

Mu 101: Introduction to Music

Queensborough Community College

Instructor: Dr. Alice Jones

Spring 2018

Sections H2 (T 2:10-5), H3 (W 2:10-5), L3 (W 5:10-8)



BUT REALLY, ART IS A PRIVATE LANGUAGE FOR SOPHISTATES TO CONGRATULATE THEMSELVES ON THEIR SUPERIORITY TO THE REST OF THE WORLD.



Richard Wagner, Prelude to *Lohengrin*, Act III (1850)



1. What are your first impressions of this piece?
2. What does this piece seem to communicate or convey? What feelings does it instill in you (the listener)?

Richard Wagner, Prelude to *Lohengrin*, Act III (1850)



What inimitable art did Beethoven employ in his “C-minor Symphony,” [No. 5], in order to steer his ship from the ocean of infinite yearning to the haven of fulfillment! He was able to raise the utterance of his music *almost* to a moral resolve, but not speak aloud that final word; and after every onset of the will, without a moral handhold, we feel tormented by the equal possibility of falling back again to suffering, as of being led to lasting victory. Nay, this falling-back must almost seem to us more “necessary” than the morally ungrounded triumph, which therefore—not being a necessary consummation, but a mere arbitrary gift of grace—has not the power to lift us up and yield to us that “ethical” satisfaction which we demand as outcome of the yearning of the heart...

3. Why do you think Wagner looked to Beethoven as a role model? How does Wagner see himself in relation to Beethoven? How does Wagner feel about his cultural lineage?

Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, (1865) Act III Liebestod [Love-death transfiguration]

- Idealizes death (a climactic, beautiful, romanticized event)
- Isolde hallucinates about Tristan
- The orchestra is equally important as the singer
- The voice is sometimes enfolded by the orchestra (just like Isolde is engulfed by her passion)



Leontyne Price (b. 1927), soprano

Reactions to *Tristan und Isolde*



"So there I sat in the topmost gallery of the Berlin Opera House, and from the first sound of the cellos my heart contracted spasmodically... Never before has my soul been deluged with such floods of sound and passion, never had my heart been consumed by such yearning and sublime bliss... A new epoch had begun: Wagner was my god, and I wanted to become his prophet."

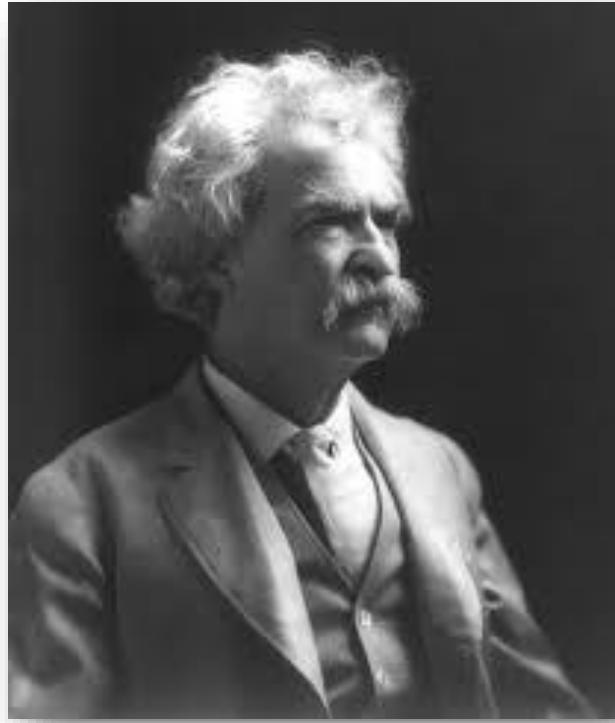
—Bruno Walter, conductor 1889



"There was only Beethoven and Richard [Wagner] – and after them, nobody."

—Gustav Mahler, composer (1904)

Reactions to *Tristan und Isolde*



"I know of some, and have heard of many, who could not sleep after it, but cried the night away. I feel strongly out of place here. Sometimes I feel like the one sane person in the community of the mad." –Mark Twain, 1891

It was "the most repugnant thing I have ever seen or heard in all my life."
–Clara Schumann



