera Carolina, Toledo Opera; *Elektra* with Academy of Vocal Arts and Teatro di San Carlo Napoli; *Minnie* in *La Fanciulla del West* with

Indianapolis Opera and Nashville Opera; *Odabella* in *Atilla* with Sarasota Opera; and *Leonora* in *Il Trovatore* and *Serena* in *Porgy and Bess* with Toledo Opera. Other notable roles include *Senta* in *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Brünnhilde* and *Sieglinde* in Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and *Isolde* in *Tristan und Isolde*.

Ms. Graham has appeared in concert as *Isolde* in *Tristan und Isolde*, and Mahler’s *Symphony No. 8* with the Washington Chorus at the Kennedy Center; appeared as *Soprano Soloist* in *Elijah* with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir; *Verdi’s Requiem* with Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Mississippi Symphony Orchestra, and The Händel Society of Dartmouth; *Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9* with Lima Symphony and Philadelphia Orchestra; and *Serena* in *Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess* with Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra and Springfield Symphony.

Highlights include a recital with the Liederkrantz Society; a solo performance in “A Life in Opera – Celebrating Leontyne Price” with Springfield Symphony Orchestra; *Isolde* in *Tristan und Isolde* with the Young Musicians Foundation Orchestra; *Brünnhilde* excerpts from *Die Walküre* for the L’Opéra de Montréal; the *Britten War Requiem* with the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi; appearances at opera galas for Pacific Opera Victoria, Vancouver Opera, Oakville Symphony, Orquesta Sinfonica de Xalapa and Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM; a concert performance as *Isolde* in *Tristan und Isolde* in Zagreb, Croatia; a gala concert with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Sonora; and concerts with ProMusica and Festival Opera.

Ms. Graham was the first-place winner of the Gerda Lissner International Vocal Competition in the Wagner Division, the first-place winner of the Joyce Dutka Competition, a recipient of the prestigious Sullivan Foundation Grant, and the first-place winner in the Wagner Division of the Liederkrantz Competition. In Canada, her many awards and honors include the coveted Jean Chalmers prize in the Canadian Music Competition, winner of the Edward Johnson Competition, and first place in the Jeunes Ambassadeurs Lyriques Competition.



## Richard Wagner



Born: May 22, 1813, Leipzig

Died: February 13, 1883, Venice

### “Arrival of the Guests at Wartburg Castle,” from *Tannhäuser*

(Dresden, 1843-5; rev. Paris, 1861 and Vienna, 1875)

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, and strings.

**Performance time:** ca. 8:00

*I was in a state of gnawing, sensuous agitation that excited continually both blood and nerves when I sketched out the music for Tannhäuser and brought it to completion.*

Richard Wagner

Wagner composed his three-act opera *Tannhäuser* early on in his career. He had already written and premiered *Rienzi* at Dresden’s Königliches Hoftheater in October of 1842 and three months later offered *The Flying Dutchman* at the same venue. Unfortunately, *Dutchman* only received a lukewarm reception from the German audiences. Wagner, still only twenty-nine, was disappointed in the musical public’s perception of *Dutchman* yet was inspired to continue work on another grand opera whose dramatic scenario and thematic sketches had been left on the back burner for nearly a year. This is where the story of *Tannhäuser* begins.

Wagner had been living in Paris since the fall of 1839. These were difficult days for the young com-

poser. The Paris Opera was not interested in *Rienzi* (completed 1840) and he was forced to eke out a living making piano arrangements and writing articles for music periodicals. It was during the summer of 1841 that the philologist Samuel Lehrs introduced Wagner to the German legends of Lohengrin, a knight of the Holy Grail, and *Tannhäuser*, a medieval minnesinger. Realizing that both of these tales and their leading characters were excellent operatic subject matter, Wagner stored these ideas in his memory for future reference. In the meantime, he feverishly dove into another non-commissioned work, *The Flying Dutchman*, finishing it in only seven weeks by November, 1841. Suddenly, Wagner’s fortune changed when he learned that the Dresden Opera had accepted *Rienzi*. By April of the following year, an optimistic Wagner and his wife Minna had departed the French capital en route to Dresden.

