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By the year 1812 the vivid reign of Napoleon Bonaparte was already in its decline. But one year afterward a musician was born who was destined to take his place as a most dynamic European personality, one of the very greatest geniuses the world had ever known. The name of Richard Wagner is by now familiar not only in the field of music, but in that of literature, art, and drama as well. That one man could arouse such tempests of fury and controversy as he, that actually undeclared wars could be fought over him, that people could often come to blows at the mere mention of his name, that he could be twice exiled from his loved native Germany and many of his works internationally jeered off the stage, that glorious accomplishments like "Tristan and Isolde" and "The Flying Dutchman" could remain unproduced because no singers could cope with the parts, and that yet he could continue unswervingly along the same original lines that he first set out to follow and finally triumph over everything is no little credit to his personality.

Thrifty German café-owners in 1860, fearing the loss of chinaware and dishes, posted signs in their inns declaring, "It is forbidden to discuss religion or Wagner."

Composers and critics formed themselves mainly into two schools, actually opposing camps, pro and con Wagnerian, and set out either to establish the much-deserved prestige and honor of their beloved idol, or else to bring to an end the lengthy rule of a selfish musical maniac who, in his indefinite, incomprehensible operatic utterances,

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glorified the ego of the German "superman."

That Wagner was horribly egoistic there is no question. As a friend of his who truly loved him (Peter Cornelius) said, "Wagner never for a moment thinks seriously of anyone but himself." He seemed to sense his massive ^{greatness before}, either achieving it or having it thrust upon him, and felt that, being superior not only to the entire world of men, but to the highest of geniuses of all times, it was an honor, aside from the most basic duty, for everyone who came in contact with him to sacrifice, suffer, and go out of his way to please and serve him, and think the way he did, for his own sake. This is the impression he seems to have left with persons like Hans von Bulow, whose wife (a daughter of Liszt) he stole under ^{her} the ~~latter's~~ ^{husband's} "very nose" after partaking his hospitality, funds, and fame for his own use. A letter was sent to another friend of his, ^{who} not ^{be} so easily domineered, in which he demanded a ^{loan} ~~gift~~ of the latter's most gorgeous and quite expensive mansion on the Rhine river for several months in order that he might become sufficiently inspired to write another masterpiece of an opera. The friend's repayment for this was to be the honor of having met and served such a great genius. Upon the refusal received, Wagner became highly insulted, terminated the "friendship", and never spoke to him again.

It is believed that persons too easily convinced of their own importance put an immediate limitation on their greatness. To this theory or rule Wagner is an outstanding exception. He felt he had a mission in life to perform; as Ernest Newman says, "His nature was all ex-

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tremes; he either loved intensely or hated furiously, was either delirious with happiness or in the darkest depths of woe. His chequered life, so full of dazzling fortunes and incredible misfortunes, of dramatic changes from intoxicating hope to blind despair, had bred in him the conviction that he was born under a peculiarly powerful and maleficent star."

Nietzsche, famous German philosopher, was, in his youth, a passionate admirer of Wagner, writing, "Bayreuth signifies for us the morning sacrament on the day of battle", and calling him, according to Durant, "a Siegfried who has never learned the meaning of fear". However, as he grew older Nietzsche gradually became disgusted with Wagner's display of egoism, his attack on the French in 1871 (due to the poor reception they gave "Tannhauser"), and his unexpected jealousy of Brahms. As Nietzsche said, "It is impossible for me to recognise greatness which is not united with candor and sincerity towards one's self. The moment I make a discovery of this sort, a man's achievements count for absolutely nothing with me." Later we find him attacking Wagner with uncontrolled fury, probably because the latter was at first so dear to him and then turned out to be so bitterly disappointing. The mutual attraction was probably caused by the contrast of natures, Wagner's being so ruggedly masculine and Nietzsche's so feminine and pure. Years after Wagner had died, the philosopher, in one clear moment during his final, pathetic insanity, said of the musician, "Him I loved much."

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This was but one of the fascinating friendships that Wagner ruined by his conceit and selfishness, as well as by an obstinacy whose dictations made him in some phases the great genius he was. Ernest Newman was perfectly correct in saying of him, "No man ever had such friends; no man ever lost such friends; and he lost them all by placing too great a strain on their friendship, their finances, their rights, or their independence." It was because of the philosopher's independence of thought that Wagner soon found it difficult to tolerate Nietzsche.

Franz Liszt, whom he admired and deeply loved more than any other man was probably the least mistreated among Wagner's friends, ^{yet} and even their friendship was made to suffer. One reason that Wagner was more lenient to Liszt may have been his interest in, which culminated in the marriage to the latter's daughter.

It should not be **thought for a moment**, however, that Wagner as a friend was all culprit. He could be generous and kindly beyond measure when he wanted to, as he was ~~in~~ supporting the parents of his first wife and in trying to see that she was never without money, but this streak of devotion and beneficial tendency came only when there was no necessity to sacrifice and when it gave him in his own estimation personal power. He loved power to the utmost and felt that sacrifice was a magnificent thing until he was called upon to make it. Then it was that he believed that the entire world and universe existed merely to oppose him, but when he was happy he thought it a matter of simple logic that everyone had found occasion **ion** to rejoice.

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This egoism, together with its selfish demands, is completely absent from the art of Richard Wagner, but the massive expectations and glorification of the German race are its most typical qualities. Perhaps nowhere else as in the "Nibelungenlied" does he so stress the theory of "superman" and patriotism to the Fatherland.

Including one long interruption the composer devoted twenty-six years to the creation of the entire work, the chronology reading as follows:

The Drama:

- (1) Siegfried's Death, The Dusk of the Gods.....1845
- (2) Young Siegfried.....1851
- (3) The Valkerie.....1852
- (4) The Rhinegold.....1853

The Music:

- (1) The Rhinegold.....1853-54
- (2) The Valkerie.....1854-56
- (3) Siegfried, Act 1 and part of Act 2.....1856-57
- (4) Siegfried, end of Act 2, and Act 3.....1869
- (5) The Dusk of the Gods.....1869-74

The poem was printed in 1853 and the first performance of the complete cycle given in 1876 under the direction of Hans Richter.

