

Mu 102: Principles of Music

Instructor: Dr. Alice Jones

Borough of Manhattan Community College

Fall 2019

Section 0701 (MW 7:30-8:45a)



Recap

- Music criticism
- Music history!



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 world; 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...

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 engulfed by the orchestra (just like Isolde is engulfed by her passion)



Leontyne Price (b. 1927), soprano

Shall I drink of them,
plunge beneath them?
Breathe my life away
in sweet scents?
In the heaving swell,
in the resounding echoes,
in the universal stream
of the world-breath –
to drown,
to founder –
unconscious –
utmost rapture!

Reactions to *Tristan und Isolde*

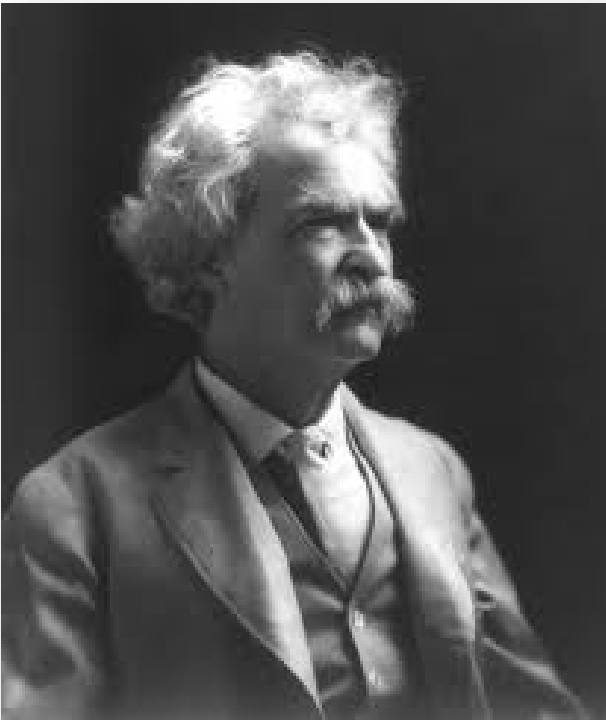


"So there I sat in the topmost gallery of the Berlin Opera House, and from the first sound of the cellos my heart contracted spasmodically... Never before has my soul been deluged with such floods of sound and passion, never had my heart been consumed by such yearning and sublime bliss... A new epoch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

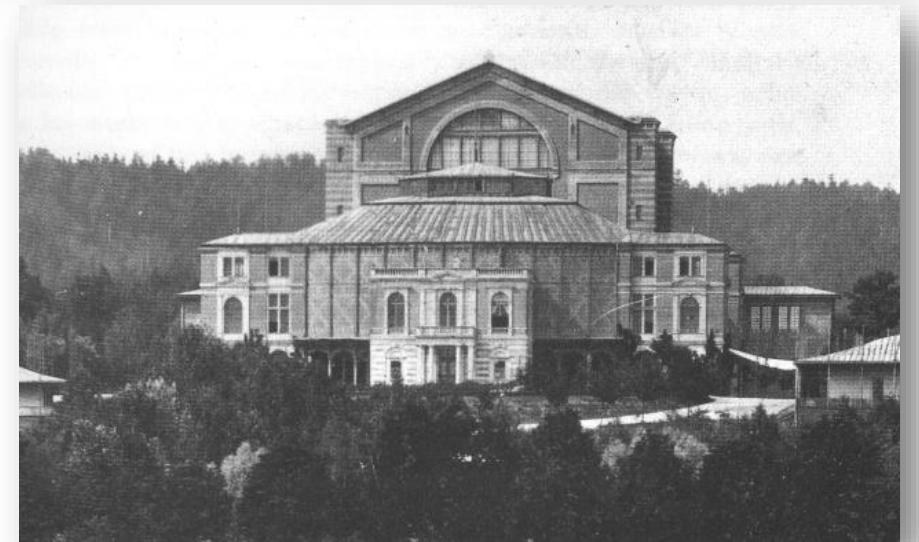
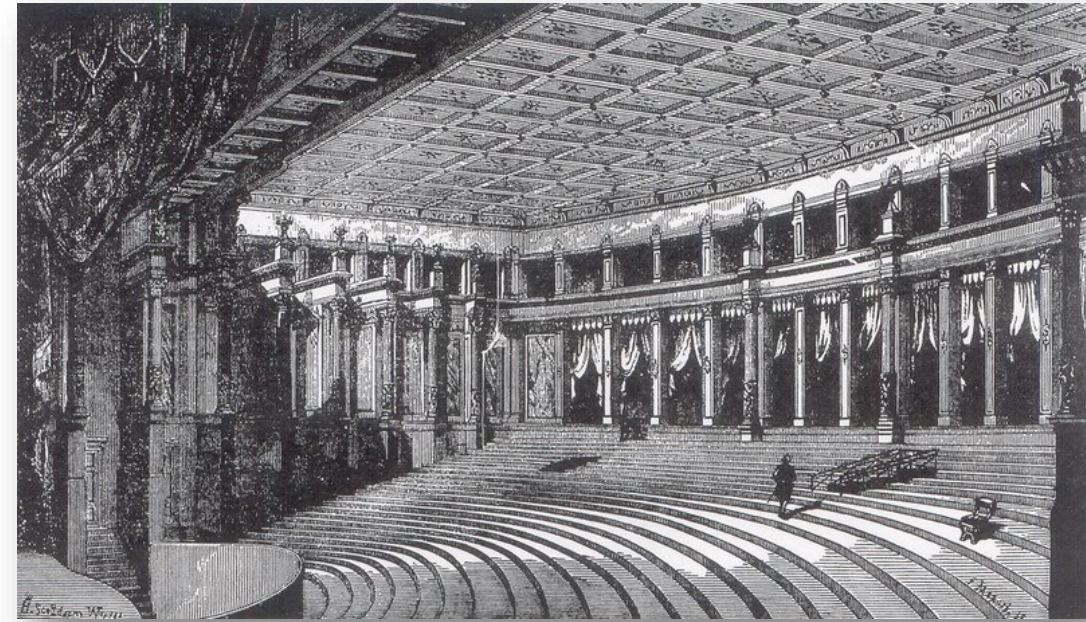


Richard Wagner, Prelude to *Lohengrin*, Act III (1850)

3. Who is another artist or musician that you think commands the same intensity of reaction, admiration, and influence that Wagner did in his time?
4. How do Wagner's ideas make you feel?
5. How would you feel if your favorite artist or musician made similar statements?
6. 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



What's Opera, Doc? (1957)



Reminders

- 3 remaining classes – all assigned reading is online:
 - W Dec 4: 20th century (Impressionism and Expressionism)
 - M Dec 9: 20th century, minimalism, sound migration
 - W Dec 11: no reading (current events in the world of music)
- Writing #5 (Music criticism) due Dec 2
- Writing #6 (Concert Response #2) due Dec 11
- Course evaluations through Dec 12 (online)



End write

Is it necessary to know who a musician *is* (as a person) when you listen to their music?

Provide a specific example that shows why it is necessary.

Provide a specific example that shows why it is not necessary.