*Tannhäuser* was also beginning to take shape in Wagner’s mind at this time. During the summer of 1842, Wagner vacationed for three weeks in Templece (now a part of the Czech Republic) and was inspired to plan *Tannhäuser’s* basic structure, write a portion of the libretto, and compose some of the



Poster for the first Paris production of *Tannhäuser* (1861).

significant musical themes. Following this brief respite, Wagner shelved these earliest efforts while the first performances of *Rienzi* and *Dutchman* consumed his energies. Rather than *Dutchman's* storm-tossed seas and violent shipwrecks, Wagner was convinced that *Tannhäuser's* story of lust, love, and forgiveness related more to the general human experience and would be understood.

Work resumed on the new dramatic opera in 1843 (libretto finished in July) with two years of steady progress being made until the final notes of the famous overture were penned in April of 1845. *Tannhäuser* (full title *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg*, “Tannhäuser and the Minnesinger’s Contest at Wartburg”) was first heard in Dresden’s Königliches Hoftheater on October 19, 1845 with Wagner conducting. Even though a magnificent production was given, Dresden’s operagoers did not receive *Tannhäuser* as enthusiastically as the composer had anticipated. Most of this had to do with the fact that this was Wagner’s first operatic endeavor to place considerable emphasis on the drama while removing the traditional distinction between recitative and aria. Wagner made numer-

ous revisions to the score throughout his life – the most important being the Paris one of 1861 and the final Vienna version of 1875. In *Cosima Wagner’s Diaries* (1878-83), Wagner’s second wife revealed before her husband’s death that he felt “he still owed *Tannhäuser* to the world.” During the course of the opera’s one hundred seventy-five year history, it has become one of the staples of the genre.

*Tannhäuser's* drama centers upon two well-known German folk tales. The first deals with the thirteenth century minnesinger and poet Tannhäuser while the second focuses on a six-hundred-year-old singing contest held at Wartburg Castle. Wagner weaves a story about the conflict between chaste and erotic love and how true redemption from the profane can be received through pure love. The “Arrival of the Guests” scene occurs at the close of Act II. Here, a parade of noble couples enters the Singer’s Hall at Wartburg Castle to greet their host, Landgrave (Count) Hermann. Highlighted by brilliant trumpet fanfares interspersed throughout the eight-minute courtly march, this is one of the finest and most dignified symphonic processions ever written.

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## Richard Wagner

Born: May 22, 1813, Leipzig

Died: February 13, 1883, Venice

### “Dich, teure Halle,” from *Tannhäuser*

(Dresden, 1843-5; rev. Paris, 1861  
and Vienna, 1875)

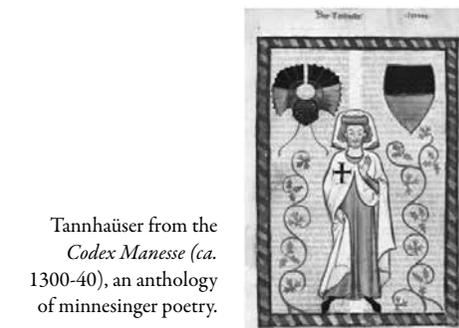
**Instrumentation:** Soprano soloist with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, and strings.

**Performance time:** ca. 5:00

*Joy is not in things. It is in us.*

Richard Wagner

Tannhäuser was a documented historical figure who flourished during the mid-thirteenth century. He was a German wandering poet and minnesinger whose prose/songs remain extant in the great fourteenth century illuminated manuscript *Codex Manesse*. Compiled for the Manesse family of Zurich during the years 1300-40, the *Codex Manesse* or *Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift* (Great Heidelberg Book of Songs/Poetry), is the single most comprehensive primary source of Middle High German minnesinger poetry. With thousands of verses mostly about courtly and erotic love, the codex contains the writings of 140 poets of the period along with full-page paintings (miniatures) of their images. A single folio holds Tannhäuser’s poems and ballads while his portrait shows him dressed in the habit of the Teutonic Order. His costume suggests he may have participated in Frederick II’s Sixth Crusade of 1228/9. Given the ubiquitous eroticism



Tannhäuser from the  
*Codex Manesse* (ca.  
1300-40), an anthology  
of minnesinger poetry.

found on the manuscript’s pages, Tannhäuser’s *Bußlied* (Poem of Atonement) is quite unusual for the collection. It is known that Tannhäuser’s contributions to the anthology date from 1245-65, yet his biography is obscure beyond what is found in the *Codex Manesse*.