Through this period the development of Wagner's style may be followed from stage to stage. While the earlier parts are stronger dramatically, it is in the later ones where supreme mastery of interpretation and musical invention are fully expounded.

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During the long period of interruption Wagner reached full maturity, composing such works as "Tristan and Isolde" and "Die Meistersinger", the second of which will be discussed later. His development must have been either extremely rapid or else very spasmodically formed, as "The Valkerie" which was written in immediate succession to "The Rhinegold", is an infinitely superior work. It will be noticed that the chronology of the drama reads backwards. This oddity in connection with the cycle, which is famous for its accurate development and precision, is that the four parts (musically speaking, the operas) composing it were conceived in a backward order, i. e., the "Dusk of the Gods" or "Siegfried's Death" first, and, as this needed an explanation, "Siegfried", "The Valkerie" and "The Rhinegold" following.

"The Ring", as is true of all great masterpieces, was accepted and judged in a variety of ways. The simplest, as Hutcheson suggests, is as "gorgeous music accompanied by spectacular stage effects and a grandious story." Also he adds, "We may think of it as a medley of fairy tales in which we encounter giants and a giant-killer, a sleeping beauty and a magic ring, sword, and helmet, mysterious charms and spells of incredible potency, a talking bird, a youth who sets out to learn to shiver, and so forth."

"On a higher plane," Hutcheson states, "we may find in it an interpretation in operatic terms of vivid Northern mythology rooted in the Icelandic sagas and the German Nibelungenlied."

George Bernard Shaw saw in it a "Social treatise on the vexed relations between capital and labor," and those looking for an improving

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moral may view it as an example that the basis of all evil is the lust for money.

If considering the music alone, the amateur is in no danger in feeling unreserved admiration. Only the expert musician should, or can, adopt another attitude, and, as Hutcheson explains, "only for a comparison of the beautiful with the superb." He goes on to add, "It was his (Wagner's) settled conviction that only out of the equal union of music, poetry, dramatic action, and scenic effects could a successful art of music drama grow." This theory is the basis of Wagner's supreme greatness. It accounts for the almost unlimited extent of his genius and for the ease with which he entered into and succeeded in the numerous fields of art.

While "the Ring" does contain certain extravagances, contradictions, inconsistencies, and even absurdities, these are completely outweighed by its grandeur, emotional intensity and the unusual beauty of the music. Its main weaknesses lie in the fact that, some scenes are unduly vague, while others by comparison are far too long and repetitious. The remainder of the fault in the cycle is in a few of the minor character studies, some of which, like in the cases of Donner, Froh, and Freia, are undeveloped, other characters like Fricka and Hunding made too entirely unattractive, and still others, as Alberich, Mime, and Fafner, created purely villainous, with no other sides to their natures. Also persons like Wotan, Fasolt, Gunther, and Guthrune are, in contrast with other characters, far too weak. Yet, in any drama, especially in one so large as this, it is clearly impossible to develop each and every

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character to his or her fullest possibilities. What Wagner has done with the most prominent figures in his "Nibelungenlied" alone entitles him to the fame, greatness, and applause he has received in such generous portions. Hutcheson was correct in saying, "It would be a grave injustice to Wagner to take 'The Ring' with untempered seriousness in all its pages." The drama falls into the category of a trilogy with a prelude.

The operas of Richard Wagner differ in almost all respects from those written in the Italian tradition. He was one of the first to introduce "leitmotives" to the field of music and incorporated the idea in practically all of his musical writings. A "leitmotive" may be defined as a short theme representing either a person, an emotion, or some conception (abstract or concrete) dealing with the drama. It is seldom longer than eight measures, and appears in mainly two forms, one type easily distinguishable and unvaried throughout the music (opera, overture-fantasia, tone-poem, or whatever the case may be), and the other standing for a good many ideas at once and sometimes appearing so adorned as to be scarcely recognisable. An example of the first type in this Wagnerian drama is the "sword motive:"

and of the second the "Valhalla theme":

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which may represent either Valhalla itself, or the entire group of gods, or else Wotan, who has **no particular** motive assigned to him. The theory of leitmotives does much to add to the lucidity of the music and brings the entire art of sound closer to that of literature by outlining and placing themes as if they were ideas. For instance, the merging of two or more motives corresponds to the combination of the same number of thoughts or emotions, thus easily illustrating conflict, agreement, locality, motion, love and friendship, hate, etc. It might be said, generally speaking, that the leitmotives represent the nouns in music; their combination and positions the verbs; and the harmonic structure, instrumentation, and tonal colour the adjectives; while adverbs are expressed in the tempo. Much modern music is based upon this theory, a notable example being Debussy's tone-poem "Afternoon of a Faun", and, as is noticed in the study of Scriabine and color-music, the idea was developed to a deeper stage.

Wagner's leading motives are subject to changes and variations of tempo, rhythm, orchestral color, and dynamics very easily. They also involve a great deal of passage work and prolonged, developed extension. However, to relieve the monotony Wagner often reverts to purely recitative music, and inserts without hesitation choruses, songs, and ensembles in the old style, never separating them from the rest of the music for a reason presently to be discussed. He has certain motives in his operas that are not characteristically Wagnerian, as they lead merely to another theme and are purely incidental. An example is the "Rainbow motive", which appears only in the final scene of

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"The Rhinegold" and leads only to the "Valhalla theme":

But the most typically Wagnerian treatment of leitmotives is having them come from the orchestra and very seldom from the singers. The voice was used by Wagner merely as another instrument in the orchestra, and, as it required for his music because of this an extra quality of power, clarity, and richness, we find an extra subdivision in voice grouping, i.e. Wagnerian sopranos, contraltos, tenors, baritones, and basses. Most famous of the Wagnerian sopranos today is Kirstan Flagstad, famed Nordic singer, who is ranked as the very finest interpreter of the German master of all times. ~~by several authorities, among whom are conductors born during the lifetime of Wagner.~~ Lauritz Melchior, magnificent Wagnerian tenor is rated in the same class as Madame Flagstad.

