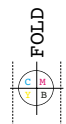


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- CD 2** **78'39**
- 1 Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg:** Prelude to Act I 9'11
Wiener Philharmoniker
Zubin Mehta
 - 2 Tannhäuser:** Overture and Venusberg Music 21'56
 - 3 Der fliegende Holländer:** Overture 10'32
 - Symphony in C major**
 - 4 I** Sostenuto e maestoso – Allegro con brio 12'04
 - 5 II** Andante ma non troppo, un poco maestoso 12'12
 - 6 III** Allegro assai – Un poco meno allegro – 5'59
Tempo I – Meno allegro – Presto
 - 7 IV** Allegro molto e vivace – Più allegro 6'22

Concertgebouw Orchestra, Amsterdam 2 3
San Francisco Symphony Orchestra 4–7
Edo de Waart

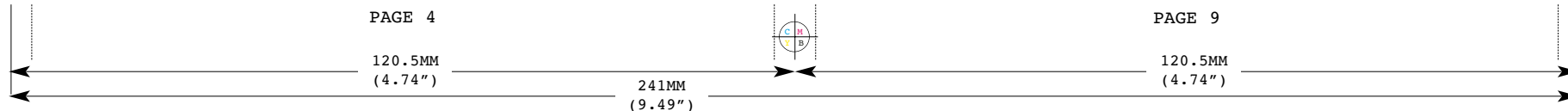
Raymond Tuttle

composer still was a teenager. Wagner admitted that his influence was Beethoven, and there also are suggestions of late Mozart in its fugal finale. He sent the score to Felix Mendelssohn, who accepted it with deafening silence. Rather than disowning this unruly child, however, Wagner loved it, and he even arranged for it to be performed as late as 1882 for Cosima's 44th birthday. Her wry response, upon hearing it, was to refer to the Wagnerian hero Siegfried: 'This was created by someone unacquainted with fear.'

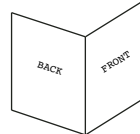


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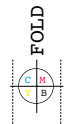


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et *Juliette*, which premiered in late 1839, inspired Wagner to move forward with his Faustian project.

Der Fliegende Holländer (The Flying Dutchman), the opera which followed *Rienzi*, was a big step forward in the composer's development. Based on a legend retold by Heinrich Heine, the opera concerns a sea captain who, having committed blasphemy, has been cursed to sail until Judgment Day unless he can find a woman eternally faithful to him. Originally, Wagner planned to set his opera in Scotland, but the experience of passing by Norwegian fjords during a stormy crossing from Riga to London inspired him to change the locale to Norway.

The Overture immediately thrusts us into the middle of a storm at sea, and the horns shout out the Dutchman's theme. Later, we also hear music associated with the heroine, Senta, as she daydreams at her spinning wheel about the fabled Dutchman, and a chantey for the Norwegian sailors. As with the Overture to *Rienzi*, Wagner masterfully whips many musical elements together in a most rousing fashion, although here – as in the opera itself – the results are more coherent.

In *Tannhäuser*, the noble minstrel for whom

the opera is named is held in the thrall of Venus herself. The denizens of Venusberg enjoy an orgiastic bacchanalia until cupids, shooting their arrows of love, restore calm to the scene. The minstrel, now surfeited by the Venusberg's sensuality, returns to his former haunts and his beloved Elisabeth. To win her hand in marriage, he enters a song-context on the subject of love, but when rival minstrels address the subject in idealized terms, Tannhäuser, forgetting himself, praises the fleshly love of Venus. Tannhäuser is banished and, seeking forgiveness, joins pilgrims bound for Rome, where the Pope tells him that he cannot be forgiven any more than his wooden staff can sprout leaves. Despairing, Tannhäuser returns home, and Venus tempts him anew. Just then, he learns that Elisabeth has died, having prayed that he will be forgiven. As the now redeemed Tannhäuser himself falls lifeless to the ground, the pilgrims sing of a miracle: in Rome, the papal staff has given forth leaves. The Overture, which begins with the melody of the famous Pilgrims' Chorus, includes music from the Venusberg, and quotes Tannhäuser's Act I aria in praise of Venus.

Wagner's sole completed symphony is an early work, first performed in 1832 when the

In *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (The Mastersingers of Nuremberg), Richard Wagner, whose operas many found indigestible because of their size and their subject matter, tried to broaden his appeal. While its comic elements are unusual for Wagner, it is among his most challenging works. (It lasts well over four hours.) Another paradox is stylistic. Wagner believed that German composers needed to reject French operas, with their plots based on actual events or people, rhyming libretti and distinct 'numbers' – arias, duets, choruses, ensembles and so on. When *Die Meistersinger* appeared in 1868, Wagner, to the confusion of his disciples, was found to have broken several of his own rules.

Die Meistersinger glorifies craftsmanship and art. It is a fable about the relationship between creativity and self-discipline. The main characters are Walther von Stolzing, a young knight; Eva, the daughter of a local goldsmith; and Hans Sachs, a cobbler, and the 'mastersinger' who mentors Walther. Comedy is provided by the ludicrous character of Beckmesser, the town clerk whose reactionary attitudes blind him to Walther's untamed yet potent talent. The Overture, among Wagner's most popular, previews many of the opera's melodies, sometimes woven together

contrapuntally, as if to symbolize its themes of artistic creativity and intellectual discipline.