In *Tannhäuser*, Wagner weaves a story centering upon the struggle between carnal and pure love. The general storyline of the opera unfolds as follows:

After leaving Venusburg and the charms of Venus, goddess of love, the poet Tannhäuser finds himself in the valley of Wartburg, where he is united with a group of knights. Among them is his friend Hermann, the landgrave, whose niece Elisabeth languishes in seclusion inside the castle. When Tannhäuser hears her name, he decides to

take part in a singing contest there. Elisabeth is overjoyed to see him again. However, during the contest, while the knights sing the virtues of pure and sacred love, Tannhäsuer improvises a song of sensual pleasures and his experience at Venusburg. The audience is shocked and the knights draw their swords, but in the end Tannhäuser is banished and must go to Rome to obtain the Pope's forgiveness. However, the Pope refuses to pardon Tannhäuser. On his way back to Venus, Tannhäuser is saved by Elisabeth's prayers before dying at the foot of her casket.

Act II begins in the Singer's Hall at Count Hermann's castle. Elisabeth learns that her love, Tannhäuser, is returning to Wartburg Castle that had been the site of his many triumphs in singing competitions. She enters the hall and greets it with brilliance and great joy in her opening aria "Dich, teure Halle."

Dich, teure Halle, grüss ich wieder,  
froh grüss ich dich, geliebter Raum!  
In dir erwachen seine Lieder  
und wecken mich aus düstrem Traum.  
Da er aus dir geschieden.  
wie öd erschienst du mir!  
Aus mir entfloh der Frieden,  
die Freude zog aus dir!  
Wie jetzt mein Busen hoch sich hebet,  
so scheinst du jetzt mir stolz und hehr,  
der mich und dich so neu belebet,  
nicht weilt er ferne mehr!  
Sei mir gegrüsst!  
Sei mir gegrüsst!  
Du, teure Halle,  
Sei mir gegrüsst!

Dear hall, I greet thee once again,  
joyfully I greet thee, beloved place!  
In thee his songs awaken me  
from gloomy dreams.  
When he departed from thee,  
how desolate thou didst appear to me!  
Peace forsook me,  
joy took leave of thee.  
How strongly now my heart is leaping;  
to me now dost appear exalted and  
sublime.  
He who thus revives both me and thee,  
Tarrys afar no more.  
I greet thee! I greet thee!  
Thou precious hall,  
receive my greeting!

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## Richard Wagner

Born: May 22, 1813, Leipzig

Died: February 13, 1883, Venice

### "Prelude and Liebestod," from *Tristan und Isolde*

(Zurich, Venice, and Lucerne, 1857-9)

**Instrumentation:** Soprano soloist with orchestra comprising 3 flutes (3rd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, harp, and strings.

**Performance time:** ca. 18:00

*Imagination creates reality.*

Richard Wagner



John Duncan, *Tristan & Isolde* (1912).

In the 1850s, Wagner was at the height of his creative powers. Not long after completing *Die Walküre* in March of 1856, the inspired composer hit upon an idea that would ultimately materialize as one of the greatest works in the operatic repertoire, *Tristan und Isolde*. For several years, Wagner had been digesting the writings of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (often dubbed "the artist's philosopher"). In particular, he identified with Schopenhauer's notion of subjection followed by redemption. That is, only by sublimating our human will can we achieve immortal peace. This theme courses through *Tristan* and in the end culminates in Princess Isolde singing her "Liebestod" (love death) aria renouncing earthly love and striving for something more spiritual.

During the early winter of that same year, Wagner began sketching his plan for *Tristan*. Other projects, such as finishing Acts I and II of *Siegfried*,

soon took priority and he was forced to set aside his dramatic designs for his next opera. Eventually Wagner was able to resume work on *Tristan* with the actual composition of it beginning in a cottage near Zurich during August of 1857. A year later, with the ink still drying on the manuscript for Act I, he traveled to Venice and finished the full score to Act II in March of 1859. Immediately afterward, Wagner returned to Switzerland and penned the climatic final bars of Act III, the "Liebestod." *Tristan und Isolde*, by command of King Ludwig II, was premiered on June 10, 1865 in Munich at the Königliches Hof-und-Nationaltheater with Hans von Bülow on the podium. It is relevant to note that the Prelude had already been presented in Prague on March 1, 1859 at a concert also conducted by von Bülow. Below is a synopsis of the drama.