Singing Wagnerian solos in the stage dramas is a terribly trying affair for most virtuosos, and, for that matter, for numerous members of the audience to listen to (not necessarily anti-Wagnerians, either.) The composer, dislikingⁱ applause at the conclusion of each aria because he believed it interrupted the continuity of the drama and distracted the attention of the singers from the mood and idea of the opera, connected his arias by a sort

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of tonal fabric, thus often eliminating even a single pause in whole scenes. This tonal fabric, aside from accomplishing Wagner's original purpose, also set the mood of the drama and provided a commentary on the story, explaining difficult parts of the text and the actions.

Hutcheson had suggested methods for easier, more thorough comprehension of the "Ring Cycle", which I have listed here:

- (1). Learn leading motives.
- (2) Read the libretto, or else a summary of the plot.
- (3). Consult a guidebook.
- (4) If possible, listen to the Victor record #11215 as played by the London Symphony Orchestra, to actually hear the main themes.
- (5). At the performances of the operas, try to identify and trace the connection of the main motives with their words and actions.
- (6) Read the text, if possible the German version.
- (7) Pay special attention to the stage directions.
- (8). Try to follow through the score while listening to the music.

It may be added that the directions stated here are equally valuable when applied to any piece of ununderstood or unknown music. They would also help to give us a clearer conception of compositions with which we are already familiar.

The "Rhinegold" opens with an orchestral suggestion of the serene water of the Rhine river at dawn. Over a sustained E flat harmony, which

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is held for one hundred and thirty-six measures, the first leading motive is heard:

Silent, scintillating water,
Blue and gold, with green shadows
Stealing in from the sky,
Flows in cool serenity on through the country towns,
Hushed in early dawn----
Soon the light will break in a million ripples
Over the clear waves,
And no one will guess, gazing at the bright blue and
vermillion of the river
What mists of dreams have fleetingly shone and spark-
led there in the moonlight of the evening before.

The story goes on to relate how the three Rhinemaidens, Wellgunde, Woglinde, and Flosshilde are frolicing while guarding the treasure of the Rhinegold, entrusted to their care. They are interrupted in their play by Alberich, a Nibelung, who has entered unnoticed from a rocky recess

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and is scrambling with great difficulty over the jagged, rough bottom of the green river. ("The Nibelungs are swarthy gnomes **inhabiting** the subterranean caverns of the earth."Hutcheson.)* His jerky movements are imitated by the orchestra, and then, as he stops to watch them at play and finally speaks to them ingratiatingly, they are at first startled and then amused. Noticing that the gnome appears to be in love with them, the Rhinemaidens tease and coquette him, and as he chases them over and about the rocks, the orchestra again resumes the musical portrayal of his clumsy efforts. Unable to catch any of them, the dwarf shakes his fist and foams at the mouth in rage, but suddenly his attention is attracted to the beautiful treasure, now fully illuminated by the beams of golden light entering from the emerald surface above. The Rhinemaidens also notice it, and their musical greeting to it is expressed in a very important theme:

*"(We readily accept, as part of the fairy tale, Alberich's facility in living and breathing under water without the ability to swim a single stroke."Hutcheson.)

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Alberich inquires about the gold and is informed that a ring created out of it would give its possessor the rule of the entire world:

A "Renunciation" theme follows this "Ring" motive, as the maidens continue to explain that one who acquires ^{the} gold must forever renounce love. Not realizing how anxious the dwarf is to get the treasure because of the intense fury they have instilled in him by their pranks, the Rhinemaidens continue their teasing, while Alberich muses and plots how to acquire the gold and thus the power of the ring. (The gnome deliberates that while he will lose the beauty of love, lust will still

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be his. "We shall see later that he seduces a woman with his gold and becomes the father of Hagen, who is instrumental in bringing about the death of Siegfried and the final catastrophe," adds Hutcherson.) Greatly panic-stricken to perceive that despite their jeers the dwarf has managed to climb the rocks and grab the treasure, the Rhinemaidens vainly pursue him in his escape with it, and, while the orchestra plunges into an interlude during the change of scenery, the stage is covered with darkness.

In scene two, after the "Rhinegold" theme is played in a minor key followed by the "Renunciation" theme, the fog gradually rises to reveal the mountain spaces of Valhalla, the newly-built home of the gods. The "Ring" motive is slowly changed into the "Valhalla" theme. It is early dawn and we see Wotan and his wife Fricka regarding the splendid castle of Valhalla, she with despair, he with pride. Her worry is caused by the fact that the giants Fasolt and Fafner, who have built the palace, have been vaguely promised Freia, the goddess of youth and beauty, as their reward. Having just awakened, she reproaches her husband, but he reminds her that she also strongly desired the building of the castle. She admits, in a lyrical melody entitled "The Enchantment of Love" that this was because she had hoped the palace would encourage him to remain more at home with her instead of faithlessly roaming. In response to this, Wotan reminds her smilingly that he must stay faithful to her, as he gave one of his eyes to win her. ("Wotan is always represented as lacking an eye, though not always as having sacrificed it to win Fricka.

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In the first scene of 'The Dusk of the Gods' one of the Norms relates that Wotan paid an eye to drink from the well of wisdom at the roots of the great ash tree supporting the world (Yggdrasill). It was from that tree that Wotan cut the shaft for his spear," says Hutcheson. On this spear are sacredly carved the laws of the universe.)

Suddenly Freia comes rushing in, pursued by the two giants and crying for aid from Wotan, who remains calm, remembering that the half-god Loge had arranged for Freia to be exchanged for some worthwhile substitute. The two giants, however, demand immediate payment and Loge is nowhere to be seen. They proceed to discuss the matter with Wotan, insisting that he live up to his contract, reminding him that if he fails to do so, he will have no peace of mind, as his duty is written on his sacred spear. Fasolt wishes that Freia be given to him because he loves her for her beauty, but Fafner reveals that his chief desire is not so much for Freia as for her cultivation of the apples of youth, over which nobody else has power. After two more gods rush in (Donner and Froh) and dispute with Wotan to be allowed to drive away the giants by means of beating, the Loge motive is finally heard.