Parsifal was Wagner's last opera. It is based on an epic poem written in the thirteenth century by Wolfram von Eschenbach – himself a character in *Tannhäuser*. Later poets added to the story, as did Wagner, when he prepared the libretto. (The opera premiered in Bayreuth in 1882, one year before the composer's death.) *Parsifal* concerns knights who guard the Holy Grail – the cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper, and the spear which pierced him on the cross. The spear was stolen by the magician Klingsor, and only a 'fool without guile' can recover it. Parsifal, a young hunter, appears among the Knights of the Grail. Because he is pure and incorruptible by sensual temptations, he conquers Klingsor. He returns the spear to the knights and becomes their leader, but not before having undergone a painful journey of self-denial and enlightenment. The radiantly beautiful Prelude includes three motifs which figure prominently in the opera. In order of appearance, these represent the Eucharist (strings and woodwinds in unison), the Grail (trumpets and trombones) and Faith (full brass).

Rienzi is exactly the sort of opera Wagner would turn his back on in later decades. Its setting is Rome in the 1500s. Its title character



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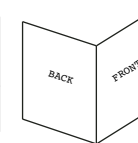
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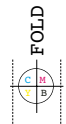


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is a papal notary who overthrows corrupt nobles and is appointed tribune by fellow citizens, only to be accused of corruption himself. In the opera's spectacular finale, the Capitol has been set on fire and Rienzi perishes in the flames. The first two acts, in particular, follow models established by the grandest French and Italian operas, and there are many spectacular set pieces, including an Act II ballet, in which ancient and 'modern' Rome are allegorically united.

As with *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal*, *Rienzi* is lengthy – the 1842 premiere lasted over six hours – but the quality of its musical invention is variable, and modern productions of the complete opera are infrequent. What has saved the opera from oblivion is *Rienzi's* Prayer in the final act, and the Overture, which includes the Prayer (sung here by violins and cellos) and other themes from the opera proper. The results, if not subtle, are undeniably stirring.

The 'romantic opera' *Lohengrin* (first performed in 1850) also is based on German legend. Elsa of Brabant, a noble maiden who has been accused of murdering her brother Gottfried, is championed by Lohengrin, an unknown knight who arrives on a boat drawn by a swan. They marry, but there's a

catch: she must never ask his name or from where he came. Elsa's enemies poison her with suspicion, however, and in their bridal chamber, she asks the forbidden question. Sadly, he reveals that he is a knight of the Grail, and the son of Parsifal, and now that his secret has been revealed, he must return – alone – to the Grail. The boat returns, but in the final minutes of the opera we learn that the swan is Gottfried, who had been bewitched by Elsa's enemies. A white dove appears, and Gottfried is transformed back into human form. As Lohengrin departs, now guided by the dove, Elsa falls lifeless in Gottfried's arms.

The opera's Act I Prelude anticipates the Prelude to *Parsifal*. Wagner slowly accumulates and then releases dramatic and harmonic tensions. It has been said that the music begins in the clouds and reaches its climax as angels descend from heaven bearing the Holy Grail. Having entrusted it to the Knights of the Grail, the angels then return to heaven with a long decrescendo. The Prelude to Act III is a short, brilliant piece representing celebrations at Elsa's and Lohengrin's wedding.

The *Kinderkatechismus* is a curiosity unknown even to many admirers of Wagner's

music. This is one of the few examples of 'private' music Wagner composed for his household. In English, its complete title is 'A Children's Catechism for Kosel's Birthday' – 'Kosel' being one of the nicknames Wagner gave his wife Cosima. In its original form, it was performed by the Wagner children, accompanied by piano, on Christmas Day in 1873. A year later, Wagner scored it for a small orchestra, and added an instrumental postlude taken from the very end of the recently completed *Götterdämmerung*.

Yet another legend inspired *Tristan und Isolde*, but this one has been traced not to Germany but to the Celts. In *The Wagner Compendium*, Barry Millington states that the opera 'is the musical depiction of a passion so intense, a yearning so inextinguishable, that its consummation can be experienced only in death. As such, it is generally acknowledged to be one of the most voluptuous scores ever written.' As the opera opens, Isolde is being escorted from Ireland to Cornwall by Tristan, who slew her beloved Morold. She is to wed Tristan's uncle, King Mark. Thinking she is drinking poison with him, Isolde actually shares a love potion with Tristan. In Cornwall, the lovers consummate their passion, but are

discovered. Tristan is wounded. Mortally ill, he returns to his native Brittany. Isolde arrives in time for him to die in her arms. As she sings the so-called 'Liebestod' (Love-death), the lovers are reunited, as Millington writes, 'beyond material existence' and 'in the realm of inner consciousness, the ultimate reality symbolized by "death" and "night".' The Prelude presents several motifs which appear later in the opera in the context of the pair's forbidden love. This music, with its almost pornographic depiction of love, and its harmonic ambiguities, hit audiences in the 1860s (and well beyond) like a lightning bolt.

Franz Liszt, Wagner's father-in-law, composed a three-movement *Faust Symphony* in 1857, although the idea came to him as far back as 1844. Wagner had a similar idea, and to give credit where credit is due, his proposed *Faust Symphony* probably predated Liszt's by several years. Liszt, however, actually completed his symphony, whereas Wagner contented himself with just a *Faust Overture* corresponding to the planned symphony's first movement ('Faust in Solitude'). In his autobiography, Wagner claims that his inspiration for this work was hearing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in Paris, but it is more likely that Berlioz's *Roméo*



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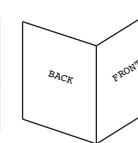
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