King Mark of Cornwall sends his nephew, Tristan, to Ireland to fetch for him Isolde,

the daughter of the King of Ireland. The princess, angered because Tristan has come to seek her for another rather than for himself, orders her maid, Brangäne, to prepare a death potion. However, Brangäne has substituted a love potion for the fatal one, and, after drinking a toast, the two lovers face each other with passionate ardor. The second act takes place in King Mark's castle, and is dominated by the love scene between Tristan and Isolde. King Mark breaks in upon them, and denounces Tristan for his treachery. Melot, one of Mark's men, stabs Tristan. As Tristan lies wounded, Isolde comes to him then Tristan dies in her arms. Meanwhile, King Mark arrives with his men to pardon the lovers. But it is too late, Tristan is dead, and Isolde dies singing her "Liebestod."

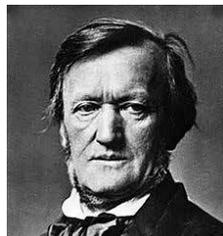
*Tristan und Isolde* is one of the most compelling stories of passion in music literature. Many opera-goers and musicians alike have felt that in the "Liebestod," no greater love music can be found. These, of course, are subjective opinions. Regardless, the "Liebestod" does seem to possess the capability of overcoming its listeners to point of nearly rendering them emotionally depleted. Some thirty years after the first performance, Giuseppe Verdi left this reflection on Wagner's opera:

*The work that arouses my greatest admiration is Tristan. The giant structure fills me time and time again with astonishment and awe. I still cannot quite comprehend that it was conceived and written by a human being.*

Mild und leise wie er lächelt,  
wie das Auge hold er öffnet –  
Seht ihr's, Freunde? Seht ihr's nicht?  
Immer lichter wie er leuchtet,  
stern-umstrahlet hoch sich hebt?  
Seht ihr's nicht? Wie das Herz ihm  
mutig schwillt, voll und hehr  
im Busen ihm quillt?  
Wie den Lippen, wonnig mild,  
süßer Atem sanft entweht – Freunde! Seht!  
Fühit und seht ihr's nicht?  
Hör ich nur diese Weise,  
die so wundervoll und leise,  
Wonne klagend, alles sagend,  
mild versöhnend aus ihm tönend,  
in mich dringet, auf sich schwinget,  
hold erhallend um mich klinget?  
Heller schallend, mich umwallend –  
Sind es Wellen sanfter Lüfte?  
Sind es Wogen wonniger Düfte?  
Wie sie schwellen, mich umrauschen,  
soll ich atmen, sol ich lauschen?  
Soll ich schlürfen, untertauchen?  
Süß in Düften mich verhauchen?  
In dem wogenden Schwall,  
in dem tönenden Schall,  
in des Welt-Atems wehendem All –  
entrinken, versinken –  
unbewußt – höchste Lust!

Mildly and gently, he smiles,  
how the eye he opens sweetly –  
Do you see it friends? Don't you see it?  
Brighter and brighter how he shines,  
illuminated by stars rises high?  
Don't you see it? How his heart  
boldly swells, fully and nobly  
wells in his breast? How from his lips  
delightfully, mildly, sweet breath  
softly wafts – Friends! Look!  
Don't you feel and see it?  
Do I alone hear this melody,  
which wonderfully and softly,  
lamenting delight, telling it all,  
mildly reconciling sounds out of him,  
invades me, swings upward,  
sweetly resonating rings around me?  
Sounding more clearly, wafting around me –  
Are these waves of soft airs?  
Are these billows of delightful fragrances?  
How they swell, how they sough around me,  
shall I breathe, shall I listen?  
Shall I drink, immerse?  
Sweetly in fragrances melt away?  
In the billowing torrent,  
n the resonating sound,  
in the wafting Universe of the World-Breath  
drown, be engulfed –  
unconscious – supreme delight!

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## Richard Wagner



Born: May 22, 1813, Leipzig

Died: February 13, 1883, Venice

### “The Ride of the Valkyries,” from *Die Walküre*

(Zurich, 1854-56)

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, and strings.