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Loge often tends to revert to, ungodly origin from which he was changed by Wotan. Secretly he hates all the gods, is disliked by them, and is patiently biding his time to consume Valhalla. An example of the animosity between Loge and the gods occurs upon the entrance of the former, who compliments the giants on their fine work in completing the castle and tells them they have fully earned their reward, to which Donner and Froh reply with angry words and bitter punning. Wotan prevents a quarrel by asking Loge what he can find to give the giants instead of Freia. To this Loge replies in many tuneful phrases how he searched the entire earth for something to substitute for the love of woman and was only laughed at by all creatures. "There was only one!" Loge continued, "who gave up love for gold" and he continues by relating the story told him by the Rhinemaidens of the theft of their treasure.

The relating of the story has its characteristic effect upon each person present. The giants resent Alberich's new acquisition as he is their natural enemy, Wotan falls to musing about the possibilities of power of the ring, Fricka and Frëia are interested in the idea of ornamentation the ring may provide, and Fricka also beseeches her husband to try to get the gold when she is told that anyone possessing it need never fear her husband's infidelity.

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Spurred on by Loge's evil advices Wotan decides to steal the gold from Alberich, answering his conscience by pretending he will return it to the rightful owners, the Rhinemaidens. The offer of the giants to accept the gold as their reward is curtly rejected by Wotan, who now desires it for himself, while they, weary of arguing, state that they are taking Freia with them as a hostage until evening, when Wotan must make his decision which is to be their payment.

As the gods disappear with Freia, Loge snickeringly points out to Wotan that already the gods are losing their youth, and after a mist momentarily hides the stage it is noticed that he is correct. They have not eaten the apples of youth that day and soon the tree of magic fruit will die if Freia is not brought back to take care of it.

Wotan brusquely decides to visit Alberich's underground home immediately, and as a heavy dark smoke covers the scene he and Loge make their way to the rocky depths of the Nibeung's home. The music accompanying their flight is:

This blends into the smithy motive, which is accompanied by **eighteen** tuned anvils behind the stage:

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When the stage clears Wotan and Loge appear in the underground caverns of the Nibelheim, who are a menace to the world because they dream throughout their ceaseless skilled work of conquest of the earth. They have become embittered by Alberich, their underworld "boss", who at the present is boxing the ear of his brother Mime. The latter has been forced to make Alberich a cap ("Tarnkap") of an odd gold, and knowing its magic properties he is reluctant to give it up. Finally pain forces him to drop it, and his brother puts it on, breathes a spell, and disappears from sight, making his presence nevertheless felt by flogging Mime, though he is invisible. The owner of the cap, which turns out to be made of the Rhinegold, can furthermore turn into any shape he desires. When Wotan and Loge approach Mime to offer him consolation, he falls to brooding, the theme of which is represented by:

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Mime has lyrical capabilities (a quality which the future Siegfried grows to despise) and illustrates them in the following:

Upon the return of Alberich and his threat by flourishing the ring (also made of the gold) all the dwarfs disappear and the "boss" is left to talk to Wotan and Loge, neither of whom he trusts.

The latter, by means of deceitful flattery, engages the dwarf in a con-

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versation from which he learns that Alberich intends to continue to collect the riches of the mines in order finally to wipe out the world and Valhalla, together with love, so that he shall not need to be the only one to endure life without it. By still more compliments Loge induces the dwarf to show them how he can change his shape so that he may sleep in perfect safety without the fear that some one will make off with his new treasure. Alberich, greatly pleased by the compliments turns first into a huge serpent and then into a ~~toad~~, in which form Wotan and Loge seize, bind, and carry him off with them.

After they ascend to Valhalla they return his "Tarncap" to Alberich and refuse the glittering masses of riches he offers them from his underground home. They tear the ring from his finger despite his howls and wails and then free him, but before he disappears he shrieks a curse on the ring that overshadows the entire cycle. "Whoever shall wear it", he claims, "shall soon know death because of it; whoever does not have it shall be tortured by envy for it; whoever owns it but does not wear it shall constantly have worries and cares; whoever possesses it shall be stalked by murder and be a slave to his magic." He disappears and Wotan is too preoccupied with his new treasure to give heed to the blaspheming of the dwarf, but the latter's curse is destined to destroy many lives and happinesses before a noble and godlike woman sacrifices herself to lift the spell. Part of the curse is musically portrayed by the theme "Motive of Destruction":

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Fasolt and Fafner soon arrive with Freia and the golden apples, Donner, Froh and Fricka having already come. With the arrival of Freia the gods once more assume their youthful appearance, but now the giants demand their pay. Fasolt, the better of the two, has grown sentimental in regard to the lovely goddess and requires that the new reward must completely destroy the vision of her. The gold that Alberich previously offered Wotan instead of the ring is piled high on the ground to hide Freia from the view of Fasolt, but through the mass he claims he can still catch the glint of her eye. The tarn-cap is thrown on to conceal this, but just as all seems satisfactory Fafner spies the gleam of her hair through one crevice. All the gold has been used up, but Fafner, noticing the ring Wotan wears, demands that it also be added to the reward. Trouble begins to brew, the giants again claim Freia, and Donner and Froh begin to mutter in dissatisfaction, but just then the goddess of the earth and of ancient wisdom rises out of the ground from her eternal sleep to solemnly warn Wotan about the curse on the ring. Her ghostlike appearance is announced by the theme:

According to the story nothing past, present, or future is hid from her knowledge, and she announces to Wotan that ill fortune is in store for the gods. Having said this she sinks in a mist into the earth again to return to her eternal sleep. Wotan is anxious to follow her, but is

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prevented from doing so by the others, as all the gods regard Erda as sacred. Uneasy by her prophesy he calls Freia to his side and casts the ring on the pile of gold. The two giants pull out bags into which to place their new treasure, but now Fafner is reluctant to part with half of it. The gods are asked to arbitrate the quarrel, and as Wotan wishes to have nothing more to do with them Loge, catching at the opportunity to play another evil trick, advises Fasolt to take the ring and Fafner all the rest. Fasolt manages to get the ring, the two giants fight, and he is killed under its wicked curse. His brother drags off the load of treasure to his haunt where he is to guard it for many years in the form of a dragon. Wotan, gloomy and oppressed about the whole affair, shakes off his melancholy to enter with Fricka and the gods into his new home. He silently plans to protect Valhalla by a race of heroes, his thoughts finding expression only in the "Sword motive":

As they cross the gleaming bridge leading to the palace the wails of the Rhinemaidens are heard below, demanding the return of their treasure. They blaspheme the falseness of the gods, who only laugh and continue along the bridge to the castle as the curtain falls.