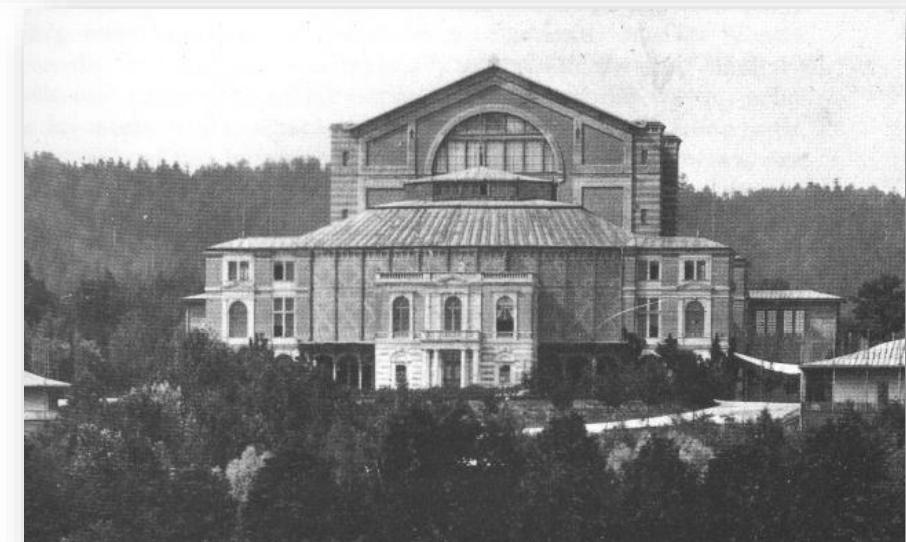
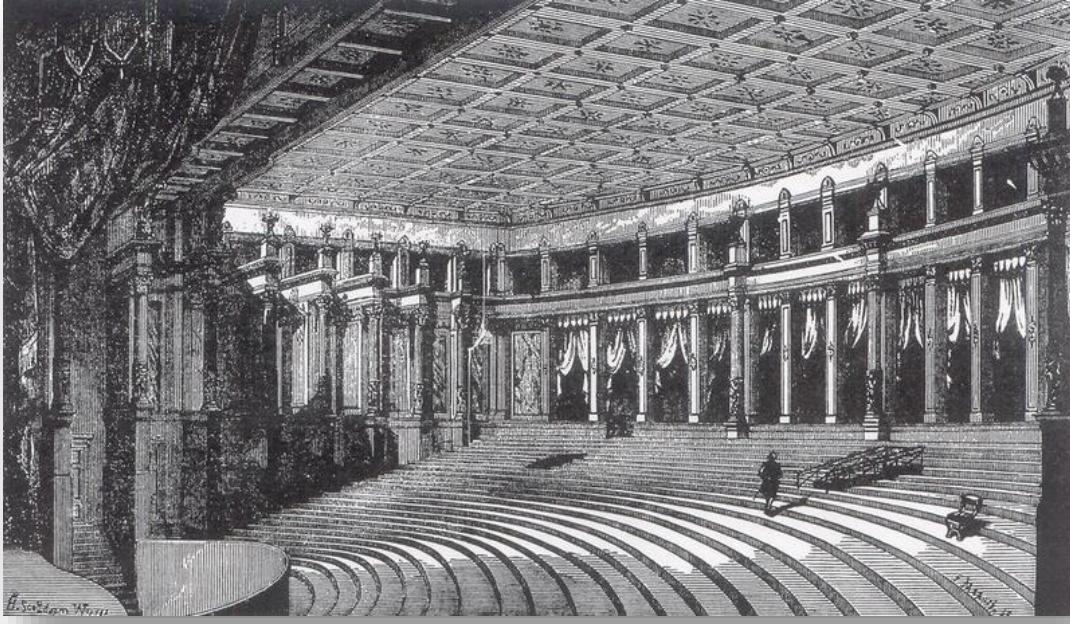
Richard Wagner, Prelude to *Lohengrin*, Act III (1850)



4. Who is another artist or musician that you think commands the same intensity of reaction, admiration, and influence that Wagner did in his time?
5. How do Wagner's ideas make you feel?
6. How would you feel if your favorite artist or musician made similar statements?
7. How is your listening experience different now compared with your first impressions of the piece?

Wagner's influence

- Concert going: Bayreuth Festspielhaus
 - Stadium seating (no private boxes and the audience's attention is focused on the stage)
 - Lights are dimmed during performances
 - Sunken orchestra pit
- Every musician working in the West at the turn of the 20th century had to contend with the shadow of Wagner: imitate, follow, or reject



Student Blog Post

- Teach the class about a topic using music
- Any 5 pieces you choose
- Proposal due in class March 21

Homework and reminders

- Rest of semester = series of seminar-like topics in music history
- Weekly reading is available online:
 1. Intro to the Classical period (textbooks like you've been reading)
 2. A chapter for music students about issues with studying music history that ties together and extends ideas we've touched upon in class and online (15pp)
- March 19-25: Online Discussion #7
- March 20/21: Student Blog Post proposal due
- Looking ahead – Concert Response Essay prompt is available online
- Have a great weekend!