**Performance time:** ca.5:00

*Last request to my faithful artists! Distinctness!*

Richard Wagner

Richard Wagner’s *Die Walküre* is the second opera in his massive tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Written over a period of twenty-six years, the sheer scale of the epic Ring cycle makes it the most ambitious contribution to operatic literature by any composer. Loosely based on the Nordic *Völsunga Saga* and *Poetic Edda* of the 13th century, *Das Rheingold* (1854), *Die Walküre* (1856), *Siegfried* (1871), and *Götterdämmerung* (1874) follow the struggles of gods, heroes, and mythical creatures over three generations. “The Ride of Valkyries,” one of Wagner’s best-known works, dramatically opens Act III of *Die Walküre* as the orchestral prelude.

In the spring of 1849, Wagner was forced to flee his Dresden home in the wake of the European Revolutions of 1848. Implicated by his political views, he absconded to Zurich with the help of Franz Liszt. It was here in Switzerland that the main theme of “The Ride...,” the leitmotif *Walkürenritt*,

was first written down in July of 1851. After three years of work on other portions of *the Ring*, Wagner returned to “The Ride...” and finished a preliminary draft in 1854. By the end of the winter in 1856, he had the entire opera fully composed and orchestrated.

Wagner waited sixteen years for the first performance of *Die Walküre* at Munich’s National Theatre on June 26, 1870. Within six months he was already receiving requests to program “The Ride...” separately but forbade any such performance until the entire *Ring* had been heard. A year after the opera’s premiere, the French composer Georges Bizet described Wagner’s music in a letter of May 29, 1871 to his mother-in-law:

*It is the fate of great geniuses to be misunderstood by their contemporaries. Wagner is no friend of mine...yet I cannot forget the immeasurable enjoyment which I owe to this original genius. The charm of his music is inexpressible. Here are voluptuousness, tenderness, love...This man is the nineteenth German spirit incarnate.*



Emil Doepler, *Walkyrien* (ca. 1905)

All four operas were finally performed together from August 13-17, 1876 at the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth – an opera house designed by Wagner specifically for the purpose of staging the *Ring*. After that, he lifted his embargo on “The Ride...” and conducted it himself in London on May 12, 1877.

On the operatic stage, “The Ride of the Valkyries” portrays the Valkyries, with their winged

helmets and shields, assembling on their mountain-top after scouting a battlefield for fallen warriors. Wagner’s musical portrayal of this scene relies heavily upon the brass and woodwinds with the strings being given a more atmospheric role. Easily one of classical music’s greatest hits, “The Ride...” has impressed countless audiences with its sweeping intensity. Hold on to your hats!

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## Richard Wagner

Born: May 22, 1813, Leipzig

Died: February 13, 1883, Venice

### “Siegfried’s Rhine Journey,” from *Götterdämmerung*

(*Lucerne and Bayreuth, 1869-74*)

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (1st and 2nd optional doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, glöckenspiel, triangle, harp, and strings.

**Performance time:** ca.11:00

*I write music with an exclamation point!*

Richard Wagner

*Götterdämmerung* (“Twilight of the Gods”) is the fourth and final opera in Wagner’s enormous saga *Der Ring und des Nibelungen* (“The Ring and the Nibelung”). Up to this point in the first three epic music dramas, the plots have centered upon the powers of a magic ring and the life of Siegfried, the protagonist. *Das Rheingold* describes a cursed golden ring and a contest among the gods for dominance. *Die Walküre* explains the circumstances surrounding the incestuous conception of Siegfried by twin brother and sister Siegmund and Sieglinde. *Siegfried* provides an account of earlier events in the title character’s life. *Götterdämmerung* concludes the tetralogy with the death of Siegfried.

In a brief sketch dated October 4, 1848, Wagner had jotted down some preliminary ideas for what would eventually become *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Creating four massively proportioned operas takes an inordinate amount of time and intellectual en-



Ferdinand Leeke, *Siegfried's Rhine Journey* (1908).  
Oil on canvas. Private collection.

ergy. Wagner labored on *The Ring* periodically over the next twenty-six years. In the late 1850s and 1860s, the writing and premieres of *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger* interrupted his progress. Even so, he was able to maintain the continuity of his thoughts over this lengthy period. The bulk of the text for *Götterdämmerung* was worked out from 1848 to December of 1852. The actual composition of the music began in 1862 with the full score being completed on Christmas Eve, 1873. The Prologue, where “Siegfried’s Rhine Journey” occurs, was conceived during the first half of 1870. The entire *Der Ring des Nibelungen* was initially performed over a four-day stretch in August of 1876 at Wagner’s own Bayreuth Festspielhaus.