Between "Rhinegold" and the next opera, "Valkerie", a few facts must be explained. Wotan has carried out his plan by making his daughters,

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born by Erda, armed maidens of great beauty and holiness whose duty it is to bring to Valhalla on their white horses dying warriors of great bravery who will dine in its great halls forever, in the same time protecting it. There are nine maidens, their leader and favorite of her father being Brunnhilde.

As Alberich prophesied, whoever did not possess the ring would be knawed by a desperate envy for it, and Wotan has been plotting to regain it. Under the name of Walse he visited the earth in the form of a mortal and married a mortal woman who bore him a son and daughter, Siegmund and Sieglinde, twins. It was his idea to originate a race of heroes, one of whom would be sure to slay the dragon Fafner and obtain the ring for Wotan.

His son, being trained to a life of hardihood, was often taken hunting by his father, and upon their return from an expedition one day they discovered that the mother had been killed and Sieglinde stolen to become the future wife of a great warrior.

For many years after this father and son endured a life of hardship in the forest, and when Siegmund was fully grown Wotan disappeared, promising him that in his hour of darkest need he would find a redeeming sword in his hand. From here, in the guise of a wanderer he visited the wedding of Sieglinde, where he thrust the sword of which he spoke into the stem of a great ash tree, from which no man since had drawn it.

For a time Siegmund lived in loneliness, and afterwards began to search for companionship in the world of men. They all seemed against him, however, and one day, weary and defeated in a fight on behalf of a

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strange maiden, he arrived exhausted at Sieglinde's home. The brother and sister, however, did not recognize each other and their last names gave them no clues, as Siegmund knew his father as "Wolfe" and Sieglinde as "Walse".

We may now proceed to the first act of the opera. A brief introduction is played by the orchestra and represents a fierce storm raging around the home of Sieglinde:

The curtain rises on the living-room of the house, where the great ash stands noticeably prominent. Siegmund opens the door and, seeing no one there, enters wearily and approaches the fire. His theme is denoted by:

Sieglinde then enters, believing her husband Hunding has come home. Seeing, however, that it is a stranger who is too weary to even speak to her, she sings what is known as the motive of pity:

Being roused from his fatigue he begs for water and upon receiving it now regains his vigor and regards Sieglinde with increasing interest.

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The combining of the Siegmund and Pity themes denotes dawning affection:

This is the new Love motive that has been arrived at by this combination. He inquires to whom the house belongs, and upon understanding that it is one of unhappiness (at least as far as Sieglinde is concerned) proposes to leave so as not to bring any more misunderstanding and sorrow to it. She impulsively begs him to remain, however, and being quite touched he stays, introducing himself as "Wehwalt" (Woeful). They regard each other with emotional understanding, the motive of Sieglinde meanwhile being played:

Suddenly hearing her husband outside Sieglinde hurries to the door and opens it for the warrior, completely armed. His theme is expressed by:

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Hutcheson describes it as "the complete Hunding-motive, stern almost to brutality, yet by no means ignoble."

Sieglinde explains to her husband how she found Siegmund fatigued at her fireplace and tried to help him, and he invites the stranger to be his guest. Noticing the similarity in the features between his wife and Siegmund, as well as their involuntarily ardent glances at one another, Hunding grows suspicious but says nothing until the stranger tells of his battle that day. Then ~~he~~ reveals that he himself was Siegmund's foe, and as the latter caused him to lose many of his men he challenges him to a fight the next day.

The theme of the Volsungs (denoting both children of Wotan and his mortal wife) somberly appears:

Hunding gruffly orders Sieglinde out of the room to prepare his evening drink, and as she leaves she tries with a glance to indicate the position of the sword in the trunk, of the ash. Siegmund, however, does not understand her and Hunding bids her depart.

After he, too, has left Siegmund, knowing his hour of greatest despair has come, cries out to Wotan to give him the sword he was promised, and

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though the flames in the fireplace momentarily spring up to illuminate the weapon in the great ash in an orange glow Siegmund is too preoccupied with his own thoughts to notice it.

Finally the door opens and Sieglinde softly enters, beautifully robed in white. She admits that she has just drugged her husband's drink and then proceeds to relate the story of the mysterious stranger at her wedding who left behind the sword. This, she claims, was surely meant for a hero like Siegmund who is to save her from her unhappy fate.

Joyfully clasping her in his arms Siegmund sings the beautiful Spring Song as the door is blown open by the last gust of the storm outside:

Gazing at his features it dawns on her that they are like these she had seen when bending over still water and she claims that she must have heard his voice before----somewhere in childhood. While she ponders this question he leaps over to the great ash and draws out the sword, which loosens from the trunk at his grip. In their singing they soon discover that they are brother and sister, but by this time they are so in love that Siegmund cries out, "Bride and sister! Let the blood of the Volsungs prevail!" He clasps her wildly to him as the curtain drops.

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It may be here added that the music of these last few pages is superb beyond analysis, illustrating Wagner at his very best.

The prelude to the next scene illustrates the two children of Wotan joyfully escaping through the forest. A galloping theme depicting Hunding in pursuit (rather the fear of this) soon changes into the Valkyries theme:

When the curtain rises it is again near Valhalla, on a rocky mountain pass. Wotan is instructing his daughter Brunnhilde to go watch the fight between Hunding and Sieglinde and award victory to the latter. Joyfully she answers with her own motive:

Happily as she prepares to leave she warns Wotan also to prepare for battle, as the mood of approaching Fricka appears to be none too pleasant.

Fricka is furious over the knowledge that Sieglinde and Siegmund are to be lovers as well as brother and sister. When Wotan asks her to bless the union for the line of heroes it will bring she caustically asks him if he has forgotten the gods since his immoral wanderings on earth. Not knowing that she was informed of this matter so completely

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Wotan turns from pride to keen shame and sullen mutterings. She continues that she has tolerated both his union with a mortal woman and that with Erda, but this is unbearable. She bitterly resents the aid he is about to give to Siegmund, little caring whether he is destined to be father to a great hero, and accuses Wotan of neglecting her in preference to Siegmund, reminding him of the years spent with him in the forests of the earth. Wotan's denial of this arouses her demand that if he did not help his son before he should not do so now, and finally, after much discussion Wotan sadly agrees to remove the sacred power from the sword and have Siegmund killed.

Fricka leaves as Brunnhilde joyfully enters ready to leave for the battle. The following scene was considered by Wagner himself the most important in the whole ring cycle, as it gives Wotan's explanation of actions. His daughter, suddenly terrified at seeing him so dejected and furious, falls on her knees begging him to tell her what misfortune has befallen him, and in her song we see the first glimpse of Brunnhilde's character. Hutcheson sums it up by saying, "She is Wotan's unconscious mind, existing only in him, infinitely loving and devoted. We shall see that she disobeys his express command to follow what she knows to be the wish of his soul. Ultimately she is banished from Valhalla because she is too noble and disinterested for the selfish society of the gods."

Brunnhilde listens attentively to Wotan's story, never for a moment seeing him any light other than the wise, the just, and the righteous. When she protests against what he wishes her to do thunders away leaving

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puzzled and unhappy. Gathering her weapons she rides down to the forest where Siegmund and Sieglinde are escaping. By this time Sieglinde's conscious begins to bother her, and raving madly she falls into an unconscious fever. As Siegmund attends to her Brunnhilde enters to break the news of his death to him:

He, however, becomes so crazed at the thought of leaving Sieglinde that he threatens to kill her, too, and this moves Brunnhilde so profoundly that for the first time in her life she ignores Wotan's command and promises Siegmund life and victory:

Note how amazingly the Song of Death theme has changed into the Promise of Life. Hutcheson explains, "We should fail to understand Brunnhilde fully did we not realize that at this point the transition from the devoted daughter of Wotan to the noble and purposeful woman of the later dramas has already begun.***It is not pity for the hero or for the lovers, it is not the filial impulse to follow Wotan's wish rather than his command, that decides her to resist the god's behest. No: it is the threat to the life of the unborn Siegfried that determines her present action and the whole course of her later life. Henceforth, though at first unconsciously, her de-

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votion is transferred from Wotan to Siegfried."

Brunnhilde joyfully leaves and then Siegmund departs, after bidding Sieglinde farewell and letting her remain sleeping so as not to have to watch the battle.

She is soon awakened, however, by troubled dreams and as a thunderstorm gathers while Siegmund and Hunding fight in the distance Wotan appears raging and shatters the magic of the sword. It breaks in Siegmund's hand and at a thrust from Hunding he falls dead on the ground. Sieglinde now faints from horror, but as Wotan contemplates his hero's dead body Brunnhilde springs on her steed and dragging Sieglinde with her speeds away to save another victim from her father's anger. It may be mentioned that Hunding also falls dead at the wish of Wotan, thus completely observing the custom of operas of the day, that is, in tragedies all participants must be pronounced dead before the opera may end. Wotan arouses himself to recall Brunnhilde's terrible disobedience and furiously pursues her to Valhalla.

The prelude to the third act depicts the meeting of the Valkyries at Valhalla, each maiden with a dead warrior slung over her horse. Brunnhilde comes galloping towards them, however, with a living woman in her arms and begs them to save her from the wrath of Wotan. As Sieglinde awakens she begs for death until Brunnhilde encourages her to live for the sake Siegmund's unborn child she is to bear. Upon hearing this she longs for escape and Brunnhilde tells her to fly alone to Fafner's cave, the one place Wotan will be certain to shun, while she herself will remain with the Valkyries to hide her escape and endure Wotan's anger.

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When Wotan arrives he disperses the crowd of Valkyries and remaining alone with Brunnhilde tells her her penalty is to be the renunciation from Valhalla. She begs him, however, that if she must lead a mortal life let her at least sleep within a circle of flames to make sure that the hero who saves her and claims her for his wife will not be a coward. Softened to pity for his favorite daughter who must now be lost to him Wotan agrees and calls to Loge to light the fire that shall protect the beautiful Valkyrie:

After this motive of slumber Wotan bids her farewell:

and the scene ends as he prophesies that never may anyone enter the fire who fears the point of Wotan's universal spear.

Between the time of this opera and the one following it ("Siegfried") many years have passed. Brunnhilde still slumbers in the circle of fire, Fafner as a dragon still guards his gold and the ring in a dim forest cave, and Mime, Alberich's brother, has his home and workshop in another cavern not far from Fafner's. When Sieglinde fled from Wotan she stumbled accidentally upon the cave of Mime instead of the one to which Brunnhilde directed her. There she gave birth to Siegfried and then died, and her son has been raised by the dwarf who hopes that the

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boy, being destined to become a hero, will some day steal Fafner's treasure for himself (Mime).

The first scene opens upon Mime's forest home, where Siegfried enters with a wild bear to tease his cowardly guardian. When Mime scolds him the boy tells that he loves animals, for their companionship means more to him than that of the sly, insincere Mime. Thus we are informed of the relationship between the dwarf and Siegfried. After releasing the bear Siegfried asks about his parents, as he claims that in a pool of water he noticed the extraordinary difference between his own features and those of Mime. The dwarf falteringly confesses that he is no kin to Siegfried, although the latter owes him everything. (Mime hopes that by placing the lad in an obligatory position he will receive the gold Siegfried is eventually to steal.) Siegfried learns the story of his parents, but is told about his father only that he was killed in battle.

He runs out into the forest again, and upon his disappearance Wotan enters in the guise of a wanderer. Mime is distrustful of him and behaves quite disrespectfully, until Wotan announces that the sword with which Fafner is to be killed is that of Siegmund, and the only person who may fashion it over into its magic form is Siegfried. He disappears, leaving Mime terror-stricken at discovering it was a god who spoke to him.

Recovering from his fright upon the entrance of Siegfried, he proceeds indirectly to hint at the refashioning of the sword. He explains to the boy that he must learn fear, and Siegfried is very much

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interested in this unknown sensation. Mime says that the only way in which he may learn it is by encountering the horrible dragon Fafner and stealing his gold. Siegfried is completely won over and is at once given the fragments on his father's broken sword. These he files and mends beautifully in his own way and the magic power is recaptured once more.