“Siegfried’s Rhine Journey” is heard at the end of the Prologue to *Götterdämmerung* and functions as an orchestral interlude (curtains down) preceding the action about to begin in Act I. As dawn breaks, Siegfried and his new bride Brunnhilde emerge from their cave high on a mountaintop

surrounded by fire. The hero had fearlessly walked through a ring of fire to claim the imprisoned Brunnhilde as his own.

Having consummated their marriage the previous night, Siegfried places the magic ring of power on Brunnhilde’s finger as a sign of his eternal love and fidelity. However, Siegfried’s journeys are not yet over. He mounts his wife’s horse and, carrying her shield, rides off in pursuit of further adventure up the Rhine where he will eventually meet his doom.

The music begins quietly depicting the dawn of a new day. Further along, Siegfried’s horn call (his *leitmotif* or identifying motive) is heard signifying his departure on the river. The interlude continues energetically recalling the beautiful Brunnhilde and the swirling waters of the Rhine.

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## Richard Wagner

Born: May 22, 1813, Leipzig

Died: February 13, 1883, Venice

### “Siegfried’s Funeral March,” from *Götterdämmerung*

(*Lucerne and Bayreuth, 1869-74*)

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (3rd doubling on piccolo), 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 6 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, 2 timpani, cymbals, tenor drum, triangle, 2 harps, and strings.

**Performance time:** *ca.* 8:00

*Achievements, seldom credited to their source,  
are the result of unspeakable drudgery and worries.*

Richard Wagner

In 1848 when Wagner was initially inspired to write the prose that would, in finished form, become the libretto for *Götterdämmerung* (“Twilight of the Gods”), he titled his newest opera *Siegfrieds Tod* (“Siegfried’s Death”). In fact, the first poem to come from his pen during the early stages of the project bore the same heading. Wagner soon discovered that while *Siegfrieds Tod* was probably sufficient enough to stand on its own as an opera, ideally there needed to be more background on Siegfried’s life and the origins of the magic golden ring. Text revisions continued until 1856. By then, Wagner had also completed working librettos for the first three operas of *Der Ring und des Nibelungen* (*Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, and *Siegfried*). Along the way he decided to change the title of the climatic and concluding opera in the series from *Siegfrieds Tod*

to *Götterdämmerung*. Wagner wrote these librettos in reverse order from *Götterdämmerung* backwards to *Das Rheingold*, yet the music was composed from start to finish in the intended sequence of *The Ring* tetralogy.

“Siegfried’s Funeral March” has been extracted from the close of the penultimate scene in Act III of *Götterdämmerung*. As the hero’s body is being carried away in a solemn funeral procession, this powerful and dramatic music functions as an orchestral interlude transitioning to the final scene. Below are some of the brief details of the opera’s storyline leading up to this moment in the action:



Mayer and Pearson, Richard Wagner (mid-1860s).  
Photograph in National Portrait Gallery (Photographs Collection), London.

In the hall of the Gibichungs, Brünnhilde confronts Siegfried who has been given a potion by the evil and cunning Hagen which has caused him to lose his memory. Siegfried does not recognize his beloved Brünnhilde who now believes she has become the victim of treachery. Brünnhilde vows vengeance. She plans with Hagen to have Siegfried go hunting the following day when he can be killed. Suddenly, Siegfried recalls Brünnhilde and sings ecstatically of his love for her. As he sings, he is murdered by Hagen. The vassals lift his body and carry it back to hall.

Wagner greatly admired Beethoven’s orchestral music. In time, he came to the conclusion that operatic music could be given symphonic treatment as well. With an enlarged ensemble and the development of previously heard *leitmotive* themes, “Siegfried’s Funeral March” is most certainly symphonic in nature and causes the opera-goer’s attention to shift from the singers to the orchestra. This is one of the most stirring passages in the entire *Ring* cycle. The murder of young Siegfried was the point where Wagner started his work on *Götterdämmerung*. It remains the climatic point of the four-opera saga. Once this music is heard it is never forgotten.

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## Richard Wagner

Born: May 22, 1813, Leipzig

Died: February 13, 1883, Venice

### “Brünnhilde’s Immolation,” from *Götterdämmerung*

(*Lucerne and Bayreuth, 1869-74*)

**Instrumentation:** Soprano solo with orchestra comprising 3 flutes (3rd doubling on piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling on English horn), 3 clarinets (3rd doubling on bass clarinet), 3 bassoons, 6 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, glöckenspiel, suspended cymbals, tam-tam, tenor drum, triangle, 2 harps, and strings.

**Performance time:** ca. 18:00

*Even if I know I shall never change the masses,  
never transform anything permanent, all I ask is that  
the good things also have their place, their refuge.*

Richard Wagner

The entire realm of the gods disintegrates in Act III of *Götterdämmerung*. Siegfried has been murdered by the deceitful Hagen on a hunting excursion. His corpse has been transported to the great hall of the Gibichung accompanied by the sounds of a tremendous funeral march. In the hall, Hagen attempts to remove the magic golden ring from Siegfried’s finger, the gold of which had been stolen from the Rhinemaidens. Brünnhilde appears, seizes the ring, and promises to return it to the water-nymphs. She then orders a funeral pyre to be constructed for Siegfried. It is at this point that the heroine begins her “Immolation” aria. After re-



Austrian soprano Anna Bahr-Mildenburg as Brünnhilde (1898).

turning the ring to the Rhinemaidens, Brünnhilde rides her horse, Grane, into the burning pile of logs. The inferno extends to Valhalla, the palace of the gods, destroying it. The Rhine overflows its banks while the Rhinemaidens drag Hagen to a watery grave and regain their treasure. Brünnhilde’s death releases the curse from the ring.

*Götterdämmerung’s* final scene along with Brünnhilde’s solemn and passionate aria of immolation – of sacrifice – concludes one of the greatest of all operas. “Brünnhilde’s Immolation” functions as Wagner’s epilogue, his postscript, to *Götterdämmerung* and the entire *Ring* cycle. As Brünnhilde rides her horse into the flames, Wagner summarizes some of *The Ring’s* most prominent themes in creating a miniature symphonic tone poem.

### Brünnhilde

*Starke Scheite schichtet mir dort  
am Rande des Rhein’s zu Hauf!  
Hoch und hell lod’re die Gluth,  
die den edlen Leib des behesten Helden  
verzehrt.*

*Sein Roß führet daber,  
daß mit mir dem Recken es folge:  
denn des Helden heiligste Ehre zu theilen  
velangt mein eigener Leib.  
Vollbringt Brünnhilde’s Wort!*

[Young men raise the pyre; young women decorate it with draperies and flowers.]

*Wie Sonne lauter strahlt mir sein Licht:  
der Reinste war er, der mich verrieth!  
Die Gattin trügend, true dem Freunde,  
von der eig’nen Trauten einzig  
ihm theuer, schied er sich durch sein Schwert.  
Ächter als er schwur Keiner Eide:  
treuer als er hielt Keiner Verträge;  
lautrer als er liebte kein And’rer:  
Und doch, alle Eide, alle Verträge;  
die truest Liebe, trog keiner wie Er!  
Wißt ihr, wie das ward?  
O ihr, der Eide ewige Hüter!  
Lenkt euren Blick auf mein blühendes  
Leid; erschaut eure ewige Schuld!  
Meine Klage hör’, du behrster Gott!  
Durch seine tapferste That,  
dir so tauglich erwünscht,  
weihstest du den, de du gewirkt,  
dem Fluche dem du verfelest;  
Mich mußte der Reinste verrathen,  
daß wissend würde ein Weib!  
Weiß ich nun was dir frommt?  
Alles, Alles, Alles weiß ich,  
Alles ward mir nun frei.  
Auch deine Raben hör’ ich rauschen;  
mit bang ersehnter Botschaft  
send’ ich die Beiden nun heim.  
Ruhe, ruhe, du Gott!*

[The vassals lift Siegfried’s body onto the pyre. Brünnhilde takes the Ring from Siegfried’s finger, and addresses it.]

### Brünnhilde

Mighty logs I bid you now pile  
on high by the river shore!  
Bright and fierce kindle the fire;  
let the noblest hero’s corse its flames be  
consumed.

His steed bring to me here,  
that with me his lord he may follow:  
for my body burneth with the holiest  
longing my hero’s honor to share.  
Fulfill Brünnhilde’s behest!