The prelude to Act 2 illustrates Fafner guarding his treasure. Hutcherson says of him, "Greed and sloth have depraved a mind which, though from the first innately stupid, was once capable of creating a splendid home for the gods."

When the curtain opens it is night in the forest before Fafner's cave, and Alberich is seen lying on the cliff meditating. Wotan enters and greets him, but he is supersilious in his manner toward the god. Wotan warns him of Mime and then disappears. But the Wanderer motive is now combined with the Brunnhilde theme, showing that in all his travels Wotan still cannot forget his beloved daughter. Alberich slides into a crevice of a cliff and vanishes just as day dawns.

Siegfried and Mime then enter, Siegfried ready to learn fear. He sends Mime away while he waits for the dragon. Pondering meanwhile on the parents he never knew he is comforted by the sound of bird-calls through the woods, but regrets that he cannot understand their words. In calling to the birds he awakens Fafner who glides out ready for combat. The two fight and Siegfried, with great agility fatally wounds the dragon. In his dying breaths Fafner warns Siegfried of the person who aroused him to fight the dragon, claiming that, although he knows not who the person is, he is plotting Sieg-

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fried's death. When he draws the sword out of Fafner's heart Siegfried's hand becomes smeared with a bit of the dragon's blood and in putting it to his mouth to taste it he learns the language of the birds.

Mime and Alberich then enter, and Mime, who has prepared a drugged drink for the hero offers it to him so that, as he falls into a stupor, he may kill him with his own sword. Siegfried, however, is warned by the birds and kills Mime instead. They then tell him of a companion for him, a beautiful maiden asleep within a circle of fire, and Siegfried follows the birds as they lead him to Brunnhilde.

The third act of Siegfried was resumed by the composer after a respite of twelve years. Wotan temporarily awakens Erda to relate to her all that has occurred and to promise her that now her sleep shall forever remain uninterrupted. She sinks back into the earth as Siegfried, having lost sight of the birds, enters. He does not know who Wotan is, but asks him for directions to reaching Brunnhilde. Wotan, however, is filled with pride at the sight of his grandson and bores him with endless questions. He claims he will not allow him to pass through the fires that surround Brunnhilde, whereupon Siegfried breaks Wotan's universal spear, thus proving his superiority. Wotan tremblingly picks up the remnants of his spear, realising that the rule of the gods will soon be over, as the emblem of their law is shattered. He disappears in the mist as Siegfried climbs the hill to brave the flames that imprison Brunnhilde.

Siegfried succeeds in passing through, and awakens Brunnhilde from her long slumber by a kiss. She greets the sunlight happily and tells Siegfried that she has long protected him, even before his birth. It now dawns,

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upon her that her unconscious love for Siegfried was the reason for all her past actions, sufferings, and strivings. She cannot immediately resign herself to mortal love, but before Siegfried's emotion she is no longer restrained. The love duet they sing is one of the finest of all Wagner's works for loftiness, delicacy, and tenderness.

The prelude to "The Dusk of the Gods", the fourth and last opera of the cycle, may be compared for dramatic effect to the opening of Shakespeare's "Macbeth". There are three sisters who spin the cord of night between them, their names being Past, Present, and Future. They discuss events of all times and tell how Wotan plans to chop down the great tree Yggdrasil and throw the faggots into Loge's heart, the wound springing up into such a flame that it will consume Valhalla. Suddenly the cord breaks in their hands, illustrating the terrifying omen that divine knowledge and the rule of the gods is about to be ended, and they leave their somber spinning to search their mother Erda in the bowels of the earth.

The curtain rises to show Siegfried ~~already~~^{gone} depart temporarily from Brunnhilde to seek deeds of heroism in the world.

From here we go to the castle of Hagen, who is the illegitimate son of Alberich. He lives in the palace with Gunther, head of the house and his half-brother. Guthrune, Gunther's sister is present with these two, who are seated in the hall and discussing their honorable standing among men. Hagen answers that Gunther needs a bride and Brunnhilde would be just the woman for him. He craftily

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suggests that when Siegfried, in his travels, stops at their castle they give him a love-potion to drink which will completely obliterate the thought of Brunnhilde from his heart and make him love Guthrune instead. Soon afterwards Siegfried arrives and this plan is executed successfully. A great friendship springs up between Gunther and Siegfried and the latter is promised Guthrune as his bride if he will lend Gunther his tarn-cap so that he may assume the shape of Siegfried and thus steal Brunnhilde. Siegfried is unwilling, so they compromise on allowing Siegfried to take the form of Gunther in order to steal the Valkyrie. It must be understood that Siegfried has completely forgotten his love for Brunnhilde and his penetration into the fires that surrounded her long slumber. The motive of Guthrune alone possesses his thoughts:

Hagen is mainly interested in seeing Brunnhilde because Siegfried left with her the ring and from his father he inherited the desire to again obtain it. Siegfried sets out to find Brunnhilde as the scene ends.

The curtain opens again to reveal Brunnhilde gazing rapturously at Siegfried's ring. Wagner uses his great mastery in mingling the ring theme with that of forgetfulness to identify the time as that when Siegfried is first tasting the potion. Suddenly from the clouds descends one of Brunnhilde's Valkyrie sisters, who has defied the wishes of her father by stealing out to speak alone with Brunnhilde. She relates how

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Wotan has received many omens that Valhalla is soon destined to fall and how he has already chopped down Yggdrasil in a mournful and feverish mood, "No longer does he taste Fréia's apples," she says, but he is kind only when thinking of Brunnhilde. It is important, then, that Brunnhilde cast the ring she is wearing into the river to the Rhinemaidens, so as to rid them all of its bitter curse.

Brunnhilde now lives in a world other than Valhalla and refuses to part with the symbol of Siegfried's love, so her sister rushes in a frenzy back to her home.

Before long Siegfried in the form of Gunther enters and, when Brunnhilde, frightened, defies him he wrests the ring from her grasp and carries her back to his friend.

In Act two we may again make a comparison of Wagner and Shakespeare, this time referring to Hamlet. Hagen in a dream sees the ghost of his father Alberich and is advised of his course of action in the daytime. Alberich insists that in order for their possession of the ring to be absolute Siegfried must be murdered:

and Hagen swears to this as the ghost disappears and dawn comes.