Like rays of sunshine streameth his light:  
The purest was he, who hath betrayed!  
In wedlock traitor, true in friendship;  
from his heart’s own true love, only  
beloved one, barred was he by his sword.  
Truer than his were oaths ne’er spoken;  
faithful as he, none ever held promise;  
purer than his, love ne’er was plighted.  
Yet oaths hath he scorned, bonds hath he  
broken, the faithfulest love none so hath  
betrayed! Know ye why that was?  
Oh ye, of vows the heavenly guardians!  
Turn now your eyes on my grievous  
distress; behold your eternal disgrace!  
To my plaint give ear, thou mighty god!  
Through his most valiant deed,  
by thee so dearly desired,  
didst thou condemn him to endure  
the doom that on thee had fallen;  
he, truest of all, must betray me,  
that a wise woman might grow!  
Now I know all thy need?  
All things, all things, all now know I.  
All to me is revealed.  
Wings of thy ravens wave around me;  
with tidings long desired,  
I send thou my messengers home.  
Rest thou, rest thou, o god!

*Mein Erbe nun nehm' ich zu eigen.  
Verfluchter Reif! Furchtbarer Ring!  
Dein Gold fass' ich und geb' es nun fort.  
Der Wassertiefe weise Schestern,  
des Rheines schwimmends Töchter,  
euch dank' ich redlich'n Rath:  
was ihr begehrt, ich geb' es euch:  
aus meiner Asche nehmt es zu eigen!  
Das Feuer, das mich verbrennt,  
rein'ge vom Fluche den Ring!  
Ihr in der Fluth löset ihn auf,  
und lauter bewahrt das lichte Gold.  
das Euch zum Unheil geraubt.*

My heritage yields now the hero.  
Accursed charm! Terrible ring!  
My hand grasps thee, and gives thee away.  
Ye sisters wise who dwell in the waters,  
give ear, ye sorrowful Rhine maids,  
good counsel lives in your redes:  
what ye desire I leave to you:  
now from my ashes take ye your treasure!  
Let fire, burning this hand,  
cleanse, too, the ring from its curse!  
Ye in the flood, wash it away,  
and purer preserve your shining gold  
That to your sorrow was stolen.

[She puts the Ring on her finger, then takes a firebrand from one of the vassals,  
waves it and points to the background.]

*Fliegt heim, ihr Raben! Raun't es eurem  
Herren, was hier am Rhein ihr gehört!  
An Brünnhildes Felsen fährt vorbei!  
Der dort noch lodert,  
weist Log nach Walhall!  
Denn der Götter Ended dämmert nun auf.  
So werf' ich den Brand  
in Walhalls prangende Burg.*

Fly home, ye ravens! Tell the lord the  
tidings that here on the Rhine ye have learned.  
To Brünnhilde's rock first wing your flight!  
there burneth Loge:  
straight away bid him to Walhall!  
For the end of godhood draweth now near.  
So cast I the brand  
on Walhall's glittering walls.

[She lights the pyre. Two ravens fly up and disappear. Grane is led in.]

*Grane, mein Roß! Sei mir gegrüßt!  
Weißt du auch, mein Freund,  
wohin ich dich führe?  
Im Feuer leuchtend, liegt dort dein Herr,  
Siegfried, mein seliger Held.  
Dem Freunde zu folgen wieherst du freudig?  
Lockt dich zu ihm die lachende Lohé?  
Fühl' meine Brust auch, wie sie entbrennt;  
helles Feuer das Herz mir erfaß,  
ihn zu umschlingen, umschlossen von ihm,  
in mächtigster Minne, vermählt ihm zu sein!*

Grane, my steed, I greet thee, friend!  
Know'st thou now to whom  
and whither I lead thee?  
In fire radiant, lies there thy lord.  
Siegfried, my hero blest.  
To follow thy master, joyfully neigh'st thou!  
Lures thee to him the light with its laughter?  
Feel, too, my bosom, how it doth burn;  
glowing flames now lay hold on my heart:  
fast to enfold him, embraced by his arms,  
in might of our loving with him aye made one!

[She swings herself on the horse and urges it forward to the pyre.]

*Heiajoho! Gran! Grüß' deinen Herren!  
Siegfried! Siegfried! Sieh!  
Selig grüß dich dein Weib!*

Heiajoho! Grane! Give him thy greeting!  
Siegfried! Siegfried! See!  
Brünnhilde greets thee in bliss!