Siegfried returns successful in his mission and, when Guthrune is called he resumes his natural form. Vassals are now assembled for a double wedding and when Gunther and Brunnhilde approach they meet Siegfried and his bride-to-be in a series of wild shrieks from the orchestra. Brunnhilde, upon seeing the magic ring on Siegfried's hand,

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understands the entire trick and accuses Siegfried of stealing it from a woman. Siegfried is confused, as he clearly remembers the battle with Fafner and tells them so. Brunnhilde claims Siegfried is her husband, and he, thinking she refers to his second visit to her defends himself by saying he acted in the name of Gunther. He is asked by all present to swear on the point of a spear that death may come to him if he was ever Brunnhilde's husband aside from in the form of Gunther. Brunnhilde snatches the spear from his hand after this and swears that she also invites death if her charge is untrue.

The dramatic tension in this section is paralleled only by the quality of the music. Siegfried tells Gunther to look after his wife and all leave the halls except Brunnhilde, Gunther, and Hagen. Hagen offers to avenge Brunnhilde on Siegfried, but she refuses. However, in her anguish she unwittingly reveals that Siegfried will die if a spear pierces his back. Evil Hagen has just been waiting for this opportunity and this decides his course of action. Gunther hesitates because of the woe this will inflict upon his sister Guthrune, so Hagen, ever handy with wicked plans, suggests that a hunting party be arranged for the morrow in which the murder will appear an accident. Brunnhilde submits to this because of her feverish longing for vengeance. The scene ends with Brunnhilde's marriage to Gunther.

The final act of the "Nibelungenlied" opens with the hunting party in progress. Siegfried momentarily separated from the remainder of the party, has wandered to the banks of the river and there meets the Rhinemaidens. They, anxious beyond measure to recover their stolen treasure, beseech him

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to part with the ring, telling him of its awful curse. The fearlessness in Siegfried's character, however, prevents him from doing so, and thus the final omen and warning is wasted on him. He then returns to the group.

They ask to hear the story of his life and he relates it up to the point where he met Brunnhilde. Here Hagen interrupts to offer him a drink that is in truth intended to restore his memory. He drinks and without being conscious of the change proceeds quite naturally to relate how he dared the flames to find the Valkyrie. But now the oath he made on the spear-head is bound to come true. Hagen calls his attention to some birds in the distance and as he turns around to watch them, stabs him. As Siegfried dies his love and thoughts are all of Brunnhilde, and he believes she is waiting for him beyond death.

The final scene returns us to the hall of Hagen. Guthrune awaits Siegfried and finally the party returns bearing his corpse. She accuses them all of murder and in the confusion Gunther and Hagen fight, the former falling. Brunnhilde enters and, telling Guthrune the true state of affairs, takes her place beside Siegfried.

She commands a huge funeral pyre to be built and, as Siegfried's body goes up in flames, she takes her steed, which one of the hunters has used, and, calling farewell to her husband, ^(Siegfried) and to the Rhinemaidens to come take their ring, she rides into the fire to her death. Suddenly the whole Rhine overflows, the castles of Hagen and Valhalla are drowned, and through it all comes the song of the Rhinemaidens, finally attaining again their long-lost treasure.

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I have concentrated so much on the story of these four operas because I feel it is the best way of giving the reader a conception of the spirit of the music. Both the story and the music are classics of culture, and Wagner did a beautiful piece of work in so well connecting them in mood and temperament.

It is difficult to "get down to earth" after dealing so long with ^{so} lofty and superb ^a subject as the "Nibelungenlied". But Wagner's other operas are far from prosaic, and "Die Meistersinger", for example, while not as fantastic and full of imagination as the "Ring" cycle, is nevertheless full of charm and poetic thought.

I do not intend to deal much with the story of this opera, but I would ^{nevertheless} like to summarize it ~~anyhow~~ before proceeding with a brief discussion of the music.

Walter is a young musician who is apprentice in a musical corporation of the sixteenth century. One of the most respected members of the corporation offers his daughter Eva as a prize to the musician who composes the most inspiring and beautiful song for a festival. Walter falls in love with Eva and determines to enter the contest, and thus win the girl (who secretly returned his affection) as his bride.

Others have also the same idea, and soon it becomes apparent that musicians of all ages are vying to win the lovely Eva. One in particular steals melodies from other composers, as well as from his colleagues, and Walter almost has another competitor in kindly Hans Sachs, whom Eva considers as a father. The latter, however, longs to see her happy and does not write a song. Walter obtains his inspiration from a dream, writes the music, and is chosen to marry Eva.

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"Die Meistersinger" is Wagner's most melodious opera and was written with the intention that it was to prove to hostile critics that the composer was fully capable of creating magnificent lyrical music as well as the powerful, lengthy, heavy type that depended on its harmonies for its main originality.

The overture, although independent of the opera, is best understood when the audience is familiar with the rest of the drama. It is built on the five most important themes of the opera, two of them depicting the Corporation of Meistersingers and the other three the love between Eva and Walter von Stolzing. In the overture, however, these motives are simplified and not so dramatic as in the opera.

The first melody, "The Meistersinger", is perhaps the most typical of the opera:

"First come heavy and pompous chords, with a movement at once noble and pedantic, affecting a march rhythm, vividly portraying the character of the Meistersinger, men of profound convictions and resolute principles, in the main worthy of respect, but often carrying their

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zeal to the verge of absurdity,"Claims Lavignac, professor at the Conservatory of Paris.

The theme coming next is "Waking Love:

which is followed, after its entirety of fourteen bars, by "The Banner", a less "bourgeois" melody than the first Meistersinger motive:

This motive stands for the pomp, ceremony, tradition, and respect of the corporation. After eight measures sometimes called "Love's Question" comes the theme "Love Confessed":

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The final motive also deals with Walter and his love and is called "Impatient Ardour":

Variations and dramatic combinations of these themes compose the remainder of the overture, which serves to introduce the main spirit of the opera. The overture is completely symbolic and leaves the course of events for the rest of the drama.

Act one opens with a church scene and introduces the leitmotives representing most of the main characters. Those of especial importance in the music rather than the story are the "Hans Sachs" theme and "Saint